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# Oxford

CONCISE DICTIONARY OF

# LITERARY

# TERMS

# 牛津文学学术语词典



上海外语教育出版社  
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随着改革开放的不断深入以及国际交流的日趋广泛,外语学习已经不仅仅局限于语言技能的培养。通过英语获取专业知识、提高专业水平、跟踪学科的最新发展已经成为时代的要求。因此,目前国内急需一批用英语编纂的专业词典。

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本社编辑部

# Preface

This is a book of hard words alphabetically arranged and briefly explained. It cannot purport to fulfil the functions of a balanced expository guide to literary criticism or literary concepts, nor does it attempt to catalogue the entire body of literary terms in use. It offers instead to clarify those thousand terms that are most likely to cause the student or general reader some doubt or bafflement in the context of literary criticism and other discussion of literary works. Rather than include for the sake of encyclopaedic completeness all the most common terms found in literary discussion, I have set aside several that I have judged to be sufficiently well understood in common speech (*anagram*, *biography*, *cliché* and many more), or virtually self-explanatory (*detective story*, *psychological criticism*), along with a broad category of general concepts such as *art*, *belief*, *culture*, etc., which may appear as literary-critical problems but which are not specifically literary terms. This policy has allowed space for the inclusion of many terms generated by the growth of academic literary theory in recent years, and for adequate attention to the terminology of classical rhetoric, now increasingly revived. Along with these will be found hundreds of terms from literary criticism, literary history, prosody, and drama. The selection is weighted towards literature and criticism in English, but there are many terms taken from other languages, and many more associated primarily with other literatures. Many of the terms that I have omitted from this dictionary are covered by larger or more specialist works: a brief guide to these appears on page 245.

In each entry I have attempted to explain succinctly how the term is or has been used, with a brief illustrative example wherever possible, and to clarify any relevant distinctions of sense. Related terms are indicated by cross-reference, using an asterisk (\*) before a term explained elsewhere in the dictionary, or the instruction *see*. I have chosen not to give much space to questions of etymology, and to discuss a term's origin only when this seems genuinely necessary to clarify its current sense. My attention has been devoted more to helping readers to use the terms confidently for themselves. To this end I have displayed the plural forms, adjectival forms, and other derived words relevant to each entry, and have provided

## Preface

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pronunciation guides for more than two hundred potentially troublesome terms. The simplified pronunciation system used, closely based on the system devised by Joyce M. Hawkins for the *Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, offers a basic but sufficient indication of the essential features of stress-placing and vowel quality. One of its advantages is that it requires very little checking against the pronunciation key on page ix.

In compiling this dictionary, the principal debt I have incurred is to my predecessors in the vexed business of literary definition and distinction, from Aristotle to the editors of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. If the following entries make sense, it is very often because those who have gone before have cleared the ground and mapped its more treacherous sites. My thanks are owed also to Joyce Hawkins and Michael Ockenden for their help with pronunciations; to Kim Scott Walwyn of Oxford University Press for her constant encouragement; to Peter Currie, Michael Hughes, Colin Pickthall, and Hazel Richardson for their advice on particular entries; to my students for giving me so much practice; and especially to Harriet Barry, Pamela Jackson, and John Simons for giving up their time to scrutinize the typescript and for the valuable amendments they suggested.

C.B.

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# Pronunciation

Where a term's pronunciation may not be immediately obvious from its spelling, a guide is provided in square brackets following the word or phrase. Words are broken up into small units, usually of one syllable. The syllable that is spoken with most stress in a word of two or more syllables is shown in **bold type**.

The pronunciations given follow the standard speech of southern England. However, since this system is based on analogies rather than on precise phonetic description, readers who use other varieties of spoken English will rarely need to make any conscious adjustment to suit their own forms of pronunciation.

