

Overview of Literary Movements

Before the Romantic Movement, artists see themselves as the spokespersons for society. Artists believe that individual effort will restore order in the world.

After the Romantic Movement, artists increasingly see themselves as outcasts, alienated and isolated. They portray society as dysfunctional, isolating individuals who are themselves incapable of effective action. The world is permanently chaotic and meaningless.

Romanticism

The Fulcrum: 1790's to 1830's

Romantics distrust society and government, long to be part of nature and, therefore, close to God, They admire ancient historical periods, especially, ancient Greece and Rome and the medieval era.

1837 – 1901 Victorian Era named for Queen Victoria known for prudery, but art & lit were both romantic and realistic. Gothic novels exaggerate and examine that part of human nature the Victorians repressed.

1830 – 1860 Transcendentalism
(A philosophical form of romanticism) Important in the U.S.

1850 – 1890 Realism

1885 – 1895 Symbolism
(Some critics date the symbolist movement from the author Baudelaire - 1857)

1890 – 1930 Naturalism

Modernist Movements:

1909 – 1918 Imagism (American and British)

1910 – 1930 German Expressionism

1916 – 1923 Dadaism
1920's + - Cubism
1924 – 1960's – Surrealism (French)

1945 + - French Existentialism

1950 – 1960's Absurdism
American, British, European

1965 + Post Modernism

1650 AD – 1800 AD
Neoclassicism and The Age of Reason
English Restoration – 1660 – 1688
English Augustan 1700 – 1750
Enlightenment: 1750 – 1800
(French and American Revolutions are products of the Enlightenment)

1300 AD – 1650 AD
Renaissance sweeps northward across Europe.

500 AD – 1500 AD
Medieval Age
Battle of Hastings 1066 AD

900 BC – 500 BC
Greece: 900 BC – 300 BC
Rome: 500 BC – 500 AD

Classicism and Modernism / Post Modernism both focus on the individualism but for different reasons.



← Individuals have control - individuals have no control →



Literary and Artistic Movements

Use this detailed outline with the Overview Diagram of Artistic and Literary

Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome

- Greek Literature - Homer 9th – 8th B.C. through 300 AD
- Roman Literature from 500 BC to 500 A.D
- Major philosophy combines humanism and rationalism.
- The world is man's to "interrogate, explore, and enjoy."
- Man is the measurer and interpreter of all things.

Medieval Age – Middle Ages or Dark Age – 500 AD to 1500 AD (this is an arbitrary date)

- From the fall of Rome to the Renaissance.
- Feudalism was the political structure but nations are reforming slowly.
- Mysticism - Christianity / Catholicism was the religion that was a major political force.
- Crusades
- Chivalry
- The Great Chain of Being
- Chivalry
- Courtly Love
- Bubonic Plague
- Changes in the English Language.

Renaissance – 1300 - 1650

- Renaissance means "rebirth," and the rebirth of classical knowledge, of rationalism and humanism.
 - Beginning in Italy in the 1300's, the Renaissance moves northward until the 1600's.
 - The attempt to integrate Christianity and humanism.
 - In England, Shakespeare is part of the English Renaissance.
 - The Reformation began on November 1, 1517 when Martin Luther posted the 95 theses on the church door of Wittenberg.
 - Henry VIII of England splits England away from the Catholic Church and starts The Church of England.
- Queen Elizabeth I makes England a great power.

Neoclassicism or The Age of Reason

1650 – 1800 AD

- Rationalism
- Science and math dominate –
- Deism (mechanical universe set in motion by a rational God who left it to run according to mathematical laws.)
- Religious turmoil (Catholic vs. Protestant) Puritanism is a strict segment of Protestantism.
- Strong, absolute monarchies rule nations.

The Neoclassic Era can be subdivided:

- 1660 –1688 - English Restoration (after Cromwell, the English monarchy was restored with Charles II and remains through James II).

- 1700 – 1750 English Augustan era. The time of Queen Anne when the English felt a parallel to ancient Rome and the Roman Emperor Augustus whom they remembered for perfection of learning and classical thought.
- 1750 – 1800 The Enlightenment – Scientific thinking and the power of human thinking could improve man and society.

Up to this point, artists see themselves as spokespeople for society.

