A DICTIONARY OF MODERN CRITICAL TERMS

Revised and Enlarged Edition

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Volume 10

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1973
Revised edition published in 1987 by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd

This edition first published in 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-69377-7 (Set)
ISBN: 978-1-315-52921-9 (Set) (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-68389-1 (Volume 10) (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-54426-7 (Volume 10) (ebk)

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Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Published in the USA by
Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc.
in association with Methuen Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Set in Imprint, 11 on 12 pt with Helvetica
by Inforum Ltd, Portsmouth
cased edition printed by TJ Press (Padstow) Ltd
paperback edition printed by The Guernsey Press Co. Ltd

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
available

British Library CIP Data also available

ISBN 0–7102–1021–3 (c)
0–7102–1022–1 (pb)

Preface

This book is directed at an area of the literary catalogue which may seem already rather crowded: there are many 'dictionaries' and 'encyclopaedias' of literature and of critical terminology available, some of them excellent in their own way. But their ways are characteristically different from the approach adopted here. This is not an encyclopaedia, so it does not attempt a comprehensive survey of authors, periods, or genres—though it does explore a number of 'isms' which have been peculiarly vital in the growth of modern literary thought, and it takes a look at some of the major genres which have ordered and shaped European, English and American literature. Nor is this a 'dictionary' in the usual sense, in that its primary concern is not to provide brief working definitions of critical terms. For this reason the student will miss the scores of terms for the labelling of verbal detail, from *acatalectic* to *zeugma*. Although I would not deny that a precise, comprehensible and agreed descriptive vocabulary is essential to the practice of criticism, I have decided to exclude the majority of such terms from this book: there are many other sources where the student can look them up, for example, Babette Deutsch, *Poetry Handbook* (1961), Alex Preminger (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1965), Joseph T. Shipley, *Dictionary of World Literary Terms* (3rd ed., 1970). The present work is not designed to replace these terminological handbooks, but to add to and qualify such aids by encouraging a new perspective on literary terminology: to stimulate curiosity about how literary terms work actively for us, rather than to satisfy a utilitarian desire to gain access to their traditional meanings.

Reliable definitions and illustrations of rhetorical terms are not hard to come by. Rhetorical figures and schemes result from certain traditional arrangements of elements of language; the basic elements of language (i.e. language in general) remain constant from age to age, and are unvarying from one individual language to another, thus the range of language devices available to the verbal artist is limited and universal. Though some devices may go out of fashion while others attain a temporary popularity, the verbal bases of the chief and characteristic devices of style and rhetoric are not really vulnerable to the passage of time. It is difficult to imagine a language, or a stage in a language's history, in which metaphor, or paradox, or rhythm, would not be possible, or in which the linguistic causes of these literary devices would need to be completely redefined. For instance, a paradox is a paradox because it embodies one particular type of clash of meanings.

Such a semantic discord is achievable today by using a type of linguistic structure which was available four centuries ago to poets writing according to the rules of rhetoricians such as Puttenham and Wilson or, earlier still, to Cicero writing in Latin. Rhetorical possibilities do not alter substantially, so there is no need for a new glossary of rhetorical terms for each new literary generation. But there are other areas of critical terminology which are more flexible and so more creative. A concept such as 'tension' or 'irony' or 'baroque', for instance, is not tied down by any immutable linguistic rule, and it is such terms which are used creatively by literary communities to explore and define their attitudes to poetic and fictional experience. These terms should receive close scrutiny, and they are the major subject of the present book. New terms suddenly emerge—'apocalypse' and 'fabulation' are modern examples—as critics or writers strive to find a focus for some new perception, some new orientation towards the literary corpus of their culture. Where neologisms or borrowings from non-literary discourse are concerned, it is easy to see that terms are primarily the instruments of investigation and conceptualization, that they are not mere labels for pre-existent components of literature and criticism. It is not so obvious that many established critical terms, perhaps most terms of greater abstractness than the rhetorical ones, are exploratory rather than definitive: that they are used not to fix concepts in utter security, but to derive and to comprehend concepts. Also, of course, as instruments in the process of reading: what particular literary structure a reader perceives depends to a considerable extent on the concepts he has developed in his general, more distant thoughts about literature, his participation in the universe of critical discourse. So the commonest, ostensibly most agreed critical terms may be conceptually 'active' in a reader or critic. What spatial metaphors is he willing to attach to *plot*: simple line, maze, or meander? How concrete is a *theme*: is it a string of images at the surface of a work, or a more abstract, underlying stream of thought?

It seems to me that, if we are going to be at all self-conscious about our critical terminology—and this book implicitly argues for self-consciousness—we must take an openly flexible view about its nature. We should not ask 'what does such-and-such a term mean?', expecting some incontrovertible and memorizable definition, but 'what are the potentialities of this term? What can I do with it?' The contributors to this book were invited to write their entries in this questioning, analytic spirit. Wherever a more or less stable usage is found we have, of course, aimed to reflect it. But we are much more interested in writing about critical concepts in such a way as to open up their potentialities for literary enquiry than we are in providing finished definitions which

may give a false impression of the completeness of some line of thought about literature.

We have attempted to be suggestive, informative, but not authoritarian. The book cannot be used as a source of instant definitions, nor as a reference against which one's own use of literary terms can be checked for 'correctness'. The attitudes to literary terminology reflected in a desire to use a book in such ways are, we believe, rather suspect: the student wants an authority to disperse his insecurity; he is unwilling to become conscious of the power of critical terminology to enrich his literary awareness.