The sounds represented are as follows:

a	as in cat	i	as in pin	s	as in sit
ā	as in ago	ī	as in pencil	sh	as in shop
ah	as in calm	l	as in eye	t	as in top
air	as in hair	j	as in jam	th	as in thin
ar	as in bar	k	as in kind	th	as in this
aw	as in law	l	as in leg	u	as in cup
ay	as in say	m	as in man	ū	as in focus
b	as in bat	n	as in not	uu	as in book
ch	as in chin	ng	as in sing, finger	v	as in voice
d	as in day	nk	as in thank	w	as in will
e	as in bed	o	as in top	y	as in yes
ē	as in taken	ō	as in lemon		or when preceded by
ee	as in meet	oh	as in most		a consonant = I as in
eer	as in beer	oi	as in join		cry, realize
er	as in her	oo	as in soon	yoo	as in unit
ew	as in few	oor	as in poor	yoor	as in Europe
ewr	as in pure	or	as in for	yr	as in fire
f	as in fat	ow	as in cow	z	as in zebra
g	as in get	p	as in pen	zh	as in vision
h	as in hat	r	as in red		

The raised n (<sup>˞</sup>) is used to indicate the nasalizing of the preceding vowel

## Pronunciation

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sound in some French words, as in *baton* or in *Chopin*. In several French words no syllable is marked for stress, the distribution of stress being more even than in English.

A consonant is sometimes doubled, especially to help show that the vowel before it is short, or when without this the combination of letters might suggest a wrong pronunciation through looking misleadingly like a familiar word.

# A

**absurd, the**, a term derived from the \*existentialism of Albert Camus, and often applied to the modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value. Many 20th-century writers of prose fiction have stressed the absurd nature of human existence: notable instances are the novels and stories of Franz Kafka, in which the characters face alarmingly incomprehensible predicaments. The critic Martin Esslin coined the phrase **theatre of the absurd** in 1961 to refer to a number of dramatists of the 1950s (led by Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco) whose works evoke the absurd by abandoning logical form, character, and dialogue together with realistic illusion. The classic work of **absurdist** theatre is Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*, 1952), which revives some of the conventions of clowning and \*farce to represent the impossibility of purposeful action and the paralysis of human aspiration. Other dramatists associated with the theatre of the absurd include Edward Albee, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and Václav Havel.

**academic drama** (also called school drama), a dramatic tradition which arose from the \*Renaissance, in which the works of Plautus, Terence, and other ancient dramatists were performed in schools and colleges, at first in Latin but later also in \*vernacular adaptations composed by schoolmasters under the influence of \*humanism. This tradition produced the earliest English comedies, notably *Ralph Roister Doister* (c.1552) by the schoolmaster Nicholas Udall.

**acatalectic**, possessing the full number of syllables in the final \*foot (of a metrical verse line); not \*catalectic. *Noun*: **acatalexis**.

**accent**, the emphasis placed upon a syllable in pronunciation. The term is often used as a synonym for \*stress, although some theorists prefer to use 'stress' only for metrical accent. Three kinds of accent may be distinguished, according to the factor that accounts for each: etymological accent (or 'word accent') is the emphasis normally given to a syllable according to the word's derivation or \*morphology; rhetorical

## accentual verse

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accent (or 'sense accent') is allocated according to the relative importance of the word in the context of a sentence or question; metrical accent (or stress) follows a recurrent pattern of stresses in a verse line (see metre). Where metrical accent overrides etymological or rhetorical accent, as it often does in \*ballads and songs (Coleridge: 'in a far countree'), the effect is known as a **wrenched accent**. See also ictus, recessive accent.

**accentual verse**, verse in which the \*metre is based on counting only the number of stressed syllables in a line, and in which the number of unstressed syllables in the line may therefore vary. Most verse in Germanic languages (including Old English) is accentual, and much English poetry of later periods has been written in accentual verse, especially in the popular tradition of songs, \*ballads, nursery rhymes, and hymns. The predominant English metrical system in the 'high' literary tradition since Chaucer, however, has been that of **accentual-syllabic** verse, in which both stressed and unstressed syllables are counted: thus an iambic \*pentameter should normally have five stresses distributed among its ten syllables (or, with a \*feminine ending, eleven syllables). See also alliterative metre.

**acephalous** [a-sef-äl-üs], the Greek word for 'headless', applied to a metrical verse line that lacks the first syllable expected according to regular \*metre: e.g. an iambic \*pentameter missing the first unstressed syllable, as sometimes in Chaucer:

Twenty bookès, clad in blak or reed

*Noun*: **acephalexis**. See also truncation.

