

A  
HANDBOOK  
TO  
LITERATURE

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*Seventh Edition*

WILLIAM HARMON  
C. HUGH HOLMAN

# A HANDBOOK TO LITERATURE

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WILLIAM HARMON

*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

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*Late of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

*Based on the Original Edition by  
William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard*



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# Preface to the Seventh Edition



For more than ten years now, I have given part of every day to the fifth, sixth, and seventh editions of this handbook, and, even before the seventh is technically finished, I have started to make notes for the eighth.

I have little to add to what has been said in earlier prefaces, except to report something I had not expected: this kind of work has been more to me and of me than creative writing. One of the improvements in the world since the first edition sixty years ago, as far as I am concerned, is such expansion and relaxation of literary studies that we may now pay to works of biography, history, philosophy, and social science the same kind of critical attention that was once austere reserved for poems, plays, and novels. And, since the idea of “text” has been enlarged much beyond the realm of print, one may look at an objective work, like this handbook, as a personal text not too different from a poem. For what it may be worth, I can testify, after twenty-five years of publishing books of poetry, that verse is of my life a thing apart, but that the making of reference works like anthologies and handbooks is my whole existence. That exaggerates things somewhat, but it registers my sense of being on even in my dreams. With every conscious experience of a text—television production, magazine, bumper sticker, tattoo, overheard conversation—I can feel the gears grinding. And probably even more so with casual and unconscious experiences. My wife asks, “Is that a spoof?” and I immediately wonder if the handbook needs an entry for “spoof.” *TV Guide* calls things “soap noir” (*Twin Peaks*) or “gender-bender” (a film in which a break-dancer with ESP solves a murder), and the machinery starts to hum. People who know me have probably learned to spot changes in my expression that mean “He’s handbooking.”

I want to thank them for their forbearance when I ask them about the meaning of “soap noir,” “gender-bender,” “spoof,” “pseudomorph,” or any of a thousand other things. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Valerie Matthews and Julia Stockton for help with proofreading and much else. Thomas Inge, George Kennedy, Roy McGalliard, Christoph Schweitzer, Mark Wallace, and Joon Yoon came through with advice about specific items. Reviews of larger scope were provided by Joseph W. Creech, Lucy Fischer, Martin Gardner, Russell Graves, Jacqueline Henkel, James G. Janssen, Dale Kramer, Marc Manganaro, John Ney Rieber, Joseph Rudman, Ellen J. Stekert, and Susan Wanlass. My failure to follow all of their recommendations does not mean that I am rejecting or ignoring them. Only so much can be done, and, as I say, there is already a file labeled “8e.”

William Harmon

# To the User



The *Handbook* proper is a listing of terms variously defined, discussed, explained, and illustrated, with no attempt at exhaustiveness, completeness, or novelty. As with certain earlier editions, this seventh edition provides selected references for some of the more important, difficult, or controversial entries. As in the sixth edition, the initial capitals heading the chapters have been chosen from twenty-six different typefaces significant in the history of writing and printing.

- Terms being defined are given in **boldface** type.
- Within the body of the definition, the term in question, along with variants and derivatives, is in *italics*.
- A term used in a sense defined elsewhere may be printed in SMALL CAPITALS to indicate a cross reference.
- If other articles in the *Handbook* seem helpful, the statement “See AN APPROPRIATE ARTICLE” is included. For example, the entry on **Complication** includes the terms PLOT, RESOLUTION, DRAMATIC STRUCTURE, RISING ACTION, ACT, and TRAGEDY, all of which are listed in the *Handbook*: Each appears in SMALL CAPITALS to indicate that entries thereon may be consulted. The word *complication* itself is italicized in the body of the entry.

Immediately following the alphabetical listing, the Outline of Literary History tabulates the most important events in the literary history of English-speaking people, along with a few undeniably significant non-English items. Since the fifth edition, the *Handbook* has included an Index of Proper Names, which lists the names and pseudonyms of all actual persons mentioned in the *Handbook* proper. The Index gives the title or short title of articles in which the person is mentioned.

