

# Appendix C

## GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

The terms briefly defined here are for the most part more fully defined earlier in the text. Hence many of the entries below are followed by page references to the earlier discussions.

**Absurd, Theater of the** plays, especially written in the 1950s and 1960s, that call attention to the incoherence of character and of action, the inability of people to communicate, and the apparent purposelessness of existence

**accent** stress given to a syllable (244)

**act** a major division of a play

**action** (1) the happenings in a narrative or drama, usually physical events (*B* marries *C*, *D* kills *E*), but also mental changes (*F* moves from innocence to experience); in short, the answer to the question "What happens?" (2) less commonly, the theme or underlying idea of a work (199-200)

**allegory** a work in which concrete elements (for instance, a pilgrim, a road, a splendid city) stand for abstractions (humanity, life, salvation), usually in an unambiguous, one-to-one relationship. The literal items (the pilgrim and so on) thus convey a meaning, which is usually moral, religious, or political. To take a nonliterary example: The Statue of Liberty holds a torch (enlightenment, showing the rest of the world the way to freedom), and at her feet are broken chains (tyranny overcome). A caution: Not all of the details in an allegorical work are meant to be interpreted. For example, the hollowness of the Statue of Liberty does not stand for the insubstantiality or emptiness of liberty.

**alliteration** repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the beginnings of words (*free-form, phantom*) (248)

**allusion** an indirect reference; thus when Lincoln spoke of "a nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," he was making an allusion to the Declaration of Independence.

**ambiguity** multiplicity of meaning, often deliberate, that leaves the reader uncertain about the intended significance

**anagnorisis** a recognition or discovery, especially in tragedy—for example, when the hero understands the reason for his or her fall (195)

**analysis** an examination, which usually proceeds by separating the object of study into parts (13-22)

**anapest** a metrical foot consisting of two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one. Example, showing three anapests: "As I came/to the edge/of the wood" (245)

**anecdote** a short narrative, usually reporting an amusing event in the life of an important person

**antagonist** a character or force that opposes (literally, "wrestles") the protagonist (the main character). Thus, in *Hamlet* the antagonist is King Claudius, and the protagonist is Hamlet; in *Antigone*, the antagonist is Creon, and the protagonist Antigone.

**antecedent action** happenings (especially in a play) that occurred before the present action (202)

**apostrophe** address to an absent figure or to a thing as if it were present and could listen. Example: "O rose, thou art sick!" (227)

**approximate rhyme** only the final consonant sounds are the same, as in *crownd/alone, or pail/fall*.

**archetype** a theme, image, motive, or pattern that occurs so often in literary works it seems to be universal. Examples: a dark forest (for mental confusion), the sun (for illumination) (123-124)

**aside** in the theater, words spoken by a character in the presence of other characters, but directed to the spectators, that is, understood by the audience to be inaudible to the other characters (206)

**assonance** repetition of similar vowel sounds in stressed syllables. Example: *light/bride* (248)

**atmosphere** the emotional tone (for instance, joy, or horror) in a work, most often established by the setting

**ballad** a short narrative poem, especially one that is sung or recited, often in a stanza of four lines, with eight, six, eight, and six syllables, with the second and fourth lines rhyming. A **popular ballad** is a narrative song that has been transmitted orally by what used to be called "the folk"; a **literary ballad** is a conscious imitation (without music) of such a work, often with complex symbolism.

**blank verse** unrhymed iambic pentameter, that is, unrhymed lines of ten syllables, with every second syllable stressed (249-250)

**cacophony** an unpleasant combination of sounds

**caesura** a strong pause within a line of verse (246)

**canon** a term originally used to refer to those books accepted as Holy Scripture by the Christian church. The term has come to be applied to literary works thought to have a special merit by a given culture, for instance, the body of literature traditionally taught in colleges and universities. Such works are sometimes called *classics*, and their authors are called *major*

**authors.** As conceived of in the United States until recently, the canon consisted chiefly of works by dead white European and American males—partly, of course, because middle-class and upper-class white males were in fact the people who did most of the writing in the Western Hemisphere, but also because white males (for instance, college professors) were the people who chiefly established the canon. Not surprisingly the canon makers valued (or valorized or “privileged”) writings that revealed, asserted, or reinforced the canon makers’ own values. From about the 1960s feminists and Marxists and others have argued that these works had been regarded as central not because they were inherently better than other works but because they reflected the interests of the dominant culture, and that other work, such as slave narratives and the diaries of women, had been “marginalized.”

