

THE CASSELL
DICTIONARY OF

Literary and
Language Terms

Christina Ruse and Marilyn Hopton



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The Cassell Dictionary of
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Introduction

This dictionary is not another academic reference to literary terms. It has been compiled and written by teachers for students who are studying English at an advanced level. The wordlist was assembled after a careful analysis of set texts, syllabuses, textbooks, glossaries, literary essays and reviews.

This book is intended as a straightforward and readable explanation of literary and language terms together with examples from literary works likely to be met in course material or almost certainly available from libraries. The authors have deliberately avoided rare or obscure references and the language of the entries has been kept as straightforward as possible. The information is introductory but is intended to encourage students by offering suggestions for further reading and including many cross-references that direct students on an interesting journey in a particular area of interest.

Unlike other references, this book does not assume any classical education or any knowledge of British cultural history. Therefore, essential information is provided about personalities, historical contexts, social and economic influences and the links between one period or movement and another. Whenever it is relevant, the relationships between English literary heritage and other countries in Europe and elsewhere are described and discussed.

The contents deal with traditional as well as modern grammatical terms and there are numerous examples to help understanding and illustrate correct usage. Language and literature are inextricably linked, for example in considerations of style, and a reference work combining the two aspects is particularly desirable.

Vocabulary items that may not be readily identifiable as literary terms but are common in course work and essays are explained in the dictionary, often with cross-references to related items. Examples are *abridge* and *adapt* or *essay* and *thesis*. Informal vocabulary such as *waffle* is also included.

In entries directly associated with literature courses and examinations detailed guidance is provided for good essay writing. Examples of this can be seen under *appreciation*, *character sketch* and *detective fiction*.

Finally, the authors have mentioned influences of other art forms such as film, television, light entertainment and popular song. The connections between these and the literary heritage are obvious but are all too often neglected.

This dictionary, then, is very useful for

- Students who are studying literature at school and college. It will be particularly useful for those taking a module in literature as part of a wider course of study.
- Overseas students who are studying English in situations where English is the language of education and examination but is not the mother tongue.
- Foreign students who are studying English language and literature at an advanced level.

Saying the words

Many words in this dictionary are unusual or difficult to say. These words are shown with a special spelling to help you.

Example: aesthete /ees-theet/ or motif /moh-teet/

The darker letters show that this part of the word is spoken more strongly.
The hyphens separate spoken parts of the word.

There are sounds that have many different spellings in English.

Example: 'ee' can be fet, bet, piece, athlete etc.

For these sounds the following spellings are used:

ee	as in	<u>fe</u> t, <u>be</u> t, <u>pie</u> ce, <u>athle</u> te
i	as in	<u>pr</u> int, <u>com</u> ic, <u>syll</u> able, <u>my</u> th
e	as in	<u>te</u> nse, <u>he</u> ad, <u>add</u> ress, <u>edit</u>
a	as in	<u>act</u> , <u>black</u> , <u>adapt</u> , <u>par</u> able
aa	as in	<u>hard</u> , <u>drama</u> , <u>arch</u> ive, <u>contrast</u>
o	as in	<u>soft</u> , <u>com</u> edy, <u>nov</u> el, <u>waff</u> le
aw	as in	<u>clau</u> se, <u>saw</u> , <u>board</u> s, <u>vaude</u> vill <u>e</u>
oo	as in	<u>mood</u> , <u>blue</u> , <u>mov</u> ement, <u>troub</u> adour
yoo	as in	<u>new</u> , <u>muse</u> , <u>review</u> , <u>mascul</u> ine
u	as in	<u>pun</u> , <u>tong</u> ue, <u>coup</u> let, <u>conund</u> rum
er	as in	<u>verb</u> , <u>heard</u> , <u>first</u> , <u>word</u>
a	as in	<u>drama</u> , <u>aside</u> , <u>howl</u> er, <u>iron</u> y
ay	as in	<u>case</u> , <u>apron</u> , <u>grail</u> , <u>deism</u>
oh	as in	<u>tone</u> , <u>hero</u> , <u>folio</u> , <u>folk</u>
ie	as in	<u>light</u> , <u>mime</u> , <u>vari</u> ety, <u>rhyme</u>
ou	as in	<u>noun</u> , <u>owl</u> , <u>crown</u> , <u>umlaut</u>
oi	as in	<u>voice</u> , <u>toy</u> , <u>foil</u> , <u>tabloid</u>
ere	as in	<u>near</u> , <u>hero</u> , <u>coher</u> ent, <u>ballade</u> er
air	as in	<u>bare</u> , <u>fairy</u> , <u>pear</u> , <u>werewol</u> f
yur	as in	<u>cure</u> , <u>Europe</u> , <u>Puritan</u> , <u>caesura</u>
ur	as in	<u>sure</u> , <u>allure</u> , <u>rural</u> , <u>brochure</u>
k	as in	<u>call</u> , <u>chorus</u> , <u>key</u> , <u>baroque</u>
g	as in	<u>gloss</u> , <u>tag</u> , <u>figure</u> , <u>agony</u>
dg	as in	<u>joy</u> , <u>gender</u> , <u>tragedy</u> , <u>conjunction</u>
th	as in	<u>thrill</u> , <u>theatre</u> , <u>myth</u> , <u>diphthong</u>

