

: STRUCTURE :**15.0 Objectives****15.1 Introduction****15.1.1 What is Literary Term ?****15.1.2 Importance of Literary Terms****15.3 Literary Terms****15.4 Exercise****15.5 Let Us Sum Up****15.6 Books Suggested****Answers****15.0 OBJECTIVES**

In this Unit we shall;

- learn a few selected literary terms, along with their detail meaning,
- learn about association of the terms discussed in this unit.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

This present unit defines and discusses terms that are commonly used to understand, classify, analyze, and interpret literature. The selected literary terms will definitely provide guideline for further reading of literature especially toward undergraduate students of English, and other literatures. However, these literary terms are proved to be a useful for advanced students, as well as for the general reader with literary interests.

15.1.1 What is a Literary Term ?

‘Term’ or ‘Terminology’ means vocabulary related to a certain field of study, profession or activity. It is a system of words used to name things in a particular discipline. One is able to work comfortably in a given profession if knows the terms used within the profession. Similarly, it is important to know some of the basic terms and expressions used to discuss and analyze literature.

Literary term means the technique, style and formatting used by literary writers to highlight, elaborate or strengthen compositions. For example, every story has a theme, setting, conflict and is written from a particular point-of-view. All these words in Italics are literary terms and they have specific meanings in the interpretation of the work.

15.1.2 Importance of Literary Terms :

These words help us to understand literature and find out the characteristics of a work along with its meaning and significance. Understanding

of literary terms helps to appreciate a work of literature deeply. It helps a student of literature to the writer's thoughts and ideas in a better manner.

15.3 LITERARY TERMS

1. **Absurd Theatre or Absurd Literature** : The term is applied to the works of literature (mostly drama and other prose) that depict human condition essentially being meaningless– absurd. The term is derived from *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) by Albert Camus where he writes,

“In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile.... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity.”

Thus it is derived from Existentialism of Albert Camus. It represents purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value. As a rebellion against basic beliefs and values in traditional culture and literature the Absurd movement emerged in France after the tragic and horrors of World War 2. In Absurd Theatre or Literature generally the characters face alarmingly incomprehensible predicaments. The phrase ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ was coined by the critic Martin Esslin with the reference of works of dramatists who evoked the absurdity by leaving behind logical form, character and dialogue together with realistic illusion that of the 1950s. Mainly they were led by Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. ‘Waiting for Godot’ by Samuel Beckett is one of the best examples of ‘Absurd Theatre’.

2. **Aestheticism** : The word is derived from the Greek which means sensitive, perceptive and sentient. The term represents the doctrine that regards beauty as an end or final destination in itself. It is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty and taste. It applies to a literary movement of the second half of the nineteenth century leading to the belief in ‘Art for Art's Sake’.

Immanuel Kant and other German philosophers separated the sense of beauty from practical interests in support of ‘Aestheticism’. ‘Aestheticism was adopted in France by Baudelaire, Flaubert and in England by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and several poets of the 1890s under the slogan of ‘Art for Art's Sake’. Oscar Wilde was the leader of Aestheticism. It attempts to preserve the arts from didactic or political purposes. Barnett Newman says, “Aesthetic is for the artist as Ornithology is for birds.”

3. **Analogy** : Analogy means a comparison between two things, typically on the basis of their structure and for the purpose of explanation and clarification. It is an allegory between the workings of nature and those of human societies. It is also the process of arguing from the point of view of similarity
4. **Ambiguity** : Ambiguity befalls when words carry double or more meanings. It means openness to different interpretations. It is also known as ‘Multiple meanings’ or ‘Plurisignation’. Figurative language

is often ambiguous. The publication of 'Seven Types of Ambiguity' (1930) by William Empson encouraged the usage of the term 'Ambiguity' in criticism to identify a thoughtful poetic device, the use of a single word or expression to signify two or more diverse references or to express two or more distinct attitudes or feelings. Verbal richness adds here to the poetic richness.

5. **Archetype** : This term is used since 1930s. 'Arche' means 'primitive' and 'types' means 'form'. Thus 'Archetype' means a 'primitive form'. The term signifies narrative designs, arrangements of action, character types, themes and images which recur in a wide variety of works of literature as well as in myths, dreams and even social rituals. The famous psychologist Carl Jung used the term describing it as 'primordial images formed by repeated experiences in the lives of our ancestors, inherited in the 'collective unconscious' of the human race and often expressed in myths, religion, dreams and fantasies as well as in literature.' Jung said that primordial images lie in collective human consciousness and so it evokes profound emotional responses in the reader because it resonates with an image already existing in his/her unconscious mind. Such characters, images, actions etc. have the power to stir generation after generation because they are archetypal in nature. Northrop Frye discussed common archetypes in all literatures.
6. **Apocalyptic** : Apocalyptic writing is the writing that aims to reveal the future history of the world and the ultimate destiny of the earth and its inhabitants. It reveals such futuristic secrets through prophecy. Such writing is generally found concerned with the coming end of the world seen in terms of a visionary pattern of history. The Second Coming a poem by W. B. Yeats is an example of apocalyptic writing.
7. **Agnosticism** : The term has its roots in science. The term was coined in 1869 by Thomas Huxley who was the biologist. He said, "I neither affirm nor deny the immortality of man. I see no reason for believing it, but on the other hand I have no means of disproving it." Thus it denotes the view that the truth values of certain claims, especially metaphysical and religious claims such as whether or not God exist, are unknown and perhaps unknowable. Agnostic is one who does not believe or disbelieve in the existence of God. Thus the approach encouraged by biologists like Huxley and Charles Darwin became popular amongst the writers between around 1850 and 1914, arose from the scientific thought of the time.
8. **Allegory** : It is an extended narrative in which the characters and incidents symbolize underlying ideas. Usually it is moral or ethical in nature. For example, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is a series of romantic adventures but each incident has a moral significance too. The triumph of the Red Cross Knight in *Faerie Queene* signifies the defeat of error by holiness. Personification and metaphor are the chief ambassadors of Allegory. Sometimes it is conveyed through the expression of abstract ideas in concrete terms. For instance, in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* the characters and places like Hopeful, Giant