Romanticism

- 1800 – 1830 are the prime years of the movement, but qualities of romanticism are in art and literature for another 30 years; so we could say 1800 – 1860.
- Emphasis on individualism and human rights
- Truth lies in the heart
- Imagination over reason
- Search for the ideal
- Emotions are valid, authentic, and the filter by which to judge the world around us
- Enthusiasm for nature
- Mysticism
- Admiration of classical and medieval history
- The Industrial Revolution ends romanticism.
- Transcendentalism
 - A part of the romantic movement
 - Important in New England in the U.S.
 - Goal was to unite all individuals to both the natural world and to a person's inner world.
 - Combined the tenets of many religions and philosophies: Christianity, eastern religions, Platonism
 - Each person has a portion of the cosmic divine force in him.
 - Man could find God's moral law in nature.
 - Each person should trust his heart because intuition and conscience leads us to the truth.
 - Man had an Oversoul. Transcendentalists said that every living thing in nature came from and returned to the Oversoul, a cosmic force like God. Emerson said to think of the Oversoul like the ocean. When the tide comes in, water is trapped in puddles. Each puddle is a living thing, with a specific form (a person, a leaf, etc). When the tide comes in, the puddles disperse back into the great ocean. At the next tide, droplets from one puddle combine with droplets from other puddles to form another living entity; therefore, trees, animals, various people, etc., are all part of each other.
 - Anti – Transcendentalism
 - Saw life as tragic
 - The gap between human desires and human possibility was not bridgeable
 - Human motives were a mix of good and evil
 - In U.S., authors called the Brahmins after the highest cast of Hindu society. James Russell Lowell, Longfellow, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Hawthorne and Melville were all anti-transcendentalists.

Victorian Period

- 1837 – 1901 – the Reign of Queen Victoria in England, but affected all Europe
- English Chauvinism

- Complacency
- Industrial Revolution
- High standard of decency and respectability
- Rise of the middle class
- Class consciousness
- Hypocrisy
- Influenced by science
- Interest in the occult
- Suppressed emotions
- Exaggeration in architecture, home decorations, people's dress
- Modernists revolted against this stifling era
- Gothic novels were popular

Realism

- 1850 - 1890
- Reaction against romanticism
- Truthful treatment of material
- Be the objective camera
- Concentrate on the present
- Influenced by the Civil War (for the U.S.), Freud, Industrial Revolution, Marx, and Darwin.
- Interest in the Middle Class (the bourgeoisie) and its problems, values, etc.
- Democratic attitude

Naturalism

- Extreme realism – also called calloused realism
- Influenced by the industrial revolution, Freud and Darwin
- Nature acts upon people who are victims of heredity and environment
- The universe is neutral to man's suffering and joy.
- There is no higher purpose for living than just the activity of living.
- Clinical, documentary style

Symbolism

- 1885 – 95
- Emotional, romantic reaction to realism
- Origin – France about 1850 (Baudelaire)
- Edgar Allen Poe was an influence
- Deeply influenced British and American poetry in the 20th century
- The goal of art is the personal, emotional response
- Authors: Hugo, Tennyson, Joyce, Yeats, Singe

Many symbolist writers have also been called Impressionists.

Impressionism

- 1870's +
- Adapted from the French art movement
- Depicts characters, scenes, moods as they appear to an individual at a precise moment
- Uses details in a story poem, music like brush strokes.
- Concentrates on the impressions an object makes, not the object itself; so details are suggested not stated.
- Interest in light
- Relies on images and imagery

- Uses stream of consciousness.
- Creates logic with psychological (free) association
- Details of the environment may be shadowy, but details of inner life will be vivid.
- (Impressionism differs from expressionism significantly because it avoids conscious distortion and abstraction.
- Authors: Oscar Wilde, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf

Modernist Movement – 1914 – 1965

The various artistic movements under the umbrella of modernism reject realism, naturalism, and scientific theory. The modernist artist rejects recorded history, traditional values, traditional rhetoric and language. Modernists elevate the individual, the inner man (over the social man), and the power of the subconscious. Artists experimented with form, color, and language. They used symbols and myths to express truth. There are many literary and artistic movements in the Modernist Movement. See accompanying chart.

Modernist Movement begins after World War I

- All of the sub-movements:
- Reject realism, naturalism, and the scientific theories that are the basis of these;
- Reject history;
- Reject all the past and present societies of recorded history;
- Reject traditional values;
- Reject traditional rhetoric and language;
- Elevate the individual;
- Elevate the inner man over the social man
- Elevate the subconscious over the conscious mind;

Therefore, the Modernist Artists tried Deep Experimentation with language, forms, symbols, and myths.

Here are the various movements within the Modernist Movement.

