Expressionism Study Guide

Expressionism

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Contents

Introduction

Expressionism arose in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a response to bourgeois complacency and the increasing mechanization and urbanization of society. At its height between 1910 and 1925, just before and just after World War I, expressionist writers distorted objective features of the sensory world using symbolism and dream-like elements in their works illustrating the alienating and often emotionally overwhelmed sensibilities. Painters such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Edvard Munch helped to lay the foundation for Expressionism in their use of distorted figures and vibrant color schemes to depict raw and powerfully emotional states of mind. Munch's *The Scream* (1894), for example, a lithograph depicting a figure with a contorted face screaming in horror, epitomized the tone of much expressionist art. In literature, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche emphasized cultivating individual willpower and transcending conventional notions of reasoning and morality. His *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1885), a philosophic prose poem about the "New Man," had a profound influence on expressionist thought. In France, symbolist poets such as Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire wrote visionary poems exploring dark and ecstatic emotional landscapes.

In Germany in the twentieth century, poets such as Georg Trakl and Gottfried Benn practiced what became known as Expressionism by abandoning meter, narrative, and conventional syntax, instead organizing their poems around symbolic imagery. In fiction, Franz Kafka embodied expressionist themes and styles in stories such as *The Metamorphosis* (1915), which tells of a traveling salesman who wakes to find himself transformed into a giant insect. Expressionist dramatists include Georg Kaiser, Frank Wedekind, Ernst Toller, and August Strindberg, often referred to as the "Father of Expressionism." Some critics claim Strindberg's play *To Damascus* (1902) is the first true expressionist drama; others argue that it is Reinhard Johannes Sorge's *The Beggar*, performed in 1917; and still others claim it is Oskar Kokoschka's *Murderer, the Women's Hope*, written in 1907. The discrepancy underscores the question as to whether or not a coherent literary movement called Expressionism with a common set of features ever really existed, or whether it is more of an attitude towards art and society. In the early 1930s, the Nazi regime, which considered the movement decadent, banned its practitioners from publishing their work or producing their plays.

Themes

Regeneration

The defining event of the expressionist movement is World War I. After the war, much expressionist writing portrayed the attempt to forge a new future for Germany. Writing from this time champions the birth of the "new man," the "new vision," and the "new society." Toller's play *The Transformation* typifies one strain of early postwar expressionist drama, as it shows how one man's spiritual renewal is linked to his country's regeneration. Written as a *stationendrama*, *The Transformation* follows the central character's spiritual progress through a series of episodes, connected only through the character's experience. The protagonist, Friedrich, a young Jewish sculptor, transforms himself from an alienated and wandering artist into a friend of the proletariat who finally finds a cause to believe in and die for. At the end of the play, Friedrich implores the masses to create a society based upon compassion and justice, and to throw off the yoke of capitalist oppression.

Human Condition

Expressionist literature is defined by protagonists and speakers who passionately seek meaning in their lives. They often discover that the life they have been living is a sham, and through a sign or circumstance, or dint of sheer will, attempt to change their lot. Kaiser's dramas, for example, feature protagonists who struggle to make difficult choices in recapturing a sense of authenticity. His play *The Burghers of Calais*, for example, details the action of a central character that kills himself so that fellow townspeople might survive. Another Kaiser play, *From Morn till Midnight* (1917), also concerns a protagonist who seeks regeneration through martyrdom. In much expressionist literature, it is the journey, rather than the goal, which is most important.

Sexuality

Part of the expressionist drive to represent truth involved tackling what expressionists saw as the hypocrisy of society's attitude towards sex and sexuality. Strindberg, Reinhard, and especially Wedekind all explicitly addressed the ways in which society sapped humanity's life force by either ignoring or repressing the sexual drive. More than any other expressionist, Wedekind, who derived many of his ideas from Strindberg and Nietzsche, attacked bourgeois morality in his dramas. In *Spring's Awakening*, he represents institutions such as the German school system as agents of deceit and mindless evil in their attempts to keep students ignorant of their own sexuality. His "Lulu" plays glorify sexuality, as his main character asserts her desire to live passionately. Perhaps no other expressionist writer embraces Nietzsche's call for humanity to embrace life and energy in all of its animalism.

Alienation

Before World War I, the alienation portrayed in expressionist literature was often related to the family and society in more general, some might say adolescent, ways. After the war, alienation was more directly related to the state. For example, Kafka's protagonists, such as Gregor Samsa, are ostracized by their families because they do not conform to familial expectations. Most expressionist writers came from middle-class families who embodied the very hypocrisy they sought to expose in their writing. Later dramatists such as Kaiser and Toller wrote about the alienation experienced by workers. Kaiser's *Gas* trilogy graphically depicts the injustice of Wilhelmian capitalism towards the working class, underscoring the inherent corruptness of a system in which owners are pitted against employees, who have no claim to the things they produce. Director Fritz Lang adapted the trilogy into his popular 1927 film, *Metropolis*, underscoring the inhumanity of a society that lets technology grow unchecked.

Style

Abstraction

For expressionists, abstraction is the distillation of reality into its essence. Expressionists are not interested in presenting the world as human beings might see it or apprehend it through any of the senses, but rather as they emotionally and psychologically experience it. In drama, abstraction means that a play is conceptual rather than concrete, and it means that plots and characters are frequently symbolic and allegorical. For instance, a character might simply be called "Father," as in Strindberg's play *The Father*, or "Cashier," rather than, say, Mrs. Jones, as in a realistic play. The idea is to show the universality of human experience rather than its particularity. In poetry, writers such as Trakl attempt to represent the psychological depth and texture of the human experience through a series of fragmented and disjointed symbolic images, rather than relying on narrative or a speaker with a coherent identity.

Monologue

Monologues are speeches by a single person, and they are especially prevalent in expressionist theater. Partly, this is due to the didactic nature of much expressionist theater, and partly it is because Expressionism often champions the individual and his vision of the world. When characters speak to themselves, which they often do in expressionist plays, the monologues are called soliloquies. Strindberg, Kaiser, and Toller all made extensive use of monologues and soliloquies in their plays.

Genre

Many expressionists had the idea that art could not be separated into categories such as plays, poetry, or fiction. Instead, they experimented with mixing genres. Plays often contained dance, music, and sets that resembled art galleries, and characters would periodically launch into verse. Expressionists such as Wassily Kandinsky, a painter, poet, and dramatist, practiced this form of "total art" in productions such as *The Yellow Sound*, in which he uses color, music, and characters with names such as "Five Giants," "Indistinct Creatures," and "People in Tights" to abstractly represent the human condition.

