In a Romantic critic like William Hazlitt, taste becomes, not the search for a common standard, but instead the varying exercise of sympathy between the author and the reader. (See David Bromwich, *Hazlitt* [1983].) For the great Victorian sage John Ruskin (1819–1900), the refining of the individual's taste was a moral imperative, deeply bound to Ruskin's prophetic vision of an improved society. (See JUDGMENT.)

In "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" (1965), reprinted in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1969), Stanley Cavell describes the idea of taste in terms of the responses that modernist art asks from us. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1979) offers a more skeptical view of taste as a mere desire for social prestige. E. E. Kellett, *The Whirligig of Taste* (1929), remains a useful study of the variations in literary taste. See also Denise Gigante's *Taste* (2005).

**terza rima** A verse form developed by Dante for his *Divine Comedy*, written at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Terza rima is composed of tercets that rhyme *aba bcb cdc ded* (and so on). It has been a rare form in English-language verse, though it was occasionally used in the Renaissance. The best-known English poem in terza rima is the sublime and devastating "The Triumph of Life" (1822), the final (unfinished) work by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

**textual criticism** The textual critic attempts to assess the authority of the surviving texts of a literary work, often to produce a scholarly edition of the work. As such, textual criticism should be a central part of literary study. Though we are often tempted to think of the work of editors and publishers as invisible, or as at most unwelcome interferences with the book we are trying to read, books rely for their very existence on editing, on the publishing process, and on authors who change their minds, often producing several different versions of a single work.

Textual editing depends on, and follows from, critical intelligence. As G. Thomas Tanselle points out, there is no sense in which textual scholarship precedes critical judgment; instead, it flows from critical judgment. Which has more authority: an author's first draft, his final revision—or the published edition that passed through the hands of an editor? Should we conflate successive versions with an eye to a composite text, or print them side by side? Should we reproduce without changes a particular published text of a work, or should we try to correct its errors (and how do we decide what is an error)? Textual criticism addresses these and similar questions in its work.

See Fredson Bowers, *Textual and Literary Criticism* (1959), Jerome Mc-Gann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and G. Thomas Tanselle, *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing* (1990).

**theater.** See DRAMA

**theater of cruelty** A concept developed by the French actor and writer Antonin Artaud, chiefly in *The Theater and Its Double* (1938). The theater, "like dreams, is bloody and inhuman," Artaud wrote, "a spasm in which life is continually lacerated" and in which order and hierarchy are disturbed.

The theater of cruelty, Artaud continued, "proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets." Artaud's "naked language" of theater urged "the transgression of the ordinary limits of art and speech." He advocated the liberation of theater from a focus on the text, instead seeking "a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought." Cosmic ideas of creation, chaos, and revolutionary upheaval played a central role. See also ABSURD.

**topos** In Greek, "place." A topos is a literary commonplace or (in Latin) *locus communis,* a recognizable spot. Topos implies literal location: we come upon certain familiar literary themes or subjects just as a traveler might discover a bend in the road or a broad meadow. (Over here is the Petrarchan beloved, yet again, with her ideal beauty and inaccessibility; over there, the ancient fable of green fields, the earthly paradise that returns us to a perfect childhood.)

Topos is comparable to the medieval English term *matere* (i.e., matter), which, as John Hollander remarks, implies a conjoined sense of "topic, question and realm." (The legends surrounding the court of King Arthur are the "matter of Britain," as opposed to the Carolingian "matter of France.") A literary topos is a place, but also an issue or argument, a point made clear in Northrop Frye's recasting of topoi (the plural of topos) as archetypes. In chivalric romance, for instance, the topos or archetypal motif of the heroic virgin asks a question, and makes a claim, about the integrity of the lonely self in a hostile social environment. See Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (1976). See also ARCHETYPE; INEXPRESSIBILITY TOPOS; MYTH.

**tragedy** Tragedy is the genre that comes after epic, in prestige as well as in historical sequence. Homer probably lived in the eighth century BCE; Aeschylus,

Sophocles and Euripides flourished three hundred years later, in the brilliance of fifth-century Athens. Tragedy began, possibly around 535 BCE, as the central part of the springtime festival of the god Dionysus. (The legendary first actor of tragedy was named Thespis, leading to our word *thespian*.) Usually, three tragic playwrights would compete against one another for the first prize, each of them taking a single day to present three tragedies followed by a satyr play (a brief, rather scurrilous comedy). (The festival also included sacrifices to Dionysus, the pouring of libations, and a procession of war orphans.)

