

A GLOSSARY OF
LITERARY TERMS

M. H. Abrams

A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

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Dan S. Norton and Peters Rushton

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FOREWORD

As a teacher whose work has for years been facilitated by Norton and Rushton's engaging *Glossary*, I welcomed the invitation to revise this useful little book and bring it up to date. It quickly became evident, however, that patchwork emendation would produce a hybrid something that would have pleased the late authors no more than it did the editor. I have therefore rewritten the text in its entirety and have also added well over one hundred terms to the original version. The additions include a number of useful older terms—*abstract and concrete*, *criticism*, *diction*, *folio*, *humanism*, *primitivism*, *style*, and many others—together with such more recent commonplaces as *ambiguity*, *archetype*, *emotive language*, *the new criticism*, *empathy*, *tension*, and (the choice was inevitable) *objective correlative*. The aim throughout has been to supplement the preferred definition of a term with enough indications of its semantic changes in time, and of its diversity in present usage, to provide the student with a chart by which to steer a course through the shifting referents and submerged ambiguities of literary discussion.

For introductory courses in literature, and for courses in literary history and criticism, I have found it a great convenience to assign a selected set of terms from the *Glossary* week by week as these become pertinent to the materials under consideration. In this way the lecturer avoids breaking the continuity of his discussion to interject definitions that can be studied more conveniently and accurately at the student's leisure, and from a printed text. The present *Glossary* has been designed to be useful also in advanced courses and as a handy reference book for the general reader. The range of the topics, both critical and historical, is wide; the analyses lend themselves to refinement and expansion in class; and the references to sources, examples, and authoritative larger treatments invite the reader to go on to explore the more important subjects on his own.

The entries have been organized as a series of essays, alphabetically arranged, in which minor terms are usually discussed under the major or generic terms to which they are related. To lighten the cross-indexing, separate alphabetical entries have been omitted for compound terms which include the class name under which they are discussed. Thus, *comedy of manners* and *high comedy* will be found under *Comedy*, *practical criticism* under *Criticism*, *dramatic irony* under *Irony*, and *slant rhyme* under *Rhyme*.

This *Glossary* has profited greatly from the learning and acumen of my colleague, Professor W. R. Keast.

M. H. A.

January, 1957

A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

Abstract and Concrete. A sentence is sometimes said to be abstract if it makes a general statement about a class of things or persons ("All men are created equal") as opposed to a particular statement about an individual object or person ("Grishkin is nice . . ."). More commonly it is said to be abstract if its subject is an "abstraction"; that is, if it is the name for a quality—"beauty," "brightness," "heat"—which cannot exist apart from the object or situation of which it is an attribute, or if it is the name for an entity—"poetry," "reason," "force"—which cannot be perceived by the senses. Shakespeare's "Ripeness is all" and Pope's

Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
Man never is, but always to be, blest,

are both abstract. "Concrete" is the term applied to a sentence which refers to particular, perceivable things and situations. When Dante said of God,

His will is our peace,

he made a statement involving the abstractions "will" and "peace." In the line immediately following,

It is that sea to which all moves,

Dante supplemented the abstract statement with the more concrete instance of the eternal movement of all waters to their abiding place, the sea. Usually, however, critics reserve the word "concrete" for statements which are not only about particular and perceivable things, but also present their sensuous qualities with uncommon vividness and detail. A familiar example is Keats's

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanchèd linen, smooth, and lavendered,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon.

Accent. See **Meter**.

Act. A major division of the action of a play. The division into acts was brought into English drama by the Elizabethan writers (see **Elizabethan Age**), who followed their Roman models by writing plays in five acts. Modern plays are commonly divided into three acts.

2 AESTHETIC DISTANCE

Acts are subdivided into scenes, each of which consists of a unit of action in which there is no change of place or break in the continuity of time. Nowadays the end of a scene is usually indicated by dropping the curtain.