Historical Context

Pre-World War I Germany

Expressionism blossomed in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century during the reign of William II. Germany was a relatively prosperous country under Wilhelm, with an established middle class, and it is the very complacency of this middle class, its order, efficiency, and obsession with social conventions, against which many writers and artists rebelled. In particular, expressionists saw hypocrisy in German society's repressive and repressed attitudes towards sex and the simultaneous popularity of prostitution. In *Literary Life in German Expressionism and the Berlin Circles*, literary historian Roy Allen notes, "The flourishing of prostitution in the Wilhelminian era, as the expressionist viewed it, most sharply gave the lie to the effectiveness of the Wilhelminian approach to morality, particularly to sexual conduct." Wedekind's plays underscore this hypocrisy. In *Spring's Awakening*, for example, he singles out German schools for their part in keeping children ignorant about their own bodies and sexuality. Sigmund Freud's theories on infantile sexuality and the unconscious during this time had a profound effect on expressionist thinking. In 1900, Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, followed in 1901 by *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and in 1905 by *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. For expressionists, the sexual instinct provided humanity with its drive and creative force. A society that stifles that drive by either ignoring it or demonizing it, produces citizens who could never wholly be themselves.

However, most expressionists during this time were not political activists, at least not in any substantial way. Instead of taking to the streets, as revolutionaries were doing in Russia, they met in coffee houses and cafes in Berlin and Munich and published their work in journals they often started themselves, after established presses rejected their writing. Herwarth Walden of *Der Sturm* and Franz Pfemfert of *Die Aktion* were two editors who left big publishing houses to start their own magazines dedicated to expressionist writings. Allen characterizes those who were part of the cafe circle of writers and artists as a historical type: "In many respects, the expressionists in these circles exhibit features commonly associated with the bohemian artist as he has appeared in societies dominated by the middle class in the last approximate century and a half."

War Years and After

For many Germans, the start of World War I was a surprise. Some were quickly politicized and voiced their opposition to the war, some fled to Switzerland, and others joined the military and died in battle. Many journals ceased publishing altogether, as military authorities began censoring them for antiwar sentiment. The publication of new journals was banned, without the permission of military authorities. Antiwar or anti-establishment plays were also routinely banned, but at least one director and theater

manager, Max Reinhardt, circumvented public censorship by producing "invitation only" plays. After the war, while Germans struggled for direction and purpose, many expressionists joined the Communist Party and fought for the Revolution. They poured back into the cafes, with a new sense of urgency, their art now wedded to a political ideal. Kaiser, Toller, and Carl Sternheim produced plays espousing pacifism and universal brotherhood, while various political factions fought for control of the government. Toller's play *The Transformation*, produced in 1919, captures the spirit of postwar enthusiasm for new beginnings, as does *A Man's Struggles*, written while Toller was imprisoned during the last two years of the war. The former features Friedrich, an example of expressionist drama's "New Man"□a Christlike figure with none of the baggage of being God□ who undergoes a series of nightmarish trials and tribulations only to overcome them in the end and lead the masses into a new and glorious future.

Movement Variations

Abstract Expressionism

With its roots in the expressionist movement of the early part of the century, abstract expressionism, also known as the "New York school," was developed in New York City and Eastern Long Island in the mid-1940s. Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Philip Guston, and others focused on the materiality of painting, often using oversized canvases, incorporating ac- cidents that occurred during composition into the painting, and experimenting with color and space to express the painter's vision. One of the most controversial of the group, Pollock, would lay down huge canvasses, and then drip, throw, and splash paint on it, often using sticks and trowels instead of brushes. The resulting "painting," sometimes a mixture of paint, sand, and glass, embodied the artist's own turbulent creative processes. Because abstract expressionist art was nonrepresentational and because the subject of many of the compositions was the making of the work itself, a large part of the public did not take it seriously at first. However, critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, who coined the term "Action Painting," worked hard to popularize it. Robert Coates was the first to use the term "abstract expressionism," in the *New Yorker* in 1936.

Film

Expressionist techniques were used extensively in film in the 1920s, as German directors such as F. W. Murnau, G. W. Pabst, and Robert Wiene adapted techniques from art and theater for the wide screen. The first truly expressionist film is Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), which used exaggerated camera angles, painted scenery, and the lighting of individual actors to create a nightmarish atmosphere. Film historians also consider *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to be the first horror film. In the 1940s, directors such as Billy Wilder, Michael Curtiz, and Otto Preminger used the bizarre perspectives and lighting techniques of expressionist film to create what some critics claim is a distinctly American style: film noir. Films such as Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) feature cynical, disillusioned male protagonists stuck battling an existential crisis while searching for the answer to some inscrutable or ill-defined problem, usually concerning a dangerously sexy woman. Many of the noir screenplays from the 1940s are derived from the hard-boiled detective novels of writers such as James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett. Film noir is filmed in black-and-white and characterized by gritty urban settings, witty banter, flashbacks, and voice-overs. They do not end happily.

Early Twentieth-Century Painting

Expressionist painting, like literary Expressionism, sought to depict emotional and psychological intensity and, like its literary cousin, formed a response to Realism. One

group of expressionists was the Fauves (i.e., wild beasts), represented best by Frenchmen Henri Matisse and Georges Rouault. Like many expressionists, these two were inspired by the painterly innovations of van Gogh and Gauguin, particularly their liberal use of bold colors and distorted shapes to signify raw emotion. Matisse arranged line and color to express the essence of subjects, and is known more for what he leaves out of his paintings than what he puts in. Rouault used violent brush strokes in his portraits of noble figures like Christ to reveal his own inner passion. In Dresden, Germany, a group of artists calling themselves "The Bridge" (Die Brücke) practiced a darker style of Expressionism. They drew inspiration from van Gogh and Gauguin as well, but also from Munch, the Norwegian painter famous for his 1894 lithograph, *The Scream*. Painters including Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, and Kokoschka put brush to canvas to explore a passionate, yet often angst-ridden view of the world and themselves. They often painted street scenes of Berlin, emphasizing the hostile, alienating quality of modern urban life. In Munich, "The Blue Rider" (Der Blaue Reiter), a group of artists headed by the Russian, Kandinsky, practiced an even more abstract style of Expressionism. Kandinsky and fellow "rider" Franz Marc abandoned all pretenses toward objectivity, composing pictures purely of line and color, with no resemblance to the physical world. Marc's color symbolism and Kandinsky's geometric abstraction were attempts to embody the spiritual dimension of humanity, itself an unseen entity.

Representative Authors

Franz Kafka (1883-1924)

Born on July 3, 1883, in Prague, Bohemia (now Czechoslovakia), Franz Kafka was an introverted, sickly, and shy boy who struggled to meet the expectations of a demanding father. After receiving a law degree in 1906, Kafka began writing in earnest, publishing his stories in the literary magazine of his good friend, Max Brod. Kafka died of tuberculosis on June 3, 1924, in Austria. While alive, Kafka directed Brod to burn all of his manuscripts. Brod ignored Kafka's wish and, over the next few decades, edited and published all of his unfinished stories.

