

Literary Devices and General Terms

Aesthetics The nature or philosophy of beauty in art, literature, or nature.

Allergy When characters, settings, and events stand for other people or events or for abstract ideas or qualities; also an extended metaphor. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious or political significance and the characters are often personifications of abstract ideas such as charity, hope, greed, or envy. Ex: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout and Jem represent innocence, Atticus is a model of integrity, etc. Or in the children's holiday video "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Rudolph, the dentist elf, Yukon Cornelius and the Abominable Snowman represent the various types of misfits in society; Santa and the Reindeer Coaches represent normal society.

Alliteration The repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words. It can be used to reinforce meaning, unify thought, or simply for the musical effect.

Allusion A reference to someone, something, or some event known from history, literature, religion, politics, sports, science, music, art, or some other branch of culture. Allusions conjure up biblical authority, scenes from Shakespeare's plays, historic figures, wars, great love stories, and anything else that might enrich an author's work. Allusions imply reading and cultural experiences shared by the writer and reader, functioning as a kind of shorthand whereby the recalling of something outside the work supplies an emotional or intellectual context.

Anachronism Out of time; placing something in a time where it does not belong, Ex. A reference to World War I as "the first world war" in a novel set in the 1920's. (No one anticipated the second World War in the 1920's, and WWI was referred to during that time as "the Great War," not the *first* one.)

Analogy A comparison between two items, situations, or ideas that are somewhat alike but unlike in most respects. Frequently an unfamiliar or complex object or idea will be explained through comparison to a familiar or simpler one.

Anecdote A brief story told to illustrate a point or serve as an example of something.

Antagonist A character or force in conflict with the main character, or protagonist

Antihero An atypical protagonist, who can be particularly graceless, inept, stupid, or dishonest.

Antithesis the rhetorical contrast of ideas by means of parallel arrangements of words, clauses, or sentences Ex. "action, not words" or "they promised freedom and provided slavery")

Aphorism A brief saying embodying a moral, such as Pope's "Some praise at morning what they blame at night, / but always think the last opinion right." From the *Essay on Criticism*.

Apology A written or spoken defense.

Apostrophe An address, either to someone who is absent and therefore cannot hear the speaker or to something nonhuman or a personified abstraction that cannot comprehend. Apostrophe often provides a speaker the opportunity to think aloud. (Ex., Donne's "Death, be not proud".)

Archetype An image, story-pattern, or character type which recurs frequently in literature and evokes strong, often unconscious, associations in the reader.

Assonance The repetition of similar vowel sounds, preceded and followed by different consonants, in the stressed syllables of adjacent words. Ex: "She hated her failure to make the grade."

Audience The receivers (intended, immediate, mediated) for a speaker's or writer's message.

Autobiography A form of nonfiction in which a person tells his or her own life story.

Bildungsroman A coming of age novel; the story of a person's development to the point where the protagonist recognizes his/her place and role in the world.

Biography A form of nonfiction in which a writer tells the life of a person.

Cacophony A succession of harsh, discordant sounds in either poetry or prose, used to achieve a specific effect. (Opposite of **euphony**)

Note the harshness of sound and difficulty of articulation in these lines:

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

Hopkins, "God's Grandeur"

Canon An accepted list of literary works. Originally meant those books of the Bible scholars considered to be Holy Scripture; more recently it refers either to a body of work attributed by scholars to a particular author (Shakespeare's 37 plays) or more generally canon may refer to those works that are privileged, or given special status by a culture, works we tend to think of as classics, or "Great Books."

Carpe Diem The Latin phrase meaning "seize the day." This is a very common literary theme, especially in lyric poetry; it emphasizes that life is short, time is fleeting, and that one should make the most of present pleasures.

Catharsis A moral and spiritual cleansing you receive when watching a protagonist overcome great odds.

Confidant/confidante A character who has little effect on the action but in whom the protagonist or some other major character confides.

