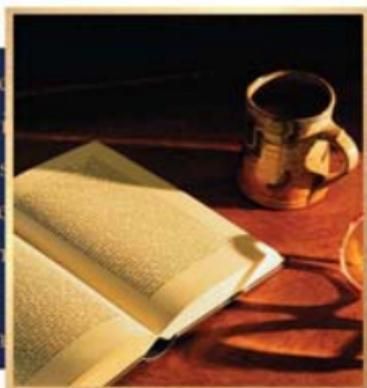


A DICTIONARY OF

LITERARY AND THEMATIC TERMS

SECOND EDITION

Literary History: A term for the history of literature. It is frequently synonymous with literary studies. In its contemporary version, new history differs from these in that it also includes the history of literature and that the history of literature can take various forms of history. Literati: A term for people describing members of the literary world.



Literature: usually understood to refer to "creative" works in the form of poetry, fiction, drama. One problem created by this sense of the term is that it excludes nonfictional works commonly regarded as part of literature. Implicit in this view, as well as in the notion that the term applies to "serious" novels, plays, and poems, but only to "serious" as opposed to "popular" examples of those forms. The assumption underlying this distinction is that popular literature is ephemeral entertainment, unworthy of inclusion.

EDWARD QUINN



A D I C T I O N A R Y O F

*Literary and
Thematic Terms*

Second Edition

EDWARD QUINN

 Facts On File
An imprint of Infobase Publishing

A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms, Second Edition

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Preface

This book offers the student or general reader a guide through the thicket of literary terms. Unlike traditional books of this type, however, it takes an expanded view of the term *literary*. One cause of this expansion is the new way of talking about and teaching literature that has emerged since the late 1960s under the general heading of “theory.” Theory often deals with subjects that seem at best only peripherally related to what we think of as literature, but some of its insights have provided us with new tools to understand the processes of reading, writing, interpreting, and (alas, to a relatively insignificant extent) enjoying literature. This book provides discussions of the major terms begotten by theory, always with the goal of relating them to literary study.

Another form of expansion is reflected in the title word *thematic*. This is the first book of literary terms to include within it discussions of major literary themes, such as death, love, and time, and also of themes that have a particular significance for our age, such as AIDS, alienation, and anti-Semitism. Still another expansion of “literature” is its extension to include film, television, and other forms of popular culture, thus the appearance of terms such as *macguffin*, *sitcom*, and *rap*.

These updatings and innovations, however, should not obscure the fact that most of the entries in this book have been in existence for centuries, some of them—those relating to Aristotle—as old as 2,500 years. Like other living things, the literary tradition continues to evolve and expand, enriching the lives of all those lucky enough to come to know it. To that end, this book offers itself as a modest guide.

The subtitle of this new edition might well be labeled, “From Academic Discourse to Zines” since these are the first and last new entries in the book. However, while these two appropriately suggest the ever expanding range of what constitutes “literary” terms, they also indicate the somewhat shifting, deceptive nature of these terms. At first glance, *academic discourse* appears to be a rusty relic of an ivory-towered past, while *zines* seems to embody the essence of a computer-generated future. But as the entries themselves indicate, academic discourse has recently become a hotly “contested site,” while the zines phenomenon is more than

PREFACE

75 years old. This is a sobering reminder, as another new entry, *liberal/conservative imagination*, demonstrates in the political sphere, that the old trickster *time* never tires of keeping us off balance. Time also offers a convenient device to categorize the thematic entries new to this edition, which include traditional, rooted-in-the-past entries such as individualism, skepticism, Odysseus/Ulysses; timely present-oriented themes such as nuclear war, terrorism and prison literature, and those subjects that slip through the chronological cracks, like alcohol, baseball, and vampirism.

Among new entries that bespeak the future are those dedicated to the various ethnic American literatures, many of which are just beginning to find their voices, but which, we can safely assume, will grow in importance and recognition as our country continues the great experiment of seeking renewal through immigration.

My thanks to Gail Quinn for typing this manuscript under combat conditions and Deirdre Quinn for pitching in at a critical point. Thanks again to Karl Malkoff, this time for offering his slow-witted friend a crash course in Computers 101. Continued thanks to Jeff Soloway of Facts On File for his patience, encouragement, and sound advice.

