

Affective fallacy

A term used by New Critics (advocates of close reading) to explain that a reader's emotional response to a text is neither important nor equivalent to its interpretation. The affective fallacy confuses what a poem is and what it does.

Alienation

The condition of being isolated from other people or a place; being removed from society.

Alliteration

A literary device in which consonants are repeated at the beginning of words.

Allusion

A reference to another work of art.

Ambiguity

A stylistic error in everyday speech in which a word or expression has multiple meanings, often used intentionally in poetry.

Anthropomorphism

The attribution of human characteristics to a god, animal, or object.

Antithetical Parallelism

Images and ideas used in opposition to display respective differences.

Archetype

A recurrent plot pattern, image, descriptive detail, or character that evokes from the reader strong but illogical responses. Carl Jung coined the term to describe the memories of humankind's collective past that lie in the subconscious but are tapped through images of birth, death, the seasons, etc., that stir emotions in the reader.

Argument

In literature, it can mean the summary of a plot; in literary criticism it means a position taken by the writer.

Atmosphere

The mood, or feeling, of a piece.

Audience

In the theater the audience means the spectators; in literature it refers to readers.

Bibliography

The list of sources consulted by an author in an essay or other piece of writing; usually appearing at the end of the work.

Bildungsroman

A German word meaning "formation novel"; usually a novel that describes a central character's process of growing up.

Biography

An account of a life written by someone else.

Blog

An on-line journal usually written by an individual; often interactive. The formal term is Weblog ("web" plus "log").

Catharsis

Aristotle's term to describe an emotional or psychological experience evoked by a literary work.



Caesura

A break or pause in a line of poetry marked by punctuation.

Character

A "person" in a play, novel, or poem.

Characterization

The process by which an author creates a character's distinctive qualities.

Cliché

An overused or unoriginal phrase.

Close reading

A detailed analysis of the text itself without consideration of historical, cultural, or authorial concerns.

Colloquial language

Informal language used in everyday and familiar conversations and exchanges.

Comedy

A work of art that is humorous or satirical; in comedy, characters usually triumph over adversity.

Complex sentence

A sentence that contains two or more independent clauses.

Conclusion

The final part of a process; in an essay, a summary of the arguments.

Connotation

An implication from a word or phrase other than its literal definition, based on its usage; an association evoked by a particular word.

Context

The surrounding circumstances of an event or text (historical background, author's experiences, etc.).

Contrastive pair

Two words, phrases, or images that work in contrast to each other for effect.

Convention

An accepted format, structure, mode, style, or behavior.

Creative non-fiction

An genre of writing that fictionalizes real events.

Defamiliarization

A process in which a writer can make a reader perceive something in a new way by describing something strangely, forcing a more intense consideration of the meaning or expanded understanding of an idea, event, or experience.

Dialogue

The direct speech of characters engaged in conversation.

Diction

The choice of words used by a character; the vocabulary used by the writer.



Direct & Indirect speech

Direct—when the exact words someone says are quoted; Indirect—when the words are changed to report the message.

Discourse

A way of seeing and thinking about the world. Refers not only to speech patterns but also to a particular mindset secured by philosophical assumptions that predispose a person to interpret the world in a particular way. Conflicting ideologies during a given period in time can be referred to as “discourses.”

Doggerel

Badly written verse; verse expressed in a clumsy, plodding meter, often for effect.

Dramatic Irony

A technique used by the writer which allows the audience to have information unknown to the characters.

Elision

A syllabic compression of a word to maintain meter in a line of poetry (ex.: “O’er”).

Ellipsis

The omission of a word or words from a sentence in order to aid clarity through compression (indicated by “…”).

End-stopped line

A term used in poetry for when the sense and meter of a line coincide with a full stop or pause at the end of the line.

Enjambment

A term used in poetry for when the sense of a line carries on to the line or verse that follows (without punctuation at the end of the continuing line).

Epic poem

A long poem that narrated the adventures of legendary figures from ancient myths.

Epic simile

An extended simile in which comparisons are made over several lines of poetry.

Epiphany

A sudden understanding or insight, often concerning the essential nature of truth.

Exposition

A device in which a writer gives essential information about what has happened leading up to the action about to unfold.

Extract

A short piece taken from a longer text.

Fable

A short fictional tale in prose or poetry that has a strong moral message.

Figurative language

Language that uses imagery and is not literal.

First person narrative

The use of character as the narrator of a story which provides a single, fixed perspective.



Free indirect style / narrative

A technique where a third person narrative temporarily assumes the voice of one of the characters.

Genre

A type or form of writing with clear characteristics (the Gothic novel, etc.).