Like many of the expressionists, Kafka was influenced by Nietzsche and Strindberg. His writings, primarily novels and stories, depict an absurdist view of the world, which he describes in paradoxically lucid terms. In the use of symbols and types, his stories often resemble parables. Like Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka's characters often find themselves in the midst of an incomprehensible world, consumed with guilt and alienated from those they love. *The Trial*, for example, a novel unfinished at the time of Kafka's death, concerns a bank clerk who is arrested but never told the charges. He attempts to negotiate a Byzantine legal system to find the answer, but never does, and is finally killed "like a dog." Today, the term "Kafkaesque" is used as an adjective suggesting something possessing a complex, inscrutable, or bizarre quality.

Georg

Kaiser (1878-1945)

Widely acknowledged as the leader of the expressionist movement in theater, Georg Kaiser was born November 25, 1878, in Magdeburg, Germany. Kaiser's father, an insurance agent, was frequently away on business, and his mother, who schooled her six children at home, raised Kaiser. Like many of the characters in his plays, Kaiser was a traveller, venturing to Argentina for a time and throughout Europe. As business did not temperamentally suit him, he had difficulty making a living. However, his family financed his travels, until 1908, when he married the wealthy Margarethe Habenicht. In plays such as *The Citizens of Calais* (1917) and *From Morn to Midnight* (1917), Kaiser juxtaposed fantasy and reality, used rapidly shifting scenes, and gave his characters generic names to underscore their symbolic and universal significance. Kaiser's plays typically feature a questing protagonist who searches everywhere for meaning but finds none. These characters often commit suicide. Kaiser's famous trilogy of plays□*Coral* (1917), *Gas I* (1918), and *Gas 2* (1920)□are as relevant today as they were eighty years ago in their indictment of mindless and mechanized labor and the selfishness of big business.

Kaiser's influence on the development of European drama cannot be understated. Along with Strindberg and Toller, he changed the direction of twentieth-century drama by opening it up to other dramatic possibilities. Critics consider Kaiser and Bertolt Brecht, who also used expressionist techniques, the two leading German playwrights of the twentieth century. Kaiser's plays were banned when the Nazis came to power in 1933. At the beginning of World War II, the writer fled to Switzerland, where he died of an embolism on June 4, 1945.

Eugene O'Neill (1883-1953)

Born in New York City on October 16, 1883, Eugene O'Neill spent the first years of his life traveling around the country with his family while his father performed. Family dysfunction became a staple theme of his plays, and is a recurring theme of expressionist theatre. O'Neill read Strindberg and Wedekind while recuperating from tuberculosis in 1912, and began writing plays incorporating expressionist techniques and style. Not only was O'Neill the first American to write expressionist plays, but he was also the first American playwright to receive international acclaim for his work. *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), O'Neill's first full-length play, received the Pulitzer Prize, and in 1936 the literary community showed its approval by awarding O'Neill the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is the first American playwright to have won the award. Literary historians point to his 1920 play, *The Emperor Jones* as an example of American expressionist theater, as well as *The Great God Brown* (1926). In these plays, O'Neill uses ghosts, music, lighting, and stage sets to externalize the inner life of his characters. Other O'Neill plays include *Desire under the Elms* (1924), *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1939-41). After a long illness, O'Neill died of pneumonia on November 27, 1953, in Boston, Massachussetts.

August Strindberg (1849-1912)

Often referred to by literary historians as the "Father of Expressionism," (Johan) August Strindberg was born January 22, 1849, in Stockholm, Sweden. His father, though well intentioned, was a strict disciplinarian whose expectations the writer labored under and rebelled against. Strindberg's lifelong difficulty with women both frustrated him and fueled his creative energies. Strindberg was opposed to the idea of a liberated woman, yet he was also attracted to women who refused to be limited to the role of mother and wife. This conflict contributed to three divorces and a string of failed romances. A novelist and essayist as well as a playwright, Strindberg had his first play produced when he was 21. However, for much of his life he struggled financially, working as a librarian, newsletter editor, tutor, and journalist. His controversial ideas often landed him in trouble, and in 1884 he was tried□yet acquitted□ for blasphemy for stories he wrote that belittled women and criticized conventional religious practices. Towards the end of his life, Strindberg achieved critical as well as financial success, and his plays were performed throughout Europe. In 1912, he was awarded the "anti-Nobel Prize" in recognition for the way in which his writing challenged conventions and authority. He died in May of that year from stomach cancer.

Strindberg's early plays, written in a naturalistic vein, address historical matters using realistic dialogue as the primary means of communication. He developed his expressionist style, which he referred to as "dreamplay," in his later work. In plays such as *The Road to Damascus* (1898-1904), *The Dream Play* (1901), and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), Strindberg uses "types" instead of fully developed characters, and incorporates visual elements and music into the action to symbolize humanity's unconscious desires. In his dream sequences, Strindberg frequently represents humanity's misery and search for meaning and redemption.

Georg Trakl (1887-1914)

Georg Trakl was born February 3, 1887, in Salzburg, Austria, into the middle-class Austrian family of an artistic but emotionally unstable mother. Trakl developed emotional problems as an adolescent. His reading of gloomy writers such as Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Arthur Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Baudelaire only added to his despair, as did his liberal use of various opiates. Trakl wrote frequently but only began to publish regularly after he met Ludwig von Ficker, editor of the journal *Der Brenner*, who nurtured Trakl's talent and provided him with a vehicle for his poetry. Trakl's emotional health deteriorated during World War I, when, as a dispensing chemist, he had to care for a large number of wounded men. Seeing the obscene wounds of soldiers and witnessing their unrelenting pain compounded Trakl's own misery, and he was hospitalized for depression. In Krakow, Poland, on November 3, 1914, Trakl overdosed on cocaine.

Trakl's poems use symbolic imagery and have a dream-like structure to them. He frequently strings together images that on the surface appear unrelated, but on a deeper level are tonally coherent. In this way, his poems are close to musical compositions in their structure. Although they are frequently about decay, death, and despair, Trakl's poems such as "All Souls," "A Romance to Night," "Mankind," and "Trumpets" often embody a kind of spiritual longing, characteristic of much expressionist verse. American poet Robert Bly helped to renew interest in Trakl's poetry during the 1970s by translating his work and linking it with "deep image" poetry.

