

A Glossary of Literature and Composition

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A Glossary of Literary and Critical Terminology

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Preface

This book provides a useful index to concepts that writers, critics, and scholars have used to describe and discuss the language and its literature. We offer this glossary not as a last word but as a tool that teachers, writers, and anyone who uses English may find helpful and up to date.

The revised edition of the glossary concentrates on three major branches of English studies: literature (including criticism), rhetorical theory, and composition. Each of these branches during the last few years has developed scores of new concepts and has brought new significance to many old ones. We have included as many terms as our own scholarship embraces, seeking as much depth as is permitted by a glossary that does not try to be encyclopedic.

In line with "what's happening" in modern rhetoric and literature studies this book adopts a "now" approach to English. Wherever contemporary practice conflicts with the traditional, we have moved intrepidly toward the contemporary. Yet we are aware that *now* has grown out of *then*, that the scholarship of the '80s and '90s must blend the traditional with the new, the normative with the permissive, the analytic with the intuitive, emphasizing each as may be appropriate. In short, we have tried to put the language and its literature in contemporary perspective without forsaking those traditions that remain valid—and we have tried to do so without making our book a hodgepodge of all things to all readers.

Since the first appearance of this glossary a decade ago, many teachers have written to thank us for the unique feature of bibliographies at ends of entries. We are pleased that these references have proved useful. In this edition we retain most of the original references, and we update many entries with contemporary references.

Properly, this glossary belongs not on the reference shelf but at the elbow, ready for instant use. Its aim is to aid in what is essentially a private but ultimately a social enterprise—the sharpening of both zest and competence in reading, writing, talking, listening, and reasoning.

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A

abbreviation Brevity and conciseness are virtues in composition, but the needless abbreviation of words is a form of discourtesy to the reader and should be avoided. In a reference book, where the intention is to convey the most information in the least space, abbreviation is freely used; in the Armed Forces and in businesses a stringent abbreviation, almost to the point of shorthand, is also used; and in the sciences and in technical writing the conciseness of abbreviation and the precision of symbols speed communication. But in standard prose abbreviation should be used only when it is customary or conventional. Deciding what is customary or conventional is the crux of the writer's problem. The answer almost always depends on context, but a general solution is never to abbreviate if the reader will be puzzled or stymied in discovering the intended meaning.

Since abbreviation is an aspect of spelling, deciding the literal appearance of an abbreviation is easily done: a good dictionary usually provides lists of abbreviations. But decisions about the *form* of an abbreviation pose greater difficulties: (1) Should the initial letter, or all the letters, be capitalized? (2) Should the abbreviation be italicized? (3) Should the abbreviation be written with or without period or periods? General answers, which are helpful but not invariable, are (1) Capitalize an abbreviation that would be capitalized when spelled out. Thus *Mr.*, *Dr.*, *St.*, when used as titles preceding names; *U.S.A.*, *AFL-CIO*, and similar all-initial abbreviations. (2) Italicize an abbreviation if the spelled-out word or words would be italicized. (3a) Punctuate any abbreviation that is pronounced in full, as if the complete spelling were present, with the appropriate number of periods: *Mr.* (read *mister*); *n.d.* (read *no date*); *e.g.* (read *for example*). (3b) An all-initial abbreviation should be punctuated if the letters are pronounced individually—*U.S.A.*, *C.O.D.*, *A.D.*, *B.C.*—but to this there are many exceptions. (3c) Any abbreviation that is read as a complete word (thus, an ACRONYM) should not be punctuated: *NATO*, *UNESCO*, *CORE*, *SNCC*. *Note*: Words like *don't* and *we'll* are contractions, not abbreviations; they never take periods.

