A DICTIONARY OF LITERARY TERMS

J. A. Cuddon

REVISED EDITION

A DICTIONARY OF LITERARY TERMS

J. A. Cuddon

REVISED EDITION

ANDRE DEUTSCH

First published January 1977 by
André Deutsch Limited
105 Great Russell Street London WC1

Revised edition August 1979

Printed in Great Britain
by W & J Mackay Limited, Chatham

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Cuddon, John Anthony
A dictionary of literary terms. –
2nd. ed. – (Language library).
1. Literature – Dictionaries
I. Title II. Series
803 PN41

ISBN 0-233-97088-6

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A. Alvarez, pastiche in the preface to *The New Poetry* (1961), by permission of the author.
Kingsley Amis, extract from 'Beowulf' by permission of the author.
W. H. Auden, 'If I could tell you' and extracts from *Letter to Lord Byron* from *Collected Poems*, by permission of Faber & Faber and Random House Inc.
Nicolas Bentley, two clerihews by permission of the author.
John Berryman, extract from 'The Dispossessed' from *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* by permission of Faber & Faber and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
John Betjeman, extract from 'In Westminster Abbey' from *Collected Poems* by permission of the author and John Murray Ltd.
Roy Campbell, 'The Seventh Sword' from *Mithraic Emblems*, by permission of The Bodley Head.
Charles Causley, extracts from 'Mother, Get Up, Unbar the Door', 'The Prisoners of Love', 'Timothy Winters' and 'The Life of the Poet', by permission of the author and David Higham Associates Ltd.
J. R. Clark Hall, extracts from translation of *Beowulf* by permission of George Allen & Unwin Ltd and Barnes & Noble.
Jack Clemo, extract from 'The Plundered Fuchsias' from *The Map of Clay*, by permission of Methuen & Co USA Ltd.
John Crowe Ransom, extract from 'Dog' from *Selected Poems*, by permission of Laurence Pollinger Ltd and Alfred A. Knopf, Random House Inc.
C. Day Lewis, extract from 'Sing We the Two Lieutenants' from *A Time to Dance* in *Collected Poems 1954*, by permission of the Executor of the Estate of C. Day Lewis, Hogarth Press and Jonathan Cape Ltd.
T. S. Eliot, extracts from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'The Waste Land', 'Ash Wednesday', 'Little Gidding', and 'Dry Salvages' from *Collected Poems 1909–1962*; UK: by permission of Faber & Faber and USA: 'from *Collected Poems 1909–1962* by T. S. Eliot, copyright 1963, 1964, by T. S. Eliot. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.'
D. J. Enright, extract from 'The Laughing Hyena by Hokusai' from *Selected Poems*, by permission of Chatto & Windus and Bolt & Watson.
Geoffrey Hill, extract from 'God's Little Mountain' from *For the Unfallen* by permission of the author and André Deutsch Ltd.
David Holbrook, 'Living? Our Supervisors will do that for Us' reprinted by permission of the author.
Ted Hughes, extracts from 'February', 'View of a Pig', and 'Thrushes' from *Lupercal*, by permission of the author, Faber & Faber and Harper & Row.
Robinson Jeffers, extract from 'Hurt Hawks' from *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Random House Inc.
David Jones, extracts from 'Middle Sea and Lear Sea' from *Anathemata*, by permission of Faber & Faber and the Chilmark Press.
James Kirkup, extracts from 'Four Haiku on the Inland Sea', from *Paper Windows*, by permission of the author and Curtis Brown Ltd.

Philip Larkin, extract from 'The Whitsun Weddings', by permission of the author and Faber & Faber.

D. H. Lawrence, 'Kangaroo' and 'Snake'; UK: by permission of Laurence Pollinger Ltd; USA: 'From the *Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* edited by Vivian de Sola Pinto and F. Warren Roberts, copyright 1964, 1971, by Angelo Ravagli and C. M. Weekley. Executors of the Estate of Frieda Lawrence Ravagli. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of the Viking Press Inc.'

