Symbolism Study Guide

Symbolism

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Introduction

The symbolist movement in literature originated during the 1850s in France and lasted until about 1900. Symbolism exerted a profound influence on twentieth-century literature, bridging the transition from Realism to Modernism. Symbolism also exerted a strong influence on the arts, including theatre, painting, and music. The symbolists sought to convey very personal, irrational, and dream-like states of consciousness, relying heavily on metaphorical language to approximate, or symbolize, an eternal essence of being that, they believed, was abstracted from the scope of the five senses. These literary ideals developed as a reaction against the dominance of positivism, which emphasized rational thought, objectivity, and scientific method. Symbolism also represented a reaction against Realism and Naturalism in literature, which sought to accurately represent the external world of nature and human society through descriptions of objective reality. Stylistically, the symbolists emphasized the inherent musicality of language, developed the use of *vers libre* (free verse), and modernized the existing form of the prose poem. The symbolists were greatly influenced by the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, whose *Les fleurs du mal* (1857; *Flowers of Evil*) embodied many of their literary ideals. In addition to Baudelaire, the central figures of French Symbolism are the poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. French Symbolism affected international literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular, inspiring the Russian symbolist movement, which developed in the 1880s. The literature of Germany, Great Britain, Japan, the United States, and Turkey was also influenced by Symbolism. Though poetry dominated the symbolist movement, great works of fiction and drama were also written by adherents of Symbolism.

Themes

The Inner Life of the Individual

The symbolist writers were concerned with expressing various elements of the internal life of the individual. They focused on subjective mental impressions, internal moods, delicate emotional states, and spiritual sentiments in reaction against the nineteenth-century focus on objective, external, concrete realities as perceived through rational scientific methods. Their use of imagery often exemplifies states of mind, the imagination, the human psyche, and dreams. Huysmans's symbolist novel *Against the Grain*, for example, concerns a man who isolates himself in a country house, avoiding contact with other people; the focus of the novel is thus on the detailed subjective perceptions of the hypersensitive protagonist within an isolated envi- ronment. Many symbolist poems, particularly those of Rimbaud, evoke the inner world of the child, capturing childhood impressions, perceptions, and flights of imagination.

The Journey

Many symbolist writers describe various journeys, voyages, or quests as metaphors for internal explorations into the inner consciousness of the individual. Baudelaire's poem "Le Voyage" ("The Voyage") describes a journey as a symbol of the quest for meaning and satisfaction in life. Rimbaud, who wrote many of his major poems while traveling with Verlaine, often focuses on symbolic journeys in his poetry, frequently describing travel as a metaphor for a quest into the imagination. For example, "Le Bateau ivre" ("The Drunken Boat"), one of Rimbaud's most famous poems, narrates a voyage by boat as a metaphor for an internal voyage into the mind of the individual. Verlaine also wrote a number of poems based on his travels with Rimbaud.

Sensual and Spiritual Love

The major symbolist poets were men, and many of their poems explore the tension in their lives between the sensual love of women and the spiritual idealization of women. These themes are addressed in the first section of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*, wherein three cycles of love poetry are associated with three different women with whom Baudelaire was involved during his life. Baudelaire's poem "The Head of Hair" focuses on the sensuality of a woman's hair. The symbolist poets also strove for the realization of spiritual ideals through their love poetry. They considered beauty to be an abstract spiritual ideal that can only be hinted at through the presence of physical beauty. Mallarmé described this concept as the ideal flower that does not exist in any real bouquet. Not all symbolist poetry was inspired by heterosexual relationships. The love poetry of both Verlaine and Rimbaud was often inspired by their own homosexual relationship.

Religion and Spirituality

Symbolist literature is often preoccupied with spiritual exploration and religious questions. Symbolist writers developed religious themes in a variety of ways. Much of Baudelaire's poetry explores the Catholic concept of sin and the figure of Satan. The section of *Flowers of Evil* entitled "Revolt" focuses on Baudelaire's struggles with the allure of Satanism. Rimbaud, on the other hand, offers harsh criticism of traditional religious beliefs throughout his writing, while striving to express spiritual ideals. Verlaine, who experienced a religious awakening while in prison, wrote poetry expressing the Catholic faith in his volume *Wisdom*. Blok is noted for his verse ballad *The Twelve*, in which the exploits of a band of revolutionary rebels are described as a Christian parable.

Urban Life

Modern urban life is an important element and central theme of symbolist poetry that inaugurated the transition to modern literature in the twentieth century. Baudelaire, in his "Parisian Tableaus," a section of *Flowers of Evil*, wrote some of the first poetry to depict nineteenth-century urban landscapes and urban squalor. His famous poem "The Swan" expresses feelings of alienation evoked by life in the modern city.

Style

Free Verse

Free verse or *Vers libre* was developed by the symbolist poets as a form of verse liberated from the traditional formal requirements of French poetry, such as meter and rhyme. The symbolists felt the formal qualities of a poem should emerge from its content, rather than being imposed upon it by the rules of tradition. Free verse poetry thus tends to be structured according to the rhythms of everyday speech. French symbolist poets Jules Laforgue (1860-1887) and Gustave Kahn (1859-1936) were the first to develop free verse, which they began to use in the 1880s. Because of the influence of symbolist poetry, free verse came to characterize modern poetry in the twentieth century. Early English-language poets who used free verse include T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

Musicality of Language

Symbolist writers were particularly interested in bringing out the musical qualities of language. They developed works of lyrical beauty in which language was orchestrated with image to create a symphony of mood and suggestion. Verlaine and Mallarmé are particularly revered for the musical qualities of their poetry. Blok brought musicality to Russian verse in his ballad *The Twelve*. In drama, the plays of Maeterlinck are notable for the musical qualities of the dialogue.

Mood

The symbolists focused on evoking a strong sense of mood through the use of language. Moods such as longing, regret, a sense of loss, and reverie are often expressed in symbolist literature. The poets strove to evoke specific moods through the expression of subtle internal states of mind. In symbolist fiction and drama, plot is less important than the overall mood or atmosphere that is created.

The Fairy Tale

A number of symbolist writers drew from traditional folktales and fairytales in their works of poetry, fiction, and drama. Maeterlinck, for example, in his plays *The Princess Maleine* and *Pelleas and Melisande*, drew from a variety of popular folktales to create dramas set in traditional fairytale settings and featuring characters from folk literature. Rimbaud drew extensively on the fairytale in experimental narrative poems that transform this traditional genre.

Historical Context

Although the subject matter of symbolist poetry was focused on the individual and was generally apolitical, several of the symbolist poets themselves were involved in major political events that took place in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. These events included the Revolution of 1848, the Second Empire, the Franco-German War, and the Paris Commune.

The Revolution of 1848 in France was a uprising of citizens that resulted in the overthrow of the existing constitutional monarchy under King Luis-Philippe. The revolution consisted of three days of rioting during the month of February, in which the army engaged in a violent clash with a crowd of demonstrators. As a result of this public unrest, the king chose to abdicate the throne and named his nine-year-old grandson as his successor. Thus began the period of French government known as the Second Republic, which included a new constitution providing for a variety of social reforms. Four months after the formation of the Second Republic, civil unrest again erupted in Paris in a four-day-long civil war known as the June Days. The June Days were sparked when workers, supported by students and artisans, protested against government budget cuts that denied welfare to thousands of unemployed people. This rebellion ended after the army shot and killed 1,500 demonstrators and arrested 12,000 of them. The symbolist poet Baudelaire, at that time still unpublished, is known to have participated in both the February and the June uprisings of 1848.

In the first presidential election of the Second Republic, voters chose Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. According to the constitution of the Second Republic, no president could serve more than one four-year term. Thus, after serving several years as president, Louis- Napoleon Bonaparte, who wished to maintain his position as leader of France, staged a coup of his own government in 1851. After some seventy politicians were arrested, Napoleon presented a new constitution and formulated a new government. The citizens of France immediately responded to Napoleon's actions by staging mass protests throughout Paris and the outlying provinces. In the course of several days of demonstrations, the police and military killed hundreds of protestors and arrested some 27,000 people. Although he was not harmed or arrested, Baudelaire is known to have participated in these demonstrations. After these events, Baudelaire gave up on political activism and focused his attentions on writing. In 1852, Louis- Napoleon had himself named Emperor Napoleon III of France, beginning an era of French government known as the Second Empire.

The advent of the Franco-German War (also known as the Franco-Prussian War), brought an end to the Second Empire of France. In 1870, France declared war on Germany, after which time German troops invaded France. When war broke out, Huysmans, not yet a published author, was called to military duty. However, he almost immediately contracted dysentery and spent most of the war in various military hospitals without seeing battle. Huysmans was eventually granted sick leave from the military, and returned home to Paris. Arriving home, he found himself in a Paris besieged by Prussian forces. Huysmans diligently kept notes on his experiences of the siege that he

intended to use for a later novel (a project which he continued to work on after the war but never completed).

In the Battle of Sedan, French military forces, headed by the Emperor Napoleon, were surrounded and defeated by the Germans in 1870. The French surrendered and Napoleon, along with thousands of French troops, was taken as a prisoner of war. On the home front in Paris, citizens disillusioned by the capture of Napoleon took to the streets to demand a new government. Thus, in 1870 a new government in France, known as the Third Republic, was formed without violent conflict. Early in 1871, France signed an armistice with Prussia. The Third Republic lasted until the German occupation of France during World War II.

Although the Third Republic endured until World War II, it was not without opposition. In 1871, a rebellion in France known as the Paris Commune lasted some two-and-a-half months. The Paris Commune began when a coalition of political activists in Paris, opposing a variety of Third Republic initiatives, organized an insurrection against the newly formed government. Soon, a municipal government, known as the Commune of Paris, was formed by the revolutionaries, who were known as the communards. Similar communes were formed in outlying cities, but were quickly put down by the French government. Huysmans, who held a low-level government post during and after the Franco-German war, fled with the French government to Versailles for the duration of the Paris Commune. Rimbaud, still a teenager and not yet published, ran away from home to participate in the Paris Commune. After three weeks, Rimbaud returned home, narrowly missing the bloody conflict that was to follow, when government troops violently crushed the rebellion during what became known as the "Bloody Week." The communards responded by executing hostages, among whom was the archbishop of Paris, and setting fire to major municipal buildings. Some 20,000 rebels and 750 government troops were killed during the "Bloody Week," and some 45,000 insurrectionists were arrested or deported. The defeat of the Paris Commune effectively squelched political resistance in France for years afterward. Rimbaud, disillusioned by this defeat, turned his focus from political activism to the pursuit of writing. Huysmans returned to Paris with other government officials after the insurrection was put down.