Thanks also to Liam and Adam Kirby, Caitlin, Kieran and Declan, Maya, and Shannon Quinn for being the grandest of grandchildren. Finally, a special debt to Barbara Gleason, whose patience, tact, and support kept the ship afloat even after it had sprung a few leaks.



Abbey Theatre The Dublin home of the Irish National Theatre Company, where some of the most celebrated plays of the 20th century first appeared. On its opening night, December 26, 1904, the Abbey presented four short plays: William Butler Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *On Baile's Strand*, Lady Augusta Gregory's *Spreading the News*, and John Millington Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen*. This premiere set a standard that the company was to maintain for the next two decades. The company presented Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (greeted by rioters protesting the play as "a libel of the Irish character") in 1907 and his powerful tragedy *Deirdre of the Sorrows* in 1910. The twenties saw the presentation of Sean O'Casey's great tragicomic achievements: *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), the latter causing another riot at the theater.

Although never matching the great achievements of its early years, the Abbey, which burned down in 1951 and reopened in 1966, continues to produce plays and players of unusually high quality, maintaining its status as one of the premier theaters in Europe.

Hugh Hunt's *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904–1978* (1979) offers a historical overview of the Abbey's productions, politics and personalities. Adrian Frazier's *Behind the Scenes* (1990) is a witty and provocative reading of the Abbey's early years viewed from the perspective of NEW HISTORICISM.

Absolute, the In philosophy, the principle of fundamental reality that underlines and sustains the various forms it assumes in the world. Although the idea of an unconditioned Absolute is as old as Plato, the term is associated with 19th-century German idealist philosophy, most notably in the work of G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel maintained "the Absolute is spirit; this is the highest definition of the absolute." For Hegel, the role of great art—for example, Greek tragedy—was to provide the average person with an approach to the Absolute that was more accessible than philosophy.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Samuel Taylor Coleridge adopted this principle in developing his theory of literature, a theory in which NATURE appears as the Absolute. Coleridge's conception assumed a dominant place in 19th-century literary theory. Among reactions in the early years of the 20th century to Coleridge's ROMANTICISM, the movement known as the NEW HUMANISM, led by the scholars Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, called for a rejection of transcendental, idealist terms, of which the Coleridgean Absolute was a major example.

Jacques Derrida, the principal exponent of DECONSTRUCTION, criticized Western thought for operating on the basis of LOGOCENTRISM, the belief that there exists an Absolute, a "logos" that transcends the limitations of language.

The scholar Robert Calasso used the term *absolute literature* to describe writings that reveal a search for an absolute. (*See also* GODS.)

Paul Elmer More's *The Demon of the Absolute* (1928) constitutes a strong indictment of the Absolute; Robert Harland's *Superstructuralism* (1987) provides a thoughtful analysis of Derrida's argument. Robert Calasso's study is *Literature and the Gods* (2001).

abstract expressionism *See* ACTION PAINTING.

absurd Ridiculous or unreasonable, a definition that has been extended to characterize human life. In the 20th-century philosophy of EXISTENTIALISM, the French writer Albert Camus employed the term to describe the futility of human existence, which he compared to the story of Sisyphus, the figure in Greek mythology condemned for eternity to push a stone to the top of a mountain only to have it roll back down again.

In the wake of two world wars, the principle of absurdity found fertile soil in the imaginations of modern writers. An early example is the fiction of Franz Kafka, peopled with guilt-ridden, alienated, grotesquely comic characters. In the 1950s a group of playwrights created a new form of drama, which the critic Martin Esslin named "the theatre of the absurd," to describe plays that abandoned traditional construction and conventional dialogue. These plays were notable for their illogical structure and the irrational behavior of their characters. Chief among the absurdist playwrights was Samuel Beckett, whose *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) had a revolutionary impact on modern drama. In *Waiting for Godot*, two tramps wait for Godot, who sends a message every day that he will meet them tomorrow. They pass the time engaging in comic stage business, trying to remember where they are and how they got there—as one character puts it, "Anything to give us the illusion we exist." The second act repeats the first with slight variations; Godot never arrives, and the two tramps continue to wait.

