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# Literary Movements *for Students*



Volume 1 & 2

# Literary Movements *for Students*

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

**Volume 1**

*David Galens, Project Editor*



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# Introduction

## **Purpose of the Book**

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

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

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

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each literary movement, information on me-

dia adaptations is provided (if available), as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and non-fiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers, study questions, and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on each movement.

## **Selection Criteria**

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

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

volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for movements to be included in possible future volumes.

### ***How Each Entry Is Organized***

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

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the movement, which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding it, and related themes.
- **Representative Authors:** this section includes basic facts about several authors associated with the movement, focusing on their relationship to the movement, including specific works written by the authors that might be typical of the movement.
- **Representative Works:** a description of specific works that have been identified as typical or representative of the movement.
- **Themes:** an overview of the major topics, themes, and issues related to the movement. Each theme discussed appears under a separate subhead and is easily accessed through the bold-face entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the movement, such as setting, point of view, and narration, as well as important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism. Literary terms are explained within the entry but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Movement Variations:** this section briefly discusses variations of the movement, including variations in geography (i.e., different countries), history (i.e., periodic revivals of the movement), philosophy, and art.
- **Historical Context:** this section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate *in which the movement took place*. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the movement took place. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the move-

ment, including any public controversy surrounding the movement. For older movements, this section includes a history of how the movement was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent movements, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned for *LMfS* that specifically deals with the movement and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as one or more pieces of previously published criticism on the movement (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material used in compiling the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. It includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

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

- **Media Adaptations:** if available, a list of important film and television adaptations related to the movement, including source information. The list may also include such variations as audio recordings, musical adaptations, and stage adaptations.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the movement. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast:** an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the time and culture of the movement and late twentieth-century or early twenty-first-century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place in which the literary movement took place and modern Western culture.
- **What Do I Study Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured literary movement or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same representative authors and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.



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## Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

## Citing Literary Movements for Students

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

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

The Bildungsroman. *Literary Movements for Students*. Ed. David Galens. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003.

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

Kerschen, Lois. Critical Essay on the Bildungsroman. *Literary Movements for Students*. Ed. David Galens. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003.

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

Carpenter, Charles A. “‘Victims of Duty’? The Critics, Absurdity, and *The Homecoming*.” *Modern Drama* Vol. 25, No. 4 (December 1982), 489–95; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*, Vol. 2, ed. David Galens (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003), pp.

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

Perry, Margaret. “The Major Novels.” *Silence to the Drums: A Survey of the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*. Greenwood Press, 1976, pp. 61–88; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*, Vol. 2, ed. David Galens (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003), pp.

## We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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# *Bildungsroman*

## **Movement Origin**

**c. 1766**

Bildungsroman is the name affixed to those novels that concentrate on the development or education of a central character. German in origin, “bildungs” means formation, and “roman” means novel. Although *The History of Agathon*, written by Christoph Martin Wieland in 1766–1767, may be the first known example, it was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, written in 1795, that took the form from philosophical to personal development and gave celebrity to the genre.

More than any other type of novel, the Bildungsroman intends to lead the reader to greater personal enrichment as the protagonist journeys from youth to psychological or emotional maturity. Traditionally, this growth occurs according to a pattern: the sensitive, intelligent protagonist leaves home, undergoes stages of conflict and growth, is tested by crises and love affairs, then finally finds the best place to use his/her unique talents. Sometimes the protagonist returns home to show how well things turned out. Some Bildungsromane end with the death of the hero, leaving the promise of his life unfulfilled. Traditionally, English novelists complicate the protagonist’s battle to establish an individual identity with conflicts from outside the self. German novelists typically concentrate on the internal struggle of the hero. The protagonist’s adventures can be seen as a quest for the meaning of life or as a vehicle for the author’s social and moral opinions as demonstrated through the protagonist.



The Bildungsroman was especially popular until 1860. However, anti-German sentiment during the world wars contributed to the demise of its influence, along with the emergence of a multitude of modern experiments in novel writing. Nonetheless, James Joyce wrote his Bildungsroman, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, in 1916, and the genre has continued to be adopted, with distinguishing variations, by writers of many nationalities.