Aesthetic distance. See **Objective and Subjective.**

Affective fallacy. See **Criticism.**

Alexandrine. See **Meter.**

Allegory. An allegory undertakes to make a doctrine or thesis interesting and persuasive by converting it into a narrative in which the agents, and sometimes the setting as well, represent general concepts, moral qualities, or other abstractions. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan allegorizes his doctrine of Christian salvation by telling how Christian, warned by Evangelist, flees from the City of Destruction and makes his way toilsomely to the Celestial City; en route he encounters such characters as Faithful, Hopeful, and the Giant Despair, and wins through places like the Slough of Despond, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and Vanity Fair. A paragraph from this work will give a glimpse of the allegorical process:

Now as Christian was walking solitary by himself, he espied one afar off come crossing over the field to meet him; and their hap was to meet just as they were crossing the way of each other. The Gentleman's name was Mr. Worldly-Wiseman; he dwelt in the Town of Carnal-Policy, a very great Town, and also hard by from whence Christian came.

A great variety of literary forms have been used for allegory. The medieval *Everyman* is an allegorical drama, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* an allegorical romance, *The Pilgrim's Progress* an allegorical prose narrative, and William Collins' *Ode on the Poetical Character* an allegorical lyric poem. See **Didactic**, **personification** (under **Figurative language**), **Plot and Character**; and consult C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (1936).

A **fable** is a story, exemplifying a moral thesis, in which animals talk and act like human beings. In the fable of the fox and the grapes, the fox, after unsuccessfully exerting all his wiles to get the grapes hanging beyond his reach, concludes that they are probably sour anyway. The moral is that we tend to belittle what we can't have ourselves. The most famous collection of fables is attributed to the Greek writer, Aesop; another notable collection was written by La Fontaine, a Frenchman of the seventeenth century. John Gay and many other English authors wrote fables, and so did the American writers Joel Chandler Harris, in his Uncle Remus stories, and James Thurber, in his *Fables for Our Time*.

A **parable** also enforces a moral or other kind of doctrine, but not, like allegory, by the actions of abstract personifications, nor, like fable, by a narrative in which animals are the agents. Instead, a parable is a short

narrative, presented so as to bring out the analogy, or parallel, between its elements and a lesson that the speaker is trying to bring home to us. The parable was one of Christ's favorite literary devices; examples are His parables of the sower, of the Good Samaritan, and of the wise and foolish virgins. Here is the short parable of the fruit trees that Christ used in instructing His listeners how to detect false prophets (Matthew 7:16-20):

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

An **exemplum** was a story told by medieval preachers as a particular instance illustrating the general text of a sermon; the story was usually claimed to be true. In Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, the Pardoner, preaching on the text, "Greed is the root of all evil," presents by way of exemplum the story of the three revelers who set out to find Death, but find a heap of gold instead, then kill one another in the attempt to gain sole possession of the treasure. Chaucer's Chanticleer borrows the preacher's technique in the ten exempla he tells in a vain effort to persuade his sceptical wife, Dame Pertelote the hen, that bad dreams forbode disaster.

Alliteration is the repetition of consonants, especially at the beginning of words or of stressed syllables. In Old English poetry alliteration was a regular element of each line, but since then it has been used for special effects only:

The blazing brightness of her beauties beame,
And glorious light of her sunshiny face
To tell, were as to strive against the streame.

SPENSER

Consonance is the repetition of a pattern of consonants, with changes in the intervening vowels: live-love, hill-hall, lean-alone. W. H. Auden's "O where are you going?" said reader to rider," makes prominent use of this device; the last stanza reads:

"Out of this house"—said *rider* to *reader*,
"Yours never will"—said *farer* to *fearer*,
"They're looking for you"—said *hearer* to *horror*,
As he left them there, as he left them there.¹

Assonance is the repetition of identical or related vowel sounds, especially in stressed syllables. Note the recurrent *a* and *u* sounds in Coleridge's

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree.

¹ From Song XXV in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden*, copyright 1945 by W. H. Auden.

Rhyme can be regarded as a special instance of both vowel and consonant repetition; see **Rhyme**. For other sound effects in verse, see **Euphony and Cacophony** and **Onomatopoeia**.

Allusion in poetry is a brief reference to a person, place, or event assumed to be sufficiently well known to be recognized by the reader. In Thomas Nashe's

Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye;
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

the allusion is to Helen of Troy. Gray's lines about Eton,

Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,
That crown the watery glade,
Where grateful Science still adores
Her Henry's Holy Shade,

contain an allusion to Henry VI, the founder of Eton College.

Ambiguity. Since William Empson published *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), this term has been widely used to signify that often, in poetry, two or more meanings of a word or phrase are relevant. "Multiple meaning" and "plurisignation" are alternate terms for the same phenomenon; they have the advantage of avoiding the implication, in the ordinary use of "ambiguity," that the quality is a stylistic fault rather than a valuable poetic device.