The following abbreviations and symbols are used in the main body of this *Handbook*:

- b. = born
- c. = circa (around, about)
- d. = died
- ed. = editor, edition, edited by
- edd. = editions
- eds. = editors
- ˘ = breve (marks the first vowel in short syllables of quantitative scansion and weak syllables of qualitative scansion)
- ˉ = macron (marks the first vowel in long syllables of quantitative scansion)
- ˊ = acute accent (marks the first vowel in syllables with primary stress in qualitative scansion)
- ˋ = grave accent (marks the first vowel in syllables with secondary stress in qualitative scansion as in *sécōndàry*)

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# A

**Poliphilus** 1928. Typeface cut by Monotype Corp., Ltd., in England. Based on typeface cut by Francesco Griffo in 1499.



**Abbey Theatre** Associated with the IRISH LITERARY REVIVAL, the *Abbey Theatre* was an outgrowth of an earlier group, the Irish Literary Theatre, founded by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1899, which became the Irish National Theatre Society in 1902. In 1904 the company moved to the *Abbey Theatre* in Dublin. It endured, producing plays with a markedly national emphasis, until the theater burned in 1951. W. B. Yeats was director of the *Abbey Theatre* until his death in 1939. Among the major playwrights of the company were Yeats, Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, James Stephens, and Lord Dunsany. See CELTIC RENAISSANCE.

**Abecedarius** An ACROSTIC, the initial letters of whose successive lines (STROPHES or STANZAS) form the alphabet. Strictly speaking, each word in a line should begin with the same letter, although this difficult task is seldom attempted. See ACROSTIC.

**Abridgment** A shortened version of a work, but one that attempts to preserve essential elements. See ABSTRACT, EPITOME, SYNOPSIS, PRÉCIS.

**Absolute** A term applied to anything totally independent of influences, limitations, controls, or modifiers. In grammar, it refers to a word, such as "unique," that cannot be compared or qualified, or to a phrase that is free of the customary syntactical relationships to other parts of the sentence. W. B. Yeats favored absolutes, as in "How can I, *that girl standing there*. . . ." In CRITICISM, it implies inviolable standards by which a work of art should be measured. An absolutist CRITIC holds that there are fundamental and immutable values that determine moral and aesthetic worth.

**Abstract** A severe ABRIDGMENT that summarizes the principal ideas or arguments advanced in a much longer work. *Abstracts* of articles and dissertations are widely pro-

## ABSURD

duced today. In reference to meaning, the term *abstract* is opposed to concrete. When art is being referred to, the term means nonrepresentational or nonobjective.

**Absurd** In contemporary literature and criticism, a term applied to the sense that human beings, cut off from their roots, live in meaningless isolation in an alien universe. Although the literature of the *absurd* employs many of the devices of EXPRESSIONISM and SURREALISM, its philosophical base is a form of EXISTENTIALISM that views human beings as moving from the nothingness from which they came to the nothingness in which they will end through an existence marked by anguish and absurdity. They live in a world in which there is no way to establish a significant relationship between themselves and their environment. Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* is one central expression of this philosophy. Extreme forms of illogic, inconsistency, and nightmarish FANTASY mark the literature expressing this concept. The idea of the *absurd* has been powerfully expressed in drama (see ABSURD, THEATER OF THE) and in the novel, where Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, Günter Grass, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., have practiced it with distinction. See ANTIHERO; ANTINOVEL.

[References: Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, *The Absurd* (1969); Wolodymyr T. Zyla, ed., *From Surrealism to the Absurd* (1970).]

**Absurd, Theater of the** A term invented by Martin Esslin for the kind of drama that presents a view of the absurdity of the human condition by the abandoning of usual or rational devices and by the use of nonrealistic form. It expounds an existential ideology and views its task as essentially metaphysical. Conceived in perplexity and spiritual anguish, the *theater of the absurd* portrays not a series of connected incidents telling a story but a pattern of images presenting people as bewildered beings in an incomprehensible universe. The first true example of the *theater of the absurd* was Eugène Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (1950). The most widely acclaimed play of the school is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Other playwrights in the school, which flourished in Europe and America in the 1950s and 1960s, include Jean Genêt, Arthur Adamov, Edward Albee, Arthur Kopit, and Harold Pinter. See ABSURD; BLACK HUMOR.