th	as in	that, with, the, other
ch	as in	chain, each, question, posthumous
sh	as in	short, fiction, brochure, ancient
zh	as in	measure, version, genre, montage
ng	as in	song, English, blank, function
y	as in	yarn, year, yellow, your
ks	as in	index, climax, axiom, lexis

A

abbreviation

formal style requires full stops, as in *B.A., p.m.*, but not after *Dr, Mrs, Ltd, Pty* etc (which include the last letter of the original word). It is a modern trend to leave out full stops altogether especially for frequently used abbreviations such as *BBC, TV, eg, etc*, and when the abbreviation is an acronym, such as *AIDS* or *OPEC*.

ab initio

/ab i-nish-ee-oh/

a Latin phrase meaning 'from the beginning'.

abridge

to shorten a novel etc by leaving out parts, but without changing the main story. Some of Shakespeare's plays are published in abridged editions for schools; the parts considered unsuitable for children have been removed. See ADAPT. **abridgement** noun.

absolute

1 describes a grammatical construction that is independent of the main clause, as in *Seriously though, shouldn't you write and apologize?*

2 describes a transitive verb used without a direct object, as in *Her loud voice is likely to disconcert.*

abstract

a summary of the main details of a piece of writing or a speech, particularly when these have a scientific or academic content.

abstract noun

the name of anything we experience as an idea or quality, not something we experience by sight, touch, smell etc, e.g. *beauty, doubt, history*. See CONCRETE NOUN.

absurd, theatre of the

any dramatic work that portrays the concept of life as being meaningless and the universe as having no real purpose.

In order to show this, these plays include almost no development or motivation in the characters, each of whom is unable to communicate successfully with others. There is also no significance to the dialogue, and the total effect is to portray an irrational, often illogical, set of episodes without a definite or conventional plot. Samuel Beckett, with works such as *Waiting for Godot* (1956), and Harold Pinter, with

works such as *The Birthday Party* (1960), are two of several modern playwrights who have written such drama. See EXISTENTIALISM.

academy

an official association of literary, scientific or artistic men and women formed to promote culture and learning, especially one of national importance, such as *The Royal Society* (1662) (for sciences) in England; *L'Académie française* (1635) (for language) in France. The word comes from the place near Athens where Plato's Academia was founded, one of the five chief schools of philosophy in Ancient Greece (c. 387 BC to AD 529).

acatalectic

/a-kat-a-lek-tik/

describes a line of verse that is 'complete' because it includes all the syllables necessary to maintain a uniform metrical pattern (i.e. all the feet are complete), as in this opening line of Wole Soyinka's *Night* (1967):

Your hand | is heavily, Night, | upon | my brow |

See CATALECTIC.

accent

to stress or emphasize particular syllables in a line of verse in order to produce a metrical pattern or rhythm. The symbol $\bar{}$ or $\acute{}$ indicates an accented (stressed) syllable, as in

I wan $\bar{}$ dered lone $\bar{}$ ly as | a cloud |

See UNACCENTED.

account

a written or spoken report, description etc, especially one produced for official use.

accusative = OBJECTIVE.

acknowledgement

an author's or publisher's statement, with thanks, at the beginning of a book that other writers, books, illustrations etc have been used when preparing a book.

acronym

a word (a type of abbreviation) formed from the first letters of other words, such as BASIC (Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code) or AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

acrostic

(usually) a poem written so that the initial letters of the lines produce a word or phrase relevant to the theme, such as in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610). Acrostics are also used as memory devices, such as *Every Good Boy Deserves Fun* (EGBDF, the notes on the lines in written music). See **MNEMONIC**.

act

1 a major division of a play. Shakespeare used the classical model of five acts (although there is no conclusive evidence that he actually divided his plays into scenes and acts; in 1709, Nicholas Rowe provided the divisions we know), but in modern times three acts are usual. One-act plays form a newer, separate dramatic category.

