

Twentieth-Century  
Literary Criticism

TCLC 255



Volume 255

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



**GALE**  
CENGAGE Learning™

Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.  
255**

Project Editor: Kathy D. Darrow

Editorial: Dana Barnes, Sara Constantakis,  
Matthew Derda, Kristen Dorsch, Dana  
Ferguson, Jeffrey W. Hunter, Reed  
Kalso, Michelle Kazensky, Jelena O.  
Krstović, Michelle Lee, Camille  
Reynolds, Marie Toft, Lawrence J.  
Trudeau

Content Conversion: Katrina D. Coach,  
Gwen Tucker

Indexing Services: Laurie Andriot

Rights and Acquisitions: Margaret  
Chamberlain-Gaston, Tracie Richardson

Composition and Electronic Capture: Gary  
Oudersluys

Manufacturing: Cynde Lentz

Product Manager: Mary Onorato

© 2011 Gale, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored, or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For product information and technology assistance, contact us at  
**Gale Customer Support, 1-800-877-4253.**

For permission to use material from this text or product,  
submit all requests online at [www.cengage.com/permissions](http://www.cengage.com/permissions).

Further permissions questions can be emailed to  
[permissionrequest@cengage.com](mailto:permissionrequest@cengage.com)

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

*Gale*  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN-13: 978-1-4144-7035-1

ISBN-10: 1-4144-7035-5

ISSN 0276-8178

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

# Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series

For criticism on	Consult these Gale series
Authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999	<i>CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM (CLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1900 and 1999	<i>TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM (TCLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1800 and 1899	<i>NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE CRITICISM (NCLC)</i>
Authors who died between 1400 and 1799	<i>LITERATURE CRITICISM FROM 1400 TO 1800 (LC)</i> <i>SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM (SC)</i>
Authors who died before 1400	<i>CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE CRITICISM (CMLC)</i>
Authors of books for children and young adults	<i>CHILDREN'S LITERATURE REVIEW (CLR)</i>
Dramatists	<i>DRAMA CRITICISM (DC)</i>
Poets	<i>POETRY CRITICISM (PC)</i>
Short story writers	<i>SHORT STORY CRITICISM (SSC)</i>
Literary topics and movements	<i>HARLEM RENAISSANCE: A GALE CRITICAL COMPANION (HR)</i> <i>THE BEAT GENERATION: A GALE CRITICAL COMPANION (BG)</i> <i>FEMINISM IN LITERATURE: A GALE CRITICAL COMPANION (FL)</i> <i>GOTHIC LITERATURE: A GALE CRITICAL COMPANION (GL)</i>
Asian American writers of the last two hundred years	<i>ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE (AAL)</i>
Black writers of the past two hundred years	<i>BLACK LITERATURE CRITICISM (BLC-1)</i> <i>BLACK LITERATURE CRITICISM SUPPLEMENT (BLCS)</i> <i>BLACK LITERATURE CRITICISM: CLASSIC AND EMERGING AUTHORS SINCE 1950 (BLC-2)</i>
Hispanic writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries	<i>HISPANIC LITERATURE CRITICISM (HLC)</i> <i>HISPANIC LITERATURE CRITICISM SUPPLEMENT (HLCS)</i>
Native North American writers and orators of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries	<i>NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE (NNAL)</i>
Major authors from the Renaissance to the present	<i>WORLD LITERATURE CRITICISM, 1500 TO THE PRESENT (WLC)</i> <i>WORLD LITERATURE CRITICISM SUPPLEMENT (WLCS)</i>

## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

### Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the numbers of the *TCLC* volumes in which their entries appear.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

## Citing *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, (2003); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88, no. 2 (May 2005): 284-93. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 356-65. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88.2 (May 2005): 284-93. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 356-65. Print.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*. Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32. Print.

