

## Glossary of Literary and Critical Terms

### A

**Abstract** a) A summary of a piece of written work, or b) language that conveys ideas or general qualities of people or things. Abstract is the opposite of concrete, which conveys specific information about a particular person or thing. Abstract writing lacks vivid or precise detail, whereas concrete writing possesses specific detail.

**Act** The major division in a play or dramatic work. An act has one or more scenes.

**Aestheticism** (Aesthetic movement) Refers to a movement in late nineteenth-century Europe centered on a belief in "art for art's sake." Rooted in the ideas of Immanuel Kant, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé, and others, aestheticism believed that art was not meant to serve a moral or didactic purpose; art's value was its beauty. The ideas of aestheticism came to England through writers such as Walter Pater and later influenced writers such as Wilde and Swinburne who were connected with the Decadence movement. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart.

**Aesthetics** The study of beauty in both nature and art. Aesthetics addresses philosophical questions about the nature of beauty, psychological questions about the effects of beauty, and theoretical issues related to taste and perception of beauty.

**Affective Fallacy** A term first used by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley for the practice of basing literary interpretation upon the response of readers or upon the emotional effect a particular work has on readers. Wimsatt and Beardsley believed affective fallacy to be flawed, as with another fallacy they coined, intentional fallacy, in which one evaluates a literary text according to its author's explicit or implicit intentions. These are major ideas within New Criticism. Reader Response criticism has also countered the notions of the affective and intentional fallacies.

**Age of Sensibility (Age of Johnson)** A period of British literature spanning the years 1744-1785, though 1789 and 1798 are alternate end dates. This period is sometimes referred to as the Age of Johnson because of Samuel Johnson's considerable influence upon literature. The characteristics of the Age of Johnson link this period with the end of the Neoclassical period, whereas the Age of Sensibility anticipates the Romantic period. In contrast to the Augustan era,

the Age of Sensibility focused upon instinct, feeling, imagination, and sometimes the sublime. New cultural attitudes and new theories of literature emerged; the novel became an increasingly popular and prevalent form. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Age of Transcendentalism** Often referred to as Romanticism, Transcendentalism is a literary period spanning the years 1828 to 1865, the time between Jacksonian democracy and the end of the U.S. Civil War. This period was one of increased westward expansion and the beginnings of urbanization and industrialization. The Romantic period was also the first major explosion of a distinctively American body of literature; for this reason, this period is also referred to as the American Renaissance. Many of American literature's most well-known writers emerged during this time. Issues and subjects addressed in literature of this time ranged from the American identity, to the slavery debate, to historical narratives, to poems and narratives inspired by Romanticism, to prose works examining the nature the American democracy and national unity. American Romanticism is related to, but distinct from, British Romanticism. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Allegory** A narrative in which abstract concepts are represented as something concrete, typically major elements in the story, such as characters, objects, actions, or events. It possesses two parallel levels of meaning and understanding: a literal level, where a surface level story is recounted, and a symbolic level, which addresses abstract ideas. Allegories are often considered extended metaphors: the surface level story helps to convey moral, religious, political, or philosophical ideas. There are two major kinds of allegory: historical and political allegories and allegories of ideas. Related to allegory are the parable and exemplum. Parables are very short, realistic narratives about people that are meant to teach a moral or a religious lesson. Often they are used to emphasize a narrator's lesson or point. Exemplums are used in sermons to illustrate and validate a particular theme or idea.

**Alliteration** The repetition of the same sounds in initial consonants or stressed syllables in a sequence of words.

**Allusion** An indirect reference in a literary text to a well-known person or place, or to an historical, political, or cultural event. The reference can also be to a literary, religious, or mythological text. Allusions are not usually identified, as it is assumed the reader will make the connection.

**Ambiguity** Ambiguity refers to the ways words or phrases can connote a range of meanings. Ambiguity points to the openness of language to different interpretations and understanding. Also called "plurisignation" or "multiple meanings."

**American Renaissance** Often referred to as the Age of Transcendentalism or, more often, the Romantic period (American), the American Renaissance refers to the first major explosion of a distinctively American body of literature. It is a literary period spanning the years 1828 to 1865, the time between Jacksonian democracy and the end of the U.S. Civil War. This period was one

of increased westward expansion and the beginnings of urbanization and industrialization. Many of American literature's most well-known writers emerged during this time. Issues and subjects addressed in literature of this time ranged from the American identity, to the slavery debate, to historical narratives, to poems and narratives inspired by Romanticism, to prose works examining the nature the American democracy and national unity. American Romanticism is related to, but distinct from, British Romanticism. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Anapestic** (anapest) A common metrical unit of poetry consisting of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. Metrical units (called feet) make up a poem's meter, or rhythms in poetry made by units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Antagonist** The most significant character or force that opposes the protagonist in a narrative.

**Antebellum** A term used to describe pre-Civil War American literature; the term is usually applied to pre-Civil War Southern American literature in particular.

**Antithesis** A rhetorical or philosophical contrast or opposition which is emphasized by parallelism.

**Antithetical criticism** In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), and his other works, Harold Bloom introduces this concept that asserts that all poets' work is a rewriting of the poetic tradition and that this rewriting involves the misreading of previous poets. This poetic act of misreading, however, is a site of creativity and innovation. Bloom acknowledges that critics also misread and that their misreadings result in a range of interpretations which go beyond what the poet thought he or she was saying.

**Anxiety of influence** In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), and his other works, Harold Bloom argued that a poet must confront and resist the poetic tradition in order to find and assert his or her individual poetic voice. Bloom also describes how an Oedipal-type relationship arises between the poet and the poetic tradition. Emerging from Bloom's work is the concept of antithetical criticism. Bloom asserts that all poets' work is a rewriting of the poetic tradition and that this rewriting involves the misreading of previous poets. This poetic act of misreading, however, is a site of creativity and innovation. Bloom acknowledges that critics also misread and that their misreadings result in a range of interpretations which go beyond what the poet thought he or she was saying.

**Apostrophe** A figure of speech wherein a thing, place, abstract idea, dead or absent person is addressed directly as if present and capable of understanding and responding.

**Archetypal criticism** A type of literary criticism that focuses on particular archetypes, narrative patterns, themes, motifs, or characters that recur in a particular literary work or in literature in general.

**Archetype** According to Carl Jung, archetypes are characters, images, plot patterns, rituals, and settings that are shared by diverse cultures. Jung believed that archetypes are part of humanity's "collective unconscious" and that they appear in literature, myth, folklore, and rituals from a wide range of cultures. They also manifest themselves in the subconscious thoughts and dreams of people. Literary critic Northrop Frye argued that literary archetypes are recurrent images and symbols in literature. Archetypal criticism focuses on particular archetypes, narrative patterns, themes, motifs, or characters that recur in a particular literary work or in literature in general.

**Aside** A short remark or speech spoken by a character to the audience or to another character. According to convention, it is assumed that the aside is not heard by the other characters. Asides tend to reveal insight into plot, character, or emotion.

**Assonance** The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds in a sequence of words. Usually the repetition occurs in the stressed syllables and the vowel sound is followed by different consonant sounds. The effect of assonance is thought to be euphony.

**Atmosphere** The general feeling or emotion created in the reader at a given point in a literary work. Atmosphere (also called mood) is created by language, setting, imagery, sensory, and extra-sensory perceptions. It should not be confused with tone.

**Augustan era** A period of British literature beginning in 1700 and ending in 1745. Writers in this period linked themselves with writers in the age of the Roman Emperor Augustus. Augustan writers imitated the literary forms of Horace, Virgil, and Ovid and drew upon the perceived order, decorum, moderation, civility, and wit of these writers. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Avant-garde** A term used since the late nineteenth century to suggest art or writing that challenges tradition, or that is innovative, experimental, revolutionary, or ahead of its time.

## B

**Ballad** A poem that recounts a story, usually a single episode, that was originally intended to be sung. Ballads feature simple language, dramatic action, and frequently, but not always, a tragic ending.

**Beat Writers (Beat Generation)** Refers to a period of American literature in the 1950s which was anti-traditional, anti-establishment, and anti-intellectual. Their writings challenged social and literary traditions and were characterized by a loose and informal structure and an informal, slang-filled diction. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Bildungsroman** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, that traces the development of a protagonist from childhood to adulthood and chronicles the maturation of his or her character, intellect, and often spirituality or morality. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a Bildungsroman because, even though Huck is only thirteen years old, by the end of the novel, he learns a great deal about himself and others. Throughout the course of the novel, he grows from a naïve, carefree boy who accepts others' sense of morality as truth to one who trusts his own morals in a corrupt society and—perhaps most importantly—recognizes the humanity of slaves.

**Black comedy** A literary work or style where disturbing subject matters such as death, misfortune, disease, war, and suffering are treated with a sardonic or bitter humor. Usually black comedies are designed to shock or offend and often feature an element of futility or hopelessness.

**Blank verse** Lines of unrhymed verse, almost always in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter is a specific type of meter (the rhythms in poetry made by units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables) with lines made up of ten units, or feet, of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. Blank verse is the meter that most closely resembles the natural patterns of English speech. John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* is written in blank verse:

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,

Each of these lines is made up of ten feet, or beats, of unstressed and then stressed syllables: “of MANS first DISoBEDiENCE and the FRUIT / of THAT forBIDden TREE whose MORTal TAST,” and so on.

## C

**Cacophony** Combinations of words that sound and convey harshness and roughness. Sometimes called "dissonance," cacophony is the opposite of euphony.

**Caesura** Comes from the Latin for "a cutting." Caesura is a pause in a line of verse replicating natural breaks in language. Often caesuras occur between clauses or sentences or through the poet's use of punctuation.

**Canon** In literary criticism, canon refers to a) a body of works attributed to a particular author, or b) works that are given special cultural status. Works that are labeled "classics" or "Great Books" or that are frequently taught or anthologized are called "canonical."

**Carnival (Carnivalization)** As theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), the carnival is a liberating and potentially subversive event that allows participants to transgress, overturn, or challenge hierarchies, customs, and laws, often only temporarily. Bakhtin argues that carnivalization has an effect on everyday life and on literature and language. Carnival is an element of Bakhtin's dialogic criticism in which he described literary works as either monologic or dialogic. Unrelated to the number of characters, monologic works have one dominant voice or discourse, which is often but not always the voice of the dominant culture or ideology of the author's culture. In contrast, dialogic works allow numerous voices or discourses to emerge and interact. Thus, dialogic criticism is the analysis of these numerous voices and discourses, and the carnival is one event which brings out these multiple voices to challenge the hierarchies of the dominant culture or ideology.

**Caroline age** The fourth era of the Renaissance period in British literature defined by the reign of Charles I (1625-1649). The Caroline age was that of the English Civil War between the supporters of the king (called Cavaliers) and the supporters of Parliament (called the Roundheads). Literature of this period featured poetry, nonfiction prose, and the Cavalier Poets, who were associated with the court and wrote poems of gallantry and courtship. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Carpe diem** Latin for "seize the day," carpe diem is a frequent and traditional literary theme. In lyric poetry, carpe diem is used to convey the transience of life, youth, and love, and to implore readers to make the most of each fleeting moment.

**Catharsis** According to Aristotle, viewers watching tragic drama would feel a catharsis or a release of emotion. Catharsis refers to the purging or cleansing of emotion, which leads to relief or other beneficial emotions in an audience.