In fact, the literary canon has never been static (in contrast to the biblical canon, which has not changed for more than a thousand years), but it is true that certain authors, such as Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, have been permanent fixtures. Why? Partly because they do indeed support the values of those who in large measure control the high cultural purse strings, and perhaps partly because these books are rich enough to invite constant reinterpretation from age to age, that is, to allow each generation to find its needs and its values in them. (93–94)

**catastrophe** the concluding action, especially in a tragedy

**catharsis** Aristotle’s term for the purgation or purification of the pity and terror supposedly experienced while witnessing a tragedy.

**character** (1) a person in a literary work (e.g., Romeo); (2) the personality of such a figure (e.g., sentimental lover). Characters (in the first sense) are sometimes classified as either “flat” (one-dimensional) or “round” (fully realized, complex). (140–146)

**characterization** the presentation of a character, whether by direct description, by showing the character in action, or by the presentation of other characters who help to define each other

**cliché** an expression that through overuse has ceased to be effective. Examples: acid test, sigh of relief, the proud possessor

**climax** the culmination of a conflict; a turning point, often the point of greatest tension in a plot (140)

**comedy** a literary work, especially a play, characterized by humor and by a happy ending (193–194)

**comparison and contrast** to compare is strictly to note similarities; to contrast is to note differences. But *compare* is now often used for both activities

**complication** an entanglement in a narrative or dramatic work that causes a conflict (139)

**conflict** a struggle between a character and some obstacle (for example, another character or fate) or between internal forces, such as divided loyalties (139–140)

**connotation** the associations (suggestions, overtones) of a word or expression. Thus *severely* and *three score and ten* both mean “one more than sixty-nine,” but because *three score and ten* is a biblical expression, it has an association of holiness; see *denotation*. (276–277)

**consistency building** the process engaged in during the act of reading, of reevaluating the details that one has just read in order to make them consistent with the new information that the text is providing (14)

**consonance** repetition of consonant sounds, especially in stressed syllables. Also called *half rhyme* or *slant rhyme*. Example: *arouse/doze* (248)

**convention** a pattern (for instance, the fourteen-line poem, or sonnet) or motif (for instance, the bumbling police officer in detective fiction) or other device occurring so often that it is taken for granted. Thus it is a convention that actors in a performance of *Julius Caesar* are understood to be speaking Latin, though in fact they are speaking English. Similarly, the soliloquy (a character alone on the stage speaks his or her thoughts aloud) is a convention, for in real life sane people do not talk aloud to themselves. (206–207)

**couplet** a pair of lines of verse, usually rhyming (248)

**crisis** a high point in the conflict that leads to the turning point (140)

**cultural materialism** criticism that sets literature in a social context, often of economics or politics or gender. Borrowing some of the methods of anthropology, cultural materialism usually extends the canon to include popular material, for instance, comic books and soap operas.

**dactyl** a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. Example: *underwear* (245)

**deconstruction** a critical approach that assumes language is unstable and ambiguous and is therefore inherently contradictory. Because authors cannot control their language, texts reveal more than their authors are aware of. For instance, texts (like such institutions as the law, the churches, and the schools) are likely, when closely scrutinized, to reveal connections to a society’s economic system, even though the authors may have believed they were outside the system. (120–121)

**denotation** the dictionary meaning of a word. Thus *soap opera* and *daytime serial* have the same denotation, but the connotations (associations, emotional overtones) of *soap opera* are less favorable. (276)