Although this book does not aim at complete and definitive coverage of the world of critical terminology, it can nevertheless claim to be 'representative' in a significant way. I have put together essays by a fairly large and varied gathering of critics and teachers: men and women who received their literary education at a range of different universities and in different countries; also—and I regard this as very important—people of different generations. This diversity results in heterogeneity of critical standpoint; but the group is large enough to engender something more valuable than mere disagreement: it is a cross-section of critical attitudes and, I believe, a dramatic representation of the richness of contemporary criticism. This 'dictionary' of the critical lexicon is designed to be read as well as consulted; and it can be read as a picture of literary criticism entering the 1970s as a vital and professional humane discipline.

Preface to the second edition

In the first edition of this book, I took the view that literary studies should be given a pluralistic representation, and I believe that is still appropriate. It would be wrong to say that literary study is a science guided by a single valid theory and set of procedures: I mean, wrong as an empirical description of the state of the art today; many theorists have argued that there could, and should, be a science of 'poetics' or 'theory of literature', and that might indeed be desirable, but no such theory has yet found acceptance.

Since 1970 the field of literary studies has become even more diversified. Traditional assumptions persist, particularly in literary education; but forms of new thinking have been developed which question tradition from several angles. Particularly stimulating have been ideas drawn from other disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, psychology and politics. Not only have new schools of criticism emerged; whole areas such as narrative analysis have become greatly refined; also, there have been radical revaluations of some basic ideas—concepts as fundamental as 'author', 'reader', and 'language'. As I have indicated, such developments have not displaced earlier conceptions. Generally they have been felt by the traditional critical establishment to be contentious, aesthetically or politically. So debate flourishes today, and the pluralistic model is just as appropriate as it was fifteen years ago.

I am glad to have been given the opportunity to revise and expand this *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, in this situation. New articles have been commissioned to cover as many as possible of the new developments (e.g. AUTHOR, DECONSTRUCTION, MARXIST CRITICISM); and several pieces have been completely rewritten (e.g. METAPHOR, STRUCTURALISM). All the original authors who could be contacted have been given the opportunity to revise and update their contributions; some did not wish to do so, and in such cases I have limited my own editorial intervention to very minor corrections and updatings. So a traditionalist basis is preserved in this book, accurately reflecting the situation in the discipline.

I gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of my fellow-contributors in effecting this revision, and particularly those of my colleagues at the University of East Anglia who have advised and supported me during a period of revision which was unreasonably prolonged by my commitments as Dean. Thanks also to the publishers for waiting patiently for a delayed typescript.

A

absurd

The theatre of the absurd was a term, derived from Camus and popularized by Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), applied to a group of dramatists whose work emerged during the early fifties (though Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco's *The Bald Prima Donna* were actually written in the late forties). In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) Camus defined the absurd as the tension which emerges from man's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which steadfastly refuses to evidence either. To writers like Ionesco and Beckett this paradox leaves man's actions, aspirations and emotions merely ironical. The redeeming message no longer comes from God but is delivered by a deaf mute to a collection of empty chairs (*The Chairs*, 1952); human qualities, such as perseverance and courage, no longer function except as derisory comments on man's impotence (*Happy Days*, 1961); basic instincts and responses, the motor forces of the individual, become the source of his misery (*Act Without Words*, 1957). Camus himself could see a limited transcendence in man's ability to recognize and even exalt in the absurd (*The Outsider*, 1942) or in the minimal consolation of stoicism (*Cross Purpose*, 1944). But he came to feel that absurdity implied a world which appeared to sanction Nazi brutality as easily as it did individual acts of violence. From an examination of the nature of absurdity, therefore, he moved towards liberal humanism: 'The end of the movement of absurdity, of rebellion, etc. . . . is compassion . . . that is to say, in the last analysis, love'. For writers like Beckett and Ionesco such a dialectical shift was simply bad faith. For to the 'absurd' dramatist it is axiomatic that man lives in an entropic world in which communication is impossible and illusion preferred to reality. The individual has no genuine scope for action (Hamm sits lame and blind in *Endgame*, 1958; Winnie is buried to the neck in sand in *Happy Days*; the protagonist of Ionesco's *The New Tenant* (written 1953, produced 1957) is submerged beneath proliferating furniture); he is the victim of his metaphysical situation. Logically, the plays abandon linear plot, plausible character development and rational language. In contrast to Camus' work their style directly reflects their subject.

The term 'absurd drama', applied by Esslin to dramatists as diverse as Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, Arrabal and Simpson, is something of a blunt weapon. Esslin had a disturbing if understandable tendency to trace the origins of the absurd in an incredible array of writers some of whom do not properly belong in a theatre which is convinced of the unbridgeable gulf between aspiration and fulfilment, the impossibility of communication, or the futility of human relationships. In other words he is not always completely scrupulous in distinguishing between style and content. In a more recent revision of his book, however, he has shown a commendable desire to underline the deficiencies of a term which, while proving a useful means of approaching dramatists intent on forging new drama, was never intended as a substitute for stringent analysis of the work of individual writers.

CWEB

action, actor

see DRAMA

Aestheticism

A sensibility, a philosophy of life and of art, and an English literary and artistic movement, culminating in the 1890s, with Oscar Wilde as its most extravagant exponent and Walter Pater its acknowledged philosopher. Other names commonly associated are those of the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Swinburne, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Andrew Lang, William Sharp, John Addington Symonds and the early Yeats. Aubrey Beardsley and J. McNeill Whistler are representative of the same trend in the fine arts.

