

# THE ENGLISH MAJOR'S LITERARY TERMINOLOGY CHEAT SHEET

## *A Note from the Author/Collator/Editor/Fellow Cheater:*

Here's a collection of literary terms that will, either immediately or in the future, be important for you to understand. There are terms and concepts here that you'll need to incorporate into an analysis of a piece of fiction, the scansion of a poem, or the interpretation a drama. You don't have to memorize these, but you should be familiar with them. If one of your professors uses a word you don't understand, you should write it down and check here for its meaning. If it's not included here, check the sources I list at the end.

***A posteriori:*** In rhetoric, logic, and philosophy, a belief or proposition is said to be *a posteriori* if it can only be determined through observation. In general, these are inductive arguments in which the thinker puts forth a belief or proposition as a universal rule she or he puts forth in response to an example seen in nature; the specific observed example comes first, and the logical argument follows on a universal level later.

***A priori:*** In rhetoric, logic, and philosophy, an argument is said to be *a priori* if its truth can be known or inferred independently of any direct perception. Logic, geometry, and mathematics are usually held as such. In general, these *a priori* arguments rely upon deductive reasoning—fashioning a general statement that should (in terms of logic) be true, and then applying the argument to a specific instance; the universal statement comes first, and then specific applications in the real world are expected to match it.

**Accent:** The emphasis or stress placed on a syllable in poetry. Traditional poetry commonly uses patterns of accented and unaccented syllables (known as feet) that create distinct rhythms. Much modern poetry uses less formal arrangements that create a sense of freedom and spontaneity. The following line from *Hamlet*: “To be or not to be: that is the question” has five accents, on the words “be,” “not,” “be,” and “that,” and the first syllable of “question.”

**Act:** The major structuring principle of drama; it is traditionally subdivided into scenes. Elizabethan theater adopted this formal structure from classical antiquity, dividing the plot into five acts; in the 19c, the number of acts was reduced to four, in the 20c generally to three. Sometimes acts are abandoned altogether in favor of a loose sequence of scenes.

**Actor:** An agent that stands at the intersection of text, transformation, and performance in drama and thereby distinguishes the performing arts from literary texts in the narrow sense of the term. The actor is the mediator of the combined concerns of the author and the director in the performance, the last phase of drama. Traditional actor training distinguishes between the internal method (with a focus on individual qualities of the actor) and the external method (stressing technique).

**Affective fallacy:** The “wrong belief in subjective effects.” It is an important term of new criticism, attacking any kind of interpretation that considers the reader's emotional reactions to a text as relevant to the scholarly analysis of text. See also *intentional fallacy*.

**Alienation:** A term from Marxism, suggesting that we live in an unnatural state, in a state of estrangement from our true human nature, which is caused by the economic conditions of production in a capitalist society.

**Alienation effect:** According to the German playwright and theoretician Bertolt Brecht, the alienation effect should guarantee that dramatic performances, actors—and above all the

audience—maintain a critical distance from the play in order to be aware of the artificial and illusory nature of a theatrical performance. See also *defamiliarization*.

**Allegory:** A symbolic narrative in which the surface details imply a secondary meaning. Allegory often takes the form of a story in which the characters represent moral qualities. The most famous example in English is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the hero named Christian flees the City of Destruction and travels through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, and finally arrives at the Celestial City. The entire narrative is a representation of the human soul's pilgrimage through temptation and doubt to reach salvation in heaven. Medieval works were frequently allegorical, such as the plays *Mankind* and *Everyman*. Other important allegorical works include mythological allegories like Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche in *The Golden Ass* and Prudentius' *Psychomachiae*. More recent non-mythological allegories include Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Butler's *Erewhon*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Kay Boyle's story "Astronomer's Wife" and Christina Rossetti's poem "Up-Hill" both contain allegorical elements.

An allegory is an act of interpretation, a way of understanding, rather than a genre in and of itself. Poems, novels, or plays can all be allegorical, in whole or in part. These allegories can be as short as a single sentence or as long as a ten-volume book. The label "allegory" comes from an interaction between symbols that creates a coherent meaning beyond that of the literal level of interpretation.

**Alliteration:** A type of rhyme in which the first consonant is repeated within the same line. See also *assonance*. The following description of the Green Knight from *Sir Gavain and the Green Knight* gives an example of alliteration:

And in guise all of green, the gear and the man:  
A coat cut close, that clung to his sides  
An a mantle to match, made with a lining  
Of furs cut and fitted—the fabric was noble. . . .

**Allusion:** A reference to a familiar literary or historical person or event, used to make an idea more easily understood. For example, describing someone as a "Romeo" makes an allusion to Shakespeare's famous young lover in *Romeo and Juliet*.

**Ambiguity:** In common conversation, it is a vague or equivocal expression when precision would be more useful. Intentionally vague expressions in literature—any wording, action, or symbol that can be read in divergent ways—leave something in the text undetermined in order to create multiple possible meanings. William Empson called ambiguity "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language."

**Anachronism:** Placing an event, person, item, or verbal expression in the wrong historical period. Shakespeare has one in *Julius Caesar*:

Brutus: Peace! Count the clock.  
Cassius: The clock has stricken three (Act II, scene i, lines 193-94).

Elizabethan theater often intentionally used anachronism in its costuming, a tradition that survives today when Shakespeare's plays are performed in biker garb or in Victorian frippery. Indeed, from surviving illustrations, the acting companies in Elizabethan England appeared to deliberately create anachronisms in their costumes. Some actors would dress in current Elizabethan garb, others in garb that was a few decades out of date, and others wore pseudo-historical costumes from past-centuries—all within a single scene or play.

**Analogy:** A comparison of two things made to explain something unfamiliar through its similarities to something familiar, or to prove one point based on the acceptedness of another. Similes and metaphors are types of analogies. Analogies often take the form of an extended simile, as in Blake's aphorism: "As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys."

**Anapest:** A poetic foot in which two unstressed syllables are followed by a stressed syllable, as in:

    ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea

**Anthropomorphism:** The presentation of animals or objects in human shape or with human characteristics. The term is derived from the Greek word for "human form."

**Apostrophe:** A literary figure in which the writer addresses a non-human entity as if it could hear and speak and hold a dialogue, as in Keats' apostrophe to Autumn in the first two lines of "To Autumn":

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

**Archetypal criticism:** Based on the depth psychology of C.G. Jung, this text-oriented approach analyzes texts according to collective motifs or archetypes of the human unconscious which are shared by various periods and languages and appear in myth and literature (e.g., mother figure, shadow, etc.). See also *myth criticism*.

**Archetype:** An original model or pattern from which other later copies are made, especially a character, an action, or situation that seems to represent common patterns of human life. Often, archetypes include a symbol, a theme, a setting, or a character that some critics think have a common meaning in an entire culture, or even the entire human race. These images have particular emotional resonance and power. Archetypes recur in different times and places in myth, literature, folklore, fairy tales, dreams, artwork, and religious rituals. Using the comparative anthropological work of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, psychologist Carl Jung theorized that the archetype originates in the collective unconscious of mankind—the shared experiences of a race or culture, such as birth, death, love, family life, and struggles to survive and grow up. These would be expressed in the subconscious of an individual who would recreate them in myths, dreams, and literature. Examples of archetypes found cross-culturally include the following:

- 1) *Recurring symbolic situations* (such as the orphaned prince or the lost chieftain's son raised ignorant of his heritage until he is rediscovered by his parents, or the damsel in distress rescued from a hideous monster by a handsome young man who later marries the girl. Also, the long journey, the difficult quest or search, the catalog of difficult tasks, the pursuit of revenge, the descent into the underworld, redemptive rituals, fertility rites, the great flood, the end of the world);
- 2) *Recurring themes* (such as the Faustian bargain; pride preceding a fall; the inevitable nature of death, fate, or punishment; blindness; madness; taboos such as forbidden love, patricide, or incest);
- 3) *Recurring characters* (such as witches or ugly crones who cannibalize children, lame blacksmiths of preternatural skill, womanizing Don Juans, the hunted man, the femme fatale, the snob, the social climber, the wise old man as mentor or teacher, star-crossed lovers; the caring mother-figure, the helpless little old lady, the stern father-figure, the guilt-ridden figure searching for redemption, the braggart, the young star-crossed lovers,

the bully, the villain in black, the oracle or prophet, the mad scientist, the underdog who emerges victorious, the mourning widow or women in lamentation);

- 4) *Symbolic colors* (green as a symbol for life, vegetation, or summer; blue as a symbol for water or tranquility; white or black as a symbol of purity; or red as a symbol of blood, fire, or passion) and so on;
- 5) *Recurring images* (such as blood, water, pregnancy, ashes, cleanness, dirtiness, caverns, phallic symbols, yonic symbols, the ruined tower, the rose or lotus, the lion, the snake, the eagle, the hanged man, the dying god that rises again, the feast or banquet, the fall from a great height).

**Article:** One of the shorter forms of secondary sources on a specific topic, text, or author published in a journal or collection of essays. The term “article” is used synonymously with essay, which, however, also refers to a semi-literary genre in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Aside:** A form of monologue in drama. It is not meant to be heard by the other figures of the play, providing information only for the audience.

**Assonance:** A type of rhyme in which the first vowel of a word is repeated later in the same line. See also alliteration. There are several patterns of assonance in these lines from Hopkins’s “God’s Grandeur”:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

**Author-oriented approaches:** Movements in literary criticism which try to establish a direct connection between a literary text and the biography of the author. See also *biographical criticism*.

**Ballad:** A sub-genre of narrative poetry. It is situated between the longer epic poetry and the shorter lyric poetry. It is characterized by well-rounded plots and complex narrative techniques, but it is not sufficient in range and size to match the proportions of the epic or the romance. It traditionally uses a quatrain form. An example of an anonymous folk ballad is “Edward,” which dates from the Middle Ages. Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and Keats’ “La Belle Dame sans Merci” are examples of literary ballads.