'When Shakespeare's Cleopatra, exciting the asp to a frenzy, says,

Come, thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate
Of life at once untie; poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and despatch—,

her speech is richly multiple in significance. For example, "mortal" means "fatal" or "death-dealing," and at the same time serves as a reminder that the asp is itself mortal, or subject to death. "Wretch" is a contemptuous epithet, yet also expresses pity (Cleopatra goes on to refer to the asp as "my baby at my breast, That sucks the nurse asleep"). And the two meanings of "despatch"—"make haste" and "kill"—are equally relevant. Compare **Connotation and Denotation** and **pun** (under **Figurative language**).

"Intricate" in the same passage exemplifies a special type of multiple meaning, the **portmanteau word**. The term was introduced into literary criticism by Humpty Dumpty, in explicating to Alice the meaning of the opening lines of "Jabberwocky":

"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

"Slithy," Humpty Dumpty explained, "means 'lithe and slimy'. . . . You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word." A portmanteau word, then, is a word coined by fusing two other words; thus Shakespeare's "intrinsicate" is a blend of "intrinsic" and "intricate." James Joyce exploited this device to the full in order to sustain the multiple levels of meaning in his dream narrative, *Finnegans Wake*.

Anapest. See **Meter**.

Anecdote. See **Short story**.

Annal. See **Chronicle**.

Antagonist. See **Plot and Character**.

Anticlimax. See **Pathos and Bathos**.

Antistrophe. See **Ode**.

Antithesis. See **Couplet**.

Apostrophe. See **Rhetorical figures**.

Archaism. See **Diction**.

Archetype is a term much used since the 1930's, when it was imported into criticism from the depth psychology of C. G. Jung. Jung described archetypes as "primordial images" formed by repeated experiences in the lives of our ancestors, inherited in the "collective unconscious" of the human race, and often expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and fantasies, as well as in literature. In literary criticism the term "archetype" (or "archetypal image" or "archetypal pattern") is applied to a character type or plot pattern or description which recurs frequently in literature and folklore and is thought to evoke profound emotional responses in the reader because it resonates with an image already existing in his unconscious mind. The death-rebirth theme is often said to be the basic archetype. Some other patterns frequently traced in literature are the journey under the sea, the Paradise-Hades archetype, and the archetypal images of the Fatal Woman, the ruthless Male Hero, the Devil, and God. An influential book on the subject is Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934). Compare **Stock characters**.

Article. See **Essay**.

Assonance. See **Alliteration**.

Atmosphere is the mood pervading a literary work, setting up in the reader expectations as to the course of events, whether happy or (more commonly) disastrous. Shakespeare establishes the tense and fearful atmosphere of *Hamlet* by the terse and nervous dialogue of the opening; Coleridge engenders a strange compound of religious and superstitious terror by his manner of describing the initial scene of "Christabel"; and Hardy, in *The Return of the Native*, makes Egdon Heath an immense and brooding presence which reduces to pettiness and futility the human struggle for happiness for which it is the setting. See **Setting**.

Augustan Age. In its original application, the Augustan Age was the brilliant literary age of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid under the Roman emperor Augustus (27 B.C.—A.D. 14). Oliver Goldsmith and other eighteenth-century writers applied the name by analogy to England during the reign of Queen Anne (1702–1714). The term is now most frequently applied to the first forty-five years of the eighteenth century, the age of Pope, Swift, Addison, and Steele, although occasionally (as in George Saintsbury's *The Peace of the Augustans*) the term is used to cover the whole eighteenth century. See **Neoclassic and Romantic** and, for some prominent literary forms in this period, **Couplet, Satire, Sensibility and Sentimentalism**.

Autobiography. See **Biography**.

Ballad. A convenient thumbnail definition of the ballad is that it is a song—usually a short song—that tells a story. The **folk ballad** or **popular ballad** is one whose author (if it had a single author) is unknown, and which has been transmitted from singer to singer by word of mouth. Since the individual singer is apt to introduce changes in both words and tune, the ballad can be said to be recomposed each time it is rendered. Typically, the folk ballad is impersonal and dramatic; it centers on the climactic episode in the story, tells it tersely through dialogue and action without comment by the author, and explains what has gone before, if at all, chiefly by brief allusion in the dialogue. The most common stanza form—called the **ballad stanza**—is a quatrain in alternate 4- and 3-stress lines, rhyming abcb. This is the form of "Sir Patrick Spens"; the first stanza of this ballad also exemplifies the conventionally abrupt opening and the manner of proceeding by briefly described action and curt dialogue:

The king sits in Dumerling towne
Drinking the blude-red wine:
"O whar will I get a guid sailor,
To sail this schip of mine?"