**acrostic**, a poem in which the initial letters of each line can be read down the page to spell either an alphabet, a name (often that of the author, a patron, or a loved one), or some other concealed message. Variant forms of acrostic may use middle letters or final letters of lines or, in prose acrostics, initial letters of sentences or paragraphs.

**act**, a major division in the action of a play, comprising one or more \*scenes. A break between acts often coincides with a point at which the plot jumps ahead in time.

**actant**, in the \*narratology of A. J. Greimas, one of six basic categories of fictional role common to all stories. The actants are paired in \*binary opposition: Subject/Object, Sender/Receiver, Helper/Opponent. A character (or *acteur*) is an individualized manifestation of one or more actants; but an actant may be realized in a non-human creature (e.g. a dragon as Opponent) or inanimate object (e.g. magic sword as Helper, or Holy Grail as Object), or in more than one *acteur*. *Adjective*: **actantial**.

**Aestheticism**, the doctrine or disposition that regards beauty as an end in itself, and attempts to preserve the arts from subordination to moral, \*didactic, or political purposes. The term is often used synonymously with the **Aesthetic Movement**, a literary and artistic tendency of the late 19th century which may be understood as a further phase of \*Romanticism in reaction against \*philistine bourgeois values of practical efficiency and morality. Aestheticism found theoretical support in the \*aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and other German philosophers who separated the sense of beauty from practical interests. Elaborated by Théophile Gautier in 1835 as a principle of artistic independence, aestheticism was adopted in France by Baudelaire, Flaubert, and the \*Symbolists, and in England by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and several poets of the 1890s, under the slogan *l'art pour l'art* ('art for art's sake'). Wilde and other devotees of pure beauty—like the artists Whistler and Beardsley—were sometimes known as *aesthetes*. *See also* decadence, *fin de siècle*.

**aesthetics** (*US esthetics*), philosophical investigation into the nature of beauty and the perception of beauty, especially in the arts; the theory of art or of artistic taste. *Adjective*: *aesthetic* or *esthetic*.

**affective**, pertaining to emotional effects or dispositions (known in psychology as 'affects'). Affective criticism or **affectivism** evaluates literary works in terms of the feelings they arouse in audiences or readers (*see e.g.* catharsis). It was condemned in an important essay by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley (in *The Verbal Icon*, 1954) as the **affective fallacy**, since in the view of these \*New Critics such affective evaluation confused the literary work's objective qualities with its subjective results. The American critic Stanley Fish has given the name **affective stylistics** to his form of \*reader-response criticism. *See also* intentional fallacy.

**afflatus**, a Latin term for poetic inspiration.

**agitprop** [aj-it-prop], a Russian abbreviation of 'agitation and propaganda', applied to the campaign of cultural and political propaganda mounted in the years after the 1917 revolution. The term is sometimes applied to the simple form of \*didactic drama which the campaign employed, and which influenced the \*epic theatre of Piscator and Brecht in Germany.

**agon** [a-gohn] (plural **agones** [ā-goh-niz]), the contest or dispute between two characters which forms a major part of the action in the Greek \*Old Comedy of Aristophanes, e.g. the debate between Aeschylus and Euripides in his play *The Frogs* (405 BC). The term is sometimes extended to formal debates in Greek tragedies. *Adjective*: **agonistic**.

**alba**, *see* aubade.

## Alcaics

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**Alcaics**, a Greek verse form using a four-line \*stanza in which the first two lines have eleven syllables each, the third nine, and the fourth ten. The \*metre, predominantly \*dactylic, was used frequently by the Roman poet Horace, and later by some Italian and German poets, but its \*quantitative basis makes it difficult to adapt into English—although Tennyson and Clough attempted English Alcaics, and Peter Reading has experimented with the form in *Ukelele Music* (1985) and other works.

**aleatory** [ayl-eer-tri] or **aleatoric**, dependent upon chance. Aleatory writing involves an element of randomness either in composition, as in \*automatic writing and the \*cut-up, or in the reader's selection and ordering of written fragments, as in B. S. Johnson's novel *The Unfortunates* (1969), a box of loose leaves which the reader could shuffle at will.