### **Suggestions are Welcome**

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Product Manager:

Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series  
Gale  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)  
Fax: 248-699-8884



## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *TCLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

### **COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *TCLC*, VOLUME 255, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:**

*African American Review*, v. 32, winter 1998. Copyright © 1998 by *African American Review*. Reproduced by permission.—*Arizona Quarterly*, v. 15, autumn, 1959, for “Daughter of Vikings: Isak Dinesen” by George Brandon Saul. Copyright © 1959 by the Regents of the University of Arizona. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Black American Literature Forum*, v. 15, summer 1981. Copyright © 1981 by *African American Review*. Reproduced by permission.—*CLA Journal*, v. 26, December 1982. Copyright © 1982 by The College Language Association. Used by permission of The College Language Association.—*The Crisis*, v. 78, July 1971. Copyright © 1971 by *The Crisis*. Reproduced by permission. The publisher wishes to thank the Crisis Publishing Co., Inc., the publisher of the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for the use of this material first published in the July 1971 issue of *The Crisis*.—*Critical Inquiry*, v. 8, 1981. Copyright © 1981 by University of Chicago Press. Reproduced by permission of the University of Chicago Press.—*The Hudson Review*, v. XVII, winter 1964-1965. Copyright © 1964-1965 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*Iberoamericana*, v. 6, March 2006. Copyright © 2006 by Vervuert Verlag. Reproduced by permission.—*The Journal of Narrative Technique*, v. 15, winter 1985. Copyright © 1985 by Eastern Michigan University. Reproduced by permission.—*The Langston Hughes Review*, v. 1, fall 1982. Copyright © 1982 by Langston Hughes Society. Reproduced by permission.—*Latin American Theatre Review*, v. 8, fall 1974; v. 11, fall 1977; v. 24, fall 1990. Copyright © 1974, 1977, 1990. Reproduced by permission.—*The Massachusetts Review*, v. 19, summer 1978. Copyright © 1978 by *The Massachusetts Review*. Reproduced by permission.—*Modern Fiction Studies*, v. 24, winter 1978-79. Copyright © 1978-79 by Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, v. 75, 1974. Copyright © 1974 by *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*. Reproduced by permission.—*Romance Quarterly*, v. 26, 1979. Copyright © 1979 by Taylor & Francis Group. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group, www.informaworld.com.—*Scandinavian Studies*, v. 57, autumn 1985, for “The Uses of Duplicity: Isak Dinesen and Questions of Feminist Criticism,” by Susan Hardy Aiken. Copyright © 1985 by *Scandinavian Studies*. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*The Twentieth Century*, v. 159, March 1956. Copyright © 1956 by *The Twentieth Century*. Reproduced by permission.

### **COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *TCLC*, VOLUME 255, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:**

Addison, Jr. Gayle. From “The Outsider,” in *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America*. Copyright © 1975 by Addison Gayle, Jr. Used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.—Aiken, Susan Hardy. From *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*, The University of Chicago Press, 1990. Copyright © 1990 by University of Chicago Press. Reproduced by permission.—Aynesworth, Michele McKay and Roberto Arlt. From “Introduction” in *Mad Toy*, translated by Michele McKay Aynesworth. Copyright © 2002 Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Barnwell, Kathryn. From “Tapping the Roots: Hidden Sources of Power in Isak Dinesen’s ‘The Dreamers,’” in *Isak Dinesen and Narrativity: Reassessments for the 1990s*, edited by Gurli A. Woods, Carleton University Press, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by McGill-Queen’s University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Barr, Marleen. From “Food for Postmodern Thought: Isak Dinesen’s Female Artists as Precursors to Contemporary Feminist Fabulators,” in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, edited by Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin, The University of Tennessee Press, 1990. Copyright © 1990 by The University of Tennessee Press. Reproduced by permission.—Brown, J. Andrew. From *Test Tube Envy: Science and Power in Argentine Narrative*, Bucknell University Press, 2005. Copyright © 2005 by Associated University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Flint, Jack M. From “The Concept of Anguish,” in *The Prose Works of Roberto Arlt: A Thematic Approach*, Durham Modern Language Series, 1985. Copyright © 1985 by University of Durham. Reproduced by permission.—Gunnars, Kristjana. From “Life as Fiction: Narrative Appro-