**Chapbook** Distributed by "chapmen" or peddlers from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, chapbooks contained popular literature such as ballads, tracts, fairy tales, and nursery rhymes.

**Character** A fictional or imagined person in a narrative or literary text. Characters are often defined as flat, round, or stock. Flat characters are usually minor characters with one outstanding trait; flat characters rarely change during the course of the work (also called static characters) and are often based on stock characters. A round character is usually one of the main characters and is presented in a complex and detailed manner. A round character usually undergoes a significant change in response to the events or circumstances described in the plot. Because they change during the work, these characters are often called dynamic characters. Stock characters are common or stereotypical types of characters that are commonly seen in literature.

**Characterization** How an author uses description, action, dialogue, and emotion to convey the complexities of a character. Authors frequently use descriptions of a character's appearance, history, conversations, thoughts, reactions, and emotions. In this way, characterization is created, developed, conveyed, and revealed. Characterization also involves creating a character's motivation for why a particular character is driven or inspired to act in the ways he or she does in response to events of the plot.

**Chorus** In Greek tragedy, the chorus often sang, danced, and interacted with the events of the play or functioned as a commentator on the characters or events. In Elizabethan tragedy, a chorus often spoke a prologue and epilogue to the play and offered a commentary on the events or characters. Choral characters or choral figures are also characters in a literary work who stand apart from the action and provide insight or commentary on the events or characters.

**Close reading** A thorough and detailed analysis of a literary text and the elements that make up that literary work. Close readings examine all aspects and complexities of a specific text, including style, content, form, imagery, symbolism, and diction. They are also called explications and are often connected with Practical Criticism and New Criticism.

**Colloquialism** An informal or everyday expression, phrase, or word.

**Colonial period** A period in American literature beginning with the founding of the English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia and lasting until the passing of the Stamp Act in 1765. Americans' opposition to the British Parliament's Stamp Act was a spark for the American Revolution (1776). Because the Colonial period was dominated by Puritan beliefs, imaginative literature was very rare; in some colonies it was banned for being immoral. Literature of this period was therefore often historical, religious, or didactic. Writings were primarily in genres such as tracts, polemics, journals, narratives, sermons, and some poetry. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Comedy** Broadly, comedy means anything that is amusing or entertaining. In a dramatic context, comedy usually involves a movement from unhappiness to happiness and often relates to themes of regeneration, renewal, and human triumph over chance. Comedy usually refers to plays or films, but prose fiction and narrative poetry can also contain comic elements. Forms of comedy include commedia dell'arte ("comedy of the professional actors"), which emerged in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century and usually involved love intrigues, stock characters, and a mostly improvised dialogue surrounding a scenario. Commedia dell'arte influenced European dramatists, particularly Elizabethan writers. Romantic comedy usually involves themes of love and young lovers and almost always has a happy ending. Comedy of manners is a high comedy, usually about love, that relies on intellectual rather than physical comedy and is meant to appeal to a "cultivated" audience. Comedy of manners is often associated with Restoration drama, and the setting is frequently aristocratic or high society. Farce is a form of low comedy and relies upon exaggerated character and physical action and unpredictable or improbable plot situations. Farce aims at entertaining, often with elements of panic, surprise, and cruelty.

**Comedy of manners** A form of high comedy, usually about love, that relies on intellectual rather than physical comedy and is meant to appeal to a "cultivated" audience. Comedy of manners is often associated with Restoration drama, and the setting is frequently aristocratic or high society. More specific than the broader sense of anything amusing or entertaining, comedy usually involves a movement from unhappiness to happiness and often relates to themes of regeneration, renewal, and human triumph over chance.

**Commedia dell arte** "Comedy of the professional actors," commedia dell arte is a form of comedy which emerged in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century that usually involved love intrigues, stock characters, and a mostly improvised dialogue surrounding a scenario. Commedia dell arte influenced European dramatists, particularly Elizabethan writers. More specific than the broader sense of anything amusing or entertaining, comedy usually usually involves a movement from unhappiness to happiness and often relates to themes of regeneration, renewal, and human triumph over chance.

**Commonwealth age** Also called the Puritan Interregnum (meaning "between reigns"), the Commonwealth period is the fifth era of the Renaissance period in British literature. This era begins with the execution of Charles I in 1649 and lasts until the restoration of the Stuart Monarchy with the crowning of Charles II in 1660. During this era, England was ruled by Parliament and the Puritan Oliver Cromwell until his death in 1658. Puritan rule was significant to literary history because theatres were closed on moral and religious grounds. While drama did not flourish, significant examples of nonfiction prose and poetry were written during this period. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Concrete poetry** A form of poetry that is meant to be seen not only as a written text but also as a visual object. Words, phrases, and punctuation are placed on the page in a way that creates an image or a graphic form. The shape of the poem suggests the content, subject, or theme.

**Concrete** Language that conveys specific information about a particular person or thing. Concrete is the opposite of abstract, which conveys general ideas or qualities of people or things. Abstract language lacks concrete language's vivid or precise detail.

**Conflict** The struggle between two forces in a literary work that constitutes the foundation of plot, or the arrangement of events, actions, and situations in a narrative work. Conflicting forces can include other characters, situations, events, and fate. Other forces can be a character's own personality, the inexorable progress of history, or simple circumstance. Generally, there are four types of conflict: 1) physical conflict between a character and the natural or physical world; 2) social conflict between a character and another character, or characters and society or a segment of society; 3) psychological conflict between a character and his or her thoughts, ideas, actions, or beliefs; and 4) metaphysical conflict between a character and fate or a deity.

**Consonance** The repetition of identical or similar consonants in a sequence of words with different vowel sounds.

**Context** Context is either a) the parts of a text that either precede or follow a given passage, or b) the social, cultural, biographical, and literary circumstances that exist outside a text. In both cases, context works against looking at a text in isolation.

**Convention** Either a) a character, plot, device, image, theme, or motif used frequently in literature, or b) an unrealistic device, such as an aside, that an audience or reading public has agreed to tolerate.

**Couplet** A grouping of two rhymed verse lines typically with a common metrical pattern or line length.

**Criticism (Literary criticism)** The detailed and reflective analysis of a literary work in order to understand meaning or to describe significance, interpretation, or evaluation. There are many different approaches to literary criticism based on various theories of interpretation, analysis, and reading.

## D

**Dactylic (dactyl)** A common metrical unit of poetry consisting of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. Metrical units (called feet) make up a poem's meter, or rhythms in poetry made by units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Decadence** A movement in British literature during the late nineteenth century. The term "decadence" was used to refer to qualities found in Greek and Roman literature in the last three centuries B.C.E. Decadence writers believed this classical literature possessed high refinement with an element of impending decay. They found this body of classical literature to be an appropriate reflection of European society. The ideas of Decadence were articulated by writers such as Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier. Decadence arrived in England through Swinburne in the 1890s. Because Decadence was concerned with unconventional artistic forms and ideas, many of its followers led unconventional lives in terms of behavior, dress, and sexuality. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Deconstruction** A close reading of a text that aims to demonstrate that a literary text is not a unified or logical whole, but is instead a text of many irreconcilable and contradictory readings. A deconstructive reading shows how conflicting elements undermine a seemingly unified structure and meaning and conveys that there is an unlimited number of interpretations. Deconstruction focuses on the text itself: as Jacques Derrida wrote, "there is nothing outside the text."

**Dénouement** Also referred to as resolution, dénouement is what follows the climax of a narrative and is usually the final scene in a play or the final chapter or section in a narrative or novel. French for "unknotting," dénouement is the final untying or clearing up a plot where its mysteries, confusions, or uncertainties are resolved. Dénouement can be applied to tragedy and comedy but catastrophe is usually used to describe the final resolution in tragedy. There are two main types of dénouement: open dénouement refers to endings where the author leaves several unresolved issues or loose threads for the reader to consider; closed dénouement refers to endings where all or almost all of the uncertainties are resolved, leaving very few loose threads.

**Deus ex Machina** Latin for "god out of a machine." It refers to a) the practice in Greek drama of a god descending into the play from a crane-like machine in order to solve a problem in the plot and thus enable the play to end, or b) an unexpected, contrived, or improbable ending or solution in a literary text.

**Dialogic criticism** A method of literary criticism based on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin described literary works as either monologic or dialogic. Unrelated to the number of characters, monologic works have one dominant voice or discourse, which is often but not always the voice of the dominant culture or ideology of the author's culture. In contrast, dialogic works allow numerous voices or discourses to emerge and interact. Thus, dialogic criticism is the analysis of these numerous voices and discourses.

**Dialogue** In literature, dialogue is either a) the representation of spoken exchanges between or among characters, or b) a literary work where characters discuss or debate a particular subject.

**Diction** Either a) the author's choice of words or vocabulary in a literary work, or b) a performer's manner or style of speaking, including phrasing and punctuation. Poetic diction refers specifically to the choice and phrasing of words suitable to verse.

**Didactic** A literary work that overtly attempts to instruct or convey a lesson about morality or behavior.

**Dimeter** A line of poetry consisting of two metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Discourse (Discourse analysis)** Broadly defined, discourse is any mode of utterance which is part of social practice. Often discourse describes a discourse community that shares specific word or word usages, rules, and ideas. In linguistics, discourse describes units of language longer than a single sentence. In literary studies, discourse also includes the thoughts, statements, utterances, and dialogues of literary characters. Discourse analysis is a) the study of the relationships between sentences in written and spoken discourse, and b) the study of the way human knowledge is collected and structured into discourse or discourse communities.

**Drama** Usually referring to plays or the telling of a story through impersonation. Also refers to works written for the theater or works written in prose or verse that are meant to be performed theatrically.

**Dramatic monologue** A poem where a single persona addresses an imaginary and silent audience. Dramatic monologues attempt to imitate natural speech and to reveal something about the character and situation of the persona.

**Dramatis personae** The cast of characters usually in a play but sometimes in a novel. In a play, Dramatis Personae is sometimes the heading given to the list of characters preceding the play that often contains short descriptions of the characters.

**Dub poetry** A type of poetry emerging in the 1970s from Jamaica and England that was heavily influenced by the rhythms and themes of reggae music and meant to be performed publicly and orally.

**Dynamic character** A specific type of character, or fictional or imagined person in a narrative or literary text. A dynamic (also called round) character is usually one of the main characters, is presented in a complex and detailed manner, and usually undergoes a significant change in response to the events or circumstances described in the plot. A dynamic character is distinct from a static or flat character, typically a minor character, identified by a single outstanding trait, who doesn't change in the text. In Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Macon "Milkman" Dead III begins the novel as a selfish, narcissistic man with no respect for his family or community. By then end, he's recognized his shortcomings, developed the ability to empathize with others, and gained a sense of awe and admiration for his ancestors. In contrast, the handyman Freddie is the town gossip who doesn't change and primarily serves to give Milkman his nickname after seeing him breastfeed at an inappropriate age.

## E

**Early National period** A period of American literature that spans the years between 1775 and 1828, beginning with the American Revolution and ending with the rise of Jacksonian democracy. This period is sometimes called the Federalist period after the conservative federalists in power at the time. During this period, a distinctly American body of imaginative literature began to emerge. The first American novel, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, was published in 1789. Poetry, essays, and sketches also began to flourish. Slave narratives were also published. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Early Tudor Age** Refers to the first era of the Renaissance period in British literature spanning 1500-1558. The Early Tudor period is known for its poetry and nonfiction prose. British literature's first dramatic comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*, was first performed in 1553. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Echoism** Also called onomatopoeia. There are two applications of this term: a) broadly, it refers to words or passages in which the sound echoes the sense, or the words or passages sound like the words they describe either in terms of movement or sound, or b) more specifically, it refers to the sound of a word closely resembling or echoing the sound it conveys, such as “buzz” or “hiss.”