**Bibliography or list of works cited:** An alphabetical list of primary and secondary sources used in a scholarly paper to document sources. See also *footnotes* and *critical apparatus*.

**Bildungsroman:** (German for “novel of education”) The term is also applied in English for a sub-genre of the novel which generally shows the development of a *protagonist* from childhood to maturity. See also *coming-of-age story*.

**Biographical criticism:** An author-oriented approach in literary criticism. It tries to establish a relationship between the biography of an author and his or her works.

**Biographical fallacy:** The error of believing, as George Kane says, that “speculative lives” of narrators and characters “have some historical necessity,” i.e., characters and events in the author’s historical life must have inspired, influenced, or been the source for any fictional events or characters in the work, or that the narrative speaker in a literary work must be synonymous with the author or poet’s own voice and viewpoints. It was very common in 19<sup>c</sup> scholarship, for instance, to assume that Shakespeare’s political or religious beliefs manifest in Prospero’s words or Hamlet’s soliloquies. The truth is often more complex; several of Shakespeare’s characters in different plays express diametrically opposed viewpoints from each other, so which ones (if any) can we safely declare represent the

playwright's personal perspectives? Even in cases where the narrator speaks in the first person, or when a character in a poem has the exact same name as the author, it proves impossible to prove that voice is identical with the author's personal beliefs. For example, the voice of "Geoffrey" in *The Canterbury Tales* appears to be ignorant of details that the historical author Geoffrey Chaucer knew intimately, so his fictional character cannot be equated safely with the historical author Geoffrey Chaucer who wrote the work. Likewise, the voice speaking in the poem, "Daddy," by Sylvia Plath, refers to multiple suicide attempts and a father's early death, and these two details lure readers into equating that voice with the suicide attempts and abusive father in the poet Sylvia Plath's own life—even though the age of the father's death and the number of suicide attempts do not match Plath's age when she attempted suicide or her total number of suicide attempts. Trying to make a direct connection here results in the biographical fallacy.

**Blank Verse:** Loosely, any unrhymed poetry, but more generally, unrhymed iambic pentameter verse (composed of lines of five two-syllable feet with the first syllable unaccented, the second accented). Blank verse has been used by poets since the Renaissance for its flexibility and its graceful, dignified tone. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is in blank verse, as are most of Shakespeare's plays.

**Bowdlerization:** The attempt to change or remove passages or sections in a larger work while still letting the work be published—a sort of mini-censorship. A text altered in this way is "bowdlerized." This term comes from the name of Reverend Thomas Bowdler (1754-1825), who edited *The Family Shakespeare* (1815-18). In his edition, Bowdler removed whatever he considered "unfit to be read by a gentleman in the company of ladies."

**Cadence:** The melodic pattern just before the end of a sentence or phrase—e.g., an interrogation or an exhortation. More generally, the natural rhythm of language depending on the position of stressed and unstressed syllables. Cadence is a major component of individual writers' styles. A cadence group is a coherent group of words spoken as a single rhetorical unit, such as a prepositional phrase, "of parting day" or a noun phrase, "our inalienable rights."

**Caesura:** A pause in a line of poetry, usually occurring near the middle. It typically corresponds to a break in the natural rhythm or sense of the line but is sometimes shifted to create special meanings or rhythmic effects. The opening line of Poe's "The Raven" contains a caesura following "dreary": "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary..."

**Canon:** A term originally used for holy texts. It now refers to the entirety of those literary texts which are considered to be the most important in literary history.

**Canto:** A sub-division of an epic or narrative poem comparable to a chapter in a novel. Examples include the divisions in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, or Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

**Carpe Diem:** A Latin term meaning "seize the day." This is a traditional theme of poetry, especially lyrics. A carpe diem poem advises the reader or the person it addresses to live for today and enjoy the pleasures of the moment. Two celebrated carpe diem poems are Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time."

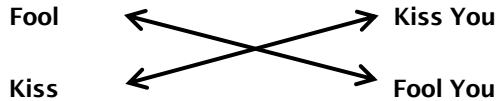
**Catharsis:** This term from Aristotle's theory of drama means "cleansing" in Greek. It is the effect of purification achieved (by audiences watching a play or readers reading a literary work) through the contemplation of how others experience pain and suffering.

**Censorship:** The attempt to either stop a particular work from being printed, an attempt to stop a work from being taught in schools, or an attempt to make it illegal to buy or sell copies of that work. In medieval and early Renaissance times, for instance, the Inquisition had a list known as the “Index of Banned Works,” and any titles on this list were supposed to be destroyed or confiscated by the church. In Hitler’s Germany, as an example, any work by a Jewish author or any work that criticized the Nazi party was to be publicly burned.

**Character:** A figure presented in a literary text, including main character or protagonist and minor character. Recurring character types in drama are called *stock characters*.

**Characterization:** The figures in a literary text can either be characterized as types or individuals. Types that show only one dominant feature are called *flat characters*. If a figure is more complex, the term *round character* is applied. In both cases, a figure has to be presented either through showing (dramatic method) or telling (narration). See also *modes of presentation*.

**Chiasmus:** An arrangement of letters, words, and phrases in the form of a cross (from the Greek letter “X”); it is most commonly used in two adjacent lines of a poem. For example, take “Never let a Fool Kiss You or a Kiss Fool You.”



**Chorus:** In classical Greek theater the chorus, a group of reciters or chanters, was positioned in the orchestra between the audience and the actors. Early Greek drama did not depend on dialogue between the figures of a play as much as on dialogue between figures and the chorus. The chorus generally recited lyrical poems, either commenting on the action of the play or addressing the actors in a didactic manner.

**Climax:** (also *crisis* or *turning point*) The crucial element of traditional plot when the action undergoes decisive changes. In linear plots the climax is preceded by exposition and complication and followed by the resolution.

**Close reading:** A central term in new criticism. It is often used as a synonym for intrinsic or text-immanent interpretation. See also *affective fallacy* and *intentional fallacy*.

**Closet drama:** A stylized sub-genre of drama which is not intended to be performed but to be read in private.

**Collective unconscious:** In 20c Jungian psychology, this term refers to a shared group of *archetypes* (atavistic and universal images, cultural symbols, and recurring situations dealing with the fundamental facts of human life) passed along from each generation to the next in folklore and stories or generated anew by the way we must face similar problems to those our ancestors faced. Within a culture, the collective unconscious forms a treasury of powerful shared images and symbols found in our dreams, art stories, myths, and religious icons.

**Colonialism:** The term refers broadly and generally to the habit of powerful civilizations to “colonize” less powerful ones. On the obvious level, this process can take the form of a literal geographic occupation, outright enslavement, religious conversion at gun-point, or forced assimilation of native peoples. On a more subtle level, this process can take the form of bureaucratic policy that incidentally or indirectly leads to the extinction of a minority’s language or culture, economic exploitation of cheap labor, and globalistic erasure of cultural differences. The term is often applied in academic discussions of literature from the colonial period.

**Comedy:** A sub-genre of drama with witty, humorous themes intended to entertain the audience. It is often regarded as the stylized continuation of primitive regeneration cults, such as the symbolic expulsion of winter by spring. This fertility symbolism culminates in the form of weddings as standard happy endings of traditional comedies.

**Comedy of manners or Restoration comedy:** A popular form of English drama in the second half of the 17c, mainly portraying citizens from the upper ranks of society in witty dialogues.

**Coming-of-age story:** A novel in which an adolescent protagonist comes to adulthood by a process of experience and disillusionment. This character loses his or her innocence, discovers that previous preconceptions are false, or has the security of childhood torn away, but usually matures and strengthens by this process. Examples include Wieland's *Agathon*, Herman Raucher's *Summer of '42*, Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. In German, a tale in the genre is called a *Bildungsroman* or an *Erziehungsroman*. Examples include Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and Thomas Mann's *Königliche Hoheit*.

**Complication or conflict:** An element of traditional plot. During the complication, the initial exposition is changed in order to develop into a climax; in linear plots, it is preceded by the exposition and followed by the climax and *denouement*.

**Conceit:** An elaborate or unusual comparison—especially one using unlikely metaphors, simile, hyperbole, and contradiction. Before the beginning of the 17c, the term “conceit” was a synonym for “thought” and roughly equivalent to “idea” or “concept.” It gradually came to denote a fanciful idea or a particularly clever remark. In literary terms, the word denotes a fairly elaborate figure of speech, a clever and fanciful metaphor, usually expressed through elaborate and extended comparison, which presents a striking parallel between two seemingly dissimilar things—for example, elaborately comparing a beautiful woman to an object like a garden or the sun.

The conceit was a popular device throughout the Elizabethan Age and Baroque Age and was the principal technique of the 17c English metaphysical poets. This usage of the word “conceit” is unrelated to the best-known definition of “conceit” as an arrogant attitude or behavior.

The conceit figures prominently in the works of John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and T.S. Eliot. One of the most famous conceits is Donne's “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” a poem in which Donne compares two souls in love to the points on a geometer's compass. In *Richard II*, Shakespeare compares two kings competing for power to two buckets in a well, for instance. A conceit is usually classified as a subtype of metaphor. Contrast with *epic simile*.

**Concrete poetry:** A movement in poetry focusing especially on the outward visual form of a poem, including the shape and layout of letters, lines, and stanzas.

**Confessional Poetry:** A form of poetry in which the poet reveals very personal, intimate, sometimes shocking information about himself or herself. Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman wrote poetry in the confessional vein.