For the Aesthete, if his creed is to be derived from Pater's conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873), reality amounts to sharp, fleeting impressions, images and sensations arrested by the creative individual from an experience in constant flux. The life of art, or the art of life, which the Aesthete wishes to equate, is ideally a form of purified ecstasy that flourishes only when removed from the roughness of the stereotyped world of actuality and the orthodoxy of philosophical systems and fixed points of view. The quest of unadulterated beauty is recommended as the finest occupation man can find for himself during the 'indefinite reprieve' from death which his life is. Pater's phrase, 'the love of art for its own sake', a version of the French *l'art pour l'art*, has served the Aesthetes as a slogan, implying the repudiation of the 'heresy of instruction' (Baudelaire's *l'hérésie de l'enseignement*). Art, Whistler wrote in his 'Ten o'clock' lecture (1885), is 'selfishly occupied with her own perfection only' and has 'no desire to teach'. As a fashionable fad,

English Aestheticism was brought to a halt with the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1896.

Aestheticism, as a stage in the development of Romanticism, is not limited to England. Profoundly a movement of reaction and protest, it reflects the growing apprehension of the nineteenth-century artist at the vulgarization of values and commercialization of art accompanying the rise of the middle class and the spread of democracy ('a new class, who discovered the cheap, and foresaw fortune in the facture of the sham'—Whistler). The hostility of an alienated minority towards bourgeois 'Religion of Progress' ('Industry and Progress,' Baudelaire wrote, 'those despotic enemies of all poetry') prompted an indulgence in the decadent, the archaic and the morbid. The Death of God, as proclaimed by Nietzsche among others, turned the Aesthete towards the occult and the transcendental in an attempt to make a thoroughly spiritualized art substitute for the old faith. The *fin-de-siècle* witnesses the proclamation of an élitist 'new hedonism' determined, in the words of Oscar Wilde, 'never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience'.

Philosophy provides the theoretical mainstay of the prevalent moods. Kant's postulate (*Critique of Judgement*, 1790) of the disinterestedness of the aesthetical judgment, and the irrelevance of concepts to the intuitions of the imagination, is taken up and carried further by Schopenhauer. In the latter's thought, an 'absolute' Art removes the mind from a despicable life and frees it from its bondage to the will. Since music is the most immaterial art, as well as the most removed from quotidian reality, it becomes the ideal. Schopenhauer declares that 'to become like music is the aspiration of all arts', which is echoed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872); by Verlaine in *'de la musique avant toute chose'*, and by Pater in his equally famous 'All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music' (*The Renaissance*, 1873). The ensuing cult of pure or 'essential' form is as characteristic of symbolism and literary Impressionism as it is of the entire English 1890s. This, in turn, leads to the devaluation of the subject-matter in favour of personal, innovatory techniques and the subtleties of exquisite execution.

See Madeleine L. Cazamian, *Le Roman et les idées en Angleterre*, vol. 2: *L'Anti-intellectualisme et l'esthéticisme* (1880–1900) (1935); L. Eckhoff, *The Aesthetic Movement in English Literature* (1959); J. Farmer, *Le Mouvement esthétique et 'décadent' en Angleterre* (1931); W. Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Movement* (1945); Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (1949); H. Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties* (1913); R. V. Johnson, *Aestheticism* (1969); Louis Rosenblatt, *L'Idée de l'art pour l'art dans la littérature anglaise pendant la période victorienne* (1931); Ruth Zabriskie Temple, *The Critic's Alchemy: A Study of*

the Introduction of French Symbolism into England (1953).

NZ

aesthetics

(The study of the beautiful) has developed, especially in Germany, into a formidable subject. Lack of space forbids any attempt to deal with its philosophical and psychological problems here; but some discriminations may be made to clarify and amplify its use as a critical term.

First, *aesthetic pleasure* may be distinguished from other pleasures—according to the Kantian definition now widely accepted—as that which is disinterested, the result of perceiving something not as a means but as an end in itself, not as useful but as ornamental, not as instrument but as achievement. To perceive it so is to perceive its 'beauty' (if it turns out to have any). Such beauty, being the counterpart to use or purpose, which largely depend on content, must spring from formal qualities, as must the special pleasures its perception gives rise to. Non-moral, non-utilitarian, and non-acquisitive, this is the purest of the pleasures, the one least exposed to bias from areas outside the work of art (and therefore the one most appropriate for defining what 'art' is; see ART). Second, aesthetic pleasure may be distinguished from *aesthetic appreciation*. The former emphasizes one's experience of the work, which may be mistaken, untutored or injudicious; the latter emphasizes the characteristics of the work, and implies a critical assessment of their 'beauty'. Third, both presuppose *aesthetic attention*. Unless a work is regarded in the way indicated above—for what it is, not for what it is up to—its aesthetic qualities, if any, are likely to go unperceived. For this reason works where the subject, or manner, deeply involve the reader are less likely to give aesthetic pleasure or to prompt aesthetic appreciation than those that encourage aesthetic attention by formal devices that lend *aesthetic distance*.

