

Bedford Glossary Critical Literary Terms

ROSS MURFIN • SUPRYIA M. RAY

The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms

Second Edition

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The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms

Preface

The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms grows out of our work on the Bedford/St. Martin's *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* series, which presents classic literary works reprinted together with editorial material and critical essays designed to introduce college students to current literary theories, concepts, and terms. The success of this series and of our collaboration encouraged us to undertake this admittedly formidable project.

Although we have admired and learned from other available glossaries, we also concluded that they are not fully attuned to current developments in literary studies or to the needs of today's students. Accordingly, we set out to produce a glossary that would not only redefine old terms in a concise and accessible manner but also comprehensibly introduce the newest critical theories, approaches, and terminology. In the process, we sought to incorporate a wide variety of examples reflecting the diversity of the arts and the world itself. Furthermore, we saw the glossary as an opportunity to help students understand how "literariness" figures in their lives, not only in the classroom and in the books they read but also in all the "texts" that shape their experiences, including those of popular culture.

Notable Features of This Glossary

It defines more than 800 important terms. To establish the boundaries of the territory we would cover, we began by sifting through existing glossaries and identifying more than 500 traditional, indispensable terms, such as *irony*, *metaphor*, *romance*, *form*, and *narrative*. We then sought to define and describe these terms in a manner that readers would find clear and current, taking into account their changing inflections in modern critical discourse. (For example, we refer to deconstructive theorist Paul de Man's

view of irony as a figure of speech and suggest that the gender-reversal scene in Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* is an example of anagnorisis as currently understood.) We also reworked the discussions of critical terms that had previously appeared in the *Case Studies* series. Writing and rewriting, building on the suggestions of reviewers, we continued to add and define terms. Some of these additions were traditional terms, but most were new terms and concepts (for instance, *domesticity*, *jouissance*, *hyper-text*, *orientalism*, and *phallogentric*). The result was a glossary containing more than 700 entries. The second edition is even more comprehensive, defining more than 800 terms.

Its examples are drawn from both literature and popular culture. As we drafted our definitions, we searched for illustrative examples not only in canonical literature but also in contemporary literature, older literary works that have often been overlooked, and popular culture. We included hundreds of examples from major figures commonly cited in literary glossaries: Homer, Shakespeare, Swift, Dickinson, Joyce, and other classic writers. But we also looked to the work of numerous other writers who reflect the rich variety of literature. Accordingly, we reference previously marginalized writers such as Olaudah Equiano and Aphra Behn, as well as culturally diverse contemporary authors such as Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, Amy Tan, and Salman Rushdie.

Most distinctively, we have included examples from “nonliterary” forms and genres, including architecture, movies, music, television shows, newspaper columns, political speeches, and comic books. In our glossary, students will see literary strategies and devices at work in episodes of *Seinfeld*, *Far Side* cartoons, and political propaganda posters. Such pop culture examples acknowledge the recent theoretical blurring of the boundaries between “high” and “low” culture. They also invite those students who find literary studies formidable yet pride themselves on their familiarity with popular culture to discover that traditional literary concepts pervade all of our arts — and our lives. Similes and flashbacks are as common in the texts students know best as they are in literary works more traditionally defined.

It is designed to be a straightforward and handy reference. We aimed to produce a glossary that would be accessible and enjoyable. Accordingly, we endeavored to keep our definitions succinct and our examples lively. Entries are arranged alphabetically, from *absence* to *zeugma*. Cross-referenced terms appear in boldface within definitions, signaling that the boldfaced term has been defined separately in another entry. (For a more detailed explanation of technical matters — the use of boldface and italics, the meaning of the phrases *See* and *See also*, and how we handle dates and foreign language titles — turn to the section entitled “A Note on References and Cross-References,” p. xiii.) We have included an index of examples at the back of the book, in the event that a reader wants to see if and how the glossary makes use of a particular work.

New to This Edition

A new edition offers an invaluable opportunity to update and improve a book. There is nothing like the passage of time and a jury of peers—instructors and students who class-test a book and discover gaps and shortcomings—to alert authors to the need for revisions. A nationwide survey of instructors who assigned the first edition of the *Bedford Glossary* led us to make the following changes to the second edition.

Over 70 new terms are defined. Literary glossaries are almost infinitely expandable. No matter how comprehensive, every glossary omits some terms that are important or likely to become important. In the second edition of the *Bedford Glossary*, we have added definitions of many traditional terms, topics, and genres, such as *anachrony*, *folklore*, and *prolepsis*. In particular, we have tried to increase our attention both to classical rhetorical terms, such as *anaphora* and *paralipsis*, and to mass-market genre writing, such as *detective fiction* and *fantasy fiction*. We have also defined a number of contemporary critical terms that are often overlooked—such as *epistémé* and *heteroglossia*—and ventured introductions to emerging fields of critical study such as *disability studies* and *ecocriticism*.

