

Glossary for Humanities 124

abstract art - painting or sculpture which simplifies, distills, or distorts figures from the real world. Abstract art emphasizes forms, lines, and colors.

abstract expressionism - style of **abstract art** characterized by sinuous lines, organic shapes, and few identifiable objects. Often understood to be a free expression of subconscious mental activity.

aesthetics - the study of beauty and judgments of beauty.

agape - the purely spiritual love of one person for another. This love corresponds to the love of God or Christ for mankind. (Contrast with **eros**, **philia**, and **platonic love**.)

allegory - a narrative or image in which the characters and events stand for certain virtues, vices, or ideas.

alliteration - the repetition of consonant sounds in neighboring words or syllables. Listen for "p" and "k" sounds in Peter piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

allusion - a direct or indirect reference to a person, event, work of art, etc. (Compare with **illusion**.)

ambiguous - open to two or more interpretations. In literature, ambiguity may enrich the meaning, enhance the irony, or add complications that lead beyond simplistic interpretations. (Compare with **ambivalent**.)

ambivalent - contradictory emotional or psychological attitudes. (Compare with **ambiguous**.)

analysis - a process or method of study by separating something into its constituent elements. Analysis is the opposite of **synthesis**.

animism - a belief that there is a life force in all things, both animate and inanimate. This includes a belief in spirits who rule the natural elements such as the wind, the sun, the moon, etc.

annunciation - a god, or messenger from a god, appears to a mortal and brings a message.

aria - an elaborate solo song with instrumental accompaniment. Characters in operas, oratorios, and cantatas express their feelings in arias.

art song (lied) - a composition for solo voice and piano in which the music contributes to the meaning of the text. In contrast to the folk song, the text and music of the art song are of known authorship and the accompaniment is an important part of the composition.

asceticism - the idea that self-denial and abstention from self-indulgence lead to higher religious, emotional, or intellectual states. **Ascetics** often engage in disciplined behavior (such as contemplation and fasting) for spiritual, moral or intellectual benefits.

assonance - the repetition of vowel sounds in neighboring words or syllables. How now, brown cow?

autobiography - the story of a human life written by the person living it.

autonomy - independence in making decisions and performing actions.

baroque - the European style in music and art of the 17th and early 18th centuries, featuring elaborate ornamentation, complex designs, and curvilinear forms.

beautiful - keenly delighting the senses. Beauty is often attributed to whatever approaches perfection in form, proportion, arrangement, grace, color, sound, or other qualities.

brass instruments - orchestral instruments made of brass or another metal. All are made of tubes that have a cup-or funnel-shaped mouthpiece at one end. The other end widens to form the "bell" of the instrument. Brass instruments have been called the "heavy artillery" of the orchestra. The trumpet, French horn, trombone, and tuba are the main instruments of the symphony orchestra's brass section.

carpe diem - Latin for "seize the day," i.e., make the most of the moment since we shall soon grow old and die. The carpe diem theme is often expressed in **lyric poetry**.

cartoon - a full-scale drawing for an artwork, intended to be transferred to a wall, panel, tapestry, etc.

catastrophe - the final event that completes the unraveling of the plot in a play. In tragedies, this is usually a sudden, horrible event.

characterization - direct or indirect representation of persons in narrative and dramatic works.

choreography - the arrangement of the steps and movements that make up a ballet or dance.

chorus - In Greek tragedy, a group of twelve or fifteen masked performers who dance and sing. Often the chorus comments on the action in the play and interprets it from the standpoint of traditional wisdom.

classical - a term for the historical period when civilization and the arts reach a peak of refinement. Also, the European style in literature, music and art of the late 18th century, thought to echo Greek and Roman art.

coda - A closing section, or tail, added to a musical movement. A **coda** is not usually an essential part of the movement.

composition - arrangement of all the elements in a work of visual art.

consonance, dissonance - consonance is the agreeable effect, or repose, produced by certain combinations of tones sounded together. **Dissonance** is the disagreeable effect, or tension, produced by other combinations of tones. Ideas about consonance and dissonance have changed during the course of music history.