**Edwardian period** A period of British literature named for the reign of Edward VII (1901-1910) and referring to literature published after the Victorian period and before World War I. The Edwardian period is not characterized by a consistent style, theme, or genre; the term generally refers to a historical period rather than a literary style. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Elegy** In Greek and Roman times, elegies were poems that used elegiac meter (alternating hexameter and pentameter lines). In the European tradition, elegy has become a term referring to poems lamenting the loss of someone or something. Elegies are poems of mourning, loss, and lament and are often, but not always, about love.

**Elizabethan Age** The second era of the Renaissance period in British literature, spanning the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The Elizabethan Age was a period marked by developments in English commerce, nationalism, exploration, and maritime power. It is considered a great age in literary history, particularly for drama. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**End rhyme** The similar sound in syllables or paired groups of syllables at the end of a line of verse. Less common is internal rhyme in which the rhyme occurs within a line of verse

**English sonnet** Generally, a sonnet is a one-stanza lyric poem of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter with a specific rhyme scheme. Sonnets address a range of themes, but love is the most common. The English (or Shakespearean) sonnet has three quatrains (4 lines) and a concluding couplet (two lines) with an abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme. The Spenserian sonnet offers a variant rhyme scheme of abab bcba cdcd ee. In the English sonnet, the sestet describes a problem or situation that is repeated in each sestet with some variation; the remaining couplet offers a summary, usually with a turn of thought. William Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 130,” more commonly recognized by its first line, illustrates the common form and content of the English sonnet:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

**Enjambement (or enjambment)** French for "striding over," enjambement occurs when the sense and/or grammatical structure of a sentence moves from one verse line to the next without a punctuated pause.

**Epiphany** In literature, it is a moment of insight, discovery, revelation, or understanding that alters a character's life in a meaningful way. Originally, epiphany had only spiritual implications but now it is frequently used in secular situations.

**Epic** A long, formal narrative poem with elevated style. Epics narrate a story of national importance based on the life and actions of a hero. Frequently the fate of the nation depends upon the hero and his actions. Often the hero is either descended from or protected by the gods.

**Epilogue** Either a) a concluding section of a play or other literary work; b) a recitation by an actor at the end of a play asking for applause or favorable reviews; or c) the end of a fable where the moral is stated.

**Epistolary novel** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, told through the characters' writing and exchange of letters.

**Epithet** An adjective or adjectival phrase used to define a person or a thing. It can also refer to a characteristic attribute or quality of a person or thing.

**Erziehungsroman** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, which chronicles a character's education.

**Essay** A short, written prose composition that discusses a subject or proposes an argument without claiming to be an exhaustive or complete study of the subject. Frequently, essays attempt to persuade or express a particular point of view.

**Euphony** Words that sound pleasant, smooth, or musical and whose meanings also evoke pleasant feelings. Euphonic sounds include long vowel and liquid consonants like l's and r's. Euphony's opposite is cacophony.

**Exemplum** A type of allegory (narrative in which abstract concepts are represented as something concrete, typically major elements in the story, such as characters, objects, actions, or events) used in sermons to illustrate and validate a particular theme or idea.

**Explication** Also called close reading. A thorough and detailed analysis of a literary text and the elements that make up that text. Explication involves examining all aspects and complexities of a specific text, including style, content, form, imagery, symbolism, and diction.

**Expressionism** In literature and visual art, expressionism was a reaction to realism and naturalism. Rather than expressing verisimilitude and external reality, expressionism seeks to convey subjectivity, feeling, imagination, and emotional states of mind.

## F

**Farce** A form of low comedy that relies upon exaggerated character and physical action and unpredictable or improbable plot situations. Farce aims at entertaining, often with elements of panic, surprise, and cruelty. More specific than the broader sense of anything amusing or entertaining, comedy usually involves a movement from unhappiness to happiness and often relates to themes of regeneration, renewal, and human triumph over chance.

**Feminine rhyme** Generally, rhyme refers to the similar sound in syllables or paired groups of syllables. Feminine rhymes are rhyming stressed syllables followed by identical unstressed syllables. Masculine rhymes are rhymes with single-syllable stressed words.

**Feminist criticism** A school of literary criticism emerging in the late 1960s, feminist criticism examines literary depictions of gender and gender issues. Although there are many subsets of feminist criticism, they are related in their attention to their analysis of gender in relation to literature, language, and culture.

**Figurative language** Figurative language uses figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, and alliteration. In contrast to literal language wherein words are taken in their primary or denotative sense, figurative language is connotative and conveys the richness and complexity of language. In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot, Prufrock worries about “The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase” so much that he imagines himself “formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall.” Literally, his language refers to an insect collection; it figuratively points to Prufrock’s fears about what others think about him. He

imagines others looking at him with judgments so harsh that they feel like torture. Later, he asks, “Do I dare to eat a peach?” Reading this line literally would suggest the speaker is worried about eating fruit, but a figurative reading would reveal that he is too timid, too self-doubting to even consider himself sensual or sensuous, invoked by the image of the fleshy, juicy, messy experience of eating a peach.

**First-person narrator** The narrator of a story told from the perspective of a persona who uses "I" or "me" to recount the story's events. Usually a first person is involved in the plot, but not always. Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* begins “Call me Ishmael,” immediately introducing its first-person narrator. Mark Twain's titular narrator of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* begins, “You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter.”

**Flash fiction** A short story under 1000 words. Also called sudden fiction.

**Flashback** A scene used to show events that occur before the opening scene. Flashbacks are used to provide insight into or background about events, settings, characters, or context and can take the form of a character's dreams, remembrances, or reflections or a narrator's comments. Also called analepsis.

**Flat character** A specific type of character, or fictional or imagined person, in a narrative or literary text. A flat or static character is typically a minor character with a single outstanding trait and is often based on a stock character, or a common, stereotypical character. A flat character doesn't change in the text, distinguishing it from a round (also called dynamic) character, who is usually one of the main characters, is presented in a complex and detailed manner, and usually undergoes a significant change in response to the events or circumstances described in the plot.

**Foil** A character whose qualities or actions are in stark contrast with those of another character, usually the protagonist. Foils are often used to convey or develop the protagonist's character.

**Folktale** A short narrative, usually of unknown authorship, that is passed down and preserved by oral tradition. Folktales can include genres such as legends, fables, tall tales, and fairy tales.

**Foot (feet)** A unit of rhythm, created by one or more stressed syllables combined with one or more unstressed syllables, that makes up a line of poetry. Examples of feet include iamb (iambic, adj.), an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable; trochee (trochaic, adj.), a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable; dactyl (dactylic, adj.), a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables; and anapest (anapestic, adj.), two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. Two less-common metrical feet include the spondee (spondaic, adj.), a foot of two successive syllables that are equally or almost equally stressed, and the pyrrhic (pyrrhic, adj.), a foot of two successive syllables that are equally or almost equally unstressed. The type of foot and the number of feet per line determine the poem's meter.

**Foreshadowing** Suggestions of what is to come later on in a narrative. Foreshadowing can be created through imagery, dialogue, diction, events, or actions. Authors use foreshadowing to create narrative cohesion, build suspense, and develop plot. Because foreshadowing hints at what is to come, it helps an author prepare readers for an ending, thus helping to create resolutions that do not seem contrived.

**Form** Either a) the genre or the general type of a literary work (i.e., sonnet, novel, or short story), or b) the way a literary work's component parts are arranged into a shape or structure.

**Formalism** Formalism is the study of a literary work's component parts. Rather than examining factors external to the text, formalist critics analyze the literary work as an object in and of itself.

**Frame narrative (frame story)** A story or narrative that includes or encloses one or more stories. Usually there is a thematic or plot-based connection between the frame narrative and the interior stories. Also called "tale within a tale."

**Free Verse** A form of verse where rhythm is not organized into regular meter. Free verse also has irregular line lengths, lacks rhyme schemes, and depends on natural speech rhythms. Also known as "open form."

## G

**Gay and lesbian theory/ Queer Theory** A form of gender criticism focusing on literary representations of and issues connected with homosexuality (and heterosexuality). Queer Theory is related to gay and lesbian theory but offers a distinct approach to analyses of gender and sexualities.

**Genre** French for "type." Genre is used to classify literature according to form, style, or content. Sonnet, novel, tragedy, and elegy are all examples of genre.

**Gothic** As applied to literature, Gothic refers to a kind of literature that creates a sense of terror and suspense. The Gothic can be characterized by its use of claustrophobic and confining spaces, macabre and medieval-based settings, and gloomy moods. Another feature is its recurring use of dark, threatening, violent forces which often trap virtuous young heroines. The Gothic novel is still a vibrant form and can be traced back to Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764).

## H

**Harlem Renaissance** A period in American literature in the 1920s and 1930s emerging from African-American writers, artists, musicians, and performers. The Harlem Renaissance was the first major burgeoning of visual, literary, and performing arts by African Americans concerned with African-American life, art, culture, and politics. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Heptameter** A line of poetry consisting of seven metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Hermeneutics** Originally referring to the principles used to interpret Biblical readings, hermeneutics now refers to theories and philosophies related to the interpretation, perception, and understanding of texts.

**Hexameter** A line of poetry consisting of six metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Historical novel** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, using historical events, situations, and characters for its premise. The historical novel was made popular in the nineteenth century by Sir Walter Scott.

**Homostrophic stanzas** Stanzas of identical form, number of lines, and rhyme scheme. Homostrophic stanzas are common in Horatian odes, or reflective, private lyric poems with an elaborate stanza structure and distinct tone of formality and stateliness, addressing either a person or an abstract idea or entity.

**Horatian ode** Reflective, private lyric poems with an elaborate stanza structure and distinct tone of formality and stateliness, addressing either a person or an abstract idea or entity. Meditative and personal Horatian odes are distinct from the public, choral celebrations of Pindaric odes. Horatian odes use homostrophic stanzas, or stanzas of identical form, number of lines, and rhyme scheme.

**Hubris** Excess of pride usually leading to divine retribution. Hubris usually leads a character toward ignoring warnings from gods or higher powers, transcending human limits, or violating a moral or cultural code. The character's downfall is usually seen as the gods' retribution for hubris. Hubris is a specific form of tragic flaw, or defect in a protagonist's character or reasoning that brings about his or her downfall.

**Hyperbole** A figure of speech which uses exaggeration for comic, ironic, or serious effect. Its opposite is understatement or meiosis.

**Iamb (or Iambic)** A unit of poetic meter (or foot) that involves an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Metrical units (feet) make up a poem's meter, or rhythms in poetry made by units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Ideology** A set of beliefs or assumptions that are common to a particular group. For members of a group, the dominant ideology will seem natural or entirely logical and will usually be taken as a given. Generally, a society has one or more dominant ideologies, but other ideologies can co-exist.

**Imagery (image)** Imagery (collective form of image) refers to a) depictions of objects or qualities perceived by the five senses; b) the figurative language used to convey abstract ideas concretely; or, more specifically, c) the depiction of visual objects or scenes. Imagery is what makes language and literature concrete and not abstract.

**Impressionism** In literature, impressionism refers to the depiction of a character's fleeting impressions of character, place, setting, and events, as well as his or her subjective observations. Impressionism focuses primarily on the inner or emotional life of a character rather than on external reality.