**Conflict:** The opposition between two characters (such as a protagonist and an antagonist), between two large groups of people, or between the protagonist and a larger problem such as forces of nature, ideas, public mores, and so on. Conflict may also be completely internal, such as the protagonist struggling with his psychological tendencies (drug addiction, self-destructive behavior, and so on); William Faulkner famously claimed that the most

important literature deals with the subject of “the human heart in conflict with itself.” Conflict is the engine that drives a plot.

Examples of narratives driven mainly by conflicts between the protagonist and nature include Jack London’s *To Build a Fire* (in which the Californian struggles to save himself from freezing to death in Alaska) and Stephen Crane’s *The Open Boat* (in which shipwrecked men in a lifeboat struggle to stay alive and get to shore). A narrative driven by conflict between a protagonist and an antagonist is Malory’s *Le Morte D’arthur*, in which King Arthur faces off against his evil son Mordred, each representing civilization and barbarism respectively. Examples of narratives driven by internal struggles include Daniel Scott Keyes’ *Flowers for Algernon*, in which the hero struggles with the loss of his own intelligence to congenital mental retardation, and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart,” in which the protagonist ends up struggling with his own guilt after committing a murder. In complex works of literature, multiple conflicts may occur at once. For instance, in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, one level of conflict is the unseen struggle between Othello and the machinations of Iago, who seeks to destroy him. Another level of conflict is Othello’s struggle with his own jealous insecurities and his suspicions that Desdemona is cheating on him.

**Connotation:** The impression that a word gives beyond its defined meaning. Connotations may be universally understood or may be significant only to a certain group. Both “horse” and “steed” denote the same animal, but “steed” has a different connotation, deriving from the chivalrous or romantic narratives in which the word was once often used.

**Consonance:** (also *Half Rhyme* or *Slant Rhyme*) A stylistic device often used in poetry characterized by the repetition of two or more consonants using different vowels, for example, the “i” and “a” followed by the “tter” sound in “pitter patter.” It repeats the consonant sounds but not vowel sounds. Alliteration differs from consonance insofar as alliteration requires the repeated consonant sound to be at the beginning of each word, where in consonance it is anywhere within the word, although often at the end. In half rhyme, the terminal consonant sound is repeated. A special species of consonance is the use of a series of sibilant sounds (/s/ and /sh/ for example); this is sometimes known simply as sibilance.

**Context-oriented approaches:** Various movements and schools which approach a literary text not merely as an intrinsic, independent work of art, but as part of a wider context. The context can be historical (e.g., new historicism), national (e.g., literary history), sociopolitical (e.g., Marxist literary theory), generic (e.g., poetics), or gender-related (e.g., feminist literary theory).

**Couplet:** A stanza form that consists of two lines, often expressing a complete and self-contained thought. This couplet is from Alexander Pope’s “Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady”:

‘Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expense,  
And Splendour borrows all her rays from Sense.

**Critical apparatus:** The formal element of secondary sources which encompasses the notes, in-text citations, and the list of works cited (and possibly an index of key words, names, or titles).

**Cultural studies:** A critical movement interested in culture as a comprehensive discourse-based phenomenon. It shows striking structural analogies to trends in deconstruction and new historicism.

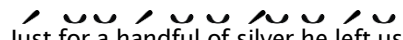


**Cyberpunk:** (1) A loose school of science fiction authors including William Gibson, Bruce Stirling, Rudy Rucker, and Neal Stephenson who rose in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s. (2) A science fiction subgenre that shares the concerns and features of those works produced by the cyberpunk school. Features of their novels and short stories in this period include the following motifs:

- a disturbing, amoral vision of the near-future focusing on urban life, often in post-industrial dystopias.
- casual violence between gangs, private armies of mercenaries, and decadent government agencies
- ubiquitous (and often dangerous) cybernetic implants and sensory enhancements in the general population
- powerful multi-national corporations or franchises that have gradually become more influential than *passé* governments
- appearances of high-tech multicultural crime syndicates, especially the Japanese yakuza and Jamaican drug posses
- renegade or illegal artificial intelligence programs seeking to free themselves from corporate control
- cheap designer drugs or precise mind-altering and mood-altering chemicals
- failures of space travel, which forces ever greater numbers of people into cramped urban conditions
- finally (and most especially) computer hackers who link to computers by directly plugging their brains into networks (often referred to as “jacking in”), or by wearing virtual reality goggles.

Common themes include the dehumanization, commodification, and mechanization of the individual; the negative effects of commercialization upon society; and implicit philosophical questions regarding consciousness and sensory reality. These cyberpunk authors have been profoundly influential in late 20c science fiction films (such as *Strange Days*, *Robocop*, etc.) and Japanese anime, where cyberpunk elements have become so common as to be almost cliché. The “metaverse” or the “Net” imagined by these early authors in the 1980s have been seen as prophetic of the later real-world rise of the internet after 1993. Examples of novels, anthologies, short stories, and other literary works from the cyberpunk movement include *Neuromancer*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, *Islands in the Net*, and “Johnny Mnemonic.” More recently, Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* has put a more satirical spin on the genre.

**Dactyl:** A poetic foot in which a stressed syllable is followed by two unstressed syllables, as for example in


  
 Just for a handful of silver he left us

**Deconstruction:** A complex text-oriented critical approach, based on the works of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Like semiotics, it regards texts as systems of signs, but differs from traditional schools of structuralism by concentrating on the interaction of the signifiers, almost abandoning the concept of a signified. See also *post-structuralism*.

As an interpretive movement in literary theory it reached its apex in the 1970s. Deconstruction rejects absolute interpretations, stressing ambiguities and contradictions in literature. Deconstruction grew out of the linguistic principles of De Saussure who noted that many Indo-European languages create meaning by binary opposites. Verbal

oppositions such as good/evil, light/dark, male/female, rise/fall, up/down, and high/low show a human tendency common transculturally to create vocabulary as pairs of opposites, with one of the two words arbitrarily given positive connotations and the other word arbitrarily given negative connotations. Deconstructionists carry this principle one step further by asserting that this tendency is endemic to all words, and hence all literature. For instance, they might try to complicate literary interpretations by revealing that “heroes” and “villains” often have overlapping traits, or else they have traits that only exist because of the presence of the other. Hence these concepts are unreliable in themselves as a basis for talking about literature in any meaningful way. Detractors of deconstruction often argue that deconstructionists deny the value of literature, or assert that all literature is ultimately meaningless. It would be more accurate to assert that deconstructionists deny the absolute value of literature, and assert that all literature is ultimately incapable of offering a constructed meaning external to the “prison-house of language,” which always embodies oppositional ideas within itself.

Deconstruction is symptomatic in many ways of postmodernism. In the more radical fringes of postmodernism, postmodern artists, dramatists, poets, and writers seek to emphasize the conventions of story-telling (rather than hide these conventions behind verisimilitude) and break away from conventions like realism, cause-and-effect, and traditional plot in narratives. Such a text might be called “deconstructed” in a loose sense. See also *différance*.

**Deduction:** The process of logic in which a thinker takes a rule for a large, general category and assumes that specific individual examples fitting within that general category obey the same rule. For instance, a general rule might be that “Objects made of iron rust.” When the logician then encounters a shovel made of iron, he can assume deductively that the shovel made of iron will also rust just as other iron objects do. This process is the opposite of induction. Induction fashions a large, general rule from a specific example. Deduction determines the truth about specific examples using a large general rule. Deductive thinking is also called *syllogistic thinking*.

**Defamiliarization:** A stylistic device used to make the reader aware of literary conventions; related to the Brechtian alienation effect. See also *metafiction* and *Russian formalism*.

**Denotation:** The definition of a word, apart from the impressions or feelings it creates in the reader. The word “apartheid” denotes a political and economic policy of segregation by race, but its connotations—oppression, slavery, inequality—are numerous.

**Denouement:** French term for “resolution,” the last element of a linear plot in which the complication of the action is resolved after the climax.

**Detective novel:** A sub-genre of the novel that centers on uncovering a crime.

**Deus ex machina:** (from the Greek *theos apo mechanes*) An unrealistic or unexpected intervention to rescue the protagonists or resolve the story’s conflict. The term means “The god out of the machine,” and it refers to stage machinery. A classical Greek actor, portraying one of the Greek gods in a play, might be lowered out of the sky onto the stage and then use his divine powers to solve all the mortals’ problems. The term is a negative one, and it often implies a lack of skill on the part of the writer. In a modern example of *deus ex machina*, a writer might reach a climactic moment in which a band of pioneers were attacked by bandits. A cavalry brigade’s unexpected arrival to drive away the marauding bandits at the conclusion, with no previous hint of the cavalry’s existence, would be a *deus ex machina* conclusion. Such endings mean that heroes are unable to solve their own problems

in a pleasing manner, and they must be “rescued” by the writer himself through improbable means. In some genres, the *deus ex machina* ending is actually a positive and expected trait. In various *vitae*, or Saint’s Lives, divine intervention is one of the normal climactic moments of the narrative to bring about the rescue of a saint or to cause a mass conversion among conventional pagan characters.

**Diction:** The choice of a particular word as opposed to others. A writer could call a rock formation by many words—a stone, a boulder, an outcropping, a pile of rocks, a cairn, a mound, or even an “anomalous geological feature.” The analytical reader then faces tough questions. Why that particular choice of words? What is the effect of that diction? The word choice a writer makes determines the reader’s reaction to the object of description, and contributes to the author’s style and tone. Compare with *concrete diction* and *abstract diction*. It is also possible to separate diction into *high* or *formal diction*, which involves elaborate, technical, or polysyllabic vocabulary and careful attention to the proprieties of grammar, and *low* or *informal diction*, which involves conversational or familiar language, contractions, slang, elision, and grammatical errors designed to convey a relaxed tone.

