

GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

ABSTRACT LANGUAGE Language that describes ideas or qualities rather than specific, observable people, places, and things, which are described in **CONCRETE LANGUAGE**.

ACTION At its simplest, the thing or things that happen in a story's **PLOT**—what the **CHARACTERS** do and what is done to them. A story may have more than one action (a plot and one or more **SUBPLOTS**), but a successful short story usually has one identifiable central action.

ALLEGORY A narrative in which **CHARACTERS**, places, things, and events represent general qualities and their interactions are meant to reveal a general or abstract truth. Such characters, places, things, and events thus often function as **SYMBOLS** of the concepts or ideas referred to.

ALLUSION An implied or indirect reference to something with which the reader is supposed to be familiar.

AMBIGUITY A situation expressed in such a way as to admit more than one possible interpretation; also, the way of expressing such a situation. Many short story writers intend some element of their work to be ambiguous, but careless or sloppy writing often creates unintentional ambiguity, or *vagueness*.

ANALYSIS A separation of a story into its component parts, as a means of understanding its meaning or structure.

ANECDOTE A brief, unified **NARRATION** of one incident or **EPISODE**, often humorous and often based on an actual event. Some very good short stories may consist of nothing more than an anecdote; others may be made up of several anecdotes strung together, or may use one or more anecdotes as a way of advancing the **PLOT** or developing a **CHARACTER**.

ANTAGONIST A **CHARACTER** in some stories who is in real or imagined opposition to the **PROTAGONIST** or **HERO**. The **CONFLICT** between these characters makes up the **ACTION**, or **PLOT**, of the story. It is usually resolved in some way, but it need not be.

ANTICLIMAX An unexpected, insignificant **RESOLUTION** to a narrative, sometimes appearing in the place of a **CLIMAX**, sometimes after a true climax. Many anticlimaxes are the unintended result of inept writing, but often—especially in **MODERN** works—they are used intentionally to indicate the randomness, futility, or boredom of human life and action.

ANTHERO A **PROTAGONIST** who lacks the conventional qualities of a **HERO**. Generally the anthero is considered a modern form of characterization, a commentary on traditional portrayals of idealized heroes. Franz Kafka's protagonist Gregor Samsa is one example.

ANTI-STORY An experimental short story that attempts to convey **OBJECTIVE** reality by avoiding what its authors consider the false **CONVENTIONS** of **PLOT**, **CHARACTER**, and **THEME**, relying instead on seemingly uninterpreted and unarranged fragments of direct experience and language.

ATMOSPHERE The **MOOD**, feeling, or quality of life in a story as conveyed by the author's choices of language and organization in describing the setting in which the speech and activity of the **CHARACTERS** takes place. The atmosphere in which an author makes characters appear and events occur is often important in determining the **TOPE** of the work.

AUTHORIAL INTRUSION See **EDITORIAL POINT OF VIEW**.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE A **CHARACTER** (often but not always the **NARRATOR**) through whose perception the author observes the **ACTION** of a story and whose perspective thus shapes the reader's view of that action. The term was coined by Henry James, who felt, essentially, that the true subject matter of **FICION** is the effect of the action on the understanding of this central intelligence.

CHARACTER Any person who plays a part in a narrative. Characters may be **FLAT**—simple, one-dimensional, unsurprising, and usually unchanging or *static*—or **ROUND**—complex, full, described in detail, often contradictory, and usually *dynamic*, i.e., changing in some way during the story. The main character in the story can usually be labeled the **PROTAGONIST** or **HERO**; he or she is often in **CONFLICT** with some other character, an **ANTAGONIST**. Other characters who affect the **ACTION** slightly or only indirectly may be called *minor* characters; but, depending on the intention or the skill of the author, the main characters need not be round, nor the minor characters flat. Minor characters can sometimes be complex and dynamic also.

CLIMAX The turning point or point of highest interest in a narrative; the point at which the most important part of the **ACTION** takes place and the final outcome or **RESOLUTION** of the **PLOT** becomes inevitable. Leading up to the climax is the **RISING ACTION** of the story; after the climax, the **FALLING ACTION** takes the reader to the **DENOUEMENT** or **CONCLUSION**, in which the results of the climactic action are presented.

Closed ending The conclusion of a story in which the **ACTION** ends in unambiguous success or failure (or death) for the **PROTAGONIST**.

