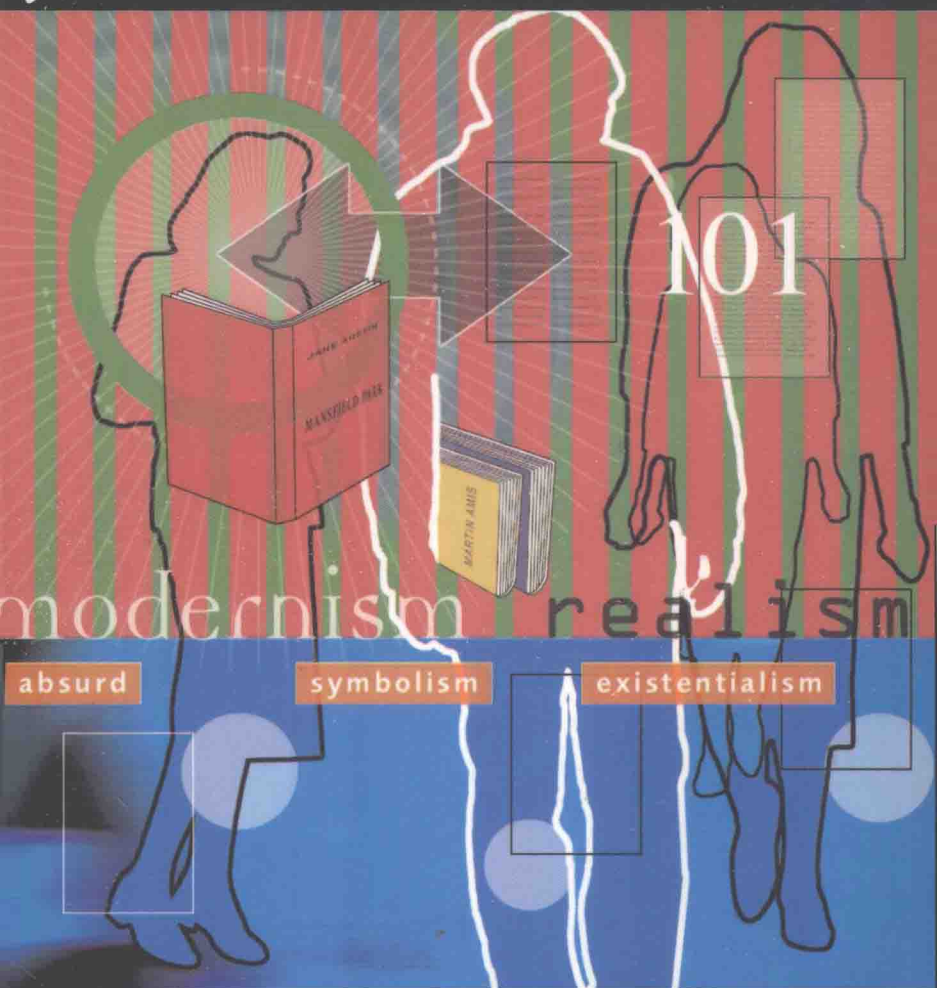




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01

LITERATURE

101

KEY IDEAS

LITERATURE

Brenda Downes

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Introduction

Welcome to the **Teach Yourself 101 Key Ideas** series. We hope that you will find both this book and others in the series to be useful, interesting and informative. The purpose of the series is to provide an introduction to a wide range of subjects, in a way that is entertaining and easy to absorb.

Each book contains 101 short accounts of key ideas or terms which are regarded as central to that subject. The accounts are presented in alphabetical order for ease of reference. All of the books in the series are written in order to be meaningful whether or not you have previous knowledge of the subject. They will be useful to you whether you are a general reader, are on a pre-university course, or have just started at university.

We have designed the series to be a combination of a text book and a dictionary. We felt that many text books are too long for easy reference, while the entries in dictionaries are often too short to provide sufficient

detail. The **Teach Yourself 101 Key Ideas** series gives the best of both worlds! Here are books that you do not have to read cover to cover, or in any set order. Dip into them when you need to know the meaning of a term, and you will find a short, but comprehensive account which will be of real help with those essays and assignments. The terms are described in a straightforward way with a careful selection of academic words thrown in for good measure!