Criticism Analysis, study, and evaluation of individual works of literature.

Deductive Reasoning from general to specific.

Dialogue The verbal exchanges between characters. Dialogue makes the characters seem real to the reader or audience by revealing firsthand their thoughts, responses, and emotional states. See also diction.

Deus Ex Machina Literally, "God in the Machine," a Greek idea from when a god would be lowered or brought on stage to rescue the hero; now it applies to any time the hero is saved by a miraculous or "out-of-the-blue," unexpected event.

Diction A writer's choice of words, phrases, sentence structures, and figurative language, which combine to help create meaning.

Connotation All of the emotions associated with a word.

Denotation The dictionary definition of a word.

Doppelganger Literally, a "double-goer," a mysterious twin or a double fighting against your good work.

Dystopia "Bad place," - an imaginary world which was constructed to be perfect, but failed; present tendencies are carried out to their unpleasant end.

Epic see **Poetry**

Epiphany A sudden understanding or realization which prior to this was not thought of or understood.

Euphemism A device where being indirect replaces directness to avoid unpleasantness.

Euphony A combination of pleasing sounds in poetry or prose (opposite of **cacophony**).

Ethos "Ethical appeal". A rhetorical appeal which relies upon the credibility or trustworthiness of the speaker or author.

Expository A mode of writing that is used to explain something.

Extended metaphor See metaphor.

Fable A brief story that is told to present a moral or practical lesson.

Figurative Language Language not meant to be interpreted in a literal sense.

Flashback A scene in a literary work that interrupts the action to show an event that happened earlier.

Foil A character whose traits are the opposite of those of another character and who thus points up the strengths or weaknesses of another character.

Foreshadowing The use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest coming action.

Frame Story A story that contains another story or stories. Usually the frame story explains why the interior story or stories are being told. (*Frankenstein* – Victor's story is revealed in letters from the sailor Robert Walton)

Genre A particular type or category of writing.

Gothic A work characterized by a general mood of decay, action that is dramatic and generally violent or otherwise disturbing, loves that are destructively passionate, and settings that are grandiose, if gloomy or bleak.

Hamartia From Greek and translated as "sin," literally it means an error, mistake, frailty, or misstep. The protagonist's hamartia will cause his or her downfall.

Homily Religious speech or writing that usually gives practical moral counsel rather than discussion of doctrine.

Hubris Extreme pride and arrogance shown by a character that ultimately brings about his downfall; from the Greek tradition of a character who believed himself/herself to be equal to a god, thus creating a nemesis.

Hyperbole A boldly exaggerated statement that adds emphasis without intending to be literally true, as in the statement "He ate everything in the house." Hyperbole (also called overstatement) may be used for serious, comic, or ironic effect.

Imagery Words or phrases that appeal to one of the five senses.

In Media Res "In the midst of things," starting a story in the middle of the action. Later, the first part will be revealed. A familiar example of this would be *The Odyssey*.

Invective A violent verbal attack.

Irony A contrast or an incongruity between what is stated and what is meant, or between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.

Verbal irony A writer or speaker says one thing and means something entirely different.

Dramatic irony creates a discrepancy between what a character believes or says and what the reader or audience member knows to be true.

Tragic irony is a form of dramatic irony found in tragedies such as *Oedipus the King*, in which Oedipus searches for the person responsible for the plague that ravishes his city and ironically ends up hunting himself.

Situational irony exists when there is an incongruity between what is expected to happen and what actually happens due to forces beyond human comprehension or control. The suicide of the seemingly successful main character in Edwin Arlington Robinson's poem "Richard Cory" is an example of situational irony.

Cosmic irony occurs when a writer uses God, destiny, or fate to dash the hopes and expectations of a character or of humankind in general. In cosmic irony, a discrepancy exists between what a character aspires to and what universal forces provide.

Juxtaposition To place side by side purposefully so as to permit comparison or contrast.