priation in Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*," in *Isak Dinesen and Narrativity: Reassessments for the 1990s*, edited by Gurli A. Woods, Carleton University Press, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by McGill-Queen's University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Hannah, Donald. From "Art and Dream," in *"Isak Dinesen" and Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality*, published by Putnam and Company, 1971. Reproduced by permission of the Random House Group, Ltd.—Hansen, Frantz Leander. From "Aristocratic Conduct of Life and Bourgeois Lifelessness: *Winter's Tales*," in *The Aristocratic Universe of Karen Blixen: Destiny and the Denial of Fate*, translated by Gaye Kynoch, Sussex Academic Press, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by Sussex Academic Press. Reproduced by permission.—James, Sibyl. From "Gothic Transformations: Isak Dinesen and the Gothic," in *The Female Gothic*, edited by Juliann E. Fleenor, Eden Press Inc., 1983. Copyright © 1983 by Eden Press, Inc. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Lee, Judith. From *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*. Copyright © 1993 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.—Lindstrom, Naomi. From *Arlt's Exposition of the Myth of Woman*, reproduced from *Woman as Myth and Metaphor in Latin American Literature*, edited with an Introduction by Carmelo Virgillo and Naomi Lindstrom, by permission of the University of Missouri Press. Copyright © 1985 by the Curators of the University of Missouri. Reproduced by permission.—Martinez, Victoria. From "General Characteristics of the *Aguafuertes porteñas*," in *The Semiotics of a Bourgeois Society: An Analysis of the Aguafuertes Porteñas by Roberto Arlt*, Scripta Humanistica, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by Studia Humanitatis. Reproduced by permission.—Mullins, Maire. From "The Gift of Grace: Isak Dinesen's *Babette's Feast*," in *The Gift of Story: Narrating Hope in a Postmodern World*, edited by Emily Griesinger and Mark Eaton, Baylor University Press, 2006. Copyright © 2006 Baylor University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Perry, Margaret. From "A Fisher of Black Life: Short Stories by Rudolph Fisher," in *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, edited by Victor A. Kramer, AMS Press, 1987. Copyright © 1987 by AMS Press, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—Scruggs, Charles. From "Sexual Desire, Modernity, and Modernism in the Fiction of Nella Larsen and Rudolph Fisher," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by George Hutchinson, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by Cambridge University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Simmons, Diane. From "Isak Dinesen: A Passion for Africans," in *The Narcissism of Empire: Loss, Rage and Revenge in Thomas De Quincey, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, and Isak Dinesen*, Sussex Academic Press, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by Sussex Academic Press. Reproduced by permission.—Soitos, Stephen F. From *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction*. Copyright © 1996 by Stephen F. Soitos and published by the University of Massachusetts Press. Reproduced by permission.—Stambaugh, Sara. From *The Witch and the Goddess in the Stories of Isak Dinesen: A Feminist Reading*, UMI Research Press, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by UMI Research Press. Reproduced by permission.

# Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

**Barbara M. Bibel**

Librarian  
Oakland Public Library  
Oakland, California

**Dr. Toby Burrows**

Principal Librarian  
The Scholars' Centre  
University of Western Australia Library  
Nedlands, Western Australia

**Celia C. Daniel**

Associate Reference Librarian  
Howard University Libraries  
Washington, D.C.

**David M. Durant**

Reference Librarian  
Joyner Library  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina

**Nancy T. Guidry**

Librarian  
Bakersfield Community College  
Bakersfield, California

**Heather Martin**

Arts & Humanities Librarian  
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Susan Mikula**

Librarian  
Indiana Free Library  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

**Thomas Nixon**

Humanities Reference Librarian  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis  
Library  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**Mark Schumacher**

Jackson Library  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Greensboro, North Carolina

**Gwen Scott-Miller**

Assistant Director  
Sno-Isle Regional Library System  
Marysville, Washington

# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Gale Literature Product Advisory Board xiii

<b>Roberto Arlt 1900-1942</b> .....	1
<i>Argentine novelist, playwright, essayist, and short story writer</i>	
<b>Isak Dinesen 1885-1962</b> .....	77
<i>Danish short story writer, novelist, autobiographer, essayist, poet, and playwright</i>	
<b>Rudolph Fisher 1897-1934</b> .....	240
<i>American short story writer, novelist, essayist, and playwright</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 309

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 427

*TCLC* Cumulative Nationality Index 447

*TCLC-255* Title Index 453

# Roberto Arlt

## 1900-1942

(Full name Roberto Godofredo Christophersen Arlt) Argentine novelist, playwright, essayist, and short story writer.

The following entry provides an overview of Arlt's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC*, Volume 29.