**Différance:** Jacques Derrida’s French term (untranslatable in English), which puns on the verb *différer* meaning “to differ” and “to defer,” which he uses as an antonym for *logocentrism*. Basically, Derrida’s starting spot is the linguist Saussure’s theory about the arbitrary nature of language (the combination of phonetic sounds we use as a “sign” has no logical connection with the object it refers to). Derrida then pushes this idea to its logical extreme, “that to differ or differentiate is also to defer, postpone or withhold [meaning].” Thus absolute meaning continuously and endlessly remains one step removed from the system of signs/words/symbols we use to discuss meaning. See also *deconstruction*.

**Discourse:** A term referring to oral or written expression within a certain thematic framework, as for example historical, economic, political, or feminist discourse. See also *genre* and *text type*.

**Dissonance:** A combination of harsh or jarring sounds, especially in poetry. Although such combinations may be accidental, poets sometimes intentionally make them to achieve particular effects. Dissonance is also sometimes used to refer to close but not identical rhymes. When this is the case, the word functions as a synonym for consonance. Browning, Hopkins, and many other poets have made deliberate use of dissonance.

**Double entendre:** A remark that is intended by the speaker to be interpreted in two different ways by different hearers. For example, some of Captain Absolute’s comments in Sheridan’s *The Rivals* are understood literally by Mrs Malaprop and ironically by the audience.

**Drama:** One of the three classical literary genres, involving the levels of text, transformation, and performance. Besides the written word, drama also relies on aspects of the performing arts, including a number of non-verbal means of expression mainly of a visual kind, such as stage design, scenery, facial expressions, gestures, make-up, props, and lighting.

**Dramatic Irony:** Occurs when the audience of a play or the reader of a work of literature knows something that a character in the work itself does not know. The irony is in the contrast between the intended meaning of the statements or actions of a character and the additional information understood by the audience. A celebrated example of dramatic irony is in Act V of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, where two young lovers meet their end as a result of a tragic misunderstanding. Here, the audience has full knowledge that Juliet’s apparent “death” is merely temporary; she will regain her senses when the mysterious “sleeping potion” she has taken wears off. But Romeo, mistaking Juliet’s drug-induced

trance for true death, kills himself in grief. Upon awakening, Juliet discovers Romeo's corpse and, in despair, slays herself.

**Dramatic Poetry:** Any lyric work that employs elements of drama such as dialogue, conflict, or characterization, but excluding works that are intended for stage presentation. A monologue is a form of dramatic poetry.

**Dystopia:** (from the Greek, *dys topos*, "bad place") The opposite of a utopia; an imaginary society in fictional writing that represents, as M. H. Abrams puts it, "a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected in some disastrous future culmination." For instance, while a utopia presents readers with a place where all the citizens are happy and ruled by a virtuous, efficient, rational government, a dystopia presents readers with a world where all citizens are universally unhappy, manipulated, and repressed by a sinister, sadistic totalitarian state. This government exists at best to further its own power and at worst seeks actively to destroy its own citizens' creativity, health, and happiness. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* are all fictional dystopias.

**Eclogue:** In classical literature, a poem featuring rural themes and structured as a dialogue among shepherds. Eclogues often took specific poetic forms, such as elegies or love poems. Some were written as the soliloquy of a shepherd. In later centuries, "eclogue" came to refer to any poem that was in the pastoral tradition or that had a dialogue or monologue structure. A classical example of an eclogue is Virgil's *Eclogues*, also known as *Bucolics*. Giovanni Boccaccio, Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, Jonathan Swift, and Louis MacNeice also wrote eclogues.

**Eighteenth century:** The period also known as the neoclassical, golden or Augustan age. It brought major innovations and changes in English literature due to the introduction of newspapers and literary magazines as well as the evolution of the novel and the essay as new forms.

**Elegy:** A classical form of lyric poetry. A lyric poem that laments the death of a person or the eventual death of all people. In a conventional elegy, set in a classical world, the poet and subject are spoken of as shepherds. In modern criticism, the word elegy is often used to refer to a poem that is melancholy or mournfully contemplative. Peter Sacks, in his *The English Elegy*, calls it a "poem of mortal loss and consolation." Milton's "Lycidas" and Shelley's "Adonais" are elegies.

**Elizabethan age:** The period in English history, culture, and literature during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). The term is sometimes used synonymously with *Renaissance*.

**Elizabethan theater:** A period of renewal for drama in the English Renaissance under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603); William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe are among its most important representatives.

**End rhyme:** A rhyme scheme based on identical syllables at the end of certain lines of a poem.

**English or Shakespearean sonnet:** The traditional sonnet form in English literature, which consists of three quatrains and one couplet and uses iambic pentameter as its meter; its fourteen lines follow the rhyme pattern abab cdcd efef gg.

**Enjambment:** The running over of the sense and structure of a line of verse or a couplet into the following verse or couplet. Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" is structured as a series

of enjambments, as in lines 11-12: “My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires and more slow.”

**Epic:** A long and complex form of narrative poetry. It differs drastically from lyric poetry in length, narrative technique, portrayal of characters, and plot. At the center of a complex plot stands a national hero who has to prove himself in numerous adventures and endure trials of cosmic dimensions. In the modern age, the epic has been overshadowed by the novel. See also romance. Epics are typically written in a classical style of grand simplicity with elaborate metaphors and allusions that enhance the symbolic importance of a hero’s adventures. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* are all epics.

**Epic Simile:** (also *Homeric Simile*) An elaborate, detailed comparison written as a simile many lines in length. From Milton’s *Paradise Lost*:

Angel Forms, who lay entranced  
Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks  
In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades  
High over-arched embower; or scattered sedge  
Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed  
Hath vexed the Red-Sea coast, whose waves o’erthrew  
Busiris and his Memphian chivalry,  
While with perfidious hatred they pursued  
The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld  
From the safe shore their floating carcasses  
And broken chariot-wheels.

**Epistolary novel:** A sub-genre of the novel which relates the plot in first-person narration using letters of correspondence as its medium.

**Epithalamion:** (also *Epithalamium*) A song or poem written to honor and commemorate a marriage ceremony. Examples include Edmund Spenser’s “Epithalamion” and e. e. cummings’s “Epithalamion.”

**Essay:** A semi-literary genre; popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It deals with a particular topic in a scholarly manner while at the same time using a literary style. From the current perspective in literary criticism, the literary essay can be classified as both primary and secondary literature. Today, the term “essay” is also used synonymously with *article*.

**Exposition:** The first element of a linear plot, when the initial situation of the unfolding action is revealed; in a linear plot, the exposition is followed by the complication, the climax, and the *denouement*.

**Expressionism:** A movement in various fields of art and literature in the early 20c. It is characterized by the exaggeration of certain aspects of the “object” portrayed (e.g, strong lines in painting or the emphasis on types in the characterization of figures in literature); it is often seen as a counter-movement or reaction to realism.

**Eye rhyme:** A type of rhyme which is based on syllables with identical spelling but different pronunciation.

**Feminist literary theory:** A collection of context-oriented critical stances that encompasses recent approaches whose different methodologies focus on gender as a starting point for literary analysis. See also *gender theory*.

**Festschrift:** A collection of essays in honor of a distinguished scholar. See also *secondary source*.

**Fiction:** A term to differentiate the literary prose genres of short story, novella, and novel from drama and poetry; in older secondary sources it is often used synonymously with *epic*.







**Figural narrative situation:** The point of view in which the narrator moves into the background, suggesting that the plot is revealed solely through the actions of the characters in the text. This technique is a relatively recent phenomenon that developed with the rise of the modern novel, mostly as a means of encouraging the reader to judge the action without an intervening commentator.

**First-person narration:** The point of view in which one of the characters who is part of the plot tells the story, referring to her- or himself in the first person singular.

**Flashback:** A device in the structuring of plot which introduces events from the past in an otherwise linear narrative. See also *foreshadowing*.

**Flat character:** In contrast to *round characters*, this kind of figure displays only one dominant character trait. See also *characterization*.

**Foot:** The smallest unit of rhythm in a line of poetry. In English-language poetry, a foot is typically one accented syllable combined with one or two unaccented syllables. There are many different types of feet.

<b>Iambus:</b> an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable:	
<b>Trochee:</b> a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable:	
<b>Anapest:</b> two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable:	
<b>Dactyl:</b> a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables:	
<b>Spondee:</b> two accented syllables	
<b>Pyrrhic:</b> two unaccented syllables	

Here is a mnemonic for the five most common feet:

I	Iamb		Accord	Canucks
T	Trochee		Volvo	Steelers
A	Anapest		Grand Marquis	Buccaneers
D	Dactyl		Cadillac	Patriots
S	Spondee		X-5	White Sox

**Footnote or endnote:** References to primary or secondary sources, or additional commentary, either as a footnote at the bottom of the page or as an endnote at the end of a research paper.

**Foreshadowing:** A device in the structuring of plot which brings information from the future into the current action. See also *flashback*.

**Formalism:** A term that is mostly used synonymously with structuralism to characterize text-oriented approaches in the first half of the 20c which focused on the formal aspects of a literary work. See also *Russian formalism*.

**Frame narrative:** The result of inserting one or more small stories within the body of a larger story that encompasses the smaller ones. Often this term is used interchangeably with both the literary technique and the larger story itself that contains the smaller ones, which are called *pericopes*, “framed narratives” or “embedded narratives.” The most famous example is Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, in which the overarching frame narrative is the story

of a band of pilgrims traveling to the shrine of Thomas á Becket in Canterbury. The band passes the time in a storytelling contest. The framed narratives are the individual stories told by the pilgrims who participate. Another example is Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which the frame narrative consists of a group of Italian noblemen and women fleeing the plague, and the framed narratives consist of the tales they tell each other to pass the time while they await the disease's passing. *The 1001 Arabian Nights* is probably the most famous Middle Eastern frame narrative. Here, in Bagdad, Scheherazade must delay her execution by beguiling her Caliph with a series of cliffhangers.

