

Purple Patch. A translation of Horace's Latin phrase "purpureus . . . pannus" in his versified *Ars Poetica* (first century B.C.). It signifies a marked heightening of style in rhythm, diction, repetitions, and figurative language that makes a passage of verse or prose—especially a descriptive passage—stand out from its context. The term is sometimes applied without derogation to a set piece, separable and quotable, in which an author rises to an occasion. An example is the eulogy of England by the dying John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (II. i. 40 ff.), beginning:

This royal throne of kings, this scept'ed isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise. . .

Other well-known examples are Lord Byron's depiction of the Duchess of Richmond's ball on the eve of Waterloo in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III, xxi–xxviii (1816), and Walter Pater's prose description of the *Mona Lisa* in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci in *The Renaissance* (1873). Usually, however, "purple passage" connotes disparagement, implying that one has self-consciously girded oneself to perform a piece of fine writing. In Stella Gibbons' satiric novel, *Cold Comfort Farm*, the fictional narrator is proud of her purple descriptive passages, and follows the example of Baedeker's guidebooks by marking them with varying numbers of asterisks: "Dawn crept over the Downs like a sinister white animal, followed by the snarling cries of the wind eating its way between the black boughs of the thorns."

Queer Theory is often used to designate the combined area of gay and lesbian studies, together with the theoretical and critical writings about all modes of variance—such as cross-dressing, bisexuality, and transsexuality—from society's normative model of sexual identity, orientation, and activities. The term "queer" was originally derogatory, used to stigmatize male and female same-sex love as deviant and unnatural; since the early 1990s, however, it has been increasingly adopted by gays and lesbians themselves as a non-invidious term to identify a way of life and an area for scholarly inquiry. (See Teresa de Lauretis, *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, 1991; and Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, 1996.)

Both **lesbian studies** and **gay studies** began as "liberation movements"—in parallel with the movements for *African-American* and *feminist* liberation—during the anti-Vietnam War, anti-establishment, and countercultural ferment of the late 1960s and 1970s. Since that time these studies have maintained a close relation to the political activities to achieve, for gays and lesbians, political, legal, and economic rights equal to those of the heterosexual majority. Through the 1970s, the two movements were primarily separatist: gays often thought of themselves as quintessentially male, while many lesbians, aligning themselves with the feminist movement, characterized the gay movement as sharing the anti-female attitudes of the reigning patriarchal culture. Recently, however, there has been a growing recognition (signalized by the adoption of the joint term "queer") of the degree to which the two groups share a history as a despised and suppressed minority and possess common political and social aims.

In the 1970s, researchers for the most part assumed that there was a fixed, unitary identity as a gay man or as a lesbian that has remained stable through human history. A major endeavor was to identify and reclaim the works of non-heterosexual writers from Plato to Walt Whitman, Oscar Wilde, Proust, Gide, Auden, and James Baldwin, and from the Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos to Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde. The list included writers (Shakespeare and Christina Rossetti are examples) who represented in their literary works homoerotic subject matter, but whose own sexuality the available biographical evidence leaves uncertain. (See Claude J. Summers, *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader's Companion to the Writers and Their Works, from Antiquity to the Present*, 1995.) In the 1980s and 1990s, however—in large part because of the assimilation of the viewpoints and analytic methods of Derrida, Foucault, and other *poststructuralists*—the earlier assumptions about a unitary and stable gay or lesbian identity were frequently put to question, and historical and critical analyses became increasingly subtle and complex.

A number of queer theorists, for example, adopted the deconstructive mode of dismantling the key binary oppositions of Western culture, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and natural/unnatural, by which a spectrum of diverse things is forced into only two categories, and in which the first category is assigned privilege, power, and centrality, while the second is derogated, subordinated, and marginalized. (See under *deconstruction*.) In an important essay of 1980, "Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich posited what she called the "lesbian continuum" as a way of stressing how far-ranging and diverse is the spectrum of love and bonding among women, including female friendship, the family relationship between mother and daughter, and women's partnerships and social groups, as well as overtly physical same-sex relations. Later theorists such as Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler undertook to invert the standard hierarchical opposition by which homosexuality is marginalized and made unnatural, by stressing the extent to which the ostensible normativity of heterosexuality is based on the suppression and denial of same-sex desires and relationships.

Another prominent theoretical procedure has been to undo the "essentialist" assumption that heterosexual and homosexual are universal and transhistorical types of human subjects, or identities, by historicizing these categories—that is, by proposing that they are social and discursive *constructs* that emerged under special ideological conditions in a particular culture at a particular time. (See *essentialism*, under *humanism*.) A central text is the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976), which claims that, while there had long been a social category of sodomy as a transgressive human act, the "homosexual," as a special type of human *subject* or identity, was a construction of the medical and legal discourse of the latter part of the nineteenth century. In a further development of constructionist theory, Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), described the categories of gender and of sexuality as *performative*, in the sense that the features which a cultural discourse institutes as masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual, it also makes happen, by establishing an identity that the socialized individual assimilates and the patterns of behavior that he or she enacts. Homosexuality, by this

view, is not a particular identity that effects a pattern of action, but a socially pre-established pattern of action that produces the effect of originating in a particular identity. Another constructionist text, frequently cited in the arguments against essentialism, is "One Is Not Born a Woman" (1981) by Monique Wittig, in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992).

The constructionist view has been elaborated by considering the cross-influences of race and of economic class in producing the identities and modes of behavior of gender and sexuality. (See, for example, Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," 1977, reprinted in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African-American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell, 1994; and Ann Allen Stickley, "The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview," in *Conditions: Five Two*, 1979.) Sustained debate among queer theorists concerns the risk of a radical constructionism, which would dissolve a lesbian or gay identity into a purely discursive product specific to a particular culture, as against the need to affirm a special and enduring identity in order to signalize and celebrate it, as well as to establish a basis for concerted political action.

A number of journals are now devoted to queer theory and to lesbian, gay, and transgender studies and criticism; the field has also become the subject of regularly scheduled learned conferences, and has been established in the curriculum of the humanities and social sciences in a great many colleges and universities. Anthologies: Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow, eds., *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions* (1990); Diana Fuss, ed., *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (1991); and Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (1993), which includes selections by almost all the theorists and critics mentioned in this entry. *Out Takes*, ed. Ellis Hanson (1991), is a collection of essays in queer criticism devoted to a variety of motion pictures. There is a large and rapidly growing body of books on these subjects. In addition to the texts listed above, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (1990); Gregory W. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation, Marlowe to Milton* (1991); Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope, eds., *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (1992); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (1993); Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993); Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (1994); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998). See also the readings listed under *feminist criticism* and *gender studies*.

Reader-Response Criticism does not designate any one critical theory, but rather a focus on the process of reading a literary text that is shared by many of the critical modes, American and European, which have come into prominence since the 1960s. Reader-response critics turn from the traditional conception of a work as an achieved structure of meanings to the ongoing mental operations and responses of readers as their eyes follow a text on the page before them. In the more drastic forms of such criticism, matters that had been considered