**Intentional fallacy** A term used by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley to critique the practice of basing literary interpretations on either explicit or implicit statements by an author about his or her intentions regarding his or her literary text. The intentional fallacy posits that the author is an unreliable source regarding the meaning and purpose of his or her text. Instead of focusing on the author's intentions, readers should base their interpretations upon the text itself and what is in it.

**Interior monologue** A written depiction of a character's inner thoughts, sensations, memories, ideas, and impulses. Interior monologues can be a form of stream of consciousness.

**Internal rhyme** Generally, rhyme refers to the similar sound in syllables or paired groups of syllables. Internal rhyme, which occurs within a line of verse, is less common than end rhyme, which occurs at the end of a line of verse.

**Interpretation** The processes of analyzing and describing a literary work in order to articulate its meaning or significance in terms of genre, style, form, content, theme, etc. Interpretation is an important part of literary criticism, a larger concept using interpretation, analysis, and reading to describe the overall significance, meaning, or evaluation of a literary work.

**Intrusive narrator** A story's narrator who offers comment, critique, interpretation, or additional information to readers about characters or events as he or she recounts the events in the story. Its

opposite is an unintrusive narrator, who relates a story's events with a minimum of commentary, observation, or interpretation.

**Irony** Broadly speaking, irony is an incongruity or contradiction between appearance and reality. Events, situations, statements, plots, or structures can be ironic. There are numerous kinds of irony found in literary works. Verbal or rhetorical irony is when there is a discrepancy between either what a character says and what that character believes to be true, or when a character says the opposite of what he or she means. Situational irony features a discrepancy between expectation and reality and appears in two forms: dramatic irony; where there is a discrepancy between what a character sees or perceives and what the audience knows is true; and tragic irony, which involves an imperfect interpretation of information or a situation resulting in a character's tragic downfall. Another form of irony is structural irony, which occurs when the author uses a structural element such as an unreliable narrator to create a discrepancy between what is perceived and what is true. One form of structural irony is cosmic irony, where there is a disparity between a character's belief that he or she is in control of his or her own destiny and the audience's or reader's understanding that the character's fate is determined by an external force, such as the hands of the gods. Another form of structural irony is romantic irony, where the author builds and then shatters the illusion of reality he or she has created. Romantic irony reveals the author as the creator and manipulator of this particular reality.

**Irregular (or Cowleyan) ode** Generally, an ode is a lyric poem with an elaborate stanza structure and distinct tone of formality and stateliness, addressing either a person or an abstract idea or entity. Irregular odes are based upon Pindaric odes, originally public, choral celebrations of athletes but now more commonly known as odes with an unfixed number of stanzas that are arranged in groups that replicate movements of a chorus. The strophe and antistrophe are the same length and possess the same metrical pattern. They are followed by an epode of a different length and meter. Irregular or Cowleyan odes are more common than true Pindaric odes and contain varying lengths of strophes, line lengths, and rhyme schemes.

## J

**Jacobean Age** The third era of the Renaissance period in British literature defined by the reign of James I (1603-1625). In this era, many Elizabethan writers, especially playwrights, continued to flourish. Drama remained prominent; significant writings in prose, including the King James Bible, and poetry were also written. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Jeremiad** In a literary context, a jeremiad refers to a prolonged lamentation that describes how misfortunes befalling a society are the result of social and moral evils. Frequently jeremiads express a sense of hope that these misfortunes can be overcome with social or moral change.

## K

**Künstlerroman** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, which specifically traces the artistic development of a writer or other kind of artist. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a classic Künstlerroman, revolving around the young Stephen Dedalus as he pursues his calling as a poet. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has also been called a Künstlerroman—though perhaps a failed one—because Edna Pontellier develops confidence in her artistry and tries to live independently with room and time and freedom to paint; however, her struggles with society to live this independent, artistic life are unsuccessful.

## L

**Legend** A traditional narrative handed down via oral culture. Unlike folktales, legends claim to be true and often feature an historical figure and a real setting. Usually legends celebrate a significant figure or historical event or attempt to explain an inexplicable event. Sometimes legends are distinguished from myths on the grounds that legends do not deal with gods.

**Leitmotif** A recurring image, phrase, symbol, or situation in a literary work. A leitmotif is usually connected with a significant theme or idea in the work.

**Line** The formal structural unit of a poem that is usually described by the number of feet.

**Literal** Language in which words are taken in their primary or denotative sense. Its contrast is figurative language, connotative language which uses figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, and alliteration and conveys the richness and complexity of language. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, Prufrock worries about "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" so much that he imagines himself "formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall." Literally, his language refers to an insect collection; it figuratively points to Prufrock's fears about what others think about him. He imagines others looking at him with judgments so harsh that they feel like torture. Later, he asks, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" Reading this line literally would suggest the speaker is worried about eating fruit, but a figurative reading would reveal that he is too timid, too self-doubting to even consider himself sensual or sensuous, invoked by the image of the fleshy, juicy, messy experience of eating a peach.

**Literary canon** In literary criticism, the literary canon refers to a body of works that are given special cultural status. Works that are labeled "classics" or "Great Books" or that are frequently taught or anthologized are called "canonical."

**Literary theory** The system of principles or assumptions about literature, literary analysis, interpretations, readings, and how meaning is created. Theory helps to formulate approaches and articulate the questions critics ask about literature and the conclusions they reach. Theory, informally, has always been a central part of literary criticism but has moved to the forefront since poststructuralism.

**Litotes** A figure of speech in which a statement is made indirectly by denying its opposite. Examples of litotes include "not uncommon" (meaning "common"), "not bad" (meaning "good"), or "no mean feat" (meaning "an easy task").

**Local color** Descriptions in prose (usually prose fiction) which show particulars about setting, dialect, custom, habits, dress, mannerisms, and folklore about a specific region. Local color is used to create atmosphere or realism. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Lost Generation** After World War I, a group of American writers grew increasingly disillusioned by, and resistant to, what they saw as hypocrisy in dominant American ideology and culture. Many of these writers left America in search of a freer and more artistic life in London or Paris. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Lyric** In contemporary usage, lyric refers to a moderately short (usually 12-30 lines) poem expressing one speaker's emotions and thoughts. Lyric poems are not limited to a specific meter or form but are almost always about emotion, frequently concerning themes of love and grief.

## M

**Magic realism** In literature, magic realism combines the real or mundane with the fantastic. Features of magic realism include quick and unusual chronological shifts, dream-like sequences, complicated plots, and elements of surprise, shock, and the inexplicable. Frequently, fairy tales are incorporated into the work and often there is an element of contemporary social relevance.

**Marxist criticism** A branch of criticism based upon Marxist thinking and theories. According to Marx and Engels, economics provide the base (or infrastructure) of society, whereas art, politics, law, religion, and philosophy emerge from that base and form a superstructure. Marxist critics view literary works as the product of labor and analyze the implications of class and ideology within and surrounding the text. Although there are a range of approaches within Marxist criticism, most Marxist readings show how literary production is related to the economic and social realities of its time.

**Masculine rhyme** Generally, rhyme refers to the similar sound in syllables or paired groups of syllables. Masculine rhymes are rhymes with single-syllable stressed words. Feminine rhymes are rhyming stressed syllables followed by identical unstressed syllables.

**Meiosis** Greek term for understatement by which something is described in terms less grand or important than it deserves or merits, typically to minimize its importance. Meiosis is a form of litote, a figure of speech in which a statement is made indirectly by denying its opposite. The opposite of meiosis is hyperbole, a figure of speech which uses exaggeration for comic, ironic, or serious effect.

**Melodrama** Originally, any drama accompanied by music used to enhance mood or emotion. By the nineteenth century, melodramas became highly stereotypical and favored sensational plots over realistic characters. Characters in melodrama are stock characters, usually either highly virtuous or villainous, and plots are generally sensational and improbable. Virtue inevitably triumphs over villainy. The term melodrama is used today almost exclusively as a pejorative.

**Metadrama** Plays that self-consciously examine the nature of drama or the theater by drawing attention to the fact that they are plays. Also known as metatheater.

**Metafiction** Novels or works of short fiction that self-consciously examine the nature of fiction by drawing attention to the fact that they are works of fiction. Metadrama, or metatheater, does the same thing with theater.

**Metaphor** A figure of speech where one thing is described in terms of another. Metaphors, unlike similes, do not use connective words such as "like" or "as."

**Metaphysical poetry** Broadly defined as poetry that addresses spiritual or philosophical matters, but more specifically, and more often, used to describe a particular group of seventeenth-century poets.

**Meter** The rhythms in poetry made by units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables. Each metrical unit is called a foot (feet, plural). A foot usually consists of one or more stressed syllables with one or more unstressed syllables. To determine the meter, one first scans a poem to determine what kind of foot is used and then how many feet per line are included. The most common types of feet include iamb (iambic, adj.), an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable; trochee (trochaic, adj.), a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable; dactyl (dactylic, adj.), a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables; and anapest (anapestic, adj.), two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. Two less common metrical feet include the spondee (spondaic, adj.), a foot of two successive syllables that are equally or almost equally stressed, and the pyrrhic (pyrrhic, adj.), a foot of two successive syllables that are equally or almost equally unstressed. The next step in identifying the meter of a poem determines how many feet occur in each line. Metrical lines are named according to the number of feet per line: monometer (1 foot), dimeter (2 feet), trimeter (3 feet), tetrameter (4 feet), pentameter (5 feet), hexameter (6 feet), heptameter (7 feet), or octameter (8 feet). Most

verse in English literature uses a system of meter called accentual syllabic meter, a pattern of a regular number of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of a fixed number of syllables per line.

**Metonymy** A figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of another closely related thing. For example, "the crown" is used to signify the monarchy.

**Middle English period** The Middle English period runs from the Norman invasion of England in 1066 to 1500; unlike Old English, Middle English closely resembles our own English language. After the Norman invasion, there were linguistic, social, and cultural changes and also changes in the literature; the Middle English period is the first major age of secular literature in English. The fifteenth century saw a growth in literature aimed at a popular audience. In the Middle English period, a range of genres emerged including chivalric romances, secular and religious songs, folk ballads, drama, morality plays, and miracle plays. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Miracle play (or mystery play)** A Middle English play based upon a biblical story or a saint's life. A miracle play is a type of morality play, an allegorical drama in the Middle English period with a didactic purpose. Generally, morality plays used allegorical characters such as Everyman or Avarice to convey a moral lesson or to tell a story about morality.

**Modern Period** A period in British and American literature spanning the years between World War I and World War II. Works in this period reflect the changing social, political, and cultural climate and are diverse, experimental, and nontraditional. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Modernism** Modernism or the modern period should not be confused with the term contemporary. Instead, modern refers to a period in both British and North American literature and visual art beginning with the onset of World War I in 1914 and ending with the conclusion of World War II. Modern literature and art are characterized by their attempts to break away from traditional modes of expression and subject matters. Modernist works feature innovations in style, form, genre, subject matter, and thought. Frequently, modernist works are experimental, such as stream of consciousness, or connected with the avant-garde. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Monometer** A metrical line of poetry consisting of one metrical unit, or a foot. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Mood** The feeling or emotion created specifically through elements of the setting. Mood (also called atmosphere) is more specific than tone, which is established by a variety of elements, including symbolism, imagery, diction, meter, rhyme, alliteration, and assonance.

