Cross-Pollination

This is just a sample list of art definitions you may use to make sense of a "literary" work.

If I were you, I'd find dictionary, glossary, and encyclopedia entries that define key terms in painting, music, sculpture, dance, film, etc. Each definition is a kind of theory, and the definition provides the vocabulary you need to use.

[Note that I just poached these from a variety of sources to give you an idea of what you need to find.]

Important!!!

The text must invite you or provide a reason for you to discuss it in non-literary terms. This "invitation" may be evident in the text itself, an author's comment, or a particular shared context. You can't just take any text and say, "I'm going to talk about it in terms of melody and harmony." You need to have a good reason.

Cubism

The Cubist painters rejected the inherited concept that art should copy nature, or that they should adopt the traditional techniques of perspective, modeling, and foreshortening. They wanted instead to emphasize the two-dimensionality of the canvas. So they reduced and fractured objects into geometric forms, and then realigned these within a shallow, relief-like space. They also used multiple or contrasting vantage points.

In cubist artworks, objects are broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form—instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context. Often the surfaces intersect at seemingly random angles, removing a coherent sense of depth. The background and object planes interpenetrate one another to create the shallow ambiguous space, one of cubism's distinct characteristics.

In Cubism the subject matter is broken up, analyzed, and reassembled in an abstracted form. Picasso and Braque initiated the movement when they followed the advice of Paul Cézanne, who in 1904 said artists should treat nature "in terms of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone."

Surrealism

André Breton on surrealism:

Dictionary: Surrealism, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation.

Encyclopedia: Surrealism. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.

Expressionism

The term ``Expressionism'' can be used to describe various art forms but, in its broadest sense, it is used to describe any art that raises subjective feelings above objective observations. The paintings aim to reflect the artists's state of mind rather than the reality of the external world.

Expressionism is a term used to denote the use of distortion and exaggeration for emotional effect, which first surfaced in the art literature of the early twentieth century. When applied in a stylistic sense, with reference in particular to the use of intense colour, agitated brushstrokes, and disjointed space. Rather than a single style, it was a climate that affected not only the fine arts but also dance, cinema, literature and the theatre.

Expressionism is an artistic style in which the artist attempts to depict not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse in him. He accomplishes his aim through distortion, exaggeration, primitivism, and fantasy and through the vivid, jarring, violent, or dynamic application of formal elements. In a broader sense Expressionism is one of the main currents of art in the later 19th and the 20th centuries, and its qualities of highly subjective, personal, spontaneous self-expression are typical of a wide range of modern artists and art movements.

Unlike Impressionism, its goals were not to reproduce the impression suggested by the surrounding world, but to strongly impose the artist's own sensibility to the world's representation. The expressionist artist substitutes to the visual object reality his own image of this object, which he feels as an accurate representation of its real meaning. The search of harmony and forms is not as important as trying to achieve the highest expression intensity, both from the aesthetic point of view and according to idea and human critics.

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Impressionism

Characteristics of Impressionist painting include visible brushstrokes, open composition, emphasis on light in its changing qualities (often accentuating the effects of the passage of time), ordinary subject matter, the inclusion of movement as a crucial element of human perception and experience, and unusual visual angles.

The most conspicuous characteristic of Impressionism was an attempt to accurately and objectively record visual reality in terms of transient effects of light and colour.

Fugue

A contrapuntal form that is built from a single subject and has an exposition where all voices state the subject in turn, alternating tonic and dominant entrances. The fugue continues with various contrapuntal artifices which may include restatement of the subject, stretto, subject manipulations (fragmentation, inversion, retrograde, augmentation, etc). The fugue usually has several sections that are a combination of subject-sections, episodes, counter-expositions, stretti, etc.

Melody

The horizontal dimension in music, a succession of organized pitches having a definite rhythm, where the vertical dimension arises from the harmony.

Harmony

The relationship between notes when heard together, often described as the vertical dimension in music, where melody (or counterpoint) is the horizontal.

Polyphony

(Greek polyphonia, literally 'many sounds') polyphony developed in the music of the church. From the earliest musical settings of the mass, which were plainchant melodies characterized by one voice part in free rhythm, we see how, from the 9th- to the 16th-centuries, various plainchants were expanded using tropes (grafting new music and new texts onto the original chants). Polyphony, in the form of organum, the simultaneous combination of more than one melody, was developed in about the ninth century.

Practice Texts:

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

Susie Asado.

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

Susie Asado.

Susie Asado which is a told tray sure.

A lean on the shoe this means slips slips hers.

When the ancient light grey is clean it is yellow, it is a silver seller.

This is a please this is a please there are the saids to jelly.

These are the wets these say the sets to leave a crown to Incy.

Incy is short of incubus.

A pot. A pot is a beginning of a rare bit of trees. Trees tremble,

the old vats are in bobbles, bobbles which shade and shove and

render clean, render clean must.

Drink pups.

Drink pups drink pups lease a sash hold, see it shine and a bobolink

has pins. It shows a nail.

What is a nail. A nail is unison.

Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

—Gertrude Stein

Stein writes, "what I may call the early Spanish and Geography and Play period finally resulted in things like Susie Asado and Preciosila in an extraordinary melody of words and a melody and excitement in knowing that I had done this thing."

Plus, Susie Asado was apparently a Spanish flamenco, and that bit of info also invites you to discuss the poem as a flamenco dance, not a "poem" per se.

When describing her prose portraits of Cezanne, Matisse, and Picasso, Stein write, "I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing."

Consider these examples. They come from different essays, but note how the writer makes a claim, then clarifies the art concept, then continues to use the vocabulary to discuss her text. In other words, she talks about the "literary" text as though it is, in this case, a piece of music.