Finally, *aesthetic merit* should be distinguished from aesthetic qualities and reactions, for a work might possess genuine aesthetic qualities, properly provide for their appreciation, yet in fact be a poor specimen of its kind. Merit and pleasure, too, are not necessarily related. An untrained or naturally crude sensibility could clearly be aesthetically pleased by a crude work—and so, in certain circumstances, could a trained and refined sensibility (though it would *appreciate* the work for what it was).

Aesthesis (aesthetic perception) is normally a blend of aesthetic pleasure and appreciation, and may be of three kinds: *aesthesis of composition*, resulting from purely formal harmonies of part and part, or parts and whole, and more characteristic of the fine arts than of literature; *aesthesis of complementarity*, resulting from the matching of form and content; and *aesthesis of condensation*, resulting from the

perception of aesthetic qualities in part of a work only (a minimal instance, strictly speaking, of either of the other two modes).

The *Aesthetic Movement*, or *Art for art's sake*, which started in France during the latter part of the nineteenth century and flourished in England in the 1880s and 1890s, was less concerned with such niceties than with a general reaction against the Art for morality's sake so characteristic of the earlier part of the century. When Wilde averred that 'all art is quite useless' he spoke truly—if art is defined in aesthetic terms. But the pleasures of literature are usually multiple and its proper appreciation therefore rarely limited to the aesthetic. See also PLEASURE.

See Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (1958); E. F. Carritt, *An Introduction to Aesthetics* (1949); W. Gaunt, *The Aesthetic Adventure* (1945); P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (1979); John Hospers (ed.), *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (1969); H. Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory* (1968); Eliseo Vivas and Murray Krieger (eds), *The Problems of Aesthetics* (1954); *British Journal of Aesthetics (passim).*

AER

affective fallacy

see EFFECT

aktualisace

see FOREGROUNDING

alienation effect

see CONTRADICTION, EPIC THEATRE

allegory

is a major symbolic mode which has fallen into some critical disrepute this century ('dissociated', 'naive', 'mechanical', 'abstract') though it flourishes in satire, underground literature and science fiction. It is often defined as an 'extended metaphor' in which characters, actions and scenery are systematically symbolic, referring to spiritual, political, psychological confrontations (Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Orwell's *1984*). Historically the rise of allegory accompanies the inward-looking psychologizing tendencies of late antiquity and medieval Christianity (see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 1938). The 'hero' is typically a cypher (Spenser's Guyon, Christian in Bunyan, Winston Smith in *1984*), a proxy for the reader, because the action is assumed to take place in the mind and imagination of the audience; 'characters' other than the hero are, rather like Jonsonian HUMOURS, daemonically possessed by fear, desire or need. (It is often misleadingly suggested that they 'represent' vices and virtues, but when successful they *are*

jealousy, greed, modesty, etc. with intervals of neutrality where they get the plot moving or are spectators to the obsessions of other characters.) Allegory's distinctive feature is that it is a structural, rather than a textural symbolism; it is a large-scale exposition in which problems are conceptualized and analysed into their constituent parts in order to be stated, if not solved. The typical plot is one in which the 'innocent'—Gulliver, Alice, the Lady in Milton's 'Comus', K. in Kafka's *The Castle*—is 'put through' a series of experiences (tests, traps, fantasy gratifications) which add up to an imaginative analysis of contemporary 'reality'.

Many of the attitudes which characterize MODERNISM and NEW CRITICISM are explicitly hostile to the intentionalist and individualist assumptions allegory makes—that the emotive power of literature can be channelled and directed, that the work itself is the means to an end (saving souls, 'to fashion a gentleman', etc.). Pound's strictures against the abstract ('dim lands *of peace*'); Richards's insistence that poetry is 'data' not rationalist scaffolding; Yeats's stress on the mysteriousness of the genuine literary symbol—all seem to label allegory as the product of a now untenable idealism. But the clear-cut distinction between 'the music of ideas' (Richards on Eliot) and the 'dark conceit' of allegory is harder to make in practice than in theory: Yeats's *A Vision* systematizes and expounds the mystery of his symbols much as Spenser did in *The Faerie Queene*. Cleanth Brooks in *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) allegorizes all the poems he explicates, so that they become 'parables about the nature of poetry', and Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) summed up this tendency by pointing out that all analysis was covert allegorizing. But though the common distinction between allegory and symbolism falsifies the facts of literary experience when it claims an impossible instantaneity and universality for the symbol (symbolism can be grossly schematic—cf. Hemingway or Steinbeck), and accuses allegory of arid rationalism, there is a genuine distinction to be made.

Two main strands in the modernist aesthetic, the doctrine of the autonomy of the artefact, and the association of literature with collective and recurrent 'myth', combine to leave little room and few terms for allegory. We are equipped to talk about the textural enactment of content, and about the largest (mythic) patterns into which literature falls, but we are not at ease in the area between the two where form and content are often increasingly at odds, and which involves argument, discursiveness, paraphrasable opinion. Allegorists, like satirists (and the two are often the same) employ myths rhetorically, rather than respectfully embodying them (John Barth, *Giles Goat Boy*, 1966). Scholarly analysts—e.g. those dealing with Spenser's political or sexual allegory—are defensive, aware that critical theory somehow contrives

to discount their conclusions, because it is embarrassed by meanings in literature that are neither formal nor universal. See also MYTH, SYMBOL.

See Angus Fletcher, *Allegory, the Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964); Northrop Frye, 'Levels of meaning in literature', *Kenyon Review*, 1950, 246–62; A. D. Nuttall, *Two Concepts of Allegory* (1967); Edmund Spenser, 'A Letter of the Author's . . . to Sir Walter Raleigh' (1596); Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (1967); Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (1958).