So if you need a quick and inexpensive introduction to a subject, **Teach Yourself 101 Key Ideas** is for you. And incidentally, if you have any suggestions about this book or the series, do let us know. It would be great to hear from you.

Best wishes with your studies!

Paul Oliver
Series Editor

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Acmeism

The name of the style is taken from a Greek word meaning pinnacle or utmost height.

A group of young Russian poets formed the Poets' Guild in 1911 and published the magazine *Apollon*. They believed that poets should be craftsmen, not prophets. Poets writing within the movement wanted to depict the world in as real terms as possible, using language precisely and logically to give a clear set of representations. The Acmeists rejected both symbolism and mysticism, which they felt allowed vagueness.

The Acmeists had a great impact on Russian literature before the First World War, but their collective opposition to the revolution and conservative politics led to a loss of popularity during the 1920s. They failed to conform to the doctrine of Socialist Realism after 1934 and attracted official disapproval, which led to publishing bans and prison sentences.

Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilev wrote *The Path of the Conquistadors* (1905), which became a founding text of the

school. Gumilev opposed the Bolshevik revolution in 1916, and was executed for conspiracy after a plot to restore the monarchy in 1921. His wife, Anna Akhmatova, wrote mainly love poems within the principles of Acmeism. She published little after 1922.

Osip Mandelstam wrote two major collections, *Stone* (1913) and *Tristia* (1922). His work combined knowledge from his classical education with the precision and brevity demanded by the group. Although an opponent of the revolution, his work continued to be published, until he was arrested and exiled to Siberia after publicly criticizing Josef Stalin in 1934. Mandelstam continued to write and was arrested again in 1938. He died in a labour camp. His wife, Nadezhda Yakovlevna Khazina, wrote two volumes of memoirs, *Hope Against Hope* (1971) and *Hope Abandoned* (1974), neither of which were published in Russia.

see also...

Socialist Realism

Adaptations

To adapt is to make something suitable for a new need. Thus a chair could be adapted to make a stool and a book could prop up a table that has legs of different heights.

The usual reason for adapting a book is to change its form so that the story can be presented to audiences in another medium. Most commonly, novels are adapted for the stage, television or films. It is not usually possible or necessary to include the whole of the original text in any adaptations. This is partly because electronic media communicate with audiences in a different way, which causes large parts of the original text to become redundant. They offer additional information, which is not available on a printed page. Pictures and sound replace much of the description which is necessary in a book. A member of the theatre, television or cinema audience can see and hear what is happening, whereas readers have to rely on the writer's choice of words to help them to imagine people, places and events.

It is not only the best loved stories which are adapted for other media. An adaptation can reach a wider audience than most books. An example is Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (1982), which was filmed as *Schindler's List* in 1994. Audiences are drawn from: people interested in different interpretations of a much-loved story; people lacking the time or capability to read the original text; people new to the story; and even those who want to prove to themselves that an adaptation is never as good as the original book.

There is also a tradition in some countries of adapting books for a different audience from that which was originally targeted. Sometimes books written for adults are simplified and shortened for younger readers, for example, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Some books are adapted for audiotape. In both cases, the original text is shortened considerably and this process is called abridgement.

Agitprop

This term was used originally to describe drama or films which were created with the specific intention of inducing audiences to participate in political action or agitation. These works were originally produced in Russia in the years following the revolution after the Department of Agitation and Propaganda was set up in 1920. This department had responsibility for ensuring that the principles of the revolution were spread. As the population was mostly illiterate, the emphasis was on delivering the message through live theatre and film. Special trains equipped with film making and exhibition facilities travelled across Russia with a brief to spread the ideology of the revolution. The poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote a verse play in 1918 called *Mystery Bouffe* in which the working class battle with and defeat the upper class and establish a workers' paradise.

