PART ONE:

Glossary

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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 psychological response of readers, or upon the effect a particular work has on readers. Wimsatt and Beardsley believed affective fallacy to be flawed and this is one of the major ideas within **New Criticism**. **Reader Response** criticism has also coun-

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tered the notion of the affective fallacy. See also **Intentional Fallacy**.

Age of Johnson see **Age of Sensibility**

Age of Sensibility A period of British literature spanning the years 1744–1785. 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.

Age of Transcendentalism see **Romantic period** (American)

Allegory A narrative that possesses at least two levels of meaning and understanding. Allegory has two parallel levels: 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.

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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 see **Romantic period** (American)

Anapestic (**anapest**) see **Meter**

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 see **Anxiety of influence**

Anxiety of influence In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), and his other works, Harold Bloom argued that a poet must resist and confront 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 rewriting involves the misreading of previous poets. The 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. See **Archetypal criticism**.

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.

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.

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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.

Bildungsroman see **Novel**

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. See **Meter**.

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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 element that can 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. See **dialogic criticism**

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.

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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**—why a particular character is driven or inspired to act in the ways he or she does in response to events of the plot.

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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.

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

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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; there is almost always 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 and often possesses elements of panic, surprise, and cruelty.

Comedy of manners   see **Comedy**

Commedia dell arte   see **Comedy**

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. The 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.

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

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image or a graphic form. The shape of the poem suggests the content, subject, or theme.

Concrete see **Abstract**

Conflict The struggle between two forces in a literary work that constitutes the foundation of plot. 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, 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. See also **Plot**.

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 see **Stanza**

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.

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Dactylic (**dactyl**)   see **Meter**

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 3 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.

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 infinitude 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, a dialogic work allows 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   see **Meter**

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

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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   see **Character**

~*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.

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.

Echoism see **Onomatopoeia**

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.

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 era 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.

End rhyme   see **Rhyme**

English sonnet   see **Sonnet**

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 or 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   see **Novel**

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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 see **Novel**

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 see **Allegory**

Explication see **Close reading**

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.

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Farce   see **Comedy**

Feminine rhyme   see **Rhyme**

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.

First-person narrator   see **Point of View**

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   see **Character**

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**)   see **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."

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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).

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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.

Heptameter   see **Meter**

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. See also **Reception theory**.

Hexameter   see **Meter**

Historical novel   see **Novel**

Homostrophic stanzas   see **Ode**

Horatian ode   see **Ode**

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. See also **Tragic flaw**.

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

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~I~

Iamb (or **Iambic**)   A unit of poetic meter (or foot) that involves an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. See also **Meter**.

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.

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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   see **Rhyme**

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. Also see **Criticism**.

Intrusive narrator   see **Point of view**

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**   see **Ode**

~*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.

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.

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Küntstlerroman   see **Novel**

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Legend   A traditional narrative handed down via oral culture. Unlike **folktales**, legends claim to be true and often feature a 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   see **Figurative language**

Literary canon   see **Canon**

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 **post-structuralism**.

Litotes   A figure of speech where a statement is made indirectly by stating its opposite. Examples of litotes includes "not uncommon," "not bad," or "no mean feat."

Local color   Descriptions in prose (usually prose fiction) which show particulars about setting, dialect, custom, habits, dress, man-

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nerisms, 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.

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.

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 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 see **Rhyme**

Meiosis Greek term for understatement where something is described in terms less grand or important than it deserves or merits. Its opposite is **hyperbole**. Also see **Litotes**.

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.

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Metadrama   see **Metafiction**

Metafiction   Novels or 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* do 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, is used to describe a particular group of seventeenth-century poets.

Meter   The regular, or mostly regular, pattern of accented and un-accented syllables in poetry. Each metrical unit is called a **foot** (feet, plural). A foot usually consists of one or more stressed sylla-bles with one or more unstressed syllables. To determine the me-ter, one **scans** a poem to determine what kind of foot is used and how many feet per line are included. The most common types of feet used include: **iamb** (iambic, adj.) which is an unstressed sylla-ble followed by a stressed syllable; **trochee** (trochaic, adj.), which is a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable; **dactyl** (dactylic, adj.) which is a stressed syllable followed by two un-stressed syllables; **anapest** (anapestic, adj.) which is two un-stressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. Two less com-mon metrical feet include the **spondee** (spondaic, adj.) which is 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. To deter-mine the meter, one also determines how many feet are used in each line. Metrical lines are named by the number of feet per line: **monometer** (1 foot); **dimeter** (2 feet); **trimeter** (3 feet); **tetrame-ter** (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 which is a pattern made 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 more 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.

Miracle play (or **mystery play**)   A **Middle English** play based upon a biblical story or a saint's life. See also **Morality play**.

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. See also **modernism**. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart.

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

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expression and subject matters. Modernist works feature innovations in style, form, genre, subject matter, and thought. Frequently, modernist works are experimental (see also **Stream of consciousness)** or connected with the **Avant-garde**. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart.