In the introduction, the student-writer declares that the best way to understand what Pynchon is up to in The Crying of Lot 49 *is to recognize that the novel is a kind of musical composition.*

Her supporting paragraph:

Pynchon employs a concerto structure to develop and organize the characters and events in the novel. A concerto is a "musical work in which one solo instrument is accompanied by an orchestra" (wikipedia). Since a concerto has two distinct parts (the soloist and the orchestra), the interaction between these two parts is what becomes important. The form of a concerto, originally established by the composer Vivaldi, generally involves alternating passages between the soloist and the orchestra. This alternation distinguishes the two parts from one another and yet they remain connected because they are often repeating the same material. Despite apparent division/ distinction among the parts, the alternating versions of a similar theme provide a sense of unity within the movement. The very etymology of a concerto lends itself to this understanding as well. In Italian a 'concertare' has two distinct and incongruous meanings. On the one hand, it means "to contend or dispute," but it also means "to agree," so that within the term itself we get the sense of "two opposing forces" (wikipedia). When discussing his Concerto, Bartok acknowledged that the instrumentation of the piece lent itself more to the style characteristic of a symphony. However, he deliberately titled the piece a concerto due to its focus on the various alternating passages of groups of soloists and the orchestra. **Pynchon develops *The Crying of Lot 49* in the same way, structuring it like Bartok's Concerto. The variety of characters, each with their individual roles to play provide enough instrumentation to make up a "symphony," however what sets the piece apart making it more of a concerto are the "alternating passages," and different interactions between Pynchon's heroine, Oedipa, and the rest of the characters (orchestra).** [And then she goes on to demonstrate her claims.]

She makes claims about how Pynchon's novel is a kind of concerto or how Pynchon uses a-tonality.

She explains, using the language of the discipline, the musical principles or theory.

What she begins to do (before I cut her off) is apply that language to the text. She talks about the novel using the vocabulary she introduces in her clarification.

...

Another Supporting Paragraph:

Just as Bartok was highly influenced by the a-tonality present in Schoenberg's compositions, Pynchon employs his own version of a-tonality in Crying of Lot 49. A-tonality is music that "lacks a tonal center or key." Where modality is depended on the hierarchical relationship among notes, a-tonality shifts the focus from a single, central tone and results through the increasing use of "ambiguous chords, less probable harmonic [direction] and more unusual melodic and rhythmic [direction]." With a-tonality the exceptional and normal are increasingly blurred further dividing the relationship between tones and harmonies, it is difficult to connect various harmonies, there is an "obscurity" that "approaches uniformity" leaving little guidance or clarity (wikipedia-Meyer). **Although there is modality within the novel itself, much of the novel "lacks a tonal center or key," and the fact that both Pynchon and Bartok employ two seemingly oppositional elements adds to the complexity of both pieces.** [And then she goes on to demonstrate her claims.]

...

Another Supporting Paragraph

Pynchon uses the 'fugue,' a style of musical composition, as a model for his short story "Entropy." **A fugue is a "polyphonic composition based on one, two, or more themes stated by several voices or parts in turn. It is part of a contrapuntal structure that is gradually built up into a complex form having somewhat distinct divisions or states of development and a marked climax at the end" (dictionary.com). The "contrapuntal structure" or apparent disorder, of a fugue relates back to the idea in a fugue, "of or pertaining to counterpoint; composed of two or more relatively independent melodies sounded together" (dictionary.com).** Structurally, we see elements of this in "Entropy." The story is divided into two themes that are counterpoint or contrast with one another. Each story or theme is also manifest by "distinct divisions or states of development" with a "marked climax at the end," and though each story has its own individual climax, the two climaxes work in conjunction with one another, offsetting each other in such a way so that the end result is a cohesive, comprehensible message that is passed along to the audience rather than two different messages remaining distinct and conveying two completely isolated ideas. In a fugue the different voices do not start on the same key; they start on different keys, but they all drive towards the same conclusion, and this is the very composition that Pynchon does in Entropy as well. The story opens with Meatball Mulligan's lease-breaking party which offers us a cacophonous voice, full of chaos and discord where, "a litter of empty champagne fifths" are on the floor and friends are "staying awake on Heidseck and Benzedrine pills" (2568). The drugs and empty champagne bottles are used to convey a sense of chaos and disorder, a party out of control. This "melody" is then contrasted by Callisto who lives upstairs above Meatball in his perfectly constructed "sanctuary." "This hothouse jungle it had taken him seven years to weave together. Hermetically sealed, it was a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the vagaries of weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder. Through trial-and-error Callisto had perfected its ecological balance" (2569). Instead of a world where champagne bottles are unnecessarily, carelessly strewn; where weather is unpredictable like the "false spring," the characters participating in Meatball's world are experiencing, and the national politics where ex-patriots seem to work for the government; Callisto's world is deliberately constructed and ordered. These two stories form a counter-point, taking place in two different settings, starting on two different notes, and yet quite literally, they are stacked on top of one another (Callisto's apartment with the perfect ecological environment is directly above Meatball's), creating a polyphony with one another within the same structure of the story, and both are driving toward a similar climax. These stories take place side by side and yet remain perfectly distinct, separated by paragraph breaks, and without one story directly blending into the other until the very end. Similar to a fugue then, these two stories represent two distinct parts that necessarily offset each other to create a counterpoint and develop a complexity as they develop what will generate a "marked climax" at the end of the story.

The point here is to notice how the writer makes a claim, clarifies the music theory, and then uses that art theory to discuss the story.

Pay especially close attention to the way the writer re-uses and echoes the language she introduced in the "music theory" section.

She adopts that way of speaking about the story.