How does tragedy differ from epic? The most obvious contrast between the two is that tragedy is staged, whereas Homeric epic was recited or sung by a single performer (called a *rhapsode*). But there are other differences as well. Kenneth Burke remarks that, "though the same magical patterns of fatality, magnification, and humility are present" in epic as in tragedy, "in tragedy these patterns are submerged beneath a more 'enlightened' scheme of causal relationships." Burke's point is borne out by the definitive examination of tragedy, Aristotle's *Poetics* (ca. 330 BCE), which lays a strict emphasis on reasonable causality. The hero's death (the most desirable result for a tragedy, according to Aristotle) is logically fated. This willing subjection to causality, to the inevitability of event, shows tragedy's seriousness, a major theme of Aristotle's discussion. Once the plot has been set in motion, no evasions are possible.

Tragedy's main contribution to human wisdom may be exactly this strange and frightening perspective: the idea that we might be subject to an irrefutable pattern of action, one that we could not possibly know in advance. In Greek mythology, Prometheus (hero of the tragedy *Prometheus Bound*) defied the gods by concealing from men the dates of their deaths. Tragedy assumes that our future is already determined, and that we mostly remain oblivious to this determination. Wagner's Siegfried, Milton's Eve, Sophocles' Oedipus: all three are equally unaware of their fates, until destiny descends on them.

According to Aristotle the tragic hero makes a mistake (in Greek, *hamartia*, a missing of the mark). A hero like Oedipus may be marked by the violent arrogance, or *hubris*, that often attends hamartia, but his tragic punishment is always vastly greater than he deserves.

In the eyes of the German Romantics, tragedy becomes a paradoxical sign that humans are autonomous and free, since the tragic hero freely takes on his suffering—accepts and knows it, even though it is cruelly imposed. The

philosopher F. W. J. von Schelling in his *Philosophy of Art* (1802–3) describes the point of tragic heroism as follows: "To willingly endure punishment even for an *unavoidable* crime, so as to prove one's freedom precisely through the loss of this freedom."

Tragedy often relies on the principle of cosmic retribution. The hero has disturbed a balance, which must be corrected. This correction occurs impersonally. The author knows the hero will fall. Yet he refrains, as the melodramatist does not, from manipulating the plot. He refuses to save, or damn, his hero by artificial means.

Tragic drama invokes a rightness, or justice, originally drawn from ritual sources. The hero's death is a legitimate sacrifice, consumed by the audience, which participates as if at a religious ceremony. But the audience also recognizes a wrongness in the tragic destruction: a greater force (the gods, the author) has cruelly imposed the worst of catastrophes upon a hapless protagonist. While watching a tragedy unfold, we understand the causal logic of the hero's downfall, the ironclad plot that brings on the catastrophe. But a strange mystery inherent in the sacrificial character of the tragic still confronts us. Northrop Frye remarks that "the resolution of comedy comes, so to speak, from the audience's side of the stage; in a tragedy it comes from some mysterious world on the opposite side."

According to Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Euripides, the last of the great tragic playwrights, tries to dispel the mystery that clings to tragedy, attempting to make it a purely rational form. Socrates, the first anti-tragedian, exults in this decline of tragedy, this loss of its original power. So, in Nietzsche's version, philosophy wins out, for some centuries, over poetry—until the spirit of ancient, pre-Euripidean tragedy returns with the operas of Wagner.

For a fuller discussion of Aristotle's reading of tragedy, see ARISTOTELIAN CRITICISM. For an account of Greek tragic practices and their context, see Charles Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy* (1986); John Winkler and Froma Zeitlin, eds., *Nothing to Do with Dionysus?* (1990); C. J. Herington, *Poetry into Drama* (1985); J.-P. Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1986); and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986). On tragedy as a genre, consult Northrop Frye, "Theory of Genres," in *An Anatomy of Criticism* (1957); Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic* (1961); Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (1993); and Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1969, 2nd ed. 1976).