The ballad frequently uses set formulas, among them: (1) the refrain ("Edward," "Lord Randall"), (2) stock descriptive phrases like "milk-white steed" and "blood-red wine," and (3) **incremental repetition**, or the repetition of a preceding stanza with a variation that advances the narrative ("Lord Randall," "Child Waters"). See **refrain** under **Stanza**.

The standard collection of folk ballads is Francis J. Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898), also available in an abridged version edited by H. C. Sargent and G. L. Kittredge (1904). It must be remembered, however, that a published version gives only one of many variant forms of a ballad and presents only the verbal skeleton, without the song. Ballads are still being sung—and collected—in the British Isles and in the rural areas of America, especially along the Atlantic seaboard and in the adjoining hill country. For a study of the folk ballad, see G. H. Gerould, *The Ballad of Tradition* (1932).

The **literary ballad** is one written in deliberate imitation of the form and spirit of a folk ballad. Some of the most successful were written in the Romantic period: Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (which is, however, much longer and more elaborate than the folk ballad), Scott's "Proud Maisie," and Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci."

Bathos. See **Pathos and Bathos**.

Biography. Late in the seventeenth century, Dryden defined biography as "the history of particular men's lives." The name now connotes a relatively full account of the facts of a man's life, involving the attempt, by description and analysis, to recreate his character, personality, and milieu. That the writing of biography is a literary art is indicated by the slow development of its methods and devices since Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* of Greek and Roman notables, written early in the second century A.D. English biography proper, as distinguished from the commemorative and didactic saints' lives of the Middle Ages, appeared in the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century both the theory and practice of biography had greatly advanced; that age produced Dr. Johnson's monumental *Lives of the English Poets* and James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, which many hold to be the greatest biography ever written. Two especially notable biographies of men of letters written in the nineteenth century were John Lockhart's *Life of Scott* and John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*. In our own time biography has become a very popular literary form, and one or another biographical title usually stands high on the best-seller list. See Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (1928) and two works by Donald A. Stauffer, *English Biography before 1700* (1930), and *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England* (1941).

Autobiography is a biography written by the subject himself. It should be distinguished from private diaries and journals, which are day-to-day

Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
 Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
 The Hermit sits alone.

Bombast originally meant "cotton stuffing," and the word was adopted to describe verbose and pretentious diction, inflated out of proportion to the meaning and situation. In Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Faustus says:

Now by the kingdoms of infernal rule,
 Of Styx, Acheron, and the fiery lake
 Of ever-burning Phlegethon, I swear
 That I do long to see the monuments
 And situation of bright-splendent Rome;

which is no more than to say: "By Hades, I'd like to see Rome!" Marlowe's attempt to heighten the flat, literal statement, so successful elsewhere in the play, is here ludicrously inappropriate to the occasion. (See **Diction**.) Bombast is the staple of the conversation of Shakespeare's comic character Pistol, in *Henry IV, Part 2*, and *Henry V*. An amusing parody of the frequent bombast in the heroic drama of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is Henry Fielding's play, *Tom Thumb*, written in 1730 (see **heroic drama** under **Tragedy**).

Bourgeois tragedy. See **Tragedy**.

Bowdlerize. To bowdlerize is to expurgate the parts of a work considered indecent or indelicate. The word derives from Thomas Bowdler, who tidied up his *Family Shakespeare* in 1818 by omitting "whatever is unfit to be read by a gentleman in the company of ladies." *Gulliver's Travels*, Shakespeare, and the Bible are frequently bowdlerized in editions intended for children, and even some compilers of college anthologies avail themselves of Bowdler's prerogative in editing the text of Chaucer.

Bucolic poetry. See **Pastoral**.