Standard American English does use the following abbreviations:

1. For titles before names: *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Dr.*, *St.* (sometimes the more formal *M.*, *Messrs.*, *Mlle.*, *Mlles.*, *Mme.*, *Mmes.*, and *Monsig.*).
2. For certain designations after names: *Jr.*, *Sr.*, *M.P.* (Member of Parliament), *B.A.* (Bachelor of Arts), *M.A.* (Master of Arts), *Ph.D.* (Doctor of Philosophy), *M.D.* (Doctor of Medicine), *D.D.S.* (Doctor of Dental Surgery), *LL.D.* (Doctor of Laws), and for all other academic degrees.

3. For initialized terms more widely used in speech than their full forms: A.D. and B.C. (with dates), *C.O.D.* (the periods usually retained), *D.C.* (for District of Columbia), *f.o.b.*, *P.S.*, *R.S.V.P.* (the periods usually retained), *SOS*, *FCC*, *NAM*, *AMA*, *UN*, *UNESCO*, *CIO*, *YMCA*, *FBI*, *UCLA*, *NBC*, *TVA*, *TV*, *FM*, *AP*.

4. For names of radio and television stations: *WGN*, *KCBS*, *KTLA*.

5. For certain terms used in DOCUMENTATION or in parenthetical reference to such documentation: *p.* (*page*), *pp.* (*pages*), *ch.* (*chapter*), *col.* (*column*), *No.* (*number*), *Nos.* (*numbers*), *sec.* (*section*), *supp.* (*supplement*), *et al.* (*et alii*—"and others"), *etc.* (*et cetera*), *ca.* (*circa*—"about"), *cf.* (*confer*—"compare"), *f.* ("and the following page"), *loc. cit.* (*loco citato*—"in the place cited"), *MS* (*manuscript*), *n.d.* ("no date"), *op. cit.* (*opere citato*—"in the work cited"), *passim* ("throughout"), *q.v.* (*quod vide*—"which see"), *viz.* (*videlicet*—"namely").

Currently, the trend in scholarly work is toward less Latin, more English—and thus fewer abbreviations even in footnotes and scholarly asides. Such terms as *op. cit.* and *loc. cit.* are being dropped altogether in contemporary scholarship; *q.v.* and *viz.* are appearing as "see ..." and "namely."

6. For certain address designations after names of streets, avenues, boulevards, drives: *St.*, *Ave.*, *Blvd.*, *Dr.* (But these are giving way to spelled-out forms—even in business offices and newspapers.)

7. For certain commercial terms after names of companies and corporations: *Co.*, *Corp.*, *Inc.*, *Ltd.* (These, too, are giving way to spelled-out forms, and should be written only when a firm itself uses the abbreviation on its letterhead.)

8. For initials in names: *T. S. Eliot*, *H. G. Wells*, *Winston S. Churchill*. (Names should be written as their owners prefer—always *W. Somerset Maugham*, never *William S. Maugham*; always *George Bernard Shaw* or *G. B. S.*, never *George B. Shaw*.) When an initial is strictly a letter and stands for no name in particular, it usually is written without a period: *Harry S. Truman*. No periods are used after nicknames or foreshortened names like *Jim Sam*, *Fred*, or *Al*, for those are not abbreviations.

In standard American usage the names of days, months, states, cities, and countries (except *U.S.A.*, *USSR*, *UK* and certain other special designations) are spelled out rather than abbreviated.

abecedarian 1. A beginner. 2. A learner or teacher of the alphabet or of the elements of any discipline. 3. In a derogatory sense, a writer who spells out the obvious.

abridgment A condensed version of an originally larger work. Well-known examples of abridged books, both fiction and nonfiction, appear regularly in *Reader's Digest*. Claims for advantages and disadvantages of abridgments remain controversial. A social advantage is that one who reads while running, so to speak, acquires at least a handle acquaintance with a few popular books among a welter that one could read only if one had "world enough and time." A disadvantage is that readers of abridged novels miss rich details

of RENDERING. Indeed, aesthetes—more than historians—tend to condemn abridgments of good novels. By the same token, historians and biographers often disapprove of abridgments of nonfiction—for example, of the one-volume abridgment of Arnold Toynbee's twelve-volume *A Study of History*. Perhaps even among biographers, however, the one-volume version of Edgar Johnson's two-volume life of Dickens is more acceptable than would be an abridgment, say, of Leon Edel's five-volume life of Henry James.