Many more diverse and contemporary examples have been added. To appeal to today's students, we have increased the number of examples drawn from contemporary and world literature and from popular culture. Such examples range from Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible*, Stephen King's cyberfiction, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, and Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography to zen koans, proverbs from countries around the world, African American and Native American folk tales, and even urban legends.

Visual examples have been included. We have also—with a rhetorical nod to *Star Trek*, one of the world's most recognizable pop-culture franchises—boldly gone where no literary glossary has gone before by including visual examples that illustrate some of the principles discussed in the entries. For instance, we use a strip from Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* to show that allusions can be visual as well as verbal, and we include a *New Yorker* cover as an example of intertextuality. We often hear that images are displacing texts in the cognitive realm of students; with our visual examples, we try to suggest that text and image can be equally “literary.”

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Our initial thanks go to the colleagues and reviewers who helped shape the first edition of the glossary: Tom Arp, Sylvan Barnet, Susan Belasco, Shari Benstock, Patrick Brantlinger, William Cain, Russ Castronovo, the late Pascal Covici, Michael Demson, Vincenzo DeNardo, Paul Fry, Tom Goodman, David Hausman, Tracy Helenbrook, Paul Holdengräber, Carolyn Jeter, Steven Mailloux, J. Hillis Miller, Scott Moss, Audrey

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Where the preparation of the second edition is concerned, our major debt of gratitude is to Carolyn Jeter, who researched dozens of terms and produced working drafts of many new definitions. We are also indebted to Michael Demson and Steven Barney for their assistance in defining numerous rhetorical terms not included in the first edition; Rosemary Garland Thomson and H. Lewis Ulmann for help in defining *disability studies* and *ecocriticism*, respectively; Noelle Bowles, John Paul Riquelme, and Brian Buchwitz for their work on our definition of *fantasy fiction*; and John Paul Riquelme for his work on our definition of *postcolonial literature and postcolonial theory*. In addition, we wish to thank Rob Hampton for providing examples of *cliché* and *confessional poetry*; Dennis Foster for improving our definition of *epistémé*; John Chun for providing our example of *foot*; Jacques Lezra for providing our example of the term *overdetermined*; Richard Bozorth for critiquing our definition of *queer theory*; and Sarah Scofield for her assistance in researching a wide variety of points.

Thanks also go to the editorial staff at Bedford/St. Martin's: former president Charles H. Christensen, who signed the project; current president Joan E. Feinberg, who continues to believe in it; and executive editor Steve Scipione, for managing the development of both editions. We remain grateful to Pam Ozaroff for her work developing the first edition. We also thank those on the production end of the process: Marcia Cohen, Elizabeth Schaaf, and especially Diane Schadoff, the second edition's freelance editor, who skillfully steered the book through an accelerated production schedule. We appreciate the efficient permissions-clearing work done by

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Finally, and most importantly, we would like to thank our spouses, Pam Murfin and Todd Nystul, who have spent hundreds of hours surfing the Net to find dates and verify details, served as the sounding board for many of our ideas, and patiently and graciously allowed countless evenings, weekends, and even vacations to become occasions for what we have come to refer to as “glossarizing.”

A Note on References and Cross-References

A glossary is a reference book that, in addition to referring to authors and works exemplifying literary concepts, inevitably refers to itself via cross-references. We wish to provide interested readers with a more detailed explanation of our cross-referencing system—and then say a few things about the way we reference literary examples, particularly with regard to foreign language titles and the dates we have provided in connection with *all* titles.

1. Our Use of *See* and *See Also*

Where we have felt that the understanding of a specific term is particularly important to understanding the definition at issue, we have emphasized the importance of looking up that other term by using *see* or *see also*. *See* signals the most crucial terms to look up; we have used it infrequently. For instance, the term *Apollonian* can hardly be understood without reference to the term *Dionysian*, nor can *tenor* be understood without its counterpart, *vehicle*. *See also* signals the added usefulness, though not the dire necessity, of looking up a particular term.

We use *see* in three other contexts as well: to direct readers from a less common term to its most common synonym; to direct readers from a less common spelling of a term to its more common spelling; and to direct readers to another entry in which the term being looked up is actually (or more fully) defined. An example of the first type of cross-reference is the term *paranomasia*. *Paranomasia* is synonymous with *pun*, but the latter is more commonly used, and so the concept is defined there; readers looking up *paranomasia* will find a cross-reference that says “See **pun**.” In the second case, a

reader looking up *katharsis* will find a cross-reference that says “See **catharsis**.” In the third, a reader looking up the term *absence* will find a brief definition followed by a cross-reference that says “See **presence and absence**.”