[Reference: Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3d ed. (1980).]

**Academic** As a neutral term, *academic* refers to schools and academies in general. As a negative term, however, it means "aridly theoretical" in ideas or "pedantic, conventional, and formalistic" in style.

**Academic Drama** Plays written and performed in schools and colleges in the ELIZABETHAN AGE. See SCHOOL PLAYS.

**Academies** Associations devoted to the advancement of special fields of interest. The term is derived from "the olive grove of Academe" where Plato taught at Athens. One general purpose of literary *academies* has been, to quote the charter of *l'Académie*



*française* (originated c. 1629), “to labor with all care and diligence to give certain rules to our language and to render it pure, eloquent, and capable of treating the arts and sciences.” In addition to the French Academy and the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge, the following are important: The Royal Academy of Arts founded in 1768 (England); the *Real Academia Española* founded in 1713 (Spain); and the AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS founded in 1904. More like the original academy of Plato was the famous “Platonic Academy” led by Marsilio Ficino at Florence in the late fifteenth century, which disseminated the doctrines of Neoplatonism.

**Acatalectic** Metrically complete; applied to lines that carry out the basic metrical and rhythmic pattern of a poem. See CATALEXIS.

**Accent** In METRICS, the emphasis given a syllable in articulation. Perhaps no aspect of PROSODY has been the subject of greater disagreement than that dealing with *accent*; it is considered to be a matter of force, timbre, duration, loudness, pitch, and various combinations of these. Customarily, however, it is used to describe some aspect of emphasis, as opposed to duration or QUANTITY. A distinction is sometimes made between *accent* as the normal emphasis and STRESS as the emphasis required by the METER. The governing force of metrical prescription on how one reads is a matter of critical debate, involving the issue of RHYTHM.

In VERSIFICATION, *accent* usually implies contrast; that is, a patterned succession of opposites, in this case, accented and unaccented syllables. In traditional terminology ICTUS is the name applied to the STRESS itself, ARSIS the name applied to the stressed syllable, and THESIS the name applied to the unstressed syllable. The Greek usage, however, predating this Latin usage, applied THESIS to the stressed and ARSIS to the unstressed syllables.

There are three basic types of *accent* in English: WORD ACCENT or the normal STRESS on syllables; RHETORICAL ACCENT, in which the placement of STRESS is determined by the meaning of the sentence; and METRICAL ACCENT, in which the placement of STRESS is determined by the metrical and rhythmic pattern of the line. If the METRICAL ACCENT does violence to the WORD ACCENT, the resulting alteration in pronunciation is called WRENCHED ACCENT, a phenomenon common in the FOLK BALLAD. See QUANTITY, METRICS, SCANSION, STRESS.

In linguistics, *accent* refers to the pronunciation of words and phrases according to regional and/or social patterns.

[References: Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (1982); John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (1985).]

**Accentualism** Paul Fussell’s term for “the theory of the line which considers the number of stresses to be its fundamental prosodic skeleton.” Unlike SYLLABISM, which regards English as a language like French with consistently uniform syllables, this theory recognizes that English is like German in having syllables of widely varying length and strength. The exponents of *accentualism* include Joshua Steele (*Prosodia Ratio-*

## ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSE

*nalis*, 1779), William Blake, and most of the significant writers of verse of the nineteenth century.

[Reference: Paul Fussell, *Theory of Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England* (1954).]

**Accentual-Syllabic Verse** VERSE that depends for its RHYTHM both on the number of syllables to the LINE and on the pattern of accented and unaccented syllables. The basic METERS in English poetry are *accentual-syllabic*. See METER, FOOT.

**Accismus** A form of IRONY, a pretended refusal that is insincere or hypocritical. Caesar's refusal of the crown, as reported by Casca in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1,2) and Richard's disavowal of his kingly qualities in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (3,7) are examples.