abstract See PRECIS.

abstraction The process of separating attributes from their physical structures or "referents." As a device of semantics, abstractions name classes of things rather than individual things. The semanticist imagines an "abstraction ladder" upon which the successively higher rungs are the more and more general terms. An abstraction is a word whose referents are many (the more referents, the more abstract the word). An example is *animal*, which has such referents as cats, dogs, impalas, monkeys, and so on. See SEMANTICS.

abstraction ladder See SEMANTICS 3.

academic drama See CLOSET DRAMA.

accentual verse Verse measured by a set number of accents (heavily stressed syllables) in each line, rather than, as in other poetry, a regular alternation of accented and unaccented syllables. The unstressed syllables vary in number and placement from one line to the next. Anglo-Saxon poetry (for example, *Beowulf* or "The Seafarer") was not only accentual but also ALLITERATIVE and provided the model for subsequent poetry that followed the same rhythmical pattern. Thus poetry of the Middle English alliterative revival was at the same time accentual; for example, the anonymous *Gawain and the Green Knight*, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and *Morte d'Arthur*. Frequently the alliterative consonants fall on the stressed syllables, as in a typical line from *Piers Plowman* (slightly modernized): "Wives and widows wool and flax spinneþ." By and large, accentual verse is unrhymed, but some Middle English examples—notably *Gawain* and the York CRAFT CYCLE PLAYS—employ rhyme in addition to alliteration, showing the influence of French literature. Among the modern poets who have written accentual verse, Gerard Manley Hopkins is perhaps the best known (see SPRUNG RHYTHM).

REFERENCE: J. C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf*.

acronym A word in which each letter stands for another word. In the acronym "laser," the *l* stands for *light*, the *a* for *amplification*, the *s* for *stimulated*, the *e* for *emission*, and the *r* for *radiation*. In acronyms, articles, conjunctions, and prepositions are usually not assigned letters. Thus a fuller "translation" of "laser" would read: "light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation." Compare PORTMANTEAU WORDS.

acrostic A kind of poem, puzzle, or word game in which beginning and other letters form a word or phrase. Acrostics were regular features of the *Saturday Review*.

act 1. In a play, a major division in action or story-line, in a theater usually marked by the drawing of a curtain, but in printed copy simply by the words "Act One," "Act Two," and so on. (Divisions within an act are SCENES.) Sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century plays, following Roman models, had five acts. According to Renaissance commentators on Aristotle's *Poetics*, the five acts were supposed to correspond to five divisions of the action—*introduction*, *rising action*, *climax*, *falling action*, and *catastrophe* (see DRAMATIC STRUCTURE). Except for Ben Jonson, the Elizabethans did not pay much attention to acts in that sense. Shakespeare's plays, for example, were originally produced in scenes and were posthumously divided into five acts in a thorough way by the editor Nicholas Rowe (1674–1718). Rowe was a product of the age of NEO-CLASSICISM, in which dramatists were very much concerned with the problems of the classical UNITIES. Nineteenth-century plays (especially those of Barrie, Ibsen, and Shaw) consist usually of four acts. Contemporary plays tend to consist of two or three acts. The one-act play, which developed with the Abbey Players of Dublin, Ireland, and with the Provincetown (Massachusetts) Players (and also with the early twentieth-century little theater movement), is a genre of its own, corresponding to the SHORT STORY in unity of impression and brevity of time-span. 2. One of the key terms in Burke's pentad (see DRAMATISM).