Robert Lowell, extracts from 'Our Lady of Walsingham', 'Mr Edwards and the Spider', 'The Holy Innocents', and 'Man and Wife' from *Lord Weary's Castle* in *Poems 1938–49*, by permission of Faber & Faber and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.

George MacBeth, extracts from 'The God of Love', by permission of the author.

Hugh Macdiarmid, extract from 'On a Raised Beach' by permission of the author.

Norman McCaig, extract from 'Mutual Life' by permission of the author and Granada Publishing Ltd.

Roger McGough, extract from 'Hoarding' from *Watchwords* by permission of the author, Jonathan Cape Ltd and Hope Leresche & Steele.

John Masefield, extract from 'Cargoes' by permission of the Society of Authors and Macmillan Publishing Company Inc.

Ogden Nash, 'Reflections on Ice Breaking' from *Verses from 1929 On* (plus extra lines 'pot/is not'), 'What's the Use?' copyright Ogden Nash 1931 and 'Requiem', copyright Ogden Nash 1938 by permission of A. P. Watt & Son and Little, Brown & Co.

Sylvia Plath, extract from 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' by permission of Miss Olwyn Hughes and Harper & Row.

Ezra Pound, extracts from 'The Seafarer'; UK: Faber & Faber; USA: 'Ezra Pound. PERSONAE. Copyright 1926 by Ezra Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.'

Peter Redgrove, extracts from 'Lazarus and the Sea' and 'The Archaeologist' from *The Collector and Other Poems* by permission of the author and Routledge Kegan Paul Ltd.

Dylan Thomas, 'Vision and Prayer' from *Collected Poems*; UK: J. M. Dent and the Trustees for the copyrights of the late Dylan Thomas; USA: '*The Poems of Dylan Thomas*. Copyright 1946 by New Directions Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.'

R. S. Thomas, extracts from 'The Welsh Hill Country', 'Song at the Year's Turning', and 'A Blackbird Singing' from *Poetry for Supper*, by permission of the author and Granada Publishing Ltd.

Vernon Watkins, extract from 'The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd' by permission of Faber & Faber.

W. B. Yeats, extracts from 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'Among School Children' from *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, by permission of M. B. Yeats, Miss Anne Yeats and Macmillan of London and Basingstoke.

ABBREVIATIONS

abbrev.	– abbreviation, -ated
AL	– Anglo-Latin
AN	– Anglo-Norman
A	– Arabic
Ar	– Armenian
c.	– century, or centuries
Ch	– Chinese
c.	– *circa* (as in *c.* 1150, meaning the approximate date)
cf.	– *confer* 'compare'
Du	– Dutch
Eng	– English
e.g.	– *exempli gratia* 'for example'
et al.	– *et alii* 'and others'
fl.	– *floruit* 'he flourished'
F	– French
G	– German
Gk	– Greek
Heb	– Hebrew
HG	– High German
i.e.	– *id est* 'that is'
It	– Italian
J	– Japanese
K	– Korean
L	– Latin
LL	– Late Latin
LDu	– Low Dutch
LG	– Low German
MedL	– Medieval Latin
MDu	– Middle Dutch

ME	– Middle English
MHG	– Middle High German
MLG	– Middle Low German
ModL	– Modern Latin
NGk	– Neo-Greek
OE	– Old English
OF	– Old French
OHG	– Old High German
ON	– Old Norse
P	– Persian
pl.	– plural
Pg	– Portuguese
Pr	– Provençal
publ.	– published
qq. v.	– *quae vide* 'which see' (pl.)
q.v.	– *quod vide* 'which see' (sing.)
R	– Russian
Skt	– Sanskrit
S	– Serbian
sing.	– singular
Sp	– Spanish
Sw	– Swedish
trans.	– translation, -ated
T	– Turkish
viz.	– *videlicet* 'namely'
W	– Welsh

PREFACE

It is not, I believe, until you actually undertake the task of making a dictionary that you fully appreciate the implications of Dr Johnson's definition of the lexicographer as a 'harmless drudge'.