By the 1930s the term was used to describe any literature or art which encouraged a left wing analysis of society, and could be thought to promote action on the behalf of

readers or audiences. Some of the work of Berthold Brecht included what he called 'teaching plays' which derived their style from Russian agitprop. In *He Who Says Yes and He Who Says No* (1930), he offered audiences pieces which discussed specific political issues.

During the 1960s and 1970s, agitprop productions became popular in Europe and the USA. A desire to change social structures by the post-war generation led to a blossoming of oppositional writing and performance, for example, the Wooster Group and the People Show.

A current development is Theatre-for-Development, which exists in Third World countries. Groups involved work on exploratory and improvisational pieces with the explicit intention of enabling participants to analyse their lives and devise and implement strategies for change.

see also...

Epic Theatre

Alienation

The creation of an 'alienation effect' is sometimes used by writers to prevent the reader or audience from identifying with or trusting the narrative or action of a novel or play. Writers may achieve this effect in several ways.

Disruptions to the narrative such as flashbacks and the pre-figuring of events which have yet to occur in the narrative, can have an alienating effect on the reader, who becomes temporarily confused by the non-linear narrative style. A sudden mood change or the introduction of non-realistic events have a similar effect. Many modernist stream of consciousness novels have the effect of alienating the reader from close identification with characters.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and the Epic Theatre of Bertold Brecht both use alienation techniques. The Czech playwright and novelist Milan Kundera used alienation in *Jacques and His Master* (1981) and in his experimental novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1987).

There is a tradition of creating characters who are alienated from

their own fictional worlds. Lemuel Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is alienated from the societies which he visits and also from his fictional home.

Every novel by the Czech writer Franz Kafka portrayed lonely victims who cannot understand the events in which they are caught up. This is especially true of Gregor, whose alienation is symbolized by a physical transformation in *Metamorphosis* (1915). Albert Camus's novels, especially *The Outsider* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947), have deeply alienated characters, as do the plays of other absurdist and surrealist dramatists. Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) examines the effects of alienation, while Russell Hoban's *The Medusa Frequency* (1987) portrays a character who is pitched into a confusing and alienating sequence of events.

see also...

Altered States; Magical Realism; Stream of Consciousness; Surrealism

Allegory

An allegory is an extended metaphor in which characters, objects, incidents and descriptions carry a full set of meanings in addition to their literal meanings. The earliest examples of allegorical writing can be found among Aesop's Fables.

In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the chief character, Christian, is not simply a character but has a second set of meanings which allow him to stand for, or symbolize, Christianity itself. Christian's adventures also have a second set of meanings that symbolize humankind's journey through life to Heaven and the conflict between good and evil. There was often a moral lesson hidden within an apparently simple tale, as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Another common device used in allegorical writing is 'personification', which is a device whereby human feelings and characteristics are attributed to ideas, objects and non-human beings. By treating such things as characters, abstract qualities can be portrayed and explained in a more concrete way.

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* (1590–96) is an allegorical tale about the reign of Elizabeth I, in which she and her knights represent desirable qualities.

Although allegorical prose writing was most popular during the Middle Ages, there are many later examples. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860) and Virginia Woolf's *Between The Acts* (1941) are both allegorical. Other examples are J.G. Farrell's *Troubles* (1970) and *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) in which Farrell uses allegory to discuss the complex political issues. In Jim Crace's *The Gift of Stones* (1998), a novel set in the Stone Age becomes an allegory of modern economics. In *Arcadia* (1992), Crace sets the story around the building of a shopping centre and uses the characters' positions to explore issues about the free market economy.

Allegory is still most often found in poetry, which easily lends itself to the extended metaphor.

see also...

Imagery; Metaphysical

Altered States

Many fictional characters live their lives in an altered state, either voluntarily or involuntarily. The authors themselves have, for the most part, had direct personal experience of the states they describe, but this is not necessarily always true. The fiction is an attempt to offer readers an insight into life outside mainstream cultural practices and the transgression of social rules. Some writers consider only the personal consequences, while others consider the impact on society as a whole.