**dénouement** the resolution or the outcome (literally, the “unraveling”) of a plot (140)

**deus ex machina** literally, “a god out of a machine”; any unexpected and artificial way of resolving the plot—for example, by introducing a rich uncle, thought to be dead, who arrives on the scene and pays the debts that otherwise would overwhelm the young hero

**dialogue** exchange of words between characters; speech

**diction** the choice of vocabulary and of sentence structure. There is a difference in diction between “One never knows” and “You never can tell.” (216–217)

- didactic** pertaining to teaching; having a moral purpose
- dimeter** a line of poetry containing two feet (245)
- discovery** see *anagnorisis*
- drama** (1) a play; (2) conflict or tension, as in "The story lacks drama"
- dramatic irony** see *irony*
- dramatic monologue** a poem spoken entirely by one character but addressed to one or more other characters whose presence is strongly felt
- effaced narrator** a narrator who reports but who does not editorialize or enter into the minds of any of the characters in the story (158–159)
- elegy** a lyric poem, usually a meditation on a death
- elision** omission (usually of a vowel or unstressed syllable), as in *o'er* (for *over*) and in "Th' inevitable hour"
- end rhyme** identical sounds at the ends of lines of poetry (248)
- end-stopped line** a line of poetry that ends with a pause (usually marked by a comma, semicolon, or period) because the grammatical structure and the sense reach (at least to some degree) completion. It is contrasted with a *run-on line*. (000)
- English (or Shakespearean) sonnet** a poem of fourteen lines (three quatrains and a couplet), rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg* (249)
- enjambment** a line of poetry in which the grammatical and logical sense run on, without pause, into the next line or lines (246)
- epic** a long narrative, especially in verse, that usually records heroic material in an elevated style
- epigram** a brief, witty poem or saying
- epigraph** a quotation at the beginning of the work, just after the title, often giving a clue to the theme
- epiphany** a "showing forth," as when an action reveals a character with particular clarity
- episode** an incident or scene that has unity in itself but is also a part of a larger action
- epistle** a letter, in prose or verse
- essay** a work, usually in prose and usually fairly short, that purports to be true and that treats its subject tentatively. In most literary essays the reader's interest is as much in the speaker's personality as in any argument that is offered.
- euphony** literally, "good sound," a pleasant combination of sounds
- exposition** a line-by-line unfolding of the meaning of a text (48–56, 238–242)
- exposition** a setting-forth of information. In fiction and drama, introductory material introducing characters and the situation; in an essay, the presentation of information, as opposed to the telling of a story or the setting forth of an argument. (202)
- eye rhyme** words that look as though they rhyme, but do not rhyme when pronounced. Example: *come/home* (247)
- fabl** a short story (often involving speaking animals) with an easily grasped moral
- farce** comedy based not on clever language or on subtleties of characters but on broadly humorous situations (for instance, a man mistakenly enters the ladies' locker room)
- feminine rhyme** a rhyme of two or more syllables, with the stress falling on a syllable other than the last. Examples: *father/batter; tenderly/senderly* (247)
- feminist criticism** an approach especially concerned with analyzing the depiction of women in literature—what images do male authors present of female characters?—and also with the reappraisal of work by female authors (128–130)
- fiction** an imaginative work, usually a prose narrative (novel, short story), that reports incidents that did not in fact occur. The term may include all works that invent a world, such as a lyric poem or a play.
- figurative language** words intended to be understood in a way that is other than literal. Thus *lemon* used literally refers to a citrus fruit, but *lemon* used figuratively refers to a defective machine, especially a defective automobile. Other examples: "He's a beast," "She's a witch," "A sea of troubles." Literally, such expressions are nonsense, but writers use them to express meanings inexpressible in literal speech. Among the most common kinds of figures of speech are *apostrophe, metaphor*, and *simile* (see the discussions of these words in this glossary). (224–230)
- flashback** an interruption in a narrative that presents an earlier episode
- flat character** a one-dimensional character (for instance, the figure who is only and always the jealous husband or the flirtatious wife) as opposed to a round or many-sided character
- fly-on-the-wall narrator** a narrator who never editorializes and never enters a character's mind but reports only what is said and done
- foil** a character who makes a contrast with another, especially a minor character who helps to set off a major character (206)
- foot** a metrical unit, consisting of two or three syllables, with a specified arrangement of the stressed syllable or syllables. Thus the iambic foot consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. (244)
- foreshadowing** suggestions of what is to come (146–149)
- formalist criticism** analysis that assumes a work of art is a constructed object with a stable meaning that can be ascertained by studying the relationships between the elements of the work. Thus, a poem is like a chair: a chair can of course be stood on, or used for firewood, but it was created with a specific purpose that was evident and remains evident to all viewers. (118–120)
- free verse** poetry in lines of irregular length, usually unrhymed (250–251)
- gap** a term from reader-response criticism, referring to a reader's perception that something is unstated in the text, requiring the reader to fill in the material—for instance, to draw a conclusion as to why a character behaves as she does. Filling in the gaps is a matter of "consistency building." Different readers of course may fill the gaps differently, and readers may even differ as to whether a gap exists at a particular point in the text. (14)