Movement Variations

International Influence

The symbolist movement, though begun in France, had a profound influence on international literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inspired by the reading of French symbolist poetry in translation, the poets of the Russian symbolist movement emerged during the 1890s. Russian Symbolism is one of the early literary movements that characterized the "Silver Age" in Russia, a period of great intellectual and literary achievement. The development of Russian symbolist literature was inspired by the writings of the Russian philosopher and poet Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900), in conjunction with French symbolist literature. The Russian symbolist movement is dated from the 1893 publication of the essay "On the Reasons for the De- cline and on the New Trends in Contemporary Russian Literature," written by Dmitry Merezhkovsky.

Russian symbolist literature developed in two waves. The first wave included the poet Valery Bryusov (1873-1924), who translated French symbolist poetry into Russian and was regarded as the leader of Russian Symbolism; the poet Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945); and the poet and novelist Fyodor Sologub. The second wave of Russian Symbolism is associated with three major literary figures: Aleksandr Blok, Vyacheslav Ivanov, and Andrey Bely. Blok, considered one of the greatest Russian poets of the twentieth century, is celebrated for his symbolist verse ballad *The Twelve*, a religious parable that takes place during the Russian Revolution. Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949) is known as a symbolist poet and a major theoretical influence on Russian Symbolism. Andrey Bely (1880-1934) is best known for his symbolist novel *Petersburg*.

While other national cultures did not necessarily develop their own unique symbolist movements, the modernist literature of many nations did develop out of symbolist influence. English literature in particular was influenced by Symbolism, including the works of poet T. S. Eliot and poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, as well as novelists James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The imagist movement in American and English poetry, developed by Ezra Pound and others, was also inspired by Symbolism. German writers, particularly poet Rainer Maria Rilke and novelist Thomas Mann, were affected by Symbolism, which also exerted influence on Japanese and Turkish literature.

Theatre

Symbolist theatre developed in France in conjunction with the works of symbolist playwrights. In 1890, Paul Fort founded the Theatre d'Art in Paris, which produced works of symbolist drama. In 1892, upon the death of Fort, Aurelien Lugne- Poe founded the Theatre de l'Oeuvre from the Theatre d'Art. Symbolist theatre was particularly influenced by the literary ideals of Mallarmé. The theatrical productions were a reaction against realist drama in staging, costumes, and performance style. The influence of symbolist painting affected the use of backdrops and stage sets to embody

the symbolist ideals of recreating specific moods and internal states of mind, rather than reproducing realistic settings or scenarios. Maeterlinck is the most celebrated symbolist playwright. Other major symbolist playwrights include the French writers Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (1838-1889) and Paul Claudel (1868-1955).

Painting

Symbolist painting was as important to the development of modern art as symbolist poetry was to the development of modern literature. Symbolist painting was inspired by symbolist poetry and was a reaction against Realism and Impressionism. Symbolist painters focused on depicting the world of dream, myth, fantasy, and the imagination, and on creating visual expressions of internal moods and subjective states of mind. The most important symbolist painters were Odilon Redon (1840- 1916), who was a close friend of Mallarmé; Gustave Moreau (1826-1898); and Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898).

Music

Symbolism exerted a significant influence on musical composition of the twentieth century. Most notably, French composers Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) applied symbolist ideals to their music. Like Baudelaire and other symbolist poets, Debussy was strongly influenced by the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Debussy's famous composition *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1894) is based on Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun*. Debussy also adapted Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande* as an operatic composition with a libretto by Maeterlinck himself, first performed in 1902. Ravel adapted the poetry of Mallarmé to music in his 1913 vocal composition *Trois poèmes de Stephane Mallarmé* (*Three Poems by Stephane Mallarmé*).

Representative Authors

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

The poetry of Charles Baudelaire was the chief inspiration for the development of Symbolism. His masterpiece, *Les fleurs du mal* (*Flowers of Evil*), and his important collection of prose poetry *Petits poèmes en prose* (1868; *Little Prose Poems*), embody the central ideals of the symbolist movement. Baudelaire was born on April 9, 1821, in Paris, France. As a young man he established himself as a popular critic of art and literature. When he first encountered the short fiction of American writer Edgar Allen Poe in 1847, Baudelaire immediately felt that Poe's literary sensibilities resonated strongly with his own. Thenceforth, he devoted much of his life to translating the works of Poe into French. Through these translations, Poe became an important influence on the later French symbolist poets. In 1848, Baudelaire participated in two major political events in France, the Revolution of 1848 and the June Days rebellion. In 1855, eighteen of his poems were published in a literary journal as a collection entitled *Flowers of Evil*. *Flowers of Evil* was eventually expanded to include over one hundred poems and published as a single volume. In the 1860s, Baudelaire began to compose the prose poems that were posthumously collected in the volume *Little Prose Poems* (later republished as *Le spleen de Paris*, or *Paris Spleen*). Baudelaire died of complications resulting from syphilis on August 31, 1867, in Paris, in financial ruin and with many of his poems still unpublished. However, the young generation of writers who developed the symbolist movement regarded him as their literary father, and Baudelaire soon came to be widely viewed as one of the greatest French poets of the nineteenth century.

Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921)

Aleksandr (Aleksandrovich) Blok is considered the greatest poet of the Russian symbolist movement. Blok's symbolist masterpiece is the epic poem, *Dvenadtsat* (1918; *The Twelve*). His literary ideals developed from a synthesis of the influences of Russian poets Aleksandr Pushkin and Vladimir Solovyov. Blok was born on November 16, 1880, in St. Petersburg, Russia, and died on August 7, 1921, in Petrograd (the postrevolutionary name given to St. Petersburg).

Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907)

Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884; *Against the Grain*) is considered the greatest novel to emerge from the symbolist movement. Huysmans was born Charles Marie Georges Huysmans, February 5, 1848, in Paris, France. Huysmans took up a lifelong career as a civil servant for the French government. He became associated with the naturalist school of fiction headed by the great French novelist Emile Zola. The publication of *Against the Grain*, however, signaled his break with Naturalism, as the novel embodies the ideals of the symbolist poets. His novel *Là-bas* (1891; *Down There*)

is based on a real-life historical figure who was executed in 1440 for murdering children. Huysmans died of cancer May 12, 1907, in Paris.

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949)

Maurice Maeterlinck was the foremost playwright of the symbolist movement and the greatest Belgian playwright of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Maeterlinck was born on August 29, 1862, in Ghent, Belgium. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1886. Maeterlinck worked as a lawyer until 1889, when he decided to devote himself to writing. In 1897, Maeterlinck went to Paris, where he met many of the leading symbolist writers of the day. He sent his first play, *La Princesse Maleine* (1890; *The Princess Maleine*), to Mallarmé, who sent it on to an important French dramatist and critic of the day. *The Princess Maleine* was an immediate success and many plays followed, including *L'Intruse* (1890; *The Intruder*) and *Les aveugles* (1890; *The Blind*). Maeterlinck's masterpiece and the greatest work of symbolist theatre, *Pelléas et Mélisande* (*Pelleas and Melisande*), was produced at the Théatre de l'Oeuvre in 1892. His book *La vie des abeilles* (*The Life of the Bee*), published in 1901, compares his observations of the behavior of bees to human society. His play *L'Oiseau bleu* (1909; *The Blue Bird*) was an international success and has been adapted several times as a children's book and a major motion picture. The phrase "the bluebird of happiness" derives from this enormously popular and enduring story. Maeterlinck won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1911. He died of a heart attack on May 6, 1949, in Nice, France.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898)

Stéphane Mallarmé was one of the founders of the symbolist movement and a major influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry. Mallarmé was profoundly influenced by the poetry of Baudelaire, from which he developed the literary ideals of Symbolism. Mallarmé was born on March 18, 1842, in Paris, France. His mother died when he was only five years old. By the time he was twenty-one, his sister and father had also died. These early experiences with death may have contributed to the deep sense of loss expressed in his later work. Mallarmé made his living as a teacher, editor, and translator while working on his poetry. His *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1876; *The Afternoon of a Faun*) is a major work of symbolist poetry. Mallarmé also held a weekly, Tuesday-evening literary, artistic, and musical salon in his apartment in Paris. He thus was an important intellectual influence on the symbolist movement in that he devoted himself to developing and communicating the theoretical basis for Symbolism. In his poetry, Mallarmé was interested in exploring the relationship between everyday reality and an ideal world of perfection and beauty that transcends reality, what he described as the ideal flower that is absent from all bouquets. Mallarmé died September 9, 1898, in the French village of Valvins. His major works of poetry are collected in the volumes *Vers et prose* (1893) and *Poésies* (1899). His essays on literature are collected in the volume *Divagations* (1897; Wanderings).

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891)

Arthur Rimbaud was one of the founding poets of the symbolist movement and a major influence on modern poetry. Rimbaud was born on October 20, 1854, in Charleville, France. As a teenager he ran away from home to go to Paris on three separate occasions. During one of these ventures, he participated in the 1871 rebellion of the Paris Commune. However, disillusioned by the violent suppression of the Paris Commune, Rimbaud chose to devote his life to poetry rather than political action. Rimbaud, like Mallarmé and Verlaine, was influenced by the poetry of Baudelaire. In 1871, Rimbaud sent some of his poems to Verlaine, who was so impressed that he paid for Rimbaud to come to Paris and stay several months in his home. In Paris, Rimbaud met many important literary figures but alienated most of them with his vulgar behavior. However, Rimbaud and Verlaine (who was married at the time) developed an openly acknowledged homosexual relationship. The two men engaged in a tumultuous, passionate, intermittent love affair for several years. Rimbaud traveled with Verlaine to London and Brussels in the early 1870s, during which time Rimbaud composed the prose poetry later collected in *Les illuminations* (*Illuminations*). In 1873, the volatile nature of their relationship reached a peak when Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the wrist. Soon after this incident, Rimbaud returned to his family home in France, where he completed his volume of prose poetry, *Une saison en enfer* (1873; *A Season in Hell*). In 1875, Rimbaud saw Verlaine for the last time. He left Verlaine with the manuscript of the volume *Illuminations*, which Verlaine saw to publication in 1886. Rimbaud spent most of the remainder of his life traveling the world, largely cut off from the literary world of Paris. His period of poetry writing lasted from about age sixteen to twenty-one. In February 1891, Rimbaud returned to France for cancer treatments. He died on November 10, at the age of thirty-seven.

Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)

Paul Verlaine was one of the principal founders of the symbolist movement. Verlaine was born on March 30, 1844, in Metz, France. In 1862, he began his association with many of the literary figures of the day, including Mallarmé, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, and Anatole France. He married in 1870, but his marriage was disrupted by the arrival of Rimbaud in 1871, with whom Verlaine carried on a passionate and tumultuous love affair over a period of years. In 1872, Verlaine abandoned his wife to travel with Rimbaud to London and Brussels and to work on his poetry. In 1873, in Brussels, Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the wrist during a quarrel and was sentenced to two years in prison. His masterpiece, the poetry volume *Romances sans parole* (*Songs without Words*), was published in 1874, while Verlaine was still in prison. His volume *Sagesse* (1880; *Wisdom*), published in 1880, has come to be regarded as one of his major works. In the early 1880s, Verlaine was recognized as a leading symbolist poet, particularly with his poem "Art poétique." His volume *Les poètes maudits* (1884; *The Accursed Poets*), includes short biographical essays on six poets, including Mallarmé and Rimbaud. In 1886, Verlaine oversaw the publication of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. When Verlaine died of pulmonary congestion on January 8, 1896, in Paris, he was

widely recognized as a major French poet of the nineteenth century and one of the founders of the symbolist movement.

Representative Works

The Afternoon of a Faun

The Afternoon of a Faun, published by Mallarmé in 1876, is one of the greatest works of symbolist verse. It explores the relationship between the real world and an idealized spiritual world of perfection and beauty. It also deals with sensuality, passion, and physical sensation and how they attain significance through meditation and introspection.

Against the Grain

The novel *Against the Grain*, by Huysmans, was published in 1884 and is considered the greatest work of symbolist fiction. The story concerns a wealthy, privileged, and hypersensitive man who leaves Paris to isolate himself from human society. He does so by shutting himself in a luxurious country home where he sees no one. Even his servants are made to stay out of his sight. Huysmans is less concerned with plot than with the state of mind of his protagonist. Like the symbolist poets, Huysmans wished to explore the inner spiritual and psychological state of the individual through his writing. He employs prose that borders on the poetic, using language in experimental ways that embody symbolist ideals. With *Against the Grain*, Huysmans made a daring break from the Realism and Naturalism of his literary mentor, the famous French novelist Emile Zola. Huysmans's admiration of the symbolist poets is expressed within the story when the protagonist reads the poetry of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine.

Flowers of Evil

Flowers of Evil, by Baudelaire, was the primary literary inspiration for the symbolist poets, and remains one of the most celebrated works of nineteenth- century French verse. The poems embody the central ideals of Symbolism. Although Baudelaire himself was a precursor to the symbolist movement, *Flowers of Evil* is considered a major work of symbolist poetry. The first edition of 100 poems was published in 1857. A second edition in 1861 was expanded to include 126 poems. This 1861 edition is divided into six sections: "Spleen et Ideal" ("Spleen and the Ideal"), "Tableaux Parisians" ("Parisian Tableaus"), "Le Vin" ("Wine"), "Fleurs du mal" ("Flowers of Evil"), "Révolte" ("Revolt"), and "La Mort" ("Death"). In *Flowers of Evil*, Baudelaire maintains traditional formal elements of verse in poems that are highly innovative in theme and imagery. The poems address themes of original sin, beauty, love, death, and the tension between sensuality and spirituality. The subjects of the poems include the spiritual and sensual love of women, the powers of Satan, and the spiritual struggles inherent to the human condition. The section "Parisian Tableaus" was added to the 1861 edition and contains poems about the city of Paris, noted as the first modern urban poetry. *Flowers of Evil* includes Baudelaire's most famous poem, "Le Cygne" ("The Swan"), in which the

memory of a swan, escaped from the zoo and stranded near the Louvre in Paris symbolizes the human plight of alienation and loss that are commonly addressed in modern literature. Other major poems in this volume include "La Chevelure" ("The Head of Hair") and "Correspondences."

Illuminations

Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* is considered a masterwork of symbolist prose poetry. It consists of forty-two prose poems first composed in 1873. The collection was not published until 1886, at a time when Rimbaud was traveling the world. Paul Verlaine, to whom Rimbaud had given the manuscript, was unable to contact Rimbaud and published the volume without Rimbaud's knowledge. Rimbaud himself may never have seen this publication. In *Illuminations*, Rimbaud developed the prose poem in accordance with the symbolist aesthetic. His unique use of language, punctuation, and informal structure is extremely experimental, leaving many readers baffled about the poems' meanings and many critics at odds over how to interpret the work. Rimbaud's themes include the importance of childhood perceptions, the journey as metaphor, the spirit of rebellion, and the mysteries of nature. He frequently ends his poems with a single, powerful line that is both striking and enigmatic.

Pelleas and Melisande

Pelleas and Melisande, by Maeterlinck, is considered the greatest work of symbolist drama. This five-act play was first produced in 1893. It uses a fairytale setting and revolves around the Princess Melisande, whose passionate love for her husband's brother leads to doom and destruction. While the plot and characterization are relatively simple, the play expresses a powerful mood of longing in language notable for its musical qualities.

Songs without Words

Verlaine's *Songs without Words* was published in 1874 and is a collection of poems that captures the musicality of the French language. The volume includes twenty-one poems and is divided into four sections: "Ariettes oubliées" ("Forgotten Ariettas"), "Paysages belges" ("Belgian Landscapes"), "Birds in the Night" (titled in English in the original version), and "Arquarelles" ("Watercolors"). The tone of the poems is highly personal, expressing feelings of passion, guilt, regret, and nostalgia. These poems were written during Verlaine's travels with Rimbaud to Belgium and England and express his mixed feelings about the wife he abandoned as well as his feelings for Rimbaud. The first edition of *Songs without Words* was published while Verlaine was imprisoned after having shot Rimbaud in the wrist during a lover's quarrel. Verlaine originally dedicated the volume to Rimbaud, but the dedication was removed from the published edition because of the scandalous nature of Verlaine's relationship to Rimbaud.

The Twelve

The verse ballad *The Twelve*, by Blok, was published in 1918 and is a masterpiece of Russian symbolist poetry. It concerns twelve brutal Red Guards on a rampage during the St. Petersburg uprising of 1917 and 1918. Stylistically, *The Twelve* is celebrated for Blok's use of language that is both vernacular and musical, expressing harsh vulgarities as well as delicate moods.

Critical Overview

Critical response to the development of Symbolism was itself an important contribution to the symbolist movement, as many of the literary critics and leading theorists of Symbolism were themselves symbolist writers. These critics contributed to the shaping, definition, and dissemination of the movement. A discussion of critical responses to Symbolism is thus also a historical narrative of the development of the movement.

If Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Rimbaud are the fathers of Symbolism, Baudelaire may be considered the grandfather. Baudelaire's first major publication was met with public controversy as well as critical acclaim. His poetry volume *Flowers of Evil*, the seminal text of the symbolist movement, was first published amidst great controversy. Of the one hundred poems in the first edition, thirteen were singled out by a government agency as violations of laws of decency and religious morality. These thirteen poems were judged in a court of law, as a result of which six were found illegal and extracted from the published volume. Baudelaire and his editors were also required to pay a fine. (The ban on publication of these six poems in France was not lifted until 1949.) Despite this public controversy, major critics as well as some of the most important French writers of the day, including Gustave Flaubert and Victor Hugo, offered high praise for *Flowers of Evil*, recognizing the value of Baudelaire's innovative poetry. Baudelaire himself, however, was greatly discouraged by the censorship and public notoriety of his work.

The founders of Symbolism□Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Rimbaud□developed their literary ideals against the dominance of Realism in nineteenth- century literature. The realist aesthetic in poetry was concentrated in the development of a group of writers known as the "Parnassians." The Parnassians strove to create accurate, precise, objective descriptions of external objects and events, and to resist the emotional outpouring associated with romantic poetry. Mallarmé and Verlaine were among the Parnassian poets until they broke away from these ideals to write poetry focusing on the subjective, irrational, internal states of mind of the individual that characterizes the symbolist ideal.

Before the term Symbolism was applied to this new development in French poetry, these 1880s poets were termed the "decadents," a term first applied by critics to poets Verlaine and Jules Laforgue as an insult. The poets took up the epithet with pride, however, founding the literary review *Le Decadent* (*The Decadent*) in 1886. The term Symbolism was coined in 1886 in an article by Jean Moreas that laid out the theoretical and aesthetic ideals of this literary movement. Moreas suggested that symbolist was a more apt label for these poets than decadent.

The symbolist novel developed in reaction against the realist fiction of the naturalists. The realists strove to accurately represent objective depictions of external reality in their fiction, based on close, detailed observations of the world. Emile Zola, the famous French novelist, was a leader of the naturalist movement in literature, an extension of Realism. Early in his writing career, Huysmans was associated with Zola's circle of naturalist writers. However, Huysmans became the foremost symbolist novelist when he broke away from Zola's circle and wrote *Against the Grain*, a novel that focuses almost

exclusively on the internal states of mind of a hypersensitive protagonist isolated from human society. Because it so sharply broke with his own literary ideals, Zola's critical response to Huysmans's novel was predictably negative. Interestingly, although the symbolist poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé preceded and inspired Huysmans's novel, it was Huysmans's discussion of these poets in *Against the Grain* that introduced many readers to symbolist poetry. Thus, the popularity of *Against the Grain* helped expand the readership of symbolist poetry.

Although not all of their major works were published within their lifetimes, many of the major poets of the symbolist movement were, by the time of their deaths, recognized as some of the greatest and most influential writers of the nineteenth century. Writers and literary critics throughout the twentieth century agree that the symbolist movement exerted a profound and widespread influence on modern literature. Symbolism is regarded as the bridge between nineteenth-century Realism and twentieth-century Modernism in literature. Twentieth- century literary movements such as Imagism, Surrealism, and dadaism were directly influenced by Symbolism. In the early twenty first century, Symbolism continues to be widely regarded as one of the most important influences on international literature of the previous two centuries.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture and works as a freelance writer. In this essay, Brent discusses the development of the modern prose poem in symbolist literature.

Critical Essay #2

One of the many lasting influences of the symbolist movement on international literature can be seen in the development of the modern prose poem during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Prose poetry is written in the form of prose, yet maintains the lyrical language use, suggestive imagery, and thematic sensibilities of poetry. The formal properties of the prose poem are intended to liberate verse from traditional requirements of metrical form and line breaks. The prose poem also liberates prose from traditional requirements of story line and narrative closure. Prose poems are usually short, generally anywhere from one paragraph to several pages in length. One of the enduring literary issues raised by prose poetry is the question of how to define it as a literary form distinct from both poetry and prose. The very notion of prose poetry thus raises questions about the boundary between prose and poetry.

Although the symbolists did not invent prose poetry, they freed it from its traditional tone and themes and developed the form as a modern mode of expression. Baudelaire is credited as the inventor of the modern prose poem, producing the important volume *Little Poems in Prose* (1869; later published as *Paris Spleen*). Other important volumes of symbolist prose poetry include Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886) and *A Season in Hell* (1873). Mallarmé, one of the founders of Symbolism, also wrote a number of important prose poems.