Despair, Doubting Castle etc. denote mental and moral states. The chief purpose of allegory as a device in literature is to teach a lesson. An interesting story encourages a reader to learn a lesson that is presented objectively and simply.

There are some short narratives similar in its purpose but, unlike an allegory which is an extended symbolic narrative, are also called allegories. They are fable, parable and exemplum.

9. **Apocalyptic** : Writings that aim to reveal the future history of the world and the ultimate destiny of the earth and its inhabitants.
10. **Archaism** : It is an old word or expression which is usually no longer accepted. Language is an ever evolving and changing phenomena. Usually a writer should not use such words which have gone out of current language. If such words are used, the reader will fail to understand and get puzzled. Words like albeit, wot, trow are such words which were used commonly once but no longer now. They may be still used by a writer if there is a historical character who belongs to that age when these words were used. Such a kind of use is sometimes called positive archaism. For example, R.L.Stevenson's *The Black Arrow*, the writer has used : And keep ever forward, Master Shelton; turn me not back again, an ye love your life. Here the word 'ye' stands for 'You'.

If this device is used repeatedly by the writer, it turns into annoying one. In short, archaism is the use of expressions, techniques and fashions from an earlier period which is not in use in the current age.

11. **Ballad** : A ballad is as a song or poem that tells a story and has a rhythm and rhyme scheme. It is a poem that is presented with music. English ballads are typically composed of four–line stanzas. They follow an ABCB rhyme scheme. Ballad is one of the oldest poetic forms in English. It deals with tales of adventure, fighting, deeds of valour, love, hatred, and pity. The oldest form of ballad is Folk ballad or Primitive ballad which is usually transmitted orally. The strict meter and rhyme scheme of folk ballads helped singers and storytellers to remember the words of the poems easily. Chevy Chase, Sir Patrick Spens and Binnories are the examples of Folk or Primitive ballads. Literary Ballads is the literary imitation of the traditional type of ballads. It is the product of the conscious literary attempt. John Keats' ballad *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is a perfect example of the lyrical ballad's departure from the form of the traditional ballad. Coleridge's *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* and Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalot* are the other examples.
12. **Burlesque** : It is a form of comedy. It is an Italian word that means 'mockery'. It is often confused with two other forms of satire– farce and parody. There is ridiculous exaggeration in imitation of some other more serious work. Early use of burlesque is found in the ancient Greek mock epic poem *The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice*. Aristophanes and Euripides used it in their dramas. Later Roman

dramatist Plautus used it. Chaucer, Cervantes and Lesage used it to ridicule the medieval romance. In English literature, burlesque was used by Geoffrey Chaucer proficiently. John Gay and Samuel Butler also excelled in dramatic burlesque.

13. **Blank Verse** : Blank verse is one of the most common forms of English poetry. It is unrhymed verse. It is most commonly found in iambic pentameter. Shakespeare in his plays and Milton in his epic *Paradise Lost* used it. It was introduced into English by Earl of Surrey, a poet of the 16th century. It was first used in the tragedy *Gorboduc* by Sackville and Norton Example of Blank Verse in Drama. Following is an example of it from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

“HAMLET : To be, or not to be— that is the question :

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die— to sleep—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die— to sleep.
To sleep— perchance to dream : ay, there's the rub!”

This is the most famous monologue from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that has been written in blank verse. Not all lines have exactly ten syllables which is usually in iambic pentameter. Sometimes Shakespeare chose to write lines with eleven syllables, yet the stress used to be still on the tenth syllable.

Blank Verse has been used in poetry too. *Mending Wall* is a well-known poem by Robert Frost who used blank verse in his poetry. Following is an example from the same poem.

“He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, “Good fences make good neighbours.”

