



English and American literatures are among the most important components of world literature. With their unique styles, the novels, poems, poetry and other literary forms enrich the literature. For years the English and American literature has been taught in many colleges and universities, but students have difficulty in its further learning, especially the literary terms. For the better understanding of literature, we have this edition *A Brief Glossary of English and American Literary terms* and hope it would be of some help for college English majors.

赵典书 陶凤霞 编

# 英美文学学术语精编

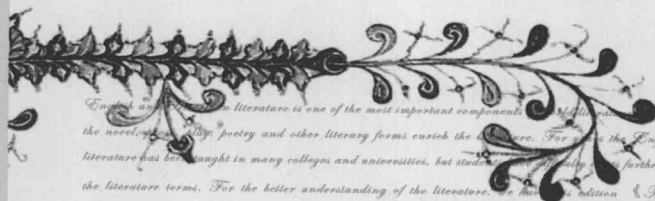


*A Brief Glossary of English*

*and American Literary Terms*



敦煌文艺出版社



English and American literature is one of the most important components of the liberal arts. With their unique style, the novel, drama, poetry and other literary forms enrich the culture. For years, the English and American literature has been taught in many colleges and universities, but students need further learning, especially the literature terms. For the better understanding of the literature, the second edition of *A Brief Glossary of English and American Literary Terms* and hope it would be of some help for college English majors.

赵典书 闫凤霞 编

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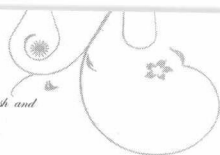
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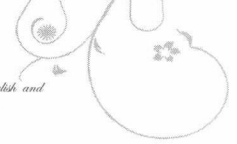


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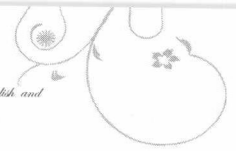


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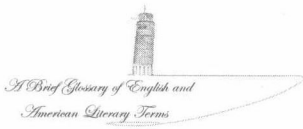


**Act and Scene** *An act is a major division in the action of a play.* In England this division was introduced by Elizabethan dramatists, who imitated ancient Roman plays by structuring the action into five acts. Late in the nineteenth century a number of writers followed the example of Chekhov and Ibsen by constructing plays in four acts. In the present century the most common form for nonmusical dramas has been three acts.

Acts are often subdivided into *scenes*, which in modern plays usually consist of units of action in which there is no change of place or break in the continuity of time. (Some recent plays dispense with the division into acts and are structured as a sequence of scenes, or episodes) In the conventional theater with a proscenium arch that frames the front of the stage, the end of a scene is usually indicated by a dropped curtain or a dimming of the lights, and the end of an act by a dropped curtain and an intermission.

**Aestheticism, or the Aesthetic Movement** *It was a European phenomenon during the latter nineteenth century that had its chief headquarters in France.* In opposition to the dominance of scientific thinking, and in defiance of the widespread indifference or hostility of the middle-class society of their time to any art that was not useful or did not teach moral values, French writers developed the view that a work of art is the supreme value among human products precisely because it is self-sufficient and had no use or moral aim outside its own being. The end of a work of art is simply to exist in its formal perfection; that is, to be beautiful and to be contemplated as an end in itself. A rallying cry of Aestheticism became the phrase “I’art pour I’art”—*art for art’s sake*.

**Affective Fallacy** In an essay published in 1946, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley defined *the affective fallacy as the error of evaluating a poem by its effect—especially its emotional effects—upon the reader.* As a result of this fallacy “the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear,” so that the criticism “ends in impressionism and relativism.” The two critics wrote in direct reaction to the view of I.A. Richards, in his influential *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1923), that the value of a poem can be measured by the psychological responses it incited in its readers. Beardsley has



since modified the earlier claim by the admission that "it does not appear that critical evaluation can be done at all except in relation to certain types of elect that aesthetic objects have upon their perceivers." So modified, the doctrine becomes a claim for objective criticism, in which the critic, instead of describing the effects of a work, focuses on the features, devices, and form of the work by which such effects are achieved . An extreme reaction against the doctrine of the affective fallacy was manifested during the 1970s in the development of reader-response criticism.

