**II BA ENGLISH**

**DRAMA**

**Samuel Beckett : Waiting for Godot - SUMMARY**

**Act I**

The setting is in the evening on a country road with a single tree present. [Estragon](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#estragon) is trying to pull off his boot, but without success. [Vladimir](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#vladimir) enters and greets Estragon, who informs him that he has spent the night in a ditch where he was beaten. With supreme effort Estragon succeeds in pulling off his boot. He then looks inside it to see if there is anything there while Vladimir does the same with his hat.

Vladimir mentions the two thieves who were crucified next to Christ. He asks Estragon if he knows the Gospels. Estragon gives a short description of the maps of the Holy Land at which point Vladimir tells him he should have been a poet. Estragon points to his tattered clothes and says he was. Vladimir continues with his narrative about the two thieves in order to pass the time.

Estragon wants to leave but Vladimir forces him to stay because they are both waiting for Godot to arrive. Neither of the two bums knows when Godot will appear, or even if they are at the right place. Later it is revealed that they do not even know what they originally asked Godot for.

Estragon gets bored of waiting and suggests that they pass the time by hanging themselves from the tree. They both like the idea but cannot decide who should go first. They are afraid that if one of them dies the other might be left alone. In the end they decide it is safer to wait until Godot arrives.

Estragon asks Vladimir whether they still have rights. Vladimir indicates that they got rid of them. He then fears that he hears something, but it turns out to be imaginary noises. Vladimir soon gives Estragon a carrot to eat.

[Pozzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#pozzo) and [Lucky](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#lucky) arrive. Lucky has a rope tied around his neck and is carrying a stool, a basket, a bag and a greatcoat. Pozzo carries a whip which he uses to control Lucky. Estragon immediately confuses Pozzo with Godot which gets Pozzo upset.

Pozzo spends several minutes ordering Lucky around. Lucky is completely silent and obeys like a machine. Pozzo has Lucky put down the stool and open the basket of food which contains chicken. Pozzo then eats the chicken and throws away the bones. Lucky stands in a stooped posture holding the bags after each command has been completed and appears to be falling asleep.

Estragon and Vladimir go to inspect Lucky who intrigues them. They ask why he never puts his bags down. Pozzo will not tell them, so Estragon proceeds to ask if he can have the chicken bones that Pozzo has been throwing away. Pozzo tells him that they technically belong to Lucky. When they ask Lucky if he wants them, he does not reply, so Estragon is given the bones.

Pozzo eventually tells them why Lucky hold the bags the entire time. He thinks it is because Lucky is afraid of being given away. While Pozzo tells them why Lucky continues to carry his bags, Lucky starts to weep. Estragon goes to wipe away the tears but receives a terrible kick in the shin.

Pozzo then tells them that he and Lucky have been together nearly sixty years. Vladimir is appalled at the treatment of Lucky who appears to be such a faithful servant. Pozzo explains that he cannot bear it any longer because Lucky is such a burden. Later Vladimir yells at Lucky that it is appalling the way he treats such a good master.

Pozzo then gives an oratory about the night sky. He asks them how it was and they tell him it was quite a good speech. Pozzo is ecstatic at the encouragement and offers to do something for them. Estragon immediately asks for ten francs but Vladimir tells him to be silent. Pozzo offers to have Lucky dance and then think for them.

Lucky dances for them and when asked for an encore repeats the entire dance step for step. Estragon is unimpressed but almost falls trying to imitate it. They then make Lucky think. What follows is an outpouring of religious and political doctrine which always starts ideas but never brings them to completion. The three men finally wrestle Lucky to the ground and yank off his hat at which point he stops speaking. His last word is, "unfinished."

The men then spend some effort trying to get Lucky to wake up again. He finally reawakens when the bags are placed in his hand. Pozzo gets up to leave and he and Lucky depart the scene. Vladimir and Estragon return to their seats and continue waiting for Godot.

A young boy arrives having been sent by Mr. Godot. Estragon is outraged that it took him so long to arrive and scares him. Vladimir cut him off and asks the boy if he remembers him. The boy says this is his first time coming to meet them and that Mr. Godot will not be able to come today but perhaps tomorrow. The boy is sent away with the instructions to tell Mr. Godot that he has seen them. Both Estragon and Vladimir discuss past events and then decide to depart for the night. Neither of them moves from his seat.

# Act II

The setting is the next day at the same time. [Estragon](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#estragon)'s boots and [Lucky](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#lucky)'s hat are still on the stage. [Vladimir](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list#vladimir) enters and starts to sing until Estragon shows up barefoot. Estragon is upset that Vladimir was singing and happy even though he was not there. Both admit that they feel better when alone but convince themselves they are happy when together. They are still waiting for Godot.

Estragon and Vladimir poetically talk about "all the dead voices" they hear. They are haunted by voices in the sounds of nature, especially of the leaves rustling. Vladimir shouts at Estragon to help him not hear the voices anymore. Estragon tries and finally decides that they should ask each other questions. They manage to talk for a short while.

Estragon has forgotten everything that took place the day before. He has forgotten all about [Pozzo](https://www.gradesaver.com/waiting-for-godot/study-guide/character-list" \l "pozzo) and Lucky as well as the fact that he wanted to hang himself from the tree. He cannot remember his boots and thinks they must be someone else's. For some reason they fit him now when he tries them on. The tree has sprouted leaves since the night before and Estragon comments that it must be spring. But when Vladimir looks at Estragon's shin, it is still pussy and bleeding from where Lucky kicked him.

Soon they are done talking and try to find another topic for discussion. Vladimir finds Lucky's hat and tries it on. He and Estragon spend a while trading hats until Vladimir throws his own hat on the ground and asks how he looks. They then decide to play at being Pozzo and Lucky, but to no avail. Estragon leaves only to immediately return panting. He says that they are coming. Vladimir thinks that it must be Godot who is coming to save them. He then becomes afraid and tries to hide Estragon behind the tree, which is too small to hide him.

The conversation then degenerates into abusive phrases. Estragon says, "That's the idea, let's abuse each other." They continue to hurl insults at one another until Estragon calls Vladimir a critic. They embrace and continue waiting.

Pozzo and Lucky enter but this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky is mute. Lucky stops when he sees the two men. Pozzo crashes into him and they both fall helplessly in a heap on the ground. Vladimir is overjoyed that reinforcements have arrived to help with the waiting. Estragon again thinks that Godot has arrived.

Vladimir and Estragon discuss the merits of helping Pozzo get off the ground where he has fallen. When Vladimir asks how many other men spend their time in waiting, Estragon replies that it is billions. Pozzo in desperation offers to pay for help by offering a hundred francs. Estragon says that it is not enough. Vladimir does not want to pick up Pozzo because then he and Estragon would be alone again. Finally he goes over and tries to pick him up but is unable to. Estragon decides to leave but decides to stay when Vladimir convinces him to help first and then leave.

While trying to help Pozzo, both Vladimir and Estragon fall and cannot get up. When Pozzo talks again Vladimir kicks him violently to make him shut up. Vladimir and Estragon finally get up, and Pozzo resumes calling for help. They go and help him up. Pozzo asks who they are and what time it is. They cannot answer his questions.

Estragon goes to wake up Lucky. He kicks him and starts hurling abuses until he again hurts his foot. Estragon sits back down and tries to take off his boot. Vladimir tells Pozzo his friend is hurt.

Vladimir then asks Pozzo to make Lucky dance or think for them again. Pozzo tells him that Lucky is mute. When Vladimir asks since when, Pozzo gets into a rage. He tells them to stop harassing him with their time questions since he has no notion of it. He then helps Lucky up and they leave.

Vladimir reflects upon the fact that there is no truth and that by tomorrow he will know nothing of what has just passed. There is no way of confirming his memories since Estragon always forgets everything that happens to him.

The boy arrives again but does not remember meeting Estragon or Vladimir. He tells them it is his first time coming to meet them. The conversation is identical in that Mr. Godot will once again not be able to come but will be sure to arrive tomorrow. Vladimir demands that the boy be sure to remember that he saw him. Vladimir yells, "You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me to-morrow that you never saw me!"

The two bums decide to leave but cannot go far since they need to wait for Godot. They look at the tree and contemplate hanging themselves. Estragon takes off his belt but it breaks when they pull on it. His trousers fall down. Vladimir says that they will hang themselves tomorrow unless Godot comes to save them. He tells Estragon to put on his trousers. They decide to leave but again do not move.

**INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS**

**Language, Society and Culture**

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. Such a cyclical relationship can be difficult to understand, but many of the examples throughout this chapter and examples from our own lives help illustrate this point. One of the best ways to learn about society, culture, and language is to seek out opportunities to go beyond our typical comfort zones. Studying abroad, for example, brings many challenges that can turn into valuable lessons. The following example of such a lesson comes from my friend who studied abroad in Vienna, Austria.

