EIGHTH EDITION

A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

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A GLOSSARY
of
LITERARY TERMS

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PREFACE

This book defines and discusses terms, critical theories and movements, and points of view that are commonly used to classify, analyze, interpret, and write the history of works of literature. The individual entries, together with the guides to further reading included in most of them, are oriented especially toward undergraduate students of English, American, and other literatures. Over the decades, however, the book has proved to be a useful and popular work of reference for advanced students, as well as for the general reader with literary interests.

A *Glossary of Literary Terms* consists of succinct essays in the alphabetic order of the title word or phrase. Terms that are related but subsidiary, or that designate subclasses, are treated under the title heading of the primary or generic term; also, words that are often used in conjunction or as mutually defining contraries (*distance and involvement, empathy and sympathy, narrative and narratology*) are discussed in the same entry. The alternative organization of a literary handbook as a dictionary of terms, defined singly, makes dull reading and requires excessive repetition and cross-indexing; it may also be misleading, because the use and application of many terms become clear only in the context of other concepts to which they are related, subordinated, or opposed. The essay form makes it feasible to supplement the definition of a term with indications of its changes in meaning over time and of its diversity of meanings in current usage, in order to help readers to steer their way through the shifting references and submerged ambiguities of its diverse applications. In addition, the discursive way of treating more or less technical terms provides an opportunity to write entries that are pleasant as well as informative to read. In each entry, **boldface** indicates terms for which the entry provides the principal discussion, and *italics* identify terms that occur in the entry but are discussed more fully elsewhere in the *Glossary*. The *Index of Terms* lists the page numbers of both the principal discussion and the subsidiary uses of each term.

The purpose of this new edition is to keep the entries current with the incessant changes in the literary and critical scene, to take into account new publications in literature, criticism, and scholarship, and to take advantage of suggestions for improvements and additions, some of them solicited by the publisher and others volunteered by users of the *Glossary*. All the entries have, to a lesser or greater extent, been rewritten in order to improve their precision and clarity, and to bring them up to date in their substance, their references and examples, and their lists of suggested readings. Books originally published in languages other than English are listed in their English translations.

Mainly in response to requests by a number of users of the *Glossary*, some forty new terms have been added; notable among them are: *aesthetics, aesthetic ideology, anaphora, Bloomsbury Group, critique, ecocriticism, gender criticism, hypertext, literature, nature writing, performance poetry, proletarian novel, rap, rime riche, topographical poetry*.

How to Use the *Glossary*

There are two indexes in this *Glossary*. The first is an *Index of Authors*, which lists all the significant references to or discussions of an author and his or her writings. This is followed, at the end of the volume, by an *Index of Terms*; to make it easy to find, the outer edges of this *Index* are colored black.

To locate the exposition in the *Glossary* of a literary term or phrase, always look it up in the *Index of Terms*. Although the entries are listed in the alphabetic order of their title-terms, the greater number of terms are defined and discussed within the texts of these primary entries, and must be located by referring to the *Index*. In it, readers will find, in **boldface**, the page number of the principal discussion of the term; this is followed by the page numbers, in *italics*, of the occurrences of the term in other entries which clarify its meaning and illustrate its functioning in critical usage. (Note that the term referred to by a secondary, italicized reference may be a modified form of the index term; the forms "parodies" and "parodic," for example, are referred to the entry on "parody.") Those terms, mainly of foreign origin, that are most likely to be mispronounced by a student are followed by simplified guides to pronunciation; the key to these guides is on the first page of the *Index of Terms*.

