

birthmark—"as fine a strawberry as ever grew in a garden"—that he is in reality the son of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson.

The foregoing discussion has summarized traditional critical analyses of traditional plot forms. Recently the *Archetypal Critic*, Northrop Frye, has proposed that the four main plot-forms reflect the myths corresponding to the four seasons; see *Genre*. And structuralist critics, regarding plots as sets of alternative conventions for ordering a fiction, have undertaken to analyze and classify plot-forms on the model of the analysis and classification of the elements and structures of language in the science of linguistics; see *Structuralist Criticism*, and the discussion of treatments of plot in Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), pages 205–224. Furthermore, a number of innovative writers of narrative fiction and drama since the 1920s have deliberately designed their works to frustrate expectations that a reader has formed on traditional plots, or have even attempted to omit a recognizable plot altogether. See, for example, *Literature of the Absurd, Modernism, anti-novel, the new novel*.

Aristotle, *Poetics*; E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927); R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones," in *Critics and Criticism* (1952); Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); Elder Olson, *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama* (1966); Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (1966); Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967); Eric S. Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense* (1974); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1980). For structuralist treatments of plot by V. I. Propp and others, see the bibliography under *Structuralist Criticism*.

Poetic Diction. The term **diction** signifies the choice of words, phrases, and figures in a work of literature. A writer's diction can be analyzed under such categories as the degree to which his vocabulary and phrasing is abstract or concrete, Latinate or Anglo-Saxon in origin, colloquial or formal, technical or common, literal or figurative.

The poetry of almost all ages has been written in a special language, a "poetic diction," which includes words, phrases, and types of figures not current in the ordinary conversation of the time. In modern discussion, however, the term **poetic diction** is usually applied to poets who, like Spenser or G. M. Hopkins, deliberately employed a diction which deviated markedly even from other poets of their age. In particular, "poetic diction," as a period-term, is used to denote the special procedures of *Neoclassic* writers of the eighteenth century who, like Thomas Gray, believed that "the language of the age is never the language of poetry" (letter to West, 1742). This diction was in part derived from the characteristic usage of admired earlier poets, such as Vergil, Spenser, and Milton, but was in part based on the reigning principle of *Decorum*, according to which a poet must adapt the stylistic level and type of his diction to the mode and status of a particular genre (see *Style*). Formal satire, such as Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, because it represented a poet's direct commentary on everyday mat-