Other “absurdist” include Eugene Ionesco (*Rhinoceros*, 1960) and Arthur Adamov (*Ping Pong*, 1955) in France, Harold Pinter (*The Caretaker*, 1959) in England, and Edward Albee (*The American Dream*, 1961) in the United States.

In FICTION, two of the best known novels of the 1950s and '60s, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Gunther Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), captured the absurdist theme and style.

Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955) is an extended treatment of the absurd applied to human existence. Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) is a landmark study of its subject; its third edition (1980) includes the author's reservations about the popularization of the term.

academic discourse A general term for the written language used by college and university faculty members. Some academics hold that the term should be plural, reflecting the range and variety of linguistic conventions that separate, for example, writing in psychology from that in art history. But despite wide differences in vocabulary and style, there are some agreed-upon features common to most academic prose, notably professional terminology (see JARGON) and rather strict criteria in determining the proof of an argument. In other words, academic discourse traditionally tends to subordinate rhetoric to logic, maintaining the appeal to reason as the highest standard of discursive language use.

Occasionally that standard is questioned or challenged by the scholars themselves. One example concerns the Shakespearean scholar Stephen Greenblatt, an exemplary practitioner of academic discourse in the books and articles he has written in connection with NEW HISTORICISM. In 2004, Greenblatt published a popular biography of Shakespeare (*Will in the World*), in which he speculates about his subject, not only rather loosely by academic standards, but substantially contradicting the thrust of his earlier works on Shakespeare's plays, producing a generally negative reaction among his academic peers. On the other hand, nonacademic reviewers and general readers have responded very positively to the biography, applauding the author for having “liberated Shakespeare from the professors and returning him to the people.” The controversy illustrates the differences generated by different discourses, and the perils of attempting a crossover from one to the other.

In COMPOSITION STUDIES, academic discourse serves as a reminder of the gap between the expectations of the traditional college teacher and the student. The latter, particularly in a BASIC WRITING course, frequently feels overwhelmed by the attempt to mimic or imitate academic discourse in a writing assignment. The effort to sound “academic” usually results in a greater failure than had the student used his/her own “voice.” One consequence has been a growing pedagogical interest in the WRITING ACROSSTHE CURRICULUM movement in an attempt to

ACADEMIC FICTION

introduce beginning writers to the forms and conventions of the major academic disciplines.

Marjorie Garber looks at the pros and cons of academic discourse in her *Academic Instincts* (2001).

academic fiction See CAMPUS NOVEL.

Académie française Powerful French academy founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, chief minister during King Louis XIII's reign, and still a force in contemporary French culture. The Académie continues to exercise its authority, overseeing and attempting to control developments in the language. Its most recent efforts, a measure of its linguistic conservatism, have been directed against the employment of loan words from other languages. The group also bestows various awards and prizes for distinguished literary achievements.

The Académie consists of 40 members, all prominent intellectuals and formerly all-male until 1980, when the novelist Marguerite Yourcenar was elected its first female member.

Academy An olive grove near Athens where Plato and his followers established a school (called the Academy) for the study of philosophy. *Academy* or *academe* are general terms for the university or the academic community. The name is alluded to in a line from the Roman poet Ovid, "And pursue truth in the groves of academe," which serves as the ironic epigraph to Mary McCarthy's satiric CAMPUS NOVEL *The Groves of Academe* (1952).

Academy Awards Annual awards given by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The symbol of the award is an "Oscar" (the origin of the name is disputed), a gold-plated statuette of a sword-bearing knight standing on rolls of film. The awards cover 23 categories of filmmaking, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Foreign Language Film, four acting awards (Best Leading Actor and Actress, Best Supporting Actor and Actress), two writing awards (Best Original Screenplay, Best Adaptation), two music awards (Best Song, Best Original Score), two short films awards (Best Animated Film, Best Live), two documentaries (Best Feature, Best Short Subject), and awards for art direction, cinematography, costume, design, editing, sound, sound effects, visual effects, and makeup.

The awards ceremony, usually occurring in March of the year following the films' original showing, is the world's most widely viewed television event. Though almost always seen in retrospect as disappointing and overly long, the ceremony

never fails to attract a large audience, lured by its potpourri of glamour, humor, and suspense. Despite their popularity, the awards have been frequently criticized for the voters' tendency to select personal favorites and blockbuster films rather than making quality judgments. The blockbuster preference is presumably related to the belief that the success of such films is always "good for the industry." Critics cite as evidence the fact that the two winners of the largest number of awards—11 each—were for two epic films, *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Titanic* (2001).