Critical Essay #3

French poets were first introduced to the prose poem, a relatively obscure genre of literature, in the mid-nineteenth century, through the French writer Louis Bertrand (1807-1841; also known as Aloysius Bertrand). Bertrand first began to publish his prose poetry in a newspaper in 1828. However, his collected volume of prose poetry *Gaspard de la Nuit* (*Gaspard of the Night*) was not published until 1842, a year after his death. With this publication, Bertrand was the first significant French writer to utilize the form of the prose poem.

The prose poems of *Gaspard of the Night* are based on Bertrand's fascination with the medieval history of the city of Dijon, France, and express a romanticized vision of the city's gothic past. Bertrand's prose poetry shows the influence of the romantic movement in literature, with which he was peripherally associated. His prose poetry, however, was entirely innovative in developing a French prose form that retains the lyrical qualities of poetry.

Baudelaire can be credited with bringing the prose poetry of Bertrand to the attention of the French literary world in 1869, when he mentioned the volume with high praise in his introduction to *Little Poems in Prose*. As Baudelaire explains in this introduction, he was first inspired to try his own hand at composing prose poetry through his reading of Bertrand's *Gaspard of the Night*. Baudelaire confesses his debt to Bertrand as his inspiration in attempting to expand the possibilities of the prose poem by applying it to expressions of life in the modern city. Baudelaire states that, while reading *Gaspard of the Night*:

> for at least the twentieth time . . . the idea came to
> me to try something similar, and to apply to the description
> of modern life, or rather *one* modern and
> more abstract life, the procedure [Bertrand] had applied
> to the depiction of ancient life, so strangely
> picturesque.

Baudelaire further describes his "dream" of writing in a form that combined elements of poetry and prose:

> Which of us has not, in his ambitious days, dreamed
> of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without
> rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and
> choppy enough to fit the soul's lyrical movements,
> the undulations of reverie, the jolts of consciousness?

Baudelaire first coined the term "prose poem" in reference to a group of his own poems published in 1861. He also describes his innovative style of prose poetry as "fables of modern life." Edward K. Kaplan, in an introduction to his 1989 volume of translations of *Little Poems in Prose*, observes that one of the modern elements of Baudelaire's fables

is the fact that, unlike traditional fables that end with a clear moral prescription, they "undermine any reassuring interpretations." Kaplan further describes this modern element of moral ambiguity in Baudelaire's prose poetry:

> Dismantling all forms of complacency and idealism,
> the Baudelarian "prose poem" amalgamates, in a dialogically
> open-ended literary unit, ambiguity and
> judgment, kindness and cruelty, anger and generosity,
> reveries and analysis. There are no definitive
> lessons□only responses.

Baudelaire's fifty prose poems were published posthumously in the 1869 volume *Little Poems in Prose*. Although Baudelaire did not invent the prose poem, the works in this volume represent his revolutionizing impact on the genre. Baudelaire modernized prose poetry and profoundly influenced the symbolist poets, many of whose greatest works are prose poems.

The prose poems of *Little Poems in Prose* treat the subject of modern urban life in Paris, a topic Baudelaire thought to be especially suited to the form of the prose poem. Baudelaire focused on the ugliness of urban existence, but regarded his subject with hopefulness and compassion. While the poems of *Flowers of Evil*, traditional in form, express the beauty of Paris, the prose poems of *Little Poems in Prose* focus on the urban squalor and human suffering of the modern city.

Following in Baudelaire's footsteps, Rimbaud published two major volumes of prose poetry. As in Baudelaire's *Little Poems in Prose*, Rimbaud in his volume *Illuminations* explored the cityscapes of Paris through the form of the prose poem. Unlike Baudelaire's Paris, Rimbaud's visions of the urban landscape are imbued with a sense of mystery beneath the squalid surface of modern city life. *A Season in Hell*, Rimbaud's second volume of prose poetry, represents an intensely personal delving into the poet's spiritual and artistic inner-anguish.

Critical Essay #4

During the early twentieth century many writers, influenced by the French symbolists, tried their hands at prose poetry. Following the lead of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, the later French symbolist writers Paul Valéry, Paul Fort, and Paul Claudel composed notable prose poems. Important writers outside of France, such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Sherwood Anderson, are also recognized for their outstanding prose poetry.

However, the prose poem throughout most of the twentieth century remained a relatively unpopular form among most readers and critics, as well as most writers. Thus, while the free verse poem, invented by the symbolists, became the dominant form of poetry throughout the twentieth century, the modern prose poem, also developed by the symbolists, was, until recently, relegated to a relatively obscure place in twentieth-century literature. The very form of the prose poem was not taken seriously by the majority of literary critics and many writers. As C. W. Truesdale observes in a preface to *The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry* (1996), the prose poem "has never received its critical due despite the excitement the form has generated among poets themselves." Truesdale describes a general "critical neglect□even hostility" to the prose poem among literary critics throughout most of the twentieth century. Truesdale goes on to assert that the dominance of free verse "has forced the prose poem . . . to the sidelines, has marginalized it as a genre."

Beginning in the 1960s, however, prose poetry gained a renewed interest among writers, and small literary magazines began to publish prose poetry with increasing frequency. Influential American writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Robert Bly contributed to this renewed interest in the prose poem in the 1960s and 1970s. The volume *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology* (1976), edited by Michael Benedikt, helped to introduce English language readers to a broad range of prose poetry.

The 1980s and 1990s saw increased interest in the prose poem among English-language writers and editors of small literary journals. During these final decades of the twentieth century, a number of anthologies of prose poetry, as well as volumes of literary criticism focused on the prose poem, saw publication. In the 1990s, journals devoted entirely to prose poetry, such as *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*, sprang up to accommodate this growing interest.

In the late twentieth century, a variety of terms came to designate prose poetry. Because of the brevity of the prose poem, its boundaries have also come to overlap with the emergence of a new form of very short fiction. Thus, the following terms have been applied to the prose poem form: "sudden fiction," "flash fiction," the "modern parable," the "modern fable," the "short short story," and "micro-fiction," among others.

In a 1996 essay entitled "The Poetry of Village Idiots," Charles Simic defines the prose poem as "an impossible amalgamation of lyric poetry, anecdote, fairy tale, allegory, joke,

journal entry, and many other kinds of prose." However, the very definition of prose poetry remains a central topic of debate, and nearly all English-language anthologies of prose poetry during this period begin with an overview of the ongoing debate as to the question of whether or not the prose poem exists as a distinct literary form, and, if so, how it might be defined and distinguished from both poetry and prose. Nonetheless, nearly all critics and writers acknowledge the debt of modern prose poetry to the innovations of the French symbolist poets in elevating the prose poem to the status of a high art particularly suited to expressions of modern life.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on Symbolism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Wellek explores the idea of Symbolism as a literary period encompassing much post-Realism Western literature, and focuses on developing an accurate system of definition for it.

The term and concept of symbolism (and symbol) is so vast a topic that it cannot even be sketched within the limits of this paper. The word goes back to ancient Greece and, there, had a complex history which has not, I suspect, been traced adequately in the only history of the term, Max Schlesinger's *Geschichte des Symbols*, published in 1912.

What I want to discuss is something much more specific: not even symbol and symbolism in literature but the term and concept of symbolism as a period in literary history. It can, I suggest, be conveniently used as a general term for the literature in all Western countries following the decline of nineteenth-century realism and naturalism and preceding the rise of the new avant-garde movements: futurism, expressionism, surrealism, existentialism, or whatever else. How has it come about? Can such a use be justified?

We must distinguish among different problems: the history of the word need not be identical with the history of the concept as we might today formulate it. We must ask, on the one hand, what the contemporaries meant by it, who called himself a "symbolist," or who wanted to be included in a movement called "symbolism," and on the other hand, what modern scholarship might decide about who is to be included and what characteristics of the period seem decisive. In speaking of "symbolism" as a period-term located in history we must also think of its situation in space. Literary terms most frequently radiate from one center but do so unevenly; they seem to stop at the frontiers of some countries or cross them and languish there or, surprisingly, flourish more vigorously on a new soil. A geography of literary terms is needed which might attempt to account for the spread and distribution of terms by examining rival terms or accidents of biography or simply the total situation of a literature.

There seems to be a widespread agreement that the literary history of the centuries since the end of the Middle Ages can be divided into five successive periods: Renaissance, baroque, classicism, romanticism, and realism. Among these terms baroque is a comparative newcomer which has not been accepted everywhere, though there seems a clear need of a name for the style that reacted against the Renaissance but preceded classicism. There is, however, far less agreement as to what term should be applied to the literature that followed the end of the dominance of realism in the 1880s and 90s. The term "modernism" and its variants, such as the German "Die Moderne," have been used but have the obvious disadvantage that they can be applied to any contemporary art. Particularly in English, the term "modern" has preserved its early meaning of a contrast to classical antiquity or is used for everything that occurred since the Middle Ages. *The Cambridge Modern History* is an obvious example. The attempts to discriminate between the "modern" period now belonging to the past and the "contemporaneous" seem forced, at least terminologically. "Modo," after all, means

"now." "Modernism" used so broadly as to include all avant-garde art obscures the break between the symbolist period and all post-symbolist movements such as futurism, surrealism, existentialism, etc. In the East it is used as a catchall for everything disapproved as decadent, formalistic, and alienated: it has become a pejorative term set against the glories of socialist realism.

The older terms were appealed to at the turn of the century by many theorists and slogan writers, who either believed that these terms are applicable to all literature or consciously thought of themselves as reviving the style of an older period. Some spoke of a new "classicism," particularly in France, assuming that all good art must be classical. Croce shares this view. Those who felt a kinship with the romantic age, mainly in Germany, spoke of "Neuromantik," appealing to Friedrich Schlegel's dictum that all poetry is romantic. Realism also asserted its claim, mainly in Marxist contexts, in which all art is considered "realistic" or at least "a reflection of reality." I need only allude to Georg Lukács' recent *Aesthetik*, in which this thesis is repeated with obsessive urgency. I have counted the phrase "Widerspiegelung der Wirklichkeit" in the first volume; it appears 1,032 times. I was too lazy or bored to count it in Volume Two. All these monisms endanger meaningful schemes of literary periodization. Nor can one be satisfied with a dichotomy such as Fritz Strich's "Klassik und Romantik," which leads away from period concepts into a universal typology, a simple division of the world into sheep and goats. For many years I have argued the advantage of a multiple scheme of periods, since it allows a variety of criteria. The one criterion "realism" would divide all art into realistic and nonrealistic art and thus would allow only one approving adjective: "real" or some variant such as "true" or "lifelike." A multiple scheme comes much closer to the actual variety of the process of history. Period must be conceived neither as some essence which has to be intuited as a Platonic idea nor as a mere arbitrary linguistic label. It should be understood as a "regulative idea," as a system of norms, conventions, and values which can be traced in its rise, spread, and decline, in competition with preceding and following norms, conventions, and values.