Frank Wedekind (1864-1918)

Born Benjamin Franklin Wedekind in Hanover, Germany, on July 24, 1864, Wedekind became one of the first playwrights in Germany to experiment with expressionist techniques. The son of a doctor and an actress, Wedekind studied law before dropping out of school to lead a bohemian life. Wedekind makes his contempt of middle-class society evident in his plays, which attack hypocrisy and repressive sexual mores. In plays such as *Pandora's Box* (1904) and *Spring's Awakening* (1906), Wedekind graphically depicts themes of sexual repression in an effort to force audiences to change their behavior. He is perhaps best known for *Lulu* (1905), in which the protagonist, a femme fatale with a monstrous sexuality, is murdered by Jack the Ripper, a serial killer who terrorized London's streets at the end of the nineteenth century. Wedekind's didactic approach to theater includes using heavily stylized dialogue,

bizarre characters and plots, and a loosely knit episodic structure to jar audiences out of their complacency. Bertolt Brecht praised his work and followed Wedekind's example in his own plays. Wedekind died of pneumonia in Munich, Germany, on March 9, 1918.

Representative Works

Spring's Awakening

Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening*, published in 1891 but not performed until 1906, explores the theme of adolescent sexuality in a distinctly modern and expressionistic manner. In nineteen episodic scenes, Wedekind presents the stories of a few teenagers as they struggle through sexual maturity because of the ignorance of their teachers and parents who themselves are sexually repressed. Wedekind's Expressionism is evident in his use of heavily stylized dialogue, which mixes lyrical and cutting irony with prosaic speech to create a seriocomic tone. He also has a character return from the dead, something that could not happen in naturalistic theater. A satirical indictment of the hypocrisy and prudery of middle-class German society, Wedekind's play was heavily censored, though it was also one of the playwright's most successful works.

The Citizens of Calais

The Citizens of Calais catapulted Kaiser into the literary limelight virtually overnight in 1917. Opening just as World War I was coming to a close, the play spoke to the sense of sheer exhaustion felt by the German populace and carried the message of conciliation. For his plot, Kaiser drew on a famous incident that allegedly occurred in 1347 during the Hundred Years' War between England and France. Faced with the destruction of Calais, Eustache, a wealthy merchant, sacrifices himself by committing suicide in an attempt to convince others of the significance of free will and the need for courage. The play is important to expressionist thought for its depiction of the "neuer Mensch" (new man), a modern human being who salvages meaning from the world through taking responsibility for his actions and setting an example for others. Many of Kaiser's plays include a Christlike protagonist who fits this "New Man" profile, and who would lead society into a new age of brotherhood through example.

The Dream Play

Strindberg's 1901 *The Dream Play* foreshadows many expressionist techniques and themes in its presentation of the unconscious. The plot concerns the daughter of an Indian god who adopts human form and discovers, through encounters with symbolic characters, the meaninglessness of human existence. With the obvious exception that the protagonist is female, the action parallels the story of Christ's life. The play itself□presented in sixteen scenes that flash backward and forward in time□ takes the form of a dream with symbols such as a growing castle, a chrysanthemum, and a shawl signifying aspects of the dreamer's life such as the imprisoned or struggling soul, and the accumulation of human pain. The characters are also symbolic. Victoria, for example, represents the ideal, yet unattainable, woman. The play has become a staple of European theater and is still performed today.

The Emperor Jones

Eugene O'Neill wrote and staged *The Emperor Jones* in 1920. It was the first American play to utilize expressionist techniques, and the most successful of O'Neill's early work. By using lights, sound, and sets, as well as actors' gestures, symbolically, O'Neill shows the audience his protagonist's psyche. As Brutus Jones, a black American who is tricked into becoming emperor of an island in the West Indies, runs through the jungle chased by rebellious natives, he has a series of encounters that symbolize not only events from his personal history but from his racial heritage as well. In this way, Jones is more of a type representing all black men. The play ran for 204 performances and gave the playwright confidence to continue experimenting with expressionist techniques. Such experiments include the use of masks in *The Great God Brown*, with spoken thoughts in *Strange Interlude* (1928) and *Dynamo* (1929), and with a chorus in *Lazarus Laughed* (1928).

The Metamorphosis

Kafka published *The Metamorphosis* in 1915; it is arguably the best known of his stories and novels and the most anthologized. The plot revolves around Gregor Samsa, a salesman who wakes up to discover he has turned into a giant insect. Samsa is locked in his room and ignored by his family until he dies. Critics point to Kafka's heavy use of symbolism in the story, a primary feature of Expressionism, and some read Samsa's transformation as representative of Kafka's own feeling of inadequacy in relation to his overbearing father. Stylistically and thematically, the story speaks to the experience of many expressionist artists and writers, who sought to find ways to express their sense of alienation from society and family and their quest to find meaning in a meaningless world.

Poems

Trakl's *Poems*, published in 1913, is the only volume he published during his life. In the introduction to *Autumn Sonata: Selected Poems of Georg Trakl*, Carolyn Forche calls Trakl "the first poet of German Expressionism," and notes that Trakl, like fellow expressionists Karl Kraus, Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele, was intensely alienated from the order of German industrial society. Trakl's poems embody this alienation: they are fragments, nightmarish images of a world choked with chaos, and of a tenuous and battered self attempting to function in that world. The logic connecting the images is associative, rather than linear. These lines are from *A Romance to Night*:

The murderer laughs until he grows pale in the
wine,
Horror of death consumes the afflicted.
Naked and wounded, a nun prays
Before the Savior's agony on the cross.

Critics debate Trakl's status as a Christian poet, but they are paying more attention to his work than any other German expressionist poet. Studies such as Francis Michael Sharp's *The Poet's Madness: A Reading of Georg Trakl* (1981), Richard Detsch's *Georg Trakl's Poetry: Toward a Union of Opposites* (1983), and a number of new translations of his poems attest to his growing influence on contemporary poetry and his importance to understanding Expressionism poetry.

Critical Overview

Critics and literary historians do not agree on what constitutes literary Expressionism, or even if it was a movement. For example, in R. S. Furness's book *Expressionism*, he acknowledges the attempts others have made to trace the origin of the movement back to the eighteenth century's *Sturm and Drang*, but claims, "It can also be argued that Expressionism is simply the name given to that form which modernism took in Germany." Roy Allen calls the problem faced by literary historians in trying to define literary Expressionism a "bugbear." Other critics and literary historians are more confident in their assessment. Ernst Toller, who is considered one of the leading postwar expressionist playwrights, writes of the movement, as embodied in drama: "Expressionism wanted to be a product of the time and react to it. And that much it certainly succeeded in doing." Mark Ritter points out, in "The Unfinished Legacy of Early Expressionist Poetry," that early literary Expressionism is particularly difficult to pin down and agrees with Allen that perhaps, "One does much better to conceive of early Expressionism as a number of loosely connected circles, primarily in Berlin." In *German Expressionist Drama*, by Literary historian Renate Benson, it is argued that Expressionism originally emerged in the fine arts, initiated by the Paris exhibition of Fauvist painters, and that literary Expressionism followed. Benson laments the fact that the Nazis banned expressionist drama when Hitler came to power, writing, "It is a tragic irony . . . that young German audiences after 1945 only became acquainted with Expressionism through the works of foreign writers . . . who themselves had been so powerfully influenced by German Expressionists."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Semansky holds a Ph.D. in English from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and he is an instructor of literature and writing whose essays, poems, stories, and reviews appear in publications such as College English, Mississippi Review, New York Tribune, The Oregonian, *and* American Letters & Commentary. *His books include* Death, But at a Good Price *(1991) and* Blindsided *(1998). In this essay, Semansky explores the idea of Expressionism as a literary movement*.

