

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC

16

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series

When you need to review criticism of literary works, these are the Gale series to use:

If the author's death date is:

You should turn to:

After Dec. 31, 1959
(or author is still living)

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICISM

for example: Jorge Luis Borges, Anthony Burgess,
William Faulkner, Mary Gordon,
Ernest Hemingway, Iris Murdoch

1900 through 1959

TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM

for example: Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald,
Henry James, Mark Twain, Virginia Woolf

1800 through 1899

NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE CRITICISM

for example: Fedor Dostoevski, George Sand,
Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson

1400 through 1799

***LITERATURE CRITICISM FROM 1400 TO 1800
(excluding Shakespeare)***

for example: Anne Bradstreet, Pierre Corneille,
Daniel Defoe, Alexander Pope,
Jonathan Swift, Phillis Wheatley

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Covers authors of all eras. Presents criticism on authors and author/illustrators who write for the preschool to junior-high audience.

Volume 16

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Excerpts from Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Died between 1900 and 1960,
from the First Published Critical Appraisals
to Current Evaluations**

**Dennis Poupard
James E. Person, Jr.
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**Thomas Ligotti
Associate Editor**

**Gale Research Company
Book Tower
Detroit, Michigan 48226**

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Preface

It is impossible to overvalue the importance of literature in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual evolution of humanity. Literature is that which both lifts us out of everyday life and helps us to better understand it. Through the fictive lives of such characters as Anna Karenin, Jay Gatsby, or Leopold Bloom, our perceptions of the human condition are enlarged, and we are enriched.

Literary criticism can also give us insight into the human condition, as well as into the specific moral and intellectual atmosphere of an era, for the criteria by which a work of art is judged reflects contemporary philosophical and social attitudes. Literary criticism takes many forms: the traditional essay, the book or play review, even the parodic poem. Criticism can also be of several types: normative, descriptive, interpretive, textual, appreciative, generic. Collectively, the range of critical response helps us to understand a work of art, an author, an era.

Scope of the Series

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC) is designed to serve as an introduction for the student of twentieth-century literature to the authors of the period 1900 to 1960 and to the most significant commentators on these authors. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are by far the most popular writers for study in high school and college literature courses. Since a vast amount of relevant critical material confronts the student, *TCLC* presents significant passages from the most important published criticism to aid students in their location and selection of criticism on authors who died between 1900 and 1960.

The need for *TCLC* was suggested by the usefulness of the Gale series *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, which excerpts criticism on current writing. Because of the difference in time span under consideration (*CLC* considers authors who were still living after 1959), there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*. For further information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism series, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to include authors who represent a variety of genres and nationalities and who are currently regarded as the most important writers of this era. In addition to major authors, *TCLC* also presents criticism on lesser-known writers whose significant contributions to literary history are important to the study of twentieth-century literature.

Each author entry in *TCLC* is intended to provide an overview of major criticism on an author. Therefore, the editors include approximately twenty authors in each 600-page volume (compared with approximately sixty authors in a *CLC* volume of similar size) so that more attention may be given to an author. Each author entry represents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work: some early criticism is presented to indicate initial reactions, later criticism is selected to represent any rise or decline in the author's reputation, and current retrospective analyses provide students with a modern view. The length of an author entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English, and from foreign criticism in translation. Critical articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. Every attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from the seminal essays on each author's work. Additionally, as space permits, especially insightful essays of a more limited scope are included.

An author may appear more than once in the series because of the great quantity of critical material available, or because of a resurgence of criticism generated by events such as an author's centennial or anniversary celebration, the republication of an author's works, or publication of a newly translated work or volume of letters. A few author entries in each volume of *TCLC* feature criticism on single works by major authors who have appeared previously in the series. Only those individual works that have been the subjects of vast amounts of criticism and are widely studied in literature classes are selected for this in-depth treatment. Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* are the subjects of such entries in *TCLC*, Volume 16.

Organization of the Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, principal

works, excerpts of criticism (each followed by a bibliographical citation), and an additional bibliography for further reading.