Some of the more inclusive items in the *Index* are supplemented by a list of closely related terms. These references expedite for the student the fuller exploration of a topic, and also make it easier for a teacher to locate entries that serve the needs of a particular subject of study. For example, supplementary references identify the entries that describe the particular types and movements of literary *criticism*, the terms most relevant to the analysis of *style*, entries that define and exemplify the various *genres* of literature, and the many entries that deal with the forms, component features, history, and critical treatments of the *drama, lyric,* and *novel*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This edition, like preceding ones, has profited greatly from the suggestions of teachers, and students as well, who proposed changes and additions that would enhance the usefulness of the *Glossary* to the broad range of courses in American, English, and other literatures. I welcome this opportunity to thank Evan Radcliffe, a former student now Professor of English at Villanova University, for his searching comments on almost every entry; his acute and knowledgeable proposals have led to many improvements in substance, phrasing, and references. My colleague at Cornell, James Eli Adams, helped me to deal with the complex and contested field of *gender criticism*. Michelle Berry, Dianne Ferriss, and Ken McClane guided me through the arcane details of the performance of rap poetry. The following teachers, at the request of the publisher, made many useful proposals for improving the *Glossary*:

> Victoria Aarons, *Trinity University*
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> Camille Roman, *Washington State University*
> Margaret Russett, *University of Southern California*

And I am happy to announce the assistance in this edition of Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Director of the National Humanities Center, North Carolina; he has brought his extensive knowledge of literary criticism and theory to bear on many of the entries, old and new, and will play an increasing role in future revisions of the *Glossary*.

Dianne Ferriss, who also worked on earlier editions, has been an indispensable assistant in preparing, correcting, and recording the text of this edition. Michael Rosenberg, Publisher at Thomson Higher Education, has continued his enthusiastic encouragement of the revisions of the *Glossary*; and Camille Adkins, Development Editor; Michael Burggren, Editorial Production Manager; and Sharon Grant, Project Manager and Editor, have ably supervised my work on the present edition. All these advisers, friends, and co-workers have

helped me approach the goal I announced in the original edition: to write the kind of handbook that would have been most valuable when, as an undergraduate, I was an eager but often bewildered student of literature and literary criticism.

A NOTE TO THE READER

To find a word or phrase, always look it up in the *Index of Terms* at the end of this volume; the outer edges of this *Index* are shaded black. Although the entries in the *Glossary* are in the alphabetic order of their title terms, the larger number of terms are discussed within these entries, and the page numbers of these discussions must be located by referring to the *Index*. The initial page of this *Index* lists the typographical cues to primary and secondary page references, and also to the pronunciation of many of the terms.

Preceding the *Index of Terms* is the *Index of Authors*. Reference to this resource will guide the reader to the commentaries in the text about the relevant works of many poets, dramatists, and novelists, literary theorists and critics, and philosophers of language and literature.

CONTENTS

LITERARY TERMS

Absurd, Literature of the. The term is applied to a number of works in drama
and prose fiction which have in common the sense that the human condition
is essentially absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only
in works of literature that are themselves absurd. Both the mood and drama-
turgy of absurdity were anticipated as early as 1896 in Alfred Jarry's French
play *Ubu roi* (*Ubu the King*). The literature has its roots also in the movements
of *expressionism* and *surrealism*, as well as in the fiction, written in the 1920s,
of Franz Kafka (*The Trial, Metamorphosis*). The current movement, however,
emerged in France after the horrors of World War II (1939–45) as a rebellion
against essential beliefs and values in traditional culture and literature. This tra-
dition had included the assumptions that human beings are fairly rational crea-
tures who live in an at least partially intelligible universe, that they are part of
an ordered social structure, and that they may be capable of heroism and dig-
nity even in defeat. After the 1940s, however, there was a widespread tendency,
especially prominent in the *existential philosophy* of men of letters such as Jean-
Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, to view a human being as an isolated existent
who is cast into an alien universe; to conceive the human world as possessing
no inherent truth, value, or meaning; and to represent human life—in its fruit-
less search for purpose and significance, as it moves from the nothingness
whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end—as an existence
which is both anguished and absurd. As Camus said in *The Myth of Sisyphus*
(1942),

> In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger.
> His is an irremediable exile. . . . This divorce between man and his life, the actor
> and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

Or as Eugène Ionesco, French author of *The Bald Soprano* (1949), *The Lesson*
(1951), and other plays in the **theater of the absurd**, has put it: "Cut off
from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his
actions become senseless, absurd, useless." Ionesco also said, in commenting
on the mixture of moods in the literature of the absurd: "People drowning in
meaninglessness can only be grotesque, their sufferings can only appear tragic
by derision."