Burlesque and Parody. "Burlesque," "parody," "caricature," and "travesty" are often used interchangeably, but to equate the terms in this way is to surrender very useful critical distinctions. It is better to use **burlesque** as the generic term for all literary forms in which people, actions, or other literary works are made ridiculous by an incongruous imitation, and to reserve the other terms as names for various species of burlesque. When the laugh is raised (as it usually is), not for its own sake, but to deride some person or object existing outside the burlesque itself, burlesque in its various species serves as a vehicle of satire (see **Satire**). It should be

added that an extended work of burlesque is usually flexible enough to exploit a variety of the devices listed below. We name it by the device that it uses most persistently; accordingly, we say that Pope's *Rape of the Lock* is a mock epic, although it includes many more than specifically mock-epic devices.

When the incongruity arises from treating a trivial subject in an elevated and serious manner, we get "high burlesque"; when it arises from treating a serious subject in a low and comic manner, we get "low burlesque." A **mock epic** (see under **Epic**) employs the conventional attributes and the elaborate style of the epic genre to make a trivial and commonplace subject laughable. A **parody**, like the mock epic, is also a form of high burlesque, but it derides, not its subject, but a particular literary work or style, by imitating its features and applying them to trivial or grossly discordant materials. John Phillips' "The Splendid Shilling" (1705) was an early parody of the style of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, applied to the subject of a starveling writer composing in a garret. Henry Fielding parodied Richardson's *Pamela*, first in *Shamela* and later in *Joseph Andrews*. Compare the first stanza of Wordsworth's "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" with the first stanza of Hartley Coleridge's parody:

He lived amidst th' untrodden ways
To Rydal Lake that lead;
A bard whom there were none to praise,
And very few to read.

One type of low burlesque is the **Hudibrastic**, named from Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663), which describes the ridiculous adventures of a Puritan knight, not in the high style appropriate to the romance of knighthood, but in a jingly meter and ludicrously colloquial idiom. Another, the **travesty**, mocks a specific work by treating its lofty subject in grotesquely extravagant or lowly terms; as Boileau put it, in a travesty of the *Aeneid* "Dido and Aeneas are made to speak like fishwives and ruffians."

Caricature is a type of portrait which makes a person ludicrous by exaggerating or distorting prominent features without losing the likeness. The term is commonly applied to drawings or paintings, but literature has its analogues in the quick verbal sketch of the quintessential appearance. Pope in *The Rape of the Lock* described Sir Plume, "With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face," and Burns caricatured the strait-laced prudes of his day as they sat at a revival meeting "Wi' screw'd up, grace-proud faces." A **lampoon** is a full-length verbal portrait of an individual in which he is ridiculed in a biting and often scurrilous manner. Pope's satiric portrait of "Atticus" (Addison) in his "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" transforms the individual too completely into a permanent type—the

genius lamed by a malice that is rendered impotent by timidity—to be properly called a lampoon; his caustic portrayal of Colley Cibber in *The Dunciad*, however, constitutes an indubitable lampoon.

See **Satire** and **Wit and Humor**, and refer to Richmond P. Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry* (1932), and Walter Jerrold and R. M. Leonard, editors, *A Century of Parody and Imitation* (1913).

Cacophony. See **Euphony**.

Caesura. See **Meter**.

Caricature. See **Burlesque and Parody**.

Caroline Period is the name for the reign of Charles I, 1625–1649, in which was fought the English Civil War. During this period Milton began to write; it was also the age of the **Cavalier Poets** (Robert Herrick, Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, and Richard Lovelace), of the religious poet George Herbert, and of the prose writers Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne.

Carpe diem. See **Motif**.

Catastrophe. See **Plot and Character**.

Catharsis. See **Tragedy**.

Cavalier Poets. See **Caroline Period**.

Character. For “the character” as a literary form, see **Novel**; for “character” as a person in a story, see **Plot and Character**.

Chiasmus. See **Rhetorical figures**.

Chorus. In early Greek times the chorus was a band of men who performed songs and dances at religious festivals. Gradually speaking parts were added, until from this choral celebration developed Greek drama. In the early Greek tragedies the songs of the chorus made up the greater part of the play, but later the chorus became a group of onlookers who commented intermittently on the action without affecting its evolution. See **Comedy** and **Tragedy**.