"Symbolism" seems the obvious term for the dominant style which followed nineteenth-century realism. It was propounded in Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931) and is asumed as a matter of course in Maurice Bowra's *Heritage of Symbolism* (1943). We must beware, of course, of confusing this historical form with age-old symbolism or with the view that all art is symbolic, as language is a system of symbols. Symbolism in the sense of a use of symbols in literature is clearly omnipresent in literature of many styles, periods, and civilizations. Symbols are all-pervasive in medieval literature and even the classics of realism□Tolstoy and Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens□use symbols, often prominently. I myself am guilty of arguing for the crucial role of symbol in any definition of romanticism, and I have written at length on the long German debate from Goethe to Friedrich Theodor Vischer about the meaning of the term "symbol" and its contrast to the term "allegory."

For our purposes I want to focus on the fortunes of the concept as a term, first for a school, then as a movement, and finally as a period. The term "symbolisme" as the designation for a group of poets was first proposed by Jean Moréas, the French poet of Greek extraction. In 1885 he was disturbed by a journalistic attack on the decadents in

which he was named together with Mallarmé. He protested: "the so-called decadents seek the pure Concept and the eternal Symbol in their art, before anything else." With some contempt for the mania of critics for labels, he suggested the term "Symbolistes" to replace the inappropriate "décadents." In 1886 Moréas started a review *Le Symboliste*, which perished after four issues. On September 18, 1886, he published a manifesto of "Symbolisme" in the *Figaro*. Moréas, however, soon deserted his own brainchild and founded another school he called the "école romane." On September 14, 1891, in another number of the *Figaro Moréas* blandly announced that "symbolisme" was dead. Thus "symbolisme" was an ephemeral name for a very small clique of French poets. The only name still remembered besides Moréas' is Gustave Kahn. It is easy to collect pronouncements by the main contemporary poets repudiating the term for themselves. Verlaine, in particular, was vehemently resentful of this "Allemandisme" and even wrote a little poem beginning "À bas le symbolisme mythe/ et termite."

In a way which would need detailed tracing, the term, however, caught on in the later 80s and early 90s as a blanket name for recent developments in French poetry and its anticipations. Before Moréas' manifesto, Anatole Baju, in *Décadent*, April 10, 1886, spoke of Mallarmé as "the master who was the first to formulate the symbolic doctrine." Two critics, Charles Morice, with *La Littérature de tout à l'heure* (1889) and Téodore de Wyzéwa, born in Poland, first in the essay "Le Symbolisme de M. Mallarmé" (1887), seemed to have been the main agents, though Morice spoke rather of "synthèse" than of symbol, and Wyzéwa thought that "symbol" was only a pretext and explained Mallarmé's poetry purely by its analogy to music. As early as 1894 Saint Antoine (pseudonym for Henri Mazel) prophesied that "undoubtedly, symbolism will be the label under which our period will be classed in the history of French literature."

It is still a matter of debate in French literary history when this movement came to an end. It was revived several times expressly□e.g. in 1905 around a review, *Vers et prose*. Its main critic, Robert de Souza, in a series of articles, "Où Nous en sommes" (also published separately, 1906), ridiculed the many attempts to bury symbolism as premature and proudly claimed that Gustave Kahn, Verhaeren, Vielé-Griffin, Maeterlinck, and Régnier were then as active as ever. Valéry professed so complete an allegiance to the ideals of Mallarmé that it is difficult not to think of him as a continuator of symbolism, though in 1938, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the symbolist manifesto, Valéry doubted the existence of symbolism and denied that there is a symbolist aesthetic. Marcel Proust, in the posthumously published last volume of his great series *Le Temps retrouvé* (1926), formulated an explicitly symbolist aesthetics. But his own attitude to symbolist contemporaries was often ambiguous or negative. In 1896 Proust had written an essay condemning obscurity in poetry. Proust admired Maeterlinck but disliked Péguy and Claudel. He even wrote a pastiche of Régnier, a mock-solemn description of a head cold. When *Le Temps retrouvé* (1926) was published and when a few years later (1933) Valery Larbaud proclaimed Proust a symbolist, symbolism had, at least in French poetry, definitely been replaced by surrealism.

André Barre's book on symbolism (1911) and particularly Guy Michaud's *Message poétique du symbolisme* (1947), as well as many other books of French literary

scholarship, have, with the hindsight of literary historians, traced the different phases of a vast French symbolist movement: the first phase, with Baudelaire (who died in 1867) as the precursor; the second, when Verlaine and Mallarmé were at the height of their powers, before the 1886 group; the third, when the name became established; and then, in the twentieth century, what Michaud calls "Néo-symbolisme," represented by "La Jeune Parque" of Valéry and *L'Annonce faite à Marie of Claudel*, both dating from 1915. It seems a coherent and convincing conception which needs to be extended to prose writers and dramatists: to Huysmans after *A Rebours* (1884), to the early Gide, to Proust in part, and among dramatists, at least to Maeterlinck, who, with his plays *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* (1890) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), assured a limited penetration of symbolism on the stage.

Knowledge of the French movement and admiration for it soon spread to the other European countries. We must, however, distinguish between reporting on French events and even admiration shown by translations, and a genuine transfer and assimilation of the French movement in another literature. This process varies considerably from country to country; and the variation needs to be explained by the different traditions which the French importation confronted.

In English, George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) and his *Impressions and Opinions* (1891) gave sketchy and often poorly informed accounts of Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Laforgue. Mallarmé's poetry is dismissed as "aberrations of a refined mind," and symbolism is oddly defined as "saying the opposite of what you mean." The three essays on Mallarmé by Edmund Gosse, all dating from 1893, are hardly more perceptive. After the poet's death Gosse turned sharply against him. "Now that he is no longer here the truth must be said about Mallarmé. He was hardly a poet." Even Arthur Symons, whose book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) made the decisive breakthrough for England and Ireland, was very lukewarm at first. While praising Verlaine (in *Academy*, 1891) he referred to the "brain-sick little school of *Symbolistes"* and "the noisy little school of *Décadents*," and even in later articles on Mallarmé he complained of "jargon and meaningless riddles." But then he turned around and produced the entirely favorable *Symbolist Movement*. It should not, however, be overrated as literary criticism or history. It is a rather lame impressionistic account of Nerval, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Laforgue, Mallarmé, Huysmans, and Maeterlinck, with emphasis on Verlaine. There is no chapter on Baudelaire. But most importantly, the book was dedicated to W. B. Yeats, proclaiming him "the chief representative of that movement in our country." Symons had made his first trip to Paris in 1889; he had visited Mallarmé, met Huysmans and Maeterlinck, and a year later met Verlaine, who in 1893 became his guest on his ill-fated visit to London. Symons knew Yeats vaguely since 1891, but they became close friends in 1895 only after Yeats had completed his study of Blake and had elaborated his own system of symbols from other sources: occultism, Blake, and Irish folklore. The edition of Blake Yeats had prepared with Edwin Ellis in 1893 was introduced by an essay on "The Necessity of Symbolism." In 1894 Yeats visited Paris in the company of Symons and there saw a performance of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axël*. The essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900) is then Yeats' first full statement of his symbolist creed. Symons' dedication to Yeats shows an awareness of symbolism as an international movement.

"In Germany," he says, exaggerating greatly, "it seems to be permeating the whole of literature, its spirit is that which is deepest in Ibsen, it has absorbed the one new force in Italy, Gabriele D'Annunzio. I am told of a group of symbolists in Russian literature, there is another in Dutch literature, in Portugal it has a little school of its own under Eugenio de Castro. I even saw some faint stirrings that way in Spain."

Symons should have added the United States. Or could he in 1899? There were intelligent and sympathetic reports of the French movement very early. T. S. Perry wrote on "The Latest Literary Fashion in France" in *The Cosmopolitan* (1892), T. Child on "Literary Paris□The New Poetry" in *Harper's* (1896), and Aline Gorren on "The French Symbolists" in *Scribner's* (1893). The almost forgotten Vance Thompson, who, fresh from Paris, edited the oddly named review *M'lle New York*, wrote several perceptive essays, mainly on Mallarmé in 1895 (reprinted in *French Portraits*, 1900) which convey some accurate information on his theories and even attempt an explication of his poetry with some success. But only James Huneker became the main importer of recent French literature into the United States. In 1896 he defended the French symbolists against the slurs in Max Nordau's silly *Entartung* and began to write a long series of articles on Maeterlinck, Laforgue, and many others, not bothering to conceal his dependence on his French master, Remy de Gourmont, to whom he dedicated his book of essays *Visionaries* (1905). But the actual impact of French symbolist poetry on American writing was greatly delayed. René Taupin, in his *L'Influence du symoblisme français sur la poésie américaine* (1929), traced some echoes in forgotten American versifiers of the turn of the century, but only two Americans living then in England, Ezra Pound around 1908 and T. S. Eliot around 1914, reflect the French influence in significant poetry.

More recently and in retrospect one hears of a symbolist period in American literature: Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens are its main poets; Henry James, Faulkner, and O'Neill, in very different ways and in different stages of their career, show marked affinities with its techniques and outlook. Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931) was apparently the very first book which definitely conceived of symbolism as an international movement and singled out Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Valéry, Proust, and Thomas Mann as examples of a movement which, he believed, had come to an end at the time of his writing. Here we find the conception formulated which, very generally, is the thesis of this paper and the assumption of many historians since Wilson's sketch. Wilson's sources were the writings of Huneker, whom he admired greatly, and the instruction in French literature he received in Princeton from Christian Gauss. But the insight into the unity and continuity of the international movement and the selection of the great names was his own. We might only deplore the inclusion of Gertrude Stein. But I find it difficult to believe that Wilson's book could have had any influence outside the English-speaking world.

In the United States Wilson's reasonable and moderate plea for an international movement was soon displaced by attempts to make the whole of the American literary tradition symbolist. F. O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* (1941) is based on a distinction between symbol and allegory very much in the terms of the distinction introduced by Goethe. Allegory appears as inferior to symbol: Hawthorne inferior to

Melville. But in Charles Feidelson's *Symbolism and American Literature* (1956) the distinction between modern symbolism and the use of symbols by romantic authors is completely obliterated. Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and Whitman appear as pure symbolists *avant la lettre*, and their ancestry is traced back to the Puritans, who paradoxically appear as incomplete, frustrated symbolists. It can be rightly objected that the old Puritans were sharply inimical to images and symbols and that there is a gulf between the religious conception of signs of God's Providence and the aesthetic use of symbols in the novels of Hawthorne and Melville and even in the Platonizing aesthetics of Emerson.