Samuel Beckett (1906–89), the most eminent and influential writer in this
mode, both in drama and in prose fiction, was an Irishman living in Paris who
often wrote in French and then translated his works into English. His plays, such
as *Waiting for Godot* (1954) and *Endgame* (1958), project the irrationalism,

helplessness, and absurdity of life in dramatic forms that reject realistic settings, logical reasoning, or a coherently evolving plot. *Waiting for Godot* presents two tramps in a waste place, fruitlessly and all but hopelessly waiting for an unidentified person, Godot, who may or may not exist and with whom they sometimes think they remember that they may have an appointment; as one of them remarks, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful." Like most works in this mode, the play is absurd in the double sense that it is grotesquely comic and also irrational and nonconsequential; it is a parody not only of the traditional assumptions of Western culture, but of the conventions and generic forms of traditional drama, and even of its own inescapable participation in the dramatic medium. The lucid but eddying and pointless dialogue is often funny, and pratfalls and other modes of slapstick are used to give a comic cast to the alienation and tragic anguish of human existence. Beckett's prose fiction, such as *Malone Dies* (1958) and *The Unnamable* (1960), presents an *antihero* who plays out the absurd moves of the end game of civilization in a nonwork which tends to undermine the coherence of its medium, language itself. But typically Beckett's characters carry on, even if in a life without purpose, trying to make sense of the senseless and to communicate the uncommunicable.

Another French playwright of the absurd was Jean Genet (who combined absurdism and diabolism); some of the early dramatic works of the Englishman Harold Pinter and the American Edward Albee are written in a similar mode. The early plays of Tom Stoppard, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) and *Travesties* (1974), exploit the devices of absurdist theater more for comic than philosophical ends. There are also affinities with this movement in the numerous recent works which exploit **black comedy** or **black humor**: baleful, naive, or inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world play out their roles in what Ionesco called a "tragic farce," in which the events are often simultaneously comic, horrifying, and absurd. Examples are Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), Thomas Pynchon's *V* (1963), John Irving's *The World According to Garp* (1978), and some of the novels by the German Günter Grass and the Americans Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and John Barth. Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) is an example of black comedy in the cinema. More recently, some playwrights living in totalitarian regimes used absurdist techniques to register social and political protest. See, for example, *Largo Desolato* (1987) by the Czech Vaclav Havel and *The Island* (1973), a collaboration by the South African writers Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona.

See *wit, humor, and the comic*, and refer to: Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (rev., 1968); David Grossvogel, *The Blasphemers: The Theatre of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet* (1965); Arnold P. Hinchliffe, *The Absurd* (1969); Max F. Schultz, *Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties* (1980); and Enoch Brater and Ruby Cohn, eds., *Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Postmodern Drama* (1990).

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 construct-ing plays in four acts. In the twentieth century the most common form for tra-ditional 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 conti-nuity 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.

Aesthetic ideology was a term applied by the *deconstructive* theorist Paul de Man, in his later writings, to describe the "seductive" appeal of *aesthetic* experience, in which he claimed, form and meaning, perception and understanding, and cognition and desire are misleadingly, and sometimes dangerously, conflated. Such a conflation, he held, is manifested in some formulations of Nazi politics as an artful remaking of the state. In de Man's view, the concept of the aes-thetic came to stand for all *organicist* approaches not only to art, but to pol-itics and culture as well. The experience of literature, he argued, minimizes the temptation of aesthetic ideology to confuse sensory experience with under-standing, since literature represents the world in such a way that neither mean-ing nor sense-experience is directly perceptible. (See Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, 1996.)