Of the many books about alcoholism, *Hangover Square* by Patrick Hamilton (1941); *The Lost Weekend* by Charles Jackson (1945); *Under The Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry (1947); and Evelyn Waugh's *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) are among the best known. *Ironweed* (1983), the fourth part of William Kennedy's sequence of novels, chronicles the effect of alcohol on the lives of the Phelan family.

Since Thomas De Quincey famously consumed laudanum and wrote *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), writers have

experimented with and written about drug-taking experiences. Aldous Huxley conceived a society controlled by the government through the use of drugs in *Brave New World* (1932), and in the utopian novel *Island* (1962) the drug-taking was purely voluntary. Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972) and the novels of William Burroughs are about addictions and attempts to break them. Recently, J.G. Ballard's *Cocaine Nights* (1997) and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) and *Ecstasy* (1997) consider the impact of new drugs on a new generation.

Twentieth-century novels about mental health and illness and its treatment and solutions include Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1990) are about surviving mental illness.

see also...

Alienation

Angry Young Men

This term is used to describe a group of English playwrights and novelists. At the end of the Second World War, a Labour government was elected in England and opportunities for higher education became available to lower middle-class people for the first time. By the mid-1950s, the first generation of working-class graduates were ready to build careers, only to discover that the pre-war social structures had not changed. They were not accepted in the jobs and social circles to which their education entitled them, because education alone did not allow them to move up the English class structure. Many used literature to express and publicize their anger, disillusionment, discontent and frustration with the slow pace of social change in post-war Britain.

John Osborne is probably the best known of this group. His play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), traces the frustration of Jimmy Porter, a working-class graduate, during his marriage to Alison, a colonel's daughter. The play explores class and personal conflict in ways which

had never been shown before on the English stage. He also wrote *The Entertainer* (1957) and *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964). Osborne's last play, *Deja vu* (1991), was a sequel to *Look Back in Anger*, with the same characters. Kingsley Amis turned anger to humour in the novel *Lucky Jim* (1954), in which he satirized the pressure on people who tried to 'better themselves' and move through the class system. Amis returned to this idea in other novels.

Whereas Osborne and Amis wrote about the problems of the aspiring middle class, and were graduates, Alan Sillitoe wrote about the working class. He was self-educated and had only been able to give up his job to write full-time after his novel, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), and an anthology of short stories, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959), had been published. David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960) and Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* (1956) are often included in this group.

Banned, Exiled and Imprisoned Writers

Fiction has been banned by many governments throughout history.

Punishment for those who disseminate ideas which governments wish to suppress has included exile and imprisonment. Fiction can be a powerful ideological tool and novelists, poets and playwrights have suffered alongside journalists and non-fiction writers. Some writers produce allegorical or satirical works in an attempt to disguise criticism of their governments.

Many writers suffered in the USSR. The Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai, author of *Love of Worker Bees* (1923), was imprisoned before the revolution. Victor Serge and Alexander Solzenitsyn (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1962) were imprisoned, and Joseph Brodsky was imprisoned then exiled to the USA. Brodsky won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987. More recently, the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, was exiled to the USA. The Czech playwright, Vaclav Havel, was imprisoned for campaigning against

the Soviet Union. He later became president of the Czech Republic.

During war time, writers are often political targets. Arthur Koestler, who wrote *Darkness at Noon* (1940), was imprisoned during the Spanish Civil War. Although many writers and artists went into exile like Rafael Alberti, the poet Federico Garcia Lorca remained in Spain and was executed by fascists.

During the Second World War, imprisoned writers included Primo Levi, who was in Auschwitz. Both Gunter Grass and Ezra Pound were imprisoned by the Allies.

In Nigeria, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, author of *Petals of Blood* (1977), and Wole Soyinka, who won the Nobel Prize in 1986, were imprisoned for criticizing the Government. As recently as 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa was convicted and hanged in Nigeria. The Chileans, Pablo Neruda and Isabel Allende were forced into exile.

see also...

Dissidence; Satire

Beat Generation

Herbert Hunke (1916–96) coined the term 'beat' to describe himself and his life. He spent years travelling through America during the depression, making notes for novels left unwritten until the end of his life and supporting a heroin habit. When he arrived in New York in the late 1940s he was addicted, exhausted, alienated and drifting through life in post-war America.