**Acephalous** "Headless"; see HEADLESS LINE.

**Acmeism** A movement in Russian poetry, begun around 1912 by members of the Poets' Guild to promote precise treatment of realistic subjects. The movement's emphasis on exactness of word and clarity of image invites comparison with its Anglo-American contemporary, *Imagism*. The founders of *Acmeism* were Nikolai Gumilev and Sergei Gorodetski. The organized group lasted only a few years, but the influence of its greatest adherents—such as Anna Akhmatova (who was married to Gumilev) and Osip Mandelstam—continues right through the present day.

**Acronym** A word formed by combining the initial letters or syllables of a series of words to form a name, as "radar," from "*radio detecting and ranging*." An *acronym* is akin to ACROSTIC.

**Acrostic** A composition, usually verse, arranged in such a way that it spells words, phrases, or sentences when certain letters are selected according to an orderly sequence. It was used by early Greek and Latin writers as well as by the monks of the Middle Ages. Though creditable verse has appeared in this form, *acrostics* are likely to be tricks of versifying. An *acrostic* in which the initial letters form the word is called a *true acrostic*; one in which the final letters form the word is called a TELESTICH. In the poem at the end of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, the first letters of the lines spell out "Alice Pleasance Liddell." The poem begins:

A boat, beneath a sunny sky,  
Lingering onward dreamily  
In an evening of July—  
  
Children three that nestle near,  
Eager eye and willing ear. . . .

An example of a true *acrostic-telestich* presented through a RIDDLE follows: 1. By Apollo was my first made. 2. A shoemaker's tool. 3. An Italian patriot. 4. A tropical fruit. Answer: *Lamb* and *Elia*:

- |    |   |       |   |
|----|---|-------|---|
| 1. | L | yr    | E |
| 2. | A | w     | L |
| 3. | M | azzin | I |
| 4. | B | anan  | A |

An *acrostic* in which the middle letters form the word is called a MESOSTICH; one in which the first letter of the first LINE, the second letter of the second line, the third letter of the third line, etc., form the word is called a *cross acrostic*, of which Poe's "A Valentine" is an example. An *acrostic* in which the initial letters form the alphabet is called an ABEDECARIUS.

**Act** A major division of a DRAMA. The major parts of the Greek plays were distinguished by the appearance of the CHORUS, and they generally fell, as Aristotle implies, into five parts. The Latin tragedies of Seneca were divided into five *acts*; and, when English dramatists in the ELIZABETHAN AGE began using *act* divisions, they followed their Roman models, as did other modern European dramatists. In varying degrees the five-*act* structure corresponded to the five main divisions of dramatic action: EXPOSITION, COMPLICATION, CLIMAX, FALLING ACTION, and CATASTROPHE. Freytag wrote of the "*act of introduction*," the "*act of the ascent*," the "*act of the climax*," the "*act of the descent*," and the "*act of the catastrophe*"; but such a correspondence, especially in Elizabethan plays, is by no means always apparent. The five-*act* structure was followed until the late nineteenth century when, under the influence of Ibsen, the fourth and fifth *acts* were combined. In the twentieth century, the standard form for serious drama has been three *acts*, for MUSICAL COMEDY and COMIC OPERA usually two; but great variation is used, with serious plays frequently divided into EPISODES or SCENES, without *act*-division. Late in the nineteenth century a shorter form, the ONE-ACT PLAY, developed. See DRAMATIC STRUCTURE, FREYTAG'S PYRAMID.

**Action** In any work of FICTION, the series of events that constitute the PLOT, what the characters say, do, think, or in some cases fail to do. Orderly *action* differs from aimless or episodic activity; an *action* customarily has a beginning, middle, and end. In the crudest sense, the *action* of a PLAY, a SHORT STORY, a NARRATIVE POEM, or a NOVEL is the answer to the question "What happened?" See PLOT.

**Actor** A person who performs in a drama in any form; the term has replaced the earlier PLAYER. Loosely, any participant in an action, as in "*actors* in the Watergate drama included John Mitchell and John Dean."