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), the *Marxist* theorist Terry Eagleton presented a history and critique of "the aesthetic," noting the many "ideolog-ical" perversions and distortions of the concept. Originally articulated in terms of freedom and pleasure, and therefore possessing an "emancipatory" potential for humankind, the aesthetic has often been appropriated by the political right so as to represent the essence of a reactionary ideology, which works most ef-ficiently when it seems not to be working at all. (See *ideology* under *Marxist criticism*, and for essays on this subject, refer to George Levine, ed., *Aesthetics and Ideology*, 1994.)

Aestheticism. In his Latin treatise entitled *Aesthetica* (1750), the German philoso-pher Alexander Baumgarten applied the term "aesthetica" to the arts, of which "the aesthetic end is the perfection of sensuous cognition, as such; this is beauty." In present usage, **aesthetics** (from the Greek, "pertaining to sense per-ception") designates the systematic study of all the fine arts, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial.

Aestheticism, or alternatively the **aesthetic movement**, was a European phe-nomenon during the latter part of the 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 has 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 "l'art pour l'art"—**art for art's sake**.

The historical roots of Aestheticism are in the views proposed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), that the "pure" aesthetic experience consists of a "disinterested" contemplation of an object that "pleases for its own sake," without reference to reality or to the "external" ends of utility or morality. As a self-conscious movement, however, French Aestheticism is often said to date from Théophile Gautier's witty defense of his assertion that art is useless (preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 1835). Aestheticism was developed by Baudelaire, who was greatly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's claim (in "The Poetic Principle," 1850) that the supreme work is a "poem *per se*," a "poem written solely for the poem's sake"; it was later taken up by Flaubert, Mallarmé, and many other writers. In its extreme form, the aesthetic doctrine of art for art's sake veered into the moral and quasi-religious doctrine of life for art's sake, with the artist represented as a priest who renounces the practical concerns of worldly existence in the service of what Flaubert and others called "the religion of beauty."

The views of French Aestheticism were introduced into Victorian England by Walter Pater, with his emphasis on high artifice and stylistic subtlety, his recommendation to crowd one's life with exquisite sensations, and his advocacy of the supreme value of beauty and of "the love of art for its own sake." (See his Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, 1873.) The artistic and moral views of Aestheticism were also expressed by Algernon Charles Swinburne and by English writers of the 1890s such as Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Lionel Johnson, as well as by the artists J. M. Whistler and Aubrey Beardsley. The influence of ideas stressed in Aestheticism—especially the view of the "autonomy" (self-sufficiency) of a work of art, the emphasis on craft and artistry, and the concept of a poem or novel as an end in itself, or as invested with "intrinsic" values—has been important in the writings of prominent twentieth-century authors such as W. B. Yeats, T. E. Hulme, and T. S. Eliot, as well as in the literary theory of the *New Critics*.

For related developments, see *decadence* and *ivory tower*. Refer to: William Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (1945, reprinted 1975); Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (1957); Enid Starkie, *From Gautier to Eliot* (1960); R. V. Johnson, *Aestheticism* (1969). For the intellectual and social conditions during the eighteenth century that fostered the theory, derived from theology, that a work of art is an end in itself, see M. H. Abrams, "Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics," in *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory* (1989). Useful collections of writings in the Aesthetic Movement are Ian Small, ed., *The Aesthetes: A Sourcebook* (1979), and Eric Warner and Graham Hough, eds., *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1848–1910* (2 vols., 1983); Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900* (2000). A useful descriptive guide to books on the subject is Linda C. Dowling, *Aestheticism and Decadence: A Selective Annotated Bibliography* (1977). For recent debates over the status of the aesthetic, see George Levine, ed., *Aesthetics and Ideology*

(1994). Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (2000) is a useful collection of historical and descriptive essays on the aesthetic.

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 effects—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 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 incites in its readers. Beardsley later 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 effect that aesthetic objects have upon their perceivers." So altered, 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*.

   Refer to: Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," reprinted in W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (1954); and Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958), p. 491 and chapter 11. See also Wimsatt and Beardsley's related concept of the *intentional fallacy*.