2 a short performance, especially one of several in light entertainment, such as a *comedian's act*, a *juggler's act*.

3 (Acts) a formal report on the proceedings, decisions etc of a learned society, formal meeting etc.

action

the events which take place in a plot or performance of a dramatic work. An *action-packed* drama is one which includes a lot of physical activity.

active

a form of a verb in which the grammatical subject is the person or thing that performs the action or is responsible for it. The active forms of the verb *break* are *break*, *breaks*, *broke*. In *Richard breaks/broke the stick*, *breaks* and *broke* are in the active form. See **PASSIVE**.

active vocabulary

the words, expressions etc used by an individual in speech or writing. See **IDIOLECT**, **PASSIVE VOCABULARY**.

acute accent

the mark ' placed above a vowel, usually 'e', to show how the vowel should be spoken, as in *cliché*.

adage

/ad-idg/

a proverb or saying that is often quoted, e.g. *Waste not, want not*.

adapt

to rewrite a literary work for another purpose, such as a play for filming or a novel for a television dramatization. E M Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) has been adapted for filming. See **ABRIDGE**.
adaptation noun.

adapter or adaptor

a person who writes adaptations.

addendum

(two *addenda*)

- 1 an appendix or supplement in a book, journal etc.
- 2 a comment or statement that is added later.

address

a formal speech given by an important person to an audience, for example by the principal to the parents and children of a school.

adjective

a word used to describe people, objects, ideas, events etc and used (usually) with nouns and pronouns, such as *a ridiculous excuse*, *up-to-date information*. Adjectives can also be used with verbs such as *appear*, *taste*, *feel* as in *Her idea seems impossible* or *That cake tastes sweet*. They can also be used with verbs such as *become* or *turn* to show how the object changes, as in *He washed his hands clean*. Also, adjectives can be used to replace a noun, as in *I'd like two large and one small, please (when shopping)*, or *I'm the youngest in the class*. Some adjectives are used with 'the' as a noun as in *the wealthy*, *the British*, *the forgotten* (all used with a plural verb). Past and present participles can be used as adjectives, e.g. *a torn page* or *a smiling baby*.

Finally, a few adjectives which end in *-ed* have a special pronunciation /-id/, as in *a learned society*, *an aged relative*. See ATTRIBUTIVE, PREDICATIVE, adjectival adjective.

An **adjectival clause** is a clause that functions as an adjective and it is always introduced by a relative pronoun, as in *a teacher who is very popular*.

An **adjectival participial clause** is a participial clause that functions as an adjective, as in *Students requiring tickets for the bus must buy them now*.

adjunct

an adverb or adverbial phrase that is an integral part of a clause or sentence, as in *explain it slowly*. It can often be contrasted with another adverb in questions or statements expressing alternatives, as in *Did you see him outside the house or was he inside?* and *I can join you afterwards but not before the meeting*.

An adjunct is not separated by commas. See CONJUNCT, DISJUNCT.

ad-lib

to make a speech or comment without any preparation or planning.
ad-lib adjective.

adverb

a word used to say when, where or how something happens, or to give information about the verb, as in *She laughed loudly*. An adverb can also give more information about adjectives, as in *an extremely loud laugh*, about other adverbs, as in *I laughed very loudly*, or about a prepositional phrase, as in *I was absolutely over the moon with joy*.

Many adjectives can become adverbs by adding *-ly*, e.g. *greatly*, *happily*. But some words ending in *-ly* are adjectives, not adverbs, e.g. *lovely*, *ugly*. A few words such as *early* function as both adverbs and adjectives, as in *I got up early* (adverb) and *I'm an early riser* (adjective). See DEGREE (adverb of degree), adverbial adjective.