**Morality play** An allegorical drama in the Middle English period with a didactic purpose. Morality plays used allegorical characters such as Everyman or Avarice to convey a moral lesson

or to tell a story about morality. Frequently, morality plays were about a conflict between good and evil or right and wrong.

**Motif** A significant element that recurs either in a specific literary work, in a group of literary texts, or in literature as a whole. Motifs can be plots, imagery, symbols, themes, ideas, narrative details, or characters. In a specific literary work, motifs usually relate and contribute to the work's larger themes.

**Motivation** The reasons or explanations for why a character acts in the ways he or she does in response to events of the plot. Motivation is part of characterization, or how an author uses description, action, dialogue, and emotion to convey the complexities of a character.

**Myth** A narrative from a culture's oral tradition, often incorporating cultural values or a belief system. Myths usually involve cosmic and natural forces and stories of creation. Frequently they involve heroic figures, superhuman beings, or supernatural forces. Myths are considered distinct from legends because myths are not rooted in historically based facts or stories.

## N

**Narrative** The telling of true or fictitious events by a narrator. Narratives can be either verse or prose and focus on the depiction of events or happenings. The study of theories and practices of narratives is called narratology.

**Narrator** The voice or character who tells a story and offers information, interpretation, or insight to readers about events, context, or character. Narrative perspectives or points of view include first-person, third-person, omniscient, limited-omniscient, intrusive, unintrusive, fallible or unreliable, and self-reflective narrators. First-person narrators are personas who use "I" or "me" to tell a story. Usually a first person is involved in the plot but not always. Second-person narrators use "you" to tell a story; these are rarely used. A third-person narrator uses "he" or "she." There are several kinds of third-person narrators. An omniscient narrator is all-knowing and has complete knowledge of all characters' thoughts and histories, as well as the story's events, settings, and contexts. An omniscient narrator can move freely between any number of characters. A limited-omniscient narrator has access to one or more (but not all) character's thoughts and some of the story's events and contexts. An intrusive narrator is one who offers comment, critique, interpretation, or additional information to readers about characters or events as he or she recounts events. An unintrusive narrator relates events with a minimum of commentary, observation, or interpretation. Unreliable or fallible narrators are those whose readers are given reasons to question or doubt the validity of their perspective. Readers can doubt a narrator's reliability or accuracy based on his or her age, intelligence, sanity, or relationship to

the events. A self-conscious narrator is one who draws attention to the fact that he or she is narrating a work of fiction, as is often the case with metafiction.

**Naturalism** An offshoot of realism in American literature, Naturalism claimed to give an even more realistic and unflinching depiction of contemporary life. Naturalism was characterized by a pessimistic view of humanity and human existence; characters in Naturalist narratives have strong, instinctual, or animalistic drives; have little or no control over the events and forces that govern their lives; and their lives are frequently intertwined with social and economic forces beyond their control. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Neoclassical period** A period of British literature spanning 1660-1785. The Neoclassical period is often divided into three subareas: the Restoration era, the Augustan age, and the Age of Sensibility.

**Neoclassicism** A style of literature primarily written from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century and the rise of romanticism. Neoclassical writers turned to ancient writers for inspiration and aesthetic ideals. Neoclassical refers to writings that appeal to reason instead of emotion and that emphasize order, reason, balance, harmony, and realism. Neoclassicism is often viewed as a contrast to romanticism.

**New Criticism** An approach to literary interpretation emerging in the 1920s, gaining prominence in the 1940s, and remaining influential throughout the 1960s and 1970s. New Critics insisted that literary criticism should focus on the literary work itself rather than on biographical, historical, or social contexts. The literary work was considered a self-contained and self-referential unit and was studied in isolation. New Critical readings were based upon explication and close readings, practices that remain relevant in literary study. Two errors in reading under New Criticism are affective and intentional fallacies, terms used by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley for the errors of basing an interpretation upon the emotional effect a particular work has on readers (affective fallacy) or upon an author's explicit or implicit intentions regarding his or her literary text (intentional fallacy). These interpretations are considered flawed by New Critics because readers should base their interpretations upon the text itself and what is in it.

**New Historicism** An approach to literary criticism gaining prominence in the 1980s, partly in response to structuralism and New Criticism. Whereas structuralists and New Critical approaches focused upon the text as a self-contained unit that should be studied in isolation, New Historicism argued that a literary work is deeply connected to and reliant upon its social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. New Historical readings seek to make connections between a literary text and its multiple contexts. New Historicism is a broad field and is related to other poststructuralist theories and approaches. Similar to, but distinct from, New Historicism is Cultural Materialism, which uses a predominantly Marxist approach.

**Novel** An extended piece of fictional prose that is distinguished from short stories and novellas by its length. Origins of the novel in England trace back to Aphra Behn's 1678 work *Oroonoko*.

As an open and flexible genre, there are numerous types of novels and innovations within the novel form. There are several common types of novels. The picaresque novel is a realistic and episodic novel that features the adventures of a likeable yet flawed roguish hero. The epistolary novel is told through the characters' writing and exchange of letters. A Bildungsroman is a novel of maturation that traces a protagonist from childhood to adulthood and chronicles the development of his or her character, intellect, and often spirituality or morality. Other novels of development include the Künstlerroman, which specifically traces the artistic development of a writer or other kind of artist, and the Erziehungsroman, which chronicles a character's education. Social novels illustrate the connections between a character and his or her social, political, historical, or cultural context(s). The historical novel, made popular in the nineteenth century by Sir Walter Scott, uses historical events, situations, and characters for its premise. Realistic novels depict characters, settings, and situations in specific detail, making the novel seem extremely realistic and plausible to its readers. Traditionally, the term romance novel has described novels that are not entirely realistic and that include fantastic or supernatural events.

**Novella** A prose fiction work of about 50-100 pages. Shorter than a novel and longer than a short story, the novella possesses formal and stylistic elements of those two prose genres. Unlike a short story, a novella is long enough to be published as an individual volume.

## O

**Objective correlative** A term first used in the nineteenth century by American painter and poet Washington Allston, it gained prominence through T.S. Eliot's analysis of *Hamlet*. In literary criticism, the term refers to objects, situations, images, or events in literary texts that evoke a particular emotion or reaction from readers or audiences without the author explicitly stating how these readers and audiences should respond.

**Octameter** A metrical line of poetry consisting of eight metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Octave** A grouping of eight rhymed verse lines typically with a common metrical pattern or line length.

**Ode** A lyric poem with an elaborate stanza structure and distinct tone of formality and stateliness. Odes either address a person or an abstract idea or entity. Odes can be private or public: private odes are meditative, subjective, and personal, whereas public odes are for ceremonial occasions such as funerals or state events. Pindar and Horace established the two classical models of the ode. Regular or Pindaric odes were originally choral and intended to publicly celebrate athletes. Pindaric odes now refer to odes with an unfixed number of stanzas that are arranged in groups that replicate movements of a chorus. The strophe and antistrophe are

the same length and possess the same metrical pattern. They are followed by an epode of a different length and meter. True Pindaric odes are rare in English literature; however, the more common irregular or Cowleyan ode is based upon the Pindaric ode. Irregular odes contain varying lengths of strophes, line lengths, and rhyme schemes. Horatian odes were more reflective and private and featured what are called homostrophic stanzas, stanzas of identical form, number of lines, and rhyme scheme.

**Old English Period (or Anglo-Saxon)** The first era of British literature, referring to the period beginning with the invasion of Celtic England by Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians) c. 450 to the conquest of England by the Norman-French William the Conqueror in 1066. After conversion to Christianity, the Anglo-Saxons developed a written language and literature. Writing of this time was primarily religious verse or prose, but there were also works such as *Beowulf* (eighth century). For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Omniscient narrator** The narrator of a story told from the perspective of an all-knowing, third-person use of “he” or “she” who has complete knowledge of all characters' thoughts and histories, as well as the story's events, settings, and contexts. An omniscient narrator can move freely between any number of characters. An omniscient narrator is distinct from a limited-omniscient narrator, who has access to one or more (but not all) characters' thoughts and some of the story's events and contexts. Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* is recounted by an omniscient narrator, giving readers access to the thoughts of all major characters and the novel's events, as well as the historical context of the French Revolution.

**Onomatopoeia** Also called echoism. There are two applications of onomatopoeia: a) broadly, it refers to words or passages in which the sound echoes the sense, or the words or passages sound like the words they describe either in terms of movement or sound, or b) more specifically, onomatopoeia is when the sound of a word closely resembles or echoes the sound it conveys, such as “buzz” or “hiss.”

**Orientalism** A term suggesting the ways in which the East was described, defined, mythologized, or imagined by the West. Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* illustrates the historical, political, and ideological processes and practices through which the Western world "orientalized" the East through false images and colonialism. Orientalism is deeply connected with colonialization and thus with postcolonial theories and criticism.

**Oxymoron** The juxtaposition of two opposite or contradictory words for effect or emphasis. Oxymorons are specific kinds of paradoxes, or statements that, on the surface, appear to be self-contradictory but, upon analysis, reveal an underlying truth, significance, or meaning. Edgar Allan Poe's poem “Dream-Land” describes a place with “Bottomless vales and boundless floods” and “Mountains toppling evermore / Into seas without a shore,” scenes that at first glance make no sense but are perfectly appropriate for a land of dreams, “out of SPACE—out of TIME.”

## P

**Paradox** A statement that, on the surface, appears to be self-contradictory but, upon analysis, reveals an underlying truth, significance, or meaning. An oxymoron, or two opposite or contradictory words juxtaposed for effect or emphasis, is a kind of paradox. Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Dream-Land" describes a place with "Bottomless vales and boundless floods" and "Mountains toppling evermore / Into seas without a shore," scenes that at first glance make no sense but are perfectly appropriate for a land of dreams, "out of SPACE—out of TIME."

**Parody** A work that imitates a literary work, style, or author for comic effect. Parody generally exaggerates or overemphasizes a central element or characteristic in order to ridicule or criticize.

**Pastoral** Traditionally, pastoral referred to writings that described the life of shepherds and shepherdesses. Originating in Greek literature and recurrent in the Renaissance, pastoral works celebrate a golden age characterized by idleness, innocence, and simplicity. Pastoral is featured in verse, drama, romances, and prose. Other terms suggesting the pastoral include idyll, eclogue, and bucolic poetry. Today, the term is also used to refer to any work that depicts a simple, peaceful, rustic, rural, agrarian, or nature-based lifestyle.

**Pathetic Fallacy** A term attributed to John Ruskin and used to describe the giving of human emotions, capabilities, and sensations to inanimate nature. For Ruskin, the term was meant as a pejorative as he believed attributing human qualities to inanimate nature was a sign of artistic weakness because it did not capture truth. Though he conceded art could create beauty, Ruskin asserted that capturing truth, not beauty, was the aim of art. Related to personification, the pathetic fallacy is a much more limited concept.

**Pathos** Greek term for passions, suffering, or deep feeling. In literary criticism, it is used to describe scenes or passages that evoke emotions, particularly sympathy, pity, or sorrow from readers or an audience. Pathos is distinct from tragedy as pathetic figures are generally helpless, suffer from events beyond their control, and are characterized by their innocence in the causes of their suffering. Tragic figures, on the other hand, usually possess agency and some degree of responsibility for their suffering.

**Pentameter** A metrical line of poetry consisting of five metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Persona** Originally referring to the masks worn by actors in ancient drama, persona now refers to the first-person voice or character an author uses to convey the story in a narrative. Although the persona uses "I," it is important not to equate the author and the persona. Author and persona should not be considered as synonyms.