Hegemony

The system of beliefs, values, and meanings to which most people in a given society subscribe. There usually exist several hegemonies at a given time representing different classes and subgroups. The term is often associated with Marxist critical theory.

Hyperbole

Deliberately exaggerated language for effect or emphasis.

Intensifier

A word that makes meaning more intense—usually an adjective or adverb.

Intentional fallacy

The false assumption that the interpretation of a literary work can be equated to the author's stated or implied intentions or private meanings. In other words, a text should not be interpreted as an expression of an author's beliefs.

Interior monologue

A technique in which the author articulates the internal thoughts of a character.

Interjection

A sudden interruption used to express a single response or emotion.

Intertextuality

When one text borrows from another or builds on the ideas found in texts that preceded it.

Irony

Language that is intended to mean the opposite of what is expressed; a humorous reversal of what was expected or intended; a situation in which one is mocked by fate.

Jargon

Technical language, understood by a restricted audience, often used negatively to describe overcomplicated phrases employed to confuse the reader or listener.

Juxtaposition

The placement of several things close together deliberately for contrast and effect.

Language patterns

Repeated structures, techniques, or devices employed regularly by an author throughout a text.

Linguistic

Of or belonging to language.

Literal

Language that is used and interpreted in its primary meaning.

Lyric poem

A poem less concerned with telling a story than with capturing a mood, emotion, or idea.



Magic realism

A style of writing where writers include elements of magic or the supernatural in otherwise realistic situations.

Matriarchy

A society dominated by women.

Metaphor

A figure of speech in which something is compared to something else (without using “like” or “as”).

Monologue

A speech in which a character speaks at length alone.

Motif

A recurring structural device that reminds the reader of a recurring theme.

Narrative

A connected series of events which form the basic plot or story.

Novel

A sustained piece of fictional writing which uses character, plot, and action to explore various themes.

Objective Correlative

A term coined by T.S. Eliot that refers to a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, or reactions that can serve to awaken in the reader the emotional response that the author desires without being a direct statement of that emotion.

Ode

From the Greek word for song; usually regularly and formally structured, expressing sentiments of profound importance.

Onomatopoeia

Using a word that sounds like the thing it describes (ex.: “bang”).

Oxymoron

A short phrase that appears to consist of contradictory ideas but makes sense in context (ex: “bittersweet”).

Pastiche

To imitate a style of writing.

Pathos

The quality in a work which evokes intense feelings of pity from an audience, or which moves the reader.

Patriarchy

A society dominated by men.

Persona

A role or character adopted by someone in a text; sometimes the term to describe the speaker in a poem.

Personification

Ascribing human qualities to inanimate objects.

Plot

What happens in a narrative.



Prose

Everyday, ordinary language organized into sentences and paragraphs.

Protagonist

The main character in a work of literature.

Quatrain

Four lines of poetry.

Register

The level of formality used in a text (defined by the vocabulary and syntax employed).

Relativism

A belief that morality and knowledge are dependent on the value system they originate from and function within and are therefore not absolute.

Rhetorical question

A question that is framed for effect, to make a statement, not necessarily for an answer.

Rhyme scheme

The pattern of rhyme in a poem, for example ABBA.

Rhythm

The metrical patterns in prose and poetry.

Romanticism

A literary movement that dates to the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798; a reaction against the Age of Reason, Romanticists declare that intuition can lead them to an understanding of themselves and their world. Individual concerns, emotions, and imagination are valued highly.

Setting

The physical, historical, situational, and/or psychological context of a literary work.

Sibilance

Repeated 's' or 'sh' sounds used to create a hissing effect.

Simile

A figure of speech using "like" or "as" to compare one thing to another.

Slang

Very informal language often derived from the workplace or the street.

Soliloquy

A speech in which a character articulates his/her innermost thoughts alone on stage.

Sonnet

A poem of 14 lines with a rhyme scheme, often comprised of an octet and sestet, usually in iambic pentameter.

Stanza

An organized grouping of a number of lines in poetry.

Stichomythia

The exchange of alternating single lines between characters in dramatic dialogue.



Stream of consciousness

A writing style that presents itself as unprepared and unedited; its free form provides access to the mind of the author or character.

Symbolism

The representation of abstract ideas by concrete objects, icons, or actions.

Syntax

The construction of a sentence.

Theme

In literature an idea that is explored and developed by the writer (for example, a theme in *Macbeth* is ambition).

Tone

The emotional aspect of the voice of a text (friendly, cold, scary, etc.).

Tragedy

A literary genre which ends unhappily, often with a character's death resulting from his/her own flaws.

Tricolon

A sentence made up of three parts, often each with growing rhetorical power.

Trope

A term synonymous with a figure of speech or word/phrase that is not to be taken literally.