**Alexandrine:** an iambic hexameter line ---that is, a poetic stanza is an alexandrine. The following alexandrine is from a stanza of John Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes":

She sighed for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

**Allegory:** *A tale in verse or prose in which characters, actions, or settings represent abstract ideas or moral qualities.* Thus, an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal in English and a symbolic meaning. The most famous allegory in English literature is John Bunyan's *The pilgrim's progress*. Bunyan's hero, Christian, makes a journey to the Celestial City, during which he meets such characters as Hope, Shame, and Despair.

We can distinguish two main types: (1) Historical and political allegory, in which the characters and actions that are signified literally in their turn represent, or “allegorize” historical personages and events. (2) The allegory of ideas, in which the literal characters represent concepts and the plot allegorizes an abstract doctrine or thesis. Both types of allegory may either be sustained throughout a work, as in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, or else serve merely as an episode in a nonallegorical work.

In the second type, the sustained allegory of ideas, the central device is the personification of abstract entities such as virtues, vices, states of mind, modes of life, and types of character.



*clusters, in a group of words.* Sometimes the term is limited occurs at then beginning of words, it is called initial alliteration; when it occurs within words, it is called internal or hidden alliteration. It usually occurs on stressed syllables.

Although alliteration sometimes appears in prose, it is mainly a poetic device. Like other forms of sound repetition, alliteration in poetry serves two important purposes; it is pleasing to the ear, and it emphasizes the words in which it occurs. A well-known example of alliteration is this line from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan": "Five miles meandering with a mazy motion."

Alliteration is an important poetic device in Anglo-Saxon poetry where it generally occurs on three of the four stressed syllables in a line. Something of the alliterative effect can be seen in this line from *Beowulf*: "And the heathen's' only hope, Hell."

Various other repetition of speech sounds are identified by special terms:

**Consonance** is the repetition of a sequence of two or more consonants, but with a change in the intervening vowel: live-love, lean-alone, pitter-patter. W. H. Auden's poem of the 1930s, "'O where are you going?' said reader to rider," makes prominent use of this device; the last stanza reads:

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

**Assonance** is the repetition of identical or similar vowels—especially in stressed syllables—in a sequence of nearby words. Note the recurrent long i in the opening lines of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn: (1820):

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou foster child of silence and slow time.....

**Allusion:** *A reference to a person, a place, an event, or a literary work that a writer expects the reader to recognize and respond to.* An allusion may be drawn

from history, geography, literature, or religion. In Act One of *Macbeth* Ross praises Macbeth's valor and skill in battle by referring to him as "Bellona's bridegroom." In Roman mythology Bellona was the goddess of war.

The title of Elizabeth Bowen's story "*Tears, Idle Tears*" alludes to a poem of the same title by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Since allusions are not explicitly identified, they imply a fund of knowledge that is shared by an author and the audience for whom the author writes. Most literary allusions are intended to be recognized by the generally educated readers of the author's time, but some are aimed at a special coterie. For example, in *Astrophel and Stella*, the Elizabethan sonnet sequence, Sir Philip Sidney's punning allusions to Lord Robert Rich, who had married the Stella of the sonnets, were identified only by intimates of the people concerned. Some modern authors, including Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, include allusions that are very specialized, or else drawn from the author's private reading and experience, in the awareness that few if any readers will recognize them prior to the detective work of scholarly annotators.

**Ambiguity** In ordinary usage "ambiguity" is applied to a fault in style; that is, the use of a vague or equivocal expression when what is wanted is precision and particularity of reference. Since William Empson published *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), however, the term has been widely used in criticism to identify a deliberate poetic device: *the use of a single word or expression to signify two or more distinct references, or to express two or more diverse attitudes or feelings*. Multiple meaning and plurisignation are alternative terms association with the word "ambiguity."