LS

alliteration

see TEXTURE

ambiguity

Opposed to 'clarity', ambiguity would be considered a fault. Modern criticism has turned it into a virtue, equivalent roughly to 'richness' or 'wit'. This reversal of normal connotations has been made possible by two factors: I. A. Richards's argument that what is required of scientific language (e.g. lucidity) is not necessarily demanded in poetry (see LANGUAGE); and William Empson's promotion of the concept in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, first published in 1930. Since Empson, ambiguity has come to be regarded as a defining linguistic characteristic of poetry.

Ambiguity is not a specific figurative device which may be chosen at will for decoration; it is not, says Empson, 'a thing to be attempted'. Rather, it is a natural characteristic of language which becomes heightened and significant in verse. The link between content and form is indirect and arbitrary; hence syntactic 'accidents' may occur, syntax realizing two or more meanings in the same signal. Linguists say that one 'surface structure' may conceal two or more 'deep structures' (the reverse situation is PARAPHRASE). Ambiguity is common in ordinary language, but we do not notice it because context usually selects just one of the alternative meanings ('disambiguates'). It is of several kinds: *homophony*, the convergence of unrelated meanings in one form (*bank, plane*); *polysemy*, a scatter of more or less connected meanings around one word (*bachelor, record*); purely syntactic ambiguity, as in *Visiting relatives can be boring* or *old men and women*.

Verse tends to be more ambiguous than prose or conversation, for several reasons: it is less redundant; context is inaccessible or irrelevant; verse displays extra levels of structure and can be 'parsed' more ways. Empson sums this up: 'ambiguity is a phenomenon of compression'. Deletion of words for metrical/stylistic reasons leads to ambivalence, as in Empson's example from Browning:

> I want to know a butcher paints,
> A baker rhymes for his pursuit . . .

So does a line-break at a crucial syntactic point:

> If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly.

Since we are disposed to assume multiple meaning in verse, we consent to read in extra meanings. The leaves in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 ('yellow . . . or none, or few') are simultaneously the leaves of the autumn metaphor and the poet's writings—leaves of a book. The problem is justification, selection; Empson's reading of 'trammel up the consequence' is clearly fantastic. What control is there over the desire to spawn meanings?

The doctrine of ambiguity is not a licence for self-indulgence, free association producing a mushy poem, an arbitrary heap of meanings. Multiple meanings must be justified by their interrelationships. We must neither impose meanings without control, nor reject all meanings but one; instead, we must reject all meanings but those which interact wittily. In the same sonnet we find 'those boughs which shake against the cold'. *Shake* is either passive—the boughs being ravaged by the cold wind—or active and defiant, the shaking of a fist, a gesture against approaching death. This is a common syntactic ambiguity, and the right one for the poem: the diametrically opposed meanings capture the conflict between decay and energy which the poem embodies. Here we have not merely *mentioned* the double meaning, but *used* it in relation to the poem's theme. Ambiguity in this usage resembles (and is the real father of) the New Critics' TENSION, IRONY, PARADOX; it comes nearer than any of them to providing a linguistic explanation for poetic complexity and wit, for it springs from the familiar resources of ordinary language.

RGF

analysis

The purpose of analysis, according to William Empson, 'is to show the modes of action of a poetical effect'. And since the work of Empson (*Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1930) and Richards (*Practical Criticism*, 1929) it has been a conviction of criticism that these effects are accessible to reason, and not mysteries reserved for silent appreciation. 'The reasons that make a line of verse likely to give pleasure . . . are like the reasons for anything else; one can reason about them' (*Seven Types*). Empson's major achievement was his demonstration that these modes of action were capable of description in terms of effects of language. The conviction that the forms and meanings of literature are linguistically generated gives to the business of analysis its modern centrality. For the classical idea of language as the dress of thought had for long limited literary analysis to the categorization of stylistic

features, the description of decorative externals. So long as the reality of the work lay 'beyond' language it had no objective existence, it could not be analysed. Traditional stylistics concerned itself with classification and comparison of types of prosody, diction, imagery, etc. without attempting to show how these features co-operated in creating the 'meaning' of a work. The tradition of *explication de texte* in French education, in which the 'texte' often seems almost incidental to the categorized information that is hung about it, demonstrates the consequences of this dualistic form-content model of language. What is offered is what Ian Watt calls 'explanation . . . a mere making plain by spreading out'; modern critical analysis demands, on the other hand, 'explication . . . a progressive unfolding of a series of literary implications' ('The first paragraph of *The Ambassadors*', *Essays in Criticism*, 10, 1960). But explication, or as W. K. Wimsatt refines it 'the ex*plicit*ation of the implicit or the interpretation of the structural and formal, the truth of the poem under its aspect of coherence' (*The Verbal Icon*, 1954), had to wait upon a language theory that would abandon this dualism and re-define 'meaning' as a totality of linguistic relationships (see LANGUAGE). If language in poetry could be conceived of not as the dress but as the body of meaning, then analysis had access to the fact of the poem, not simply to its incidentals. It could account for its 'modes of action'.

