LITERARY TERMS AND CRITICISM

Also by John Peck

HOW TO STUDY A NOVEL: A STUDENTS' GUIDE

**LITERARY TERMS
AND CRITICISM:
A STUDENTS' GUIDE**

John Peck
and
Martin Coyle

M
MACMILLAN

© John Peck and Martin Coyle 1984

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission.

First published 1984

Published by

Higher and Further Education Division

MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS LTD

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS and London

Companies and representatives

throughout the world

Typeset by

Wessex Typesetters Ltd

Frome, Somerset

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Peck, John, 1947–

Literary terms and criticism.

1. Criticism

I. Title II. Coyle, Martin

801'.95 PN81

ISBN 978-0-333-36271-6

ISBN 978-1-349-07017-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-07017-6

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
1 English, American and Commonwealth literature: a brief survey	1
2 Poetry	11
3 Drama	74
4 The novel	102
5 Critical concepts	127
6 Critical positions and perspectives	149
<i>Author index</i>	169
<i>Subject index</i>	173

For Rachel and Pamela

Preface

THIS guide is basically a dictionary of literary terms. It resembles other such dictionaries in that it attempts to provide essential information on a wide range of literary topics. It differs from other dictionaries, however, in that we have tried to produce a book that meets the particular needs of students at school, college and university. This means that the overall structure of the book, the range and kind of terms included, and the approach adopted within the individual entries, are somewhat unorthodox as compared to other guides to literary terms.

First, the overall structure: the standard approach is to provide a straightforward alphabetical listing of terms. This should make things easy to find, but a list of terms is not all that helpful if you are not entirely sure what you are looking for. We have, therefore, divided the book into six sections – a survey of literature, ‘Poetry’, ‘Drama’, ‘The novel’, ‘Critical concepts’ and ‘Critical positions and perspectives’. If, for example, you are studying a novel, you might find a number of useful ideas simply by browsing through the Novel section. If you know exactly what you are looking for, the quickest way of finding the relevant entry is to consult the Subject index at the back of the book. Our own experience as students was that we were not only puzzled by specific terms, such as ‘metaphysical poetry’, but also lacked broader ideas about literature. The Poetry, Drama and Novel sections therefore begin with introductory essays that might help you understand the characteristics of the major genres.

These introductory essays, along with the survey and the general essay on criticism in the final section, are intended to provide a view of the broad picture. They are followed by more specific entries, alphabetically arranged. We should point out

that this is not an all-inclusive guide: we do not include terms such as 'limerick' which are not in any way central in the study of literature. The exclusion of minor terms has allowed us room to include period terms, such as 'Renaissance poetry' and 'the eighteenth-century novel'. These are not, strictly speaking, literary terms, but they are descriptive terms that students encounter. It seemed more important to cover the words and phrases you are likely to meet as a student, even to the extent of including a separate entry on Shakespeare, than to worry too much about maintaining a pure approach. The intention is to provide helpful information which is directly relevant to your studies.

This idea was also uppermost in our minds in determining the approach adopted within each entry. We do not attempt to cover the entire history of any term, nor do we attempt to list all the authors who have chosen to work in a certain mode. In their place we have substituted critical discussion, attempting to provide guidelines for your study of literature. Underlying many of the definitions is the idea that literature attempts to come to terms with, or order, the complexity, or disorder, of experience. You might find this idea limiting, but it should prove useful in helping you find your critical feet. Our hope is that the definitions will show you how to get started, but really this is a guide to grow out of as you become more confident and learn how to develop and express your own ideas about literature.

Probably the best way to use this book is to browse through it, stopping at whatever catches your attention. But, as previously stated, there is a Subject index which should enable you to find a specific term quickly. In addition, there is an Author index. Most of the major authors in English are discussed in this guide: by following up the entries in the Author index you could well discover some quite useful guidelines about how to approach and discuss an individual author. The major shortcoming of most guides to literary terms is that they so often fail to tell you what you want to know: our hope is that we have gone at least some way towards providing the kind of information and critical discussion that you are likely to find useful.

We should like to thank those who have helped us in the

writing of this book. In particular we are grateful to our colleagues Michael Quinn and Stephen Copley, who have always been prepared to discuss the material and to contribute their ideas and advice. We are also grateful to those many students and teachers in Cardiff who have been extremely tolerant and helpful while we have subjected them to endless definitions, and to Sheila Morgan, not only for her excellent typing but also for her interest and constructive comments.

*University College,
Cardiff*

JOHN PECK
MARTIN COYLE