### INTRODUCTION

Arlt is a prominent Argentine author of the early twentieth century. Although best known for his experimental novel, *Los siete locos* (1929; *The Seven Madmen*), Arlt also produced a number of plays that influenced the direction and development of Argentine theater, as well as journalistic essays, known as his *Aguafuertes*, that provide astute and provocative commentary on the cultural and socio-economic climate of Buenos Aires during the early twentieth-century. Throughout his brief career, the author experimented with language and form and explored a number of themes, including the metaphysical anguish and alienation of the individual in modern society, the breakdown of Western values as a result of industrialization, the tension between reality and illusion, and the plight of the working-class individual. Undervalued for much of his career, Arlt has increasingly won recognition in recent decades for his experimental and influential works, which reflect the thematic concerns of his time and presage the formal preoccupations of the postmodern era. Writing in 1977, David William Foster described Arlt as "the critical discovery of the mid-twentieth century in Argentine literature" and argued that "it is now easy to see him as perhaps the most important Argentine writer of his period."

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Arlt was born Roberto Godofredo Christophersen Arlt on April 26, 1900, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Ekatherine Iobstraibitzer and Karl Arlt, a glassblower and accountant of German origin. His formal education ended at the age of eight, when he was expelled from school, and in the years that followed he educated himself by reading both popular and classical literature, writing stories, and pursuing his interest in science and mechanics. Arlt's relationship with his parents was strained, due in part to his father's militaristic mode of

discipline, and he left home at the age of sixteen. Over the next few years, he continued to refine his writing and published his first story, "Jehová," in 1918 in the journal *Revista Popular*. Between 1919 and 1920, Arlt completed his mandatory year of military service in Córdoba and briefly attended the Naval School of Mechanics. At various points during this time, he supported himself as a bookstore clerk, mechanic, manager of a brick factory, and journalist. In 1922, he married his first wife, Carmen Antinucci, and returned to Buenos Aires with his family in 1924. The following year, Arlt became secretary to Argentine novelist and poet Ricardo Güiraldes, who also served as his mentor. His first novel, *El juguete rabioso* (*Mad Toy*), which appeared in 1926, was dedicated to Güiraldes. During this time, Arlt continued writing for various publications and in 1928 began working for the newspaper *El Mundo*, which published his short stories and articles. Over the next several years, he wrote a column known as "Aguafuertes porteñas" for the newspaper, in which he documented Argentine life, and it was through these essays that he won public recognition.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Arlt published three more novels, *The Seven Madmen*, *Los lanzallamas* (1931), and *El amor brujo* (1932), before he turned to writing drama. His first play, *Trescientos millones*, premiered on June 17, 1932, in Buenos Aires at the Teatro del Pueblo. Over the next eight years, he wrote and produced five more plays, most notably *La isla desierta* in 1938 and *La fiesta del hierro* in 1940. Arlt also published collections of his *Aguafuertes*, or essays, and short stories during this period, as well as his final novel, *Viaje terrible*, in 1941. In 1940, the author traveled briefly to Chile with his second wife, Elizabeth Shine, and began work on his final play, *El desierto entra a la ciudad* (1953). The work was left unfinished, however, when Arlt died suddenly of a heart attack on July 26, 1942, in Buenos Aires.

### MAJOR WORKS

Many critics consider Arlt's novels to be his most significant literary contributions. His first, *Mad Toy*, concerns the coming-of-age narrative of a young man, Silvio, who attempts to make sense out of his own dreams and imagination within the chaos of Buenos Aires during the early 1900s. The novel serves as a record of Silvio's literary apprenticeship, as he learns to view the



world with an artist's eye without losing his creative spark, humor, and playfulness. In this work, Arlt combines multiple registers of language, including various dialects and street slang, as well as the romantic and hardboiled language of the popular novels that Silvio consumes. The author also mixes elements from various narrative genres, including pulp fiction, detective fiction, the realist novel, and the picaresque serial. Arlt's best-known novels, *The Seven Madmen* and its sequel, *Los lanzallamas*, feature the protagonist Erdosain, a neurotic antihero who, after losing his wife and job, joins a mysterious band of misfits, known as the Society, and searches for meaningful answers in his life. The Society's plot to take over the country and institute a utopian dictatorship is eventually revealed to be an elaborate hoax against Erdosain, who finally commits suicide after witnessing an execution and murdering his mistress. Desperation, anguish, and the alienation of the individual in modern society are primary themes of the novels, which are heightened by the disorienting style of the works. In addition to employing an unreliable and erratic narrator in each story, Arlt also incorporates contradictory footnotes and irrelevant information, while omitting facts relevant to an understanding of the narrative. The narrative structure itself lacks unity and resists logical consistency, and thus ironically underscores the protagonist's fruitless search for meaning.