## Representative Authors

### Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

One of the greatest British writers of all time, Charles Dickens was a Victorian novelist who chose the Bildungsroman format for at least two of his most famous works: *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*. Born in Portsmouth, England, on February 7, 1812, Dickens grew up in London. His father was a navy clerk who went to debtor's prison when Dickens was twelve. Forced to go to work in a shoe dye factory, he lived alone in fear and shame. These feelings led to the creation of his many orphan characters and his sympathy for the plight of the working class that made him the first great urban novelist. Although he was able to return to school and eventually clerked in a law firm, Dickens found his first success as a journalist and comic writer of the *Pickwick Papers*. However, his deep social concerns found expression in a rich intensity and variety in his later works. By the time of his death from a paralytic stroke at age fifty-eight on June 9, 1870, Dickens had written a number of works, including *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

### Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

Born on August 28, 1749, in Frankfurt, Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe became one of Europe's most well-known and versatile writers. Noted for his lyrical poetry, his influential novels, and his dramatic poem *Faust*, Goethe also made substantial contributions in the fields of biology, music, and philosophy. He wrote the first comprehensive history of science. In 1795, he published *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, a novel that is considered a prime example of the Bildungsroman. In addition, Goethe profoundly affected the growth of literary Romanticism and introduced the novella. He died in Weimar on March 22, 1832, at the age of eighty-two.

### James Joyce (1882–1941)

As a poet and novelist, James Joyce brought marked change to modern literature. Born in Dublin, Ireland, on February 2, 1882, Joyce moved frequently as a child because of his father's drinking and financial difficulties. Joyce's classic Künstlerroman (novel of an artist's development), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, portrays a hero who is a character blend of Joyce and his father. Despite his family situation, Joyce received a good education at a Jesuit school. But like his hero in *A Portrait*, Joyce later rejected religion, family, and his home country, living most of his life on the European continent. However, he wrote almost exclusively about Dublin. Joyce felt that being an artist required exile to protect oneself from sentimental involvements and that he could not write about Dublin with integrity and objectivity unless he went away. *A Portrait* established the modern concept of the artist as a bohemian who rejects middle-class values. It also set the example for a number of modern Irish bildungsromane in which heroes achieve their quest when they come to believe that alienation from society, not finding one's place in the social order, is the mark of maturity. Joyce died in Zurich on January 13, 1941, when he was only fifty-nine years old, but his innovations in literary organization and style, particularly his use of stream-of-consciousness technique, remain unique.

### Thomas Mann (1875–1955)

Considered the leading German novelist of the twentieth century, Thomas Mann was born in northern Germany on June 6, 1875. However, after 1933, he lived in either Switzerland or the United States because of his opposition to the Nazis. By then he had already won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1929. His masterpiece, *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*), was written in 1924 and is a Bildungsroman, as is a later work, *Doctor Faustus* (1947). The overall theme of Mann's works is the breakdown of civilization. Mann presents this theme in *The Magic Mountain* through a story about the patients in a Swiss sanatorium. *Doctor Faustus* is a Künstlerroman in which the protagonist is an artist who makes a pact with the devil to achieve creative vitality. The story ends tragically and parallels Germany's pact with Hitler to restore national vitality that ends in destruction. Mann died of phlebitis near Zurich on August 12, 1955.

### Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Mark Twain is known as one of America's leading realists, native humorists, and local col-

orists. He was a master in the use of folklore, psychological realism, and dialects. Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, he died of heart disease in the city he had long made his home, Hartford, Connecticut, on April 21, 1910. Twain produced not one but several classics, including what some believe to be the greatest American novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), a picaresque and satirical Bildungsroman. Probably more than any other writer, Mark Twain provided a uniquely American, and usually comic, portrayal of the Bildungsroman hero. Sadly, Twain's satire became bitter as his personal tragedies and financial reverses led to the disillusionment and depression that cloud his later writings.