Litotes A figure of speech in which the speaker emphasizes the magnitude of a statement by denying its opposite. Ex. "*That sword was not useless / to the warrior now*" *Beowulf*;
He was not unfamiliar with the works of Dickens (implying he was very familiar with them);

Metaphor A metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things, without using the word like or as. Metaphors assert the identity of dissimilar things, as when Macbeth asserts that life is a "brief candle." Metaphors can be subtle and powerful, and can transform people, places, objects, and ideas into whatever the writer imagines them to be.

An **implied metaphor** is a more subtle comparison; the terms being compared are not so specifically explained. For example, to describe a stubborn man unwilling to leave, one could say that he was "a mule standing his ground." This is a fairly explicit metaphor; the man is being compared to a mule. But to say that the man "brayed his refusal to leave" is to create an implied metaphor, because the subject (the man) is never overtly identified as a mule.

An **extended metaphor** is a sustained comparison in which part or all of a poem consists of a series of related metaphors. Robert Francis's poem "Catch" relies on an extended metaphor that compares poetry to playing catch. A controlling metaphor runs through an entire work and determines the form or nature of that work. The controlling metaphor in Anne Bradstreet's poem "The Author to Her Book" likens her book to a child.

Synecdoche is a kind of metaphor in which a part of something is used to signify the whole, as when a gossip is called a "wagging tongue," ten ships are called "ten sails", or one's children are referred to as their "flesh and blood". Sometimes, synecdoche refers to the whole being used to signify the part, as in the phrase "Boston won the baseball game."

Metonymy is a type of metaphor in which something closely associated with a subject is substituted for it. In this way, we speak of the "silver screen" to mean motion pictures, "the crown" to stand for the king, "the White House" to stand for the activities of the president.

Microcosm "Small world," representing an entire idea through a small situation or conflict.

Mood The prevailing feeling or emotional climate of a literary work.

Motif A character, incident, idea or object that recurs in various works or in various parts of the same work.
Ex: The light/dark imagery and the bird imagery that appear throughout *Romeo and Juliet*.

Objectivity Presentation of characters and plot in a literary work without overt comment or judgment by the author. Opposite of **subjectivity**.

Onomatopoeia Use of words whose sound echoes the sense (*bang, fizz, plop*).

Oxymoron The yoking of two contradictory terms; ex. *sweet pain, thunderous silence, original copy* **BUT** may also be a phrase: *conspicuous by her absence, make haste slowly*.

Paradox An apparently contradictory statement that nevertheless contains a measure of truth; *ex.* “*Art is a form of lying in order to tell the truth.*” -Pablo Picasso; “*But the essence of that ugliness is the thing which will always make it beautiful.*” - Gertrude Stein, “How Writing Is Written”

Parody A humorous imitation of another, usually serious, work, trying to make the original work seem absurd or to point out the flaws in the original work. *Ex.* *Weird Al Yankovich, or Saturday Night Live’s version of evening network news.*

Pathos “emotional appeal,” A rhetorical appeal that plays on the emotions of the audience.

Persona/Speaker Literally, a persona is a mask. In literature, a persona is a speaker created by a writer to tell a story or to speak in a poem. A persona is not a character in a story or narrative, nor does a persona necessarily directly reflect the author’s personal voice. A persona is a separate self, created by and distinct from the author, through which he or she speaks.

Personification A form of metaphor in which human characteristics are attributed to non-human things.

Plot The sequence of events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem. (See **Freytag’s Pyramid in Drama**)

Exposition The beginning of a story; introduces setting, characters, and sometimes conflict.

Rising Action Follows the inciting moment where conflict is introduced; plot becomes more complicated and conflict intensifies.

Conflict A struggle between two opposing forces or characters in a literary work.

External A character struggles against an outside force.

Internal Exists within the mind of a character torn between two ideas.

Complications Events in story that make conflict more difficult to resolve.

Climax The decisive point in a narrative or drama; the point of greatest emotional intensity or interest. The point at which the momentum of the story changes dramatically.