14. **Baroque** : Baroque is an artistic style that used exaggerated motion and easily interpreted details to produce drama, sculpture painting, architecture, dance etc. It began around 1600 A.D. in Rome, Italy and spread in Europe. The word ‘baroque’ simply means that something is elaborate and detailed. It was used derogatively in the beginning to underline excess and redundancy. At present, it is used for ornate, complex and detailed works of art.
15. **Binary** : In mathematics and digital electronics, a binary number is the number expressed in the binary system or base-2 numeral system

which represents numerical values of two different symbols typically 0 (zero) and 1 (one). Derrida used the word binary opposition for deducing meaning in deconstruction.

16. **Catharsis** : It is a Greek word which means 'Purification or cleansing'. In literature, it is used for the cleansing of emotions of the characters. Originally, the term was used in Poetics by Aristotle. Using this word, he explained the impact of tragedy on the spectators. He opined that catharsis is the ultimate end of a tragic artistic work and marks its quality. He wanted to say that there are some unwanted emotions that should be cleaned. Catharsis is the release of such unwanted emotions as pity, sadness, and fear. The process of Catharsis brings about the change of extreme emotion to rejuvenation. Catharsis was first linked to drama, especially to tragedy. The theory implied that by watching tragedy, people would get rid of unwanted emotions and display emotions at a proper amount in their lives.
17. **Colonialism/Post-colonialism** : Colonialism is the establishment of exploitation, maintenance and expansion of colony by a political power. It is a set of unequal relationships between the colonial power and the colony. Post-colonialism refers to a set of theories in philosophy and literature that grapple with the legacy of the colonial rule. Said and Spivak are major post-colonialist thinkers and literary theorists.
18. **Classicism** : Classical is something that pertains to Greek or Roman antiquity. It conforms to ancient Greek and Roman models of art. It denotes restraint, order, symmetry and repose. It is valued on account of its traditions and antiquity. It is long-established, time-tested, eternally and universally appealing.
19. **Collective Consciousness** : This term is used in sociology and psychology. It refers to the knowledge and beliefs shared by all the members of a particular race, group of society. Humans are social animals. French sociologist Emile Durkheim coined the term in 19th century. He proposed that collective consciousness results from strong positive and negative pressure on the individual. Carl Jung proposed that there was collective unconscious in addition to collective consciousness. He said that archetypes are inherited rather than learned.
20. **Deconstruction** : It is a method of critical analysis of philosophical or literary language. It emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems. Derrida presented the concept in his book of Grammatology. It is related to linguistics, humanities, social sciences, anthropology etc. He said that texts outlive their authors and become part of a set of cultural habits. Deconstruction denotes the pursuing of the meaning of a text to the point of exposing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions.
21. **Dissociation of Sensibility** : T.S. Eliot used the term 'dissociation of sensibility' in his essay '*The Metaphysical Poet.*' Donne and other metaphysical poets mingled thoughts with feelings. Donne produced

feelings pregnant with intellectual touch. Eliot simply did not mean by sensibility, a feeling but synthetic faculty which can unite thought and feeling, which can fuse the disparate experiences into a single whole.

22. **Dystopia** : It is an opposite of Utopia. It is an imaginary place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one.
23. **Dualism** : The division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects. It is a philosophical view that the world consists of dual things e.g. mind and matter; good and evil. Moral dualism is the belief that there is eternal conflict between the good and the evil. Duality is not always opposite but complementary.
24. **Expressionism** : It is a style of painting, music and drama in which the artist seeks to express emotional experience rather than the impressions of the external world. It departs from realism and naturalism. The highly personal visions communicated in the paintings of Van Gogh are examples of expressionism. It is a modernist movement that originated in Germany in the beginning of 20th century.

15.4 EXERCISE

STATE WHETHER THE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE.

1. The term Absurd has been derived from The Myth of Sisyphus by Samuel Beckett.
2. Virginia Woolf is associated with New-classicism.
3. The slogan 'Art for Art's Sake' is associated with Aestheticism.
4. The term 'dissociation of sensibility' has been used by Donne in his essay 'The Metaphysical Poet'.
5. The Second Coming a poem by W. B. Yeats is an example of apocalyptic writing.

15.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt;

- A few selected literary terms, along with their detail meaning,
- About association of the terms discussed in this unit.

15.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Abrams, Meyer Howard, and Geoffrey Harpham. A glossary of literary terms. Cengage Learning, 2011.

Baldick, Chris. The concise Oxford dictionary of literary terms. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Cuddon, John Anthony. A dictionary of literary terms and literary theory. John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

Introduction to Literature

Childs, Peter, and Roger Fowler. The Routledge dictionary of literary terms. Routledge, 2006.

Web-Resources

https://mthoyibi.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/a-glossary-of-literary-terms-7th-ed_m-h-abrams-1999.pdf

https://www.uv.es/fores/The_Routledge_Dictionary_of_Literary_Terms.pdf

[http://armytage.net/pdsdata/%5BChris_Baldick%5D_The_Concise_Oxford_Dictionary_of_L\(BookFi.org\).pdf](http://armytage.net/pdsdata/%5BChris_Baldick%5D_The_Concise_Oxford_Dictionary_of_L(BookFi.org).pdf)

ANSWERS

1. False	2. False	3. True	4. False	5. True
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