You begin full of vigour, confidence and optimism; one might even say blithely. Gradually the work grows. The original list of entries increases steadily. There seems to be no end to the reading you must do. Continually you are nagged by the persistent apprehension that you are overlooking things. Months pass; years begin to pass; the end is still not yet in sight. But hardly a day passes without a fresh discovery, new and interesting facts. These discoveries sustain you like springs of sweet water on a long and arduous trek. 'Have you included *Dinggedicht*?' asks a friend. 'And what about *pevaĭ*?' says another. A third enquires loftily 'I suppose you've got an entry on *zéjel*?'

And so it goes on. After a while the labour assumes Herculean proportions. Piles of books fill the room. The mounds of paper on the table begin to obscure the view. The card indices, notebooks and memoranda seem endless . . . The work becomes an obsession; and, after a certain stage, a kind of living creature, like an importunate child that needs continual attention and maintenance. Certainly there is drudgery. Whether or not it is harmless must depend on how accurate or inaccurate you are.

To me, making a dictionary has seemed much like building a sizable house singlehanded; and, having built it, wiring, plumbing, painting and furnishing it. Moreover, it takes about as long. But there can be no question that there is great satisfaction in the labour. When at last you survey the bundles of manuscript ready for the press you have the pardonable but, alas, fleeting illusion that now you know everything; that at last you are in a position to justify the ways of man to God.

As is usual in the making of anything, one of the main problems is to decide what to put in and what to omit. It has not been easy to

decide what a literary term really is, because, by most standards, it is a vague classification. Epic is one, hexameter is, and so is elegy. But are pornography, patter-song and apocrypha? In the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* the main definition of 'literary' runs thus: 'Of or pertaining to, or of the nature of, literature, polite learning, or books and written compositions; pertaining to that kind of written composition which has value on account of its qualities of form.' If we accept this as a working indication of what is meant by 'literary', then what is to be done about the terms (and there are many) used by printers and compositors? What about the language of grammarians and the proliferating terminology of linguists? Most or all of these are related, however tenuously in some cases, to the literary, and to literature. After long debate on those issues, I decided to be judiciously selective and include a few terms of printers, grammarians and philologists. For instance, QUARTO and FOLIO are in; LINE-BLOCK and GALLEY are out. PARAGRAPH and LOOSE and PERIODIC SENTENCE are in; SUPINE and DECLENSION are out. KENEME and MORPHEME are in; DIPHTHONG and LABIAL are out.

Another poser was whether to include all literary terms from all languages and literatures and to provide copious illustrations and examples, but this would surely seem like assuming the function of the encyclopaedist. In any case, some terms are so obscure (and rare) as to be of interest only to the specialist.

What I have endeavoured to do, then, is to provide a serviceable and fairly comprehensive dictionary of those literary terms which are in regular use in the world today; terms in which intelligent people may be expected to have some interest and about which they may wish to find out something more. If by any chance they do not know (or have forgotten) what a *haiku* is, or *verso tronco*, or how *blue-stockings* came to be so named, then I hope that this dictionary will provide them with the basic information.

I say 'fairly comprehensive' because any work of orismology is bound to be limited by the author's reading and knowledge. No man can be expected to have read everything or even a tithe of everything. I am familiar with Classical, European and Near Eastern literatures, and have some knowledge of the literatures of North America and of Commonwealth nations. But my knowledge of Oriental literatures, and those of Spanish America and South America is limited. There are, therefore, inevitably, considerable gaps.

Most of the terms are drawn from Greek, Latin, English, French,

German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Russian, Arabic, Japanese, Old French, Old Provençal and Old Norse. A few are Serbian, Chinese, Persian, Turkish, Welsh and Korean.