Falling Action The action that follows the climax, leading to resolution.

Denouement The outcome of a plot; resolution of the conflict

Point of View See **Characterization**

Prose All forms of written or spoken expression not having a regular rhythmic pattern.

Protagonist The central character in a literary work, at odds with the antagonist.

Pun A play on words. *Ex.* In *Romeo & Juliet*, Mercutio’s “*Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man.*” Or “*My advanced geometry class is full of squares.*”

Rhetoric The art of persuasion and employing the devices to persuade.

Rhetorical Shift Changing from one tone, attitude, or distance to another.

Rhetorical questions Asking a question, not for the purpose of eliciting an answer but for the purpose of asserting or denying something obliquely.

Sarcasm The use of language to hurt or ridicule. It is less subtle in tone than verbal irony.

Satire Literary art of ridiculing a subject, folly or vice in order to expose or correct it. The object of satire is usually some human frailty; people, institutions, ideas, and things are all fair game. Sarcasm, irony, and hyperbole are often used in writing satire.

Semantics The study of meaning. Sometimes limited to linguistic meaning, and sometimes used to discriminate between surface and substance.

Setting The time and place in which the events of a story occur, often helping to create an atmosphere or mood. Not just physical, setting includes ideas, customs, values, and beliefs of a particular time and place.

Simile A common figure of speech that makes an explicit comparison between two things by using words such as “like”, “as”, “than”, “appears”, and “seems”

Stream of consciousness The recording or re-creation of a character’s flow of thought. Raw images, perceptions, memories come and go in seemingly random, but actually controlled, fashion, much as they do in people’s minds.

Subjectivity the evident presence, in a literary work, of the personal feelings and opinions of the author.
Opposite of **Objectivity**.

Subplot A secondary story within a story.

Syllogism A formula for presenting a logical argument: two premises and a conclusion.
Ex: *All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.*

Symbol A person, object, image, word, or event that evokes a range of additional meaning beyond and usually more abstract than its literal significance. Symbols are educational devices for evoking complex ideas without having to resort to painstaking explanations that would make a story more like an essay than an experience.

Conventional symbols have meanings that are widely recognized by a society or culture. Some conventional symbols are the Christian cross, the Star of David, a swastika, or a nation's flag. However, some symbols are restricted to a particular work; for example, the white whale in Melville's *Moby-Dick* takes on multiple symbolic meanings in the work, but these meanings do not automatically carry over into other stories about whales.

Synesthesia Figure of speech juxtaposing one sensory image with another image that appeals to an unrelated sense; *ex. loud green shirt, golden touch, cool blue eyes.*

Synopsis A summary of the main points of a story or essay.

Syntax The arrangement of words within sentences and sentences within paragraphs.

Synthesis The joining of two or more ideas, arguments, abstracts, to produce a new idea, argument, or abstract; result of thesis and antithesis.

Theme The central meaning or dominant idea in a literary work. A theme provides a unifying point around which the plot, characters, setting, point of view, symbols, and other elements of a work are organized. It is important not to mistake the theme for the actual subject of the work; the theme refers to the abstract concept that is made concrete through the images, characterization, and action of the text.

Thesis A statement of opinion that is the writer's focus or main idea that is developed in an essay.

Tone The author's implicit attitude toward the reader or the people, places, and events in a work as revealed by the elements of the author's style. Tone may be characterized as serious or ironic, sad or happy, angry or affectionate, bitter or nostalgic, or any other attitudes and feelings that human beings experience.

Understatement The opposite of hyperbole, understatement refers to a figure of speech that says less than is intended. Understatement usually has an ironic effect, and sometimes may be used for comic purposes, as in Mark Twain's statement, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." See also hyperbole, irony.

Utopia A perfect world. Utopias usually become dystopias.

Verisimilitude The quality "of being true or real"; a likeness or resemblance of the truth, reality or a fact's probability.