**gender criticism** criticism concerned especially with alleged differences in the ways that males and females read and write, and also with the representations of gender in literature (128-131)

**genre** kind or type, roughly analogous to the biological term *species*. The four chief literary genres are nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and drama, but these can be subdivided into further genres. Thus fiction obviously can be divided into the short story and the novel, and drama obviously can be divided into tragedy and comedy. But these can be still further divided—for instance, tragedy into heroic tragedy and bourgeois tragedy, comedy into romantic comedy and satirical comedy.

**gesture** physical movement, especially in a play (208)

**half rhyme** repetition in accented syllables of the final consonant sound but without identity in the preceding vowel sound: words of similar but not identical sound. Also called *near rhyme*, *slant rhyme*, *approximate rhyme*, and *off-rhyme*. See *consonance*. Examples: *light/bet*; *affirm/perform* (247)

**hamartia** a flaw in the tragic hero, or an error made by the tragic hero (195)

**heptameter** a metrical line of seven feet (245)

**hero, heroine** the main character (not necessarily heroic or even admirable) in a work: cf. *protagonist*

**heroic couplet** an end-stopped pair of rhyming lines of iambic pentameter (249)

**hexameter** a metrical line of six feet (245)

**historical criticism** the attempt to illuminate a literary work by placing it in its historical context (124-125)

**hubris, hybris** a Greek word, usually translated as "overweening pride," "arrogance," "excessive ambition," and often said to be characteristic of tragic figures (193)

**hyperbole** figurative language using overstatement, as in "He died a thousand deaths" (237)

**iamb, iambic** a poetic foot consisting of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. Example: *alone* (245)

**image, imagery** imagery is established by language that appeals to the senses, especially sight ("deep blue sea") but also other senses ("tinkling bells," "perfumes of Arabia") (229)

**indeterminacy** a passage that careful readers agree is open to more than one interpretation. According to some poststructural critics, because language is unstable and because contexts can never be objectively viewed, all texts are indeterminate. (14)

**innocent eye** a naive narrator in whose narration the reader sees more than the narrator sees (159-160)

**internal rhyme** rhyme within a line (248)

**interpretation** the assignment of meaning to a text (97-108)

**intertextuality** all works show the influence of other works. If an author writes, say, a short story, no matter how original she thinks she is, she

inevitably brings to her own story a knowledge of other stories, for example, a conception of what a short story is, and, speaking more generally, an idea of what a story (long or short, written or oral) is. In opposition to formalist critics, who see a literary work as an independent whole containing a fixed meaning, some contemporary critics emphasize the work's *intertextuality*, that is, its connections with a vast context of writings and indeed of all aspects of culture, and in part depending also on what the reader brings to the work. Because different readers bring different things, meaning is thus ever-changing. In this view, then, no text is self-sufficient, and no writer fully controls the meaning of the text. Because we are talking about connections of which the writer is unaware, and because "meaning" is in part the creation of the reader, the author is by no means an authority. Thus, the critic should see a novel, for instance, not only in connection with other novels, past and present, but also in connection with other kinds of narratives, such as TV dramas and films, even though the author of the book lived before the age of film and TV. See Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds., *Influences and Intertextuality in Literary History* (1991).