In fact the essential conceptual metaphors had been available to criticism since Coleridge; Romantic theories of poetry as holistic and organic, with their controlling analogies of plants and trees, had supplanted the classical form-content dichotomies. But so long as these vitally interdependent 'parts and whole' were unlocated except as metaphysical abstractions, their relationships remained unanalysable. However, the revolutions in philosophy of Frege and Wittgenstein, and in linguistics of Saussure, substituted for the 'referential' or 'representational' model of language an idea of meaning as a result of complex interaction. Criticism took the point that if the meaning of a word is everything it does in a particular CONTEXT, then analysis of the words of a poem, of their total interinanimation, would be nothing less than an account of the poem itself. The metaphysical abstractions which Romantic theory identified as the form of poetry could now be located as linguistic realities, and since language has a public existence, independent of the psychologies of poet or reader, they were open to analysis.

The analytic tradition that descended from Richards and Empson, known in England (and particularly at the University of Cambridge) as *Practical Criticism* and in America as the NEW CRITICISM, was primarily concerned with semantic explorations. Its key terms—AMBIGUITY, PARADOX, TENSION, gesture—emerged from a new awareness of

multiplicity and complexity of meaning in literature. This tradition (and its modern offshoot which relies explicitly on the techniques and conceptual framework of linguistics: see LANGUAGE) has been attacked for its tendency to stick close to the lower levels of verbal structure; for its apparent neglect of value-judgments; for its alleged inability to account for the larger-scale structures of long works; for a necessary preference for short, complex, highly-textured lyric poems. Some of these objections are well-founded; some are based on misconceptions. For instance, Winifred Nowottny's *The Language Poets Use* (1962), although devoted to investigation of arguably 'external' features such as sound-values, rhyme, syntax, diction and lineation, nevertheless succeeds in providing generous and valuable criticism. Moreover, the ideal and the utility of close analysis do not stand or fall by the case for *verbal* analysis. Language provides a stable reference-point (arguably lacking in the work of the CHICAGO CRITICS) and a point of departure for broader structural observations. For one classic and one contemporary example of structural analysis freed from the trammels of purely verbal structure, see Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk-Tale* (1st Russian ed., 1928; English trans., 1958; French trans., of the 2nd Russian ed., 1970); Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970).

PM

anticlimax

see DENOUEMENT

anti-hero

see HERO

apocalyptic literature

There exists a body of biblical literature, canonical and apocryphal, conventionally called apocalyptic (from the Greek, meaning unveiling, uncovering). The Old Testament Book of Daniel and the New Testament Book of Revelation are the best known of these. They are characterized by an interest in the revelation of future events, as in prophecy. As a kind of systematized prophetic writing, the literature of apocalypse takes a wide view of human history, which it schematizes and periodizes, and an especial interest in eschatology, in the 'latter days', the end of historical time, the last judgment. These revelations are part of a hitherto secret knowledge. They tend to affect an esoteric, visionary, symbolic and fantastic scenario, a cast of animals, angels, stars and numbers, which are to be understood symbolically. The struggle between good and evil powers in the latter days of a terminal period culminates in a final judgment, the resurrection of the dead and the installation of a messianic kingdom. All these elements are not

necessarily present in any one work, and it can be convenient to use the term even where a deliberate frustration of a conventional apocalyptic expectation may be at issue.

Apocalyptic types characterize historical periods of upheaval and crisis, and interest in apocalyptic literature of the past has also occurred in such periods. Similarly, in recent years critics of secular literature have become sensitized to the apocalyptic elements in works not formally of the type, but whose language, particularly imagery, touches on the themes of revelation, renovation and ending. Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) is the most notable of these, using the 'ways in which . . . we have imagined the ends of the world' as a taking-off point for a study of fictional endings and fictional structures generally. For him, the literature of apocalypse is a 'radical instance' of fiction, depending 'on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future'. Recent awareness of apocalyptic types in fiction, he claims, has concentrated on 'crisis, decadence and empire, and . . . disconfirmation, the inevitable fate of detailed eschatological predictions'.

In using apocalypse as a type of fiction recent criticism may merely be using a congenial language to define the literature of its own time—including that of the past felt to be 'relevant'—in terms acceptable to its own sense of crisis. It seems also true that there has been a social history of apocalyptic fictions in Anglo-American literature, for while apocalypse seems almost allied with 'progressive' forces in Elizabethan times, as in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, it is entertained later with mixed fascination and horror by writers who project the Final End as an image of the abortion rather than the consummation of current trends of history. In his essay, 'The end of the world', reprinted in *Errand Into The Wilderness* (1964), Perry Miller has provided not only a summary of English and American apocalyptic literature, but an insight into the gradual transition in expectations and reasons for the desirability of this typology. He focuses particularly on the period between the Elizabethan and the Modern and on the figures of Jonathan Edwards, 'the greatest artist of the apocalypse' in America, and Edgar Allan Poe, whose eschatological stories pinpoint a transition in the handling of apocalyptic materials, foreshadowing more modern attitudes to a world-consuming holocaust.

AMG

aporia

see DECONSTRUCTION

appreciation

see AESTHETICS, EVALUATION

archaism

is the use of forms whose obsoleteness or obsolescence is manifest and thus immediately subject to the reader's scrutiny. It can be mere whimsical display: Thackeray sometimes lapses into language quaint in his own time and irrelevant to the cast of mind of his characters, his gratuitous mischief evoking a simple, ultimately repetitious response and impeding any probing of the more complex implications of characters and plot. In general, archaism's tendency is to be a simplifying device: one's experience of the language of one's own time and place is of something richly and variously suggestive, closely related to one's experience and knowledge, capable of complexity of organization and delicate flexibility, spontaneously understandable and usable, whereas archaism refers back to a linguistic or cultural system which it cannot totally reconstruct, and archaic forms may thus seem impoverished, rigid and ponderous. The consistent archaism of the Authorized Version (1611) interposes a unified tone of solemnity between the varied subject-matter and the audience, making its response more uniform because more uncomplex. More sophisticated, and richly fruitful, uses of archaic language are commonly found in great authors, invoking and incorporating the values of older literary traditions: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, T. S. Eliot provide many examples.