Vignette (vi nyet') – a literary sketch or verbal description, a brief incident or scene.

Characters and Characterization

Characterization--The means by which a writer reveals a character's personality; not just what an author chooses to tell you about a character, but also what he or she chooses not to tell you.

Character presentation

Direct presentation – by exposition or analysis, we are told what the characters are like, or another character in story describes them

Indirect presentation – author shows the characters through their actions, appearance, etc. – they are “dramatized” for reader

Most Common Ways to characterize:

1. What the narrator says about the character, including personality and appearance. (Direct characterization)
2. What the character says and thinks--his/her own dialogue and/or thoughts. (Indirect)
3. How other characters feel or behave toward the character. (Indirect)
4. By showing the characters' actions. (Indirect)

Character A person, animal, or natural force presented as a person in a literary work.

Dynamic – undergoes change.

Static – does not undergo change.

Flat – exhibits one personality trait.

Round – exhibits various, often contradictory, personality traits.

Characteristic Speech/Narration

Colloquial – Informal conversation; differs in grammar, syntax, vocabulary, imagery, or connotation.

Dialect – The characteristic speech of a particular region or social group.

Dialogue – Conversation between two or more characters in a literary work.

Narration – The kind of writing or speaking that tells a story.

Narrative Devices – The ordering of events, withholding information until a climactic moment, and all the other tools the storyteller uses to progress the storyline.

Point of View The vantage point from which a narrative is told.

First Person – Narrator is a character in the story.

Third Person Limited – Narrator is not a character in the story, but the audience sees through the eyes of only one character.

Third Person Omniscient – Narrator is not a character in the story, and the audience sees through the eyes and hears the thoughts of many characters.

Structural/Syntactical Terms

Anadiplosis Repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause; Ex.--*He endlessly discussed his hobbies. Hobbies, however, seems an odd word to describe his interest in catching alligators by the tail.*

Anaphora Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses; Ex.- *The wind tore the trees. The wind blew the sand in my face. The wind forced itself into our lives.*

Anastrophe- Inversion of the natural or usual word order of a sentence; Ex.—*“Backward run the sentences, till reels the mind.”* - parody of the style of *Time* magazine.

Antecedent The word or phrase to which a pronoun refers.

Antimetabole reversing the grammatical order of repeated words or phrases (a loosely chiasmic structure, AB-BA) to intensify the final formulation, to present alternatives, or to show contrast: *All work and no play is as harmful to mental health as all play and no work. Ask not what you can do for rhetoric, but what rhetoric can do for you. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.*

Asyndeton Deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related words, phrases or clauses- principal effect is to produce a hurried rhythm; Ex. *I came, I saw, I conquered.*

Balanced sentence Hinges in the middle, usually split by a semi-colon, the second half of the sentence paralleling the first half, but changing one or two key words or altering the word order. In the same sense, the second half of the sentence can be thought of as a kind of mirror-image of the first half.

Chiasmus Reversal of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses;
It is hard to make money, but to spend it is easy. (Adj-LV-Inf, Inf-LV-Adj).
The crowd was chaotic, but serene was her soul. (S-LV-PA, PA-LV-S)

Declarative sentence Conveys statements; simply states a fact or argument, without requiring either an answer or action from the reader; avoids any special emotional impact.

Digression Insertion of material not closely related to the work or subject.

Ellipsis The deliberate omission of a word or of words which are readily implied by the context; Ex. *“And he to England shall along with you.”* *Hamlet*, III, iii, 4

Epanalepsis Repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause; Ex. *“Business forms are as various as people forms.”* Caption from an ad for Nekoosa Paper Company; *“Year chases year, decay pursues decay.”* Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

Epistrophe Repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses; Ex. *“Writing this many fragments is unacceptable. Writing without an authentic voice is unacceptable. Copying from the encyclopedia is unacceptable. In short, the essay is unacceptable.”*

Exclamatory sentence Conveys intense emotion; a more forceful version of a declarative sentence, marked at the end with an exclamation mark; if used sparingly, will jolt the reader.