Although English used to employ formal (thou, thee) and informal pronouns (you), today you can be used when speaking to a professor, a parent, or a casual acquaintance. Other languages still have social norms and rules about who is to be referred to informally and formally. My friend, as was typical in the German language, referred to his professor with the formal pronoun Sie but used the informal pronoun Du with his fellow students since they were peers. When the professor invited some of the American exchange students to dinner, they didn’t know they were about to participate in a cultural ritual that would change the way they spoke to their professor from that night on. Their professor informed them that they were going to duzen, which meant they were going to now be able to refer to her with the informal pronoun—an honor and sign of closeness for the American students. As they went around the table, each student introduced himself or herself to the professor using the formal pronoun, locked arms with her and drank (similar to the champagne toast ritual at some wedding ceremonies), and reintroduced himself or herself using the informal pronoun. For the rest of the semester, the American students still respectfully referred to the professor with her title, which translated to “Mrs. Doctor,” but used informal pronouns, even in class, while the other students not included in the ceremony had to continue using the formal. Given that we do not use formal and informal pronouns in English anymore, there is no equivalent ritual to the German duzen, but as we will learn next, there are many rituals in English that may be just as foreign to someone else.

## Language and Social Context

We arrive at meaning through conversational interaction, which follows many social norms and rules. As we’ve already learned, rules are explicitly stated conventions (“Look at me when I’m talking to you.”) and norms are implicit (saying you’ve got to leave before you actually do to politely initiate the end to a conversation). To help conversations function meaningfully, we have learned social norms and internalized them to such an extent that we do not often consciously enact them. Instead, we rely on routines and roles (as determined by social forces) to help us proceed with verbal interaction, which also helps determine how a conversation will unfold. Our various social roles influence meaning and how we speak. For example, a person may say, “As a longtime member of this community…” or “As a first-generation college student…” Such statements cue others into the personal and social context from which we are speaking, which helps them better interpret our meaning.

One social norm that structures our communication is turn taking. People need to feel like they are contributing something to an interaction, so turn taking is a central part of how conversations play out.David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 155. Although we sometimes talk at the same time as others or interrupt them, there are numerous verbal and nonverbal cues, almost like a dance, that are exchanged between speakers that let people know when their turn will begin or end. Conversations do not always neatly progress from beginning to end with shared understanding along the way. There is a back and forth that is often verbally managed through rephrasing (“Let me try that again,”) and clarification (“Does that make sense?”)David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 268.

We also have certain units of speech that facilitate turn taking. Adjacency pairs are related communication structures that come one after the other (adjacent to each other) in an interaction.David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 277. For example, questions are followed by answers, greetings are followed by responses, compliments are followed by a thank you, and informative comments are followed by an acknowledgment. These are the skeletal components that make up our verbal interactions, and they are largely social in that they facilitate our interactions. When these sequences don’t work out, confusion, miscommunication, or frustration may result, as you can see in the following sequences:

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| **Travis:** | “How are you?” |
| **Wanda:** | “Did someone tell you I’m sick?” |
| **Darrell:** | “I just wanted to let you know the meeting has been moved to three o’clock.” |
| **Leigh:** | “I had cake for breakfast this morning.” |

Some conversational elements are highly scripted or ritualized, especially the beginning and end of an exchange and topic changes.David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 268. Conversations often begin with a standard greeting and then proceed to “safe” exchanges about things in the immediate field of experience of the communicators (a comment on the weather or noting something going on in the scene). At this point, once the ice is broken, people can move on to other more content-specific exchanges. Once conversing, before we can initiate a topic change, it is a social norm that we let the current topic being discussed play itself out or continue until the person who introduced the topic seems satisfied. We then usually try to find a relevant tie-in or segue that acknowledges the previous topic, in turn acknowledging the speaker, before actually moving on. Changing the topic without following such social conventions might indicate to the other person that you were not listening or are simply rude.

Ending a conversation is similarly complex. I’m sure we’ve all been in a situation where we are “trapped” in a conversation that we need or want to get out of. Just walking away or ending a conversation without engaging in socially acceptable “leave-taking behaviors” would be considered a breach of social norms. Topic changes are often places where people can leave a conversation, but it is still routine for us to give a special reason for leaving, often in an apologetic tone (whether we mean it or not). Generally though, conversations come to an end through the cooperation of both people, as they offer and recognize typical signals that a topic area has been satisfactorily covered or that one or both people need to leave. It is customary in the United States for people to say they have to leave before they actually do and for that statement to be dismissed or ignored by the other person until additional leave-taking behaviors are enacted. When such cooperation is lacking, an awkward silence or abrupt ending can result, and as we’ve already learned, US Americans are not big fans of silence. Silence is not viewed the same way in other cultures, which leads us to our discussion of cultural context.

## Language and Cultural Context

Culture isn’t solely determined by a person’s native language or nationality. It’s true that languages vary by country and region and that the language we speak influences our realities, but even people who speak the same language experience cultural differences because of their various intersecting cultural identities and personal experiences. We have a tendency to view our language as a whole more favorably than other languages. Although people may make persuasive arguments regarding which languages are more pleasing to the ear or difficult or easy to learn than others, no one language enables speakers to communicate more effectively than another.Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin’s, 2007), 224–25.

From birth we are socialized into our various cultural identities. As with the social context, this acculturation process is a combination of explicit and implicit lessons. A child in Colombia, which is considered a more collectivist country in which people value group membership and cohesion over individualism, may not be explicitly told, “You are a member of a collectivistic culture, so you should care more about the family and community than yourself.” This cultural value would be transmitted through daily actions and through language use. Just as babies acquire knowledge of language practices at an astonishing rate in their first two years of life, so do they acquire cultural knowledge and values that are embedded in those language practices. At nine months old, it is possible to distinguish babies based on their language. Even at this early stage of development, when most babies are babbling and just learning to recognize but not wholly reproduce verbal interaction patterns, a Colombian baby would sound different from a Brazilian baby, even though neither would actually be using words from their native languages of Spanish and Portuguese.David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 84.

The actual language we speak plays an important role in shaping our reality. Comparing languages, we can see differences in how we are able to talk about the world. In English, we have the words grandfather and grandmother, but no single word that distinguishes between a maternal grandfather and a paternal grandfather. But in Swedish, there’s a specific word for each grandparent: morfar is mother’s father, farfar is father’s father, farmor is father’s mother, and mormor is mother’s mother.David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 188. In this example, we can see that the words available to us, based on the language we speak, influence how we talk about the world due to differences in and limitations of vocabulary. The notion that language shapes our view of reality and our cultural patterns is best represented by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Although some scholars argue that our reality is determined by our language, we will take a more qualified view and presume that language plays a central role in influencing our realities but doesn’t determine them.Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 222–24.

Culturally influenced differences in language and meaning can lead to some interesting encounters, ranging from awkward to informative to disastrous. In terms of awkwardness, you have likely heard stories of companies that failed to exhibit communication competence in their naming and/or advertising of products in another language. In the United States and England, parents commonly positively and negatively reinforce their child’s behavior by saying, “Good girl” or “Good boy.” There isn’t an equivalent for such a phrase in other European languages, so the usage in only these two countries has been traced back to the puritan influence on beliefs about good and bad behavior.Anna Wierzbicka, “The English Expressions Good Boy and Good Girl and Cultural Models of Child Rearing,” Culture and Psychology 10, no. 3 (2004): 251–78. In terms of disastrous consequences, one of the most publicized and deadliest cross-cultural business mistakes occurred in India in 1984. Union Carbide, an American company, controlled a plant used to make pesticides. The company underestimated the amount of cross-cultural training that would be needed to allow the local workers, many of whom were not familiar with the technology or language/jargon used in the instructions for plant operations to do their jobs. This lack of competent communication led to a gas leak that immediately killed more than two thousand people .

## Accents and Dialects

The documentary American Tongues, although dated at this point, is still a fascinating look at the rich tapestry of accents and dialects that makes up American English. Dialects are versions of languages that have distinct words, grammar, and pronunciation. Accents are distinct styles of pronunciation.Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication across Cultures, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 199–200. There can be multiple accents within one dialect. For example, people in the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States speak a dialect of American English that is characterized by remnants of the linguistic styles of Europeans who settled the area a couple hundred years earlier. Even though they speak this similar dialect, a person in Kentucky could still have an accent that is distinguishable from a person in western North Carolina.

Dialects and accents can vary by region, class, or ancestry, and they influence the impressions that we make of others. When I moved to Colorado from North Carolina, I was met with a very strange look when I used the word buggy to refer to a shopping cart. Research shows that people tend to think more positively about others who speak with a dialect similar to their own and think more negatively about people who speak differently. Of course, many people think they speak normally and perceive others to have an accent or dialect. Although dialects include the use of different words and phrases, it’s the tone of voice that often creates the strongest impression. For example, a person who speaks with a Southern accent may perceive a New Englander’s accent to be grating, harsh, or rude because the pitch is more nasal and the rate faster. Conversely, a New Englander may perceive a Southerner’s accent to be syrupy and slow, leading to an impression that the person speaking is uneducated.