In addition to longer works of fiction, Arlt also wrote several important plays during his career. His first produced drama, *Trescientos millones*, explores the tension between reality and fantasy and features surreal and grotesque figures. The plot revolves around a poor servant girl, Sofía, who escapes the drudgery of her life by fantasizing about winning three hundred million pesos. When the son of her patroness enters her room in a drunken state, interrupting her romantic fantasy, Sofía is so overcome by the disparity between reality and her dreams that she commits suicide. In another play, *La isla desierta*, Arlt presents a social critique of the business world, which is preoccupied with production rather than human concerns, such as the imagination. Set in a public office in Buenos Aires, the play features Cipriano, a low-ranking employee, who entertains his fellow workers with a story of an idyllic island. His tale is so vivid and evocative that some of his listeners began removing their clothes. At this point in the play, their boss returns and fires everyone. *La fiesta del hierro*, one of Arlt's last plays, offers an ironic commentary on technology and industrialization. In this work, the main character is the owner of a factory that manufactures firearms. To celebrate the success of his business, he hosts a party and, in the living room where his guests will eat, erects an iron monster that will later be set on fire. The owner's twelve-year-old son is accidentally killed in the fire, however, an event that underscores Arlt's central message in the work: the technologies used to kill strangers can also kill innocent victims,

even the child of the manufacturer who profits from their production.

While Arlt produced successful novels and plays, he was equally well known within the Argentine public for his *Aguafuertes*, which first appeared as a regular column in the newspaper *El Mundo*. In numerous essays, the author provided a well-documented record of daily life in Buenos Aires, focusing his commentary on working-class citizens and the conditions of urban life in Argentina's capitol. Arlt's essays are generally concerned with ordinary people, such as the mothers, marriageable daughters, shop owners, and frequently the "man out of work," as well as those who live on society's fringes, including thieves and barflies. Rather than focusing on broader political or social issues in these writings, he concentrates on the intimate tragedies of individuals. Some critics have also identified male-female relationships, unemployment, Christianity, ethics, materialism, and humanism as some of the overarching themes in these writings. Throughout the essays, Arlt disparages hypocrisy and characterizes the working class as victims of the socio-economic system, controlled by the wealthy, which prevents the average individual from living a free and happy life. Appreciated by readers during the author's lifetime, the essays have since been regarded as important social and historical documents of a crucial time in Argentine culture. Writing in 1997, Victoria Martinez observed that the "theme and tone of Arlt's essays reflect his disillusion with social conditions in Buenos Aires, and one might consider the texts a semiotic reflection of society and class structure within Buenos Aires during the years in which they were written."

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Arlt first won recognition as a journalist in the late 1920s, through which he developed a devoted readership among Buenos Aires's working class. Recognizing the concerns of their own lives mirrored in the author's musings, these readers so appreciated his commentaries that circulation of *El Mundo* doubled on days when his column appeared. Arlt's first novels, however, were less favorably received when first published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At the time, two literary circles dominated Argentine literature: the Bodeo group, known for social realism and proletarian concerns, and the Florida group, known for avant-garde modernism. While Arlt shared some interests with the Bodeo group, he never fully subscribed to either camp, and critics struggled to place his work as a result. While *Mad Toy* found an audience among young readers, it was largely ignored by critics, and *The Seven Madmen* was misjudged to be a poorly written realistic work and censured for its use of street language, ungrammatical prose, and its disorient-

ing narrative style. The efforts of his latter years, his dramas, were performed in independent rather than commercial theaters and thus failed to reach a wide audience or garner significant critical notice. After his death, his writings were largely ignored until the late 1950s, when they were rediscovered by scholars such as Raúl Larra and the young writers of the left-wing, revisionist magazine *Contorno*, who in 1954 compared the author's ideologies with those of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. By the 1960s and 1970s, Arlt was increasingly appreciated as an anti-literary and anti-establishment writer, and *The Seven Madmen* was finally established as one of the most important Argentine novels of the twentieth century.

