

A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

- **Action:** unfolding of events in fiction; behavior or conduct of a character.
- **Aesthetic Distance:** detachment between the receptor and the work of art.
- **Allegory:** an abstraction made concrete and communicating a moral.
- **Allusion:** a reference to something or someone real or fictional.
- **Anachronism:** something that appears that is out of its' proper time.
- **Anagnorisis:** Aristotle's term for recognition, disclosure, or discovery.
- **Antagonist:** the character who opposes the protagonist; adversary or villain.
- **Archetype:** motif/character that recurs from collective unconscious (Jung).
- **Atmosphere:** the "air" breathed by the reader in a work of fiction.
- **Auditory:** relating to or experienced through hearing.
- **Author Intrusion:** abrupt entry of writer on the scene: "Had he but known."
- **Autonomous:** characters that "come to life" and behave independently.
- **Bildungsroman:** novel depicting the process of maturation.
- **Caricature:** flat character with a single exaggerated trait.
- **Catharsis:** purifying discharge of emotions (pity, fear) through a work of art.
- **Character:** fictional being, not always human, but with human traits.
- **Causality:** relation between cause and effect or regularly correlated events.
- **Climax (crisis):** the turning point in the plot of greatest intensity, conflict.
- **Complication:** Occurs as rising action moves toward a climax.
- **Conflict:** is created by clashing or opposing goals, internal or external.
- **Curved:** a character that is not quite round, yet "vibrates" for the reader.
- **Denouement:** French for "unknotting" or "unraveling" the resolution.
- **Description:** discourse intended to create mental image of a place or person.
- **Deus Ex Machina:** "god from a machine" who descends to fix a difficult plot.
- **Dichotomous Stereotype:** flat character with reverse cliché, who flip-flops.
- **Dynamic:** describes a character capable of change within a work of fiction.
- **Epiphany:** a sudden revelation of the inner essence, often at climax (Joyce).
- **Epistle:** a letter; an epistolary novel consists mainly of letters.
- **Escape Literature:** books that gratify readers' fantasies and allow escape.
- **Exegesis (explication):** close reading and analysis of a literary work.
- **Exposition:** presentation by author of essential background information.
- **Figurative Language:** expressing one thing in terms of another.
- **Flashback (retrospect):** presents an earlier episode out of time sequence.

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- **Flat:** a character that only has one side, revealing a single trait or aspect.
- **Foil:** contrasting character that sets off another character.
- **Foreshadowing:** hint of what is to come, which helps achieve suspense, unity.
- **Formula:** clichéd storyline using stock situations, conventional characters.
- **Framing Device (frame within a frame):** narrative within a narrative.
- **Genre:** meaning type or kind, now refers to formulaic “category” fiction.
- **Gothic:** “crudely medieval” mystery, a melancholy of moss-covered ruins.
- **Gustatory:** relating to or experienced by the sense of taste.
- **Imagery:** vivid pictures or sensory impressions through the use of language.
- **In Medias Res:** “in the middle of things”; starting in the middle of the action.
- **Interior Monologue:** technique that suggests the fluid activity of the mind.
- **Irony:** a situation which is the tragic reverse of what the characters think.
- **Kunstlerroman:** German for “novel of the artist”; a bildungsroman.
- **Local Color:** emphasizing picturesque details characteristic of a region.
- **Mainstream:** contemporary novel that fits into no genre or category.
- **Metaphor:** figurative language; an implicit comparison without “like” or “as”
- **Motivation:** occurs when character moves the plot, not plot the character.
- **Myth:** any idea to which people subscribe; a society’s “dream” as legend.
- **Narrative Hook:** book device at start of novel or story to arouse reader’s interest.
- **Narrator:** POV; one who tells the story or narrative, participating or distant.
- **Novel:** prose narrative that is long, complex, dealing with human experience.
- **Objective:** “fly on the wall” or “the camera”; a POV that enters no mind,
- **Olfactory:** relating to or experienced by the sense of smell.
- **Omniscient:** a POV that can enter the mind of any character.
- **Pathetic Fallacy:** endows natural world with human traits (“gloomy day”).
- **Peripeteia:** sudden or unexpected reversal or circumstances (Aristotle).
- **Picaresque:** novel with an episodic structure (from 16th century Spain).
- **Plot:** carefully arranged narrative of events, emphasis falling on causality.
- **Point Of View (POV):** assumed eye, mind and angle of vision of narrator.
- **Protagonist:** main character or leading role; not necessarily a hero or heroic.
- **Pulp Fiction:** lurid, sensational stories, printed on low quality pulp paper.
- **Reader Identification:** process by which reader associates with character(s).
- **Regional:** characteristic of a certain locale; some authors’ works are regional.

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- **Resolution:** ending, falling action, or denouement; usually to stability.
- **Round:** a multi-dimensional character that shows many sides or aspects.
- **Scene:** indirect method of showing what happens (with dialogue, details).
- **Setting:** time, place, and social milieu found in a work of fiction.
- **Short Story:** brief work, unified narrative prose with all dramatic elements.
- **Simile:** figurative language, an explicit comparison using “like” or “as”.
- **Slice of Life (Tranche de Vie):** allows reader to see, hear, without comment.
- **Slick Fiction:** short story written by formula; popular, but not “quality.”
- **Static:** describes a character that does not change within a work of fiction.
- **Story:** a narrative of events in chronological order (without rearrangement).
- **Stream of Consciousness:** psychological novel using **interior monologue**.
- **Style:** mode of expression and devices a writer employs, especially language used.
- **Subjective:** a POV that reveals the thoughts and feelings of character(s).
- **Summary:** direct method of telling what happens (as over a period of time).
- **Suspense:** uncertainty, often characterized by anxiety, tension, anticipation.
- **Symbol:** represents the concrete, material world and another, invisible level.
- **Tactile:** relating to or experienced by the sense of touch.
- **Teleological:** exhibiting design or purpose; an argument for God’s existence.
- **Theme:** the message, main thread or element of meaning in a work of fiction.
- **Tone:** writer’s attitude, as the reader infers it, in the work; not **atmosphere**.
- **Verisimilitude:** the quality of being lifelike, true or real.
- **Visual:** relating to or experienced by the sense of sight.
- **Willing: suspension of disbelief;** Coleridge’s term for reader involvement.