Alienation Effect. In his *epic theater* of the 1920s and later, the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht adapted the *Russian formalist* concept of "defamiliarization" into what he called the "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*). The German term is also translated as **estrangement effect** or **distancing effect**; the last is closest to Brecht's notion, in that it avoids the negative connotations of jadedness, incapacity to feel, and social apathy that the word "alienation" has acquired in English. This effect, Brecht said, is used by the dramatist to make familiar aspects of the present social reality seem strange, so as to prevent the emotional identification or involvement of the audience with the characters and their actions in a play. His aim was instead to evoke a critical distance and attitude in the spectators, in order to arouse them to take action against, rather than simply to accept, the state of society and behavior represented on the stage.

   On Brecht, refer to *Marxist criticism*; for a related aesthetic concept, see *distance and involvement*.

Allegory. An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to communicate a second, correlated order of signification.

   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. So in John Dryden's

Absalom and Achitophel (1681), the biblical King David represents Charles II of England, Absalom represents his natural son the Duke of Monmouth, and the biblical story of Absalom's rebellion against his father (2 Samuel 13–18) allegorizes the rebellion of Monmouth against King Charles. (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 *Absalom and Achitophel* and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), or else serve merely as an episode in a nonallegorical work. A famed example of episodic allegory is the encounter of Satan with his daughter Sin, as well as with Death—who is represented allegorically as the son born of their incestuous relationship—in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book II (1667).

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. In explicit allegories, such reference is specified by the names given to characters and places. Thus Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* allegorizes the Christian doctrine of salvation by telling how the character named Christian, warned by Evangelist, flees the City of Destruction and makes his way laboriously to the Celestial City; enroute he encounters characters with names like Faithful, Hopeful, and the Giant Despair, and passes through places like the Slough of Despond, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and Vanity Fair. A passage from this work indicates the nature of an explicit allegorical narrative:

> Now as Christian was walking solitary by himself, he espied one afar off come crossing over the field to meet him; and their hap was to meet just as they were crossing the way of each other. The Gentleman's name was Mr. Worldly-Wiseman; he dwelt in the Town of Carnal-Policy, a very great Town, and also hard by from whence Christian came.

Works which are primarily nonallegorical may introduce **allegorical imagery** (the personification of abstract entities who perform a brief allegorical action) in short passages. Familiar instances are the opening lines of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1645). This device was exploited especially in the *poetic diction* of authors in the mid-eighteenth century. An example—so brief that it presents an allegoric tableau rather than an action—is the passage in Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751):

> Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
> Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Allegory is a narrative strategy which may be employed in any literary form or genre. The early sixteenth-century *Everyman* is an allegory in the form of a *morality play*. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a moral and religious allegory in a prose narrative; Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590–96) fuses moral, religious, historical, and political allegory in a verse *romance*; the third book of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the voyage to Laputa and Lagado (1726), is an allegorical *satire* directed mainly against philosophical and scientific pedantry; and William Collins' "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1747) is a *lyric*

poem which allegorizes a topic in literary criticism—the nature, sources, and power of the poet's creative imagination. John Keats makes a subtle use of allegory throughout his ode "To Autumn" (1820), most explicitly in the second stanza, which represents autumn personified as a female figure amid the scenes and activities of the harvest season.

Sustained allegory was a favorite form in the Middle Ages, when it produced masterpieces, especially in the verse-narrative mode of the *dream vision*, in which the narrator falls asleep and experiences an allegoric dream; this mode includes, in the fourteenth century, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the French *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer's *House of Fame*, and William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. But sustained allegory has been written in all literary periods and is the form of such major nineteenth-century dramas in verse as Goethe's *Faust, Part II*; Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*; and Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts*. In the twentieth century, the stories and novels of Franz Kafka can be considered instances of implicit allegory.

Allegory was on the whole devalued during the twentieth century, but has been reinvested with positive values by some recent theorists. The Marxist critic Fredric Jameson uses the term to signify the relation of a literary text to its historical subtext, its "political unconscious." (See Jameson, under *Marxist criticism*.) And Paul de Man elevates allegory, because it candidly manifests its artifice, over what he calls the more "mystified" concept of the *symbol*, which seems to promise, falsely, a unity of form and content, thought and expression. (See de Man, under *deconstruction*.)