**Free Verse:** (also *Vers Libre*) Poetry that lacks regular metrical and rhyme patterns but that tries to capture the cadences of everyday speech. The form allows a poet to exploit a variety of rhythmical effects within a single poem. Free-verse techniques were widely used in the 20c by such writers as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Carl Sandburg, and William Carlos Williams.

**Freytag's Pyramid:** Gustav Freytag, a 19c German novelist, developed a diagram to analyze common patterns in linear plots of stories and novels:

*Exposition:*  
Setting the scene. The writer introduces the characters and setting, providing description and background.

*Inciting Incident:*  
(also *The Complication*)  
Something happens to begin the action. A single event usually signals the beginning of the main conflict.

*Rising Action:* A set of conflicts and crises that develop the plot.

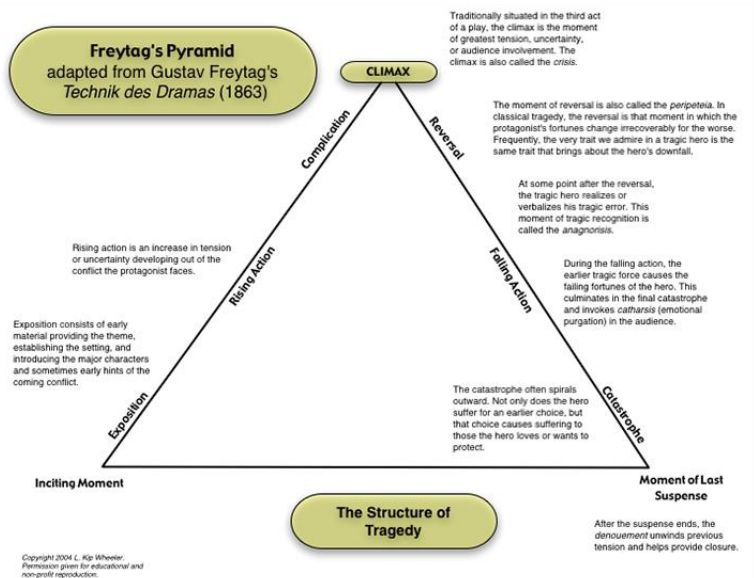
*Climax:* The moment of greatest tension, often the most exciting event. It is the event that the rising action builds up to and that the falling action follows.

*Falling Action:* Events happen as a result of the climax and the plot will quickly resolve.

*Resolution:* The main problem/conflict is resolved/completed/addressed.

*Dénouement:* The ending. At this point, any remaining secrets, questions or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. This can be the most difficult part of the plot to identify, as it is often very closely tied to the resolution.

**Gender theory:** A recent development of feminist literary theory that no longer focuses exclusively on women, but includes issues concerning both genders in the interpretation of literary texts.



**Genre:** The term to classify the traditional literary forms of epic (i.e., fiction), drama, and poetry. These categories or genres are still commonly used, although the epic has been replaced by the novel and short story. In the English-speaking world, genre denotes fiction, drama, and poetry. See also *discourse* and *text type*.

**Georgic:** A poem about farming and the farmer's way of life, named from Virgil's *Georgics*. Several English poets in the 18c produced georgics in imitation of Virgil, including John Dyer (*The Fleece*) and James Grainger (*The Sugar-Cane*).

**Gothic novel:** A sub-genre of the novel with an eerie, supernatural setting. It was particularly popular in the 19c.

**Greek theater:** An open-air amphitheater consisting of an orchestra and a *skene* (stage building). The audience was seated in circles around the orchestra. The actors moved between the *skene* and the orchestra, and the chorus was positioned in the orchestra between the audience and the actors. In the comedies and tragedies of classical Greek drama, all actors wore masks.

**Haiku:** (also *Hokku*) The shortest form of Japanese poetry, constructed in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. The message of a haiku poem usually centers on some aspect of spirituality and provokes an emotional response in the reader. Early masters of haiku include Basho, Buson, Kobayashi Issa, and Masaoka Shiki. English writers of haiku include the Imagists, notably Ezra Pound, H. D., Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, and William Carlos Williams.

**Hermeneutics:** A traditional term for the scholarly interpretation of a text.

**Heroic Couplet:** A rhyming couplet written in iambic pentameter (a verse with five iambic feet). The following lines by Alexander Pope are an example:

Truth guards the Poet, sanctifies the line  
And makes Immortal, Verse as mean as mine.

**Historical novel:** A sub-genre of the novel with characters and plot in a realistic-historical context. New journalism, which recounts real events in the form of a novel, is a related movement in the second half of the 20c.

**History play:** A sub-genre of drama. In the English tradition, it dates back to the Renaissance and dramatizes historical events or personalities.

**Hyperbole:** A rhetorical figure which consists in an exaggerated statement that is not meant to be taken literally, as when Hamlet says:

I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum.

**Iambus:** A poetic foot in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable, as for example in

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /  
The curfew tolls the knell of parting day

**Ideology:** A complex of ideas which seems to form a conceptual unit and which informs the way we think about things in a stereotypical manner. There are many ideologies in competition on certain subjects: for example, in relation to women, it is ideological knowledge which suggests that women stay at home and look after their children, when the majority of women in Britain in fact go out to work. At any particular point in time certain ideologies are dominant within a particular culture, and others are muted.



**Imagery:** (from the Latin “*imago*,” or “picture”) Refers mainly to the use of concrete language to lend a visual quality to abstract themes in a poem. See also *imagism*. The array of images in a literary work. Also, figurative language. Yeats’ “The Second Coming” offers a powerful image of encroaching anarchy:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart....

**Imagism:** A literary movement in the early 20c closely associated with Ezra Pound. It attempts to reduce and condense poetry to essential “images.” Concrete language without decorative elements is employed to achieve a strong visual effect or imagery.

**Individualization:** A characterization that emphasizes a multiplicity of character traits in a literary figure, rather than one dominant feature. See also *typification*.

**Intentional fallacy:** The “wrong belief in the author’s intention.” It is an important term of new criticism, aimed against interpretations which try to reconstruct the author’s original intentions when writing a text and thereby neglect intrinsic aspects of the text. See also *affective fallacy*.

**Interior monologue:** A narrative technique in which a figure is exclusively characterized by his or her thoughts without any other comments; it is influenced by psychoanalysis and related to the stream-of-consciousness technique.

**Internal rhyme:** A type of rhyme which is not based on end rhyme but rather on alliteration or assonance; most Old English and some Middle English poetry uses internal rhyme. An example is in the opening line of Poe’s “The Raven”: “Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary.” Here, “dreary” and “weary” make an internal rhyme.

**Interpretation:** A modern term for hermeneutics and exegesis, i.e., the search for the meaning of a text; sometimes seen in opposition to evaluative literary criticism.

**Intertextuality:** A text is never produced or interpreted in a vacuum, but always through our conscious or unconscious awareness of other, related texts. An intertextual analysis focuses upon these links between texts and studies the ways in which other texts influence the conditions of production and reception of a particular text.

**Introductory paragraph:** The first paragraph of a scholarly paper, which informs the reader about the focus, methodology, and structure of the entire paper. See also *thesis statement*.

**Irony:** In literary criticism, the effect of language in which the intended meaning is the opposite of what is stated. The title of Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” is ironic because what Swift proposes in this essay is cannibalism—hardly “modest.” There is a contrast or discrepancy between what is said and what is meant or between what happens and what is expected to happen in life and in literature. In verbal irony, characters say the opposite of what they mean. In irony of circumstance or situation, the opposite of what is expected occurs. In dramatic irony, a character speaks in ignorance of a situation or event known to the audience or to the other characters. Flannery O’Connor’s short stories employ all these forms of irony, as does Poe’s “Cask of Amontillado.”

**Journal:** A regularly-issued scholarly publication which contains essays and sometimes notes, book reviews, or review essays. See also *secondary source*.

**Literary criticism:** The systematic, scholarly approach to literary texts, often used synonymously with interpretation. See also *literary theory*.

**Literary history:** A context-oriented approach which mainly deals with the chronological and periodical classification of literary texts. This movement is informed by historical methodology; it dates and categorizes literary works and examines the influence of earlier on later works.

**Literary theory:** (also “critical theory”) The philosophical and methodological basis of literary criticism, including varying approaches to texts; the respective schools can be grouped according to text-, author-, reader-, and context-oriented approaches.

**Literature:** A vague umbrella term for written expression; it conventionally refers to primary and secondary sources. See also *text*.

**Lyric poetry:** The term for a variety of short poetic forms such as the sonnet, the ode, and the elegy. In contrast to the more complex and longer narrative poetry, it usually revolves around a single event, impression, or idea. A poem expressing the subjective feelings and personal emotions of the poet. Such poetry is melodic, since it was originally accompanied by a lyre in recitals. Most Western poetry in the 20c may be classified as lyrical. Examples of lyric poetry include A. E. Housman’s “To an Athlete Dying Young,” the odes of Pindar and Horace, Thomas Gray, and William Collins, the sonnets of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sir Philip Sidney, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Rainer Maria Rilke, and a host of other forms in the poetry of William Blake and Christina Rossetti, among many others.

**Malapropism:** The unintentional misuse of a word in mistake for one of similar sound: e.g. Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan’s *The Rivals* says, “He is the very pineapple of politeness,” meaning in fact “the very pinnacle of politeness.”

**Marxist literary theory:** A context-oriented approach to literature based on the writings of Karl Marx (1818–83) and other Marxist theorists. It analyzes literary texts as expressions of economic, sociological, and political backgrounds. Conditions of production in particular periods are examined with respect to their influence on literary writings of the time.