**Adage** A PROVERB or wise saying made familiar by long use. Examples: "No bees, no honey" (Erasmus, *Adagia*); "A stitch in time saves nine." See PROVERB.

## ADAPTATION

**Adaptation** The rewriting of a work from its original form to fit it for another medium; also the new form of such a rewritten work. A NOVEL may be “adapted” for the stage, motion pictures, or television; a PLAY may be rewritten as a novel. The term implies an attempt to retain the characters, actions, and as much as possible of the language and tone of the original; *adaptation* thus differs significantly from the reworking of a SOURCE.

**Addenda** (plural of **Addendum**) Matter to be added to a piece of writing. *Addenda* may be appended to a text in late stages of production or, after production, on a separate slip attached to the original document. *Addenda* are usually items inadvertently omitted or received too late for inclusion.

**Adonic Verse** In Greek and Latin PROSODY, the METER that consists of a DACTYL and a SPONDEE, as  $\sim\sim\sim|\sim\sim$ , or a DACTYL and a TROCHEE, as  $\sim\sim\sim|\sim\sim$ , probably so called after the Adonia, the festival of Adonis.

**Adventure Story (or Film)** A STORY in which ACTION—always exterior, usually physical, and frequently violent—is the predominant material, stressed above CHARACTERIZATION, MOTIVATION, or THEME. SUSPENSE is engendered by the question “What will happen next?” rather than “Why?” or “To whom?” In a broader sense, as Henry James insisted in “The Art of Fiction,” everything in fiction can be thought of as an adventure; he said, “It is an adventure—an immense one—for me to write this little article.” In FILM CRITICISM a recognizable subgenre is the outdoor-adventure *film*, of which the WESTERN remains the most popular form.

**Adversarius** The character in a FORMAL SATIRE who is addressed by the PERSONA and who functions to elicit and to shape that speaker’s remarks. Arbuthnot is *adversarius* to Pope in “The Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.” Such a character serves to create a situation within which he or she may speak or play a role similar to that of a STRAIGHT MAN.

**Aesthetic Distance** A term used to describe the effect produced when an emotion or an experience, whether autobiographical or not, is so objectified that it can be understood as being independent of the immediate experience of its maker. This objectification involves all aspects of representation that displace immediacy and verisimilitude. The term is also used to describe the reader’s or audience’s awareness that art and reality are separate. In this sense it is sometimes called “psychic distance.” It is related to T. S. Eliot’s OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE. See OBJECTIVITY, VERFREMDUNGSEFFEKT.

**Aestheticism** A nineteenth-century literary movement that rested on the credo of “ART FOR ART’S SAKE.” Its roots reached back to Theophile Gautier’s preface to *Made-moiselle de Maupin* (1835), which claimed that art has no utility, Poe’s theory of “the

poem *per se*" and his rejection of the "heresy of the didactic," Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and Mallarmé. Its origins had a close kinship to the reverence for beauty of the Pre-Raphaelites. Its dominant figures were Oscar Wilde, who insisted on the separation of art and morality, and Wilde's master, Walter Pater. The English PARNASIANS—Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Andrew Lang, and Edmund Gosse—were a part of the movement but were primarily concerned with questions of form rather than sharp separations of art from moral issues. Tennyson angrily paraphrased "ART FOR ART'S SAKE" as meaning:

The filthiest of all paintings painted well  
Is mightier than the purest painted ill!

**Aesthetics** The study or philosophy of the beautiful in nature, art, and literature. It has both a philosophical dimension—What is art? What is beauty? What is the relationship of the beautiful to other values?—and a psychological dimension—What is the source of aesthetic enjoyment? How is beauty perceived and recognized? From what impulse do art and beauty arise? The aesthetic study of literature concentrates on the sense of the beautiful rather than on moral, social, or practical considerations. When pursued rigorously, it leads to "ART FOR ART'S SAKE" and AESTHETICISM.

The Kantian tradition takes the *aesthetic* as the name of the attempt to bridge the gap between material and spiritual, a world of forces and magnitudes. Aesthetic objects, with their union or fusion or sensuous form and spiritual content, would serve as guarantors of the possibility of articulating the material with the spiritual. This sense of the *aesthetic* is not only Kant's: it is the one at issue in recent debates, such as those involving Terry Eagleton (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic*) and Paul de Man (*The Aesthetic Ideology*).

**Aet., Aetat.** Abbreviations for the Latin *aetatis suae*, "of his or her age." The term is used to designate the year of a person's life at which an event occurred. A picture of Henry David Thoreau bearing the legend "*aet. 35*" would be one made during Thoreau's thirty-fifth year, that is, when he was thirty-four years old.

**Affective Fallacy** The judging of a work of art in terms of its results, especially its emotional effect. The term was introduced by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and M. C. Beardsley to describe the "confusion between the poem and its result (what it *is* and what it *does*)." It complements the INTENTIONAL FALLACY. Notable versions of the *affective fallacy* are Aristotle's CATHARSIS and Longinus' "transport."

[Reference: W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (1954).]

**African American Literature** Frequently called Afro-American or BLACK LITERATURE. The formal study of such writing, long a neglected area of American literary scholarship, is increasingly important. This heightened interest in the work of African Americans has come about for two primary reasons: the growing recognition in the last half century of African Americans as a significant part of American culture and

## AGE OF JOHNSON IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

the development during the same period of a body of writing of impressive scope and quality.

For all practical purposes, *African American Literature* began in the eighteenth century with the poetry of two slaves, Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley. The first half of the nineteenth century saw further efforts by slave poets, among them George Moses Horton, but it was particularly marked by a flood of autobiographical records of the slaves' terrible experiences, known as SLAVE NARRATIVES, of which the most famous is that by Frederick Douglass. There were also polemical pamphlets and fiery sermons, and in 1853 William Wells Brown, an escaped slave, published the first novel by an African American, *Clotel, or, the President's Daughter*. As the century closed, Charles W. Chesnutt began publishing the novels that established him as an important literary figure.

In the twentieth century a host of skillful African American writers have produced work of high quality in almost every field. There have been poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Gwendolyn Brooks (who was in 1949 the first African American to receive the PULITZER PRIZE), Michael Harper, Nikki Giovanni, Don L. Lee, Ethridge Knight, and Clarence Major. The century has been particularly rich in African American novelists, including such writers as W. E. B. DuBois, Walter White, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Ishmael Reed. There have been a number of African American playwrights, among them Hall Johnson, Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry, Ossie Davis, and Imamu Baraka.

These African Americans, by writing with passion and conviction of the place they and their race have occupied and endured in a predominantly white society, have broadened the range, enriched the sympathy, and deepened the quality of American literary expression. Their contributions, notable most obviously for their power, are major forces changing the earlier American literary monolith of the white middle class.

[References: Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Black Literature in America* (1971); Joanne M. Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin, eds., *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* (1990); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (1984); Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers, eds., *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (1985); Darwin Turner, ed., *Black Literature: Essays* (1969); William D. Washington, ed., *Black Literature: An Anthology of Outstanding Black Writers* (1972).]

**Age of Johnson in English Literature** The interval between 1750 and 1798 was a markedly transitional age in English literature. The NEOCLASSICISM that dominated the first half of the century was yielding in many ways to the impulse toward ROMANTICISM, although the period was still predominantly neoclassical. The NOVEL, which had come into being in the decades before 1750, continued to flourish, with sentimental attitudes and GOTHIC horrors becoming a significant part of its content. Little was accomplished in DRAMA, except for the creation of "laughing" COMEDY by Sheridan and Goldsmith in reaction against SENTIMENTAL COMEDY. The chief POETS were Burns, Gray, Cowper, Johnson, and Crabbe—a list that indicates how thoroughly the pendulum was swinging away from Pope and Dryden. Yet it was Samuel Johnson—poet, lexicographer, essayist, novelist, journalist, and neoclassic critic—who was the major

literary figure, and his friend Boswell's biography of him (1791) was the greatest work of the age, challenged for such honor, perhaps, only by Gibbon's monumental history, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). An interest in the past (particularly the Middle Ages), in the primitive, and in the literature of the folk was developing and was contributing with increasing strength to the growing tide of ROMANTICISM. It is sometimes called the AGE OF SENSIBILITY, emphasizing the emergence of new attitudes and the development of SENSIBILITY as a major literary expression. See NEOCLASSIC PERIOD, AGE OF SENSIBILITY, SENSIBILITY.