### **Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813)**

Whenever the Bildungsroman is discussed, Christoph Martin Wieland, who was born in Germany on September 5, 1733, is mentioned as the writer of *The History of Agathon*, the precursor novel to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. A translator whose work reflects the Enlightenment, the early eighteenth-century period also known as the Age of Reason, and whose style shows rococo influences, Wieland translated twenty-two plays by Shakespeare into German (1762–1766) and also translated the classical writings of Horace and Lucian. Many of Wieland's own writings are set in Greece, including his *Die Geschichte des Agathon* (1766–1767, translated into English as *The History of Agathon* [1773]). In an early instance of publishing German literary periodicals, Wieland edited the journal *Der deutsche Merkur* (*The German Mercury*). Wieland died on January 21, 1813.

## **Representative Works**

### ***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

Like the Bildungsroman hero, Huck leaves home to find an independent life, has a surrogate father in Jim, is in conflict with his society, and reaches maturity when he repents his treatment of Jim and puts fairness and friendship over expected behavior.

Though considered by some to be a masterpiece of American literature, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* initially scandalized reviewers and parents who thought it would corrupt young children with its depiction of a hero who lies, steals, and uses coarse language. In the last half of the



*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

twentieth century, the condemnation of the book continued on the grounds that its portrayal of Jim and use of the word "nigger" is racist. While some justify the book as a documentation of the racial notions prevalent at the time of its writing, the novel continues to appear on lists of books banned in schools across the United States.

### ***The Bell Jar***

Although Sylvia Plath is well known as a poet, her autobiographical Bildungsroman is one of the best-known works in modern American literature. The novel tells the story of Esther Greenwood, a student editor on an internship at a women's magazine in New York City. It follows the standard Bildungsroman pattern of the young person who goes to the big city to pursue professional aspirations. But there is no traditional happy ending. The psychological anguish of Plath's later poetry is related to the confessional revelations of *The Bell Jar*, in which she describes the events that led to her nervous breakdown. One month after the English publication of this book in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, Plath committed suicide. The novel was published in England under Plath's name in 1966 and in the United States in 1971.





Mark Twain

### **Great Expectations**

*Great Expectations*, published in 1861 by Charles Dickens, follows the tradition of the Bildungsroman. The young protagonist, Pip, leaves his rural home to become a gentleman and win the girl of his dreams. While most Bildungsroman heroes have to make their own way, Pip has a mysterious benefactor who provides the wealth that Pip thinks will make him happy. However, in the course of finding his true values, Pip comes to realize that happiness comes not from money but from the appreciation of good friends, regardless of their social status, and from personal integrity. This novel has become an all-time classic that is still required reading in many high school curricula.

### **Invisible Man**

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* won the National Book Award when it was published in 1953. A first novel, it expresses in metaphorical language the Bildungsroman theme of searching for one's identity. The nameless black protagonist, looking for his identity, comes to the realization that he has been living the roles prescribed for him by white society. But once he steps outside the assigned sphere, he becomes "invisible" to a dominant culture that

does not recognize his individuality. symbols of the traditions of the frontier, community, and music, *Invisible Man* achieved international fame and remains one of the most important American works of the twentieth century.

### **Jane Eyre**

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, is one of the first bildungsromane with a female protagonist. In this Victorian English novel, the female hero is constrained by social expectations determined by gender-specific beliefs. At age ten, Jane is sent to residential school where she acquires skills she later uses as a governess and a village schoolteacher. In its use of natural elements and the supernatural, the novel is both romantic and Gothic. *Jane Eyre* is a Bildungsroman in that it traces Jane's development from a dependent child to a mature and independent woman. The novel dramatizes the love affair between Jane and Edward Rochester, who is married at the time they meet. Rochester keeps his insane wife sequestered in his estate, and after she dies, he and Jane are reunited. In Charlotte Brontë's own life, she had been attracted to the married headmaster of the school in Brussels where she went to study French and to teach in 1842–1843. This unhappy experience, along with the author's memories of early school years at Cowan's Bridge, contributed to the composition of *Jane Eyre*, her first published work of fiction, which was an immediate success.