**irony** a contrast of some sort. For instance, in *verbal irony* or *Socratic irony* the contrast is between what is said and what is meant ("You're a great guy," meant bitterly). In *dramatic irony* or *Sophoclean irony* the contrast is between what is intended and what is accomplished (Macbeth usurps the throne, thinking he will then be happy, but the action leads him to misery), or between what the audience knows (a murderer waits in the bedroom) and what a character says (the victim enters the bedroom, innocently saying, "I think I'll have a long sleep"). (194-195, 237)

**Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet** a poem of fourteen lines, consisting of an octave (rhyming *abbaabba*) and a sestet (usually *cdecde* or *cddcdc*) (249)

**litotes** a form of understatement in which an affirmation is made by means of a negation; thus, "He was not underweight" meaning "He was grossly overweight"

**lyric poem** a short poem, often songlike, with the emphasis not on narrative but on the speaker's emotion or reverie

**Marxist criticism** the study of literature in the light of Karl Marx's view that economic forces, controlled by the dominant class, shape the literature (as well as the law, philosophy, religion, etc.) of a society (125)

**masculine rhyme** rhyme of one-syllable words (*fiess/crises*) or, if more than one syllable, words ending with accented syllables (*behold/foretold*) (247)

**mask** a term used to designate the speaker of a poem, equivalent to *persona* or *voice* (214-219)

**meaning** critics seek to interpret "meaning," variously defined as what the writer intended the work to say about the world and human experience, or as what the work says to the reader regardless of the writer's intention. Both versions imply that a literary work is a nut to be cracked, with a kernel that is to be extracted. Because few critics today hold that meaning is clear and