2. Our Use of Boldface

We have defined more than 800 terms in this glossary, and whenever one of these terms is used in the definition of another, we have typically boldfaced that term—whether or not we are using *see* or *see also* to encourage you to look it up. (We say “typically” because we have generally avoided bolding words that are commonly understood—words like *fiction* and *play*—even though we define them.) Thus, if you look up **metaphor**, you will see a number of terms printed in boldface type within that definition, including **figure of speech**, **simile**, **tenor**, and **vehicle**.

The use of boldface type simply alerts you that we have separately defined the boldfaced term so that you can look it up if you so choose. Sometimes when boldfaced words are juxtaposed, they refer the reader to a single term and entry (e.g., **long measure**). At other times, each word is its own term and is defined separately (e.g., **anapestic hexameter** refers the reader to our separate definitions of **anapest** and **hexameter**).

Usually we have boldfaced only the first appearance of the term so as to avoid visual clutter; occasionally, however, we have chosen to boldface some later usage of a term where that action seemed more helpful and therefore appropriate. Note that we have typically boldfaced terms in whatever form they first appear. Hence you may see **new historicist** but discover that the term we actually define is **the new historicism**.

3. Our Use of *Italics*

Occasionally, italics is used as part of our cross-referencing system. Specifically, we have italicized, rather than boldfaced, the first appearance of a term that has its own entry elsewhere if that entry is followed by a *see* that would merely refer you back to the term you initially looked up. For instance, if you are reading the definition of **Marxist criticism**, you will come upon the italicized terms *base* and *superstructure*. If you were to look up the latter two terms, you would find boldfaced entries for them, but those entries would send you back to the definition of Marxist criticism via the phrase “See **Marxist criticism**.” We want to let you know that italicized terms are important enough that they may have their own entries, but we don’t want to send you on a wild goose chase that leads you back to where you started. We also, of course, want our cross-referencing system to permit you to come upon these terms boldfaced within other definitions (*base* and *superstructure* appear as **base** and **superstructure** within the definition

of **gaps**), in which case you will look the terms up and be told to “See **Marxist criticism**.”

Usually, however, italics is used for one of five other purposes. The most common, as you may have guessed, is to refer to titles of novels, other long works, or plays. The second most common use of this typeface can be spotted throughout the preceding paragraphs, where we use it in connection with terms that are being used as such — that is, as terms. In essence, if you see the phrase “the term” in front of a term — or if you could insert that phrase without disturbing the flow of the sentence — that term will be italicized (unless it has already been bolded). For instance, witness our italicization of *Apollonian*, *Dionysian*, *tenor*, and *vehicle* in the second paragraph of this essay. Note that, in the same paragraph, *see* and *see also* have also been italicized because they have been used as terms in this context. (Of course, *see* and *see also* are not italicized in the glossary proper because there they are used to signal a cross-reference, not as terms in and of themselves.)

We have also occasionally italicized terms *purely* for emphasis, as in this very sentence. Additionally, we have italicized important terms (such as *die Klassik* and *Rococo*) that have been separately defined in older glossaries but that we have glossed in our definition of some other term that, in our view, is more essential for modern readers to understand. Finally, we have sometimes used italics to highlight a series of some sort, particularly types or classifications. For instance, under **accent** we discuss *word accent*, *rhetorical accent*, and *metrical accent*.

4. Our Use of Dates

In referring to examples of the literary terms and concepts we define, we have attempted to provide what no other major glossary does — a date for each and every example, whether from traditional or popular culture sources. Note, however, that although we have tried to provide the best dates possible, this glossary is not intended to be a scholarly sourcebook for dates. By “best,” we mean that we have tried to provide the date that would be most helpful to our readers. Usually that is the work’s original publication date — but not always. Some works were written and became known long before the advent of movable type (Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, for instance). Other works were written early but not published until late in an author’s lifetime. (Thomas Hardy, for instance, didn’t publish many of the poems he wrote in his twenties until he was in his fifties and had ended his novelistic career.) In such cases, the date of composition, not the date of publication, best places the poem in biographical and historical contexts.

There are other reasons why we have sometimes chosen not to pair a given title with its initial publication date: for instance, when we are quoting the better-known, later version of a work such as D. H. Lawrence’s poem “Love on the Farm” or when it makes the most sense to pair a title

that has been translated into English (say, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*) with an original language publication date. The point is that the glossary is by no means a consistent bibliographic tool; we have made subjective judgments to further our aim of defining terms via telling historical examples.