Since we imagine earlier cultural states to have been, like our childhood, simpler, more manageable, perhaps more desirable than the present, archaism can arouse an often vague delight in the familiar but long forgotten, yet as it refers back to the unknown can also be made frightening: Thomas Mann, in *Doctor Faustus* (1947), exploits this paradox to reveal affinities between cautious, conservative habits of mind and dangerous primitivism.

Except in regionalist writers, cultural archaism is not commonly combined with consistent linguistic archaism, but it too can be a simplifying device: many historical novels exploit our unfamiliarity with the culture described to give an uncomplex, idealized, and sometimes (as in C. F. Meyer) monumental and intriguingly remote impression of human emotions such as heroism, nostalgic yearning and guilt.

See *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises,* 19 (1967).

MHP

archetype

see MYTH

Aristotelian criticism

see CHICAGO CRITICS

art

Nobody has yet defined art to anyone else's satisfaction. There is general agreement on what art is not; none on what it is. Art, as all know who are in the know, is not Life. Similarly, informed opinion is unanimous in contrasting Art and Craft, Art and Propaganda, Art and Entertainment. But here the difficulties start, since it is evident that if these things are not congruent with art they may well overlap it.

'Art', it seems, like 'good', must be simply a commendatory word covering a multitude of incompatible meanings. The commendatory component is surely what fires controversy in the quest for some common essence to be distilled from the multiplicity of admirable works—a quest inevitably vain. What commends itself to one taste is to another distasteful, for such commendation is subjective: '*de gustibus* . . .' Nor can there be agreement about objectively commendatory characteristics, for qualities perfectly appropriate to a good comic drama cannot be so to a love lyric or a tragic novel. In any case commendatory definitions are persuasive, and therefore however descriptive they purport to be are always prescriptive, and thus provocative, in effect.

The pull of common usage is probably too strong to allow this distracting commendatory element to be eliminated, but if the unanswerable question 'What is Art?' were to be dropped in favour of the practical question 'How can "Art" be most *usefully* defined?' it might be easier to diminish and control it. Anyway, it is clearly more useful to go along with common usage as far as it is consonant with the requirements already implied than to flout it completely. Perhaps the following stipulative definition will meet the case: *any work characterized by an obvious aesthetic element is to be deemed a work of art*. This definition is minimally commendatory, for it does not imply that the aesthetic element defining a literary work as 'art' need be its most valuable characteristic, or that all works, even of creative literature, *ought* to be works of 'art' as defined. It is not essentialist in so far as *any* form, whether in drama, narrative or lyric, and *any* content in combination with it, may give rise to aesthetic effects, so allowing dissimilar works all to be classed as works of art yet without the disrespect to their differences that comes from concentrating attention on some alleged metaphysical common property. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive in so far as aesthetic appreciation depends on describable formal qualities (see AESTHETICS). Finally, such a definition is consonant with the commonest use of this word in literary history, 'Art for art's sake'. Nor is it entirely inconsistent with the common contrasts mentioned. Craft, Propaganda, and Entertainment, being intended for use, not ornament, are less likely to be characterized by an obvious aesthetic element than those less instrumental works that can afford to treat the

reader more *formally*, keep him at a little distance.

The usefulness of this definition is both negative and positive. Negatively, by drastically reducing the value-connotations of 'art', it avoids that metaphysical discussion which distracts attention from more concrete critical issues. Positively, by leaving open the possibility of good, bad or indifferent art (accordingly to the quality of the aesthetic element) and also by not pre-empting the possibility of factors other than 'art' being more pleasurable or important, it encourages full and varied critical appreciation.

See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (1960); R. Wollheim, *Art and its Objects* (1968); *British Journal of Aesthetics*.

AER

assonance

see TEXTURE

atmosphere

The word 'atmosphere' often occurs in non-literary contexts in vague senses difficult to distinguish satisfactorily from literary uses. Indeed, perhaps its very vagueness makes it a necessary critical term. Unlike almost all others, it reminds us not of the human propensity to arrange phenomena in patterns and think in structures, but of our ability to suspend analytical awareness: 'atmospheric' writing perhaps exploits our delight in an apparent temporary escape from structure.

Atmosphere is created where the overtones of the words and ideas employed reinforce one another; the avoidance of challenging disharmonies reduces the amount of intellectual effort required from the reader and prevents disruption of his sense of the uniformity and continuity of the work. The paradox of 'atmospheric' literature is that although (like almost all writing) it is linear, one word following another, it gives an appearance of stasis. Such German Romantics as Brentano and Eichendorff often use rhyme-words closely related in emotional colouring, so that the second rhyme-word, in recalling the first, includes it; thus a progressively all-engulfing sense of expansion is achieved. This, combined with effects of ebb and flow as one rhyme is replaced by another, eliminates a risk of 'atmospheric' writing, namely that it will seem aimless and meagrely repetitious, and sustains the paradox (exploited more complexly by some authors, e.g. Hardy) of a movement which is no movement.