### **Jude the Obscure**

Thomas Hardy introduced into Victorian literature the concept of fatalism. This belief assumes that humans are subject to arbitrary and random forces, like chance and timing, which shape their destinies. *Jude the Obscure*, published in 1895, received widespread criticism because it attacks the Anglican Church, the elitist admissions policies of Oxford University (called Christminster in the novel), and the rigid laws regarding marriage. As a Bildungsroman, the story follows Jude Fawley's route to destruction from what Hardy called in his preface "the tragedy of unfulfilled aims." Fawley, by trade a stonemason, has spiritual and intellectual ambitions that are thwarted by his exclusion from the university and his involvement with two women, the vulgar Arabella and the intellectual Sue. He marries the first and has one child with her; he does not marry the second, and he has two children by her. Tragedy overwhelms Jude when his oldest child kills the younger ones and hangs himself. Jude himself dies miserably, an alcoholic.



# Literary Movements *for Students*

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

**Volume 2**

*David Galens, Project Editor*

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# Introduction

## **Purpose of the Book**

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

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

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

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each literary movement, information on me-

dia adaptations is provided (if available), as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and non-fiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers, study questions, and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on each movement.

## **Selection Criteria**

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

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

volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for movements to be included in possible future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized

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

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the movement, which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding it, and related themes.
- **Representative Authors:** this section includes basic facts about several authors associated with the movement, focusing on their relationship to the movement, including specific works written by the authors that might be typical of the movement.
- **Representative Works:** a description of specific works that have been identified as typical or representative of the movement.
- **Themes:** an overview of the major topics, themes, and issues related to the movement. Each theme discussed appears under a separate subhead and is easily accessed through the bold-face entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the movement, such as setting, point of view, and narration, as well as important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism. Literary terms are explained within the entry but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Movement Variations:** this section briefly discusses variations of the movement, including variations in geography (i.e., different countries), history (i.e., periodic revivals of the movement), philosophy, and art.
- **Historical Context:** this section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate *in which the movement took place*. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the movement took place. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the move-

ment, including any public controversy surrounding the movement. For older movements, this section includes a history of how the movement was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent movements, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned for *LMfS* that specifically deals with the movement and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as one or more pieces of previously published criticism on the movement (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material used in compiling the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. It includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

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

- **Media Adaptations:** if available, a list of important film and television adaptations related to the movement, including source information. The list may also include such variations as audio recordings, musical adaptations, and stage adaptations.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the movement. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast:** an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the time and culture of the movement and late twentieth-century or early twenty-first-century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place in which the literary movement took place and modern Western culture.
- **What Do I Study Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured literary movement or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same representative authors and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

## Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

## Citing Literary Movements for Students

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

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

The Bildungsroman. *Literary Movements for Students*. Ed. David Galens. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003.

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

Kerschen, Lois. Critical Essay on the Bildungsroman. *Literary Movements for Students*. Ed. David Galens. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003.

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

Carpenter, Charles A. “‘Victims of Duty’? The Critics, Absurdity, and *The Homecoming*.” *Modern Drama* Vol. 25, No. 4 (December 1982), 489–95; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*, Vol. 2, ed. David Galens (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003), pp.

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

Perry, Margaret. “The Major Novels.” *Silence to the Drums: A Survey of the Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*. Greenwood Press, 1976, pp. 61–88; excerpted and reprinted in *Literary Movements for Students*, Vol. 2, ed. David Galens (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2003), pp.

## We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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# *Absurdism*

## **Movement Origin**

**c. 1950**

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

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





completely new and mystifying to audiences in the 1950s when absurdist works first appeared, soon became not only understandable, but even commonplace and predictable. With the exception of Ionesco, most playwrights abandoned the absurdist style after the 1960s; however, many of the individual plays are now considered classics of European and American drama.

## Representative Authors

### *Arthur Adamov (1908–1970)*

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

### *Edward Albee (1928–)*

Edward Albee was born on March 12, 1928, in Virginia, to unknown parents who gave him up for adoption shortly after his birth. His adoptive father was Reed Albee, who owned part of the Keith-Albee theater circuit, and his adoptive mother was the former Frances Cotter. Albee was raised in a wealthy home in Larchmont, New York, with his parents and his grandmother. He made frequent trips to the city to attend the theater during his childhood, and his parents often hosted a variety of theater people in their home. Albee attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1946-47,