Close reading A method of analyzing literature using careful step-by-step **EXPLICATION** of the text.

COINCIDENCE An event or situation that arises for no apparent reason and with little or no preparation and then has a significant effect on the working out of the **PLOT** or the lives of one or more of the **CHARACTERS** in a work; a chance happening that has an important consequence or result, an accident of fate.

COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH The correct but informal and casual language of ordinary native speakers, including slang and contractions.

COMING-OF-AGE STORY See **INITIATION STORY**.

COMPLICATION The introduction and development of a **CONFLICT** between **CHARACTERS** or between a character and his or her situation. A complication moves the **PLOT** forward by exciting the reader's expectation that the conflict so introduced must lead to a **CLIMAX** and reach some ultimate **RESOLUTION** as a result.

COMPRESSION The use of few or short words, sentences, or paragraphs, or of very brief descriptions of **CHARACTERS** and **SETTINGS** and **NARRATIONS** of incidents, to tell a story as clearly and simply as possible, in general, an economical use of language.

CONCLUSION The outcome or **RESOLUTION** of a **PLOT** at the end of a **STORY**. Also called **DENOUEMENT**, as it may untie or resolve the plot complications encountered during the **RIISING ACTION**. See also **CLOSED ENDING**, **O. HENRY ENDING**, and **OPEN ENDING**.

CONCRETE LANGUAGE Language that describes or portrays specific, observable persons, places, and things rather than general ideas or qualities, which are described in **ABSTRACT LANGUAGE**.

CONFLICT The opposition presented to the main **CHARACTER** (or **PROTAGONIST**) of a narrative by another character (an **ANTAGONIST**), by events or situations, by fate, or by some aspect of the protagonist's own personality or nature. The conflict is introduced by means of a **COMPLICATION** that sets in motion the **RIISING ACTION**, usually toward a **CLIMAX** and eventual **RESOLUTION**.

CONNOTATION The meaning of a word (or words) that is implied or suggested by the specific associations the word calls to mind and by the **TOE** in which it is used, as opposed to its literal meaning or denotation.

CONVENTION A traditional or commonly accepted technique of writing or device used in writing, often an unbelievable device that the reader agrees to believe — such as, for example, the fact that a **FIRST-PERSON NARRATOR** is addressing the reader in a friendly and intimate manner.

CONVENTIONAL Following or observing **CONVENTIONS**; often used in a derogatory manner to indicate a certain overreliance on such conventions and thus a lack of originality or failure of imagination on the part of the writer.

Crisis The turning point in a **NARRATIVE**; the point at which the **ACTION** reaches its **CLIMAX** and its **RESOLUTION** becomes inevitable.

DECONSTRUCTION A critical approach investigating the unstable properties of language, especially the destabilization of single definitions of meaning and the defamiliarization of literary **CONVENTIONS**. In the words of one critic, deconstruction is "not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself."

DENOUEMENT The conclusion of an **ACTION** or **PLOT**, in which the **FALLING ACTION** is brought to a close and the outcome or outcomes of the **CLIMAX** are presented to the reader; from a French word meaning "the untying of a knot."

DESCRIPTION The use of language to present the features of a person, place, or thing.

DIALECT A particular variety of language spoken in a specific region, usually by a poorly educated person. Authors can use dialect to suggest signifi-

cant differences or similarities in class or background between fictional **CHARACTERS**.

DIALOGUE The written presentation of words spoken by **CHARACTERS** in a **NARRATIVE**; used to introduce the **CONFLICT**, give some impressions of the lives and personalities of the characters who are speaking, and advance the **ACTION** to its **CLIMAX** and **RESOLUTION**.

DICTION The choice and arrangement of specific words and types of words to tell a story. A writer's diction is an important element of **STYLE**, and has a significant effect on the meaning of a story. The same **ACTION** will leave a different impression on the reader when it is narrated in street slang, in the clear, precise language of an old schoolteacher, or in the professional jargon of a lawyer or a social scientist.

DIDACTIC A term used to describe a **NARRATIVE** or other work of art that is presented in order to teach a specific lesson, convey a **MORAL**, or inspire and provide a model for proper behavior.

DISTANCE An author's or a **NARRATOR**'s spatial or temporal — and hence emotional — removal or aloofness from the **ACTION** of a **NARRATIVE**, and from its **CHARACTERS**.