Critics struggle over whether or not there ever was a coherent expressionist movement, or if it is merely a label of convenience for literary historians seeking to characterize a wide range of writing practices in Western Europe in the early twentieth century. What *can* be said is that Expressionism was both part of a larger set of practices and attitudes that come under the umbrella of Modernism, and that it was a response to realistic modes of representation.

Modernism, as it applies to literature, is a term broadly used to denote certain features of form, style, and subject matter in writing in the early decades of the twentieth century. Thinkers influential to modernist literature include Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and Karl Marx, all of who challenged status quo ideas about the nature of humanity, morality, society, and writing itself. World War I furthered the adoption of Modernism, as writers such as James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot experimented with stream of consciousness, fragmentation, and other nonlinear modes of narration to represent a world whose foundations had been shaken to its roots. Expressionism undoubtedly was a part of Modernism, but was it a movement?

In his study of Expressionism in Berlin, Roy Allen defines the idea of a "literary movement" as "the concerted activities of an organized group or group of individuals work[ing] or tend[ing] towards some goal in behalf of . . . literature." Allen historicizes Expressionism by focusing on those writers who regularly met in cafes in Berlin and published one another's work. However helpful this definition might be for the historian interested in the details of small communities of writers with plans to change the order of things, it is of little use to the student trying to grasp the larger context from which Expressionism springs. Understanding the mind of the writer, as well as stylistic features and themes of what is commonly referred to as Expressionism, provides a more helpful introduction to the phenomenon.

Most critics, historians, and literature handbooks note Expressionism's response to Realism as a mode of representation. In literature, Realism refers to a historical period and a particular approach to writing. As practiced by novelists in the nineteenth century, Realism referred to descriptive writing that was plausible and that represented the ordinary in familiar ways. It attempted to reproduce the world as it was seen. Readers could believe what they read because their own experience confirmed that such stories could, in fact, happen. Instead of some far-flung romantic plot about exotic people in distant places, the realist writer focused on the everyday, describing the mundane and the local. Realists used language as a mirror held up to the world, and were interested

in portraying the "thingness" of life. The more "realist" the description, the more it matched the experience of the reader. Wilhelm Raabe, for example, a German Realist writer, described the everyday life of Berliners in his 1857 novel.

Expressionists responded to Realistic writing and art not only because it embodied what for them was a life-denying way of being in the world, but because they believed that the Realists, in attempting to portray truth, in fact were perverting it. The society that Realists portrayed in all of its middleclass frumpiness and injustices was the same one that expressionists believed was sapping their very lifeblood. Austrian author Hermann Bahr sums up the expressionist attitude best in his 1916 study, *Expressionismus*: "Man screams from the depths of his soul, the whole age becomes one single, piercing shriek. Art screams too, into the deep darkness, screams for help, for the spirit. That is expressionism." The scream, then, a response to the sudden recognition that the self is at root alone and without intrinsic meaning, is the defining image of Expressionism. In this way, expressionist writers anticipated the Existentialists who came to dominate the literary establishment after World War II.

By its nature, a scream distorts the face, denaturalizes it. A quick look at Munch's 1894 lithograph by the same name will attest to this. This is what the expressionists desired□to show the horror of everyday life, not its ordinariness. Poets such as Georg Heym and Jakob van Hoddis displayed this horror in their apocalyptic visions. The latter's poem, *End of the World* provides one early example of expressionist verse:

The bourgeois' hat flies off his pointed head,
the air reechoes with a screaming sound.
Tilers plunge from roofs and hit the ground,
and seas are rising round the coast (you read).
The storm is here, crushed dams no longer hold,
the savage seas come inland with a hop.
The greater part of a people have a cold.
Off bridges everywhere the railroads drop.

Juxtaposing mundane statements such as "The greater part of people have a cold" with sensational images of trains dropping from bridges is a feature of much expressionist poetry, as is associative logic in general, but these features do not cut across all expressionist verse. Another side of literary Expressionism is its revolutionary strivings. Apart from all the doom and gloom, many writers, especially after World War I, worked for social change. Expressionist chronicler Walter H. Sokel points out the difficulty of this endeavor in his study *The Writer in Extremis*: "German Expressionism sought to be two things in one: a revolution of poetic form and vision, and a reformation of human life. These two aims were hardly compatible." Sokel notes that by eschewing Realism as the stylistic base of their idealism, expressionist writers were not able to wed their desires for social change with their penchant for artistic experimentation. In other words, by limiting the accessibility of their work to the initiated and the educated, they also limited their potential influence. Some, like Franz Werfel, a Czech, and Hanns Johst adapted. Sokel writes of this group:

> What all of them gained was success in personal terms, a mass audience, the triumph of personal integration and power in the world. What they lost was success in aesthetic terms□the permanence and long-range effectiveness of their works.

In an essay for Victor Miesel's *Voices of German Expressionism*, Gottfried Benn, a leading expressionist writer, goes as far as to call Expressionism "a new form of historical existence" that was European at root, not German. Benn notes that between the years 1910-25 in Europe, "There was hardly another style except an anti-naturalistic style." Ulrich Weisstein, in exploring whether Expressionism is a style or a view of the world, points out that the word "Expressionism" was first used by French painter Julien-Auguste Hervé in 1901 to distinguish the work of Matisse and other painters from their impressionist predecessors, but did not find general acceptance until 1911 when art critics began to use it more liberally to describe Fauvist paintings. It was not until 1915 or so that the term was even used in reference to literature. Underscoring Expressionism's broader philosophical claims, Weisstein writes:

> Luckily . . . [Expressionism's] socio-political aspect can be subsumed under the term Activism. If, excluding this aspect, one defines the term broadly enough to include man's attitude toward himself, his fellow beings and the world at large, one can defend the use of Weltanschauung [i.e., worldview] in the sense of a sharp rejection of previously embraced views on the part of an entire generation.

Considered in this light, Expressionism could be seen as a generational conflict born out of younger artists' disgust with the inadequacies□ aesthetic, political, and social□of the previous generation. Combined with the desire not to reproduce the world, but to capture its essence in all of its chaos and rage, the expressionist literary movement was not limited to Germany. Rather, it spread across Europe and the United States, where writers held similar attitudes and were engaged in like literary enterprises. This is more true for poetry and fiction, less so for drama.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on Expressionism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following introduction excerpt, Ritchie provides an overview of formal elements in and original sources of German Expressionism.