**Alexandrianism**, the works and styles of the Alexandrian school of Greek poets in the \*Hellenistic age (323 BC–31 BC), which included Callimachus, Apollonius Rhodius, and Theocritus. The Alexandrian style was marked by elaborate artificiality, obscure mythological \*allusion, and eroticism. It influenced Catullus and other Roman poets.

**alexandrine**, a verse line of twelve syllables adopted by poets since the 16th century as the standard verse-form of French poetry, especially dramatic and narrative. It was first used in 12th-century \**chansons de geste*, and probably takes its name from its use in Lambert le Tort's *Roman d'Alexandre* (c.1200). The division of the line into two groups of six syllables, divided by a \*caesura, was established in the age of Racine, but later challenged by Victor Hugo and other 19th-century poets, who preferred three groups of four. The English alexandrine is an iambic \*hexameter (and thus has six stresses, whereas the French line usually has four), and is found rarely except as the final line in the \*Spenserian stanza, as in Keats's 'The Eve of St Agnes':

She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

**alienation effect** or **A-effect**, the usual English translation of the German *Verfremdungseffekt* or *V-effekt*, a major principle of Bertolt Brecht's theory of \*epic theatre. It is a dramatic effect aimed at encouraging an attitude of critical detachment in the audience, rather than a passive submission to realistic illusion; and achieved by a variety of means, from allowing the audience to smoke and drink to interrupting the play's action with songs, sudden scene changes, and switches of role. Actors are also encouraged to distance themselves from their characters rather than identify with them; ironic commentary by a narrator adds to this 'estrangement'. By reminding the audience of the performance's artificial nature, Brecht hoped to stimulate a rational

view of history as a changeable human creation rather than as a fated process to be accepted passively. Despite this theory, audiences still identify emotionally with the characters in *Mother Courage* (1941) and Brecht's other plays. The theory was derived partly from the \*Russian Formalists' concept of \*defamiliarization.

**allegory**, a story or visual image with a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning. The principal technique of allegory is \*personification, whereby abstract qualities are given human shape—as in public statues of Liberty or Justice. An allegory may be conceived as a \*metaphor that is extended into a structured system. In written narrative, allegory involves a continuous parallel between two (or more) levels of meaning in a story, so that its persons and events correspond to their equivalents in a system of ideas or a chain of events external to the tale: each character and episode in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), for example, embodies an idea within a pre-existing Puritan doctrine of salvation. Allegorical thinking permeated the Christian literature of the Middle Ages, flourishing in the \*morality plays and in the \*dream visions of Dante and Langland. Some later allegorists like Dryden and Orwell used allegory as a method of \*satire; their hidden meanings are political rather than religious. In the medieval discipline of biblical \*exegesis, allegory became an important method of interpretation, a habit of seeking correspondences between different realms of meaning (e.g. physical and spiritual) or between the Old Testament and the New (see typology). It can be argued that modern critical interpretation continues this allegorizing tradition. See also anagogical, emblem, exemplum, fable, parable, psychomachy, symbol.

**alliteration** (also known as 'head rhyme' or 'initial rhyme'), the repetition of the same sounds—usually initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables—in any sequence of neighbouring words: 'Land-scape-lover, lord of language' (Tennyson). Now an optional and incidental decorative effect in verse or prose, it was once a required element in the poetry of Germanic languages (including Old English and Old Norse) and in Celtic verse (where alliterated sounds could regularly be placed in positions other than the beginning of a word or syllable). Such poetry, in which alliteration rather than \*rhyme is the chief principle of repetition, is known as **alliterative verse**; its rules also allow a vowel sound to **alliterate** with any other vowel. See also alliterative metre, alliterative revival, assonance, consonance.

**alliterative metre**, the distinctive verse form of Old Germanic poetry, including Old English. It employed a long line divided by a \*caesura into two balanced half-lines, each with a given number of stressed syllables (usually two) and a variable number of unstressed syllables.