REFERENCES: Richard Corbin and Miriam Balf, "How to Read a Play," *Twelve American Plays 1920–1960*; Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theater*; Gustav Freytag's "Graph" in Jackson Barry, *Dramatic Structure*.

adage An old and supposedly wise saying, like the proverb and APHORISM. Adages are brief and memorable ("A stitch in time saves nine") and have thus become a part of folklore, transmitted orally and in writing. The adages or "morals" at the ends of Aesop's *Fables* (sixth century B.C.) are generally believed to have had oral currency in one form or another before he used them. About 1500 A.D. there appeared a collection of adages and proverbs, *Adagia*, by the Dutch humanist Erasmus. There is little definable difference between an adage and a proverb, though the latter label has a more reputable connotation. If pointlessly used too often, either may become little more than an old saw. A MAXIM is usually literary in origin.

REFERENCES: Desiderius Erasmus, *Adagia*; Funk & Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*. For distinctions between *adage*, *proverb*, *aphorism*, etc., see *Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*.

adaptation A rewriting of a work for presentation in a distinctly different GENRE or with a different style, setting, or time-frame. For example, in Greek mythology a sculptor who hated women fell in love with his own statue and, when she turned into a real woman, married her. That myth was retold in verse by Ovid and was adapted in several different genres by John Marston (1598), William Morris (1868), and W. S. Gilbert (1871). George Bernard Shaw adapted William Morris's story, turning it into the play *Pygmalion* (1913). Shaw's play was adapted by Lerner and Loewe as *My Fair Lady*, a musical comedy (1956) and a film (1964).

ad captandum or ad captandum vulgus. The deliberate use of unsound reasoning in an attempt to deceive the crowd. Using this device, an advertiser says, "More people buy Poofy—so Poofy is the best buy." The lack of connection between the two statements will probably not be noticed by more than a few. Compare **BANDWAGON**.

ad hominem In **ARGUMENTATION**, any appeal to the personal feelings and prejudices of the reader or audience (the Latin phrase means "to the man"). The device may also be used to refute an opponent's argument by reasoning through propositions already accepted. This sort of argument was the technique of Clarence Darrow in the Scopes trial of 1925, when he called his opponent, William Jennings Bryan, to the stand. Starting with Bryan's belief in the Bible as absolute truth, Darrow led Bryan to untenable positions; that is, he used Bryan's own beliefs to humiliate him.

Argument *ad hominem* is not the same thing as **ARGUMENT AGAINST THE MAN**, which attempts to discredit a proposition on the grounds that it is asserted by a discredited person. Compare **NAME-CALLING**.

ad ignorantiam In **ARGUMENTATION**, the contention that a proposition is true because an opponent (or the audience) can offer no evidence to the contrary. The device takes advantage of the ignorance of the audience. The arguer may, for example, assert that there is no such thing as infinity, and offer as "proof" that the opponent cannot prove otherwise.

ad misericordiam An appeal to the sense of pity or to the sympathy of an audience. An example is the use of photos of a crippled child to inspire gifts to research funds; another, the "send an underprivileged boy to camp" appeal to sell newspaper subscriptions. These appeals may often be justified, of course.

ad populum In **ARGUMENTATION**, an appeal to the emotions of the masses. The device is exemplified by the rabble-rouser who avoids presenting rational evidence against a proposition and shouts instead, "Are we going to let them do that to us?"

ad verecundiam Snob appeal or an appeal to one's sense of prestige. Advertisers use this device when they suggest that their product is the one to "step up" to "when you can afford the best." In **ARGUMENTATION**, the appeal is to pride, rank, sense of status.

aesthetic distance The theory that once an author has created a piece, it goes forth on its own and is to be understood on its own terms. In its extreme form, the theory holds that any reference to the author's intentions or to cultural and historical backgrounds is irrelevant.