The Roman playwrights took the chorus from the Greeks, and in the middle of the sixteenth century some English dramatists (e.g., Norton and Sackville in *Gorboduc*) imitated the use of the chorus by the Romans. The classical chorus, however, was never widely used by English writers; the

only literary masterpiece which includes this feature is John Milton's tragedy, *Samson Agonistes*. During the Elizabethan Age the term "chorus" was sometimes applied to a single character who spoke the prologue and epilogue to a play, as in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* and Shakespeare's *King Henry V*. Modern scholars sometimes use the term **choral character** to identify a person in a play, such as the Fool in *King Lear* or Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*, who stands somewhat apart from the action and by his comments provides the audience with a perspective through which to view characters and events. A character with a somewhat similar function is the **confidant** (feminine, **confidante**), who has little effect on the action but serves the protagonist as a trusted friend to whom he can confess his intimate thoughts. The confidant thus provides the author of a play or novel with a plausible device for revealing the mind and intentions of a principal character. Horatio is Hamlet's confidant, and Maria Gostrey is the confidante of Strether in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*.

Chronicle. Chronicles, the predecessors of modern "histories," were extended accounts, in either verse or prose, of national or world-wide events over a considerable period of time. Unlike the modern historian, however, the chronicler took his information where he found it and made little attempt to separate fact from legend. **Annals** differ from chronicles in being summary notices of the events taking place in a single locale or nation, recorded year by year. The most notable English chronicles are the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, started by King Alfred in the ninth century and continued until the twelfth century, and the Elizabethan *Chronicles* of England, Ireland, and Scotland by Raphael Holinshed and other writers (1577).

Chronicle plays are dramatic renderings of materials taken from the chronicle histories of England (see **Chronicle**). They came into sudden popularity in the last decade of the sixteenth century, when the fervor of patriotism following the defeat of the Spanish Armada brought a demand for plays dealing with the events of English history. At first chronicle plays presented a loosely knit series of events that occurred during the reign of an English king, and they depended for their effects mainly on a great bustle of stage battles, pageantry, and spectacle. Marlowe, however, in his *Edward II*, selected and rearranged the material in Holinshed's *Chronicles* to compose a unified drama of character; and Shakespeare's series of chronicle plays, encompassing the succession of English kings from Richard II to Henry VIII, includes such masterpieces as *Richard II* and *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*. See Felix E. Schelling, *The English Chronicle Play* (1902).

Cliché is French for the stereotype plate used in printing. Applied to diction, it signifies an expression which deviates enough from the ordinary

or the literal usage to call attention to itself and which has been used so often that it is felt to be trite and tedious. "Point with pride," "nipped in the bud," "pole out a four-bagger," "my better half," "the home beautiful," are familiar examples of such hackneyed verbal formulas. The farther a phrase departs from ordinary usage, the more readily and conspicuously does it become a cliché.

Come, and trip it as you go
On the light fantastic toe,

was quaintly charming in Milton's "L'Allegro"; but "to trip the light fantastic" as a substitute for "to dance" is now an annoying instance of false elegance. Standard Fourth of July and Commencement oratory, the writings of many sports columnists, commercial greeting cards, and the slang of up-to-date teen-agers are rich mines of clichés. "Epiphany," "redemption," "levels of meaning," "dissociation of sensibility," have become clichés of contemporary literary criticism; and with some alteration, Pope's satiric comment on the clichés of eighteenth-century versifiers would apply to Tin Pan Alley, as it did to Grub Street:

Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"
In the next line it "whispers through the trees";
If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep."

See **stock response** under **Stock characters**.

Climax. See **Plot and Character**.

Comedy. The term "comedy" is now broadly applied to works (especially in the dramatic form) in which the characters undergo embarrassments or discomfitures which are on the whole so managed that they interest and amuse us without engaging our profoundest sympathy, and in which the action turns out well for the chief characters. (Compare **Tragedy**.) English comedy developed in the sixteenth century from such native materials as the farcical episodes introduced in the medieval drama (see **Miracle and Morality plays**), together with elements of character, action, and construction derived from the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence. Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (ca. 1533), the earliest known English comedy, exemplifies this combination. Comedy rapidly achieved a high stage of development in the Elizabethan Age. Shakespeare wrote various types, including the Roman form, such as *The Comedy of Errors* (based on a play by Plautus), and **romantic comedy** (*As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*), in which the central situation is a love affair, involving a beautiful and idealized heroine, the course of which does not run smoothly but ends well. Ben Jonson's plays, such as *The Alchemist* and *Volpone*, are masterpieces of **satiric comedy**, which ridicule