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

### *Fernando Arrabal (1932–)*

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

### *Samuel Beckett (1906–1989)*

Nobel Prize winner Samuel Beckett was born in Foxrock, Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906, to William Frank Beckett, a surveyor, and Mary Jones Roe Beckett, a nurse. He attended a Protestant public school and earned a bachelor of arts degree from Trinity College in 1927 and a masters of arts degree in 1931. Although Beckett taught for a short time, he hated the teaching profession and soon resigned his position. He began traveling in Europe and eventually settled in Paris in 1937. Beckett did most of his writing in French; his work included poetry, critical essays, and novels. However, he is perhaps most famous for his dramas, particularly his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot* (1954), consid-



*Edward Albee*

ered by many critics the defining work of Absurdism. The two-act play presents two men who engage in apparently pointless conversation while waiting by the side of the road for Godot, who fails to appear on two successive evenings. It is a play in which virtually nothing happens. The same could be said of Beckett's 1957 play *Endgame*, considered by some critics an even bleaker view of human existence than *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett continued to write plays, novels, and other prose works into his eighties; he died in Paris on December 22, 1989, of respiratory failure.

### **Jean Genet (1910–1986)**

Jean Genet was born in Paris on December 19, 1910, to an unknown father and a mother who immediately abandoned him. His early years were spent in an orphanage, and he was later turned over to a foster family, who accused him of stealing from them. He spent some time in a reformatory for adolescents from which he escaped; he then joined the French Foreign Legion, from which he deserted. He wandered around Europe for the next twenty years, supporting himself through thievery and prostitution. Genet began writing in prison, where he was serving a life sentence. His supporters in the literary world were eventually able to secure a presidential pardon in 1948, after which Genet de-

voted himself to his writing, to the arts, and to political activism. He was an admirer of the Black Panther Party and soon became a cult figure, in part because of Jean-Paul Sartre's essay which characterized Genet as a saint and a martyr. Genet's first writing consisted of poetry, novels, and a fictionalized autobiography. In 1947, while still in prison, he wrote his first play, *The Maids* (1947), and after his release he continued writing dramas, many of which became major productions. His most productive and successful period as a playwright was the late 1950s and early 1960s. Beginning in 1970 Genet lived in the Middle East among the members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), whose cause he supported. He died in Paris on April 15, 1986, from throat cancer, and his memoirs offering an account of his years with the PLO were published later that year.

### **Václav Havel (1936–)**

Václav Havel, playwright, political dissident, and current president of the Czech Republic, was born in Prague on October 5, 1936, to Václav M. and Božena Vavrecková Havel. He was educated at a technical school and at Prague's Academy of Art and served in the Czech Army in 1957-59. Throughout the 1960s, Havel worked with theater groups in Czechoslovakia, serving in various capacities from



stagehand to playwright-in-residence. He gained success with his early plays, *The Garden Party* and *The Memorandum*, both of which deal with the dehumanizing effects of government bureaucracy. When the former Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, Havel was imprisoned and his plays were banned. But his international reputation grew as his works were successfully staged outside Czechoslovakia. Within his own country, he became well known as a spokesman for human rights. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Havel saw his plays return to the Czech stage; he was elected president of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) that same year, an office he continued to hold as of 2002.

### **Eugène Ionesco (1912–1994)**

Eugène Ionesco was born in Slatina, Romania, on November 26, 1912. His parents were Eugène, a lawyer, and Marie-Therese Icard Ionesco. He became a French citizen and spent most of his life in Paris. Ionesco was a painter and a playwright; a number of his plays are associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, among them *The Bald Soprano* (1950), *The Lesson* (1951), and *Rhinocéros* (1959). Ionesco used black humor to criticize social and political institutions, insisting that the only possible response to an absurd world is laughter. Nonetheless, he claimed he was not an Absurdist, and he preferred the term “Theatre of Derision” to Theatre of the Absurd. One of his favorite targets for derision, especially in his early plays, was language itself, which he considered ineffective in helping individuals communicate and even dangerous and harmful when used to manipulate. Ionesco’s work enjoyed great success in the 1950s and 1960s, but his later plays were not as well received. He turned away from drama and began to concentrate on his painting and on publishing his nonfiction. Ionesco died March 28, 1994, in Paris.