REFERENCES: W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Verbal Icon*; Meyer Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*; René Wellek, "The Mode of Existence of a Literary Work of Art," *The Southern Review* (Spring, 1942). Gordon Thompson, "Authorial Detachment . . . *Ring and the Book*," *Studies in English Literature* (Autumn, 1970); Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos*.

aestheticism, Aesthetic Movement See **DECADENTS** and **FIN DE SIÈCLE**.

affective fallacy Judging a work solely by how one feels about it.

Age of Reason See RATIONALISM.

agent 1. In Burke's rhetoric, the third term of DRAMATISM. 2. In conventional rhetoric, the performer of an action. This performer may be subject of a predication ("That *newspaper* misled us") or object in a prepositional phrase ("We were misled by that *newspaper*"). Notice that both examples identify the agent, so that the distinction between "active" and "passive" is not here in question, although the first example emphasizes "newspaper" while the second emphasizes "we." When a reader or listener must ask, "Who is doing what?" the writer had better recast. A vague utterance, like "There will be a visitation tonight," for example, prompts the reader to ask, "Who is going to do the visiting?" An agent-verb statement, like "The inspector will be visiting," is clearer and more direct, unless the writer deliberately intends for "visitation" to connote "plague." Finally, agent-verb constructions clarify and refine ambiguous strings of -ations and -icities, strings known as "NOUNIFICATIONS." For example, an ambiguous phrase like "the correction of the administration" leaves the reader asking, "Who corrected whom?" An agent-verb-object pattern can rescue the meaning here: "The administrators corrected the voters" or "The voters corrected the administrators." Compare REIFICATION.

agon 1. One of the national game festivals of ancient Greece. 2. In Greek drama, the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist(s). See DRAMATIC STRUCTURE.

agrarianism See SENSIBILITY and IDEALISM.

agreement In English syntax, the principle of consistency in number or case between verbs and their subjects, between pronouns and their referents.

1. Verb agreement is a problem only in the present tense, where English has a special form for the third-person singular verb. These rules are standard:

(a) Third-person singular subject demands singular verb: "She *wins*."

(b) Two singular subjects joined by *and* demand plural verb (unless the two are considered as one unit or each is considered separate): "Coffee and tea *are* served" (but "Ham and eggs *is* his favorite dish"); If the two subjects are modified by *each* or *every*, each is considered separate: "*Each* man and woman *has* an account"; "*every* city and town *is* on the map."

(c) Two subjects joined by *or* demand a verb that agrees with the nearer subject: "The sparkplugs *or* the carburetor *needs* cleaning"; "the carburetor *or* the sparkplugs *need* cleaning."

(d) If one subject is negative, the verb agrees with the affirmative: "The captain, not the men, *is* responsible."

(e) The phrase beginning "along with" does not affect the subject-verb agreement. "The captain, along with his men, *is* responsible."

(f) A noun clause as subject demands a singular verb: "What we want *is* lower interest rates."

Verbs agree with subjects, not with noun complements: "Our disgrace *is* the slums of great cities"; "The slums of great cities *are* a disgrace." The expletive

there is not a subject, and the verb should agree with the subject that follows: "There *are* a panda and her cubs in our zoo."

2. Pronoun agreement requires that a pronoun have the same number and the same case as the noun it stands for.

(a) The pronouns *everyone*, *everybody*, *someone*, *somebody*, *either*, *neither*, and *each* are singulars. A later pronoun that refers to such words must be singular: "*Everybody* does *her or his* own laundry"; "*neither* of the delegates has voted"; "*each* of us *deserves* recognition."

(b) Pronouns used in pairs or series must be consistent in case: "Mother and *I* went shopping," not "Mother and *me*"; "They gave the award to Tom and *me*," not "to Tom and *I*." (You would not say "to I.")

REFERENCE: H. Wendell Smith, *On Paper*.

alazon In Greek drama, a braggart—not necessarily a braggart soldier, as is the miles gloriosus in Roman comedy. See DRAMATIC STRUCTURE and IRONY 2.