**Age of Reason** A term often applied to the NEOCLASSIC PERIOD in English literature and sometimes to the REVOLUTIONARY AND EARLY NATIONAL PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, because these periods emphasized self-knowledge, self-control, rationalism, discipline, and the rule of law, order, and decorum in public and private life and in art.

**Age of the Romantic Movement in England, 1798–1832** Although a major Romantic POET, Robert Burns, had died in 1796, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* had appeared in 1789, and adumbrations of ROMANTICISM had been apparent in English writing throughout much of the eighteenth century, the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 is often regarded as marking the beginning of a period of more than three decades in which ROMANTICISM triumphed in British letters, a period that is often said to have ended in 1832, with the death of Scott. During these thirty-four years, the careers of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Mary and P. B. Shelley, Felicia Hemans, and Keats flowered; Scott created the HISTORICAL NOVEL and made it a force in international literature; Wordsworth and Coleridge articulated a revolutionary theory of Romantic POETRY; Jane Austen wrote her NOVELS OF MANNERS; Mary Shelley uncannily combined the GOTHIC NOVEL and SCIENCE FICTION, along with philosophic vision; and Lamb, DeQuincey, and Hazlitt raised the PERSONAL ESSAY to a high level of accomplishment. ROMANTICISM did not die with Scott, but the decade of the thirties saw it begin a process of accommodation. See ROMANTICISM, ROMANTIC PERIOD IN ENGLISH LITERATURE, *Outline of Literary History*.

**Age of Sensibility** A name frequently applied by contemporary critics and literary historians, such as W. J. Bate, Harold Bloom, and Northrop Frye, to the last half of the eighteenth century in England, the time called by older historians and critics the AGE OF JOHNSON. The use of the term *Age of Sensibility* results from seeing the interval between 1750 and 1798 as a seedfield for emerging romantic qualities in literature, such as PRIMITIVISM, SENSIBILITY, and the originality of the individual talent. The older term, AGE OF JOHNSON, tends to emphasize the strong continuing neoclassic qualities in the literature of the time. See AGE OF JOHNSON, NEOCLASSIC PERIOD, AGE OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT, ROMANTIC PERIOD IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

**Agent** An amateur or professional representative acting as an artist's go-between in dealings with publishers, editors, and other executives, chiefly in legal and financial

## AGON

matters but also occasionally including personal and artistic advice and assistance. The profession of literary *agent* dates back to the late nineteenth century, when A. P. Watt, sometimes considered the first professional *agent*, had Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling among his clients.

**Agon** Literally a contest of any kind. In Greek TRAGEDY it was a prolonged dispute, often a formal debate in which the CHORUS divided and took sides with the disputants. In the OLD COMEDY in Greece this debate, called epirrhematic *agon*, involved an elaborate and stylized series of exchanges between the CHORUS and the debaters, and addresses to the audience. In discussions of PLOT, it has come to mean simply “conflict.” The CHARACTERS in a work of FICTION are designated in terms of their relationship to this conflict: PROTAGONIST, ANTAGONIST, DEUTERAGONIST, and so on. As its title suggests, Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* belongs in the category of the *agon*; T. S. Eliot’s fragmentary *Sweeney Agonistes* seems to be a burlesque or caricature of the tradition.