Emanuel Levy's *Oscar Fever* (2001) offers a serious, intelligent history of the awards.

accent A regular recurring stress in a line of verse. In poetry written in English, the order and number of accented syllables determine the METER of a line or an entire poem. For example, if the order of stress is an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one, the two syllables constitute an iambic FOOT. A line containing five such feet is in iambic pentameter, as in this line from Alexander Pope:

~ / ~ / ~ / ~ / ~ /
The proper study of mankind is man.

acrostic A poem in which the first letter in each line spells out a word. A well-known example is the notoriously sentimental MOTHER acrostic. The form's low repute as a literary device is reflected in John Dryden's satiric poem "MacFlecknoe" (1682), in which he advises his hapless adversary to:

*Leave writing plays, and choose for thy command
 Some peaceful province in Acrostic land.
 There thou mayest wings display and altars raise,
 And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.*

act The major division of a DRAMA. The ELIZABETHAN five-act structure derives from the Roman playwright Seneca. Modern drama allows for considerable variation in the number of acts within a play, although the majority of contemporary plays are written in two acts. Many plays have adapted the EPIC THEATER structure of Bertolt Brecht, which substitutes a series of episodes, or self-contained incidents, for the act structure.

action The sequence of events in a novel or play. Aristotle's definition of tragedy as "an imitation of an action" underscores his contention that action rather than character is the central element in a tragic play. What he seems to emphasize is not simply what the characters do but also what underlies their specific acts. The tragic

ACTION PAINTING

action, for example, appears to be a threefold movement, characterized by the critic Kenneth Burke as the “purpose, passion and perception” of the tragic protagonist: the tragic hero begins with a specific purpose, undergoes a trial by suffering (passion), and emerges with a fuller, although tragic, sense of his own identity (perception). The idea of speech as a form of action is a major principle of SPEECH ACT THEORY.

Kenneth Burke analyzes the tragic rhythm of action in his *A Grammar of Motives* (1945).

action painting A term coined by the critic Harold Rosenberg to describe a central principle of the Abstract Expressionist art movement that developed in the 1940s and '50s. The goal of action painting was to capture the act of *creating* the painting: the painting itself was to be seen simply as the representation of the act of producing it. Jackson Pollock's technique of dripping paint as he walked over his canvas is a prime example of action painting.

Such painting is “expressionist” in that it is an expression of the artist in action. It is “abstract” in that it represents not a picture of the world but something that comes into existence in the act of making it. The emphasis in action painting is not on the eye but on the hand. The movement of the line within the painting involves its viewers, inviting them to become part of the process of creation.

The principle of action painting was incorporated into the work of the NEW YORK SCHOOL of poetry. One member of the school, Frank O'Hara, a museum curator and friend of many abstract expressionist painters, described the appeal of the new art movement: “Poetry was declining/Painting advancing/We were complaining/it was '50.” The influence of action painting on the New York School is evident in O'Hara's attempt to present directly the poet in the process of composing.

Harold Rosenberg's essays are collected in his *Act and the Actor* (1970). Jerome Klinkowitz has studied the impact of action painting on subsequent artistic, literary, and critical movements in *Rosenberg/Barthes/Hassan* (1988).

actor-manager The designation for a leading actor who is also the manager of a theater or repertory troupe. In the French theater the tradition was established by Molière, who in addition to acting and managing his troupe, was also its chief playwright.

In the English and American theater, the tradition of the actor who also served as director and producer was dominant from the end of the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th. Among the most celebrated actor-managers were David Garrick in the 18th century, Henry Irving and, in America, Edwin Booth in the 19th. Among fictional actor-managers, the genial Mr. Crummles, in Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) is memorable.

A moving homage to the actor-manager tradition is captured in the play, and later film, *The Dresser* (1981), which skillfully depicts the relationship of the actor-manager and his dresser as paralleling that of King Lear and his Fool.