## Customs and Norms

Social norms are culturally relative. The words used in politeness rituals in one culture can mean something completely different in another. For example, thank you in American English acknowledges receiving something (a gift, a favor, a compliment), in British English it can mean “yes” similar to American English’s yes, please, and in French merci can mean “no” as in “no, thank you.”David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 276. Additionally, what is considered a powerful language style varies from culture to culture. Confrontational language, such as swearing, can be seen as powerful in Western cultures, even though it violates some language taboos, but would be seen as immature and weak in Japan.Patricia J. Wetzel, “Are ‘Powerless’ Communication Strategies the Japanese Norm?” Language in Society 17, no. 4 (1988): 555–64.

Gender also affects how we use language, but not to the extent that most people think. Although there is a widespread belief that men are more likely to communicate in a clear and straightforward way and women are more likely to communicate in an emotional and indirect way, a meta-analysis of research findings from more than two hundred studies found only small differences in the personal disclosures of men and women.Kathryn Dindia and Mike Allen, “Sex Differences in Self-Disclosure: A Meta Analysis,” Psychological Bulletin 112, no. 1 (1992): 106–24. Men and women’s levels of disclosure are even more similar when engaging in cross-gender communication, meaning men and woman are more similar when speaking to each other than when men speak to men or women speak to women. This could be due to the internalized pressure to speak about the other gender in socially sanctioned ways, in essence reinforcing the stereotypes when speaking to the same gender but challenging them in cross-gender encounters. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters. Kathryn Dindia, “The Effect of Sex of Subject and Sex of Partner on Interruptions,” Human Communication Research 13, no. 3 (1987): 345–71. These findings, which state that men and women communicate more similarly during cross-gender encounters and then communicate in more stereotypical ways in same-gender encounters, can be explained with communication accommodation theory.

## Communication Accommodation and Code-Switching

Communication accommodation theory is a theory that explores why and how people modify their communication to fit situational, social, cultural, and relational contexts.Howard Giles, Donald M. Taylor, and Richard Bourhis, “Toward a Theory of Interpersonal Accommodation through Language: Some Canadian Data,” Language and Society 2, no. 2 (1973): 177–92. Within communication accommodation, conversational partners may use convergence, meaning a person makes his or her communication more like another person’s. People who are accommodating in their communication style are seen as more competent, which illustrates the benefits of communicative flexibility. In order to be flexible, of course, people have to be aware of and monitor their own and others’ communication patterns. Conversely, conversational partners may use divergence, meaning a person uses communication to emphasize the differences between his or her conversational partner and his or herself.

Convergence and divergence can take place within the same conversation and may be used by one or both conversational partners. Convergence functions to make others feel at ease, to increase understanding, and to enhance social bonds. Divergence may be used to intentionally make another person feel unwelcome or perhaps to highlight a personal, group, or cultural identity. For example, African American women use certain verbal communication patterns when communicating with other African American women as a way to highlight their racial identity and create group solidarity. In situations where multiple races interact, the women usually don’t use those same patterns, instead accommodating the language patterns of the larger group. While communication accommodation might involve anything from adjusting how fast or slow you talk to how long you speak during each turn, code-switching refers to changes in accent, dialect, or language.Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 249. There are many reasons that people might code-switch. Regarding accents, some people hire vocal coaches or speech-language pathologists to help them alter their accent. If a Southern person thinks their accent is leading others to form unfavorable impressions, they can consciously change their accent with much practice and effort. Once their ability to speak without their Southern accent is honed, they may be able to switch very quickly between their native accent when speaking with friends and family and their modified accent when speaking in professional settings.

Additionally, people who work or live in multilingual settings may code-switch many times throughout the day, or even within a single conversation. Increasing outsourcing and globalization have produced heightened pressures for code-switching. Call center workers in India have faced strong negative reactions from British and American customers who insist on “speaking to someone who speaks English.” Although many Indians learn English in schools as a result of British colonization, their accents prove to be off-putting to people who want to get their cable package changed or book an airline ticket. Now some Indian call center workers are going through intense training to be able to code-switch and accommodate the speaking style of their customers. As our interactions continue to occur in more multinational contexts, the expectations for code-switching and accommodation are sure to increase. It is important for us to consider the intersection of culture and power and think critically about the ways in which expectations for code-switching may be based on cultural biases.

## Language and Cultural Bias

In the previous example about code-switching and communication accommodation in Indian call centers, the move toward accent neutralization is a response to the “racist abuse” these workers receive from customers.Shehzad Nadeem, “Accent Neutralisation and a Crisis of Identity in India’s Call Centres,” The Guardian, February 9, 2011, accessed June 7, 2012,

 Anger in Western countries about job losses and economic uncertainty has increased the amount of racially targeted verbal attacks on international call center employees. It was recently reported that more call center workers are now quitting their jobs as a result of the verbal abuse and that 25 percent of workers who have recently quit say such abuse was a major source of stress.Cultural bias is a skewed way of viewing or talking about a group that is typically negative. Bias has a way of creeping into our daily language use, often under our awareness. Culturally biased language can make reference to one or more cultural identities, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability. There are other sociocultural identities that can be the subject of biased language, but we will focus our discussion on these five. Much biased language is based on stereotypes and myths that influence the words we use. Bias is both intentional and unintentional, but as we’ve already discussed, we have to be accountable for what we say even if we didn’t “intend” a particular meaning—remember, meaning is generated; it doesn’t exist inside our thoughts or words. We will discuss specific ways in which cultural bias manifests in our language and ways to become more aware of bias. Becoming aware of and addressing cultural bias is not the same thing as engaging in “political correctness.” Political correctness takes awareness to the extreme but doesn’t do much to address cultural bias aside from make people feel like they are walking on eggshells. That kind of pressure can lead people to avoid discussions about cultural identities or avoid people with different cultural identities. Our goal is not to eliminate all cultural bias from verbal communication or to never offend anyone, intentionally or otherwise. Instead, we will continue to use guidelines for ethical communication that we have already discussed and strive to increase our competence., which discusses culture and communication.

**HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE II**

**The Age of Hardy and the Present Age**

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|  | |  | | --- | | INTRODUCTION  The forty years between 1887 and 1928 are called the AGE OF HARDY ,this is not intended to suggest that Hardy was in any special sense a spiritual or intellectual director during that time. He was much admired by his juniors as a man of outstanding and exceptional genius, but he was no modernist.The little geniuses have, commonly, no intelligent regard for the use of tradition:they themselves the power to create a new tradition.     From the beginning of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineties the great Victorian writers devoted themselves to a literature of purposes.In the last decade of the century a new group of authors and artists set out to demonstrate  that `all art is useless’ in the sense of being free from allegiance to ideas of morality and standards of conduct. OSCAR WILDE ,the foremost of this group ,was attracted by the theories of Walter Peter ,who with surprise and reluctance found himself adopted as the mentor of Aesthetic Movement.      The  best qualities of the decadents and the worst were personified in Wilde and illustrate by his work .It would be superfluous in this brief survey.Some decadents during the period of the Age of Hardy are AUBREY Beardsley,  CHARLES GONDER, ARTHUR SYMONS, ERNEST DOWSON ,LIONEL JOHNSON.  Four years after Tennyson’s death the laureateship declined upon Alfred Austin, a political journalist who aspired  to be a philosophical poet but was capable of little more than sentimental balderdash in verse.There were poets in the land ,however between 1892 and 1913, though it was not until the later date that new poetry began again to  be read by large numbers of people .These twenty years may therefore be treated as a transition period.Three poets of this transition period stand apart from the rest:Francis Thompson ,A.E.Housman .Robert Bridges.  Bridges’s succession to the laureateship in 1913 coincided with an effort by several young poets to popularize contemporary poetry .Largely through the enterprise of ROPERT BROOKE, though under the editorship of Edward Marsh an anthology of new verse was issued in the autumn of 1913 with the title Georgian Poetry.  T.W.Robertson’s work in stage naturalism in the eighteen-sixties prepared the way for A.W.Pinero and Henry ,who in the `eighties’ and nineties popularized the `problem play’-though the `problem’ seldom escape being the offspring of the divorce court and the theatrical imagination.Henry was less popularthan Pinero, but he was sometimes a better dramatist.Even when his situations are wholly `of the theatre ‘ he could make them seem momentarily and excitingly credible.  For roughly ten years up to W.B.YEATS, the son of an irish painter ,strove to bring into existence an Irish National Theatre.When  lenght he succeeded, there began a brilliant period of irish drama,to which Yeats himself contributed several notable poetic plays.   G.B.SHAW.  George Bernard Shaw (26 July 1856 – 2 November 1950) was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics. Although his first profitable writing was music and literary criticism, in which capacity he wrote many highly articulate pieces of journalism, his main talent was for drama, and he wrote more than 60 plays. He was also an essayist, novelist and short story writer. Nearly all his writings address prevailing social problems with a vein of comedy which makes their stark themes more palatable. Issues which engaged Shaw's attention included education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class privilege.    He was most angered by what he perceived as the exploitation of the working class. An ardent socialist, Shaw wrote many brochures and speeches for the Fabian Society. He became an accomplished orator in the furtherance of its causes, which included gaining equal rights for men and women, alleviating abuses of the working class, rescinding private ownership of productive land, and promoting healthy lifestyles. For a short time he was active in local politics, serving on the London County Council.    Shaw was noted for expressing his views in uncompromising language, whether on vegetarianism (branding his own pre-vegetarian self a "cannibal"), the development of the human race (his own brand of eugenics was driven by encouragement of miscegenation and marrying across class lines), or on political questions (in spite of his own generally liberal views he was not an uncritical supporter of democracy, and is even recorded as supporting, or at least condoning, the dictators of the 1930s).  In 1898, Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a fellow Fabian, whom he survived. They settled in Ayot St Lawrence in a house now called Shaw's Corner. Shaw died there, aged 94, from chronic problems exacerbated by injuries he incurred by falling from a ladder.  He is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize in Literature (1925) and an Academy Award (1938), for his contributions to literature and for his work on the film Pygmalion (an adaptation of his play of the same name), respectively.[n 1] Shaw turned down all other awards and honours, including the offer of a knighthood.  ROBERT BRIDGES  Bridges was born in Walmer, Kent, in the UK, and educated at Eton College and Corpus Christi College, Oxford.[1] He went on to study medicine in London at St Bartholomew's Hospital, intending to practise until the age of forty and then retire to write poetry.    He practised as a casualty physician at his teaching hospital (where he made a series of highly critical remarks about the Victorian medical establishment) and subsequently as a full physician to the Great (later Royal) Northern Hospital. He was also a physician to the Hospital for Sick Children.  Lung disease forced him to retire in 1882, and from that point on he devoted himself to writing and literary research. However, Bridges' literary work started long before his retirement, his first collection of poems having been published in 1873. In 1884 he married Monica Waterhouse, daughter of Alfred Waterhouse R.A., and spent the rest of his life in rural seclusion, first at Yattendon, Berkshire, then at Boars Hill, Oxford, where he died.  He was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1900. He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1913, the only medical graduate to have held the office.  He was the father of poet Elizabeth Daryush  RUPERT BROOKE  Brooke was born at 5 Hillmorton Road, Rugby, Warwickshire,[5][6] the second of the three sons of William Parker Brooke, a Rugby schoolmaster, and Ruth Mary Brooke, née Cotterill. He was educated at two independent schools in Rugby: Hillbrow School and Rugby School.  While travelling in Europe he prepared a thesis, entitled "John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama", which won him a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, where he became a member of the Cambridge Apostles, was elected as President of the Cambridge University Fabian Society, helped found the Marlowe Society drama club and acted in plays including the Cambridge Greek Play  Brooke made friends among the Bloomsbury group of writers, some of whom admired his talent while others were more impressed by his good looks. Virginia Woolf boasted to Vita Sackville-West of once going skinny-dipping with Brooke in a moonlit pool when they were in Cambridge together.[7]  Brooke belonged to another literary group known as the Georgian Poets and was one of the most important of the Dymock poets, associated with the Gloucestershire village of Dymock where he spent some time before the war. He also lived in the Old Vicarage, Grantchester.  Brooke suffered a severe emotional crisis in 1912, caused by sexual confusion and jealousy, resulting in the breakdown of his long relationship with Ka Cox (Katherine Laird Cox).[8] Brooke's paranoia that Lytton Strachey had schemed to destroy his relationship with Cox by encouraging her to see Henry Lamb precipitated his break with his Bloomsbury group friends and played a part in his nervous collapse and subsequent rehabilitation trips to Germany.[9]  As part of his recuperation, Brooke toured the United States and Canada to write travel diaries for the Westminster Gazette. He took the long way home, sailing across the Pacific and staying some months in the South Seas. Much later it was revealed that he may have fathered a daughter with a Tahitian woman named Taatamata with whom he seems to have enjoyed his most complete emotional relationship.[10] Many more people were in love with him.[11] Brooke was romantically involved with the actress Cathleen Nesbitt and was once engaged to Noël Olivier, whom he met, when she was aged 15, at the progressive Bedales School.  Brooke was an inspiration to poet John Gillespie Magee, Jr., author of the poem "High Flight". Magee idolised Brooke and wrote a poem about him ("Sonnet to Rupert Brooke"). Magee also won the same poetry prize at Rugby School which Brooke had won 34 years earlier.  As a war poet Brooke came to public attention in 1915 when The Times Literary Supplement quoted two of his five sonnets ("IV: The Dead" and "V: The Soldier") in full on 11 March and his sonnet "V: The Soldier" was read from the pulpit of St Paul's Cathedral on Easter Sunday (4 April). Brooke's most famous collection of poetry, containing all five sonnets, 1914 & Other Poems, was first published in May 1915 and, in testament to his popularity, ran to 11 further impressions that year and by June 1918 had reached its 24th impression;[12] a process undoubtedly fuelled through posthumous interest | |

**THE PRESENT AGE**

The 20th century opened with great hope but also with some [apprehension](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apprehension), for the new century marked the final approach to a new millennium. For many, humankind was entering upon an unprecedented era. [H.G. Wells](https://www.britannica.com/biography/H-G-Wells)’s utopian studies, the aptly titled [*Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anticipations-of-the-Reaction-of-Mechanical-and-Scientific-Progress-upon-Human-Life-and-Thought) (1901) and [*A Modern Utopia*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Modern-Utopia) (1905), both captured and qualified this optimistic mood and gave expression to a common [conviction](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conviction) that science and technology would transform the world in the century ahead. To achieve such transformation, outmoded institutions and ideals had to be replaced by ones more suited to the growth and liberation of the human spirit. The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the accession of [Edward VII](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-VII) seemed to confirm that a franker, less [inhibited](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inhibited) era had begun.

Many writers of the Edwardian period, drawing widely upon the realistic and naturalistic conventions of the 19th century (upon Ibsen in [drama](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) and Balzac, Turgenev, Flaubert, Zola, Eliot, and Dickens in fiction) and in tune with the anti-Aestheticism unleashed by the trial of the archetypal Aesthete, [Oscar Wilde](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oscar-Wilde), saw their task in the new century to be an unashamedly [didactic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/didactic) one. In a series of wittily iconoclastic plays, of which [*Man and Superman*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Man-and-Superman) (performed 1905, published 1903) and [*Major Barbara*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Major-Barbara) (performed 1905, published 1907) are the most substantial, [George Bernard Shaw](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Bernard-Shaw) turned the Edwardian theatre into an arena for debate upon the principal concerns of the day: the question of political organization, the [morality](https://www.britannica.com/art/morality-play-dramatic-genre) of armaments and war, the function of class and of the professions, the validity of the family and of marriage, and the issue of female emancipation. Nor was he alone in this, even if he was alone in the brilliance of his comedy. [John Galsworthy](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Galsworthy) made use of the theatre in Strife (1909) to explore the conflict between capital and labour, and in Justice (1910) he lent his support to reform of the penal system, while [Harley Granville-Barker](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harley-Granville-Barker), whose revolutionary approach to stage direction did much to change [theatrical production](https://www.britannica.com/art/theatrical-production) in the period, dissected in The Voysey Inheritance (performed 1905, published 1909) and Waste (performed 1907, published 1909) the hypocrisies and deceit of upper-class and professional life.

Many Edwardian novelists were similarly eager to explore the shortcomings of English social life. Wells—in Love and Mr. Lewisham (1900); Kipps (1905); Ann Veronica (1909), his pro-suffragist novel; and The History of Mr. Polly (1910)—captured the frustrations of lower- and middle-class existence, even though he relieved his accounts with many comic touches. In [*Anna of the Five Towns*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anna-of-the-Five-Towns) (1902), [Arnold Bennett](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arnold-Bennett) detailed the constrictions of provincial life among the self-made business classes in the area of [England](https://www.britannica.com/place/England) known as the Potteries; in [*The Man of Property*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Man-of-Property) (1906), the first volume of The Forsyte Saga, Galsworthy described the destructive possessiveness of the professional bourgeoisie; and, in Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) and [*The Longest Journey*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Longest-Journey) (1907), [E.M. Forster](https://www.britannica.com/biography/E-M-Forster) portrayed with [irony](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/irony) the insensitivity, self-repression, and philistinism of the English middle classes.