DRAMATIC IRONY The reader's awareness of a discrepancy between a **CHARACTER**'s perception of his or her own situation or activities, or of their consequences, and the true nature of that situation or those consequences.

EDITORIAL POINT OF VIEW The occasion in a text in **THIRD-PERSON NARRATION** when the narrator adds his or her own comments, which may or may not be the opinions of the author.

EPICRAPE A quotation an author places at the beginning of a literary work that often suggests its **THEME**.

EPIPHANY A "showing forth" or sudden revelation of the true nature of a **CHARACTER** or situation through a specific event — a word, gesture, or other action — that causes the reader to see the significance of that character or situation in a new light. The term was first popularized in modern literature by James Joyce.

EPISODE A specific, usually very brief incident, often complete in itself and usually narrated at once and as a whole (as in an **ANECDOTE**). A story may consist of the **NARRATION** of one episode or of several episodes strung together and united by a common **SETTING** or common **CHARACTERS** or proceeding toward a single **CLIMAX** and **RESOLUTION**; the latter kind of story is referred to as an *episodic narrative*.

EXPLANATION The act of explaining or interpreting the meaning of a text.

EXPOSITION The presentation of background information that a reader must be aware of, especially of situations that exist and events that have occurred before the **ACTION** of a story begins.

FABLE A very short, often humorous **NARRATIVE** told to present a **MORAL**. A fable's **CHARACTERS** are often animals, and particular animals have **CONVENTIONAL** associations with specific abstract qualities or values — the fox represents wiliiness, the ant industry, and the lion nobility; for example, Leo Tolstoy said that "the bad fable has a moral, while the good fable is a moral."

FAIRY TALE A story or **FANTASY** that appeals to our sense of the marvelous, in which we suspend disbelief and let our subconscious patterns of wish fulfillment express themselves through magical occurrences, characters, or objects.

FALLING ACTION The events of a NARRATIVE that follow the CLIMAX and resolve the CONFLICT that reached its highest point in that climax before bringing the story to its conclusion or DENOUEMENT.

FANTASY A NARRATIVE or events in a narrative that have no possible existence in reality and could not have occurred in a real world; used sometimes to amuse or delight readers, sometimes to comment on or illustrate by contrast some aspect of reality, and sometimes, as in a FABLE, to present a clear MORAL that will not be complicated or diminished by the untidiness or inconsistency of reality, or as in a FAIRY TALE, to express patterns of wish fulfillment.

FICTION A NARRATIVE drawn from an author's imagination, made up of a PLOT of imagined events involving imagined CHARACTERS in imagined or imaginatively reconstructed SETTINGS; lies told with the tolerance, consent, and even complicity of the listener or reader. The word *fiction* comes from the Latin *ficere*, "an act of fashioning; a shaping, a making."

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE The use of a word or a group of words that is literally inaccurate to describe or define a person, event, or thing vividly by calling forth the sensations or responses that person, event, or thing evokes. Such language often takes the form of METAPHORS, in which one thing is equated with another, or of SIMILES, in which one thing is compared to another by using *like*, *as*, or some other such connecting word.

FIRST-PERSON NARRATION The telling of a story by a person who was involved in or directly observed the ACTION narrated. Such a NARRATOR refers to himself or herself as *I* and becomes a CHARACTER in the story, with his or her understanding shaping the reader's perception of the events and CHARACTERS.

FLASHBACK A technique of EXPOSITION in which the flow of events in a NARRATIVE is interrupted to present to the reader an earlier incident or situation that has a bearing on the story or film or its CHARACTERS.

FLAT CHARACTER A simple, one-dimensional, usually unchanging CHARACTER who shows none of the human depth, complexity, and contrariness of a ROUND CHARACTER or of most real people.

FOLKTALE A NARRATIVE that comes out of the tradition — usually the oral tradition — of a specific culture and is used to communicate that culture's beliefs, values, and history from generation to generation. See also LEGEND and MYTH.

FORESHADOWING The introduction of specific words, IMAGES, or events into a NARRATIVE to suggest or anticipate later events that are central to the ACTION and its RESOLUTION.

FORMAL ENGLISH The heightened language of educated users, usually written, although spoken on dignified and ceremonial occasions.