Imperative sentence Conveys commands; can remind readers of a point established earlier, give advice, or exhort with special urgency or intensity; When you do use an imperative sentence, it should usually contain only a mild command, and thus, end with a period; makes it clear that you want the reader to act right away.

Interrogative sentence Asks a direct question and always ends in a question mark; forces the reader to think about what you are writing.

Loose sentence A sentence with its main clause at the beginning, followed by all subordinate clauses and elements; ex. *The dog ran out the door, down the stairs, across the street, and into the bushes.* This is the most common sentence construction in the English language; it tells the reader in advance how to interpret your information.

Parallelism (Isocolon) a rhetorical device that involves a succession of sentences, phrases and clauses of grammatically equal length. In this figure of speech, a sentence has a parallel structure that is made up of words, clauses or phrases of equal length, sound, meter and rhythm.

Antithetical parallelism The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure Ex. *“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.”* Martin Luther King, Jr.

Tricolon parallelism A series of three words, phrases, or clauses in parallel structure Ex. *“Every man that has ever undertaken to instruct others can tell what slow advances he has been able to make, and how much patience it requires to recall vagrant attention, to stimulate sluggish indifference, and to rectify absurd misapprehension.”* Samuel Johnson, *Life of Milton*

Periodic sentence A sentence with its main clause at the end, following all subordinate clauses and elements; ex. *Out the door, down the stairs, across the street, into the bushes ran the dog.* This leaves the reader in suspense until the very end.

Polysyndeton The opposite of asyndeton; the deliberate use of many conjunctions - principal effect is to slow the rhythm, producing a solemn feeling; Ex. *This semester I am taking English and history and biology and sociology and physical education.*

Syntax The ordering of words into meaningful verbal patterns such as phrases, clauses, and sentences. Poets often manipulate syntax, changing conventional word order, to place certain emphasis on particular words. Emily Dickinson, for instance, writes about being surprised by a snake in her poem "A narrow Fellow in the Grass," and includes this line: "His notice sudden is." In addition to the alliterative hissing s-sounds here, Dickinson also effectively manipulates the line's syntax so that the verb is appears unexpectedly at the end, making the snake's hissing presence all the more "sudden."

Voice (syntactic) – The relationship between the subject and the verb of a sentence, expressed through syntax.

Active voice The subject of the sentence is the "doer" of the action, ex. *Bill threw the ball.* Active voice is generally preferred in formal writing.

Passive voice The subject of the sentence is receiving the action; consists of a form of the verb *Abe* and a past participle, ex. The ball *was thrown* by Bill.

Drama Terms

Act The major divisions within a play, often marking shifts in time or coinciding with the elements of a plot. Most plays consist of one, three, or five acts.

Aside A part of an actor's lines supposedly not heard by others on the stage and intended only for the audience.

Blank Verse Unrhymed iambic Pentameter, a line of five metric feet.

(Ex., Romeo's "But SOFT, what LIGHT through YON-der WIN-dow BREAKS? / It IS the EAST, and JUL-i-ET the SUN")

Chorus A group of characters in Greek tragedy (and in later forms of drama), who comment on the action of a play without participation in it.

Comedy A type of drama in which the characters experience reversals of fortune, usually for the better. In comedy, things work out happily in the end. Comic drama may be either romantic--characterized by a tone of tolerance and geniality--or satiric. Satiric works offer a darker vision of human nature, one that ridicules human folly.

Comic relief The use of a comic scene to interrupt a succession of intensely tragic dramatic moments. The comedy of scenes offering comic relief typically parallels the tragic action that the scenes interrupt.

Fourth Wall The imaginary "wall" at the front of the stage in a traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theatre, through which the audience sees the action in the world of the play. "Breaking the fourth wall" is when an actor breaks the barrier and speaks directly to the audience.