Actors' Studio See METHOD ACTING.

adage See PROVERB.

adaptation The employment of material in one medium or genre for use in another as, for example, when a novel is made into a film. Many of Shakespeare's plays are adaptations of prose narratives, and those plays have become in turn the SOURCE of countless novels, poems, films, operas, and ballets. Adaptation is one form of the practice contemporary theorists refer to as INTERTEXTUALITY.

adultery One of the major themes in the history of literature, a recurrent feature of TRAGEDY, COMEDY, ROMANCE, and the NOVEL. Marriage and the family have constituted the linchpin of the social order, guaranteeing society's survival and continuity. In this context adultery may have served a dual and contradictory role: both as threat to society and as safety valve, an outlet for the oppressive features of marriage. The literature of adultery reflects this ambivalence from the beginning. In Homer's *Iliad*, the adulterous relation of Paris and Helen is the catastrophic cause of the Trojan War, while the New Testament account of the woman taken in adultery, with Jesus' injunction that punishment of the woman belongs only to "he who is without sin," underscores the ubiquity of the sin along with the need for compassion.

Medieval romances, such as those surrounding the ARTHURIAN LEGEND or the story of Tristan and Iseult, often emphasize the destructive nature of adulterous passion. In medieval and Renaissance comedy, particularly FARCE, the emphasis frequently falls on cuckoldry, usually with the suggestion of adultery as a form of justified revenge; Machiavelli's *Mandragola* (1518) is a representative example. Shakespeare offers a distinctive variation on the tradition, focusing on *imagined* cuckoldry, a theme that forms the basis not only of such farces as *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and romances like *The Winter's Tale* but also, most memorably, the tragic action of *Othello*.

According to the critic Tony Tanner, adultery was a particularly fertile theme for the 19th-century novel, providing the opportunity to explore the instability of marriage at the historical moment when marriage was beginning to be seen in conflict with the desire for individual freedom. Undoubtedly this development was also intensely connected to the changing definitions of the nature and roles of women. In novels such as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856–57), Tolstoy's *Anna*

ADVENTURE STORY

Karenina (1875–77) and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the centrality of the woman and the complexity of her role anticipate this shift in mood. Although the heroines of all three of these novels commit adultery and are punished as social outcasts, they also achieve an authentic sense of self from the adulterous experience and the suffering that follows it.

Among 20th-century novelists, John Updike is noted for his concentration on the theme. Updike's approach is distinguished by his representation of adultery as a spiritual transgression instead of a social threat. In focusing on this spiritual or religious dimension, he follows his progenitor, Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The Scarlet Letter*, in fact, forms the basis of three novels by Updike (*A Month of Sundays*, 1975; *Roger's Version*, 1986; and *S*, 1988) in which the perspectives of the three main characters of the Hawthorne novel (Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and Hester Prynne) are recreated in contemporary terms.

The influence of the "myth of adultery" is traced in Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* (1940). Tony Tanner's *Adultery in the Novel* (1979) examines the theme in key 19th-century European novels. Donald Greiner's *Adultery in the American Novel* (1985) looks at the uses of the theme in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, and John Updike.

adventure story A type of fiction that usually includes suspense, excitement, physical danger, travel to exotic settings, and an intrepid hero/heroine. In many of these respects, the adventure story is kin to the ROMANCE, but the adventure story relies on a series of exciting episodes unified by the theme of a search for a lost person, place, or object. The prototype of the form is Homer's *Odyssey*, in which the hero faces a series of threatening situations as he attempts to voyage home.

The adventure story is one of the staples of CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883). In film, the form is a key element of the SERIAL.

advertising Although the history of advertising dates back to classical times, it did not emerge as a powerful force in society until the industrial age in the 19th century. Literature and advertising share a common purpose, to have its audiences engage in the WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF. However, where literary work asks you merely to accept the temporary illusion that its characters are real and its events really happening, the advertisement asks you to carry its illusion into the real world by buying its product or electing its candidate.

In *Advertising Fictions* (1988), Jennifer Wickes looks at the relationship of advertising and literature through the lenses of three writers, Charles Dickens, Henry James, and James Joyce, whose novels, she suggests, represent three stages

in the interaction of advertising and literature: advertising's borrowing from literature, its emergence as a perceived threat, and its ultimate triumph. She begins with a seminal example, a jingle written on a bottle of shoe polish, made by the Warren factory in London, as "one of the first examples of an individually packaged product with a textual accompaniment." When Charles Dickens was forced to work as a child, he was employed at Warren's, pasting those labels on bottles. As a young man, Dickens later wrote advertising copy for Warren's. Thus, at an early age he became conscious of advertising's power, assigning it a significant role in his novels and employing it in their sales campaigns. In *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), for example, the shop, which deals with relics of a dead past, is itself a relic, symbolized by the fact that it has no sign advertising itself. Little Nell, the novel's heroine, moves from the shop to become a model, used to advertise Mrs. Jarley's waxworks museum. The author's attitude toward advertising is evident in the name he gives the advertising copywriter, Slum. But Dickens's own reliance on advertising is evident in his use of it in his financially successful reading tours in which the texts of his novels become the advertisements for his readings.

To illustrate the second phase when advertising emerges as a formidable threat to literature, Wickes sees Henry James as an author sensitive to the impending "usurpation and displacement of literature that loomed on the horizon." A specific example of that threat is the figure in James's *The Ambassadors* (1903) of Chad Newsome, whose idyll in Europe must end. He is being called back to America to assume a critical role in the family business by becoming the head of the advertising department. Chad readily abandons his lover for the lure of advertising, which he describes as "an art. . . and infinite like all the arts. . . in the hands, naturally, of a master."

The third stage of interaction, Wickes maintains, finds a reversal of the earlier relationship. Now literature borrows the language of advertising in the vocabulary and thought of one of the 20th century's most celebrated characters, Leopold Bloom, the central figure of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Bloom is an advertising canvasser, soliciting ads for local newspapers. In the process, he has absorbed the language and slogans of advertising, of which, as his INTERIOR MONOLOGUE reveals, he is a walking repository. As a result, according to Wickes, the novel "performs a tango with advertising and is set to its music." Wickes's point is a striking one, but for many readers, the notion that the language of advertising dominates the rich linguistic tapestry that is *Ulysses* would seem to be overstating the case. Closer to the truth is her general proposition: Advertising's rise to power has been accompanied by a comparable decline in the influence of literature.

aestheticism In French and English literature, a 19th-century movement that maintained art need serve no moral or ethical purpose (see ART FOR ART'S

AESTHETICS

SAKE). In the preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1838), the French poet and novelist Thèophile Gautier proclaimed the only purpose of art was to be beautiful. The French SYMBOLIST poets attempted to translate that principle into practice.

In England the major texts of the aesthetic movement were Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866) and Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which concludes with the famous invitation to "burn with a hard gem-like flame" in the "desire for beauty, the love of art for its own sake." The best-known advocate of aestheticism was Oscar Wilde, who at the end of his life lamented in *De Profundis* (1905), "I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction." FORMALISM represents a modified, less extreme form of aestheticism.

R. V. Johnson's *Aestheticism* (1969) is an accessible treatment of the movement.

aesthetics A branch of philosophy that explores the theory of the beautiful and the nature of art. As a separate field of study, it did not begin until the mid-18th century, but the questions it deals with date back at least to Plato and Aristotle. Among these questions are those relating to art as imitation, or MIMESIS, to the function of the artist in society, and to the impact of art on its audience.

The term *aesthetic distance* refers either to the artist's or the audience's relation to the art object. A satirical novelist such as Evelyn Waugh, for example, appears to be more removed from his characters and their fate than a romantic novelist such as Sir Walter Scott.

NEW CRITICISM emphasized the need for a certain detachment in order to understand without being swept away by the tide of emotion. A similar principle is implicit in Bertolt Brecht's ALIENATION EFFECT and in the concept of DEFAMILIARIZATION.

affective fallacy A term in NEW CRITICISM used to describe the error, from a New Critical perspective, of analyzing a work of literature in terms of its impact upon a reader. The critics William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley coined the term to call attention to the distinction between the text of a work and "its results in the mind of its audience." For Wimsatt and Beardsley, any attempt to locate the meaning of a work within the mind of the reader "ends in impressionism and relativism."

A corollary fallacy, according to the same authors, the so-called INTENTIONAL FALLACY, lies in any attempt to see the meaning of a work as residing in the intention of the AUTHOR. For the New Critics, true meaning resided in "the text itself," the language of the poem or story.

One of the principal developments of a more recent critical school, READER RESPONSE CRITICISM, in the words of Jane Tompkins, “defines itself in direct opposition to the New Critical dictum issued by Wimsatt and Beardsley.”

“The Affective Fallacy” is included in Wimsatt’s *The Verbal Icon* (1954); Jane Tompkins’s critique is featured in her critical anthology *Reader Response Criticism* (1980).

African-American literature Long overlooked, the rich tradition of oral and written African-American literature had its beginnings in the songs, spirituals, and folktales of slaves working in the fields. By the late 18th century, a few slaves and former slaves, given the opportunity to read and write (an opportunity denied by law in many Southern states), published poetry. Notable among these were Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley, both slaves whose poems reflect a strong religious tone. In the early years of the 19th century a number of slaves, aided and encouraged by abolitionists, published autobiographical accounts of their experiences as slaves. These SLAVE NARRATIVES played a significant role in the anti-slavery movement that preceded the Civil War. In 1859, Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* was the first novel by an African-American writer to be published in the United States.

In the years following the Civil War, African-American literature began to reflect the frustrations and fears of a people who in large part continued to suffer from widespread discrimination and segregation. The poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and the prose of Charles Chesnut touch upon these themes, as do autobiographical works such as Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* (1901) and James Weldon Johnson’s novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912).

In the 1920s, the vast migration from the rural South to the urban North in the years leading up to and following World War I resulted in the HARLEM RENAISSANCE, the term for the period of outstanding literary activity centered in the Harlem section of New York City. During this period, Harlem served as a magnet for talented young black artists, writers, and musicians. Among the most memorable are the poets Langston Hughes (*The Weary Blues*, 1926), and Countee Cullen (*The Black Christ*, 1929), and the novelists Jean Toomer (*Cane*, 1923), Claude McKay (*Home to Harlem*, 1928), Arna Bontemps (*God Sends Sunday*, 1931), and Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937). Another distinguishing feature of these writers was their incorporation of the rhythms and themes of blues and JAZZ.

In the period preceding the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, African-American literature was dominated by three novelists: Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. Wright’s *Native Son* (1940), Ellison’s *The Invisible Man* (1952), and Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) matched passion

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with eloquence and literary skill in their depictions of the African-American experience. In the wake of the Civil Rights movement a new generation of writers emerged, establishing in unequivocal fashion the centrality of the African-American experience in the consciousness of all Americans. In the hands of writers such as Maya Angelou (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969), Ishmael Reed (*Mumbo Jumbo*, 1972), Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*, 1982), the playwright August Wilson (*Fences*, 1987), and the Nobel laureate Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, 1987), African-American literature has moved out of the ghetto onto the national stage.

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, edited by William L. Andrews *et al.*, and *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay (both 1997), provide comprehensive introductions to the African-American literary tradition.

Age of Johnson In English literary history, the second half of the 18th century, a period dominated by the poet, critic, editor, and lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson. Traditionally regarded as a merely transitional phase in the movement from NEOCLASSICISM to ROMANTICISM, the age now commands more respect for a unique literary character of its own. The critic Northrop Frye has argued that a more accurate title for the period would be the Age of Sensibility, to emphasize that the poetry of Robert Burns, Thomas Gray, William Cowper, and William Blake offered a form of literature rooted in feeling and, in the case of Blake, the sense of the poet as a visionary. The poetry of the period also represents the movement toward nature and the power of the human mind when in contact with nature.

The great nonfiction prose works of the era were Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–87) and Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791). In drama the comedy of manners (*see* COMEDY) flourished in the hands of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*The School for Scandal*, 1777) and Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*, 1773). The development of the NOVEL, begun earlier in the century, was enriched by Tobias Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker* (1771) and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–67), one of the great comic novels in English.

The age also saw the production of two works that have been extremely influential in the development of modern RHETORIC, George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1783).

James Sambrook's *The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1700–1789* (1986) provides an invaluable introduction to the ideas and attitudes of the era. Northrop Frye's appeal for an "age of sensibility" is contained in his *Fables of Identity* (1963).

aging The literature of aging and old age differs from nonliterary accounts of the process in its emphasis on individual experience, describing what it is like for a particular person at a particular point in time. As a result, taken as a whole, it is filled with contradictions and paradoxes, which see age, on the one hand, as the culmination of a rich and rewarding life, and on the other, as deterioration and dependence.

The dichotomy is well represented by two figures in Homer's *The Iliad*: Nestor, the aged Greek general, is renowned for his eloquence, wisdom, and sense of justice, all acquired in the experience of his long life. In contrast, Anchises, as a young man celebrated for his beauty, the lover of Aphrodite, now is weak, blind, having to be carried from the burning walls of Troy by his son, the Trojan hero Aeneas.

Between the heroic (Nestor) and the pathetic (Anchises) views of age stands the tragic. And that is embodied with unparalleled power in Shakespeare's portrait of King Lear. As the play opens, Lear is every inch the king, an imperious old man habituated to a lifetime of power, now demanding protestations of love from his three daughters. Thwarted by his youngest daughter, Cordelia, who refuses to play a hypocritical game, he unleashes his pent-up fury in rash, angry words—invoking the gods in his denunciation of her candor. When he discovers the true nature of his other daughters, he begins to lose his identity. "Who is it who can tell me who I am?" That is a question he must answer for himself as he undergoes the painful lessons of one who "has ever but slenderly known himself." In the process he becomes a "poor, naked wretch," who achieves insight in madness. But his suffering and the wisdom derived from it are finally eclipsed by the unanswerable question he poses to the dead body of Cordelia. "Why should a horse, a dog, a rat have life and thou no life at all?" He dies having learned what it means to be human, having paid an awful price in the process.

At the polar opposite of the view of age in *King Lear* is Robert Browning's depiction in Rabbi Ben Ezra:

*Grow old along with me
The best is yet to be*

The Rabbi urges us to use the limitations, the aches and pains of age, as spurs to participate in life, but always in the recognition that there is a divinity that shapes our ends.

In the 20th century the religious coda is less in evidence as we are enjoined to experience life fiercely, in Dylan Thomas's words, to "not go gently into that good night." A memorable representative of this conviction is Zorba in Nikos Kasantzakis's *Zorba the Greek* (1946; tr. 1952), whose passionate commitment to life leaves him open to all experience, including death.

A less romantic view of age—one closer to contemporary experience—is meticulously portrayed in the last two volumes of John Updike's Rabbit tetralogy, *Rabbit is Back* (1981) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), while the depiction of the protagonist of Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (2004), a Protestant minister of a small congregation in Iowa, now in his seventies, suggests the continuing value of religious belief in imbuing the life of an aged person with a sense of the beauty of existence.

Barbara Frey Waxman's *From the Hearth to the Open Road* (1990) is an interesting feminist study of aging in contemporary literature.

agitprop The use of literature to promote a political or ideological goal. The term—a fusion of *agitation* and *propaganda*—derives from the early years of the Soviet regime in Russia. The Soviets instituted a policy of agitation and propaganda to encourage popular participation in the goals of the Communist government. Using songs, films, and plays, agitprop agents brought the party line to towns and villages throughout the Soviet Union. In the 1920s and '30s, forms of agitprop spread throughout Europe and the United States. A celebrated American example of the form is Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), a passionate pro-labor union drama focusing on a taxi drivers' strike.

agon A Greek word for struggle or conflict. In classical drama, it denotes the portion of the play, both in tragedy and comedy, in which two characters, each one supported by members of the CHORUS, engage in heated debate. The agon was a feature of both comedy and tragedy.

The term is generally used in contemporary criticism as a synonym for a competitive struggle, particularly in the criticism of Harold Bloom, who depicts literary history in terms of the conflict between a "strong" poet and a significant predecessor whom the strong poet feels he must, in the reenactment of an Oedipal struggle, displace.

Harold Bloom's *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (1982) is a collection of essays employing his theory.

AIDS In the relatively brief period since its outbreak in the early 1980s, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) has resulted in the production of a large body of literature. Most of this work has formed the central theme of contemporary GAY LITERATURE. As the disease achieves the dimension of a worldwide epidemic, however, a small but increasing proportion of AIDS literature is being written by nongays.