counterpoint - the combination of two or more independent melodies into a single harmonic texture. Usually both melodies retain their distinctiveness.

creativity - the ability to bring something new into existence.

crescendo - gradually getting louder.

cubism - an influential style of visual art in the 20th century. Cubists reject traditional perspective and the time-honored theory that art is an imitation of nature. Instead they depict radically fragmented objects whose several sides are seen simultaneously.

dehumanization - the deprivation of human qualities; thus, the eventual reduction of a human being to the level of an object or thing.

denouement - in a literary work, the final outcome or unraveling of the conflict.

diminuendo - gradually getting softer.

dramatic irony - this occurs when a reader knows things a character is ignorant of or when characters' speech and action reveals that they do not understand themselves.

dramatic monologue - a poem in which a single fictional or historical character other than the poet speaks to a silent "audience" within the poem.

dynamics - the gradations of volume in music. Dynamic marks are the words, abbreviations, and signs that indicate degrees of volume (such as crescendo and diminuendo).

empathy - being able to identify with another person's feelings, motives, and situations; being able to put oneself in another's place.

epic - a long narrative poem about the deeds of a great hero. The Odyssey is an epic about the deeds of Odysseus.

eros - physical love or sexual desire (Contrast with **agape**, **philia**, and **platonic love**)

engraving - a print made by cutting a design into a metal plate with a pointed steel tool known as a burin. The plate is inked, and the ink wiped off, except for that remaining in the groove. Then the plate, covered with a damp sheet of paper, is run through a heavy press to reproduce an image the reverse of that on the plate.

entre chat - in ballet, a leap straight upward in which the dancer crosses his legs and strikes his heels together, usually several times.

epicurean - given to the pursuit of pleasure or to the attainment of sensuous gratification.

etching - a print made by coating a metal plate with wax and drawing through this wax down to the metal. The plate is put in an acid bath which eats into the lines; it is then heated to dissolve the wax and finally inked and printed on paper.

existentialism - A 20th-century philosophy which holds that humans must live their lives without any absolute values or divine laws. Many **existentialists** believe that since there is no guarantee of human worth or dignity, and no such thing as "human nature," humans have complete freedom to define humanity and a painful ethical responsibility to do so.

expressionism - a style of music, art, and literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in which the artist uses a medium (sound, color, shape, language, etc.) to convey strong feelings or emotions.

folk song - a song of unknown authorship passed orally from generation to generation. A folk song usually deals with things of daily life; it is often heard with slightly changed melody or words. Accompaniments may be added to folk songs, but they are not an integral part as are the accompaniments of the art song.

fresco - a painting executed on wet plaster with pigments suspended in water so that the plaster absorbs the colors and the painting becomes part of the wall.

fugue - a musical composition, in **counterpoint**, in which one or two **melodies** are repeated by successively entering **voices**. The voices are interwoven and the melodies are developed into a well-defined single structure with a strong character or unifying idea.

genre scene - a depiction of everyday life.

hamartia - a defect of character. Often used to describe the "fatal flaw" of a tragic hero.

harmony - any simultaneous combination of musical tones. The term is generally used to mean a chord, or a combination of tones, that sounds agreeable.

homophonic - music consisting of a single melodic line supported by an accompaniment in chordal style. Most hymns are homophonic.

hedonism - an ethical doctrine that asserts that pleasure or happiness is the sole good in life.

hubris - arrogant pride, or taking oneself for a god. Many believe that Oedipus' tragic fate was the result of his **hubris**.

humanism - a mode of thought, philosophy, or action that asserts the dignity and worth of human life.

humanization - the transformation of human beings from degraded inhumane states to a humane level.

hyperbole - figurative language that deliberately exaggerates for effect, and is not meant to be taken literally.

iamb - A metrical foot of two syllables. The first syllable is unstressed, the second is stressed. Examples: above, invent, ahead, a lot.

iambic pentameter - a common line of English poetry consisting of five metrical ('pentameter') feet, each foot being an iamb (unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one). Example: Kentucky is the greatest place on earth. The pentameter line is probably the most common line in English poetry. Poets often include other feet in a line that is basically iambic pentameter.