The symbolist conception of American literature is still prevalent today. It owes its dominance to the attempt to exalt the great American writers to myth-makers and providers of a substitute religion. James Baird, in *Ishmael* (1956), puts it unabashedly. Melville is "the supreme example of the artistic creator engaged in the act of making new symbols to replace the 'lost' symbols of Protestant Christianity." A very active trend in American criticism expanded symbolist interpretation to all types and periods of literature, imposing it on writings which have no such meaning or have to be twisted to assume it. Harry Levin rightly complained in an address, " Symbolism and Fiction" (1956), that "every hero may seem to have a thousand faces; every heroine may be a white goddess *incognita;* every fishing trip turns out to be another quest for the Holy Grail." The impact of ideas from the Cambridge anthropologists and from Carl Jung is obvious. In the study of medieval texts a renewed interest in the fourfold levels of meaning in Dante's letter to Can Grande has persuaded a whole group of American scholars, mainly under the influence of D. W. Robertson, to interpret or misinterpret Chaucer, the *Pearl* poet, and Langland in these terms. They should bear in mind that Thomas Aquinas recognized only a literal sense in a work invented by human industry and that he reserved the other three senses for Scripture. The symbolist interpretation reaches heights of ingenuity in the writing of Northrop Frye, who began with a book on Blake and, in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), conceived of the whole of literature as a selfenclosed system of symbols and myths, "existing in its own universe, no longer a commentary on life or reality, but containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships." In this grandiose conception all distinctions between periods and styles are abolished: "the literary universe is a universe in which everything is potentially identical with everything else." Hence the old distinctions between myth, symbol, and allegory disappear. One of Frye's followers, Angus Fletcher, in his book on *Allegory* (1964), exalts allegory as the central procedure of art, while Frye still holds fast to symbolism, recognizing that "the critics are often prejudiced against allegory without knowing the real reason, which is that continuous allegory prescribes the direction of his commentary, and so restricts his freedom."

The story of the spread of symbolism is very different in other countries. The effect in Italy was ostensibly rather small. Soffici's pamphlet on Rimbaud in 1911 is usually considered the beginning of the French symbolist influence, but there was an early propagandist for Mallarmé, Vittorio Pica, who was heavily dependent on French sources, particularly Téodor de Wyzéwa. His articles, in the *Gazetta letteraria* (1885-86), on the French poets do not use the term; but in 1896 he replaced "decadent" and "Byzantine" by "symbolist." D'Annunzio, who knew and used some French symbolists,

would be classed as "decadent" today, and the poets around Ungaretti and Montale as "hermetic." In a recent book by Mario Luzi, *L'Idea simbolista* (1959), Pascoli, Dino Campana, and Arturo Onofri are called symbolist poets, but Luzi uses the term so widely that he begins his anthology of symbolism with Hölderlin and Novalis, Coleridge and Wordsworth, and can include Poe, Browning, Pat- more, Swinburne, Hopkins, and Francis Thompson among its precursors. Still, his list of symbolist poets, French, Russian, English, German, Spanish, and Greek, is, on the whole, reasonable. Onofri was certainly strongly influenced by Mallarmé and later by Rudolf Steiner; Pascoli, however, seems to me no symbolist in his poetry, though he gave extremely symbolist interpretations of Dante. It might be wiser to think of "ermetismo" as the Italian name for symbolism: Montale and possibly Dino Campana are genuine symbolists.

While symbolism, at least as a definite school or movement, was absent in Italy, it is central in the history of Spanish poetry. The Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío initiated it after his short stay in Paris in 1892. He wrote poems under the symbolist influence and addressed, for instance, a fervent hymn to Verlaine. The influence of French symbolist poetry changed completely the oratorical or popular style of Spanish lyrical poetry. The closeness of Guillén to Mallarmé and Valéry seems too obvious to deny, and the Uruguayan poet Julio Herrera y Reissig (1873-1909) is clearly in the symbolist tradition, often of the obscurest manner. Still, the Spanish critics favor the term "Modernismo," which is used sometimes so inclusively that it covers all modern Spanish poetry and even the socalled "generation of 1898," the prose writers Azorín, Baroja, and Unamuno, whose associations with symbolism were quite tenuous. "Symbolism" can apply only to one trend in modern Spanish literature, as the romantic popular tradition was stronger there than elsewhere. García Lorca's poetry can serve as the best known example of the peculiar Spanish synthesis of the folksy and the symbolical, the gypsy song and the myth. Still, the continuity from Darío to Jiménez, Antonio Machado, Alberti, and then to Guillén seems to me evident. Jorge Guillén in his Harvard lectures, *Language and Poetry* (1961), finds "no label convincing." "A period look," he argues, does not signify a "group style." In Spain there were, he thinks, fewer "isms" than elsewhere and the break with the past was far less abrupt. He reflects that "any name seeking to give unity to a historical period is the invention of posterity." But while eschewing the term "symbolism," he characterizes himself and his contemporaries well enough by expounding their common creed: their belief in the marriage of Idea and music□in short, their belief in the ideal of Mallarmé. Following a vague suggestion made by Remy de Gourmont, the rediscovery of Góngora by Ortega y Gasset, Gerardo Diego, Dámaso Alonso, and Alfonso Reyes around 1927 fits into the picture: they couple Góngora and Mallarmé as the two poets who in the history of all poetry have gone furthest in the search for absolute poetry, for the quintessence of the poetic.

In Germany the spread of symbolism was far less complete than Symons assumed in 1899. Stefan George had come to Paris in 1889, had visited Mallarmé and met many poets, but after his return to Germany he avoided, I assume deliberately, the term "symbolism" for himself and his circle. He translated a selection from Baudelaire (1891) and smaller samples from Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Régnier (in *Zeitgenössische Dichter*, 1905), but his own poetry does not, I think, show very close parallels to the French masters. Oddly enough, the poems of Vielé-Griffin seem to have left the most clearly

discernible traces on George's own writings. As early as 1892 one of George's adherents, Carl August Klein, protested in George's periodical, *Blätter für die Kunst*, against the view of George's dependence on the French. Wagner, Nietzsche, Böcklin, and Klinger, he says, show that there is an indigenous opposition to naturalism in Germany as everywhere in the West. George himself spoke later of the French poets as his "former allies," and in Gundolf's authoritative book on George the French influence is minimized, if not completely denied. Among the theorists of the George circle Friedrich Gundolf had the strongest symbolist leanings: *Shakspeare und der deutsche Geist* (1911) and *Goethe* (1916) are based on the distinction of symbolallegory, with symbol always the higher term. Still, the term symbolism did not catch on in Germany as a name for any specific group, though Hofmannsthal□ e.g. in "Das Gespräch über Gedichte" of 1903□proclaimed the symbol the one element necessary in poetry. Later, the influence of Rimbaud□ apparently largely in German translation□Iron Georg Trakl has been demonstrated with certainty. But if we examine German books on twentiethcentury literature, symbolism seems rarely used. I found a section so called in Willi Duwe's *Die Dichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1936) which includes Hofmannsthal, Dauthendey, Calé, Rilke, and George, while E. H. Lüth's *Literatur als Geschichte (Deutsche Dichtung von 1885 bis 1947)*, published in 1947, treats the same poets under the label "Neuromantik und Impressionismus." Later, however, we find a section, "Parasymbolismus," which deals with Musil and Broch. Hugo Friedrich, in his *Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (1956), avoids the terms and argues that the quick succession of modernist styles□dadaism, surrealism, futurism, expressionism, unanimism hermetism, and so on□creates an optical illusion which hides the fact of a direct continuity through Mallarmé, Valéry, Guillén, Ungaretti, and Eliot. The little anthology in the back of the book adds St. John Perse, Jiménez, García Lorca, Alberti, and Montale to these names. Friedrich's list seems to me the list of the main symbolist poets, even though Friedrich objects to the name. Clearly, German literary scholarship has not been converted to the term, though Wolfgang Kayser's article "Der europäische Symbolismus" (1953) had pleaded for a wide concept in which he included, in addition to the French poets, D'Annunzio, Yeats, Valéry, Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Faulkner.

In Russia we find the strongest symbolist group of poets who called themselves that. The close links with Paris at that time may help to explain this, or possibly also the strong consciousness of a tradition of symbolism in the Russian Church and in some of the Orthodox thinkers of the immediate past. Vladimir Solovëv was regarded as a precursor. In 1892 Zinaida Vengerova wrote a sympathetic account of the French symbolists for *Vestnik Evropy*, while in the following year Max Nordau's *Entartung* caused a sensation by its satirical account of recent French poetry which had repercussions on Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, as late as 1898. Bryusov emerged as the leading symbolist poet: he translated Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and wrote a poem "Iz Rimbaud" as early as 1892. In 1894 he published two little volumes under the title *Russkie simvolisty*. That year Bryusov wrote poems with titles such as "In the Spirit of the French Symbolists" and "In the Manner of Stéphane Mallarmé" (though these were not published till 1935) and brought out a translation of Verlaine's *Romances sans paroles*. Bryusov had later contacts with René Ghil, Mallarmé's pupil, and derived from him the idea of "instrumentation" in poetry which was to play such a great role in the theories of the Russian Formalists. In the meantime Dimitri Merezhkovsky had, in 1893,

published a manifesto: *On the Causes of the Decline and the New Trends of Contemporary Russian Literature*, which recommended symbolism, though Merezhkovsky appealed to the Germans: to Goethe and the romantics rather than to the French. Merezhkovsky's pamphlet foreshadows the split in the Russian symbolist movement. The younger men, Blok and Vyacheslav Ivanov as well as Bely, distanced themselves from Bryusov and Balmont. Blok, in an early diary (1901-02), condemned Bryusov as decadent and opposed to his Parisian symbolism his own, Russian, rooted in the poetry of Tyutchev, Fet, Polonsky, and Solovëv. Vyacheslav Ivanov in 1910 shared Blok's view. The French influence seemed to him "adolescently unreasonable and, in fact, not very fertile," while his own symbolism appealed to Russian nationalism and to the general mystical tradition. Later Bely was to add occultism and Rudolf Steiner and his "anthroposophy." The group of poets who called themselves "Acmeists" (Gulmilëv, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelshtam) was a direct outgrowth of symbolism. The mere fact that they appealed to the early symbolist Innokenty Annensky shows the continuity with symbolism in spite of their distaste for the occult and their emphasis on what they thought of as classical clarity. Symbolism dominates Russian poetry between about 1892 and 1914, when Futurism emerged as a slogan and the Russian Formalists attacked the whole concept of poetry as imagery.

If we glance at the other Slavic countries we are struck by the diversity of their reactions. Poland was informed early on about the French movement, and Polish poetry was influenced by the French symbolist movement, but the term "M*l*asoda Polska" was preferred. In Wilhelm Feldmann's *Współ- czesna literatura polska* (1905) contemporary poetry is discussed as "decadentism," but Wyspian´- ski (a symbolist if ever there was one) appears under the chapter heading: "On the Heights of Romanticism." All the histories of Polish literature I have seen speak of "Modernism," "Decadentism," "Idealism," "Neo-romanticism," and occasionally call a poet such as Miriam (Zenon Przesmycki) a symbolist, but they never seem to use the term as a general name for a period in Polish literature.