Ten main categories can be distinguished at the outset, as follows:

1. Technical terms (e.g. iamb, pentameter, metonymy, *ottava rima*).
2. Forms (e.g. sonnet, *villanelle*, limerick, *tanka*, clerihew).
3. Genres or kinds (e.g. pastoral, elegy, *fabliau*, *Märchen*, *conte*).
4. Technicalities (e.g. pivot word, tenor and vehicle, communication heresy, aesthetic distance).
5. Groups, schools and movements (e.g. Pléiade, Parnassians, Pre-Raphaelites, School of Spenser).
6. Well-known phrases (e.g. pathetic fallacy, willing suspension of disbelief, negative capability, *quod semper quod ubique*).
7. -isms (e.g. realism, naturalism, primitivism, Platonism, plagiarism).
8. Motifs or themes (e.g. *ubi sunt*, *carpe diem*, Faust-theme, *leitmotif*).
9. Personalities (e.g. *scop*, *jongleur*, villain, *guslar*).
10. Modes, attitudes and styles (e.g. *dolce stil nuovo*, irony, Marinism, grotesque, sentimental comedy).

These ten categories account for a fair proportion of literary terms but there are hundreds which do not belong to any easily recognizable family or phylum, and any kind of taxonomical approach almost at once breaks down as soon as one begins to classify. The following haphazard list suggests the impossibility of any satisfactory division: abstract, *belles-lettres*, courtly love, diction, enlightenment, Freytag's pyramid, great chain of being, *hamartia*, inspiration, juvenilia, Grub Street, quotation titles – to mention no others.

The plan of the dictionary is simple. It is alphabetical and runs from abecedarius to zeugma; and, so to speak, from epic to limerick. Each term is given a brief description or definition. In some cases, but by no means always, when I thought it might be helpful and/or of interest, I give some brief etymology of the term. This is particularly necessary where a term comes from one thing but now denotes another. For instance, the Spanish *estribillo*. The word goes back to 'little stirrup', being the diminutive of *estribo* 'stirrup'. It here denotes a refrain or chorus (also a pet word or phrase) and is a theme, verse or stanza (of from two to four lines) of a *villancico*; and there is more to it than that.

Many indications of origin are added in brackets. Where it was not possible to do this in a simple fashion I have shown the history

at greater length within the definition of the term. Often this description explains the etymology and what the term denotes. For literary forms and genres I have provided a *résumé* of origins, history and development, and I have also provided details of notable examples and distinguished practitioners. I have not included bibliographies; to have done so would have been to lengthen the book by a third as much again. But, where appropriate, I have referred to the classic work on a particular theme or subject (e.g. C. S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love*, A. O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being*, Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*).

I would have liked to provide an example in full to illustrate every poetic form and genre (e.g. RONDEAU, ODE, ELEGY, LYRIC), but this was not feasible either. I would also have liked to include a quotation for every kind of metrical scheme, but this again would have expanded the book inordinately. It would have entailed quoting in at least sixteen different languages and this would have required translation in most, if not all, instances. Moreover, it would have involved using seven alphabets (Greek, Japanese, Cyrillic, Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit and Chinese) in addition to the Roman. Thus, in the interests of simplicity and brevity, I have settled, whenever possible, for a quotation in English verse.

Some entries were peculiarly difficult to condense, and none more so than NOVEL. The chief problem here was what to include out of the thousands of possible examples. In the end I decided to go by that principle which has guided me throughout the making of the dictionary and to include only those writers whose books I am familiar with and which have seemed to me to be of particular merit. Naturally enough, the selection must often coincide with what, in all probability, most other people would choose. Some novelists have to go in whether you like them or not because the general consensus over the years has confirmed that their novels are outstanding. On the whole, as far as the novel is concerned, I have mentioned most of those who I believe are major novelists, and I have provided a selection of minor novelists. Inevitably, the treatment of the novel (like the treatment of travel books and short stories) has involved long lists of books.