In recent years, scholars have continued to recognize the importance of Arlt's work to Argentina's literary development. Critics such as Jack M. Flint, Naomi Lindstrom, Michele McKay Aynesworth, and J. Andrew Brown have particularly focused on the author's novels, noting his experimental formal techniques, handling of characterization, and visionary perspective. Flint, writing in 1985, claimed that Arlt was the first Argentine author to realize the harmful effects of urban technological society on the individual's search for happiness, and the first "to forge his novels from this material, thus bringing the city into the novel as a central force." Several commentators, including James J. Troiano, David William Foster, and David P. Russi, have studied Arlt's often-overlooked plays, stressing the originality of these works while exploring their relationship to absurdist, expressionist, and meta-theater traditions. Arlt's *Aguafuertes*, however, are regarded among his most important literary contributions by some scholars, including Victoria Martinez and Daniel C. Scroggins, who described the essays as the author's "most detailed and direct chronicle" of the "Argentine upheaval of 1930." Despite years of neglect, Arlt is now generally considered one of the most important Argentine writers of the twentieth century, who defined his time and shaped the trajectory of Latin American letters through his innovative writings. In the words of Michele McKay Aynesworth, "Roberto Arlt, loved by many in Argentina for his tragicomic, punch-in-the-jaw writing during the 1920s and 1930s, is widely recognized today as a forerunner of Latin American 'boom' and 'post-boom' novelists such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende. His fast-paced, innovative style, fascination with popular culture, and fusion of fantasy with social realism helped pave the way for these later writers of magical realism and postmodern prose."

### PRINCIPAL WORKS

*El juguete rabioso* [*Mad Toy*] (novel) 1926  
*Los siete locos* [*The Seven Madmen*] (novel) 1929

*Los lanzallamas* (novel) 1931  
*El amor brujo* (novel) 1932  
*Prueba de amor* (play) 1932  
*Trescientos millones* (play) 1932  
*Aguafuertes porteñas* (essays) 1933  
*El jorobadito* (short stories) 1933  
*Aguafuertes españolas* (essays) 1936  
*El fabricante de fantasmas* (play) 1936  
*Saverio el cruel* (play) 1936  
*La isla desierta* (play) 1938  
*La fiesta del hierro* (play) 1940  
*El criador de gorilas* (short stories) 1941  
*Viaje terrible* (novel) 1941  
*El desierto entra a la ciudad* (play) 1953  
*Novelas completas y cuentos*. 3 vols. (novels and short stories) 1963  
*Teatro completo*. 2 vols. (plays) 1968

---

### CRITICISM

James J. Troiano (essay date fall 1974)

SOURCE: Troiano, James J. "Pirandellism in the Theatre of Roberto Arlt." *Latin American Theatre Review* 8, no. 1 (fall 1974): 37-44.

[In the following essay, Troiano notes the influence of the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello on Arlt's theater, but he adds that Arlt's "propensity toward social criticism and the utilization of grotesque elements" saves his dramatic work from being "a mere imitation of Pirandello."]

When *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* was presented in Argentina in 1923, it inspired copious imitation, most of it unimpressive. In fact, most plays modeled on Pirandello were so poor that it prompted Enzo Eloisi in 1937 to write a satirical play entitled *Nada de Pirandello, por favor*.<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that Arlt did not want to be classified with the imitators of Pirandello and for this reason the evening before the opening of *El fabricante de fantasmas* he wrote that there were in his play other sources of inspiration besides Pirandello.<sup>2</sup> Critics, nevertheless, insist, and rightfully so, on Pirandello's technical and thematic influence on Arlt's theatre in general. Significantly, they are also in agreement on the superiority of Arlt's plays in contrast to other playwrights who were inspired by Pirandello. Mirta Arlt,<sup>3</sup> Blanco Amores de Pagella,<sup>4</sup> and Frank Dauster<sup>5</sup> all consider Arlt as one of the most important playwrights influenced by Pirandello. This inspiration is most strongly felt in three plays: *Trescientos millones* (1932), *Saverio el cruel* (1936), and *El fabricante de fantasmas* (1936).

It must be noted, however, that Arlt's work is not a mere imitation of Pirandello. There is a unique quality in his plays which emanates generally from a propensity toward social criticism and the utilization of grotesque elements. These distinguishing factors will be analyzed along with the similarities between Arlt and Pirandello.

*Trescientos millones*, Arlt's first play, concerns a poor servant girl who escapes from prosaic reality by imagining an inheritance of three hundred million pesos and creating a chimerical world inhabited by characters who often appear more real than the creator herself. The characters which emanate from the servant's prolific imagination have much in common with Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*: they must play fixed roles which are imagined by their creators and, in addition, they maintain independent identities outside the sphere of their creator's influence.