**American Puritanism** *Puritanism is the practices and beliefs of the Puritans.* The Puritans were originally members of a division of the Protestant Church, who came into existence in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I. The first settlers who became the founding fathers of the American nation were quite a few of them Puritans. They came to America out of various reasons, but it should be remembered that they were a group of serious, religious people, advocating highly religious and moral principles. As the word itself hints, Puritans wanted to purify their religious beliefs and practices. They felt that the



Church of England was too close to the Church of Rome in doctrine form of worship, and organization of authority. The American Puritans, like their brothers back in England, were idealists, believing that the church should be restored to complete "purity". They accepted the doctrine of predestination, original sin and total depravity, and limited atonement through a special infusion of grace from God. But in the grim struggle for survival that followed immediately after their arrival in America, they became more and more practical, as indeed they had to be. Puritan's lives were extremely disciplined and hard. They drove out of their settlements all those opinions that seemed dangerous to them, and history has criticized their actions. Yet in the persecution of what they considered error, the Puritans were no worse than many other movements in history. As a culture heritage, Puritanism did have a profound influence on the early American mind. American Puritanism also had a enduring influence on American literature. It had become, to some extent, so much a state of mind, so much a part of the national cultural atmosphere, rather than a set of tenets.

**American Romanticism** *The Romantic Period covers the first half of the nineteenth century. A rising America with ideals of democracy and equality, its industrialization, its westward expansion, and a variety of foreign influences such as Sir Walter Scott were among the important factors which made literary expansion and expression not only possible but also inevitable in the period immediately following the nation's political independence. Yet, romantics frequently shared certain general characteristics: moral enthusiasm, faith in value of individualism and intuitive perception, and a presumption that the natural world was a source of goodness and man's societies a source of corruption. Romantic values were prominent in American politics, art, and philosophy until the Civil War. The romantic exaltation of the individual suited the nation's revolutionary heritage and its frontier egalitarianism.*

Irving deserves credit for the part he played in inspiring the American romantic imagination. His fascinating *The Sketch Book* with two of his most famous stories, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* will be placed at the top of any reading list for course on American literature. The importance of the frontier and the wilderness in American literature is for the first time well –

illustrated in Cooper's Leather-stocking Tales and was to remain a major concern for many later authors.

American Romanticism culminated around the 1840s in what has come to be known as "New England Transcendentalism" or "American Renaissance". One of the major literary figures in this period is Emerson. Emerson's Nature has been called "the manifesto of American Transcendentalism". Thoreau, the writer of Walden was a faithful follower of Emerson.

**American Transcendentalism** *American Transcendentalism or "New England transcendentalism" or "American Renaissance" is more of a tendency, an attitude, than the philosophy of Transcendentalists.* To "transcend" something is to rise above it, to pass beyond its limits. Transcendentalists took their ideas from the romantic literature of Europe, from new-Platoism, from German idealistic philosophy, and from the revelations of Oriental-mysticism. They spoke for cultural rejuvenation and against the materialism of American society. The major features of New England Transcendentalism can be summarized as the follows.

Firstly, the transcendentalists placed emphasis on spirit, or the Oversoul, as the most important thing in the Universe.

Secondly, they stressed the importance of the individual. To them, the individual was the most important element of society.

Thirdly, they offered a fresh perception of nature as symbolic of the Spirit or God. Nature was, to them, alive, filled with God's overwhelming presence. Transcendentalism is based on the belief that the most fundamental truths about life and death can be reached only by going beyond the world of the senses.

As a philosophical and literary movement, Transcendentalism flourished in New England from 1830s to the Civil War. Its doctrines found their greatest literary advocates in Emerson and Thoreau. Emerson's Nature has been called the "Manifesto of American Transcendentalism" and his The American Scholar has been rightly regarded as America's "Declaration of Intellectual Independence". Thoreau built and went to live in a small cottage on Walden Pond for a little over two years, and then came back to write about his experience there in his famous book Walden. To later generations, scarred by the horrors of the Civil