idealism - a theory that affirms that the spiritual, mental, and ideal is of central importance in reality. Idealists often hold that reality itself is essentially spiritual or the embodiment of mind or reason.

illusion - an erroneous perception of reality. (Compare with **allusion**.)

imagery - generally: all figurative or non-literal language. Specifically, imagery suggests visual and tangible pictures by using words.

impasto - paint applied very thickly to a panel or canvas.

impressionism - a late 19th-century style in which the artist uses sound or visual imagery to capture moments of transient reality. Painters usually did this by applying short strokes, or dabs, of pure color. Musicians did it by suggesting moods and places through lush, shifting harmonies and vague rhythms.

initiation - a test or ordeal which, once undergone, allows one to move to a higher state or to membership in some group.

irony - a method of expression in which the intended meaning of the words is the direct opposite of their usual sense. Example: "The speaker was using irony when he said that the stupid plan was 'very clever.'" **Irony** can also mean a combination of circumstances or a result that is the opposite of what might be expected or considered appropriate.

leitmotif - a short musical idea or theme used by a composer to represent a character, a thing, or an idea. A **leitmotif** appears throughout a musical work each time a composer wishes to remind his listeners of the subject it represents.

libretto - the text of an opera or an oratorio.

lithograph - a print made by drawing with a crayon or other oily substance on a porous stone or a metal plate. Greasy printing ink applied to the moistened stone adheres only to the lines drawn on the stone or slate. The design is then transferred to a damp sheet of paper.

lyric poetry - poetry characterized by the expression of personal emotion. "Lyric" comes from lyre: lyric poetry was originally accompanied by the music of a lyre.

magic realism - A 20th-century Latin American literary style that weaves together realistic and fantastic events. The effect is to give a sense of profound mystery to ordinary life, and a sense of ordinariness to profound mystery.

materialism - 1) a theory which holds that physical matter is the only reality. 2) a theory according to which the highest values of living lie in material well-being.

medium - the material or materials with which the artist works. Examples: oil paint, watercolor, tempera, wood, bronze, stone, plaster, concrete.

melody - a succession of musical tones, as contrasted with harmony (musical tones sounded simultaneously). By its very nature, melody cannot be separated from rhythm.

metaphor - the direct substitution of a word or phrase for an object or concept in order to suggest comparison with another object or concept. Example: Jason is a tiger on the field.

metonymy - the use of the name of one thing for something else with which it is associated. Example: Neil reads Shakespeare while driving a Ford.

meter - the measure of the number of pulses from the first beat of one measure to the first beat of the next. The organization of beats into regular groups. Example 1 2/ 1 2/ or 1 2 3/ 1 2 3/ 1 2 3.

Modernism - the philosophies and practices of modern art, most of which are anti-traditional and formally innovative. The historical period of Modernism was from approximately 1900 to 1950.

myth - A traditional story of unknown origin which tells of historical events and often explains a natural phenomenon or a cultural practice, belief, or institution.

nihilism - a doctrine which holds that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and without truth. **Nihilists** usually deny that there is any intrinsic value or meaning in human life, and many believe that the prevailing values of their society are so bad that it would be best to destroy them.

nonrepresentational art - a work which makes no reference to the world of persons, places, or the objects associated with them; art from which all identifiable subject matter has been eliminated.

oil painting - the practice of painting by using pigments (the grains or powders that give a medium its color) suspended in oil. The paint is usually applied to a stretched canvas that has

been primed with a mixture of glue and white pigment. Oils are possibly the most popular of painting media because they have much versatility and durability.

opera - a drama in which most or all the parts are sung to accompaniment (usually orchestral). Operas, unlike **oratorios**, are staged; i.e. they employ scenery, costumes, acting, and sometimes ballet. Opera is a composite form made up of arias, recitatives, overtures, and other things.