Alcaic stanza A stanza developed by the Greek poet Alcaeus, who flourished in the late seventh and early sixth century B.C. The Roman poet Horace (65–8 B.C.) also wrote many of his poems in "alcaics." The alcaic stanza consists of four lines, the first two containing eleven syllables each; the third line, nine syllables; and the fourth line, ten syllables. In these lines, the distribution of light (˘) and of heavy (ˊ) stresses, sometimes with slight variation, is as follows:

1. ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ
2. ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ
3. ˊ ˘ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˘
4. ˊ ˘ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˘

Among the best known alcaic poems in English is Tennyson's "Milton":

O mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies,

O skilled to sing of Time or Eternity,

God-gifted organ-voice of England,

Milton, a name to resound for ages;

Whose Titan angels, Gabriel, Abdiel,

Starred from Jehovah's gorgeous armories,

Tower, as the deep-domed empyrean

Rings to the roar of an angel onset!

Me rather all that bowery loneliness,

The brooks of Eden mazily murmuring,

And bloom profuse and cedar arches

Charm, as a wanderer out in ocean,

Where some refulgent sunset of India

Streams o'er a rich ambrosial ocean isle,

And crimson-hued the stately palm-woods

Whisper in odorous heights of even.

REFERENCES: Richmond Lattimore, *Greek Lyrics*; Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition*; Alex Preminger and others, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

Alexandrine In English poetry, an iambic hexameter line, usually in a stanza of iambic pentameter lines; for example, the last line of the SPENSERIAN STANZA. The term derives from the *Roman d'Alexandre*, a twelfth-century French romance that used the twelve-syllable line. Since its use by the poet Ronsard (sixteenth century) and by the playwrights Corneille and Racine (seventeenth century) the Alexandrine has been standard in French poetry as the dactylic hexameter in Latin and the iambic pentameter in English. But whereas the French Alexandrine, especially that of the nineteenth-century poet Verlaine, can be measured in syllables, the English Alexandrine is more accurately measured in metrical feet. A classic example of the English six-foot line is Alexander Pope's "That like / a wound / ed snake / drags its / slow length / a long," which pokes fun at the form. (Pope regarded as freakish any line longer than five feet.) But the Alexandrine need not drag: it may be an artistic triumph, as it is in certain lines of W. H. Auden's poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"—notably the line "Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still." In oral interpretation, the Alexandrine, like other six-beat lines, tends to break into three-beat lines, as John Hollander observes in "Metrics," in Edward Gordon, ed., *Writing and Literature*.

alienation 1. A condition in which a person is rejected or feels cut off from friends, community, or society. 2. An archetypal theme in literature (see ARCHETYPE), especially in such works as Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Camus' *The Stranger*, Guérard's *The Exiles*, Baldwin's *Another Country*, and most of Brecht's plays.

REFERENCES: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*; Timothy O'Keeffe, ed., *Alienation*; Gerald Sykes, ed., *Alienation: The Cultural Climate of Our Times*; Ned Hoopes, ed., *Who Am I?*

allegorical level See LEVELS OF MEANING.

allegory A kind of extended metaphor in which characters or PERSONIFICATIONS represent something other than themselves—virtues, vices, causes, issues. There are two main kinds of allegory: those that use personifications, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; and those that use a special kind of symbolism, as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* the main character, Christian, who "trudged through the Slough of Despond," represents the Christian soul on its pilgrimage through the world. Christian is not a real person, of course, nor is the Slough of Despond a real place; they are rather concretizations of abstract ideas made real and vital to the reader by their dramatic presentation. In *The Divine Comedy* a real man, Dante, meets the ghost of a real person, the Roman poet Vergil, who serves him as a guide through Hell. Aside from their literal roles as pilgrim and guide, Dante and Vergil represent humanity led by human reason to an understanding of the nature of evil and the spiritual consequences of sin. Such a representation is *symbolic allegory*.