An adverbial clause is a clause that functions as an adverb, as in *Stop writing when the bell rings*. *Please ask if you want me to come* is an adverbial clause of condition; *I came because I got your message* is an adverbial clause of reason. See ADJUNCT, CONJUNCT, DISJUNCT.

adverbial particle

an adverb used as part of a phrasal verb, e.g. *go away*, *keep out*

aesthete

/ees-theet/

a person who greatly appreciates literature, especially verse, and beauty in the visual arts.

aestheticism

/ees-thet-i-sizm/

great respect and love for the importance of the arts and beauty, especially the belief that this is how we should judge the value of existence. See PRERAPHAETIC

aesthetics

/ees-thet-iks/

the philosophical study of the science of beauty, using logic to judge the essence of beauty and truth; the psychological study of the processes of artistic creation and appreciation. See BELLES-LETTRES

affectation

the use of an artificial style or method of writing or speaking which is inappropriate to the subject or context, such as Mrs Elton's response in Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) to Mr Knightley's invitation to visit him and spend the day picking strawberries:

It is a morning scheme, you know, Knightley; quite a simple thing. I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here, - probably 'tis basket with pink ribbon... (and a few minutes later) ... I wish we had a donkey. The thing would be for us all to come on donkeys, Jane, Miss Bates, and me, and my *caro sposo* walking by.

affirmative

describes a verb form in a sentence without *not*, e.g. *I like it* or *She won't tell, will she?* *They worked hard today* is an affirmative sentence. See NEGATIVE.

affix

a group of letters put at the beginning (*prefix*) or at the end (*suffix*) of a word to make a new word which either has a new meaning or is a different part of speech, as in *anti-nuclear*, *disassociate*, *likely*, *African*.

Africanism

a word or expression which is characteristic of an African culture or language and is used in a non-African context, e.g. *safari*.

Afro-American

describes people who are of African and American origin and their culture, language and history.

Afro-Caribbean

describes people of African descent who were born in, or whose families come from, the islands of the Caribbean and their culture and language. See RAP.

agent

the part of a passive sentence which states the person or thing performing the action, as in *The cup was won by the reserve team*.

Age of Reason = ENLIGHTENMENT.

agitprop

/adg-it-prop/

propaganda in literature, especially supporting Communism.

agony column

a part of a newspaper or magazine in which readers write letters describing personal problems and someone (an *agony aunt*, or rarely *agony uncle*) replies.

agrapha

the sayings of Jesus Christ that are not recorded in the official Gospels.

agraphia

the loss of ability to write, caused by damage to the brain. See ALEXIA, APHASIA.

agreement

the forms of a verb, noun, pronoun etc used to show the relationship between the subject and verb etc according to number, gender etc, as in *Women and elephants never forget an injury* or *You that love England, that have an ear for her music...*

aide mémoire

/ed mem-waa/

- 1 a document that summarizes the main points in an agreement or proposal.
- 2 any device used to help a person to remember something, e.g. a mnemonic.

album

- 1 a file or book with blank pages, used to keep photographs, newspaper clippings etc.
- 2 a book with a wide variety of stories, illustrations etc, especially one produced for children.

Alexandrine

a line of verse with six iambic feet, such as in this line from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1589 and 1596):

Eaſe af|ter wā, | deāth af|ter life, | dōes great|ly pleaſe. |

It is rare in English poetry.

alexia

the lack of ability to learn how to read caused by damage to the central nervous system. See AGRAPHIA, APHASIA, DYSLEXIA.

allegory

a form of narrative writing in which the people, objects or events are used symbolically to put across a particular (usually moral or religious) meaning. Parables and fables are allegories.

John Lyly's *Endimion* (1591) is an allegorical drama, but John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is the outstanding allegory in English. Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is probably the best-known modern example. See APOLOGUE, DREAM ALLEGORY, BEAST EPIC. **allegorical** adjective.

alliteration

the deliberate repetition of the first consonant in associated words or next to stressed syllables, as in W B Yeats' *The Fisherman* (1914):

The clever man who cries
The catch-cries of the clown

or in D H Lawrence's *Snake* (1923):

He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack, long
body,
Silently.

Alliteration was a prominent feature of Old English verse and has continued to be widely used. It is often used in everyday expressions such as then and there or heaven and hell. **alliterative** adjective.

allocution

a formal speech, especially one that gives advice or tries to persuade a person to agree or believe something.

allonym

someone's name used by another writer. See PSEUDONYM.

allophone

a speech sound that is a variant of a phoneme, e.g. one that is aspirated and one that is not.

allusion

the device of making a reference to a well-known person, place etc, the significance of which the reader or audience is expected to recognize and understand. Thomas Hardy's novels are full of classical allusions.

almanac

a reference book that gives historical and statistical information.

In medieval times, an almanac was used to calculate and record the movements of the planets, moon and stars. During the 16th century, an almanac would forecast weather, disasters such as wars and the outbreak of disease. Today some almanacs continue to predict good and bad fortune.