The same ambiguity Pirandello injects into the reality of his six characters is apparent in Arlt. The father, for example, in *Sei personaggi* . . . continually insists that his suffering is as authentic as any flesh and blood person and not mere theatre. In the prologue of *Trescientos millones* Arlt intrigues the audience by listing characters as 'fantasmas.' These 'fantasmas' are supposed figments of the imagination, which at the same time are allowed to live independently of their creators, assuming very human characteristics. They discuss the meaning of life and existence, complain about their creators, and display pride and sorrow, as Arlt goes to all extremes to prove their humanity.

In the presentation of characters in the first act, Arlt distinguishes between their various levels of reality just as Pirandello does in *Ciascuno a suo modo*. Arlt lists 'la sirvienta' as a *personaje real*. *Personajes de humo* are: "La Muerte," Rocambole, "Galán," and "El Capitan."

In precisely the same way that Pirandello defines the different spheres of reality in *Ciascuno a suo modo* and *Sei personaggi* . . . and then sets out to make the difference between these two realms ambiguous, Arlt purposely confuses the distinction between the *personaje real* and the *personaje de humo*.

The technique of the rehearsal, so splendidly conceived by Pirandello in *Sei personaggi* . . . , is used also by Arlt in order to create the obscured boundaries between the realms of reality and fantasy in scenes with the "galán." The servant imagines a "galán" whom she wishes will court her. Although the servant is the supposed creator or author of the action, it is the "galán" who creates his own romantic scene; that is, while he is forced to play a specific role he still exercises considerable freedom in his interpretation of the part.<sup>6</sup> The line of demarcation between creator and character is again

extremely tenuous, for once more the creation acquires a status of virtual equality with its creator. This unorthodox relationship gives the spectator the impression of witnessing a work in progress: a love scene which is revised and reworked before their eyes. Everything that the "galán" attempts or suggests is rejected by the servant; she declines his offer to kneel or play the melancholy lover. The servant's dissatisfaction with the "galán" makes him finally protest: "¿Puede decirme qué papel hago yo aquí?" "¿Soy yo o es usted la que se tiene que declarar?" (Acto primero, p. 76) The elements which make the scene real, while it is supposedly in the servant's imagination, and the similarity the love scene shares with a rehearsal combine to heighten the air of ambiguity of the entire scene. It is not reality and yet it is simply not fiction.<sup>7</sup>

The duplicity becomes even more involved when the servant and the "galán" change roles: "Haga de cuenta que yo soy el hombre y usted la mujer," she says (Acto primero, p. 77). Now the "galán" has become the audience and the servant the character. This inversion specifically recalls *Sei personaggi* . . . and *Ciascuno a suo modo*. In the former play we see the characters amuse themselves as the actors attempt to act out their tragedy; in the latter the public attacks the actors whom they feel are falsifying the drama of their real lives. In *Trescientos millones*, when the "galán" becomes annoyed, the servant simply reminds him of her inheritance. One anticipates that she will give the more natural response: "I am the author, you the character." When instead she states "Yo tengo trescientos millones," she is converting fiction into reality by making the fiction a practical instrument. The "galán" must obey her because she has money, and for no other reason.

Arlt's social preoccupation, not at all apparent in Pirandello, is highly evident in *Trescientos millones*. The servant realizes that the fulfillment of her dreams would never be possible without a great deal of money. Therefore, the starting point of her chimerical escape is "trescientos millones," the importance of which is accentuated by the fact that this is the play's title. Jaime Giordano comments on the significance of wealth for the poor in Arlt's works: "La riqueza puede hacer olvidar la angustia metafísica, puede distraer el alma. En cambio, la pobreza dilata todas las desesperaciones."<sup>8</sup>

In the servant's imaginary journey, the captain explains to her that this money is the sole reason for the woman's newly gained importance: "Cuando se tienen trescientos millones hay que fijarse en todo. . . . Si no fuera así tanto derecho tendría a fijarse y a tener pretensiones el que no tiene un centavo como el que es multimillonario, como usted" (Acto primero, p. 74). Arlt very often describes the subservient behavior of the poor toward their wealthier counterparts. In *Trescientos millones*, the servant is presented almost as a slave to

the "patrona" whose harsh voice or shrill service bell awaken the unfortunate woman to her menial tasks. Ironically, in the servant's fantasy world it is the three hundred million pesos which enslave the characters to her.