### **Harold Pinter (1930–)**

Harold Pinter was born October 10, 1930 in a working-class neighborhood in Hackney, London, England, to Hyman and Frances Pinter. His otherwise happy childhood was marred by the nightly terror of the London air raids during World War II. He attended the Hackney Downs Grammar School where he excelled in acting, writing, and sports. In 1948 he began studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and over the next several years he worked as an actor with a variety of repertory companies. In 1957, his first play, *The Room*, was produced in Bristol, England; it was followed by *The*

*Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumbwaiter* (1967), and numerous other plays, radio and television dramas, and screenplays. Pinter is considered one of the most important playwrights of the post-World War II generation, and his plays have enjoyed success with both audiences and critics.

## **Representative Works**

### ***The American Dream***

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

### ***The Bald Soprano***

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

scribed as hilariously funny, the play as a whole is considered a tragedy as Ionesco attacks the stilted, artificial quality of language that hinders communication between individuals.

### ***The Chairs***

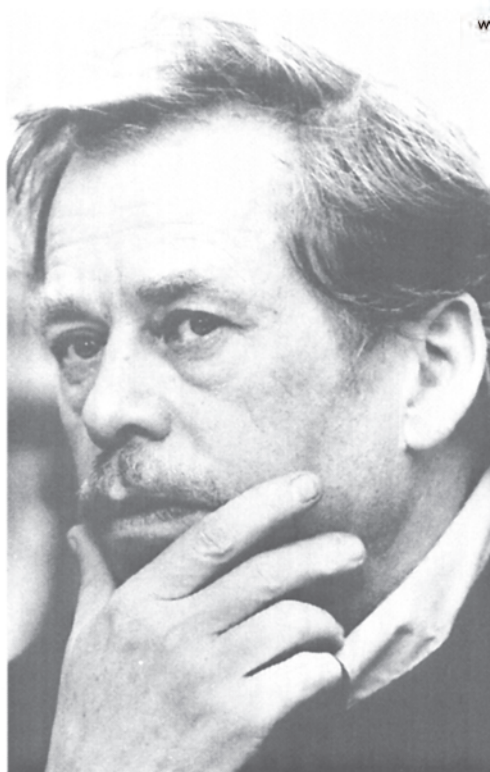
Written in 1952, Eugène Ionesco's *The Chairs* features the breakdown of language as well as one of the playwright's most famous metaphors for absurdity: the multiplication of inanimate objects. As an elderly couple sets up chairs for an invisible audience arriving to hear an important speech, the chairs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

### ***Endgame***

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

### ***The Garden Party***

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



*Václav Havel*

### ***The Homecoming***

Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, written in 1965, was the playwright's third full-length drama. The story involves a London working-class family whose eldest son has lived in the United States for several years where he is a professor of philosophy at a university. He returns, along with his wife Ruth, to his father's home, but when he later goes back to the United States, she refuses to accompany him. Instead, she plans to stay behind and care for her husband's father, uncle, and brothers, and to earn her living as a prostitute. The play features several absurdist elements but is also characterized by violence, both emotional and physical, between the family members. *The Homecoming* has generated a great deal of controversy because of the shocking nature of the plot. Critical debate has usually centered on the possible motivation for Ruth's bizarre decision. *The Homecoming* was revived on Broadway in 1991.



### **The Maids**

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

### **Ping-Pong**

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

### **Waiting for Godot**

The most famous and most critically acclaimed work associated with Absurdism is Samuel Beck-

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

### **The Zoo Story**

Edward Albee wrote his first drama *The Zoo Story* (1959), in three weeks. Uncluttered, even sparse, the play features two characters, working-class Jerry and middle-class Peter, who meet in Central Park. Jerry pours out his life story to Peter, and it is a life characterized by loneliness, alienation, and failure. Peter refuses to connect with Jerry and does not want to hear any more of his tale. Provoking Peter into a fight, Jerry kills himself on a knife he gave to Peter, thus involving him, despite his objections, in another's death if not in his life. Albee employs the diction of small children in *The Zoo Story*, a device he used in many of his later plays. The one-act play won an Obie Award in 1960 and established its author as a promising American playwright.

## **Themes**

### **Absurdity**

Absurdity is the most obvious theme explored in Absurdism. Absurdity characterizes a world that



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