**Metafiction:** “Fiction about fiction”; a term for self-reflexive literary texts which focus on their own literary elements, such as language, narrative, and plot structure; it is a main feature of postmodernism.

**Metaphor:** A rhetorical figure which “equates” one thing with another without actually “comparing” the two (e.g., “My love is a red, red rose”). See also *simile*.

**Meter:** An element of the rhythmic-acoustic dimension of poetry; stressed and unstressed syllables of a line can be organized in feet. In order to describe the meter of a verse, one indicates the name of the foot and the number of the feet used (e.g., iambic pentameter=5 iambs in each line). These are the standard English lines:

Monometer: one foot	Hexameter: six feet
Dimeter: two feet	(also called the Alexandrine)
Trimeter: three feet	Heptameter: seven feet
Tetrameter: four feet	(also called the “Fourteener” when the feet are iambic)
Pentameter: five feet	

The most common English meter is the iambic pentameter, in which each line contains ten syllables, or five iambic feet, which individually are composed of an unstressed syllable followed by an accented syllable. Both of the following lines from Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses” are written in iambic pentameter:

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

**Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea. An example: “We have always remained loyal to the crown.” See also *synecdoche*.

**Middle English period:** period of linguistic and literary history. It is considered to begin with the invasion of England by the French-speaking Normans in the 11c and ends with the advent of the Renaissance at the end of the 15c; dominant literary genres are the romance and the tale.

**Minor character:** A figure in a literary text who—in contrast to the protagonist—does not occupy the center of attention.

**“Minority” literatures:** A problematic umbrella term for movements in literature toward the end of the 20c which are represented by marginalized gender groups (women, gays, and lesbians) and ethnic groups (African-Americans, Chicanos, and Chicanas, etc.).

**Mise-en-scène:** (French for “to place on stage”). The term refers to the arrangement of all visual elements in a theater production. In film it is used as an umbrella term for the various elements that constitute the framing, including camera distance, camera angles, lenses, lighting, as well as the positioning of persons and objects in relation to each other.

**Modernism:** The period of literary and cultural history in the first decades of the 20c. It can be seen as a reaction to the realist tendencies of the late 19c. New narrative structures, points of view (e.g., stream-of-consciousness technique), and other literary forms of expression are introduced under the influence of visual art and psychoanalysis.

**Modes of presentation:** as concerns the presentation of characters and events in a literary work, it is possible to distinguish between explanatory characterization based on narration (telling) and dramatic characterization based on dialogues and monologues (showing).

**Monograph:** scholarly or book-length publication on a specific topic, text, or author. See also *secondary source*.

**Monologue or soliloquy:** long speech on stage which is not aimed at a direct dialogue partner. In the aside, a special form of monologue, a character on stage passes on information to the audience which is not accessible to the other figures in the play.

**Montage:** editing technique in film. Its effects resemble those of rhetorical figures in literature (e.g., metaphorical meaning): by combining two different images, the meaning of one object can be associated with the other, as occurs in the relationship between tenor and vehicle in metaphor. Montage is closely associated with the innovations of the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein.

**Motif:** A theme, character type, image, metaphor, or other verbal element that recurs throughout a single work of literature or occurs in a number of different works over a period of time. For example, the various manifestations of the color white in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* is a “specific” motif, while the trials of star-crossed lovers is a “conventional” motif from the literature of all periods. Also known as *Motiv* or *Leitmotiv*.

**Mystery and Miracle play:** medieval dramatic forms in which religious-allegorical or biblical themes were adapted to be performed outside the church; together with the classical Latin drama, they influenced the revival of drama in the Renaissance.

**Myth criticism:** approach which investigates the mythological deep structures of literary texts and uses them as a basis for interpretation. See also archetypal criticism.

**Narrative poetry:** in contrast to the shorter and more focused lyric poetry, it includes genres such as the epic, the romance, and the ballad, which tell a story with a clearly defined plot. Such poems may be of any length or level of complexity. Epics such as *Beowulf* and ballads are forms of narrative poetry.

**Naturalism:** term denoting texts from the end of the 19c which aim at a realistic depiction of the influence of social and environmental circumstances on characters in literary texts. See also *realism*.

**New criticism:** one of the most important Anglo-American text-oriented approaches in the decades after World War II; it differentiates interpretation from source studies, socio-historical background studies, history of motifs, as well as author-oriented biographical or psychoanalytic literary criticism and reception history in order to free literary criticism from extrinsic elements—i.e., those outside the text—and bring the focus back to the literary text as such. See also *structuralism*, *affective fallacy*, *intentional fallacy*, and *close reading*.

**New historicism:** recent context-oriented approach which builds on post-structuralism and deconstruction but also includes historical dimensions in the discussion of literary texts, presupposing a structural similarity between literary and other discourses within a given historical period.

**Note:** short secondary source in a scholarly journal. It treats a very specific aspect of a topic in only a few paragraphs.

**Novel:** important genre of prose fiction which developed in England in the 18c; the epic and the romance are indirect precursors. Structurally, the novel differs from the epic through more complex character presentation and point of view techniques, its emphasis on realism, and a more subtle structuring of the plot.

**Novella or novelette:** sub-genre of prose fiction. Due to its shortness and idiosyncratic narrative elements, it assumes a position between the short story and the novel.

**Objective Correlative:** An outward set of objects, a situation, or a chain of events corresponding to an inward experience and evoking this experience in the reader. The term frequently appears in modern criticism in discussions of authors' intended effects on the emotional responses of readers. This term was originally used by T. S. Eliot in his 1919 essay "Hamlet."

**Occasional Verse:** Poetry written on the occasion of a significant historical or personal event. *Vers de societe* is sometimes called occasional verse although it is of a less serious nature. Famous examples of occasional verse include Andrew Marvell's "Horatian ode upon Cromwell's Return from England," Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"—written upon the death of Abraham Lincoln—and Edmund Spenser's commemoration of his wedding, "Epithalamion."

**Octave:** A poem or stanza composed of eight lines. The term "octave" most often represents the first eight lines of a Petrarchan sonnet. An example of an octave is taken from a translation of a Petrarchan sonnet by Sir Thomas Wyatt:

The pillar perisht is whereto I leant,  
The strongest stay of mine unquiet mind;  
The like of it no man again can find,  
From East to West Still seeking though he went.  
To mind unhap! for hap away hath rent  
Of all my joy the very bark and rind;  
And I, alas, by chance am thus assigned  
Daily to mourn till death do it relent.

**Ode:** traditional form of lyric poetry on a serious, mostly classical theme and consisting of several stanzas. Name given to an extended lyric poem characterized by exalted emotion and dignified style. An ode usually concerns a single, serious theme. Most odes, but not all, are addressed to an object or individual. Odes are distinguished from other lyric poetic forms by their complex rhythmic and stanzaic patterns. An example of this form is John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale."

**Old English or Anglo-Saxon period:** earliest period of English literature and language between the invasion of Britain by Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes) in the fifth century CE and the conquest of England by William the Conqueror in 1066; the most important genres are the epic and poetry (including charms and riddles).

**Omniscient point of view:** point of view which describes the action from an omniscient, God-like perspective by referring to the protagonist in the third person. It is therefore often imprecisely termed third-person narration.

**Onomatopoeia:** linguistic term for a word which resembles the sound produced by the object it denotes (e.g., "cuckoo"); in poetry, it attempts to emphasize the meaning of a word through its acoustic dimension. A celebrated example of onomatopoeia is the repetition of the word "bells" in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Bells."

**Oral Transmission:** A process by which songs, ballads, folklore, and other material are transmitted by word of mouth. The tradition of oral transmission predates the written record systems of literate society. Oral transmission preserves material sometimes over generations, although often with variations. Memory plays a large part in the recitation and preservation of orally transmitted material. Breton lays, French fabliaux, national epics (including the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, the Spanish *El Cid*, and the Finnish *Kalevala*), Native American myths and legends, and African folktales told by plantation slaves are examples of orally transmitted literature.

**Ottava Rima:** An eight-line stanza of poetry composed in iambic pentameter (a five-foot line in which each foot consists of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable), following the abababcc rhyme scheme. This form has been prominently used by such important English writers as Lord Byron, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and W.B. Yeats.

**Oxymoron:** A phrase combining two contradictory terms. Oxymorons may be intentional or unintentional. The following speech from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* uses several oxymorons:

Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!  
O anything, of nothing first create!  
O heavy lightness! serious vanity!  
Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms!  
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!  
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.

**Paradox:** A statement that appears illogical or contradictory at first, but may actually point to an underlying truth. "Less is more" is an example of a paradox. Literary examples include Francis Bacon's statement, "The most corrected copies are commonly the least correct," and "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

**Paraphrase:** summary in one's own words of a passage from a secondary or primary source. See also *quotation*.

**Parenthetical documentation:** part of the critical apparatus of a scholarly paper. It allows the reader to retrace the original sources of paraphrases and quotations by giving author (or

title of the source) and page number(s) in parentheses; alternative documentation system to footnotes.

**Pastoral:** A term derived from the Latin word “pastor,” meaning shepherd. A pastoral is a literary composition on a rural theme. The conventions of the pastoral were originated by the third-century Greek poet Theocritus, who wrote about the experiences, love affairs, and pastimes of Sicilian shepherds. In a pastoral, characters and language of a courtly nature are often placed in a simple setting. The term “pastoral” is also used to classify dramas, elegies, and lyrics that exhibit the use of country settings and shepherd characters. Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Adonais” and John Milton’s “Lycidas” are two famous examples of pastorals.

**Pathos:** (from Greek *suffering*) the power of a work of literature to arouse feelings of sadness and pity in the reader or audience.