FORMALISM A critical approach that stresses the self-contained and self-referential nature of a work of art. Formalism took root in the 1920s and 1930s, flourished in the "New Criticism" of the 1940s and 1950s, and is still influential today. Formalists promote close reading, focusing on internal patterns of language and meaning within a text and excluding "external" considerations such as the author's biography, social history, or the reader's personal idiosyncratic response.

FRAME STORY A story within a story; a NARRATIVE told within the framework of another fictional setting and situation. In film, the term FRAME refers to an individual photograph on a strip of film.

GENERAL ENGLISH The ordinary speech of educated speakers.

GENRE A type of literary work, such as SHORT STORY, NOVEL, essay, play, or poem. The term may also be used to classify literature within a type, such as science-fiction stories or detective novels. In film, the term refers to a recognizable type of movie, such as a western or a thriller, that follows familiar NARRATIVE and visual CONVENTIONS.

GRAPHIC STORYTELLING Substantial single volumes of pictorial images arranged in a sequence to narrate a story with or without words.

HERO/HEROINE The PROTAGONIST of a story or other NARRATIVE; the main CHARACTER, whose CONFLICT is presented and resolved in the ACTION or PLOT. Traditionally, *heroine* has been used to refer to a female hero, but *hero* may be, and is more and more being, used to refer to a protagonist of either sex.

IMAGE A word or group of words used to give a CONCRETE representation, either literal or FIGURATIVE, of a sensory experience or an object that is perceived by the senses.

IMAGERY The use of IMAGES, especially of a consistent pattern of related images — often FIGURATIVE ones — to convey an overall sensory impression.

IMPARTIAL OMNISCIENCE The telling of a story by a THIRD-PERSON NARRATOR whose OMNISCIENCE does not allow for any evaluation or judgment of the CHARACTERS and their activities.

IMPRESSIONISM A way of writing in which an author presents CHARACTERS and events in a highly subjective and personal light, freely admitting an authorial POINT OF VIEW and effectively denying any claim to OBJECTIVITY or disinterestedness; after the style of the French impressionist painters of the late years of the nineteenth century, who sought to free painting from the REALISTIC, representational CONVENTIONS of the day.

INITIATION STORY Also called a "coming-of-age story," this type of narrative confronts a PROTAGONIST, often a child or adolescent, with a difficult experience or rite of passage that prepares him or her for adult life.

INNOCENT OR NAIVE NARRATOR A FIRST-PERSON NARRATION told from the POINT OF VIEW of a young, inexperienced, uneducated, or unintelligent NARRATOR who doesn't understand the implications of the story. This approach is used by the author to generate IRONY or sympathy in the reader.

IRONY The reader's or audience's awareness of a reality that differs from the reality the CHARACTERS perceive (DRAMATIC IRONY) or the literal meaning of the author's words (VERBAL IRONY).

LEGEND A STORY transmitted by popular oral tradition about a famous person or an important event. Unlike other FOLKTALES, legends take place in real locations and are about genuine historical figures.

LEVELS OF DICTION In English, the four levels of formality in word choice are classified as vulgar (DIALECT speech), COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH, GENERAL ENGLISH, and FORMAL ENGLISH.

LIMITED OMNISCIENCE The ability of a THIRD-PERSON NARRATOR to tell the reader directly about any events that have occurred, are occurring, or will occur in the PLOT of a story, and about the thoughts and feelings of one particular CHARACTER, or a few characters, distinguished from simple OMNISCIENCE, whereby such a NARRATOR can tell the reader directly about the thoughts and feelings of any character.

MAGICAL REALISM Fiction that interweaves realistic and fantastic details, juxtaposing the marvelous with the ordinary, as in the stories of Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez.

METAFICTION Stories about language and the process of writing, exemplified by the work of John Barth, Mary Lavin, and Julio Cortázar, among many others.

METAPHOR An implied comparison of two different things that is achieved by a figurative verbal equation of those things. "Love is a rose," "War is hell," and "The exam was a killer" are all metaphors, intended not to define the first terms mentioned but to attribute certain qualities to the thing being discussed.

MINIMALISM A literary style exemplifying economy and restraint, as seen in the stories of Donald Barthelme and Raymond Carver. Some of Ernest Hemingway's stories, such as "Hills Like White Elephants," could be considered pioneering works of minimalism in American literature.