oratorio - an extended work for voices and orchestra which is on a dramatic, Biblical, or religious theme but performed unstaged. Like opera, oratorio includes recitatives, arias, choruses, and orchestra. Unlike opera, oratorio does not use scenery, costumes, or acting. Oratorios often have narrators.

overture - instrumental music composed as an introduction to an opera, oratorio, play, etc.

palette - the surface on which an artist sets out and mixes his pigments — usually an oval or oblong tablet, with a hole for the thumb. Also, the range of colors used by an artist.

pantheism - the worship of many gods. Pantheists often worship gods of different creeds, cults, or cultures. Some pantheists believe that the universe is itself God: in this view, there is no God except for the forces and laws of natural phenomena.

paradox - a statement that appears to contradict itself or be absurd but that may be true. Emily Dickinson's statement, "Much madness is divinest sense" is an example.

pas de deux - in ballet, a figure or dance for two persons.

perception - awareness of the elements of one's environment by means of the senses; direct or intuitive awareness.

percussion - the family of instruments that are sounded by striking or shaking (and sometimes rubbing or whirling). It is the family of drums, bells, cymbals, etc.

persona - the Latin word for the mask worn by the actors of the theater and, by extension, the identity or "mask" assumed by the speaker or narrator: the fictional "I" of a literary work. The term **persona** is often used to avoid the assumption that the "I" is the true voice of the poet or author.

perspective - the representation of three-dimensional objects on a flat surface so as to produce the same impression of distance and relative size as that received by the human eye in nature. In **aerial or atmospheric perspective** the relative distance of objects is shown by gradation of tone and color and by variations in the clarity of outlines. In **linear perspective** all parallel lines in a given visual field converge at a single vanishing point on the horizon.

philia - the love one feels for friends and family. (Compare with **agape**, **eros**, and **platonic love**.)

pitch - the quality of a sound that makes it high or low on a musical scale.

pizzicato - producing sound on a stringed instrument by plucking rather than bowing the strings.

platonic love - love between persons based not on sensual or physical attraction but on spiritual or intellectual attraction. (Compare with **agape**, **eros**, and **philia**.)

plot - the arrangement of the events in a narrative or dramatic work; "plot" suggests a carefully planned relationship (often based on cause and effect) among events whereas "story" simply refers to the sequence of events.

point of view - the position or vantage-point from which the events of a short story or novel seem to be observed and presented to us. A writer has two basic choices: to present the story from the first-person point of view (the narrator uses "I") or to present the story from the third-person point of view (the narrator from outside the story refers to the characters by name or uses "he," "she," or "they").

polyphonic - music composed of two or more equally important melodic lines. A round (such as "Row, Row Your Boat") is an example of polyphonic music. **Polyphony** is used almost synonymously with the term, "counterpoint."

postmodern - the late 20th-century tendency (in art, thought, and society) to distrust objectivity, authority, universality, and moral and ideological absolutes. Postmodern artists tend to mix styles, cultures, techniques, and high and low forms of art.

praise singer - (griot) in Africa, a musician who sings about the virtues of someone.

primitivism - belief in the superiority and vitality of a simple, unsophisticated, natural way of life. **Primitivist** artists use techniques such as bold colors, formal simplicity, tribal masks, and distortion to show savage, passionate, pre-civilized life.

print - a proof or impression taken from a stone, block, or plate on which a design has been executed.

program music - instrumental music endowed with literary or pictorial associations which are usually suggested by the title or the composer's explanatory notes.

protagonist - the main character in a story or drama.

rationalism - a philosophical principle that reason alone is the source of all human knowledge.

recitative - a style of vocal music that is halfway between singing and speaking; generally, it has a simple accompaniment. It is usually quite plain, often having many words on a repeated note. The rhythm is free, following the natural accents of speech. Recitative is used in opera and oratorio where it conveys information to the audience. (The arias express emotion and show off the singers' voices.)

requiem - the Roman Catholic Mass for the dead, frequently set to music.

rococo - a style of light, fluffy art in 18th-century France characterized by frivolous spatial forms, flowing lines, and ornament. **Rococo** art is aristocratic, pleasure art: it is not deep, political, or critical of society.