## alliterative revival

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These half-lines are linked by \*alliteration between both (sometimes one) of the stressed syllables in the first half and the first (and sometimes the second) stressed syllable in the second half. In Old English, the lines were normally unrhymed and not organized in \*stanzas, although some works of the later Middle English \*alliterative revival used both stanzaic patterns and rhyme. This \*metre was the standard form of verse in English until the 11th century, and was still important in the 14th, but declined under the influence of French \*syllabic verse. W. H. Auden revived its use in *The Age of Anxiety* (1948). These lines from the 14th-century poem *Piers Plowman* illustrate the alliterative metre:

Al for love of oure Lord livede wel straite.  
In hope for to have hevene-riche blisse.

*See also* accentual verse.

**alliterative revival**, a term covering the group of late 14th-century English poems written in an \*alliterative metre similar to that of Old English verse but less regular (notably in Langland's *Piers Plowman*) and sometimes—as in the anonymous *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—using rhyme and elaborate \*stanza structure. This group may represent more a continuation than a revival of the alliterative tradition.

**allusion**, an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader's familiarity with what is thus mentioned. The technique of allusion is an economical means of calling upon the history or the literary tradition that author and reader are assumed to share, although some poets (notably Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot) allude to areas of quite specialized knowledge. In his poem 'The Statues'—

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side  
What stalked through the Post Office?

—W. B. Yeats **alludes** both to the hero of Celtic legend (Cuchulain) and to the new historical hero (Patrick Pearse) of the 1916 Easter Rising, in which the revolutionaries captured the Dublin Post Office. In addition to such *topical* allusions to recent events, Yeats often uses *personal* allusions to aspects of his own life and circle of friends. Other kinds of allusion include the *imitative* (as in \*parody), and the *structural*, in which one work reminds us of the structure of another (as Joyce's *Ulysses* refers to Homer's *Odyssey*). Topical allusion is especially important in \*satire. *Adjective*: **allusive**.

**ambiguity**, openness to different interpretations; or an instance in which some use of language may be understood in diverse ways. Sometimes known as 'plurisignation' or 'multiple meaning', ambiguity became a



central concept in the interpretation of poetry after William Empson, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), defended it as a source of poetic richness rather than a fault of imprecision. Ambiguities in everyday speech are usually resolved by their context, but isolated statements ('they are hunting dogs') or very compressed phrases like book titles (*Scouting for Boys*) and newspaper headlines (GENERALS FLY BACK TO FRONT) can remain ambiguous. The verbal compression and uncertain context of much poetry often produce ambiguity: in the first line of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,

'still' may mean 'even yet' or 'immobile', or both. The simplest kind of ambiguity is achieved by the use of \*homophones in the \*pun. On a larger scale, a character (e.g. Hamlet, notoriously) or an entire story may display ambiguity. See also *double entendre*, *equivoque*, *multi-accentuality*, *polysemy*.

**American Renaissance**, the name sometimes given to a flourishing of distinctively American literature in the period before the Civil War. As described by F. O. Matthiessen in his influential critical work *American Renaissance* (1941), this renaissance is represented by the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, H. D. Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. Its major works are Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855). The American Renaissance may be regarded as a delayed manifestation of \*Romanticism, especially in Emerson's philosophy of \*Transcendentalism.

**amoebean verses** [a-mē-bee-än], a poetic form in which two characters chant alternate lines, \*couplets, or \*stanzas, in competition or debate with one another. This form is found in the \*pastoral poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, and was imitated by Spenser in his *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579); it is similar to the \**débat*, and sometimes resembles \**stichomythia*. See also *flying*.

**amphibrach** [am-fib-rak], a metrical \*foot consisting of one stressed syllable between two unstressed syllables, as in the word 'confession' (or, in \*quantitative verse, one long syllable between two shorts). It is the opposite of the \*amphimacer. It was rarely used in classical verse, but may occur in English in combination with other feet.

**amphimacer** [am-fim-äsē], a Greek metrical \*foot, also known as the cretic foot. The opposite of the \*amphibrach, it has one short syllable between two long ones (thus in English verse, one unstressed syllable between two stressed, as in the phrase 'bowing down'). Sometimes used in Roman comedy, it occurs rarely in English verse. Blake's 'Spring' is an example:

Sound the flute! / Now it's mute: / Birds delight / Day and night.