**Performance:** last phase in the transformation of a dramatic text into a staged play. See also drama and actor.

**Performing arts:** umbrella term for artistic expressions that center on the performance of an actor in a stage-like setting. See also *drama* and *film*.

**Persona:** A Latin term meaning “mask.” Personae are the characters in a fictional work of literature. The persona generally functions as a mask through which the author tells a story in a voice other than his or her own. A persona is usually either a character in a story who acts as a narrator or an “implied author,” a voice created by the author to act as the narrator for himself or herself. Personae include the narrator of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

**Personification:** Also known as *Prosopopoeia*. A figure of speech that gives human qualities to abstract ideas, animals, and inanimate objects. William Shakespeare used personification in *Romeo and Juliet* in the following lines, where the moon is portrayed as being envious, sick, and pale with grief—all markedly human qualities:

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief.

**Philology:** summarizes an approach in traditional literary criticism. It deals especially with “material” aspects of texts, such as the editing of manuscripts, and the preservation or reconstruction of texts.

**Picaresque novel:** sub-genre of the novel. It recounts the episodic adventures of a vagrant rogue (Spanish: “pícaro”) who usually gets into trouble by breaking social norms; it attempts to expose social injustice in a satirical way.

**Plot:** logical combination of different elements of the action in a literary text. In an ideal linear plot, the initial situation or exposition is followed by a complication or conflict which creates suspense and then leads to a climax, crisis, or turning point. The climax is then followed by the resolution or denouement, which usually marks the end of a text.

**Poetic Justice:** An outcome in a literary work, not necessarily a poem, in which the good are rewarded and the evil are punished, especially in ways that particularly fit their virtues or crimes. For example, a murderer may himself be murdered, or a thief will find himself penniless.

**Poetic License:** Distortions of fact and literary convention made by a writer — not always a poet — for the sake of the effect gained. Poetic license is closely related to the concept of “artistic freedom.” An author exercises poetic license by saying that a pile of money “reaches as high as a mountain” when the pile is actually only a foot or two high.

**Poetics:** This term has two closely related meanings. It denotes

- (1) an aesthetic theory in literary criticism about the essence of poetry, or
- (2) rules prescribing the proper methods, content, style, or diction of poetry.

The term “poetics” may also refer to theories about literature in general, not just poetry.

**Poetry or poem:** literary genre which differs from prose genres in the use of verse, rhyme, and meter. In modern prose poems or experimental poetry, these classical elements are no longer valid; however, the wording and the deliberate use of certain structural elements of syntax and rhetorical figures mark these works as poetic forms. See also *narrative poetry* and *lyric poetry*.

**Point of view or narrative perspective:** the way in which characters, events, and settings in a text are presented. Narratology distinguishes between three basic points of view: the action of a text is either mediated through an exterior, unspecified narrator (omniscient point of view), through a person involved in the action (first-person narration), or presented without additional commentary through the acting figures (figural narrative situation). See also *stream-of-consciousness technique*.

**Post-colonial literature:** umbrella term that refers to texts from former British territories in the Caribbean, Africa, India, and Australia which have attracted the attention of contemporary literary critics. Sometimes also referred to as “new literatures in English”, Commonwealth literatures, and Anglophone literatures.

**Postmodernism:** movement in literary and cultural history in the second half of the 20c which takes up issues which were treated by modernism—e.g., innovative narrative techniques and plot patterns—by dealing with them on an academic, often formal level. See also *metafiction*.

**Post-structuralism:** umbrella term for the text-oriented schools in literary theory in the second half of the 20c, such as semiotics and deconstruction, which go beyond the traditional schools of structuralism and formalism.

**Primary source:** term for literary texts, usually belonging to the three traditional genres, see also *secondary source*.

**Projective Verse:** Also known as *Breath Verse*. A form of free verse in which the poet’s breathing pattern determines the lines of the poem. Poets who advocate projective verse are against all formal structures in writing, including Meter and form. Besides its creators, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Charles Olson, two other well-known projective verse poets are Denise Levertov and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka).

**Proscenium stage:** dominant stage form since the Baroque. Because of its box-like shape, it was the preferred stage for realist drama.

**Protagonist:** technical term for the main character in a literary text. See also *minor character*.

**Psychoanalytic literary criticism:** movement in literary criticism which applies the methods of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis; psychological traits of the author are examined in the text, and literary characters are analyzed as if they were real people. See also *archetypal criticism*.

**Pure Poetry:** Poetry written without instructional intent or moral purpose that aims only to please a reader by its imagery or musical flow. The term pure poetry is used as the antonym of the term “didacticism.” The poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, Stephane Mallarme, Paul Verlaine, Paul Valery, Juan Ramoz Jimenez, and Jorge Guillen offer examples of pure poetry.

**Puritan age:** religiously motivated movement which dominated English culture from 1649 to 1660; the term is also used for the colonial period in the 17c and 18c as the first literary movement on the North American continent.

**Quatrain:** stanza that consists of four lines, or an entire poem consisting of four lines. The following quatrain is from Robert Herrick's "To Live Merrily, and to Trust to Good Verses":

Round, round, the root do's run;  
And being ravisht thus,  
Come, I will drink a Tun  
To my Propertius.

**Quotation:** passage which has been taken word for word from a primary or secondary source. See also *paraphrase*.

**Reader-oriented approach:** school in literary criticism in the second half of the 20c. It concentrates on the relation between text and reader. The most important movements are reception theory, reader-response theory, reception-aesthetic, and reception history.

**Realism:** term for the period in literary history toward the end of the 19c which was preoccupied with translating "reality" into literature; it is also used as a general term for realistic portrayal in literature. See also *naturalism*.

**Reception history:** reader-oriented approach which deals with the reception of a text by the reader; sales figures, critical statements, and reviews from magazines and scholarly journals provide data for a synchronic analysis (i.e., one taking place within a certain period) of readers' reactions, as well as a diachronic analysis (i.e., one which compares historical periods) of the reception of texts.

**Reception theory:** also reception aesthetic or reader-response theory; movement in the interpretation of texts which focuses primarily on the reader. It stands in contrast to intrinsic or text-oriented approaches. See also *reception history*.

**Refrain:** A phrase repeated at intervals throughout a poem. A refrain may appear at the end of each stanza or at less regular intervals. It may be altered slightly at each appearance. Some refrains are nonsense expressions—as with "Nevermore" in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"—that seem to take on a different significance with each use.

**Renaissance:** period in English literary and cultural history which traditionally encompasses the 16c and parts of the 17c; it is often subdivided into periods named after the rulers of the time, such as the Elizabethan age (for Queen Elizabeth I) or Jacobean age (for King James). The classical genre of drama experiences its first revival in English literature; linguistics often applies the term early modern period.

**Restoration comedy.** See *comedy of manners*.

**Review article:** longer form of the book review. It discusses a number of pieces of secondary literature on a particular topic.

**Rhetoric:** precursor of modern text-oriented approaches which dates back to the practice of oratory in classical antiquity. As a source of rules for good public speech, it contains detailed instructions for every phase of oratory: *inventio* (finding themes), *dispositio* (structuring material), *elocutio* (wording with the aid of *rhetorical figures*), *memoria* (techniques for remembering the speech), and *actio* (delivery of the speech).

**Rhetorical figures or figures of speech:** a number of stylistic forms which mostly use language in its "non-literal" meaning. See *metaphor*, *simile*, *symbol*.



**Rhyme or rime:** element of rhythmic-acoustic dimension of a poem. In English, it generally includes internal rhymes (based on alliteration and assonance), end rhymes (the most frequent kind of rhyme in modern poems, based on identical syllables at the end of certain lines), and eye rhymes (which play with identical spelling but different pronunciation of words and syllables). When used as a noun in literary criticism, this term generally refers to a poem in which words sound identical or very similar and appear in parallel positions in two or more lines. Rhymes are classified into different types according to where they fall in a line or stanza or according to the degree of similarity they exhibit in their spellings and sounds.

Some major types of rhyme are “masculine” rhyme, “feminine” rhyme, and “triple” rhyme. In a masculine rhyme, the rhyming sound falls in a single accented syllable, as with “heat” and “eat.” Feminine rhyme is a rhyme of two syllables, one stressed and one unstressed, as with “merry” and “tarry.” Triple rhyme matches the sound of the accented syllable and the two unaccented syllables that follow: “narrative” and “declarative.”

Robert Browning alternates feminine and masculine rhymes in his “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”:

Gr-r-r — there go, my heart’s abhorrence!  
Water your damned flower-pots, do!  
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,  
God’s blood, would not mine kill you!  
What? Your myrtle-bush wants trimming?  
Oh, that rose has prior claims —  
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?  
Hell dry you up with flames!

Triple rhymes can be found in Thomas Hood’s “Bridge of Sighs,” George Gordon Byron’s satirical verse, and Ogden Nash’s comic poems.

**Rhythm:** A regular pattern of sound, time intervals, or events occurring in writing, most often and most discernably in poetry. Regular, reliable rhythm is known to be soothing to humans, while interrupted, unpredictable, or rapidly changing rhythm is disturbing. These effects are known to authors, who use them to produce a desired reaction in the reader. An example of a form of irregular rhythm is sprung rhythm poetry; quantitative verse, on the other hand, is very regular in its rhythm.

**Rhythmic-acoustic dimension:** umbrella term for elements of poetry such as sound, rhyme, meter, and onomatopoeia.

**Romance:** most classical romances were written in prose, most medieval ones in verse. Because of its advanced use of point of view and the structuring of plot, the romance is regarded as the first direct precursor of the novel, despite its verse form. In contrast to the epic, the romance is more focused in terms of plot and less concerned with cosmic or national issues.