romantic - the European tendency, in the art, music and literature of the early 19th century, to dramatize and exalt human emotion and to idealize nature.

rhythm - Everything pertaining to the duration of musical sound. Rhythm includes beat, accent, measure, meter, etc.

satire - a work of art, literature or music that mocks or ridicules a popular idea or public figure by reduction to absurdity.

shape - a two-dimensional area or plane with distinguishable boundaries, such as a square or a circle.

short story - a literary prose piece, usually a narrative, which focuses sharply on one character or event; generally readable in a single sitting.

simile - a comparison using like or as: "o my love's like a red, red rose."

soliloquy - a dramatic convention in which an actor, alone on the stage, speaks his or her thoughts aloud.

sonata/allegro form - a form used from the 18th century onwards, chiefly for the first movements of large instrumental works. It is based on successive stages of stability, tension, and resolution.

sonnet - a poem in 14 lines of pentameter, rhymed either in the Petrarchan (Italian) pattern abba abba cdcdcd or in the Shakespearean (English) pattern abab cdcd efef gg; a sonnet should develop an idea or sentiment through two successive stages.

stoicism - the principle or practice of showing indifference to pleasure or pain.

string instruments - instruments on which tones are produced by vibrations of taut strings. The violin, viola, cello and double bass are the backbone of the symphony orchestra's string section. The strings have more versatility and expressive range than any of the other instrument groups.

symbol - an object, sound, or image which suggests a larger idea or web of references. Some symbols are drawn from nature and others from human culture. Examples: wine is a symbol of mortal life in many cultures; the cross is a symbol of eternal life in Christian culture.

symmetry - an arrangement or balanced design in which similar or identical elements have been organized in comparable order on either side of an axis.

symphony - a work for orchestra usually consisting of three or, more commonly, four separate movements in contrasting tempos. The opening movement is almost always fast and in sonata-allegro form.

syncopation - the accenting of a beat that is not normally stressed: (1 2 3/ 1 2 3/ 1 2 3/) or the part of a beat that is not normally stressed.

synthesis - a process of combining things into a unified whole.

tempo - the rate of speed at which a musical composition is to be performed.

texture (art) - the surface quality (or apparent surface quality) of work of art--its roughness, smoothness, graininess, etc.

texture (music) - the relationship of a melody to what is being played simultaneously with it. Texture may be monophonic, homophonic, or polyphonic and may be described as thick or thin.

theme (literature) - a significant abstract idea in a literary work. Example: a major theme of Joyce's "Araby" is the boy's initiation into adulthood.

theme and variations - a musical form that generally uses only one musical idea (theme) which is repeated over and over but changed each time. The changes can occur in melody, harmony, rhythm, or texture.

tonality - the sense we have that a section or piece of music is in a certain key; an arrangement of melody and harmony so as to stress one **pitch** as the most important tone.

tone color (timbre) - the quality of sound that enables us to distinguish one musical instrument (or voice) from another even when they play the same tone at the same dynamic level.

totem - an animal or natural object considered to be a blood relative and taken as a personal symbol.

tragedy - a dramatic or literary work in which serious and important actions bring ruin or profound unhappiness to the main character. Aristotle saw tragedy as the fall of a noble character from a high position because of a flaw in his character.

trope - a figure of speech, or a twist of language: the use of a word or phrase in a new, strange way to give life or emphasis to an idea.

voice - the Western musical tradition has four basic voices:

bass - the lowest of male voice.

tenor - the highest male voice.

alto - the lowest female voice.

soprano - the highest female voice.

woodcut - a print made by carving a raised design on a block of wood cut along the grain, applying ink to the raised surfaces, and printing from these.

woodwind instruments - instruments that produce vibrations of air within a tube. The woodwinds of the symphony orchestra (arranged from highest to lowest) are as follows: piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon. Woodwind instruments are much less alike in **tone color** than the various strings or even the brasses.

word painting - attempting to portray a word or phrase in music. Examples: for the words "He descended" the music goes down. For "sheep have gone astray" the voice parts go off in all directions; for "crooked" the melody is jagged.