Critical Essay #3

However disparate the views on Expressionism may be, it is generally true that an Expressionist play will tend to be different from a Neo-Romantic or Naturalistic play, no matter how extensive their common roots. Perhaps the most striking formal feature of Expressionist drama is abstraction. Essentially this means that the Expressionist dramatist is not concerned with projecting an illusion of reality on the stage; instead he gives something abstracted from reality, that is, either something taken from the real world but reduced to the bare minimum, or something totally abstracted from reality in the sense that the norms of time and place and individuation have been completely abandoned. Hence in Expressionism there is constant stress on giving the essence□the heart of the matter□deeper images instead of "mere" surface appearances. Not surprisingly, actions and plots are also pared down to the important outlines and only crucial situations are presented, while all "unnecessary" detail is eliminated. This same tendency is noticeable in the treatment of the dramatic figures, which show no characteristic features of particular individuals but tend to embody principles which the author holds to be important. As such, they bear no names and instead are often simply designated as Father, Mother, Husband, or Wife. Other dramatic figures can similarly represent states of mind, social positions, official functions, etc.; hence they are introduced merely as Cashier, Officer, and the like. The intention is clearly to move away from the specific and the conditioned to a more general sphere of reference and significance.

Abstraction of this kind is, needless to say, by no means restricted to Expressionist drama; indeed, it is a feature of Expressionist art in general. All in all, this is in line with the Expressionists' reaction against the materialistic philosophy of the Naturalists, who tended to show the force of milieu, race, class, and social circumstance as factors conditioning the character of the individual. The Expressionists were not interested in character in this sense and did not attempt to create dramatic characters in their plays. Character for them meant a limitation of scope. They were more concerned with the soul, that which is common to all men. Instead of creating an impression of real people in real situations, the Expressionist dramatists will therefore strive with religious longing for something beyond the merely material, for eternal and transcendental values.

While this is the essential nature of Expressionistic abstraction, the rejection of the principle of mimesis was given various explanations. Kasimir Edschmid, for example, said in a speech on literary Expressionism: "The world is there. It would be senseless to repeat it." But whatever the reasons offered, time and place were ignored by the Expressionist dramatist so that he could feel free to create his own subjective universe. The dream, with its associations apparently lacking in cause or logic, was substituted for normal reality. For this practice there was a model to hand in Strindberg, though there had been forerunners within the German dramatic tradition, among whom Kleist attracted most attention. Thus, from Sorge's *Der Bettler* (The Beggar) to Kaiser's *Gas II*, one constantly encounters dream-like sequences and figures.

After the dream, the most outstanding formal element in the Expressionist drama is the monologue. This is perhaps not surprising considering its function as the main vehicle for expressing the subjective developments within the soul of the lyrical- dramatic protagonists. The use of the monologue demonstrates yet another contrast with the Naturalists, who had argued that in real life people were supposed to converse and not soliloquize. No sooner had the monologue been banished, however, than it made its way back into the drama with even greater force than before, not least through the monologue dramas of Neo-Romantic dramatists like Hofmannsthal. The revival of the monologue was propitious for the Expressionist dramatist, who did not see life in terms of communication and sociability. Even his very explosions of longing for brotherhood and *Gemeinschaft* express an awareness of the fundamental isolation of man. Thus, egocentricity and solipsism become another hallmark of his works, expressed in formal terms by the long soliloquies of the one central figure, about whom all the other figures cluster like satellites around a major planet. The protagonist expresses *himself* alone; he does not speak for others, however much he may apostrophize mankind in general.

This solipsistic character of the Expressionist drama explains another feature, namely the scream. The Expressionist dramatist is not concerned to show normal life lived at a normal level or tempo. Instead, he strives for the exceptional and extreme situation, in which the protagonist simply explodes. In this way, once again he breaks through the restricting bonds of normalcy and is beside or beyond himself. At its best this means arriving at a state of ecstasy, which is the aim of the fundamental religious striving of the Expressionists. Ecstasy means experiencing the Divine immediately and absolutely, and not merely attempting to grasp it logically or rationally. At the same time, rhetorical and ecstatic monologues are not merely an expression of the thoughts and feelings of the isolated protagonists; they have a powerful effect on each member of the audience who is there to be stirred up out of his bourgeois mediocrity by powerful utterance. Clearly, such monologues can be as unwieldy as similar speeches in a Baroque drama by Andreas Gryphius or Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein; but the effect, once the improbability is accepted, can be equally overwhelming.

It must be admitted, however, that a potential source of weakness in Expressionist drama is the almost exclusive focus on one central protagonist, while all the other figures in the drama are reduced to mere reflections of his central position. However, it is possible to overstress the dangers of the single-perspective play. The same kind of technique was, after all, employed by Kafka in his fixed-perspective narratives to very powerful effect. At its best, as for example in Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (From Morn till Midnight), the solipsistic drama could be extremely successful in the way all other characters in the play mirror and reflect the problems of the cashier. Less successful is a more lyrical drama like Sorge's *The Beggar*, where even the hero's mother, father, and girlfriend seem to have been introduced simply in order to illuminate significant aspects of the young hero's soul.

As far as the actual structure of an Expressionist drama is concerned, dynamism has been singled out as the one significantly new element. By this is meant not only the forceful nature of the language employed, but also the principle whereby the protagonist is shown following a certain path through life. Hence, the drama becomes a

Stationendrama, following the ancient religious model of the stations of the cross. This means, in effect, a sequence of scenes which follow rapidly one upon the other, often with no obvious link between them. Here again there were models in the German dramatic canon, notably in the theater of Storm and Stress, though nearer to hand were the examples of Strindberg and Wedekind. Essentially, the dynamic, episodic structure mirrored the inner turmoil and awareness of chaos in the soul of the central figure, who, following the religious model, often goes through a total transformation. Such a *Wandlung* (the title of one of Toller's plays) is most clearly apparent in the case of Kaiser's cashier who is a mere machine-man in a bank and is electrically switched on by the touch of an exotic Italian lady. Through her his transformation becomes possible; he becomes aware of "life" and tries to realize his full potential as a human being. So from being a robot he is awakened to the possibility of human existence and sets off on his quest for fulfillment, being totally transformed from one second to the next. The religious parallels to his *Aufbruch* (new start) and his pilgrimage are made symbolically clear throughout.