Atmosphere is often created by the viewing of ordinary events from an unusual angle, giving them an air of mystery: in Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913) even everyday happenings at school (which themselves evoke nostalgia in the reader) are mysterious because the child's understanding is insufficiently developed to work

out to his own satisfaction how they are affecting him.

MHP

author

According to common sense, authors are people who write books. But this is an activity subject to considerable historical variation, and one recent development in criticism has been to attend to this variation: to analyse the shifting identity of the author in relation to different institutions—the church, the court, the publishing house, the university. This analysis includes among its concerns the effects of print technology upon authorship, and the emergence in the nineteenth century of authors as a distinct professional group with legally protected rights of property in what they wrote. Another aspect of this history is the changing cultural image of authorship. Again the variation here is considerable, ranging from the scribe, to the artisan skilled in rhetoric, to the figure who imitates either nature or established models of excellence, to the seer who produces forms of writing deemed equivalent to new forms of consciousness, endowed with powers of prophecy or moral wisdom. This history demonstrates the problematic relationship between writing and authorship: are all writers authors or only some? What, in any given period, makes the difference? Nor is it a history characterized by the simple succession of one image of authorship by another: for example, the fascination with literary works as the product of divinely inspired genius which emerged in late eighteenth-century Europe revives themes found in Longinus and Plato.

The history of the practice and concept of authorship is valuable to students of literature because ideas and fantasies about the author have determined how we read and value literary works. If we regard literature as the product of genius, we approach it with reverence and an expectation of revelation. Or the logic of critical argument could be organized around the idea that the author is the sole or privileged arbiter of meaning. To discover the meaning of a work might be regarded as equivalent to understanding what the author did intend or might have intended in writing it. The problem of how to decode the author's INTENTIONS is itself the subject of extensive critical debate. What is the relevance of biographical information? Can we discern the author's intentions by analysing the literary work as a series of speech acts, each with an intended force? Can we know an author's intention without access to the historical context in which he or she wrote? What are the effects of PSYCHOANALYTIC criticism which introduces the idea of unconscious motivation into an account of authorship?

These questions continue to preoccupy literary critics, testifying to the power of the author in critical argument and in the wider culture.

Our contemporary fascination with authors is long-standing, going back at least to the eighteenth century when Samuel Johnson produced a classic of biographical criticism, *The Lives of the English Poets* (1779–81). ROMANTIC theory introduced the analogy between divine and literary creativity, and this theological aura around authorship was renewed by MODERNIST accounts of the impersonality of the great writer. Authors have become heroic figures in modern culture: whether as rebels or reactionaries, because they write books authors are expected to have wise things to say about a whole range of political and personal dilemmas.

But modern criticism has not simply underwritten the authority of authors. In a famous essay, 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1954), the American critics Wimsatt and Beardsley issued a dictat forbidding critics to refer to authorial intentions in the analysis of literature: a literary work contained all the information necessary for its understanding in the words on the page, so appeals to authorial intention were at best irrelevant, at worst misleading. The argument is valuable in so far as it warns against replacing the interpretation of texts with an interpretation of the author's life. It founders, however, for various reasons: the words on the page do not simply begin and end there, and understanding them requires reference to historical and social contexts, which are not so constant as Wimsatt and Beardsley believe. Nor can meaning be so readily divorced from intention. According to speech act theory, to understand the meaning of an utterance requires that we understand the intention of someone in uttering it. The problem with literary texts is identifying who that someone is, given the multiple displacements of the author into narrator, persona, characters, statements of traditional wisdom and other forms of quotation. Where do we find Dostoevsky amid the multiple voices which make up *Crime and Punishment*? Where do we find Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*?

The impossibility of answering these questions is the starting point for Roland Barthes's polemical essay 'The Death of the Author'. According to Barthes the author is an ideological construct whose purpose is to legitimate a practice of writing and reading which always pursues 'the voice of a single person, the author "confiding" in us'. Barthes proposes an alternative account: the text is irreducibly plural, a weave of voices or codes which cannot be tied to a single point of expressive origin in the author. Reading is not about the discovery of a single hidden voice or meaning, but a production working with the multiple codes that compose a text. Traditional assumptions about the origin and the unity of a text are reversed:

> The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity

> lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the text is constituted.

Barthes's stress upon the anonymity of the reader recalls T. S. Eliot's earlier account of the impersonality of the author in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919). Barthes shifts the terms of a MODERNIST poetics on to the side of the READER; the meaning of a text is volatile, varying according to the different occasions of reading and without reference to an authority which will fix meaning. Barthes's paradoxical transformation of authors into readers liberates us from the oppressive reverence for authorial creativity and wisdom, but it excludes important questions from the critical agenda: what is it that brings a particular person at a particular time to write? What do we make of the phenomenon of originality or of the fact that literary works have stylistic signatures which enable us to distinguish the work of one author from another? Turning authors into cults is not going to answer these questions, but neither is banishing them altogether from the discourse of literary criticism. See also CREATION, DECONSTRUCTION, DIALOGIC STRUCTURE, DISCOURSE, READER.

See J. Bayley, *The Characters of Love* (1960); R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image-Music-Text* (trans. 1977) and *S/Z* (1970, trans. 1975); M. Foucault, 'What is an author?' (1969) in *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice* (1977); P. Parrinder, *Authors and Authority* (1977).

JC

autobiography

see BIOGRAPHY