**Agrarians** Literally people living in an agricultural society, or espousing the merits of such a society, as the Physiocrats did. In this sense most espousers of pastoral traditions are *agrarians*. Thomas Jefferson was a noted early American *agrarian*. In literary history and criticism, however, the term is usually applied to a group of Southern American writers who published in Nashville, Tennessee, between 1922 and 1925, *The Fugitive*, a LITTLE MAGAZINE of poetry and some criticism championing agrarian REGIONALISM but attacking “the old high-caste Brahmins of the Old South.” Most of its contributors were associated with Vanderbilt University; among them were John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, Robert Penn Warren, and Merrill Moore. In the 1930s, championing an agrarian economy as opposed to that of industrial capitalism, they issued a collective manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand*. They were active in the publication between 1933 and 1937 of *The American Review*, a socioeconomic magazine that also analyzed contemporary literature. They found an effective literary organ in *The Southern Review* (1935–1942) under the editorship of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. In addition to their poetry and novels, the *Agrarians* were among the founders of the NEW CRITICISM.

**Agroikos** A character added by Northrop Frye to the traditional three STOCK CHARACTERS of Greek OLD COMEDY. The usual *agroikos* is a rustic who is easily deceived, a form of the country bumpkin. See OLD COMEDY, STOCK CHARACTERS.

**Alazon** The braggart in Greek COMEDY. He takes many forms: the quack, the religious fanatic, the swaggering soldier, the pedant—anyone pretentious who is held up to ridicule. From Plautus’ *Miles Gloriosus* he enters English literature where he is a STOCK CHARACTER in ELIZABETHAN DRAMA. He has been widely used in other literary forms, particularly the NOVEL. James Fenimore Cooper’s Dr. Obed Battius, in *The Prairie*, is a good example of a later mutation of this character. See MILES GLORIOSUS.



**Alba** A Provençal lament over the parting of lovers at the break of day, the name coming from the Provençal for “dawn.” It has no fixed metrical form, but each STANZA usually ends with “alba.” The first *alba* is “Reis glorios” (c. 1200) by Giraut de Bornelh. With the next generation of TROUBADOURS the *alba* grew to a distinct literary form. On occasion they were religious, being addressed to the Virgin. See AUBADE.

**Alcaics** Verses written according to the manner of the ODES of Alcaeus, usually a four-stanza poem, each stanza composed of four lines, the first two being HENDECA-SYLLABIC, the third being nine syllables, and the fourth DECASYLLABIC. Because the classical pattern is based on quantitative DACTYLS and TROCHEES, exact English *Alcaics* are practically impossible. The most notable English attempt is in Tennyson’s “Milton,” which begins:

Ö|mīghty-|moūth’d ĩn|vēntör öf | hārmön|ĭes,  
Ö|skill’d tō|sīng öf | Tīme ör Ē|tērnĭtjȳ,  
Göd-|gĭftēd|örgän-|vōice öf|Ēnglānd,  
Miltōn, ā|nāme tō rĕ|sōund fōr | āgēs.

**Alexandrianism** The spirit prevailing in the literary and scientific work of Hellenistic writers flourishing in Alexandria for about three centuries after 325 B.C. The literature is distinguished by originality, novelty, learning, and devotion to ancestral models. The academic studies are distinguished by bibliophilia, attention to detail, the establishment and collection of canons, and thoroughgoing editing and annotating. The greatest names associated with *Alexandrianism* are those of Callimachus, Philetas, Theocritus, and Lycophron.

**Alexandrine** A verse with six iambic feet (iambic hexameter). The form, that of HEROIC VERSE in France, received its name possibly from its use in Old French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries describing the adventures of Alexander the Great, or possibly from the name of Alexandre Paris, a French poet who used this METER. Its appearance in English has been credited to Wyatt and Surrey. Perhaps the most conspicuous instance of its successful use in English is by Spenser, who, in his SPENSERIAN STANZA, after eight PENTAMETER lines employed a HEXAMETER line (*Alexandrine*) in the ninth. Both the line and its occasional bad effect are described in Pope’s COUPLET:

A needless Alexandrine ends the song,  
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

Some *Alexandrines*, far from needless, are used to avoid the monotony and patness of PENTAMETER in certain STANZAS, such as RHYME ROYAL (see Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence”) and the SONNET (see Keats’s “On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again” and Longfellow’s “Mezzo Cammin”).