**Romanticism:** movement in literary history in the first half of the 19c. It appears more or less simultaneously in American and English literature. Nature poetry and individual, emotional experiences play important roles. Romanticism may be seen as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the political changes throughout Europe and America at the end of the 18c. In America, Romanticism partly overlaps with transcendentalism.

**Round character:** figure which is characterized through a number of different character traits. See also *flat character* and *characterization*.



**Signified:** the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure divided language into two basic dimensions: the mental concept (e.g., the idea of a tree), termed the signified; and that concept's manifestation in language (the sequence of sounds or letters in the word "T-R-E-E"), termed the signifier. See also *semiotics* and *deconstruction*.

**Signifier.** See *signified*.

**Simile:** rhetorical figure which "compares" two different things by connecting them with "like," "than," "as," or "compare" (e.g., "Oh, my love is like a red, red rose"). See also *metaphor*. Examples: "coffee as cold as ice" or "He sounded like a broken record." The title of Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" contains a simile.

**Soliloquy.** See *monologue*.

**Sonnet:** A fourteen-line poem, usually composed in iambic pentameter, employing one of several rhyme schemes. There are three major types of sonnets, upon which all other variations of the form are based: the "Petrarchan" or "Italian" sonnet, the "Shakespearean" or "English" sonnet, and the "Spenserian" sonnet.

A **Petrarchan sonnet** consists of an octave rhymed abbaabba and a "sestet" rhymed either cdecde, cdccdc, or cdcedc. The octave poses a question or problem, relates a narrative, or puts forth a proposition; the sestet presents a solution to the problem, comments upon the narrative, or applies the proposition put forth in the octave.

The **Shakespearean sonnet** is divided into three quatrains and a couplet rhymed thus: abab cdcd efef gg. The couplet provides an epigrammatic comment on the narrative or problem put forth in the quatrains.

The **Spenserian sonnet** uses three quatrains and a couplet like the Shakespearean, but links their three rhyme schemes in this way: abab bcba cdcd ee. The Spenserian sonnet develops its theme in two parts like the Petrarchan, its final six lines resolving a problem, analyzing a narrative, or applying a proposition put forth in its first eight lines.

Examples of sonnets can be found in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, and Adrienne Rich's poem "The Insusceptibles."

Petrarchan (Italian)	abbaabba	cdecde		
Shakespearean (English)	abab	cdcd	efef	gg
Spenserian	abab	bcba	cdcd	ee

**Spatial dimension of film:** umbrella term for a number of heterogeneous aspects in film, such as film stock, lighting, camera angle, camera movement, point of view, editing, and montage. See also *mise-en-scène*.

**Spenserian Stanza:** A nine-line stanza having eight verses in iambic pentameter, its ninth verse in iambic hexameter, and the rhyme scheme ababbcbcc. This stanza form was first used by Edmund Spenser in his allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene*.

**Spondee:** In poetry meter, a foot consisting of two long or stressed syllables occurring together. This form is quite rare in English verse, and is usually composed of two monosyllabic words. The first foot in the following line from Robert Burns's "Green Grow the Rashes" is an example of a spondee: "Green grow the rashes, O"

**Sprung Rhythm:** Versification using a specific number of accented syllables per line but disregarding the number of unaccented syllables that fall in each line, producing an irregular rhythm in the poem. Gerard Manley Hopkins, who coined the term "sprung rhythm," is the most notable practitioner of this technique.

**Stage:** the various designs of theater stages can be reduced to the two basic types of the amphitheater and the proscenium stage; most other common forms combine elements of these two.

**Stanza:** element of the visual dimension of a poem which can be classified according to the number of its lines, their meter, and rhyme; most poems are a combination of the couplet (2 lines), tercet (3 lines), and quatrain (4 lines). See also sonnet. Examples of stanza forms include the quatrain, terza rima, ottava rima, Spenserian, and the so-called *In Memoriam* stanza from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem by that title. The following is an example of the latter form:

Love is and was my Lord and King,  
And in his presence I attend  
To hear the tidings of my friend,  
Which every hour his couriers bring.

**Stock character:** recurring flat character in drama; examples include the boastful soldier, the cranky old man, or the crafty servant.

**Stream-of-consciousness technique:** narratological technique (related to *interior monologue*) which is used to represent the subconscious associations of a fictitious persona. It reflects a groundbreaking shift in cultural paradigms during the first decades of the 20c; the most famous example is the final section of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922).

**Structuralism:** umbrella term for text-oriented approaches which use formal-structural aspects (intrinsic approach) in the interpretation of texts and neglect historical, sociological, biographical, and psychological dimensions; the most important schools are Russian formalism and the Prague school of structuralism in the first half of the 20c. In the Anglo-American context, new criticism developed as a related movement. See also *semiotics* and *deconstruction*.

**Stylistics:** text-oriented approach for the description of stylistic idiosyncrasies of authors, texts, or national literatures; it deals with grammatical structures (vocabulary, syntax), elements of sound (phonology), and over-arching forms (rhetorical figures) of texts.

**Symbol:** term for "objects" in a literary text which transcend their material meaning; it is possible to distinguish between conventional symbols (which are commonly known) and private symbols (which are created by an author for a particular text).

**Synecdoche:** A figure of speech in which a part is substituted for the whole. An example: "Lend me a hand." See also *metonymy*.

**Tanka:** A form of Japanese poetry similar to haiku. A tanka is five lines long, with the lines containing five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables respectively. Skilled tanka authors include Ishikawa Takuboku, Masaoka Shiki, Amy Lowell, and Adelaide Crapsey.

**Telling:** one of the two basic modes of presentation in literary texts. In contrast to showing, it relies mostly on narration.

**Temporal dimension of film:** includes aspects such as slow motion, fast motion, plot time, length of film, flashback, and foreshadowing.

**Tercet:** A stanza that consists of three lines.

**Terza Rima:** A three-line stanza form in poetry in which the rhymes are made on the last word of each line in the following manner: the first and third lines of the first stanza, then the second line of the first stanza and the first and third lines of the second stanza, and so

on with the middle line of any stanza rhyming with the first and third lines of the following stanza. An example of *terza rima* is Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Triumph of Love":

As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay  
This was the tenour of my waking dream.  
Methought I sate beside a public way  
Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great stream  
Of people there was hurrying to and fro  
Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam. . . .

**Text:** term often used synonymously with literature; in recent usage, it is also applied to denote non-verbal sign systems such as fashion, film, geography, painting. See also *semiotics* and *deconstruction*.

**Text-oriented approaches:** movements or schools in literary theory which concentrate on the "textual" or intrinsic levels of literature by deliberately excluding extrinsic aspects—i.e., those external to the text—concerning the author (biography, complete works), audience (class, gender, age, ethnic origin, education), or context (historical, social, or political conditions). The text-oriented approaches include philology, rhetoric, and stylistics, as well as the formalist-structuralist schools of Russian formalism, Prague school of structuralism, new criticism, semiotics, and deconstruction.

**Text type:** linguistic term used for the classification of forms of expression which are mostly written, but which are not necessarily of a literary kind. It includes primary and secondary sources, texts of everyday use, advertisements, instruction manuals, etc.. See also *genre* and *discourse*.

**Theater of the absurd:** movement in 20c drama which abandons traditional plot structures and conventional character presentation in favor of new modes of portraying the disillusioned human condition after World War II.

**Theme:** The main point of a work of literature. The term is used interchangeably with thesis. The theme of William Shakespeare's *Othello*—jealousy—is a common one.

**Thesis statement:** part of the introductory paragraph of a scholarly paper; in a clear and concise way, it informs the reader about thematic focus, methodology, and structure ("road map") of the paper.

**Three unities:** rules concerning the unity of place, time, and action in drama, deriving from (mis)interpretations of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Renaissance which argue that, in a "good" play, the place of the action should not change, the time of the plot presented should correspond more or less with the length of the performance, and the action should follow a linear plot.

**Tone:** The author's attitude toward his or her audience may be deduced from the tone of the work. A formal tone may create distance or convey politeness, while an informal tone may encourage a friendly, intimate, or intrusive feeling in the reader. The author's attitude toward his or her subject matter may also be deduced from the tone of the words he or she uses in discussing it. The tone of John F. Kennedy's speech which included the appeal to "ask not what your country can do for you" was intended to instill feelings of camaraderie and national pride in listeners.

**Topic sentence:** element of every paragraph in the main part of a scholarly paper; emphasizes the specific aspect discussed in the respective paragraph and links it to the overall topic of the paper.

**Tragedy:** classical sub-genre of drama with serious themes, usually depicting the downfall of an important figure, intended to have a purging effect on the audience. See also *catharsis*.

**Transcendentalism:** period in the first half of the 19c in the US. It became the most important uniquely American literary movement; it was partly influenced by Romantic enthusiasm for nature and German idealism.

**Transformation:** link between the textual dimension and performance in drama. It primarily revolves around directing.

**Trochee:** foot in which a stressed syllable is followed by an unstressed syllable, as for example in

/    u    u    /    u    /    u    /    u  
There they are, my fifty men and women.

**Typification:** typified characters display one dominant feature which often represents an abstract idea or the general traits of a group of persons. Medieval allegorical depictions of figures preferred typification in order to personify vices, virtues, or philosophical and religious positions. See also *individualization*.

**Utopian novel:** sub-genre of the novel describing alternative worlds with the aim of revealing and criticizing existing sociopolitical conditions.

**Verse:** A line of metered language, a line of a poem, or any work written in verse. The following line of verse is from the epic poem *Don Juan* by Lord Byron: “My way is to begin with the beginning.”

**Versification:** The writing of verse. Versification may also refer to the meter, rhyme, and other mechanical components of a poem. Composition of a “Roses are red, violets are blue” poem to suit an occasion is a common form of versification practiced by students.

## **STOLEN FROM:**

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