- unchanging, the tendency now is to say that a critic offers "an interpretation" or "a reading" rather than a "statement of the meaning of a work." Many critics today would say that an alleged interpretation is really a creation of meaning. (89-93)
- melodrama** a narrative, usually in dramatic form, involving threatening situations but ending happily. The characters are usually stock figures (virtuous heroine, villainous landlord).
- metaphor** a kind of figurative language equating one thing with another: "This novel is garbage" (a book is equated with discarded and probably inedible food), "a piercing cry" (a cry is equated with a spear or other sharp instrument) (224-225)
- meter** a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables (244-247)
- metonymy** a kind of figurative language in which a word or phrase stands not for itself but for something closely related to it: *saber rattling* means "militaristic talk or action" (226)
- monologue** a relatively long, uninterrupted speech by a character
- monometer** a metrical line consisting of only one foot (245)
- montage** in film, quick cutting; in fiction, quick shifts
- mood** the atmosphere, usually created by descriptions of the settings and characters
- motif** a recurrent theme within a work, or a theme common to many works
- motivation** grounds for a character's action (205-206)
- myth** (1) a traditional story reflecting primitive beliefs, especially explaining the mysteries of the natural world (why it rains, or the origin of mountains); (2) a body of belief, not necessarily false, especially as set forth by a writer. Thus one may speak of Yeats and Alice Walker as myth makers, referring to the visions of reality that they set forth in their works. (123-124)
- narrative, narrator** a narrative is a story (an anecdote, a novel); a narrator is one who tells a story (not the author, but the invented speaker of the story). On kinds of narrators, see *point of view*. (157-165)
- New Criticism** a mid-twentieth-century movement (also called formalist criticism) that regarded a literary work as an independent, carefully constructed object, hence it made little or no use of the author's biography or of historical context and it relied chiefly on explanation (118-120)
- New Historicism** a school of criticism holding that the past cannot be known objectively. According to this view, because historians project their own "narrative"—their own invention or "construction"—on the happenings of the past, historical writings are not objective but are, at bottom, political statements. (125-126)
- novel** a long work of prose fiction, especially one that is relatively realistic
- novella** a work of prose fiction longer than a short story but shorter than a novel, say, about forty to eighty pages
- objective point of view** a narrator reports but does not editorialize or enter into the minds of any of the characters in the story (158-159)
- octave, octet** an eight-line stanza, or the first eight lines of a sonnet, especially of an Italian sonnet (249)
- octosyllabic couplet** a pair of rhyming lines, each line with four iambic feet (248)
- ode** a lyric exalting someone (for instance, a hero) or something (for instance, a season)
- omniscient narrator** a speaker who knows the thoughts of all of the characters in the narrative (157-158)
- onomatopoeia** words (or the use of words) that sound like what they mean. Examples: *buzz*, *whirr* (248)
- open form** poetry whose form seems spontaneous rather than highly patterned (251)
- oxymoron** a compact paradox, as in "a mute cry," "a pleasing pain," "proud humility"
- parable** a short narrative that is at least in part allegorical and that illustrates a moral or spiritual lesson
- paradox** an apparent contradiction, as in Jesus' words: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (237-238)
- paraphrase** a restatement that sets forth an idea in diction other than that of the original (74-75)
- parody** a humorous imitation of a literary work, especially of its style (76-77)
- pathos** pity, sadness
- pentameter** a line of verse containing five feet (245)
- peripeteia** a reversal in the action (195)
- persona** literally, a mask; the "I" or speaker of a work, sometimes identified with the author but usually better regarded as the voice or mouthpiece created by the author (214-219)
- personification** a kind of figurative language in which an inanimate object, animal, or other nonhuman is given human traits. Examples: "the creeping tide" (the tide is imagined as having feet), "the cruel sea" (the sea is imagined as having moral qualities) (227)
- plot** the episodes in a narrative or dramatic work—that is, what happens. (But even a lyric poem can be said to have a plot; for instance, the speaker's mood changes from anger to resignation.) Sometimes *plot* is defined as the author's particular arrangement (sequence) of these episodes, and *story* is the episodes in their chronological sequence. Until recently it was widely believed that a good plot had a logical structure: A caused B (B did not simply happen to follow A). But in the last few decades some critics have argued that such a concept merely represents the white male's view of experience. (139-141)
- poem** an imaginative work in meter or in free verse, usually employing figurative language
- point of view** the perspective from which a story is told—for example, by a major character or a minor character or a fly on the wall; see also *narrative, narrator, omniscient narrator* (157-141)
- postmodernism** the term came into prominence in the 1960s, to distinguish the contemporary experimental writing of such authors as Samuel Beckett

and Jorge Luis Borges from such early-twentieth-century classics of modernism as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Although the classic modernists had been thought to be revolutionary in their day, after World War II they seemed to be conservative, and their works seemed remote from today's society with its new interests in such things as feminism, gay and lesbian rights, and pop culture. Postmodernist literature, though widely varied and not always clearly distinct from modernist literature, usually is more politically concerned, more playful—it is given to parody and pastiche—and more closely related to the art forms of popular culture than is modernist literature.

**prosody** the principles of versification (244)

**protagonist** the chief actor in any literary work. The term is usually preferable to *hero* and *heroine* because it can include characters—for example, villainous or weak ones—who are not aptly called heroes or heroines.

**psychological criticism** a form of analysis especially concerned both with the ways in which authors unconsciously leave traces of their inner lives in their works and with the ways in which readers respond, consciously and unconsciously, to works (127)

**pyrrhic foot** in poetry, a foot consisting of two unstressed syllables (245)

**quatrain** a stanza of four lines (249)

**reader-response criticism** criticism emphasizing the idea that various readers respond in various ways and therefore that readers as well as authors "create" meaning (121–123, 133)

**realism** presentation of plausible characters (usually middle class) in plausible (usually everyday) circumstances, as opposed, for example, to heroic characters engaged in improbable adventures. Realism in literature seeks to give the illusion of reality.