Even on the printed page, one major difference between an Expressionist drama and its predecessors is immediately obvious by reason of the frequent alternation between verse and prose. Here again the Expressionist sees no reason to be arbitrarily limited to the single register of natural speech and is prepared to be unnatural and poetic; not that the verse is generally poetic in the normal melodic sense: instead, the Expressionistic dramatist preferred free verse which he could move into and out of quite easily, depending on the level of speech in the particular moment of the action. In verse he was able to leave the rational, logical world behind and penetrate to the deeper levels to express the stirrings of the soul. Here the poetic utterance conforms to the ecstatic state and the elevated manner. That here the Expressionist was yet again laying himself wide open to attack from hostile critics is readily apparent. Such attacks were not slow to come and have never stopped. Yet such pathos was not a simple sign of artistic impotence; on the contrary, it was a deliberately chosen style of the large gesture and the grand manner. The scream could end in stammering incoherence; pathos could result in Baroque-like effusion; but at its best the drama could be deeply stirring in its combination of rational control and surging emotion. Here once again extreme opposites seem to be the mark of the Expressionist style, which could be extremely dense, concentrated, compressed on the one hand, while on the other this shortness, sharpness, and eruptive spontaneity could overflow into seemingly endless monologues.

It is generally easy to identify the Expressionist style on the page not merely by the alternation of verse and prose but also by the proliferation of exclamation marks, dashes, and question marks, sometimes in clusters, while even the longest speech generally breaks down into shorter units, characterized by missing articles, eliminated particles, and condensed verbal forms in order to create the lapidary style of *Ballung*. Yet while such a style is, or can be, extremely aggressive and disturbing, another feature needs to be mentioned, namely its hymnic quality. Here Sorge's *The Beggar* and Hasenclever's *Der Sohn* (The Son) offer excellent examples of the manner in which the dramatists can soar higher and higher in tone, in the manner of a musical crescendo.

And yet it must not be thought that the Expressionist always operates at such a high level; indeed, it could be argued that the most striking weapon in the Expressionist armory was the ready exploitation of the grotesque, a technique deliberately designed to effect a break from a high level of tension and plunge down to the banal. The possibilities of the grotesque had been amply demonstrated by Wedekind in *Frühlings Erwachen* (Spring's Awakening) and elsewhere, and the Expressionist playwrights were not slow to follow his example. Hence, in the excitement of the Six Day Race in *From Morn till Midnight* the cashier sees five people squeezed together like five heads on one pair of shoulders till a bowler hat falls from one head onto the bosom of a lady in the audience below, to be imprinted on her bosom forever after. The bowler hat is followed by the middle man of the five, who plunges to his doom below as Kaiser puts it, like someone just "dropping" in! Such a use of the grotesque can be screamingly funny, but also screamingly terrifying. The mark of the grotesque is the distortion and exaggeration of the normal, the exploitation of caricature and distortion for effect.

Critical Essay #4

One question that has exercised the minds of critics is how far back one has to go to find the sources of that modernism in form and content associated with the theater of Expressionism. Medieval mystery plays have often been mentioned in this context, not merely because so many Expressionist plays share the religious striving of such early forms of theatrical production, but also because one of the features of Expressionism seems to have been a highly intellectual longing for a return to simpler forms. Hence, such obvious delight in *tableaux* as the "gothic" setting of Kaiser's *Die Bürger von Calais* (The Burghers of Calais) reveals, while the striking conclusion to Kaiser's play not only deliberately stresses the religious parallels to a secular situation, but also abandons language completely for a mode of expression relying on the visual impact of light, grouping, and gesture. Similarly, the whole play tends to follow a medieval "revue" pattern, in which sequences of scenes, or pictures, take the place of continuity of plot. Constantly referred to in connection with Expressionistic plays is the term *Stationendrama*. Hence, although an Expressionist play may appear on the surface to be very modernistic, modeled for example on Strindberg's *To Damascus*, the idea suggested is the far older one of the quest, involving the equally religious possibility of a revelation or transformation in the course of this path through life. Little wonder, then, that Expressionistic plays often adopted the form of the *Läuterungsdrama*, i.e., the play of purification in which an Everyman figure experiences an illumination and changes his life from one moment to the next. A feature of the Naturalistic play was the depiction of man as a creature of many conditioning factors. Man was a product of his environment, his class, race, and creed; his life ran along certain fixed tracks from which he could not deviate. The Expressionist dramatist, on the other hand, demonstrates that man is always free to choose and change. His are plays of "becoming," like Barlach's *Der blaue Boll* (Blue Boll). This character has been forced into a certain role in society, but, as the play demonstrates, he is a man and not a machine or an animal, and in the epic form of seven stations, or *tableaux*, he makes his "decision." Many Expressionistic plays are therefore also *Entscheidungsdramen*, plays in which a crucial decision for the course of a whole life is made. Very often, as in *Blue Boll*, the decision is a fundamental one involving the "Erneuerung des Menschen," the regeneration of man, a phrase which once again stresses the religious nature of so many Expressionistic works. Not surprisingly, plays of this kind tend toward universal themes and cosmic dimensions, which may mean that the characters are diminished, in one sense, as beings of flesh and blood and expanded, in another, to become representative figures for some aspect of the human dilemma.

But it would be wrong to seek the roots of Expressionist drama exclusively in the religious drama of the Middle Ages. Much more to the point is the general tendency to go back beyond the comparatively recent tradition of nineteenth-century drama to absolute simplicity combined with universal significance. This, Nietzsche had demonstrated, was to be found in the classics, not however, in the Apollonian world of beauty and light, but in the Dionysian sphere of darkness and ritual. Hence, from Kokoschka's *Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer Hope of Womankind) onward,

there is an increasing emphasis on myth. The process of condensation and compression becomes a paring down to the quintessential. The result is an economy going beyond the extreme simplicity of Greek classical drama and a concentration on all the hymnic, rhetorical potential of language. But it must be admitted that this process of reduction and concentration, combined with ritual incantations and myth-making, has some unfortunate results. However exciting it may be, Kokoschka's playlet on the myth of the purification of man who, in his struggle with woman, dies to be reborn, is so compressed that the meaning is largely obscured. In a myth-seeking play like Unruh's *Ein Geschlecht* (One Family), which was much praised in its own time, practically every permutation in the relationship between a mother and her children is projected through highly charged language□love, hate, incest, possible fratricide and matricide□while the action, which is not bound to any particular age or country, takes place before a mountain cemetery high above the wars in the valley. The results of such mythologizing can often be ludicrous, as for example in the mother's dying words which sound like an echo from Kleist, whose *Penthesilea* was indeed one of the sources of Unruh's inspiration: "Here, here and there too, plunge all your steel shafts deep into my blood! I'll melt them down till nothing remains to hurt my children."