As for dates – these, as we all know, can become boring. On the other hand, their absence can be frustrating. Accordingly, I have attempted a compromise. It seemed otiose to put in the dates of every author each time I referred to him or her, especially the famous. There are, for instance, many references to Aristotle, Plato, Horace, Dante, Chaucer, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare, Molière,

Dryden, Pope, Goethe, Keats, W. B. Yeats, Thomas Mann and T. S. Eliot. When referring to the famous I assume that the reader is familiar with the approximate period in which they flourished. When referring to the not-so-famous, but, nonetheless, important (e.g. Archilochus, Lucian, Cavalcanti, Dunbar, Clément Marot, Thomas Campion, Tieck, Lady Winchilsea, James Sheridan Knowles, Théophile Gautier, Queiros) I have, in many instances, included some indication of their dates. In any event it is clear as a rule when they lived because I refer to the century, or I give the dates of their works whenever it is helpful or necessary to do so. The dates given refer, unless otherwise indicated in the text, to the first performance of plays, the first publication in one volume of prose works, and the first collected publication of poems. I diverge from this system only where it might be misleading. I have cited in English those titles of works which are less familiar in their original form to an English-speaking reader. The dates given in this case refer to the first publication in the original language.

The whole dictionary is cross-referenced so that the user can move easily from one entry to another. The references are the plumbing and wiring of the book. If, for example, you look up **ballad** you will be referred to REFRAIN, ORAL TRADITION, HOMERIC EPITHET, KENNING, INCREMENTAL REPETITION, NARODNE PESME, BROADSIDE, FOLKSONG, LAY and NARRATIVE VERSE.

The *raison d'être* of a dictionary, I take it, is to provide information – be it commonplace or abstruse. A decent dictionary of geography, for instance, will tell us what exfoliation, jungle and *karst* are. It should also inform us about katabatic winds, *poljes* and diastrophism. It may be of interest to the reader that I have extruded a large number of terms (rather more than two hundred) which I thought were too esoteric and specialized to merit inclusion.

Apropos of this I am obliged to mention the matter of terms used in Classical prosody. Miscellaneous hierophants and Gamaliels have pointed out to me that Classical prosody, its systems and classifications, bears little relationship to English verse. This may well be so, but we have inherited the terms; they have been in use for some hundreds of years; and it will be found that the vast majority of English poets have a thorough knowledge and understanding of them. Moreover, if in doubt about their utility, one might ask: is it easier to say (or write) 'an iambic pentameter', or 'a line of verse consisting of five feet with a rising rhythm in which the first syllable of each foot is unstressed and the second stressed'? The Greeks in fact *did* have a word for almost everything and we have inherited

these terms whether we like them or not. And it seems to me much simpler to understand and use them rather than to pretend they do not exist, or find verbose alternatives.

I should add that, as this is a personal book, I have, occasionally, spread myself with entries on subjects of particular interest to me; for example, *danse macabre*, primitivism, folly literature, the conceit, revenge tragedy and table talk – to name a few. But every author and reader has his favourite themes and subjects. It is probable that, at times, I have allowed my prejudices and opinions a fairly easy rein; but when one has read many thousands of volumes of verse and drama, novels, essays, discourses, sermons, courtesy books, encyclopaedias, *novelle*, short stories, *Festschriften*, tracts and interpretations, perhaps one is entitled to ventilate a few prejudices and opinions. They are unlikely, I feel, to do any harm in such circumstances, and they may have the beneficial effect of provoking argument, comment or disagreement.

I have also taken the liberty of contributing three items of my own: first, a double-dactyl verse under that heading; secondly, an example of synthetic rhyme (under that heading); thirdly, two neologisms – namely *sufferingette* and *verbocrap* (both under the entry NEOLOGISM). At any rate, I put in a modest claim for having devised these ghost-words.

I wrote above that this is a 'personal book', but, naturally, in the course of making it, I have consulted a number of friends and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking them for giving me the benefit of their knowledge, advice and criticism. They are Mrs M. Heywood, Mr John Basing, Dr Derek Brewer, Mr Paul Craddock, Mr Vincent Cronin, Mr Charles Hoste, Dr Ian Jack, Mr Kevin Jackson, Dr Harry Judge, Mr Paul Moreland, Mr T. R. Salmon and Mr Philip Warnett. In addition I am particularly indebted to Mr Barry Duesbury who read parts of the book in manuscript and gave extensive advice on Old Norse literature; and also Mr Kenneth Lowes who gave me a great deal of help on matters relating to Spanish literature. I would like to thank my editor, the late Professor Simeon Potter, who showed much patience and gave me the unstinting help of his great learning and experience; Helen Ormerod for her care in the preparation of the dictionary; and Martin Wright and Sarah Jane Evans for their editorial assistance.