**recognition** \* see *anagnorisis* (195)

**refrain** a repeated phrase, line, or group of lines in a poem, especially in a ballad

**resolution** the dénouement or untying of the complication of the plot (4)

**reversal** a change in fortune, often an ironic twist (195)

**rhetorical question** a question to which no answer is expected or to which only one answer is plausible. Example: "Do you think I am unaware of your goings-on?"

**rhyme** similarity or identity of accented sounds in corresponding positions, as, for example, at the ends of lines: *love/dove; tender/slender* (247–248)

**rhythm** in poetry, a pattern of stressed and unstressed sounds; in prose, some sort of recurrence (for example, of a motif) at approximately identical intervals (242–245, 246–249)

**rising action** in a story or play, the events that lead up to the climax (140)

**rising meter** a foot (for example, iambic or anapestic) ending with a stressed syllable

**romance** narrative fiction, usually characterized by improbable adventures and love

**round character** a many-sided character, one who does not always act predictably, as opposed to a "flat" or one-dimensional, unchanging character

**run-on line** a line of verse whose syntax and meaning require the reader to go on, without a pause, to the next line; an *enjambéd* line (246)

**sarcasm** crudely mocking or contemptuous language; heavy verbal irony

**satire** literature that entertainingly attacks folly or vice; amusingly abusive writing

**scansion** description of rhythm in poetry; metrical analysis (246)

**scene** (1) a unit of a play, in which the setting is unchanged and the time continuous; (2) the setting (locale and time of the action); (3) in fiction, a dramatic passage, as opposed to a passage of description or of summary

**selective omniscience** a point of view in which the author enters the mind of one character and for the most part sees the other characters only from the outside (157–158)

**sentimentality** excessive emotion, especially excessive pity, treated as appropriate rather than as disproportionate

**sequence** a group of related scenes in a film

**sestet** a six-line stanza, or the last six lines of an Italian sonnet (249)

**sestina** a poem with six stanzas of six lines each and a concluding stanza of three lines. The last word of each line in the first stanza appears as the last word of a line in each of the next five stanzas but in a different order. In the final (three-line) stanza, each line ends with one of these six words, and each line includes in the middle of the line one of the other three words.

**setting** the time and place of a story, play, or poem (for instance, a Texas town in winter, about 1900) (149–150)

**short story** a fictional narrative, usually in prose, rarely longer than thirty pages and often much briefer

**shot** in film, what is recorded between the time the camera starts and the time it stops

**simile** a kind of figurative language explicitly making a comparison—for example, by using *as*, *like*, or a verb such as *seems* (224)

**soliloquy** a speech in a play, in which a character alone on the stage speaks his or her thoughts aloud (206)

**sonnet** a lyric poem of fourteen lines; see *English sonnet*, *Italian sonnet* (249)

**speaker** see *persona* (214)

**spondee** a metrical foot consisting of two stressed syllables (245)

**stage direction** a playwright's indication to the actors or readers—for example, offering information about how an actor is to speak a line

**stanza** a group of lines forming a unit that is repeated in a poem (248)

**stereotype** a simplified conception, especially an oversimplification—for example, a stock character such as the heartless landlord, the kindly old teacher, the prostitute with a heart of gold. Such a character usually has only one personality trait, and this is boldly exaggerated.

**stream of consciousness** the presentation of a character's unrestricted flow of thought, often with free associations, and often without punctuation

**stress** emphasis on one syllable as compared with another (242)

**structuralism** a critical theory holding that a literary work consists of conventional elements that, taken together by a reader familiar with the conventions, give the work its meaning. Thus, just as a spectator must know the rules of a game (e.g., three strikes and you're out) in order to enjoy the game, so a reader must know the rules of, say, a novel (coherent, realistic, adequately motivated characters; a plausible plot; for instance, *The Color Purple*) or of a satire (caricatures of contemptible figures in amusing situations that need not be at all plausible; for instance, *Gulliver's Travels*). Structuralists normally have no interest in the origins of a work (i.e., in the historical background, or in the author's biography) and no interest in the degree to which a work of art seems to correspond to reality. The interest normally is in the work as a self-sufficient construction. Consult Robert Sojoles, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and two books by Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (1976) and (for the critical shift from structuralism to poststructuralism) *On Deconstruction* (1982).