- The *author heading* consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates. The unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author most commonly wrote. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by a question mark.
- The *biographical and critical introduction* contains background information designed to introduce the reader to an author and to the critical debate surrounding his or her work. Parenthetical material following many of the introductions provides references to biographical and critical reference series published by Gale. These include *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, and past volumes of *TCLC*.
- Most *TCLC* entries include *portraits* of the author. Many entries also contain illustrations of materials pertinent to an author's career, including holographs of manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, or representations of important people, places, and events in an author's life.
- The *list of principal works* is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors where there are both foreign language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- *Criticism* is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles by the author featured in the critical entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to ascertain without difficulty the works being discussed. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. When an anonymous essay is later attributed to a critic, the critic's name appears in brackets at the beginning of the excerpt and in the bibliographical citation.
- Important critical essays are prefaced by *explanatory notes* as an additional aid to students using *TCLC*. The explanatory notes provide several types of useful information, including: the reputation of a critic; the importance of a work of criticism; the specific type of criticism (biographical, psychoanalytic, structuralist, etc.); a synopsis of the criticism; and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author's work. In many cases, these notes cross-reference the work of critics who agree or disagree with each other. Dates in parentheses within the explanatory notes refer to a book publication date when they follow a book title and to an essay date when they follow a critic's name.
- A complete *bibliographical citation* designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book by the interested reader follows each piece of criticism. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates that the essay is on more than one author.
- The *additional bibliography* appearing at the end of each author entry suggests further reading on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates that the essay is on more than one author.

An appendix lists the sources from which material in each volume has been reprinted. It does not, however, list every book or periodical consulted in the preparation of the volume.

Cumulative Indexes

Each volume of *TCLC* includes a cumulative index to authors listing all the authors who have appeared in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, and *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, along with cross-references to the Gale series *Children's Literature Review*, *Authors in the News*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*. Users will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the various series. The index, which lists birth and death dates when available, will be particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but whose death date causes them to be placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC*, yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC*.

Each volume of *TCLC* also includes a cumulative nationality index. Author names are arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities and followed by the volume numbers in which they appear.

A cumulative index to critics is another useful feature in *TCLC*. Under each critic's name are listed the authors on whom the critic has written and the volume and page where the criticism may be found.

Acknowledgments

No work of this scope can be accomplished without the cooperation of many people. The editors especially wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume, the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reprint rights, and Jeri Yaryan for assistance with copyright research. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, University of Detroit Library, University of Michigan Library, and Wayne State University Library for making their resources available to us.

Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to various suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began. Recently introduced features include explanatory notes to excerpted criticism that provide important information regarding critics and their work, a cumulative author index listing authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to criticism on a single work by a major author, and more extensive illustrations.

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors.

Authors to Be Featured in *TCLC*, Volumes 17 and 18

James Agee (American novelist and journalist)—Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and *A Death in the Family* are harshly realistic treatments of the moral crises and moral triumphs of mid-twentieth-century America. In addition, Agee's film criticism is recognized as the first serious consideration in English of film as a modern art form.

Hilaire Belloc (English poet and essayist)—One of turn-of-the-century England's premier men of letters, Belloc has been the subject of renewed critical and biographical interest in recent years.

Arnold Bennett (English novelist)—Bennett is credited with introducing techniques of European Naturalism to the English novel. Set in the manufacturing district of the author's native Staffordshire, Bennett's novels tell of the thwarted ambitions of those who endure a dull, provincial existence.

Christopher John Brennan (Australian poet)—Considered one of Australia's greatest poets, he introduced many of the techniques and themes of twentieth-century European literature to the literature of his homeland.

Hermann Broch (Austrian novelist, poet, and essayist)—Broch was a philosophical novelist whose works are considered profound reflections upon the social and moral disintegration of modern Europe. His major works, which include his masterpiece *The Sleepwalkers*, have been compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* for their contribution to the Modernist exploration of language.

Stephen Crane (American novelist)—Author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane was one of America's foremost Realist writers and is credited with establishing American literary Naturalism.

Anne Frank (Dutch diarist)—Composed while its author was hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam, *The Diary of Anne Frank* is one of the most enduring and widely read documents of the Holocaust, as well as a testament to the suffering and creative talent of its young author.

Rémy de Gourmont (French critic, novelist, and dramatist)—Gourmont was one of the most prominent French men of letters of the modern era. Displaying an encyclopedic range of learning, his critical writings were extremely influential among early twentieth-century English and American critics.

Thomas Hardy (English novelist)—Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was controversial in the late nineteenth century for its sympathetic depiction of an independent female protagonist. *TCLC* will devote an entire entry to the critical reception of this classic work of English fiction.

O. Henry (American short story writer)—O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) was one of America's most popular short story writers. His stories, known for their inventiveness

and characteristic surprise endings, are widely anthologized and often compared to the works of Guy de Maupassant.