These novelists, however, wrote more memorably when they allowed themselves a larger perspective. In [*The Old Wives’ Tale*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Old-Wives-Tale-novel-by-Bennett) (1908), Bennett showed the destructive effects of time on the lives of individuals and [communities](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communities) and evoked a quality of [pathos](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pathos) that he never matched in his other fiction; in [*Tono-Bungay*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tono-Bungay) (1909), Wells showed the ominous consequences of the uncontrolled developments taking place within a British society still dependent upon the institutions of a long-defunct landed aristocracy; and in [*Howards End*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Howards-End-novel-by-Forster) (1910), Forster showed how little the rootless and self-important world of contemporary commerce cared for the more rooted world of [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture), although he acknowledged that commerce was a necessary evil. Nevertheless, even as they perceived the difficulties of the present, most Edwardian novelists, like their counterparts in the theatre, held firmly to the belief not only that constructive change was possible but also that this change could in some measure be advanced by their writing.

Other writers, including [Thomas Hardy](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Hardy) and [Rudyard Kipling](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudyard-Kipling), who had established their reputations during the previous century, and [Hilaire Belloc](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hilaire-Belloc), [G.K. Chesterton](https://www.britannica.com/biography/G-K-Chesterton), and [Edward Thomas](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Thomas), who established their reputations in the first decade of the new century, were less confident about the future and sought to revive the traditional forms—the [ballad](https://www.britannica.com/art/ballad), the narrative poem, the [satire](https://www.britannica.com/art/satire), the [fantasy](https://www.britannica.com/art/fantasy-narrative-genre), the topographical poem, and the essay—that in their view preserved traditional [sentiments](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sentiments) and perceptions. The revival of traditional forms in the late 19th and early 20th century was not a unique event. There were many such revivals during the 20th century, and the traditional [poetry](https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry) of [A.E. Housman](https://www.britannica.com/biography/A-E-Housman) (whose book [*A Shropshire Lad*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Shropshire-Lad), originally published in 1896, enjoyed huge popular success during World War I), [Walter de la Mare](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walter-de-la-Mare), [John Masefield](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Masefield-British-poet), [Robert Graves](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Graves), and [Edmund Blunden](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edmund-Charles-Blunden) represents an important and often neglected strand of English [literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/literature) in the first half of the century.

The most significant writing of the period, traditionalist or modern, was inspired by neither hope nor apprehension but by bleaker feelings that the new century would witness the collapse of a whole civilization. The new century had begun with Great Britain involved in the [South African War](https://www.britannica.com/event/South-African-War) (the Boer War; 1899–1902), and it seemed to some that the [British Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire) was as doomed to destruction, both from within and from without, as had been the Roman Empire. In his poems on the South African War, [Hardy](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Hardy) (whose achievement as a poet in the 20th century rivaled his achievement as a novelist in the 19th) questioned simply and sardonically the human cost of empire building and established a tone and style that many British poets were to use in the course of the century, while Kipling, who had done much to engender pride in empire, began to speak in his verse and [short stories](https://www.britannica.com/art/short-story) of the burden of empire and the tribulations it would bring.

No one captured the sense of an imperial civilization in decline more fully or subtly than the expatriate American novelist [Henry James](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-James-American-writer). In [*The Portrait of a Lady*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Portrait-of-a-Lady-novel-by-James) (1881), he had briefly anatomized the fatal loss of energy of the English ruling class and, in [*The Princess Casamassima*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Princess-Casamassima) (1886), had described more directly the various instabilities that threatened its paternalistic rule. He did so with regret: the patrician American admired in the English upper class its sense of [moral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral) obligation to the [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community). By the turn of the century, however, he had noted a disturbing change. In [*The Spoils of Poynton*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Spoils-of-Poynton) (1897) and [*What Maisie Knew*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/What-Maisie-Knew) (1897), members of the upper class no longer seem troubled by the means adopted to achieve their morally dubious ends. Great Britain had become indistinguishable from the other nations of the Old World, in which an ugly rapacity had never been far from the surface. James’s dismay at this condition gave to his subtle and compressed late [fiction](https://www.britannica.com/art/fiction-literature), The Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904), much of its gravity and air of disenchantment.

James’s awareness of crisis affected the very form and style of his writing, for he was no longer assured that the world about which he wrote was either [coherent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coherent) in itself or unambiguously intelligible to its inhabitants. His fiction still presented characters within an identifiable social world, but he found his characters and their world increasingly [elusive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/elusive) and [enigmatic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enigmatic) and his own grasp upon them, as he made clear in The Sacred Fount (1901), the questionable consequence of artistic will.

Another expatriate novelist, [Joseph Conrad](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Conrad) (pseudonym of Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, born in the Ukraine of Polish parents), shared James’s sense of crisis but attributed it less to the decline of a specific civilization than to human failings. Man was a solitary, [romantic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/romantic) creature of will who at any cost imposed his meaning upon the world because he could not endure a world that did not reflect his central place within it. In *[Almayer’s Folly](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Almayers-Folly)* (1895) and [*Lord Jim*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lord-Jim-novel-by-Conrad) (1900), he had seemed to sympathize with this predicament; but in [*Heart of Darkness*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Heart-of-Darkness) (1902), *[Nostromo](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nostromo)* (1904), [*The Secret Agent*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Secret-Agent) (1907), and Under Western Eyes (1911), he detailed such imposition, and the psychological pathologies he increasingly associated with it, without sympathy. He did so as a philosophical novelist whose concern with the mocking limits of human knowledge affected not only the content of his fiction but also its very structure. His writing itself is marked by gaps in the narrative, by narrators who do not fully grasp the significance of the events they are retelling, and by characters who are unable to make themselves understood. James and Conrad used many of the conventions of 19th-century realism but transformed them to express what are considered to be peculiarly 20th-century preoccupations and anxieties.

# The Modernist revolution

## Anglo-American [Modernism](https://www.britannica.com/art/Modernism-art): Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, and Eliot

From 1908 to 1914 there was a remarkably productive period of [innovation](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/innovation) and experiment as novelists and poets undertook, in anthologies and magazines, to challenge the literary conventions not just of the recent past but of the entire post-Romantic era. For a brief moment, [London](https://www.britannica.com/place/London), which up to that point had been culturally one of the dullest of the European capitals, boasted an avant-garde to rival those of Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, even if its leading personality, [Ezra Pound](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ezra-Pound), and many of its most notable figures were American.

The spirit of Modernism—a radical and utopian spirit stimulated by new ideas in anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political theory, and psychoanalysis—was in the air, expressed rather mutedly by the pastoral and often anti-Modern poets of the Georgian movement (1912–22; see [Georgian poetry](https://www.britannica.com/art/Georgian-poetry-British-literary-group)) and more authentically by the English and American poets of the [Imagist](https://www.britannica.com/art/Imagists) movement, to which Pound first drew attention in Ripostes (1912), a volume of his own poetry, and in Des Imagistes (1914), an anthology. Prominent among the [Imagists](https://www.britannica.com/art/Imagists) were the English poets [T.E. Hulme](https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-E-Hulme), [F.S. Flint](https://www.britannica.com/biography/F-S-Flint), and [Richard Aldington](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Aldington) and the Americans [Hilda Doolittle](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hilda-Doolittle) (H.D.) and [Amy Lowell](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Amy-Lowell).

Reacting against what they considered to be an exhausted poetic tradition, the Imagists wanted to refine the language of poetry in order to make it a vehicle not for pastoral [sentiment](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sentiment) or imperialistic [rhetoric](https://www.britannica.com/topic/rhetoric) but for the exact description and evocation of mood. To this end they experimented with free or irregular verse and made the image their principal instrument. In contrast to the leisurely Georgians, they worked with brief and economical forms.

Meanwhile, painters and sculptors, grouped together by the painter and writer [Wyndham Lewis](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wyndham-Lewis) under the banner of [Vorticism](https://www.britannica.com/art/Vorticism), combined the [abstract art](https://www.britannica.com/art/abstract-art) of the [Cubists](https://www.britannica.com/art/Cubism) with the example of the Italian [Futurists](https://www.britannica.com/art/Futurism) who conveyed in their painting, sculpture, and [literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/literature) the new sensations of movement and scale associated with modern developments such as automobiles and airplanes. With the typographically arresting [*Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Blast-Review-of-the-Great-English-Vortex) (two editions, 1914 and 1915) Vorticism found its polemical mouthpiece and in Lewis, its editor, its most active propagandist and accomplished literary exponent. His experimental [play](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) Enemy of the Stars, published in Blast in 1914, and his experimental [novel](https://www.britannica.com/art/novel) Tarr (1918) can still surprise with their violent exuberance.

