

a principal character without the use of stage devices such as the *soliloquy* or the *aside*; examples are Hamlet's friend Horatio in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Cleopatra's maid Charmian in his *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In prose fiction a famed confidant is Dr. Watson in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes (1887 and following). The device is particularly useful to those modern writers who, like Henry James, have largely renounced the novelist's earlier privileges of having access to a character's state of mind and of intruding into the narrative in order to communicate such information to the reader. (See *point of view*.) James applied to the confidant the term **ficelle**, French for the string by which the puppeteer manages his puppets. Discussing Maria Gostrey, Strether's confidante in *The Ambassadors*, James remarks that she is a "ficelle" who is not, "in essence, Strether's friend. She is the reader's friend much rather" (James, *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur, 1934, pp. 321-22).

See W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (1965).

conflict (in a plot): 265.

connotation and denotation: In a widespread literary usage, the **denotation** of a word is its primary signification or reference; its **connotation** is the range of secondary or associated significations and feelings which it commonly suggests or implies. Thus "home" denotes the house where one lives, but connotes privacy, intimacy, and coziness; that is the reason real estate agents like to use "home" instead of "house" in their advertisements. "Horse" and "steed" denote the same quadruped, but "steed" has a different connotation that derives from the chivalric or romantic narratives in which this word was often used.

The connotation of a word is only a potential range of secondary significations; which part of these connotations are evoked depends on the way the word is used in a particular context. Poems typically establish contexts that bring into play some part of the connotative as well as the denotative meaning of words. In his poem "Virtue" George Herbert wrote,

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky. . . .

The denotation of "bridal"—a union between human beings—serves as part of the *ground* for applying the word as a *metaphor* to the union of earth and sky; but the specific context in which the word occurs also evokes such connotations of "bridal" as sacred, joyous, and ceremonial. (Note that "marriage" although metrically and denotatively equivalent to "bridal," would have been less richly significant in this context, because more commonplace in its connotation.) Even the way a word is spelled may alter its connotation. John Keats, in a passage of his "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819),

Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in *faery* lands forlorn,

altered his original spelling of "fairy" to the old form "faery" in order to evoke the connotations of antiquity, as well as of the magic world of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

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constructs (social and discursive): See *social constructs*.

Contemporary Period: 248. See also *Modern Period*.

contextual criticism: 217.

conventions:

1. In one sense of the term, conventions (derived from the Latin term for "coming together") are necessary, or at least convenient, devices, accepted by tacit agreement between author and audience, for solving the problems in representing reality that are posed by a particular artistic medium. In watching a modern production of a Shakespearean play, for example, the audience accepts without question the convention by which a *proscenium* stage with three walls (or if it is a **theater in the round**, with no walls) represents a room with four walls. It also accepts the convention of characters speaking in *blank verse* instead of prose, and uttering their private thoughts in *soliloquies* and *asides*, as well as the convention by which actions presented on a single stage in less than three hours may represent events which take place in a great variety of places, and over a span of many years.
2. In a second sense of the term, conventions are conspicuous features of subject matter, form, or technique that occur repeatedly in works of literature. Conventions in this sense may be recurrent types of character, turns of plot, forms of versification, or kinds of diction and style. *Stock characters* such as the Elizabethan braggart soldier, or the languishing and fainting heroine of Victorian fiction, or the sad young men of the lost-generation novels of the 1920s, were among the conventions of their literary eras. The abrupt reform of the villain at the end of the last act was a common convention of *melodrama*. *Euphuism* in prose, and the *Petrarchan* and *metaphysical conceits* in verse, were conventional devices of style. It is now just as much a literary convention to be outspoken on sexual matters as it was to be reticent in the age of Charles Dickens and George Eliot.
3. In the most inclusive sense, common in structuralist criticism, all literary works, no matter how seemingly realistic, are held to be entirely constituted by literary conventions, or "codes"—of genre, plot, character, language, and so on—which a reader *naturalizes*, by assimilating these conventions into the world of discourse and experience that, in the reader's time and place, are regarded as real, or "natural." (See *structuralist criticism* and *character and characterization*.)

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See M. C. Bra Harry Levin, "Not Hough, *Reflections c New Literary History* other entries, see p:

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