I am also indebted to the Master and Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge, whose hospitality of a 'sabbatical' term enabled me to lay the early foundations of this dictionary, in the making of which I have been constantly reminded (as, perhaps, all lexico-

graphers should be) of Johnson's sombre admonitions:

> It is the fate of those who toil at the lower employments of life to be rather driven by the fear of evil than attracted by the prospect of good; to be exposed to censure without hope of praise; to be disgraced by miscarriage, or punished for neglect, where success would have been without applause, and diligence without reward.
>
> Among these unhappy mortals is the writer of dictionaries, whom mankind has considered not as the pupil, but the slave, of science, the pioneer of literature, doomed only to remove rubbish and clear obstructions from the paths through which learning and genius press forward to conquest and glory, without bestowing a smile on the humble drudge that facilitates their progress. Every other author may aspire to praise: the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach – and even this negative recompense has been yet granted to very few.

A

abecedarius *See* ACROSTIC.

ab ovo (L 'from the egg') This term may refer to a story which starts from the beginning of the events it narrates, as opposed to one which starts in the middle – *in medias res* (*q.v.*). Horace used the expression in *Ars Poetica*.

abridged edition An abbreviated or condensed version of a work. Abridgement may be done in order to save space or to cut out passages which are thought unsuitable for some sections of the reading public. School editions of Shakespeare were often abridged (and still are occasionally) lest the sensibilities of adolescents be offended. *See also* BOWDLERIZE.

absolutism The principle or doctrine that there are immutable standards by which a work of art may be judged. The absolutist contends that certain values are basic and inviolable. *See* RELATIVISM.

abstract (a) A summary of any piece of written work; (b) Not concrete. A sentence is abstract if it deals with a class of things or persons: for example: 'All men are liars'. On the other hand 'Smith is a liar' is a concrete statement. The subject of a sentence may also be an abstraction, as in 'The wealth of the ruling classes'. Something may be said to be abstract if it is the name for a quality, like heat or faith. Critics use the terms abstract and concrete of imagery. For instance, Pope's:

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

is abstract; whereas the same poet's

Fair tresses man's imperial race insnare
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

is concrete.

In poetics the concrete has tended to be valued above the abstract. Sidney, for example, in *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595), praised poetry's concreteness. Neoclassical thought preferred generality. A preference, in theory, for concreteness, reappears with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. In the 20th c. the distinction between concrete and abstract has undergone further change. Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme attempted to formulate a theory of concrete poetry. T. S. Eliot reinforced this with his 'objective correlative' (*q.v.*).

For the most part poetry is the language of concreteness; prose that of the abstract. At any rate prose tends to be better able to deal with the abstract because it is more precise; not necessarily, therefore, more accurate. *See also* ABSTRACT POEM; IMAGISTS; NEOCLASSICISM.

abstract poem Edith Sitwell used this term for verses which depend primarily on their sound for meaning. In their more extreme forms sense is almost completely sacrificed to aural effects. Edith Sitwell herself was a gifted practitioner of such poetry, especially in the collection *Façade*. Gerard Manley Hopkins also made daring use of onomatopoeic and melopoeic devices; so did the French poet Rimbaud. Among writers using English Roy Campbell (1901–57) was perhaps the most outstanding and prolific experimenter. This example is taken from his series *Mithraic Frieze*, published in *Mithraic Emblems*:

Of seven hues in white elision,
the radii of your silver gyre,
are the seven swords of vision
that spoked the prophets' flaming tyre;
their sistered stridencies ignite
the spectrum of the poets' lyre
whose unison becomes a white
revolving disc of stainless fire,
and sights the eye of that sole star
that, in the heavy clods we are,
the kindred seeds of fire can spy,
or, in the cold shell of the rock,
the red yolk of the phoenix-cock
whose feathers in the meteors fly.