Julia Ward Howe (American poet and biographer)—A famous suffragette and social reformer, Howe was also a popular poet who is best known as the composer of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

William Dean Howells (American novelist and critic)—Howells was the chief progenitor of American Realism and the most influential American literary critic of the late nineteenth century. Several of his early novels have been recently reissued, and discussion of his work is growing.

T. E. Hulme (English poet)—A major influence on the work of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and other important twentieth-century poets, Hulme was the chief theorist of Imagism and Modernism in English poetry.

James Weldon Johnson (American novelist and poet)—One of the most prominent black public figures of his time, Johnson is also regarded as the principal forerunner of the Harlem Renaissance. His novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* was one of the first works of fiction to explore the complexity of race relations in America and profoundly influenced such writers as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright.

Rudyard Kipling (English short story writer and poet)—Best known for such works as *Kim*, *Captains Courageous*, and *The Jungle Book*, Kipling is one of the most popular authors of this century and one of the finest short story writers in world literature.

T. E. Lawrence (English autobiographer)—Lawrence is more popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia, a sobriquet received for his campaign against the Turks during World War I. His chronicle of this period in what has been described as "perhaps the strangest, most adventurous life of modern times" is contained in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. *TCLC* will present excerpts from the entire range of criticism on this classic modern work, along with commentary on Lawrence's diary, his letters, and *The Mint*, an account of his experiences following his enlistment as a private in the Royal Air Force.

Ludwig Lewisohn (American novelist and critic)—An important man of letters during the first quarter of the twentieth century, Lewisohn made a notable contribution to modern literature through his critical works and his translations of the works of German and French authors. Many of Lewisohn's later works of fiction and nonfiction reflect his concern for the plight of European Jews during the 1930s and 1940s.

Detlev von Liliencron (German poet)—The author of works in several genres, Liliencron is most renowned for his lyric poetry, which is praised for its forcefulness and vivid detail.

- George Meredith (English novelist and poet)—A prolific author and an associate of England's most famous Victorian literary figures, Meredith ranks among the outstanding writers of his era.
- Rainer Maria Rilke (German poet and novelist)—Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, a loosely autobiographical novel that explores the angst-ridden life of a hypersensitive man in Paris, is considered the author's most accomplished prose work. To mark a new translation of this novel, *TCLC* will devote an entire entry to critical discussion of this important work.
- Ole Edvart Rølvaag (Norwegian-American novelist)—Born in Norway, Rølvaag emigrated to the United States in his twentieth year, and subsequently depicted in his seven novels the experience of Norwegian immigrants in America. Both as a novelist and as a teacher at Saint Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, Rølvaag attempted to preserve among Norwegian-Americans the European values that had become obsolete in their new homeland.
- Jacques Roumain (Haitian novelist, poet, and essayist)—One of the most militant and influential Haitian intellectuals of this century, Roumain was the author of the novel *Masters of the Dew*, which was widely praised for its haunting stylistic beauty as well as its powerful social message.
- John Ruskin (English critic)—Most renowned for his critical writings on art and architecture, particularly *Stones of Venice* and the five-volume series *Modern Painters*, Ruskin was also an important social critic. His advocacy of various reforms and his association with the Pre-Raphaelite circle of artists, writers, and thinkers place him at the intellectual and cultural center of Victorian England.
- Lincoln Steffens (American journalist and autobiographer)—Steffens was one of a group of writers in the early twentieth century who were described as "muckrakers" by President Theodore Roosevelt. Steffens's call for radical reforms in American government and society forms the substance of his best works, including *The Shame of the Cities* and *The Struggle for Self Government*, and serves as the background to his highly readable *Autobiography*.
- Leo Tolstoy (Russian novelist)—His *Anna Karenin* is considered one of the greatest novels in world literature. *TCLC* will devote an entire entry to the critical history of this work.
- Mark Twain (American novelist)—Twain is considered by many to be the father of modern American literature. Breaking with the genteel literary conventions of the nineteenth century, Twain endowed his characters and narratives with the natural speech patterns of the common person and wrote about subjects hitherto considered beneath the consideration of serious art. He is renowned throughout the world for his greatest novel, *Huckleberry Finn*. *TCLC* will devote an entry solely to critical discussion of that controversial work. Included will be works of criticism written from the late nineteenth century through 1985, the centenary year of *Huckleberry Finn*'s American publication and the one hundred-fiftieth anniversary of Twain's birth.
- Robert Walser (Swiss novelist and short story writer)—Considered among the most important Swiss authors writing in German, Walser was praised by such major figures of German literature as Franz Kafka and Robert Musil. His fiction is distinguished by a grotesque imagination and black humor suggestive of the Expressionist and Surrealist movements.
- Beatrice and Sydney James Webb (English social writers)—Prominent members of the progressive Fabian society, the Webbs wrote sociological works significant to the advent of socialist reform in England and influenced the work of several major authors, including H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw.
- H. G. Wells (English novelist)—Wells is best known today as one of the forerunners of modern science fiction and as a utopian idealist who foretold an era of chemical warfare, atomic weaponry, and world wars. *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and several other works among Wells's canon are considered classics in the genres of science fiction and science fantasy. *TCLC* will devote an entire entry to Wells's accomplishments as a science fiction writer.
- Owen Wister (American novelist)—Considered the founder of modern fiction about the Old West, Wister is best known as the author of *The Virginian*, a novel that established the basic character types, settings, and plots of the Western genre.
- Andrei Zhdanov (Soviet censor)—As Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party from 1928 until 1948, Zhdanov formulated the official guidelines for all writing published in the Soviet Union. He was instrumental in establishing the precepts of Socialist Realism, which for decades severely circumscribed the subjects deemed suitable for Soviet literature.
- Emile Zola (French novelist, dramatist, and critic)—Zola was the founder and principal theorist of Naturalism, perhaps the most influential literary movement in modern literature. His twenty-volume series *Les Rougon-Macquart* is one of the monuments of Naturalist fiction, and served as a model for late nineteenth-century novelists seeking a more candid and accurate representation of human life.
- Stefan Zweig (Austrian biographer and fiction writer)—Through extensive translation of his works, Zweig's biographical studies of such important figures as Leo Tolstoy, Marie Antoinette, and Sigmund Freud, as well as his dramas and stories, are well known to English-language readers. Zweig stated that his works, both fiction and nonfiction, have as their focus "the psychological representation of personalities and their lives," which was his "main interest in writing."