MISE EN SCÈNE (*mise zahn SEN*) A French term meaning "putting into the scene," it refers to the arrangement or design of visual elements such as props, lighting, costume, and actors on the stage of a theater or in the frame of a film. In film, the term also refers to the POINT OF VIEW from which a scene is photographed.

MODERNISM A label loosely applied to the work of certain writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who investigated the structure and texture of literature and challenged its CONVENTIONS.

MONTAGE (*maahn TAAHZH*) The art of editing a film. More specifically, the term refers to an approach to editing developed by Russian filmmakers in the 1920s that aims to create emotional impact and visual meaning through a rapid sequence of brief, and often juxtaposed, shots.

MOOD The atmosphere that is created by the author's choice of details and the words with which to present them.

MORAL The lesson to be drawn from a story, especially from a FABLE or (in this sense the word is often used disparagingly) from a heavily DIDACTIC story.

MOTIVATION The external forces (SETTING, circumstance) and internal forces (personality, temperament, morality, intelligence) that compel a CHARACTER to act as he or she does in a NARRATIVE.

MYTH A symbolic NARRATIVE, often a FOLKTALE arising out of a culture's oral tradition and involving gods or superhumanly heroic figures, that is used to explain the way things are and the way things happen and to transmit the culture's values and beliefs from generation to generation.

NARRATION The dramatic telling of the events that make up the ACTION or PLOT of a story. FIRST-PERSON NARRATION is the telling of a story by a NARRATOR who participated in or directly observed the events being recounted and who is thus a CHARACTER in the story, identifying himself or herself as I. THIRD-PERSON NARRATION is the telling of a story by a detached, almost always anonymous voice who refers to the characters as *he, she, and they*. A THIRD-PERSON NARRATOR may or may not be OMNISCIENT.

NARRATIVE A sequence of events, often (but not always) unified and connected in storytelling.

NARRATOR The teller of a story; usually either a CHARACTER who participates in the story's ACTION (see FIRST-PERSON NARRATION) or a detached, anonymous

observer who may or may not present himself or herself as OMNISCIENT of the story's action from the beginning (see THIRD-PERSON NARRATION).

NATURALISM An extreme form of REALISM in which authors present their work as a scientific observation of a world in which people's acts are strictly determined by their nature and the nature of their surroundings.

NOVEL A long fictional prose NARRATIVE.

NOVELLA A short novel; a work of prose FICTION whose length falls somewhere between that of a SHORT STORY and that of a NOVEL; sometimes (though infrequently today) referred to as a *novelle*. Different critics have attempted to specify different standards of length for a novella or short novel — some saying 15,000 to 50,000 words, others 50 to 125 ordinary book pages — but there is no universal agreement on such a standard.

OBJECTIVITY An attempt by an author to remove himself or herself from any personal involvement with the CHARACTERS and ACTIONS of a story, to tell the story without bias and without expressing any personal opinions or making any personal judgments of the characters.

O. HENRY ENDING A surprising CONCLUSION that reverses the reader's expectations of the way a NARRATIVE will end, often affected by an unexpected source or by withholding information at an earlier stage of the story. This type of ending in works of short fiction was made popular by O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) in the early twentieth century.

OMNISCIENCE Literally, "all-knowingness"; the ability of an author or a NARRATOR (usually a THIRD-PERSON NARRATOR) to tell the reader directly about any events that have occurred, are occurring, or will occur in the PLOT of a story and about the thoughts and feelings of any CHARACTER.

OPEN ENDING An ambiguous CONCLUSION to a story, which suggests there might be different possibilities in the future of the PROTAGONIST.

PACE The rate at which the ACTION of a story progresses. Pace may be affected by varying the lengths of words, sentences, and paragraphs, by compressing or expanding the NARRATION of certain incidents or EPISODES, or by introducing and repeating certain key words and formulaic phrases.

PARABLE A NARRATIVE, usually short, that is told to answer a difficult moral question or teach a moral truth; often a form of ALLEGORY, because each person, event, or thing in the parable represents a literally unrelated person, event, thing, or quality that is involved in the moral dilemma being examined.

PARODY A humorous imitation of another, usually serious, work or type of work, in which the parodist adopts the quirks of STYLE or the CONVENTIONS of the work or works being imitated and uses them in extreme and ridiculous ways or applies them to a comically inappropriate subject matter.