**structure** the organization of a work, the relationship between the chief parts, the large-scale pattern—for instance, a rising action or complication followed by a crisis and then a resolution (58, 230–237)

**style** the manner of expression, evident not only in the choice of certain words (for instance, colloquial language) but in the choice of certain kinds of sentence structure, characters, settings, and themes (182, 275–290)

**subplot** a sequence of events often paralleling or in some way resembling the main story

**summary** a synopsis or condensation

**symbol** a person, object, action, or situation that, charged with meaning, suggests another thing (for example, a dark forest may suggest confusion or perhaps evil), though usually with less specificity and more ambiguity than an allegory. A symbol usually differs from a metaphor in that a symbol is expanded or repeated and works by accumulating associations (150–156, 181–182, 229–230)

**synecdoche** a kind of figurative language in which the whole stands for a part ("the law," for a police officer), or a part stands for the whole ("all hands on deck," for all persons) (226)

**tale** a short narrative, usually less realistic and more romantic than a short story; a yarn

**tercet** a unit of three lines of verse (249)

**tetrameter** a verse line of four feet (245)

**theme** what the work is about; an underlying idea of a work; a conception of human experience suggested by the concrete details. Thus the theme of *Macbeth* is often said to be that "Vaulting ambition o'erleaps itself." (166–174)

**thesis** the point or argument that a writer announces and develops. A thesis differs from a *topic* by making an assertion. "The fall of Oedipus" is a topic, but "Oedipus falls because he is impetuous" is a thesis, as is "Oedipus is impetuous, but his impetuosity has nothing to do with his fall." (34–35)

**thesis sentence** a sentence summarizing, as specifically as possible, the writer's chief point (argument and perhaps purpose) (34)

**third-person narrator** the teller of a story who does not participate in the happenings (157–159)

**tone** the prevailing attitude (for instance, ironic, genial, objective) as perceived by the reader. Notice that a reader may feel that the tone of the *persona* of the work is genial while the tone of the author of the same work is ironic. (216–217)

**topic** a subject, such as "Hamlet's relation to Horatio." A topic becomes a *thesis* when a predicate is added to this subject, thus: "Hamlet's relation to Horatio helps to define Hamlet." (64)

**tragedy** a serious play showing the protagonist moving from good fortune to bad and ending in death or a deathlike state (192–196)

**tragic flaw** a supposed weakness (for example, arrogance) in the tragic protagonist: If the tragedy results from an intellectual error rather than from a moral weakness, it is better to speak of "a tragic error." (195)

**tragicomedy** a mixture of tragedy and comedy, usually a play with serious happenings that expose the characters to the threat of death but that ends happily

**transition** a connection between one passage and the next

**trimeter** a verse line with three feet (245)

**triple** a group of three lines of verse, usually rhyming (249)

**trochee** a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. Example: *gar-den* (245)

**understatement** a figure of speech in which the speaker says less than what he or she means; an ironic minimizing, as in "You've done fairly well for yourself" said to the winner of a multimillion-dollar lottery (237)

**unity** harmony and coherence of parts, absence of irrelevance (39)

**unreliable narrator** a narrator whose report a reader cannot accept at face value, perhaps because the narrator is naive or is too deeply implicated in the action to report it objectively (160)

**vers libre** free verse, unrhymed poetry (250–251)

**verse** (1) a line of poetry; (2) a stanza of a poem (248)

**villanelle** a poem with five stanzas of three lines rhyming *a b a*, and a concluding stanza of four lines, rhyming *a b a a*. The first and third lines of the first and fourth stanzas; the entire first line is repeated as the third line of the second and fourth stanzas; the entire third line is repeated as the third line of the third and fifth stanzas. These two lines form the final two lines of the last (four-line) stanza.

**voice** see *persona*, *style*, and *tone* (214–219)