Expressionism 1905 – 1930's

- Begun in Germany before WWI
- Goal before 1920 was to renew an idealistic attitude;
- Goal after 1920 was to be “merely aggressive;”
- Anti-authoritarian, especially Victorian paternalism;
- Techniques:
 - Anti-realistic and naturalistic techniques
 - Grotesqueness
 - Violent distortion
 - Nightmare setting plot, mood
 - Use of allegory, symbols, images
 - Artists and authors present outer world only to express mood, personality, character

- De-emphasized uniqueness
- Nameless or stock characters
- Simplistic or rough language
- Telegraphic dialogue
- Reaction to:
 - Mass, modern, mechanical society;
 - Marxism's concept that the individual was being lost in mass society;
 - Freud's analysis of the influence of the subconscious mind;
 - The devaluation of the artists.

Imagism – 1909 – 1918

- A group of poets in the U.S.
- Des Imagistes is the French title of their first anthology and from which they take their name
- More a “spirit or revolt” than a movement
- Influenced deeply by Chinese poetry and Japanese Haiku (a single, sharp image)
- Major objectives:
 - Use common speech but use the exact word (not nearly exact);
 - Avoid clichés
 - Create new rhythms for new moods
 - Have absolute freedom to choose subjects
 - Present an image
 - Concentrate and compact
 - Suggest rather than give complete statements.
 - Authors: Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Archibald Macleish.
 -

Picasso and Cubism – 1881 – 1973 (lived in Paris 1904 – 1947)

- With Georg Braque developed Cubism
- Show objects from all sides at once, just as the mind sees them, not as the eye does.
- Geometrical and abstract
- Influenced all artistic movements in the 20th century
- Theory of Destructions and Sum of Destructions.

Cubist Poetry – the 1920's

- American poetry movement
- Influenced by Picasso's “destructions” and “Sum of Destructions.”
- Fragment elements of experience (destruction) and then rearrange them into a new, meaningful synthesis (sum of destructions).
- Authors: Archibald Macleish, H.D., e.e. cummings.

DADAism – 1916 – 1923

- French for “hobbyhorse” and the title of a Symbolists' journal
- Intentional childishness

- Used irrationality, chance, intuition, and comic derision to discover an "authentic reality."

Surrealism 1924 – 1960's

- Strong in France, Spain, Latin America, U.S. Led by the poet Andre Breton.
- Outgrowth of DADAism
- Dreamlike, Freudian
- Goal is to destroy or pervert the rules of art, philosophy, and logic
- Creation of conscious madness
- Against the insanity of war
- Use of startling or incompatible images
- Unusual typography
- Use of made-up words
- Irrationality
- Some authors tried automatic writing to reveal the true process of thought
- Authors / artists: Robert Lowell, Dali

Existentialism: 1940 + During and after WW II

- Human reason is inadequate
- Things / people have no meaning except as individuals create their own meaning by acting.
- Being or becoming nothing is people's greatest fear
- Efforts to act in a meaningless or absurd world lead to anguish, loneliness, and hopelessness;
- Humans are totally free but totally responsible for what they make of themselves. a condition, which creates great anxiety in individuals. There is a possibility of improvement.
- Existence comes before essence
- Je pense que je suis (I think; therefore, I am." Descartes)
- Since nothing is absolute, a single person can improve himself and society if the person acts authentically and independently;
- Improvements in human nature and society can come only from within individual people and their individual actions; existentialism can be an optimistic philosophy (change is possible if individuals enact it.
- Authors: Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Dostoyevsky
- Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" explains existentialism.

Absurdism – 1950 +

- The Theater of the Absurd
- Abandons rational devices to present the absurdity of the human condition.
- Existentialism forms Absurdism philosophical base
- Expressionism and surrealism give Absurdism many of its devices and techniques;
- Humans are cut off from their religious and philosophical roots;

- Humans live in meaningless isolation in an alien universe;
- Humans move from the nothingness from which they came to the nothingness in which they will end;
- Humans live an existence of anguish and absurdity;
- There is no way for people to establish a significant relationship between themselves and their environment;
- Extreme forms of illogic, inconsistency and nightmarish fantasy are characteristics;
- Incidents are not connected to tell a story; rather pattern of images present people as bewildered beings in an incomprehensible universe.
- Authors: Albee, Heller, Pynchon, Grass, Vonnegut, Pinter, Ionesco, Beckett, and Stoppard.

Post Modernism 1965 +

- Pessimistic attitude
- Denial of order or hopeful future
- Belief that humans can no longer construct order
- The presentation of highly fragmented universe
- Incorporation of phenomenology
 - The theory that something only exists if it exists in one's consciousness. Existence of anything is entirely subjective and, therefore, not really provable. Thus, no one will be able to agree on anything – not even the meaning of words. For example, two people look at a door, which they think is blue. Person A's idea of blue may be different from Person B's idea of blue, and we have no way of knowing or testing.
 - Authors: Pinter, Pynchon, Fowles, and Stoppard.