**Personification** A figure of speech through which inanimate objects, ideas, concepts, or animals are given human characteristics, or are referred to as if human. Personification is broader and distinct from the pathetic fallacy.

**Petrarchan sonnet** Generally, a sonnet is a one-stanza lyric poem of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter with a specific rhyme scheme. Sonnets address a range of themes, but love is the most common. The Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet has two main parts: an octave (eight lines) with a rhyme scheme of abba abba followed by a sestet (six lines) with a rhyme scheme of cde cde (or sometimes cdc cdc). The Petrarchan sonnet usually uses the octave to state or describe a problem and the sestet to resolve it. John Milton's "Sonnet 19" illustrates the form of the Petrarchan sonnet:

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest He returning chide;  
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"  
I fondly ask; but Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

**Phenomenological criticism** A type of literary criticism based upon the ideas of phenomenology and the thinking of philosophers such as Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and the group of thinkers called the Geneva School. Phenomenology relates to philosophic questions about the relationships between meaning and object, and is founded upon assumptions that objects themselves do not have inherent meaning but instead meaning comes from the meaning a person perceives in that object.

**Picaresque novel** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, that features the realistic and episodic adventures of a likeable yet flawed roguish hero.

**Pindaric odes** Public, celebratory lyric poems with an elaborate stanza structure and distinct tone of formality and stateliness, addressing either a person or an abstract idea or entity. Regular or Pindaric odes were originally choral and intended to publicly celebrate athletes. Pindaric odes now refer to odes with an unfixed number of stanzas that are arranged in groups that replicate movements of a chorus. The strophe and antistrophe are the same length and possess the same metrical pattern. They are followed by an epode of a different length and meter. True Pindaric odes are rare in English literature; however, the more common irregular or Cowleyan ode is

based upon the Pindaric ode. Irregular odes contain varying lengths of strophes, line lengths, and rhyme schemes. Pindaric odes are distinct from the more reflective and personal Horatian odes.

**Plot** The arrangement or design of events, actions, and situations in a narrative work. Plot is considered to be the "raw material" of story and should be considered as distinct from story. Whereas story is what happens or what the narrative is about, plot is the pattern or sequence of events the author creates in order to achieve a particular narrative, and a thematic, emotional, or artistic effect. Plot, or intrigue as it was once called, is constructed through a range of strategies and devices such as conflict, suspense, and dénouement (or resolution).

**Point of view** The perspective (or perspectives) from which a story is told. Narrative points of view include first-person, third-person, omniscient, limited-omniscient, intrusive, unintrusive, fallible or unreliable, and self-reflective narrators. First-person narrators are personas who use "I" or "me" to tell a story. Usually a first person is involved in the plot but not always. Second-person narrators use "you" to tell a story; these are rarely used. A third-person narrator uses "he" or "she." There are several kinds of third-person narrators. An omniscient narrator is all-knowing and has complete knowledge of all characters' thoughts and histories, as well as the story's events, settings, and contexts. An omniscient narrator can move freely between any number of characters. A limited-omniscient narrator has access to one or more (but not all) character's thoughts and some of the story's events and contexts. An intrusive narrator is one who offers comment, critique, interpretation, or additional information to readers about characters or events as he or she recounts events. An unintrusive narrator relates events with a minimum of commentary, observation, or interpretation. Unreliable or fallible narrators are those whose readers are given reasons to question or doubt the validity of their perspective. Readers can doubt a narrator's reliability or accuracy based on his or her age, intelligence, sanity, or relationship to the events. A self-conscious narrator is one who draws attention to the fact that he or she is narrating a work of fiction, as is often the case with metafiction.

**Postbellum** A term used to describe American literature after the Civil War.

**Postcolonial criticism** A form of literary criticism and theory that analyzes texts produced in and about cultures once colonized by Europeans. Postcolonial criticism and theory is a broad area of inquiry with different subareas, but generally it examines intersecting issues such as power, power structures, representation, liberation, oppression, ideology, language discourse, race, class, and gender. A key concept in postcolonial criticism is Orientalism, a term suggesting the ways in which the East was described, defined, mythologized, or imagined by the West. Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* illustrates the historical, political, and ideological processes and practices through which the Western world "orientalized" the East through false images and colonialism. Because it examines literary texts in their social, political, historical, and cultural contexts, it is related to New Historicism.

**Postmodern period** In British and American literature, the postmodern period refers to literature written after World War II. The postmodern period reflects anxieties concerning and reactions to life in the twentieth century. Postmodern works are often highly experimental and anti-

conventional. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Postmodernism** Refers to works of literary and visual art in Europe and North America produced after World War II. Postmodernist works often address the alienation of the individual and the meaninglessness of human existence. They also react against elitist ideas of "high art." Postmodernism is characterized by works that are often highly innovative in terms of style, format, and technique, or works that are self-referential, that draw upon popular or so-called "low culture," or that combine genres or blur genre distinctions.

**Poststructuralism** Although there is not a unified poststructuralist theory, poststructuralism refers to a body of literary theories and critical perspectives that challenge structuralist approaches to literature. Examples of poststructuralist theories and approaches include postcolonial, feminist, gay and lesbian, deconstruction, Marxist, New Historicism, psychological, and psychoanalytic. Though distinct, these approaches are related in terms of their critique of structuralism through the primacy of literary theory and their attempts to formulate new theories and critical methodologies.

**Pre-Raphaelitism** Refers to a period of Victorian literature and art. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) was formed in 1848 by a group of visual artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and Edward Burne-Jones. These artists attempted to return painting to the simplicity and truthfulness of art before Raphael (1483-1520) and the High Renaissance. Rossetti was also a poet and the Pre-Raphaelite ideas were thus extended to literary arts. Pre-Raphaelite art and literature looked back to the medieval world, and in turn, offered a highly religious, sensual, and symbolic representation of that world. Some scholars argue that Pre-Raphaelitism is a precursor to aestheticism and Decadence later in the nineteenth century. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Prologue** Either a) an introductory section to a literary work that establishes character, scene, setting, context, or theme, or b) the character or speaker who makes an introductory speech in a play.

**Proscenium arch** An architectural feature of post-Renaissance theaters that separates the playing area from the proscenium and the audience. Over time, the convention has evolved that the audience can see the players on the stage but the players cannot see the audience, nor are they aware of the audience.

**Proscenium** The proscenium is the area between the curtain and the edge of the stage.

**Prose** Latin for "straightforward discourse." Prose is language which is not in verse form.

**Protagonist** The main character in a play or narrative, often in conflict with the antagonist. Usually the plot revolves around, or is set into action by, the protagonist.

**Psychoanalytic criticism** Broadly, a form of psychological criticism, but much more theoretically informed. Emerging in the 1920s, psychoanalytic criticism was based upon the work of Freud, particularly his work on the subconscious and the processes of analysis. Early psychoanalytic criticism analyzed authors through their works, but increasingly it has focused upon the analysis of literary or dramatic characters. Ernest Jones's 1949 study, *Hamlet and Oedipus*, for example, examined Hamlet in terms of Freud's description of the Oedipal complex. Today, psychoanalytic criticism and theory has many subareas of inquiry and scholarship, notably work on gender, sexuality, and language. Many scholars have built on the work of Freud, while others have contested or even rejected his theories. The theories of Jacques Lacan are among the most prevalent in the field. Psychoanalytic criticism also connects with other poststructuralist theories.

**Psychological criticism** A school of literary criticism based on the assumption that literature offers a window into the mind and mental processes of its author. Psychological criticism explores literature in order to describe, discover, and analyze an author's personality or mental processes.

**Pun** A play on words, also called paronomasia. A pun is a figure of speech that creates humor by playing off a word's ambiguity. A pun either draws upon one word's two distinct meanings or two similar sounding words with distinct meanings (homonyms). Usually puns are intentionally humorous, but they can also be serious in intent.

**Puritan Interregnum** Also called the Commonwealth period, the Puritan Interregnum ("between reigns") is the fifth era of the Renaissance period in British literature. This era begins with the execution of Charles I in 1649 and lasts until the restoration of the Stuart Monarchy with the crowning of Charles II in 1660. During this era, England was ruled by Parliament and the Puritan Oliver Cromwell until his death in 1658. Puritan rule was significant to literary history because theatres were closed on moral and religious grounds. While drama did not flourish, significant examples of nonfiction prose and poetry were written during this period. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Pyrrhic** An uncommon metrical unit of poetry consisting of two successive syllables that are equally or almost equally unstressed. Metrical units (called feet) make up a poem's meter, or rhythms in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

## Q

**Quatrain** A grouping of four verse lines with varying rhyme schemes, typically with a common metrical pattern or line length.

## R

**Reader Response criticism** Not a specific theory but an approach to understanding and analyzing how readers create meaning from literary texts. Reader Response criticism examines different readers' responses to given works and attempts to understand the relationship between response and the making of meaning(s). Emerging primarily in the U.S. in the 1970s, Reader Response is often connected with the work of Stanley Fish. As with other literary theories and critical approaches, there are numerous subsets within the area. Different Reader Response critics analyze areas such as particular reading communities, how Reader Response intersects with other poststructuralist theories, and the processes a reader uses to form meaning. Related to but distinct from Reception theory.

**Realistic novel** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, that depicts characters, settings, and situations in specific detail, making the novel seem extremely plausible to its readers

**Realistic period** A period in American literature from the end of the Civil War (1865) to 1900. This period was the era of Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction, as well as increased industrialization and urbanization. Though there were still elements of romanticism, this period was considered realistic in its emphasis on unidealized and truthful depictions; principles of realism were outlined by William Dean Howells. Within the Realistic period were local color writers and Naturalist writers. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Reception theory** A form of Reader Response theory connected with the work of Hans Robert Jauss and focused on a reading public's responses to a literary work, rather than on an individual's response. Reception theory is particularly interested in looking at how a general readership's interpretation or understanding of a literary work changes over time and builds on or reacts to previous readers' understandings. Reception theory attempts to create a dialogue between a literary text and readers from different historical and cultural moments.

**Renaissance period in British literature** The Renaissance usually refers to the period following the Middle Ages in Europe. The Renaissance (meaning "rebirth") is used broadly to refer to the flourishing of literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and learning in general that began in Italy in the fourteenth century and spread across Europe. The Renaissance saw the use and adaptation of classical or classically inspired forms. The Renaissance period in British literature spans the years 1500 to 1660 and is usually divided into five subsections: Early Tudor, Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, and Commonwealth (or Puritan Interregnum).

**Restoration era** A period of British literature beginning with the crowning of Charles II and the restoration of the Stuart line in 1660 and ending around 1700. After the Puritan ban on theatres

was lifted, theatre came back into prominence. Drama of this period frequently focused upon the aristocracy and the life of the court, and is characterized by its use of urbanity, wit, and licentious plot lines. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Revolutionary period** A period in American literature usually said to begin with the passing of the Stamp Act in England and end in 1790. The Revolutionary period generally refers to writings that are politically motivated, either in support of British rule or in support of American patriotism and independence. Writings in this period include those by Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Rhetoric** Broadly, rhetoric is most often defined as the use of language (either written or spoken) for the purposes of persuasion. Although there are numerous sub-areas within rhetoric, the most common definition is based on Aristotle's statement that rhetoric is "discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given case." Aristotelian-based discussions of rhetoric frequently concern invention (finding and arguing proof or evidence), disposition (arranging the argument and proof), and style (using the diction, images, rhythm, etc. that will most effectively convey one's points).