Monometer   see **Meter**

Mood   see **Atmosphere**

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   see **Character** and **Characterization**

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, super-human beings or supernatural forces. Myths are considered distinct from **legends** because myths are not rooted in historically based facts or stories. See also **Archetype** and **Archetypal criticism**.

~*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. See also **Point of View**

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.

Neoclassical period   A period of British literature spanning 1660–1785. The Neoclassical period is often divided into three sub-areas: 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.**

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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. See also **Affective fallacy** and **Intentional fallacy**.

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 usually fictional prose that is distinct from **short stories** and **novellas** for 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. Types of novels include, but are not limited to the following types. 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 exchanging letters. A *Bildungsroman*, is a novel of development 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 *Erzie-*

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hungsroman, 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   see **Meter**

Octave   see **Stanza**

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 either be private or public: private odes are meditative, subjective and personal, whereas public odes are for ceremonial occasions such as funerals or state events. There are two classical models of the ode based on the odes of Pindar and Horace. Pindar's odes were originally choral odes 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. Horace's odes were more reflective and private and featured what are called **homostrophic** stanzas, stanzas of identical form, number of lines and rhyme scheme.

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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 the 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.

Omniscient narrator   see **Point of view**

Onomatopoeia   Also called echoism. There are two applications of onomatopoeia: a) broadly, it refers to words or passages where the sound echoes the sense, that is to say, the words or passages sound like the words they describe either in terms of movement or sound or b) more specifically, onomatopoeia is employed when the sound of a word closely resembles or echoes the sound it conveys, for example, 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 opposite or contradictory words for effect or emphasis. See also **Paradox**.

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Paradox   A statement that, on the surface, appears to be self-contradictory but, upon analysis, reveals an underlying truth, significance or meaning. See also **Oxymoron**.

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

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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   see **Meter**

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   see **Sonnet**

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   see **Novel**

Pindaric odes   see **Ode**

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 pat-

tern 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. Points of view used in narratives 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" and there are a number of kinds of third-person narrators. An omniscient narrator 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 their age, intelligence, or their relationship to the events, perspective, or even their sanity. 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 sub-areas, but generally it examines intersecting issues such as power, power structures, representation, liberation, oppression, **ideology**, language **discourse**, race, class and gender. Because it examines literary texts in their social, political, historical, and cultural contexts, it is related to **New Historicism**. See also **Orientalism**.

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. See also **Postmodernism**. For major writers and works in this area, see the Literary History Chart.

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 such as 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.

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.

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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 sub-areas 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   See **Commonwealth period**

Pyrrhic   see **Meter**

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~Q~

Quatrain see **Stanza**

~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 US, 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 see **Novel**

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.

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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**, **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 (see **Commonwealth age**) 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. See also **Comedy**. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart.

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, Alexan-

der Hamilton, and James Madison. See also **Early National period**. For major writers and works in this period, see the Literary History Chart.

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 the "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 (usually at the end of lines of **verse**). *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. See **sonnet** for examples of rhyme schemes.

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   see **Romanticism**

Romantic comedy   see **Comedy**

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 distinctly 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.

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.

Romanticism   A broadly used term 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, the individual over society, and that celebrate the imagination, sub-

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jective 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 a historic past. See also **Romantic period (American)** and **Romantic period (British)**.

Round character see **Character**

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 the metrical patterns in poetry, the rhyme scheme, and number of lines per **stanza**. Scansion also includes counting the stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses, and determining the metrical feet and the line lengths. See also **Meter**.

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 of 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 Ferdinard de Saussure, semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems and the work they do to create meaning. Signs can include (but are not limited to) written and spoken words, body language, gestures, physical signs, and symbols. A sign is considered to be 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). See also **Signifier and signified**.

Sestet   see **Stanza**

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   see **Sonnet**

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 signifier 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

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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   see **Novel**

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   see **Sonnet**

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Spondaic/ spondee   see **Meter**

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   see **Character**

Stock character   see **Character**

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. See also **ode**.

Structuralist criticism   Derived from linguistic theories of language and **Russian formalism**, structuralists attempt to understand the *langue* or underlying system of utterances of a work and analyze how 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. See also **Semiotics**.

Structure   Refers to a) the arrangement or ordering of material in a prose or poetic work or 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 the 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 Appollinaire (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, 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

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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. See also **Symbolism**.

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.

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Tercet or **triplet**   see **Stanza**

Tetrameter   see **Meter**

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. See also **Literary theory**.

Third-person narrator   see **Point of view**

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 way. 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. See also **Catharsis**.

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* which is an error, mistake, misstep, failure, or error in judgment or reasoning. See also **Hubris**.

Trimeter see **Meter**

Trochaic/trochee see **Meter**

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.

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Understatement   see **Meiosis**

Unintrusive narrator   see **Point of view**

Unreliable narrator   see **Point of view**

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, 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 History Chart.

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.