PATHOS The quality in a work that evokes sorrow or pity. Inappropriate pathos, or a too-frequent resorting to pathetic effects, can reduce a work to SENTIMENTALITY, or *bathos*.

PERSONA The fictional mask or voice an author may adopt to tell a story.

PLOT The series of events in a NARRATIVE that form the ACTION, in which CHARACTERS or characters face an internal or external CONFLICT that propels the story to a CLIMAX and an ultimate RESOLUTION. Plot determines

the way the reader experiences the story. It is an aesthetic pattern created in the different stages of the narrative, encompassing the EXPOSITION, RISING ACTION, CLIMAX, FALLING ACTION, and CONCLUSION.

POINT OF VIEW The perspective from which an author lets the reader view the ACTION of a narrative; thus, the choice of who tells the story. In FIRST-PERSON NARRATION the NARRATOR tells a story he or she took part in or observed directly; such a narrator usually knows only what has been explicitly revealed or what he or she has been able to deduce from that. In THIRD-PERSON NARRATION the narrator is not directly involved in the story and so views it from a certain DISTANCE. Such a narrator may be OMNISCIENT about the CHARACTERS and their actions and MOTIVATIONS, or his or her knowledge may be LIMITED to what one or a few characters know or even to the plainly observable speeches and acts of the characters.

PROTAGONIST The main CHARACTER of a narrative; his HERO. The ACTION of the story is usually the presentation and RESOLUTION of some internal or external CONFLICT of the protagonist; if the conflict is with another major character, that character may be called the ANTAGONIST.

REALISM The telling of a story in a manner that is faithful to the reader's experience of real life, limiting events in the PLOT to things that might actually happen and CHARACTERS to people who might actually exist.

RESOLUTION The FALLING ACTION of a NARRATIVE, in which the CONFLICT, set in motion during the RISING ACTION and reaching its high point in the CLIMAX, is settled, or at least significantly altered, and the story moves swiftly toward its conclusion or DENOUEMENT.

REVERSAL Any turnabout in the fortunes of a CHARACTER, especially of the PROTAGONIST.

RISING ACTION The event or events that present and develop the CONFLICT whose dramatization is the story's ACTION; the COMPLICATION (or set of complications) that leads up to the CLIMAX.

ROMANTICISM A literary movement that flourished in the nineteenth century, valuing individuality, imagination, and the truth revealed in nature.

ROUND CHARACTER A full, complex, multidimensional CHARACTER whose personality reveals some of the richness and contradictoriness we are accustomed to observing in actual people, rather than the transparent obviousness of a FLAT CHARACTER.

SATIRE A work that ridicules some aspect of human behavior by portraying it at its most extreme; distinguished from PARODY, which burlesques the STYLE or content of a particular work or type of work.

SCREENPLAY A script for a film containing all of the scenes, DIALOGUE, ACTION, and often camera position and angle.

SENTIMENTALITY An overreliance on emotional effect or PATHOS so great as to strain the reader's willingness to believe; also referred to as *bathos*.

SETTING The place and time in which a story's ACTION takes place; also, in a broader sense, the culture and the ways of life of the CHARACTERS and the shared beliefs and assumptions that guide their lives.

SHORT STORY A short fictional prose NARRATIVE, often including the YARN, the SKETCH, the FABLE, and the TALE. The term is often applied to any work of narrative prose FICTION shorter than a NOVEL. Edgar Allan Poe said the story's distinguishing factors were that it possesses aesthetic UNITY and can be read in one sitting. The trouble with that definition, as the writer

William Saroyan once pointed out, is that some people can sit longer than others. See the discussion of this term in the Introduction and in the Elements of Fiction.

SIMILE A FIGURATIVE comparison of one thing to another, especially to one that is not usually thought of as similar. The comparison is achieved by using connecting words such as *like* or *as*. An old country song says, "Life is like a mountain railway," and then goes on to describe the narrow, tortuous paths people must follow in dealing with life's moral dilemmas, and the steep fall that awaits those who are not careful. The simile makes possible this figurative comparison of two such dissimilar things as *life*, a very large abstraction, and *mountain railway*, a very specific and seemingly unrelated object.

SKETCH A relaxed, static, predominantly descriptive prose composition that may include action but no PLOT or causally related actions that develop and resolve a CONFLICT.