In Czech literature the situation was more like that in Russia: Brˇezina, Sova, and Hlavácˇek were called symbolists, and the idea of a school or at least a group of Czech symbolist poets is firmly established. The term "Moderna" (possibly because of the periodical *Moderní Revue*, founded in 1894) is definitely associated with decadentism, *fin de siècle*, a group represented by Arnosˇt Procházka. A hymnical, optimistic, even chiliastic poet such as Brˇezina cannot and could not be classed with them. The great critic F. X. Sˇalda wrote of the "school of symbolists" as early as 1891, calling Verlaine, Villiers, and Mallarmé its masters but denied that there is a school of symbolists with dogmas, codices, and manifestoes. His very first important article, "Synthetism in the New Art" (1892), expounded the aesthetics of Morice and Hennequin for the benefit of the Czechs, then still mainly dependent on German models.

The unevenness of the penetration of both the influence of the French movement and very strikingly of the acceptance of the term raises the question whether we can account for these differences in causal terms. It sounds heretical or obscurantist in this age of scientific explanation to ascribe much to chance, to casual contacts, and to personal predilections. Why was the term so immensely successful in France, in the

United States, and in Russia, less so in England and Spain, and hardly at all in Italy and Germany? In Germany there was even the tradition of the continuous debate about symbol since Goethe and Schelling; before the French movement Friedrich Theodor Vischer discussed the symbol elaborately and still the term did not catch on. One can think of all kinds of explanations: a deliberate decision by the poets to distance themselves from the French developments; or the success of the terms "Die Moderne" and "Neuromantik." Still, the very number of such explanations suggests that the variables are so great that we cannot account for these divergencies in any systematic manner.

If we, at long last, turn to the central question of what the exact content of the term is, we must obviously distinguish among the four concentric circles defining its scope. At its narrowest, "symbolism" refers to the French group which called itself "symbolist" in 1886. Its theory was rather rudimentary. These poets mainly wanted poetry to be non-rhetorical□i.e. they asked for a break with the tradition of Hugo and the *Parnassiens*. They wanted words not merely to state but to suggest; they wanted to use metaphors, allegories, and symbols not only as decorations but as organizing principles of their poems; they wanted their verse to be "musical," in practice to stop using the oratorical cadences of the French alexandrines, and in some cases to break completely with rhyme. Free verse□ whose invention is usually ascribed to Gustave Kahn□was possibly the most enduring achievement which has survived all vicissitudes of style. Kahn himself in 1894 summed up the doctrine simply as "antinaturalism, antiprosaism in poetry, a search for freedom in the efforts in art, in reaction against the regimentation of the *Parnasse* and the naturalists." This sounds very meager today: freedom from restrictions has been, after all, the slogan of a great many movements in art.

It is better to think of "symbolism" in a wider sense: as the broad movement in France from Nerval and Baudelaire to Claudel and Valéry. We can restate the theories propounded and will be confronted by an enormous variety. We can characterize it more concretely and say, for example, that in symbolist poetry the image becomes "thing." The relation of tenor and vehicle in the metaphor is reversed. The utterance is divorced, we may add, from the situation: time and place, history and society, are played down. The inner world, the *durée*, in the Bergsonian sense, is represented or often merely hinted at as "it," the thing or the person hidden. One could say that the grammatical predicate has become the subject. Clearly such poetry can easily be justified by an occult view of the world. But this is not necessary: it might imply a feeling for analogy, for a web of correspondences, a rhetoric of metamorphoses in which everything reflects everything else. Hence the great role of synesthesia, which, though rooted in physiological facts and found all over the history of poetry, became at that time merely a stylistic device, a mannerism easily imitated and transmitted. This characterization could be elaborated considerably if we bear in mind that style and world view go together and only together can define the character of a period or even of a single poet.

Let me try to show, at least, how diverse and even incompatible were the theories of two such related poets as Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Baudelaire's aesthetic is mainly "romantic," not in the sense of emotionalism, nature worship, and exaltation of the ego, central in French romanticism, but rather in the English and German tradition of a

glorification of creative imagination, a rhetoric of metamorphoses and universal analogy. Though there are subsidiary strands in Baudelaire's aesthetics, at his finest he grasps the role of imagination, "constructive imagination," as he calls it in a term ultimately derived from Coleridge. It gives a metaphysical meaning, "a positive relation with the infinite." Art is another cosmos which transforms and hence humanizes nature. By his creation the artist abolishes the gulf between subject and object, man and nature. Art is "to create a suggestive magic containing at one and the same time the object and the subject, the external world and the artist himself."

Mallarmé says almost the opposite in spite of some superficial resemblances and the common attachment to Poe and Wagner. Mallarmé was the first poet radically discontent with the ordinary language of communication; he attempted to construe an entirely separate language of poetry far more consistently than older cultivators of "poetic diction" such as the practitioners of *trobar clus*, or Góngora, or Mallarmé's contemporary, Gerard Manley Hopkins. His aim of transforming language was, no doubt, in part negative: to exclude society, nature, and the person of the poet himself. But it was also positive: language was again to become "real," language was to be magic, words were to become things. But this is not, I think, sufficient reason to call Mallarmé a mystic. Even the depersonalization he requires is not mystical. Impersonality is rather objectivity, Truth. Art reaches for the Idea, which is ultimately inexpressible, because so abstract and general as to be devoid of any concrete traits. The term "flower" seems to him poetic because it suggests the "one, absent from all bouquets." Art thus can only hint and suggest, not transform as it should in Baudelaire. The "symbol" is only one device to achieve this effect. The so-called "negative" aesthetics of Mallarmé is thus nothing obscure. It had its psychological basis in a feeling of sterility, impotence, and final silence. He was a perfectionist who proposed something impossible of fulfillment: the book to end all books. "Everything on earth exists to be contained in a book." Like many poets before him, Mallarmé wants to express the mystery of the universe but feels that this mystery is not only insoluble and immensely dark but also hollow, empty, silent, Nothingness itself. There seems no need to appeal to Buddhism, Hegel, Schopenhauer, or Wagner to account for this. The atmosphere of nineteenth-century pessimism and the general Neoplatonic tradition in aesthetics suffice. Art searches for the Absolute but despairs of ever reaching it. The essence of the world is Nothingness, and the poet can only speak of this Nothingness. Art alone survives in the universe. Man's main vocation is to be an artist, a poet, who can save something from the general wreckage of time. The work or, in Mallarmé's terms, the Book is suspended over the Void, the silent godless Nothingness. Poetry is resolutely cut off from concrete reality, from the expression of the personality of the poet, from any rhetoric or emotion, and becomes only a Sign, signifying Nothing. In Baudelaire, on the other hand, poetry transforms nature, extracts flowers from evil, creates a new myth, reconciles man and nature.

But if we examine the actual verse of the symbolists of this period, we cannot be content with formulas either of creative imagination, of suggestion, or of pure or absolute poetry.

On the third wider circle of abstraction we can apply the term to the whole period on an international scale. Every such term is arbitrary, but symbolism can be defended as rooted in the concepts of the period, as distinct in meaning, and as clearly setting off the period from that preceding it: realism or naturalism. The difference from romanticism may be less certainly implied. Obviously there is a continuity with romanticism, and particularly German romanticism, also in France, as has been recently argued again by Werner Vordtriede in his *Novalis und die französischen Symbolisten* (1963). The direct contact of the French with the German romantics came late and should not be overrated. Jean Thorel, in "Les Romantiques allemandes et les symbolistes français," seems to have been the first to point out the relation. Maeterlinck's article on Novalis (1894) and his little anthology (1896) came late in the movement. But Wagner of course mediated between the symbolists and German mythology, though Mallarmé's attitude, admiring toward the music, was tinged with irony for Wagner's subject matter. Early in the century Heine, a *romantique défroqué* as he called himself, played the role of an intermediary which, to my mind, has been exaggerated in Kurt Weinberg's study, *Henri Heine: Héraut du symbolisme français* (1954). E. T. A. Hoffmann, we should not forget, was widely translated into French and could supply occult motifs, a transcendental view of music, and the theory and practice of synesthesia.

Possibly even more important were the indirect contacts through English writers: through Carlyle's chapter on symbolism in *Sartor Resartus* and his essay on Novalis; through Coleridge, from whom, through another intermediary, Mrs. Crowe, Baudelaire drew his definition of creative imagination; and through Emerson, who was translated by Edgar Quinet.

Also, French thinkers of the early nineteenth century knew the theory of symbolism at least, from the wide application to all the religions of the world made by Creuzer, whose *Symbolik* was translated into French in 1825. Pierre Leroux used the idea of "symbolic poetry" prominently in the early thirties. There was Edgar Allan Poe, who drew on Coleridge and A. W. Schlegel and seemed so closely to anticipate Baudelaire's views that Baudelaire quoted him as if he were Poe himself, sometimes dropping all quotations marks.

The enormous influence of Poe on the French demonstrates, however, most clearly the difference between romanticism and symbolism. Poe is far from being a representative of the romantic worldview or of the romantic aesthetic, in which the imagination is conceived as transforming nature. Poe has been aptly described as an "angel in a machine": he combines a faith in technique and even technology, a distrust of inspiration, a rationalistic eighteenth-century mind with a vague occult belief in "supernal" beauty. The distrust of inspiration, an enmity to nature, is the crucial point which sets off symbolism from romanticism. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry all share it; while Rilke, a symbolist in many of his procedures and views, appears as highly romantic in his reliance on moments of inspiration. This is why Hugo Friedrich excludes him from his book on the modern lyric and even disparages him in a harsh passage. This is why the attempt to make Mallarmé a spiritual descendant of Novalis, as Vordtriede tried, must fail. Mallarmé, one might grant, aims at transcendence, but it is an empty transcendence, while Novalis rapturously adores the unity of the mysterious

universe. In short, the romantics were Rousseauists; the symbolists, beginning with Baudelaire, believe in the fall of man or, if they do not use the religious phraseology, know that man is limited and is not, as Novalis believed, the Messiah of nature. The end of the romantic period is clearly marked by the victory of positivism and scientism, which soon led to disillusionment and pessimism. Most symbolists were non-Christians and even atheists, even if they tried to find a new religion in occultism or flirted with Oriental religions. They were pessimists who need not have read Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann, as Laforgue did, to succumb to the mood of decadence, *fin de siècle*, *Götterdämmerung*, or the death of God prophesied by Nietzsche.