Additional Authors to Appear in Future Volumes

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 Adamic, Louis 1898-1951
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 Agustini, Delmira 1886-1914
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 Akiko, Yosano 1878-1942
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 Aliyu, Dan Sidi 1902-1920
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 Bahr, Hermann 1863-1934
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 Barreto, Lima 1881-1922
 Benet, William Rose 1886-1950
 Benjamin, Walter 1892-1940
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 Berdyaev, Nikolai Aleksandrovich 1874-1948
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 Blake, Lillie Devereux 1835-1913
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 Hilton, James 1900-1954
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 Louys, Pierre 1870-1925
 Lucas, E(dward) V(errall) 1868-1938
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 Maghar, Josef Suatopluk 1864-1945
 Manning, Frederic 1887-1935
 Maragall, Joan 1860-1911
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 Masaoka Shiki 1867-1902
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 Nobre, Antonio 1867-1900
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Orczy, Baroness 1865-1947	Sabatini, Rafael 1875-1950	Tuchmann, Jules 1830-1901
Owen, Seaman 1861-1936	Saintsbury, George 1845-1933	Turner, W(alter) J(ames) R(edfern) 1889-1946
Page, Thomas Nelson 1853-1922	Sakutaro, Hagiwara 1886-1942	Vachell, Horace Annesley 1861-1955
Papini, Giovanni 1881-1956	Salinas, Pedro 1891-1951	Van Dine, S.S. (William H. Wright) 1888-1939
Parrington, Vernon L. 1871-1929	Sanborn, Franklin Benjamin 1831-1917	Van Doren, Carl 1885-1950
Peck, George W. 1840-1916	Santayana, George 1863-1952	Van Dyke, Henry 1852-1933
Peret, Benjamin 1899-1959	Sardou, Victorien 1831-1908	Vazov, Ivan Minchov 1850-1921
Phillips, Ulrich B. 1877-1934	Schickele, René 1885-1940	Veblen, Thorstein 1857-1929
Pickthall, Marjorie 1883-1922	Seabrook, William 1886-1945	Villaespesa, Francisco 1877-1936
Pinero, Arthur Wing 1855-1934	Seton, Ernest Thompson 1860-1946	Wallace, Edgar 1874-1932
Pontoppidan, Henrik 1857-1943	Shestov, Lev 1866-1938	Wallace, Lewis 1827-1905
Prem Chand, Mushi 1880-1936	Shiels, George 1886-1949	Walsh, Ernest 1895-1926
Prévost, Marcel 1862-1941	Skram, Bertha Amalie 1847-1905	Webb, Mary 1881-1927
Quiller-Couch, Arthur 1863-1944	Smith, Pauline 1883-1959	Webster, Jean 1876-1916
Quiroga, Horacio 1878-1937	Sodergran, Edith Irene 1892-1923	Whitlock, Brand 1869-1927
Randall, James G. 1881-1953	Solovyov, Vladimir 1853-1900	Wilson, Harry Leon 1867-1939
Rappoport, Solomon 1863-1944	Sorel, Georges 1847-1922	Wolf, Emma 1865-1932
Read, Opie 1852-1939	Spector, Mordechai 1859-1922	Wood, Clement 1888-1950
Reisen (Reizen), Abraham 1875-1953	Spengler, Oswald 1880-1936	Wren, P(ercival) C(hristopher) 1885-1941
Remington, Frederic 1861-1909	Squire, J(ohn) C(ollings) 1884-1958	Yonge, Charlotte Mary 1823-1901
Renard, Jules 1864-1910	Stavenhagen, Fritz 1876-1906	Zecca, Ferdinand 1864-1947
Riley, James Whitcomb 1849-1916	Stockton, Frank R. 1834-1902	Zeromski, Stefan 1864-1925
Rinehart, Mary Roberts 1876-1958	Subrahmanya Bharati, C. 1882-1921	
Ring, Max 1817-1901	Sully-Prudhomme, Rene 1839-1907	
Rohmer, Sax 1883-1959	Talev, Dimitov 1898-1966	
Rolland, Romain 1866-1944		

Readers are cordially invited to suggest additional authors to the editors.

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

1892-1927

(Born Niihara Ryūnosuke) Japanese short story writer, novelist, poet, translator, and critic.

Akutagawa is widely known to readers and critics for the short story "Rashōmon," which, with another of his stories, "Yabu no Naka" ("In a Grove"), was adapted in 1950 by Kurosawa Akira for the noted film *Rashōmon*. He is considered one of the foremost authors of Japan's modern era, a period that began in 1868 under the rule of the Emperor Meiji. His works contributed greatly to his generation's thoughtful consideration of such issues as the function and merits of different literary genres and the artist's role in contemporary Japanese society; they also proved instrumental in extricating Japanese literature from what critics consider the morass of gossip and tedious didacticism into which it had fallen before the Meiji Restoration. In his works, Akutagawa drew upon elements of both Eastern and Western literary forms to create a distinctively modern form of Japanese literature.

Within the relatively brief span of approximately forty years, from Meiji's accession in 1868 until the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, Japan underwent a period of profound change, shaking off an isolationist past and energetically embracing a wide spectrum of elements of Western culture. While the Japanese were quick to assimilate industrial and scientific advancements, they were less eager to adopt Western thought and values. For a time, attempts were made to incorporate Western technology into a society still predominantly Eastern in its spiritual character. This desire was not only impossible to fulfill, but it also inspired a sense of conflict between Japan's traditions and the new Western ways. An additional source of conflict was the deep interest shown by Japanese writers in contemporary European literature. What began in the 1880s as a mere trickle of Western literature into Japan became a torrent by the end of the century. Translation of European authors assumed monumental importance, acquainting the reading public with a totally unfamiliar body of writing and inspiring many Japanese writers to break away from traditional forms that they believed had grown sterile. From this passion for European literature emerged a revived interest in Japan's past, for many authors came to see their heritage as the only precious thread of continuity in a world filled with ominous change. Akutagawa was acutely aware of these conflicts, and throughout his career he sought to utilize the modern, realistic techniques of European literature as well as elements of Japan's past, attempting to revive Japanese literature by exploring the promising resources of both Western and Eastern cultures.

Akutagawa was born in Irifunecho, a district within Tokyo. His father was the enterprising owner of five dairies by the time Akutagawa was born. Shortly after Akutagawa's birth his mother, a woman of tenuous mental health, lapsed into a schizophrenic state from which she never recovered, although she lived for another ten years. Remembrance of his mother's insanity and the resulting fear that he might have inherited her mental condition preyed upon Akutagawa all his life; he later bitterly satirized tainted heredity, as well as capitalism, traditional morality, and other aspects of contemporary Japanese society, in *Kappa*, a novel in which the protagonist finds him-

self transported, like the hero of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, to a world where alien creatures comport themselves with all the shortcomings and foibles of human beings. After his mother's death, Akutagawa was adopted by his mother's elder brother and his wife, who gave the boy their family name, Akutagawa. His adopted parents had remained largely untouched by Western culture, and they instilled in him a reverence for Japanese traditions, particularly in literature. Akutagawa developed a fondness for ancient legends and tales of the grotesque, both of which later figured significantly in his work. However, he was a voracious reader, and by the time he reached middle school he was reading the works of Henrik Ibsen, Rudyard Kipling, and Anatole France, among others, sharing in his country's wave of interest in European literature. He attended Tokyo Imperial University, where he excelled in his studies of English literature, translated many Western works, and became quite active in publishing a student-produced literary periodical, as well as regularly participating in a discussion group conducted by the renowned novelist Natsume Sōseki.

Some of the short stories for which Akutagawa is most widely known had already appeared in periodicals by the time he graduated in 1916, and he was widely acclaimed as one of the brightest newcomers on the literary scene. He accepted a part-time teaching position at the Naval Academy at Yokosuka, meanwhile strengthening his reputation during 1917 by publishing his stories in various magazines and in two collections. In 1918 Akutagawa married the niece of a friend he had known since childhood; in the same year, he also entered into a contract with a Japanese newspaper to publish his fiction. This enabled him to resign his post at the Naval Academy and devote himself entirely to his writing.

In 1921, Akutagawa was sent by his newspaper to China as an "overseas observer," an assignment which proved to be a turning point in his life. Never having enjoyed sound health, he suffered during his travels from a number of debilitating illnesses that left him weakened, depressed, and helpless to combat a developing mental illness brought on by fears of a deterioration similar to his mother's. His writing, which up to this point was firmly rooted in history and legend, grew introspective and autobiographical. Akutagawa's fear of madness became obsessive, and he sought temporary respite from both psychological and physical troubles through the use of drugs, toying with the idea of suicide. Following the mental breakdown of a close friend, Akutagawa took his own life with poison in 1927.

While Akutagawa did not confine himself to any particular genre during his career, his greatest work was done in the short story form. He consistently attempted to examine predictable and universal patterns of human behavior, and to depict those natural aspirations and illusions that transcend barriers of space and time. Conflicts between the natural inclinations of human beings and the demands imposed by ordered societies, as well as humanity's struggle with baser propensities, are echoed throughout Akutagawa's works. For example, "Rashōmon," which has come to be synonymous with its author's name,

candidly and symbolically confronts the moral dilemma of a servant for whom convention and prosperity have been effaced by misfortune. Set in twelfth-century Kyoto, a locale rife with plague, violence, and anarchy, "Rashōmon" depicts the moral collapse of a man driven to assault and thievery by the horror he witnesses in a society which has itself collapsed and lives by the savage morality of expediency; the sight of an old crone squatting in a roomful of dead epidemic victims, matter-of-factly denuding the corpses of their hair to make a wig she can sell, destroys the man's last compunctions. In this story Akutagawa portrayed the psychological drama of humanity caught in the confrontation between circumstantial chaos and structured morality, an approach unceasingly fascinating to him, in one of the ancient settings he had always found so effective as dramatic background. His commitment to presenting life in even its most unsavory aspects led him to depict subjects which, though often offensive to his critics, were essential to providing the proper perspective for character development, as exemplified in a story such as "Rashōmon." Somewhat less grim, but not without the author's unvarnished appraisal of human nature, "Kumo no Ito" ("The Spider's Thread") deals allegorically with one man's pervasive egoism, a flaw that proves fatal both to himself and to others. A robber, Kandata, has been banished to hell after his death, and the all-merciful Buddha, who would deliver him from eternal agony, recalls that he once spared the life of a spider that crossed his path. Buddha, therefore, causes the spider to spin a single thread that extends far down into hell. Kandata begins to climb this thread, but soon notices that other sinners are likewise employing this means of escape. Fearful lest the thread break under their weight, Kandata summarily orders the others to relinquish the salvation he is convinced was intended only for himself, and at that moment the thread breaks, plunging all, including Kandata, back into hell, and Buddha into inestimable sadness over human selfishness. While Akutagawa's subjects here, as elsewhere, constitute faithful representations of both the grim and the foolish aspects of human behavior, they are not always devoid of humor. "Hana" ("The Nose"), for example, addresses egoism by relating the predicament of a Buddhist monk who has succeeded in shortening his enormous nose, the bane of his existence and, as he sees it, the impediment to his social acceptance; his resulting vanity is then penalized by coldness from peers who before had been quietly solicitous of his feelings. Many critics have noted in this and other stories Akutagawa's unpretentious treatment of human behavior revealed in insights edged by dry wit, and astute characterization effected in a word, gesture, or expression.

Although Akutagawa wrote with great speed, he was an exacting stylist, and it is probably this facet of his writing, more than any other, that has been most widely discussed. The author, who had always evinced a passion for poetry, once affirmed: "Human life cannot compare with a single line by Baudelaire." He himself wrote poetry and, although far better known for his short stories, often insisted both upon referring to himself as a poet and being recognized as one. Indicative of his poetic influences are his concern with the precise word and his method of portraying characters through subtle characteristics rather than explicit statement. Some commentators have praised Akutagawa's stark, spare prose as an appropriate vehicle for illuminating human foibles and misfortune and for judiciously keeping the narrator's presence unobtrusive. Others have found his style conspicuous for its lack of description, and note that it often obscures the very subject matter that the author sought to emphasize. Similarly, many critics have debated whether Akutagawa regarded his stories as anything more

than a mere vehicle to exhibit his verbal dexterity. While Akutagawa's distinctive style has been the source of critical controversy, and while the author's devotion to matters of technique has been well documented, the content of his work was never deliberately subordinated to method of expression. In fact, Akutagawa believed that it would be a grave mistake to assume the primacy of either form or content, both of which were to him inseparable, and the marriage of which he considered essential to the attainment of high artistic achievement.

As well as being an artist, Akutagawa was a literary theorist. In addition to his carefully considered position on form and content, the pursuit of aesthetic perfection was of extreme importance to him, insofar as this ideal could be realized by the artist during the creation of any one work, and notwithstanding the artist's inherent fallibility. Akutagawa was also adamant in his unwillingness to divorce criticism from other realms of artistic endeavor. Opposing what he considered the cowardice of contemporary critics, whose accomplishments, for the sake of expediency, had become superficial, and the half-heartedness of those fellow-artists who took up criticism as a hobby, Akutagawa maintained that criticism was no less an art form than any other. His directness and genuine desire to see a serious, comprehensive body of critical theory restored to Japanese literature gained Akutagawa the universal respect of his literary peers, despite their frequent opposition to his views.

One of the most famous of these critical debates occurred in 1927, when Akutagawa argued in print with the noted novelist Tanizaki Junichirō over the necessity of plot in the novel. The debate was launched when Akutagawa questioned the artistic value of plot, referring explicitly to Tanizaki's recent works, in which strange stories and complicated plots, departing as far as possible from mundane reality, were characteristic features. Tanizaki's own innovations were the result of his efforts to break away from the scrupulously candid autobiographical "shishōsetsu" or "I-novel," with which he had been highly dissatisfied, a feeling shared in many Japanese literary circles where keen interest was quickly aroused by the ensuing controversy. Tanizaki asserted that his attention to plot constituted interest in the novel's structure and, therefore, in its architectural beauty. He further maintained that the novel, by virtue of its form, was capable of the greatest structural beauty of all literary genres. Akutagawa, in turn, argued that in terms of structural aesthetics, drama must be said to have the greater structural beauty, and, moreover, that the value of a novel is determined by its "poetic spirit," a term he went on to define as lyrical in the broadest sense of the word: that is, literature that is not subject to the criteria of entertainment and vulgar interests. Tanizaki affirmed that he considered it useless and meaningless to try to present an absolute standard of artistic value for the novel, for art, he believed, like human history, develops and progresses. He contended that Japanese literature had to be rescued from the lingering influences of Naturalism and its preoccupation, among Japanese artists, with the mindless recording of human nature at its most mundane or sordid by a return to novels with plot. Akutagawa finally conceded, barring his insistence that a pure "poetic spirit" determines a novel's artistic value, to the validity of Tanizaki's points. Ironically, throughout his career Akutagawa had consistently practiced many of Tanizaki's literary tenets, to which his scrupulous detachment and bizarre subjects bear testimony. Some commentators believe that his years of unstinting productivity, coupled with conflicts between his family and career had, by the time of his debate with Tanizaki, brought Akutagawa to a