A variety of literary *genres* may be classified as species of allegory in that they all narrate one coherent set of circumstances which are intended to signify a second order of correlated meanings:

A **fable** (also called an **apologue**) is a short narrative, in prose or verse, that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behavior; usually, at its conclusion, either the narrator or one of the characters states the moral in the form of an *epigram*. Most common is the **beast fable**, in which animals talk and act like the human types they represent. In the familiar fable of the fox and the grapes, the fox—after exerting all his wiles to get the grapes hanging beyond his reach, but in vain—concludes that they are probably sour anyway: the express moral is that human beings belittle what they cannot get. (The modern expression "sour grapes" derives from this fable.) The beast fable is a very ancient form that existed in Egypt, India, and Greece. The fables in Western cultures derive mainly from the stories that were, probably mistakenly, attributed to Aesop, a Greek slave of the sixth century B.C. In the seventeenth century a Frenchman, Jean de la Fontaine, wrote a set of witty fables in verse which are the classics of this literary kind. Chaucer's "The Nun's Priest's Tale," the story of the cock and the fox, is a beast fable. The American Joel Chandler Harris wrote many Uncle Remus stories that are beast fables, told in southern African-American dialect, whose origins have been traced to *folktales* in the oral literature of West Africa that feature a trickster like Uncle Remus' Brer Rabbit. (A **trickster** is a character in a story who persistently uses his wiliness, and gift of gab, to achieve his ends by outmaneuvering or outwitting other characters.) A counterpart in many Native American cultures are the beast fables that feature

Coyote as the central trickster. James Thurber's *Fables for Our Time* (1940) is a recent set of short fables; and in *Animal Farm* (1945) George Orwell expanded the beast fable into a sustained satire on Russian totalitarianism under Stalin in the mid-twentieth century.

A **parable** is a very short narrative about human beings presented so as to stress the tacit analogy, or parallel, with a general thesis or lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home to his audience. The parable was one of Jesus' favorite devices as a teacher; examples are His parables of the good Samaritan and of the prodigal son. Here is His terse parable of the fig tree, Luke 13:6–9:

> He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" And he answering said unto him, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bears fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

Recently Mark Turner, in a greatly extended use of the term, has used "parable" to signify any "projection of one story onto another," or onto many others, whether the projection is intentional or not. He proposes that, in this extended sense, parable is not merely a literary or *didactic* device, but "a basic cognitive principle" that comes into play in interpreting "every level of our experience" and that "shows up everywhere, from simple actions like telling time to complex literary creations like Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*." (Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind*, New York, 1996.)

An **exemplum** is a story told as a particular instance of the general theme in a religious sermon. The device was popular in the Middle Ages, when extensive collections of exempla, some historical and some legendary, were prepared for use by preachers. In Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale," the Pardoner, preaching on the theme "Greed is the root of all evil," incorporates as exemplum the tale of the three drunken revelers who set out to find and defy Death and find a heap of gold instead, only to find Death after all when they kill one another in the attempt to gain sole possession of the treasure. By extension the term "exemplum" is also applied to tales used in a formal, though nonreligious, exhortation. Thus Chaucer's Chanticleer, in "The Nun's Priest's Tale," borrows the preacher's technique in the ten exempla he tells in a vain effort to persuade his skeptical wife, Dame Pertelote the hen, that bad dreams forebode disaster. See G. R. Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England* (2nd ed., 1961, chapter 4).

Many **proverbs** (short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life) are allegorical in that the explicit statement is meant to have, by analogy or by extended reference, a general application: "a stitch in time saves nine"; "people in glass houses should not throw stones." Refer to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, ed. W. G. Smith and F. P. Wilson (1970).

See *didactic, symbol* (for the distinction between allegory and symbol), and (on the fourfold allegorical interpretation of the Bible) *interpretation: typological and allegorical*. On allegory in general, consult C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), chapter 2; Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory*