

*A Glossary of
Literary Terms*

SEVENTH EDITION



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Literary Terms*

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M. H. ABRAMS

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To Ruth

❧ Preface ❧

This book defines and discusses terms, critical theories, 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, they have proved to be a useful work of reference also for advanced students, as well as for the general reader with literary interests.

The *Glossary* presents a series 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 commonly 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 in current usage, in order to help readers to steer their way through the shifting references and submerged ambiguities of its literary applications. In addition, the discursive way of treating more or less technical terms provides the author with an opportunity to write entries that are readable as well as useful. In each entry, **boldface** indicates terms for which the entry provides the principal discussion; *italics* identify terms that occur in the entry but are discussed more fully elsewhere in the *Glossary*, on pages that are specified in the *Index of Terms*.

The purpose of this new edition is to keep the entries current with the rapid and 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 but many generously volunteered by users of the *Glossary*. All the entries have been rewritten and a number have been drastically recast, especially those which describe the innovative and rapidly evolving critical theories of the last several decades. All of the revisions aim to make the expositions as lucid and precise as possible, and also to widen the range of

examples and references, especially of writings by women and by cultural groups that have only recently become prominent. In each entry, the list of suggested readings has been brought up to the date of this revision. Books originally published in non-English languages are listed in their English translations.

This edition discusses more than one-hundred new terms; and in response to requests by a number of users, each of the following items has been given a substantial new entry: *alienation effect*; *antihero*; *author and authorship*; *Black Arts Movement*; *cultural studies*; *deism*; *edition*; *epic theater*; *golden age*; *haiku*; *Harlem Renaissance*; *metaphor, theories of*; *narration, grammar of*; *postcolonial studies*; *Pre-Raphaelites*; *queer theory*; *science fiction and fantasy*; *socialist realism*; *sublime*; *textual criticism*; *Victorian and Victorianism*.

For the greater convenience of the user, the entries hitherto gathered in a special section, "Modern Theories of Literature and Criticism," have now been distributed into the alphabetic order of the other entries in the *Glossary*. A new entry, *theories of criticism, current*, lists the sequence of these movements, together with the approximate time when they became prominent in literary criticism, from *Russian formalism* in the 1920s and 30s to *postcolonial studies* and *queer theory* in the 1990s. An additional feature in this edition, requested by many users, is an *Index of Authors*, which precedes the *Index of Terms* at the end of the volume and lists all the significant references in the *Glossary* to authors and their writings.

How to Use the "Glossary"

To find the exposition of a literary term or phrase, always look it up in the *Index of Terms*, which is printed at the end of the volume; to make this *Index* easy to find, the outside edges of its pages are colored black. Although the separate entries in the *Glossary* are in the alphabetical order of their title terms, the greater number of terms are defined and discussed within the text of these entries, and so must be located by referring to the *Index*. In the *Index of Terms*, 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 that 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, refer 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 general or 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 separate entries that treat the particular types and movements of literary *criticism*, the terms most relevant to the analysis of *style*, the particular entries that define and exemplify the types of *figurative language* or of literary *genres*, 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 earlier ones, has profited from the suggestions of teachers, and often also students, who proposed changes and additions that would enhance the usefulness of the *Glossary* to the broad range of courses in American, English, and foreign literatures. I welcome this opportunity to thank Nate Johnson, who served as my research assistant during a postgraduate year at Cornell; his wide-ranging knowledge and critical acumen have led to many improvements in the substance and phrasing of this version of the *Glossary*. Dianne Ferriss has been of great assistance in preparing and correcting the text of this edition. I am especially grateful for the valuable suggestions by Sean M. Andrews and Francis-Noël Thomas and by my colleague Jonathan Culler. Claire Brantley, Acquisitions Editor, Camille Adkins, Developmental Editor, Louise Slominsky and Andrea Joy Wright, Project Editors at Harcourt Brace have, firmly but tactfully, instigated and supervised my work on this revision. All these advisers, friends, and co-workers have helped me come closer to the goal announced in the original edition: to write the kind of handbook that I would have found most valuable when, as an undergraduate, I was an eager but sometimes bewildered student of literature and criticism.

❧ *A Note to the Reader* ❧

To find a literary 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 stained black. Although the individual entries in the *Glossary* are in the alphabetic order of their title terms, the larger number of terms are discussed within the text of these entries, so that the page numbers of these discussions must be located by referring to the *Index*. For explanation of the typographical cues in the entries and in the *Index*, refer to the section of the Preface, above, entitled "How to Use the *Glossary*."


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