STEP-OUTLINE A story told in one- or two-sentence steps for a film TREATMENT.

STEREOTYPE A generalized, oversimplified CHARACTER (often a STOCK CHARACTER) whose thoughts and actions are excessively predictable because they are used so frequently that they have become CONVENTIONAL.

STOCK CHARACTERS CONVENTIONAL CHARACTERS who appear in numerous works, especially in works of the same type, and behave in predictable ways. Examples include the cruel stepmother in fairy tales and the hard-boiled detective in certain mystery stories.

STORY An account of an incident or a series of events, either factual or invented. See SHORT STORY.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS The NARRATIVE technique by which an author attempts to capture the flow of a CHARACTER's thoughts, often in a series of separate and apparently unrelated passages that unite to give an IMPRESSIONISTIC view of reality as seen by that character.

STRUCTURALISM A critical approach that developed contemporaneously with FORMALISM, similarly stressing attention to the formal elements of texts but regarding them as manifestations of a larger series of cultural codes and CONVENTIONS that govern responses to works of art (and indeed all other human artifacts). Structuralist criticism studies categories of thought and finds them embedded in language itself — or, more precisely, in the relations among the constituent parts of language.

STYLE The habitual manner of expression of an author. An author's style is the product of choices, made consciously or unconsciously, about elements such as vocabulary, organization, DICTION, IMAGERY, PACE, and even certain recurring THEMES or subjects.

SUBPLOT A minor PLOT, often involving one or more secondary CHARACTERS, that may add a COMPLICATION to the ACTION of a NARRATIVE or may reinforce that action or provide an enlightening contrast to it or a welcome relief from its tension.

SURREALISM A way of writing that involves the presentation of a super-real, dreamlike world where CONVENTIONS are upended and rationality is dispensed with. The spontaneous creations of the unconscious are depicted in a surrealist work through FANTASY and incongruous IMAGERY.

SUSPENSE The anxious uncertainty an author creates in a reader about the outcome of a story's ACTION. Suspense is often resolved when the action reaches a CLIMAX, after which the RESOLUTION is more or less inevitable.

SYMBOL A person, event, or thing that stands for or represents by association some other, usually broader, idea or range of ideas, in addition to maintaining its own literal meaning.

TALE An early form of the **SHORT STORY**, usually involving remote places and times, and events leading to a dramatic, conclusive ending.

TALL TALE A **TALE** or **SHORT STORY** based on a consciously ludicrous distortion.

THEME The central, unifying point or idea that is made concrete, developed, and explored in the **ACTION** and the **MAGERY** of a work of fiction.

THIRD-PERSON NARRATION The telling of a story by a detached, usually anonymous **NARRATOR**, a voice who refers to all the **CHARACTERS** as *he*, *she*, and *they*. Such a narrator may view the story with full **OMNISCIENCE**, which may or may not be **PARTIAL OMNISCIENCE**; or he or she may have only **LIMITED OMNISCIENCE**, seeing through the eyes of only one or a few characters.

TONE The expression of the author's attitude toward his or her subject matter — the **CHARACTERS**, their **SETTING**, and the **ACTION** they undertake or undergo. Tone is revealed in the author's **DICTON**, **MAGERY**, organization, vocabulary, and various other choices that contribute to the making of a **STYLE**.

TREATMENT The expansion of a film's step-outline from one or two sentences to paragraphs of present-tense, moment-by-moment description.

UNITY The relation of all parts of a work to one central or organizing principle that forms them into a complete and coherent whole.

UNRELIABLE NARRATOR A fictional **CHARACTER** telling the story whose knowledge or judgment about events and other characters is so flawed or limited as to make him or her a misleading guide to the reader.

VERBAL IRONY The reader's awareness of a discrepancy between the real meaning of the situation being presented and the literal meaning of the author's words in presenting it.

VERISIMILITUDE The use of certain lifelike details to give an imaginative **NARRATIVE** work the semblance of reality or actuality.

VOICE A term referring to the specific manner chosen by the author to tell the story. Voice encompasses elements of **POINT OF VIEW** and **LITERARY STYLE** (**TOPE**, **DICTON**, etc.).

YARN An elaborated **ANECDOTE** or series of anecdotes narrated in colloquial language.