Symbolism is also clearly set off from the new avant-garde movements after 1914: futurism, cubism, surrealism, expressionism, and so on. There the faith in language has crumbled completely, while in Mallarmé and Valéry language preserves its cognitive and even magic power: Valéry's collection of poems is rightly called *Charmes*. Orpheus is the mythological hero of the poet, charming the animals, trees, and even stones. With more recent art the view of analogy disappears: Kafka has nothing of it. Postsymbolist art is abstract and allegorical rather than symbolic. The image, in surrealism, has no beyond: it wells, at most, from the subconscious of the individual.

Finally, there is the highest abstraction, the wide largest circle: the use of "symbolism" in all literature, of all ages. But then the term, broken loose from its historical moorings, lacks concrete content and remains merely the name for a phenomenon almost universal in all art.

These reflections must lead to what only can be a recommendation, to use the third sense of our term, to call the period of European literature roughly between 1885 and 1914 "symbolism," to see it as an international movement which radiated originally from France but produced great writers and great poetry also elsewhere. In Ireland and England: Yeats and Eliot; in the United States: Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane; in Germany: George, Rilke, and Hofmannsthal; in Russia: Blok, Ivanov, and Bely; in Spain and South America: Darío, Machado, and Guillén. If we, as we should, extend the meaning of symbolism to prose, we can see it clearly in the late Henry James, in Joyce, in the later Thomas Mann, in Proust, in the early Gide and Faulkner, in D. H. Lawrence; and if we add the drama, we recognize it in the later stages of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hauptmann, and in O'Neill. There is symbolist criticism of distinction: an aesthetics in Mallarmé and Valéry, a looser creed in Remy de Gourmont, in Eliot, and in Yeats, and a flourishing school of symbolist interpretation, particularly in the United States. Much of the French "new criticism" is frankly symbolist. Roland Barthes' new pamphlet, *Critique et vérité* (1966), pleads for a complete liberty of symbolist interpretation.

Still, we must not forget our initial reminder. A period concept can never exhaust its meaning. It is not a class concept of which the individual works are cases. It is a regulative idea: it struggles with preceding and following ideals of art. In the time under consideration the strength of the survivals was particularly great: Hauptmann's *Die Weber* was performed in the same year (1892) as *Blätter für die Kunst* began to appear; Blok's *Poems on the Beautiful Lady* were written in the same year (1901) as Gorky's *Lower Depths*. Within the same author and even within the same work of art the

struggle was waged at times. Edmond Jaloux called Joyce "at the same time a realist and a symbolist." The same is true of Proust and Mann. *Ulysses* combines symbolism and naturalism, as no other book of the time, into a synthesis of grand proportion and strong tension. In Trieste Joyce lectured on two English writers and on two English writers alone: they were characteristically Defoe and Blake.

As agreement on the main periods of European literature grows, so agreement to add the period term "symbolism" to the five periods now accepted should increase. But even were a different term to be victorious (though none I can think of seems to me even remotely preferable), we should always recognize that such a term has fulfilled its function as a tool of historiography if it has made us think not only about individual works and authors but about schools, trends, and movements and their international expansion. Symbolism is at least a literary term which will help us to counteract the dependence of much literary history on periodization derived from political and social history (such as the term " Imperialism" used in Marxist literary histories, which is perfectly meaningless applied to poetry at that time). Symbolism is a term (and I am quoting the words I applied to baroque in 1945) "which prepares for synthesis, draws our minds away from the mere accumulation of observations and facts, and paves the way for a future history of literature as a fine art."

Source: Rene Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History," in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism*, Yale University Press, 1970, pp. 90-121.

Adaptations

Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande* was adapted as an opera by Claude Debussy, with a libretto by Maeterlinck, in 1902.

Topics for Further Study

The symbolist movement in literature was an important influence on modern painting. The major symbolist painters were Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and Puvis de Chavannes. Find art books with reproductions of symbolist paintings by these or other artists. Choose one symbolist painter and provide a brief biography of him or her, focusing on the period during which he produced the majority of his symbolist works. Discuss one painting by the artist, describing the painting in your own words. In what ways does this painting express the ideals of the symbolist movement?

Read Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun*, then find and listen to a recording of Debussy's musical adaptation *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. Compare and contrast the poem to the prelude. In what ways are the ideals of the symbolist movement expressed through Debussy's musical composition? How are the ideals of Symbolism expressed differently in the different mediums of poetry and music?

Maeterlinck was the foremost author of symbolist drama. Read his play *Pelleas and Melisande*. With a group of students, perform one scene from the play, then discuss as a group the scene you have performed. Describe the symbolist elements and themes of the scene. In what ways does your performance of the scene enhance your understanding of the play?

Although the symbolist writers did not invent the prose poetry form, a number of them did develop the prose poem as a modern form of expression. For this assignment, choose *one* of the following options: a) Choose three prose poems from either Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen* or Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, and write an essay describing the major theme or themes, the poet's use of language, and the symbolist elements of the poem; or, b) Look through published volumes of prose poetry to get a sense of the form, then write five to ten of your own original prose poems.

Compare and Contrast

1850-1900: France experiences several internal rebellions and major changes of government. The Second Republic, a constitutional democracy ruled by a president, lasts from the Revolution of 1848 until 1852. The Second Empire, under the rule of Emperor Napoleon III, remains relatively stable from 1852 until 1870. The Third Republic, a constitutional democracy with a president, remains relatively stable from 1871 until the German occupation of France in 1940.

Today: The current French government, known as the Fifth Republic, is a constitutional democracy ruled by a president. The Fifth Republic was formulated in 1959 and has remained relatively stable for over forty years.

1850-1900: France engages in warfare as well as alliances with several European nations. In the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856, France, in alliance with England and Turkey, is at war with Russia. In the Franco-German War of 1870 to 1871, France is invaded and defeated by Germany. In 1894 France enters a pact with Russia known as the dual alliance. According to the dual alliance, the two nations would aid one another in case of aggression by the triple alliance (1882) of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

Today: France—along with Germany, England, Austria, and Italy among others—is a member of the European Union, an organization of some fifteen independent European nations united by various social, political, economic, and legal interests to maintain peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with one another.

1850-1900: After the Revolution of 1848, universal manhood suffrage is established in France, giving all adult males the right to vote in political elections and referenda.

Today: Since 1945, women in France, as well as men, have been granted the right to vote.

1850-1900: One of the few European nations that did *not* experience a revolution in 1848, Russia remains a vast empire ruled by an autocratic csar until the revolution of 1917. A major social reform is enacted in 1861, when the serfs in Russia, essentially peasant slaves, are emancipated and granted the right to own land.

Today: After some seventy years of communist rule (since 1917), the U.S.S.R. is dismantled in 1991 and divided into some twelve independent nation-states, of which Russia is the largest and most powerful. The nations of the former Soviet Union remain strongly associated with one another through the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991.

What Do I Read Next?

Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (1931), by Edmund Wilson, provides an important critical discussion of the symbolist movement and its influence on such twentieth-century writers as William Butler Yeats, Paul Valéry, T. S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein.

Six French Poets of the Nineteenth Century: Lamartine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé (2000), edited by E. H. Blackmore and A. M. Blackmore, provides a bilingual edition of French symbolist poetry with an English translation on facing pages.

French Symbolist Poetry: An Anthology (1980), edited by John Porter Houston and Mona Tobin Houston, provides English translations of major works of French symbolist poetry.

The Crisis of French Symbolism (1990), by Laurence M. Porter, offers criticism and interpretation of the works of the major symbolist poets Mallarmé, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud.

Four French Symbolists: A Sourcebook on Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and Maurice Denis (1996), by Russell T. Clement, offers a helpful guide to further sources on the major French symbolist painters.

Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant- Garde (1993), by Frantisek Deak, provides discussion of the development of symbolist theatre in France.

Models of the Universe: An Anthology of the Prose Poem (1995), edited by Stuart Friebert and David Young, provides an introduction to prose poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from a variety of writers.

Debussy in Performance (1999), edited by James R. Briscoe, includes essays on Debussy and Symbolism as well as discussion of his musical adaptations of Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun* and Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande*.

Debussy and His World (2001), edited by Jane F. Fulcher, includes an essay on Debussy's participation in the Tuesday salons held by Mallarmé.

Paris and the Nineteenth Century (1992), by Christopher Prendergast, provides historical analysis of nineteenth-century culture and politics in Paris, France.

Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914 (1968), edited by Roland N. Stromberg, offers discussion of major artistic and literary movements in Europe during the period in which the symbolist movement developed.

Further Study

Carter, A. E., *Paul Verlaine*, Twayne, 1971.

Carter provides an authoritative biography of Paul Verlaine, one of the founders of the French symbolist movement in poetry.

Eisenman, Stephen, *The Temptations of Saint Redon: Biography, Ideology, and Style in the Noirs of Odilon Redon*, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Eisenman provides discussion of thematic and stylistic elements of the symbolist works of Odilon Redon, a major French symbolist artist.

Fowlie, Wallace, *Rimbaud and Jim Morrison: The Rebel as Poet*, Duke University Press, 1993.

Fowlie offers a comparison of the nineteenth-century French symbolist poet Rimbaud and the 1960s American rock star Jim Morrison. Fowlie asserts that both Rimbaud and Morrison expressed a similar sense of rebellion in their art and that both figures stand as modern antiheroes.

Kolakowski, Leszek, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, Doubleday, 1968.

Kolakowski provides a historical overview of the development of positivist thinking. The symbolist movement arose in part as a reaction against the positivist ideals of rational, objective reasoning and scientific method that dominated nineteenth-century thought.

Lacambre, Geneviève, *Gustave Moreau: Magic and Symbols*, Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

Lacambre provides discussion of the life and work of Gustave Moreau, a major French symbolist painter.

Millan, Gordon, *A Throw of the Dice: The Life of Stephen Mallarmé*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1994.

Millan provides a biography of the French symbolist poet Mallarmé.

Peyre, Henri, *Baudelaire: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, 1962.

Peyre offers critical discussion of the poetry of Baudelaire, a major French poet often noted as the grandfather of Symbolism.

Robb, Graham, *Rimbaud*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2000.

Robb provides a biography of Rimbaud, a major French symbolist poet.

Bibliography

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Parisian Prowler: Le Spleen de Paris, Petits poèmes en prose*, translated by Edward K. Kaplan, University of Georgia Press, 1989, pp. 129-30.

Kaplan, Edward K., ed., Preface, in *The Parisian Prowler: Le Spleen de Paris, Petits poèmes en prose*, University of Georgia Press, 1989, pp. x-xi.

Simic, Charles, "The Poetry of Village Idiots," in *Verse*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1996, pp. 7-8, quoted in *The Best of "The Prose Poem: An International Journal,"* edited by Peter Johnson, White Pine Press, 2000, p. 13.

Truesdale, C. W., Preface, in *The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry*, edited by Robert Alexander, Mark Vinz, and C. W. Truesdale, New Rivers Press, 1996, p. xix.

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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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