5. Our Use of Foreign Language Titles

As our reference to the dating of *Notes from the Underground* suggests, we have not always cited original foreign language titles along with their English translations. (For practical reasons, we have *never* included original foreign language titles when the work in question was not written in a language using the Roman alphabet.) Whether the original title, the English language title, or both titles appear depends upon what we felt constituted relevant information within the context of a given definition. Hence you will see the French philosopher Michel Foucault's work *The History of Sexuality* listed using both its original French title, *L'histoire de la sexualité*, and the aforementioned English translation. Just keep in mind that, as with dates, the glossary should not be used as a bibliographic reference. We have not made a comprehensive effort to search out all original foreign language titles; we have merely included them in certain cases where the reader might find the information useful.

For ease of reference, we have alphabetized foreign language titles in the index according to the first letter of the first word, even if that word is an article like *une* or *la* that translates as "a" or "the." Thus, while you will find *The History of Sexuality* alphabetized under *H* rather than *T*, the corresponding foreign language title, *L'histoire de la sexualité*, appears under *L*, not *H*.

The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms

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Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms

A

absence: The idea, advanced by French theorist Jacques Derrida, that authors are not present in **texts** and that meaning arises in the absence of any authority guaranteeing the correctness of any one interpretation.

See **presence and absence** for a more complete discussion of the concepts of presence and absence.

abstract: The opposite of *concrete*. Abstract terms and statements describe ideas or **denote** general qualities of persons or things; concrete terms or statements refer specifically to particular persons or things. For example, the statement “Vivian hates Carly” is concrete; the statement “Hate is an ineradicable component of human nature” is abstract.

Literary critics have extended the term *concrete* to refer to any passage that is rich in detail (especially in language that appeals to the five senses) and that creates a clear **image** for the reader, whether through literal or **figurative language**. Passages written in a general manner or lacking vivid detail or specific experience are called abstract.

FURTHER EXAMPLES: Robert Burns’s most famous poetic statement, “O, my Luve’s like a red, red rose / That’s newly sprung in June” (1796), is a concrete poetic statement. W. H. Auden’s statement on love in “Heavy Date” (1940) is abstract:

I believed for years that
Love was the conjunction
Of two oppositions;
That was all untrue. . . .

Absurd, the (absurd, literature or theater of the): A phrase referring to twentieth-century works that depict the absurdity of the modern human condition, often with implicit reference to humanity's loss or lack of religious, philosophical, or cultural roots. Such works depict the individual as essentially isolated and alone, even when surrounded by other people and things. Although **drama** has been the medium of choice for Absurdist writers, the term may be applied to any work of literature that stresses an **existential** outlook, that is, one depicting the lonely, confused, and often anguished individual in an utterly bewildering universe.

Because writers associated with this movement believe that the only way to represent the absurdity of the modern condition is to write in an absurd manner, the literature of the Absurd is as bizarre in **style** as it is in subject matter. **Conventions** governing everything from **plot** to **dialogue** are routinely flouted, as is the notion that a work of literature should be unified and coherent. The resulting **scenes**, actions, and dialogue are usually disconnected, repetitive, and intentionally nonsensical. Such works might be comic were it not for their obviously and grotesquely tragic dimensions.

The **genre** has its roots in such literary movements as **surrealism** and **expressionism** and owes a great debt to the works of Franz Kafka. It developed in France during the 1940s in the novels and philosophical writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The theater of the Absurd emerged around 1950 with Eugène Ionesco's *La cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*) (1954), in which, not surprisingly, there is no soprano, let alone a bald one. Equally influential was Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1954), in which two tramps wait in vain for someone who may not even exist — and with whom they are not even sure they have an appointment.

Several novels written during the 1950s and 1960s in Great Britain and the United States contained Absurdist elements, but most Absurdist works have been written as plays. Harold Pinter was primarily responsible for developing British Absurdist theater; Edward Albee is America's leading Absurdist playwright.

FURTHER EXAMPLES: Jean Genet's *Le balcon* (*The Balcony*) (1957), Edward Albee's *The Sandbox* (1959), and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* (1965). Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) is at once a popular novel and an Absurdist work.

accent: The **stress**, or emphasis, placed on a syllable (the symbols ˈ and ˘ are used for stressed and unstressed syllables, respectively). Three main types of accent exist. *Word accent* refers to the stress (or lack thereof) placed on syllables of words as they are pronounced in ordinary speech. *Rhetorical accent*, by contrast, refers to the stress placed on syllables or words according to their location or importance in a sentence (and may thus be different from word accent). A third type of accent, *metrical accent*, refers to the stress placed on syllables in accordance with the poetic **meter**; when the metrical pattern of a poem “forces” a syllable to be