[World War I](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I) brought this first period of the Modernist revolution to an end and, while not destroying its radical and utopian impulse, made the Anglo-American Modernists all too aware of the gulf between their ideals and the [chaos](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chaos) of the present. Novelists and poets parodied received forms and styles, in their view made [redundant](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/redundant) by the immensity and horror of the war, but, as can be seen most clearly in Pound’s angry and satirical [*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hugh-Selwyn-Mauberley) (1920), with a note of anguish and with the wish that writers might again make form and style the bearers of authentic meanings.

In his two most innovative novels, [*The Rainbow*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Rainbow) (1915) and [*Women in Love*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Women-in-Love) (1920), [D.H. Lawrence](https://www.britannica.com/biography/D-H-Lawrence) traced the sickness of modern civilization—a civilization in his view only too eager to participate in the mass slaughter of the war—to the effects of industrialization upon the human psyche. Yet as he rejected the conventions of the fictional tradition, which he had used to brilliant effect in his deeply felt autobiographical novel of working-class family life, Sons and Lovers (1913), he drew upon [myth](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth) and symbol to hold out the hope that individual and [collective](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collective) rebirth could come through human intensity and passion.

On the other hand, the poet and playwright [T.S. Eliot](https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-S-Eliot), another American resident in London, in his most innovative poetry, *[Prufrock and Other Observations](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Prufrock-and-Other-Observations)* (1917) and [*The Waste Land*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Waste-Land) (1922), traced the sickness of modern civilization—a civilization that, on the evidence of the war, preferred death or death-in-life to life—to the spiritual emptiness and rootlessness of modern existence. As he rejected the conventions of the poetic tradition, Eliot, like Lawrence, drew upon myth and symbol to hold out the hope of individual and collective rebirth, but he differed sharply from Lawrence by supposing that rebirth could come through self-denial and self-abnegation. Even so, their satirical intensity, no less than the seriousness and scope of their analyses of the failings of a civilization that had voluntarily entered upon the First World War, ensured that Lawrence and Eliot became the leading and most [authoritative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authoritative) figures of Anglo-American Modernism in [England](https://www.britannica.com/place/England) in the whole of the postwar period.

During the 1920s Lawrence (who had left England in 1919) and Eliot began to develop viewpoints at odds with the reputations they had established through their early work. In [*Kangaroo*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kangaroo-by-Lawrence) (1923) and [*The Plumed Serpent*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Plumed-Serpent) (1926), Lawrence revealed the attraction to him of [charismatic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charismatic), masculine leadership, while, in For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order (1928), Eliot (whose influence as a literary critic now rivaled his influence as a poet) announced that he was a “classicist in literature, royalist in politics and anglo-catholic in religion” and committed himself to [hierarchy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hierarchy) and order. Elitist and paternalistic, they did not, however, adopt the extreme positions of Pound (who left England in 1920 and settled permanently in Italy in 1925) or Lewis. Drawing upon the ideas of the left and of the right, Pound and Lewis dismissed [democracy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy) as a sham and argued that economic and ideological manipulation was the dominant factor. For some, the antidemocratic views of the Anglo-American Modernists simply made explicit the reactionary tendencies [inherent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inherent) in the movement from its beginning; for others, they came from a tragic loss of balance occasioned by World War I. This issue is a complex one, and judgments upon the literary merit and political status of Pound’s ambitious but immensely difficult Imagist [epic](https://www.britannica.com/art/epic) [*The Cantos*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Cantos) (1917–70) and Lewis’s powerful sequence of politico-theological novels The Human Age (The Childermass, 1928; Monstre Gai and Malign Fiesta, both 1955) are sharply divided.

## Celtic Modernism: Yeats, Joyce, Jones, and MacDiarmid

Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, and Eliot were the principal male figures of Anglo-American Modernism, but important contributions also were made by the Irish poet and playwright [William Butler Yeats](https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Butler-Yeats) and the Irish novelist [James Joyce](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Joyce). By virtue of nationality, residence, and, in Yeats’s case, an unjust reputation as a poet still steeped in Celtic mythology, they had less immediate impact upon the British literary intelligentsia in the late 1910s and early 1920s than Pound, Lewis, Lawrence, and Eliot, although by the mid-1920s their influence had become direct and substantial. Many critics today argue that Yeats’s work as a poet and Joyce’s work as a novelist are the most important Modernist achievements of the period.

In his early verse and drama, Yeats, who had been influenced as a young man by the [Romantic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Romantic) and Pre-Raphaelite movements, evoked a legendary and supernatural [Ireland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ireland) in language that was often vague and grandiloquent. As an adherent of the cause of Irish [nationalism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism), he had hoped to instill pride in the Irish past. The poetry of The Green Helmet (1910) and Responsibilities (1914), however, was marked not only by a more concrete and [colloquial](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colloquial) style but also by a growing isolation from the nationalist movement, for Yeats celebrated an aristocratic Ireland epitomized for him by the family and country house of his friend and patron, [Lady Gregory](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Augusta-Lady-Gregory).

The grandeur of his mature reflective poetry in [*The Wild Swans at Coole*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Wild-Swans-at-Coole) (1917), [*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Michael-Robartes-and-the-Dancer) (1921), [*The Tower*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Tower) (1928), and [*The Winding Stair*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Winding-Stair) (1929) derived in large measure from the way in which (caught up by the violent [discords](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discords) of contemporary Irish history) he accepted the fact that his idealized Ireland was illusory. At its best his mature style combined passion and precision with powerful symbol, strong rhythm, and lucid diction; and even though his poetry often touched upon public themes, he never ceased to reflect upon the Romantic themes of creativity, selfhood, and the individual’s relationship to nature, time, and history.

Joyce, who spent his adult life on the continent of [Europe](https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe), expressed in his [fiction](https://www.britannica.com/art/fiction-literature) his sense of the limits and possibilities of the Ireland he had left behind. In his collection of short stories, [*Dubliners*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dubliners) (1914), and his largely autobiographical novel [*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Portrait-of-the-Artist-as-a-Young-Man) (1916), he described in fiction at once realist and symbolist the individual cost of the sexual and imaginative oppressiveness of life in Ireland. As if by provocative contrast, his panoramic novel of urban life, [*Ulysses*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ulysses-novel-by-Joyce) (1922), was sexually frank and imaginatively profuse. (Copies of the first edition were burned by the New York postal authorities, and British customs officials seized the second edition in 1923.) Employing extraordinary formal and linguistic inventiveness, including the [stream-of-consciousness](https://www.britannica.com/art/stream-of-consciousness) method, Joyce depicted the experiences and the fantasies of various men and women in Dublin on a summer’s day in June 1904. Yet his purpose was not simply documentary, for he drew upon an encyclopaedic range of European literature to stress the rich universality of life buried beneath the provincialism of pre-independence Dublin, in 1904 a city still within the [British Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire). In his even more experimental *[Finnegans Wake](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Finnegans-Wake)* (1939), extracts of which had already appeared as Work in Progress from 1928 to 1937, Joyce’s commitment to cultural universality became absolute. By means of a strange, polyglot [idiom](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/idiom) of puns and [portmanteau words](https://www.britannica.com/topic/portmanteau-word), he not only explored the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious but also suggested that the languages and [myths](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myths) of Ireland were interwoven with the languages and myths of many other [cultures](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cultures).

The example of Joyce’s experimentalism was followed by the Anglo-Welsh poet [David Jones](https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Jones-English-artist-and-writer) and by the Scottish poet [Hugh MacDiarmid](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hugh-MacDiarmid) (pseudonym of Christopher Murray Grieve). Whereas Jones concerned himself, in his complex and allusive poetry and prose, with the Celtic, Saxon, Roman, and Christian roots of Great Britain, MacDiarmid sought not only to recover what he considered to be an authentically Scottish [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture) but also to establish, as in his In Memoriam James Joyce (1955), the truly [cosmopolitan](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cosmopolitan) nature of Celtic [consciousness](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness) and achievement. MacDiarmid’s masterpiece in the [vernacular](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular), [*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Drunk-Man-Looks-at-the-Thistle) (1926), helped to inspire the Scottish renaissance of the 1920s and ’30s.

# The literature of [World War I](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I) and the interwar period

The impact of World War I upon the Anglo-American Modernists has been noted. In addition the war brought a variety of responses from the more-traditionalist writers, predominantly poets, who saw action. [Rupert Brooke](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rupert-Brooke) caught the idealism of the opening months of the war (and died in service); [Siegfried Sassoon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Siegfried-Sassoon) and Ivor Gurney caught the mounting anger and sense of waste as the war continued; and [Isaac Rosenberg](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isaac-Rosenberg) (perhaps the most original of the war poets), [Wilfred Owen](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wilfred-Owen), and [Edmund Blunden](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edmund-Charles-Blunden) not only caught the comradely compassion of the trenches but also addressed themselves to the larger [moral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral) perplexities raised by the war (Rosenberg and Owen were killed in action).

It was not until the 1930s, however, that much of this [poetry](https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry) became widely known. In the wake of the war the dominant tone, at once [cynical](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cynical) and bewildered, was set by [Aldous Huxley](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aldous-Huxley)’s satirical [novel](https://www.britannica.com/art/novel) *[Crome Yellow](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Crome-Yellow)* (1921). Drawing upon Lawrence and Eliot, he concerned himself in his novels of ideas—[*Antic Hay*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Antic-Hay) (1923), [*Those Barren Leaves*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Those-Barren-Leaves) (1925), and [*Point Counter Point*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Point-Counter-Point) (1928)—with the fate of the individual in rootless modernity. His pessimistic vision found its most complete expression in the 1930s, however, in his most famous and inventive novel, the anti-utopian [fantasy](https://www.britannica.com/art/fantasy-narrative-genre) [*Brave New World*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brave-New-World) (1932), and his account of the anxieties of middle-class [intellectuals](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectuals) of the period, [*Eyeless in Gaza*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eyeless-in-Gaza) (1936).

Huxley’s frank and disillusioned manner was echoed by the dramatist [Noël Coward](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Noel-Coward) in The Vortex (1924), which established his reputation; by the poet [Robert Graves](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Graves) in his autobiography, [*Good-Bye to All That*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Good-Bye-to-All-That) (1929); and by the poet [Richard Aldington](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Aldington) in his [*Death of a Hero*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Death-of-a-Hero) (1929), a semiautobiographical novel of prewar bohemian [London](https://www.britannica.com/place/London) and the trenches. Exceptions to this dominant mood were found among writers too old to consider themselves, as did Graves and Aldington, members of a betrayed generation. In [*A Passage to India*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Passage-to-India-novel) (1924), [E.M. Forster](https://www.britannica.com/biography/E-M-Forster) examined the quest for and failure of human understanding among various ethnic and social groups in India under British rule. In [*Parade’s End*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Parades-End) (1950; [comprising](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/comprising) Some Do Not, 1924; No More Parades, 1925; A Man Could Stand Up, 1926; and Last Post, 1928) [Ford Madox Ford](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ford-Madox-Ford), with an obvious debt to James and Conrad, examined the [demise](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/demise) of aristocratic [England](https://www.britannica.com/place/England) in the course of the war, exploring on a larger scale the themes he had treated with brilliant economy in his short novel [*The Good Soldier*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Good-Soldier) (1915). And in Wolf Solent (1929) and A Glastonbury Romance (1932), [John Cowper Powys](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Cowper-Powys) developed an [eccentric](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eccentric) and highly erotic mysticism.

These were, however, writers of an earlier, more confident era. A younger and more contemporary voice belonged to members of the [Bloomsbury group](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bloomsbury-group). Setting themselves against the humbug and hypocrisy that, they believed, had marked their parents’ generation in upper-class England, they aimed to be uncompromisingly honest in personal and artistic life. In [Lytton Strachey](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lytton-Strachey)’s iconoclastic biographical study [*Eminent Victorians*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eminent-Victorians) (1918), this amounted to little more than amusing irreverence, even though Strachey had a profound effect upon the writing of biography; but in the [fiction](https://www.britannica.com/art/fiction-literature) of [Virginia Woolf](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Virginia-Woolf) the rewards of this outlook were both profound and moving. In short stories and novels of great delicacy and lyrical power, she set out to portray the limitations of the self, caught as it is in time, and suggested that these could be [transcended](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transcended), if only momentarily, by engagement with another self, a place, or a work of art. This preoccupation not only charged the act of reading and writing with unusual significance but also produced, in [*To the Lighthouse*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/To-the-Lighthouse) (1927), [*The Waves*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Waves) (1931)—perhaps her most inventive and complex novel—and [*Between the Acts*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Between-the-Acts) (1941), her most sombre and moving work, some of the most daring fiction produced in the 20th century.

Woolf believed that her viewpoint offered an [alternative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alternative) to the destructive egotism of the masculine mind, an egotism that had found its outlet in World War I, but, as she made clear in her long [essay](https://www.britannica.com/art/essay) [*A Room of One’s Own*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Room-of-Ones-Own) (1929), she did not consider this viewpoint to be the unique possession of women. In her fiction she presented men who possessed what she held to be feminine characteristics, a regard for others and an awareness of the multiplicity of experience; but she remained pessimistic about women gaining positions of influence, even though she set out the desirability of this in her feminist study [*Three Guineas*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Three-Guineas) (1938). Together with Joyce, who greatly influenced her [*Mrs. Dalloway*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mrs-Dalloway-novel-by-Woolf) (1925), Woolf transformed the treatment of subjectivity, time, and history in fiction and helped create a feeling among her contemporaries that traditional forms of fiction—with their frequent indifference to the mysterious and inchoate inner life of characters—were no longer adequate. Her eminence as a literary critic and [essayist](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mr-Bennett-and-Mrs-Brown) did much to foster an interest in the work of other female [Modernist](https://www.britannica.com/art/Modernism-art) writers of the period, such as [Katherine Mansfield](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Katherine-Mansfield) (born in New Zealand) and [Dorothy Richardson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dorothy-M-Richardson).

Indeed, as a result of late 20th-century rereadings of Modernism, scholars now recognize the central importance of women writers to British Modernism, particularly as [manifested](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifested) in the works of Mansfield, Richardson, [May Sinclair](https://www.britannica.com/biography/May-Sinclair), Mary Butts, [Rebecca West](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rebecca-West) (pseudonym of Cicily Isabel Andrews), [Jean Rhys](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Rhys) (born in the West Indies), and the American poet [Hilda Doolittle](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hilda-Doolittle) (who spent her adult life mainly in England and Switzerland). [Sinclair](https://www.britannica.com/biography/May-Sinclair), who produced 24 novels in the course of a [prolific](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prolific) literary career, was an active feminist and an advocate of psychical research, including psychoanalysis. These concerns were evident in her most accomplished novels, Mary Olivier: A Life (1919) and Life and Death of Harriett Frean (1922), which explored the ways in which her female characters contributed to their own social and psychological repression. [West](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rebecca-West), whose pen name was based on one of Norwegian playwright [Henrik Ibsen](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henrik-Ibsen)’s female characters, was similarly interested in female self-negation. From her first and greatly underrated novel, [*The Return of the Soldier*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Return-of-the-Soldier) (1918), to later novels such as [*Harriet Hume*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Harriet-Hume) (1929), she explored how and why middle-class women so tenaciously upheld the division between private and public spheres and helped to sustain the traditional values of the masculine world. West became a highly successful writer on social and political issues—she wrote memorably on the Balkans and on the [Nürnberg trials](https://www.britannica.com/event/Nurnberg-trials) at the end of World War II—but her public acclaim as a journalist obscured during her lifetime her greater achievements as a novelist.

In her 13-volume Pilgrimage (the first volume, Pointed Roofs, appeared in 1915; the last, March Moonlight, in 1967), [Richardson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dorothy-M-Richardson) was far more positive about the capacity of women to realize themselves. She presented events through the mind of her autobiographical [persona](https://www.britannica.com/art/persona-literature), Miriam Henderson, describing both the social and economic limitations and the psychological and [intellectual](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual) possibilities of a young woman without means coming of age with the new century. Other women writers of the period also made major contributions to new kinds of psychological realism. In Bliss and Other Stories (1920) and The Garden Party and Other Stories (1922), [Mansfield](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Katherine-Mansfield) (who went to England at age 19) revolutionized the [short story](https://www.britannica.com/art/short-story) by rejecting the mechanisms of plot in favour of an impressionistic sense of the flow of experience, punctuated by an arresting moment of insight. In Postures (1928, reprinted as Quartet in 1969), Voyage in the Dark (1934), and Good Morning, Midnight (1939), [Rhys](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Rhys) depicted the lives of [vulnerable](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vulnerable) women adrift in London and Paris, vulnerable because they were poor and because the words in which they innocently believed—honesty in relationships, [fidelity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fidelity) in marriage—proved in practice to be empty.

Creating heavily symbolic novels based on the quest-romance, such as Ashe of Rings (1925) and Armed with Madness (1928), Butts explored a more general loss of value in the contemporary wasteland (T.S. Eliot was an obvious influence on her work), while [Doolittle](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hilda-Doolittle) (whose reputation rested upon her contribution to the Imagist movement in poetry) used the quest-romance in a series of autobiographical novels—including Paint It Today (written in 1921 but first published in 1992) and Bid Me to Live (1960)—to chart a way through the contemporary world for female characters in search of sustaining, often same-sex relationships. Following the posthumous publication of her strikingly original prose, Doolittle’s reputation was revised and [enhanced](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enhanced).