**Rhetorical figures** Along with tropes, rhetorical figures are one of two kinds of figures of speech. Rhetorical figures, unlike tropes, do not radically alter the sense or meaning of a word. Examples of rhetorical figures are antithesis, apostrophe, rhetorical questions, and meiosis, among others.

**Rhyme** The similar sound in syllables or paired groups of syllables. The more common end rhyme occurs at the end of a line of verse, whereas internal rhyme occurs within a line of verse. Masculine rhymes are rhymes with single-syllable stressed words. Feminine rhymes are rhyming stressed syllables followed by identical unstressed syllables. Rhyme scheme is the pattern of rhymes used. For example, the English or Shakespearean sonnet has an abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme, illustrated by William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130":

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

An Italian or Petrarchan sonnet has an abba abba cde cde rhyme scheme, as seen in John Milton's "Sonnet 19":

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest He returning chide;  
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"  
I fondly ask; but Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

**Rhythm** Greek for "flow," rhythm refers to the pattern of sound established in either prose or verse through pauses and stressed and unstressed syllables. Rhythm, though related, is distinct from meter, which is much more formal, regular, and measured into patterns called metrical feet.

**Romance** A term used broadly in literature, art, and philosophy with a range of diverse definitions and applications. In literature, it usually refers to works that emphasize emotion over reason and the individual over society and that celebrate the imagination, subjective experiences, and individual expression. Romance has also been used to describe medieval narratives or narratives that look back to medieval times. Romances can also refer to works with an exotic or foreign setting or works that are set in an historic past. A romance is also a novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, that is not entirely realistic and includes fantastic or supernatural events.

**Romantic comedy** A form of comedy usually involving themes of love and young lovers, almost always with a happy ending. More specific than the broader sense of anything amusing or entertaining, comedy usually involves a movement from unhappiness to happiness and often relates to themes of regeneration, renewal, and human triumph over chance.

**Romantic period (American)** A literary period spanning the years 1828 to 1865, the Romantic period covers the time between Jacksonian democracy and the end of the Civil War. This period was one of increased westward expansion and the beginnings of urbanization and industrialization. The Romantic period was also the first major explosion of a distinctively American body of literature; for this reason, this period is also referred to as the American Renaissance. Many of American literature's most well-known writers emerged during this time. This period is sometimes referred to as the Age of Transcendentalism. Issues and subjects addressed in literature of this time ranged from the American identity, to the slavery debate, to

historical narratives, to poems and narratives inspired by Romanticism, to prose works examining the nature the American democracy and national unity. American Romanticism is related to, but distinct from, British Romanticism. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Romantic period (British)** A period of British literature beginning in 1785 (some argue 1789 or 1798) and ending in 1837. Many writers in the Romantic period emphasized feeling and imagination and looked toward nature for insight into the divine. The individual and his or her subjective experiences and expressions of those experiences were highly valued. Many scholars see the artistic and aesthetic freedoms in romanticism in contrast to the ideals of neo-classicism. In addition to a wealth of poetry, the Romantic period featured significant innovations in the novel form, including the Gothic novel. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Romanticism** A term used broadly in literature, art, and philosophy with a range of diverse definitions and applications. In literature, it usually refers to works that emphasize emotion over reason and the individual over society and that celebrate the imagination, subjective experiences, and individual expression. Romance has also been used to describe medieval narratives or narratives that look back to medieval times. Romances can also refer to works with an exotic or foreign setting or works that are set in an historic past. Romanticism also refers to specific literary periods in American and British literature. The American Romantic period covers the time between Jacksonian democracy and the end of the Civil War (1828 to 1865). This period was one of increased westward expansion and the beginnings of urbanization and industrialization. The American Romantic period was also the first major explosion of a distinctively American body of literature; for this reason, this period is also referred to as the American Renaissance. Many of American literature's most well-known writers emerged during this time. This period is sometimes referred to as the Age of Transcendentalism. Issues and subjects addressed in literature of this time ranged from the American identity, to the slavery debate, to historical narratives, to poems and narratives inspired by American Romanticism, to prose works examining the nature the American democracy and national unity. American Romanticism is related to, but distinct from, British Romanticism, which began in 1785 (some argue 1789 or 1798) and ended in 1837. Many writers in the British Romantic period emphasized feeling and imagination and looked toward nature for insight into the divine. The individual and his or her subjective experiences and expressions of those experiences were highly valued. Many scholars see the artistic and aesthetic freedoms in Romanticism in contrast to the ideals of neo-classicism. In addition to a wealth of poetry, the British Romantic period featured significant innovations in the novel form, including the Gothic novel. For major writers and works in these areas, see the Literary History Chart in the Writing and Research section.

**Round character** A specific type of character, or fictional or imagined person in a narrative or literary text. A round (also called dynamic) character is usually one of the main characters, is presented in a complex and detailed manner, and usually undergoes a significant change in response to the events or circumstances described in the plot. A round character is distinct from a flat or static character, typically a minor character, identified by a single outstanding trait, who doesn't change in the text. In Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Macon "Milkman" Dead III

begins the novel as a selfish, narcissistic man with no respect for his family or community. By the end, he's recognized his shortcomings, developed the ability to empathize with others, and gained a sense of awe and admiration for his ancestors. In contrast, the handyman Freddie is the town gossip who doesn't change and primarily serves to give Milkman his nickname after seeing him breastfeed at an inappropriate age.

**Russian formalism** Emerging in Russia in the early twentieth century, Russian formalism draws attention to the ways in which literary language is distinct from regular everyday language. Russian formalists attempted to describe literary language in an objective, scientific manner rather than in a subjective, expressive way. They concerned themselves with the features and technical devices of a literary work (such as syntax, imagery, rhythm, and figurative language), rather than its themes, ideas, or cultural significance.

## S

**Satire** Prose, verse, or dramatic works which seek to expose the failings of individuals, institutions, ideas, communities, or society in general. Works can either be entirely satiric or possess elements of satire. The tone of satire can range from mildly humorous to a bitter indictment; there are frequently elements of scorn, indignation, or contempt. Often there is a corrective element since satires often function as social critique or as a spark for social change.

**Scan or scansion** The process of analyzing poetry for its rhyme scheme, the number of lines per stanza, and its metrical patterns (patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables per line).

**Scene** Usually refers to a subdivision of an act in a play or dramatic performance. Scene can also refer to a) a division in a play with no change of locale or without an abrupt shift in time; b) a division based on the entrance or departure of a character or a group of characters on the stage; or c) the physical locale where a play is set.

**Semiotics** A term associated with Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems and the work they do to create meaning. Signs are made up of signifiers (words or symbols) and signified (the concept to which the word or symbol is referring), the connection between which is arbitrary but agreed upon by convention. Signs can include (but are not limited to) written and spoken words, body language, gestures, physical signs, and symbols. A sign is anything that conveys information to anyone who understands the codes and conventions of a particular sign system. Semiotics posits that meaning does not come from the signs themselves but from the differences between signs and the relationships between signs. Semiotic approaches to literary criticism examine the way literary codes and conventions create meaning(s).

**Sestet** A grouping of six rhymed verse lines, typically with a common metrical pattern or line length.

**Setting** Setting refers to the location, historical moment, social context, or circumstances in which a literary work or scene is set. In drama, it also includes the scenery and props and is often referred to as décor or mise en scène.

**Shakespearean sonnet** Generally, a sonnet is a one-stanza lyric poem of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter with a specific rhyme scheme. Sonnets address a range of themes, but love is the most common. The Shakespearean (or English) sonnet has three quatrains (4 lines) and a concluding couplet (two lines) with an abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme. The Spenserian sonnet offers a variant rhyme scheme of abab bcba cdcd ee. In the Shakespearean sonnet, the sestet describe a problem or situation that is repeated in each sestet with some variation; the remaining couplet offers a summary, usually with a turn of thought. William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130," more commonly recognized by its first line, illustrates the common form and content of the Shakespearean sonnet:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

**Short story** A prose narrative of about 2,000-12,000 words. Though short stories have many of the features of novels, they are distinct from novels in their length and in their more narrowed focus. Historically, the short story is related to the tale, fable, myth, parable, and exemplum.

**Signifier and signified** The signifier is the word (either written or spoken) or symbol that refers to the signified (the concept to which the word or symbol is referring). The connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, but agreed upon by convention. Together, the signifier and the signified form what Saussure called a sign, the study of which is semiotics.

**Simile** A figure of speech that is a comparison of two different things or ideas using "like" or "as." Similes are used to illustrate or enhance an idea or an image. Similes are less definite than metaphors.

**Sketch** Either a) a short (1000-2000 words) descriptive fiction or nonfiction prose work that describes a place or character in detail rather than events, or b) in a play, a sketch is a self-contained scene.

**Slave narrative** Narratives written by slaves or, more often, former slaves, in the late eighteenth century until the American Civil War. Slave narratives were written in the first person and depicted life under slavery. Almost always, slave narratives were written to advance the cause of abolition by showing the inhumanity, cruelty, and brutality of slavery. After the abolition of slavery, slave narratives became much less prominent.

**Social Novel** A novel, or extended piece of fictional prose, that illustrates the connections between a character and his or her social, political, historical, or cultural context(s).

**Soliloquy** A monologue in a play spoken by one character who is alone or believes himself or herself to be alone on the stage. In the soliloquy, the character describes thoughts, emotions, or ideas to himself or herself or reveals important information to the audience. A soliloquy is a form of monologue, but a monologue is not necessarily a soliloquy. If other characters are present, a monologue is not a soliloquy.

**Sonnet** A one-stanza lyric poem of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter with a specific rhyme scheme. Sonnets address a range of themes, but love is the most common. There are two major kinds of sonnets: the Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet and the English (or Shakespearean) sonnet. The Italian sonnet has two main parts: an octave (eight lines) with a rhyme scheme of abba abba followed by a sestet (six lines) with a rhyme scheme of cde cde (or sometimes cdc cdc). The Italian sonnet usually uses the octave to state or describe a problem and the sestet to resolve it. The English sonnet has three quatrains (4 lines) and a concluding couplet (two lines) with an abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme. The Spenserian sonnet offers a variant rhyme scheme of abab bcbc cdcd ee. In the Shakespearean sonnet, the sestets describe a problem or situation that is repeated in each sestet with some variation; the remaining couplet offers a summary, usually with a turn of thought.

**Sonnet sequence/cycle** A group of sonnets written by one poet and interconnected by theme. Sonnet sequences usually depict love and the progression or disintegration of the love relationship.

**Spenserian sonnet** Generally, a sonnet is a one-stanza lyric poem of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter with a specific rhyme scheme. Sonnets address a range of themes, but love is the most common. The Spenserian sonnet has three quatrains (4 lines) and a concluding couplet (two lines) with an abab bcbc cdcd ee rhyme scheme. It is a variant of the Shakespearean (or English) sonnet's abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme.

**Spondaic/ spondee** An uncommon metrical unit of poetry consisting of two successive syllables that are equally or almost equally stressed. Metrical units (called feet) make up a poem's meter, or rhythms in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Stanza** A grouping of verse lines often (but not always) with a common rhyme scheme, metrical pattern, or line length. A stanza pattern is determined by its number of lines, number of metrical feet per line, and the meter and rhyme. Names of stanzas include couplet (two rhymed lines), tercet or triplet (three lines with the same rhyme), quatrain (4 lines with varying rhyme schemes), sestet (six lines), and octave (eight lines).