Probably the single most outstanding trait in Arlt's works which differentiates his work from Pirandello's is the Argentinian's utilization of the grotesque tradition in literature. Nothing is ever certain in the grotesque world, in which life might be compared to walking on the edge of a precipice from which one might fall at any moment. Man's inability to foresee imminent dangers or to understand clearly his immediate environs supports the conviction that surprise is a fundamental component of the grotesque tradition.<sup>10</sup>

The reader or spectator is often suddenly and unexpectedly flung into a confused and unpredictable world; a seemingly tranquil moment very often literally explodes into a violent nightmare. The world of the grotesque generally involves "the ludicrous demon," dreams, carnivals, and the mask and face motif. All of these elements are apparent in Arlt's plays. Each is presented in order to accentuate the unexpected nature of the grotesque world where fantasy and dreams are confused with reality and the dangerous and harmless are impossible to distinguish. Dreams and "the ludicrous demon" are most evident in *Trescientos millones*.

The mysterious world of dreams is particularly appropriate for the artist with a grotesque vision of life.<sup>11</sup> The artist first lures the character, and consequently the reader or spectator, into believing that he can distinguish dream from reality only to shock him into the awareness that his original perception was erroneous.

The dream world acquires more importance than the real world in *Trescientos millones*. The servant submerges herself in her fantasy world and is awakened only by the voice of the "patrona" or the ringing of the service bell. The dream-like quality of the play is in clear contrast to Pirandello who also presents dreamers as the main characters (Enrico IV) but shows mainly their interaction with other people. Probably *Trescientos millones* is closer to *Sei personaggi* . . . in this sense because there is an ambiguous distinction in both works between the literary 'personaggi' and real people. Nevertheless, Pirandello still does not create the illusion of the grotesque dream world as Arlt does.

This grotesque unpredictability is apparent also in what Lee Byron Jennings calls "the ludicrous demon."<sup>12</sup> No one or nothing can be trusted or predicted. A monster might be transformed into a clown or prince or vice versa. Dante's Geryon in *The Inferno* appears as an innocuous, or even charming, young man while in reality he is a monster who will devour everything in sight.

The grotesque world and consequently Arlt's works are filled with unpredictable freaks and demons. Death in *Trescientos millones* is a clear example of this bizarre type of creature. The entrance of a personified death would strike terror in the heart of anyone. Nevertheless, Death in Arlt's play carries a sense of humor. It first reprimands the servant for not offering a chair, consequently complains about the general untidiness of the servant's quarters, explains that the panacea for all ills is deviled ham, and then lecherously touches the servant's body. Death changes from an extremely fastidious, complaining type to a lustful individual. In short, Arlt presents Death in a completely unexpected way, which accentuates the absolute unpredictability of the world.

*El fabricante de fantasmas* is the play most strongly influenced by Pirandello, again particularly compared to *Ciascuno a suo modo* and *Sei personaggi*. . . . The play concerns a dramatist who murders his wife and is consequently pursued by his own characters and led to his death. Arlt's relationship with Pirandello can be noted in these elements: self-conscious theatre, the play-within-a-play technique, commentary and criticism of the inner play, a breakdown of aesthetic distance, the creation of different levels of reality, and a fixed but autonomous role for the characters.

Similar to Pirandello in his self-conscious theatre, Arlt concerns himself with the creative process in *El fabricante de fantasmas*. The protagonist compares himself to a character in a play and actually presents his real life in the play-within-a-play: *Los jueces ciegos*. This leads one to draw an immediate parallel with *Ciascuno a suo modo* in which Pirandello similarly creates a situation in which art imitates a real life occurrence.

The similarities between *El fabricante de fantasmas* and Pirandello's works become even more explicit as the creative process literally unfolds before the spectator's eyes. Pedro begins to work on his drama with the aid of two "fantasmas," one of whom is "el fantasma de Martina," the counterpart of his lover, Martina, and the other a "galán." What follows is reminiscent of Pirandello's *Sei personaggi* . . . in that the characters act out their unfinished drama and the director writes it down. The characters in both plays are autonomous; the author's contribution is merely a passive notation of these independent unfolding existences. Pedro at times expresses unhappiness with the way the scene progresses, in much the same way as the servant does in *Trescientos millones* and the manager in *Sei personaggi*. . . . The audience in this way receives the impression that it is viewing a rehearsal or a play-within-a-play. This produces a tension similar to that between the actors and the characters in *Sei personaggi*. . . . When Martina, for example, directs a question about behavior with women to the author himself rather than