## The 1930s

World War I created a profound sense of crisis in English [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture), and this became even more intense with the worldwide economic collapse of the late 1920s and early ’30s, the rise of fascism, the [Spanish Civil War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Spanish-Civil-War) (1936–39), and the approach of another full-scale conflict in [Europe](https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe). It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the writing of the 1930s was bleak and pessimistic: even [Evelyn Waugh](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Evelyn-Waugh)’s sharp and amusing [satire](https://www.britannica.com/art/satire) on contemporary England, [*Vile Bodies*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vile-Bodies) (1930), ended with another, more disastrous war.

Divisions of class and the burden of sexual repression became common and interrelated themes in the fiction of the 1930s. In his [trilogy](https://www.britannica.com/art/trilogy) [*A Scots Quair*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Scots-Quair) (Sunset Song [1932], Cloud Howe [1933], and Grey Granite [1934]), the novelist [Lewis Grassic Gibbon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lewis-Grassic-Gibbon) (pseudonym of James Leslie Mitchell) gives a panoramic account of Scottish rural and working-class life. The work resembles Lawrence’s novel [*The Rainbow*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Rainbow) in its historical sweep and intensity of vision. Walter Greenwood’s Love on the Dole (1933) is a bleak record, in the manner of Bennett, of the economic depression in a northern working-class community; and [Graham Greene](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Graham-Greene)’s It’s a Battlefield (1934) and [*Brighton Rock*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brighton-Rock-novel-by-Greene) (1938) are desolate studies, in the manner of Conrad, of the loneliness and guilt of men and women trapped in a contemporary England of conflict and decay. [*A Clergyman’s Daughter*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Clergymans-Daughter) (1935) and [*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Keep-the-Aspidistra-Flying) (1936), by [George Orwell](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Orwell), are evocations—in the manner of Wells and, in the latter case unsuccessfully, of Joyce—of contemporary lower-middle-class existence, and [*The Road to Wigan Pier*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Road-to-Wigan-Pier) (1937) is a report of northern working-class mores. [Elizabeth Bowen](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Bowen)’s [*Death of the Heart*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Death-of-the-Heart) (1938) is a [sardonic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sardonic) analysis, in the manner of James, of contemporary upper-class values.

Yet the most characteristic writing of the decade grew out of the determination to supplement the [diagnosis](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diagnosis) of class division and sexual repression with their cure. It was no accident that the poetry of [W.H. Auden](https://www.britannica.com/biography/W-H-Auden) and his Oxford contemporaries [C. Day-Lewis](https://www.britannica.com/biography/C-Day-Lewis), [Louis MacNeice](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-MacNeice), and [Stephen Spender](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephen-Spender) became quickly identified as the authentic voice of the new generation, for it matched despair with defiance. These self-styled prophets of a new world [envisaged](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/envisaged) freedom from the bourgeois order being achieved in various ways. For Day-Lewis and Spender, technology held out particular promise. This, allied to Marxist precepts, would in their view bring an end to poverty and the suffering it caused. For Auden especially, sexual repression was the enemy, and here the writings of [Sigmund Freud](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sigmund-Freud) and D.H. Lawrence were valuable. Whatever their individual preoccupations, these poets produced in the very [play](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) of their poetry, with its mastery of different [genres](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genres), its rapid shifts of tone and mood, and its strange [juxtapositions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/juxtapositions) of the [colloquial](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colloquial) and [esoteric](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/esoteric), a blend of seriousness and high spirits irresistible to their peers.

The adventurousness of the new generation was shown in part by its love of travel (as in [Christopher Isherwood](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Christopher-Isherwood-British-American-author)’s novels [*Mr. Norris Changes Trains*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mr-Norris-Changes-Trains) [1935] and [*Goodbye to Berlin*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Goodbye-to-Berlin) [1939], which reflect his experiences of postwar Germany), in part by its readiness for political involvement, and in part by its openness to the writing of the avant-garde of the Continent. The verse dramas coauthored by Auden and Isherwood, of which [*The Ascent of F6*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Ascent-of-F6) (1936) is the most notable, owed much to [Bertolt Brecht](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertolt-Brecht); the political parables of [Rex Warner](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rex-Ernest-Warner), of which [*The Aerodrome*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Aerodrome) (1941) is the most accomplished, owed much to [Franz Kafka](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franz-Kafka); and the complex and often obscure poetry of [David Gascoyne](https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Gascoyne) and [Dylan Thomas](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dylan-Thomas) owed much to the [Surrealists](https://www.britannica.com/art/Surrealism). Even so, Yeats’s mature poetry and Eliot’s [*Waste Land*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Waste-Land), with its parodies, its satirical edge, its multiplicity of styles, and its quest for spiritual renewal, provided the most significant models and inspiration for the young writers of the period.

The writing of the interwar period had great breadth and [diversity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity), from Modernist experimentation to new documentary modes of realism and from art as [propaganda](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda) (particularly in the theatre) to conventional fiction, drama, and poetry produced for the popular market. Two trends stand out: first, the impact of film on the writing of the decade, not least on styles of visual realization and [dialogue](https://www.britannica.com/art/dialogue), and, second, the [ubiquitous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ubiquitous) preoccupation with questions of time, on the psychological, historical, and even cosmological levels. As the world became less stable, writers sought both to reflect this and to seek some more-fundamental grounding than that provided by contemporary circumstances.

The literature of [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II) (1939–45)

The outbreak of war in 1939, as in 1914, brought to an end an era of great [intellectual](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual) and creative exuberance. Individuals were dispersed; the rationing of paper affected the production of magazines and books; and the poem and the [short story](https://www.britannica.com/art/short-story), convenient forms for men under arms, became the favoured means of literary expression. It was hardly a time for new beginnings, although the poets of the [New Apocalypse](https://www.britannica.com/art/New-Apocalypse) movement produced three anthologies (1940–45) inspired by Neoromantic anarchism. No important new novelists or playwrights appeared. In fact, the best [fiction](https://www.britannica.com/art/fiction-literature) about wartime—Evelyn Waugh’s Put Out More Flags (1942), Henry Green’s Caught (1943), James Hanley’s No Directions (1943), [Patrick Hamilton](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Patrick-Hamilton)’s The Slaves of Solitude (1947), and [Elizabeth Bowen’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Bowen) The Heat of the Day (1949)—was produced by established writers. Only three new poets (all of whom died on active service) showed promise: [Alun Lewis](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alun-Lewis), Sidney Keyes, and [Keith Douglas](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Keith-Castellain-Douglas), the latter the most gifted and distinctive, whose eerily detached accounts of the battlefield revealed a poet of potential greatness. Lewis’s haunting short stories about the lives of officers and enlisted men are also works of very great accomplishment.

It was a poet of an earlier generation, [T.S. Eliot](https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-S-Eliot), who produced in his [*Four Quartets*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Four-Quartets) (1935–42; published as a whole, 1943) the masterpiece of the war. Reflecting upon language, time, and history, he searched, in the three quartets written during the war, for [moral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral) and religious significance in the midst of destruction and strove to counter the spirit of [nationalism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism) inevitably present in a nation at war. The creativity that had seemed to end with the tortured religious [poetry](https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry) and verse [drama](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) of the 1920s and ’30s had a rich and extraordinary late flowering as Eliot concerned himself, on the scale of The Waste Land but in a very different manner and mood, with the well-being of the society in which he lived.

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## Literature after 1945

Increased attachment to religion most immediately characterized [literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/literature) after World War II. This was particularly perceptible in authors who had already established themselves before the war. W.H. Auden turned from Marxist politics to Christian commitment, expressed in poems that attractively combine classical form with [vernacular](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular) relaxedness. Christian belief suffused the verse plays of T.S. Eliot and [Christopher Fry](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Christopher-Fry). While [Graham Greene](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Graham-Greene) continued the powerful merging of thriller plots with studies of moral and psychological [ambiguity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity) that he had developed through the 1930s, his [Roman Catholicism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism) loomed especially large in novels such as The Heart of the Matter (1948) and The End of the Affair (1951). [Evelyn Waugh](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Evelyn-Waugh)’s Brideshead Revisited (1945) and his Sword of Honour [trilogy](https://www.britannica.com/art/trilogy) (1965; published separately as Men at Arms [1952], Officers and Gentlemen [1955], and Unconditional Surrender [1961]) venerate Roman Catholicism as the repository of values seen as under threat from the advance of [democracy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy). Less-traditional spiritual [solace](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solace) was found in Eastern mysticism by [Aldous Huxley](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aldous-Huxley) and [Christopher Isherwood](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Christopher-Isherwood-British-American-author) and by [Robert Graves](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Graves), who maintained an impressive output of taut, graceful [lyric poetry](https://www.britannica.com/art/lyric) behind which lay the creed he expressed in [*The White Goddess*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-White-Goddess) (1948), a matriarchal mythology revering the female principle.