**Static character** A specific type of character, or fictional or imagined person in a narrative or literary text. A static or flat character is typically a minor character with a single outstanding trait and is often based on a stock character, or a common, stereotypical character. A static character doesn't change in the text, distinguishing it from a dynamic (also called round) character, who is usually one of the main characters, is presented in a complex and detailed manner, and usually undergoes a significant change in response to the events or circumstances described in the plot. The handyman Freddie in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is a static character: he's simply the town gossip who doesn't change and primarily serves to give the protagonist his nickname (Milkman) after seeing him breastfeed at an inappropriate age. In contrast, Milkman is a dynamic character because he begins the novel as a selfish, narcissistic man with no respect for his family or community, and by then end, he's recognized his shortcomings, developed the ability to empathize with others, and gained a sense of awe and admiration for his ancestors.

**Stock character** Specific types of characters, or fictional or imagined people in a narrative or literary text, so commonly seen in literature that they are seen as stereotypical types. Fairy tales have perhaps the most recognizable stock characters, including fairy godmothers, cruel stepmothers, and prince charmings. Westerns (both literature and film) contain strong, silent, solitary heroes; occasional sidekicks who primarily assist the hero and may offer comic relief; and cruel villains with black hats who ultimately lose to the hero.

**Stock response** A standard, expected, or stereotypical response from a reader or audience. A stock response is usually a convention or an automatic response rather than a reflective response.

**Stock situation** Like stock characters, these are frequently used incidents, scenarios, or sequences of events that are recurrent in literature or a specific literary form.

**Stream of consciousness** A type of prose narration often evident in modern period fiction and used to replicate the way the human mind works. A kind of interior monologue, stream of consciousness attempts to convey a character's thoughts directly and with immediacy; stream of consciousness prose is associative, flowing, continual, fragmented, sensory, and often disjointed. Like our thought patterns, stream of consciousness often blurs past and present.

**Strophe** The strophe is a) the part of a Greek choral ode sung by the chorus as it dances in one direction; the antistrophe is the part of the choral ode when the chorus dances in the opposite direction, and b) a term used for a poetic stanza. In odes, or lyric poems with elaborate stanza structures and a distinct tone of formality and stateliness, the strophe and antistrophe are the same length and possess the same metrical pattern.

**Structuralist criticism** Derived from linguistic theories of language and Russian formalism, structuralists use semiotics, or the study of signs and sign systems, to understand the underlying system of utterances of a work and analyze how its signs, codes, and convention work to create and produce meaning. Structuralist approaches to literature examine a literary work not for what it says but for how it conveys or produces meaning through its linguistic elements, codes, and conventions.

**Structure** Refers to a) the arrangement or ordering of material in a prose or poetic work nor b) in drama, how plot is created and how material is ordered into acts and scenes.

**Style** An author or literary movement's distinctive or characteristic use of diction, imagery, syntax, language, or literary devices. In short, style is the way an author uses the sum total of all literary elements in a work.

**Stylistics** Similar to linguistics and semantics, stylistics examines a literary work's style. Rather than using subjective or expressive modes of literary analysis, stylistics attempts to offer a more scientific reading of literary works. Of concern to stylistics are phonology (study of sound), prosody (study of versification), diction, syntax, and figurative language.

**Surrealism** A visual and literary artistic movement beginning in France in the 1920s and 1930s. The term *surréaliste* was first used by poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1917) to name a movement "beyond the real." The ideas of surrealism were more fully articulated by André Breton's *Manifesto on Surrealism* (1924). Surrealism seeks to break down boundaries between the real and the imagined, and rationality and irrationality, as well as challenge social, moral, and artistic conventions. The "deep mind" or subconscious was thought to be the true source of creativity and a process called "automatic writing" was used to access this source. Surrealist work often refers to dreams and hallucinations, and features a free association between ideas and images. Though it was a movement in and of itself, the Surrealists had a lingering impact on future generations of artists and writers.

**Suspense** The uncertainty or anxiety built into a plot. Suspense is most often created through foreshadowing, which is used to hint at what is to come.

**Symbol** Something that stands for something else or that represents something larger, such as a concept or idea. In Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use," the quilts made from scraps of the narrator's mother's dresses, father's shirts, and great grandfather's Civil War uniform and hand-quilted by the narrator, her sister, and their mother symbolize the heritage that the narrator and her daughter Maggie cherish enough to embrace and "use" daily.

**Symbolism** The use of symbols or a set of related symbols or a sustained use of symbols. Symbolisme was also a literary movement in late-nineteenth-century France as a reaction to realist impulses in literature; Symbolists often developed their own independent and subjective systems of symbolism.

**Synecdoche** A figure of speech where a part of something is used to represent the whole (for example, "hands" to refer to manual labor) or where the whole is used to represent the part (for example, "Montréal" is used to refer to the Montréal Canadiens). A kind of metonymy.

**Syntax** Either refers to a) how words or clauses are ordered to create sentences, or b) the grammatical rules regulating word order and sentence structure.

## T

**Tercet or triplet** A grouping of three rhymed verse lines, typically with a common metrical pattern or line length.

**Tetrameter** A metrical line of poetry consisting of four metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Text** The body of a written work which is distinct from a reader's interpretation of, or an author's intentions toward, that work.

**Theme** A significant abstract idea emerging from a literary work or the statement the work appears to make about its subject. Usually themes are indirectly suggested and are generally conveyed through figurative language, imagery, symbols, or motifs. Themes that are overt or explicitly stated are called didactic.

**Theory** Either a) principles, predictions, or assumptions used to make sense of an occurrence or an event, or b) principles or assumptions that form a reasoned analysis or inquiry into an occurrence, event, or phenomenon. Literary theory is the system of principles or assumptions about literature, literary analysis, interpretations, readings, and how meaning is created. Theory helps to formulate approaches and articulate the questions critics ask about literature and the conclusions they reach.

**Third-person narrator** The narrator of a story told from the perspective of a persona who uses "he" or "she" to recount the story. There are several kinds of third-person narrators. An omniscient narrator is all-knowing and has complete knowledge of all characters' thoughts and histories, as well as the story's events, settings, and contexts. An omniscient narrator can move freely between any number of characters. A limited-omniscient narrator has access to one or more (but not all) character's thoughts and some of the story's events and contexts. An intrusive narrator is one who offers comment, critique, interpretation, or additional information to readers about characters or events as he or she recounts events. An unintrusive narrator relates events with a minimum of commentary, observation, or interpretation. Unreliable or fallible narrators are those whose readers are given reasons to question or doubt the validity of their perspective.

Readers can doubt a narrator's reliability or accuracy based on his or her age, intelligence, sanity, or relationship to the events. A self-conscious narrator is one who draws attention to the fact that he or she is narrating a work of fiction, as is often the case with metafiction.

**Tone** The author's attitude in a literary text toward the audience or reader (i.e., familiar, formal) or toward the subject itself (i.e., satiric, celebratory, ironic).

**Tragedy** For Aristotle, tragedy was "an action of high importance," but today tragedy is a form of drama or other literary work that usually ends in death or some other non-comedic event. Tragedy is usually brought about because of a character's tragic flaw, hubris, or a broader hamartia (error, mistake, or failure). Tragedy is usually dependent upon the audience's awareness and acceptance of a tragic hero's potential or redeeming qualities. According to Aristotle, viewers watching tragic drama experience a catharsis, or a purging or cleansing of emotion, leading to relief or other beneficial emotions in an audience.

**Tragic flaw** A defect in the protagonist's character or reasoning that brings about his or her downfall. A more narrow version of the tragic flaw is the Greek concept of hamartia, an error, mistake, misstep, failure, or error in judgment or reasoning. A specific kind of tragic flaw is hubris, an excess of pride usually leading to divine retribution. Hubris usually leads a character toward ignoring warnings from gods or higher powers, transcending human limits, or violating a moral or cultural code. The character's downfall is usually seen as the gods' retribution for hubris. In *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, Oedipus's search for knowledge brings about his downfall as he learns that he indeed killed his own father and married his mother. In Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, Willie Loman's inability to live in the present because of his dreams, delusions, and lies becomes his tragic flaw.

**Trimeter** A metrical line of poetry consisting of three metrical units, or feet. Meter is the rhythm in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables.

**Trochaic/trochee** A common metrical unit of poetry consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. Metrical units (called feet) make up a poem's meter, or rhythms in poetry made by these units of sound created by accented and unaccented syllables..

**Tropes** Along with rhetorical figures, one of the two kinds of figures of speech. Trope comes from the word "turning" and so tropes include figures of speech which somehow "turn" language to give it another meaning or sense. Examples of tropes include simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, personification, and hyperbole, among others.

## U

**Understatement** Also known by its Greek term “meiosis,” understatement is describing something in terms less grand or important than it deserves or merits, typically to minimize its importance. Its opposite is hyperbole, a figure of speech which uses exaggeration for comic, ironic, or serious effect.

**Unintrusive narrator** A story’s narrator who relates a story’s events with a minimum of commentary, observation, or interpretation. Its opposite is an intrusive narrator, who offers comment, critique, interpretation, or additional information to readers about characters or events as he or she recounts the events in the story.

**Unreliable narrator** An unreliable or fallible narrator is one who recounts a story and gives readers reasons to question or doubt the validity of his or her perspective. Readers can doubt a narrator's reliability or accuracy based on his or her age, intelligence, sanity, or relationship to the events. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” gradually reveals her mental instability as she suffers from an extreme form of postpartum depression, causing readers to question her visions of a woman inside the wallpaper. William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* offers multiple narrators, the first of which is Benjy, a mentally retarded man who can barely recount chronological events, making it difficult to decipher the plot; however, the third section, narrated by Benjy’s brother Jason—while perhaps the most clear in terms of narrating the chronological events of the plot—is the least reliable because of his cruelty and lack of compassion. He represents Benjy as solely a despicable source of shame; his niece Quentin as an evil, amoral tramp; and himself as a mere victim of everyone else’s dysfunction—all judgments the reader recognizes as untrustworthy because of Jason’s character flaws.

**Utopia (and dystopia)** Utopia is a word used to describe fictional writings that describe an idealized but non-existent place with an idealized way of life, political system, or society. Often utopias are used as a form of social critique (especially critiques of political or economic systems) or social commentary. The word "utopia" is a combination of the Greek words "eutopos," meaning "good place," and "outopos," meaning "no place." The opposite of utopia is a dystopia ("bad place"), where negative features of a particular society, culture, or political structure are exaggerated for effect.

## V

**Verse** A term used to a) describe poetry in general; b) refer to a single poem; or c) refer to a stanza (erroneously, some critics argue).

**Victorian period** A period of British literature named for the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901); some scholars argue that what is called the Victorian period began in 1830 or 1832. Early Victorian literature is that written before 1870 and Late Victorian literature is that written after

1870. Varied in form, style and content, Victorian literature reflects a changing social, political, economic, and cultural climate. Industrialization, urbanization, technological advances, and economic and political changes are just a few of the forces reflected in Victorian literature. Recurrent issues include poverty, class, gender, philosophy, and religious issues. Three related sub areas include Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, and Decadence. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary Timeline in the Writing and Research section.

**Vignette** A brief composition that is usually a piece of descriptive prose, an essay, sketch, or short story. A vignette can either be a stand-alone work or can be part of a larger work.