An example of the fruitful use of classical simplicity is Goering's war play *Seeschlacht* (Naval Encounter). Unruh's play is marked by shouts, screams, and exclamations, and Goering's play too is a *Schreidrama* or "scream play," another label often attached to Expressionist drama. But the striking feature of *Naval Encounter* is the tight discipline and the controlled, hard, highly stylized language. The quick switches from short, sharp stichomythic utterances of classical brevity to long monologues of considerable eloquence are a feature of the new Expressionist style which revels in the conjunction of extremes□ice-cold with feverheat, compression with expansiveness, logicality with ecstasy, stasis with dynamicism. Characteristically, too, there is little or no plot□merely the situation of men moving toward their inevitable fate, in this case sailors in a gun turret going into battle, and hence to their death. There is no realistic detail: the stylization is now complete, the compression to abstract form extreme, the process of depersonalization total. The whole work with its Socratic dialogue has the style and rigor of a classical tragedy with its constant suggestion of forces outside man controlling his destiny. Yet the final outcome is not determined by fatalism but by the individual who stands out against the forces that threaten to control him and mankind. Man's duty to man is thus the chief criterion. Hasenclever, too, adopted the classical style in his antiwar play *Antigone;* his play *Menschen* (Humanity) is an even better example of the dangers of hovering between classical simplicity and a passion-play structure.

However, Expressionist dramatists were not generally accused of excessive formalism (though, as has been seen, the tendency toward classical concentration and condensation laid them open to this charge): they were more likely to be accused of formlessness. On the whole, this charge is probably unfair and brought about by the Expressionistic predilection for the open forms of drama associated with the German Storm and Stress. These open forms, in fact, as used by the previously underestimated Klinger and J. M. R. Lenz, whose works included balladesque and filmic scene sequences, gradually came to be appreciated in the period which began just before World War I and ended just after it. Indeed, Lenz in particular emerged as a model for

the twentieth century. An even more important influence than Lenz was Georg Büchner, also an exponent of the open form, whose most important drama was produced successfully for the first time about this period. The impact of his *Woyzeck* can be seen particularly in the Alban Berg opera *Wozzeck*, which it inspired.

Source: J. M. Ritchie, "Introduction," in *German Expressionist Drama*, Twayne Publishers, 1976, pp.15-39.

Adaptations

The 2000 film *Pollock*, starring Ed Harris, is a portrait of artist Jackson Pollock, a leader of the abstract expressionist painters popular during the 1940s and 1950s. The film is based on the biography *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith.

Mai Zetterling's 1981 documentary *Stockholm* presents a portrait of the Swedish city, its people, and their leaders. The film also includes a historical introduction to the works of Strindberg.

Actor Paul Robeson starred in the 1933 film adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*.

The Norwegian Film Institute distributes director Unni Straume's film, *Dreamplay*, an adaptation of Strindberg's *The Dream Play*.

Topics for Further Study

After studying the expressionist paintings of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky, compose a poster in the expressionist style for Strindberg's *The Dream Play* or O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. Present the poster to your class and describe its expressionist features.

With at least three other classmates, brainstorm a list of images for the following emotions and ideas: fear of death, journey of the soul, betrayal of a friend, unrequited love, rebelling against authority. What differences do you notice between your images and those of your classmates? Write a short essay accounting for these differences.

Research German expressionist director Fritz Lang's movies *M* and *Metropolis*, and present your research to the class. Then show one of the movies and hold a discussion of whether or not Expressionism is successful as an approach for film.

Edvard Munch's lithograph *The Scream* is often cited as being one of the earliest and most representative of expressionist paintings. It is also one of the most heavily marketed images of the twentieth century. Write a short essay explaining why this is so.

Read *Citizens of Calais* by Georg Kaiser, poems from Georg Trakl's collection *Poems*, and Kafka's story *The Hunger Artist*, and then compose a list of what is similar about all of these works.

Compare and Contrast

1910-1920: Largely as a result of the introduction of new weapons such as tanks, poison gas, and airplanes, more than ten million people die in World War I, creating an atmosphere of pervasive disillusionment and despair.

Today: Technological advances make it easier for countries and individuals to develop nuclear and biological weapons, increasing the potential for worldwide catastrophe.

1910-1920: In Russia, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, seize power and proclaim Russia a Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.

Today: Having largely abandoned communism, Russia makes steps towards a full-fledged democracy and market economy.

1910-1920: Expressionist literature, drama, and art dominate the avant-garde in Europe, shocking audiences and viewers in its departure from Realism.

Today: The capacity of art and literature to shock is largely gone, and no one movement or approach dominates. Instead of shock, readers and viewers often feel boredom in response to artists' and writers' experimentations.

What Do I Read Next?

Siegfried Kracauer's study of early German film (1910-1940), *From Caligari to Hitler*, provides insight into Expressionism's influence on German cinema.

Giles MacDonogh's 2001 biography, *The Last Kaiser: The Life of Wilhelm II*, tackles three important issues in the ruler's life: his personality, his relationship with his parents, and his role in the outbreak of World War I. Wilhelm II ruled Germany during the peak of Expressionism.

Bernard S. Myers's book *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt* (1957) surveys expressionist painters and painting in the 1920s and 1930s.

Roy Pascal's study *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society*, published in 1973, traces the roots of Expressionism to the late nineteenth century, examining its relationship to Naturalism and Realism.

In 1986, Christopher Waller published *Expressionist Poetry and Its Critics*, a study of how writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, and Robert Musil would critically approach representative expressionist poets.

Ulrich Weisstein's essay "German Literary Expressionism: An Anatomy," in the May 1981 issue of *German Quarterly*, explores how difficult it is to find common features for works that are often lumped under the category "German Literary Expressionism."

Further Study

Bridgwater, Patrick, *Poet of Expressionist Berlin: The Life and Work of Georg Heym*, Libris, 1991.

Bridgwater provides an accessible and entertaining biography of one of the leading poets of the expressionist movement.

Brod, Max, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, Da Capo, 1995.

Brod was a friend of Kafka's, and his biography is an insider's look at Kafka's life. This is an accessible, very sensitive, and thorough biography written on Kafka.

Dove, Richard, *He Was a German: A Biography of Ernst Toller*, Libris, 1990.

Toller was a socialist and leading expressionist dramatist. Dove provides an entertaining biography of his life and art.

Johnson, Walter, *August Strindberg*, Twayne, 1976.

Johnson's work on Strindberg's life and plays is an excellent place to begin study of this expressionist writer.

Styan, John, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Expressionism and Epic Theater*, Cambridge, 1981.

Styan considers expressionist theater as embodying a "rigorous anti-realism" in its representation of the world.Styan argues that Expressionism is most coherent in theater as opposed to poetry or fiction.

Webb, Daniel Benjamin, *The Demise of the "New Man": An Analysis of Ten Plays from Late German Expressionism*, Verlag Alfred Kummerle, 1973.

Webb's study traces the depiction of the "New Man" in expressionist plays from the 1920s and 1930s, concluding that playwrights became disillusioned with the ideal of such an entity and began writing about his downfall.

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Willet considers the expressionist movement in relation to historical, political, and social developments.

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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 novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. 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 novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

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

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume 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; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. 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 work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. 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: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. 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 Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series 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. 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 has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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 (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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