In 1947 he met a group of poets and writers who had already imagined a 'New Vision', which would challenge the conformity of post war USA. Their work was rebellious and oppositional, as they rejected the norm of middle class values and commercialism. This group readily embraced Hunke's philosophy and became the most famous voices of the Beat Generation. At one point over a thousand writers were using the style. They produced loose structured free verse and novels. They promoted voluntary poverty, individuality and personal release through jazz, sex, alcohol, drugs and their own interpretations of

Buddhism and mysticism.

Much of the material was published by City Lights, which was run by the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti who wrote *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958). Some of the work was so challenging that there were attempts to prevent publication. Both Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) and William Burroughs's novel, *The Naked Lunch* (1959), were the subjects of obscenity trials before eventual publication.

Jack Kerouac wrote several novels, the most famous of which is *On The Road*, written on a continuous roll of paper in three weeks in 1957. Kerouac added a new meaning to beat when he said it was also short for 'beautiful'. Other writers associated with the movement include the poet Gregory Corso (*Gasoline*, 1958) and Gary Snyder (*Riprap*, 1959).

see also...

Underground Poetry

Biographical and Autobiographical Writing

Writing about the lives of real people can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Biographies are accounts of real people's lives, written by another person. Autobiographies, which first began to appear in English during the nineteenth-century, are the accounts which people write of their own lives. Both biographies and autobiographies are generally accepted as containing truthful details about past events.

In a biography, truth and detail may be limited by the availability of material, and in an autobiography, the author may deliberately limit the scope of the account. In biography, the relationship of the writer to the subject may influence attitudes to the subject and choices about inclusion and exclusion of material. Some autobiographical works are 'ghost-written', which means that a professional writer has been employed to do the writing. Both kinds of writing are classified as non fiction by publishers, booksellers and libraries.

While it can be argued that all

forms of fiction produce episodes from the lives of invented characters, there is a discrete literary genre of fictional biography and autobiography. In such works, the author adopts the non-fiction style to write the life story of an invented character. The style is therefore a pastiche of the genuine biography or autobiography and is usually chosen for its humorous potential.

Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) is fictional autobiography. Virginia Woolf wrote *Flush* (1933), a fictional biography of a dog belonging to Robert and Elizabeth Barratt-Browning. Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) is told through a fictional biographer who is obsessed with the writer Gustave Flaubert. One unusual example is C. Northcote Parkinson's *The Life and Times of Horatio Hornblower* (1970), the fictional biography of a character created by another author, C.S. Forester.

see also...

Diaries

Bloomsbury Group

The name given to a group of British writers, philosophers and artists who used to gather in London during the early years of the twentieth-century. Bloomsbury had become a cultural centre after the building of the British Museum in 1759 and the opening of London University in 1826. By the 1900s the area was well provided with libraries and bookshops but was unfashionable, which made housing affordable.

Although members of the group came from well-established, well-connected and well-educated families, they were regarded as radical and avant-garde. Their work challenged and rejected the restrictive values of Victorian England and influenced the development of English arts and literature. The group included the artists Roger Fry and Duncan Grant, the critic Clive Bell, the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the economist John Maynard Keynes. The writers E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey and Leonard Woolf still enjoy international acclaim. Two sisters married within this group: Vanessa Bell became an art critic and

Virginia Woolf is recognized as one of the greatest novelists of the century. Virginia and Leonard Woolf set up the Hogarth Press to publish their own work, European novels in translation and the work of many young writers including T. S. Eliot.

Virginia Woolf is the most famous of the Bloomsbury writers. She published nine novels and many volumes of essays, letters and feminist writings. Following the publication of her third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1919), Woolf became established as a modernist writer. In *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1931), she developed experimental techniques. Woolf is best known for a style known as 'stream of consciousness' or 'interior monologue', which presents characters' emotions, memories and impressions in a 'raw' state, running on just as thoughts do and often omitting conventional punctuation.

see also...

Modernism; Stream of Consciousness