Freytag's Pyramid Gustav Freytag's conception of the structure of a typical five-act play; has been applied to other dramatic forms and even to fiction, including prose. See **Plot**.

Malapropism the unintentional misuse of a word by confusion with one of similar sound, especially when creating a ridiculous effect, as in *I am not under the affluence of alcohol*

Props Articles or objects that appear on stage or are used by a character during a play. Ex. - The bird cage in *Trifles* and Romeo's dagger in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Scene – The minor divisions within an act of a play, usually marking the entrance or exit of a group of characters.

Soliloquy A dramatic convention that allows a character alone on stage to speak his or her thoughts aloud. If someone else is on stage, and the characters' words are unheard, the soliloquy becomes an aside.

Stage direction A playwright's descriptive or interpretive comments that provide readers (and actors) with information about the dialogue, setting, and action of a play. Modern playwrights, including Ibsen, Shaw, Miller, and Williams tend to include substantial stage directions, while earlier playwrights typically used them more sparsely, implicitly, or not at all.

Stichomythia A type of dialogue in which actors exchange short remarks; it is usually characterized by repetition and antithesis and delivered rapidly.

QUEEN: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET: Mother, you have my father much offended.

QUEEN: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

Tragedy a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.

Tragic flaw A weakness or limitation of character, resulting in the fall of the **tragic hero**. King Lear's pride is one example.

Tragic hero A privileged, exalted character of high repute, who, by virtue of a **tragic flaw** and fate, suffers a fall from glory into suffering. Sophocles' Oedipus is an example.

Tragicomedy A genre that blends elements of tragedy and comedy. Tragicomedies tend to fall into two main categories; those in which a potentially tragic series of events is resolved happily and those in which the comedy has dark or bitter overtones.

Poetry Terms

POETIC FORMS

Apostrophe – See **General Terms**

Ballad Traditionally, a ballad is a song, transmitted orally from generation to generation, that tells a story and that eventually is written down. As such, ballads usually cannot be traced to a particular author or group of authors. Typically, ballads are dramatic, condensed, and impersonal narratives, such as "Bonny Barbara Allan." A literary ballad is a narrative poem that is written in deliberate imitation of the language, form, and spirit of the traditional ballad, such as Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci." See also ballad stanza, quatrain.

Carpe diem The Latin phrase meaning "seize the day." This is a very common literary theme, especially in lyric poetry, which emphasizes that life is short, time is fleeting, and that one should make the most of present pleasures. Robert Herrick's poem "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" employs the **carpe diem** theme.

Didactic poetry Poetry designed to teach an ethical, moral, or religious lesson. Michael Wigglesworth's Puritan poem "Day of Doom" is an example of didactic poetry.

Doggerel A derogatory term used to describe poetry whose subject is trite and whose rhythm and sounds are monotonously heavy-handed.

Dramatic monologue A type of lyric poem in which a character (the speaker) addresses a distinct but silent audience imagined to be present in the poem in such a way as to reveal a dramatic situation and, often unintentionally, some aspect of his or her temperament or personality.

Elegy A mournful, contemplative lyric poem written to commemorate someone who is dead, often ending in a consolation. Tennyson's In Memoriam, written on the death of Arthur Hallam, is an elegy. Elegy may also refer to a serious meditative poem produced to express the speaker's melancholy thoughts. See also lyric.

Epic A long narrative poem, told in a formal, elevated style, that focuses on a serious subject and chronicles heroic deeds and events important to a culture or nation. Milton's "Paradise Lost", which attempts to "justify the ways of God to man," is an epic.

Epigram A brief, pointed, and witty poem that usually makes a satiric or humorous point. Epigrams are most often written in couplets, but take no prescribed form.

Lyric A type of brief poem that expresses the personal emotions and thoughts of a single speaker. It is important to realize, however, that although the lyric is uttered in the first person, the speaker is not necessarily the poet. There are many varieties of lyric poetry, including the dramatic monologue, elegy, haiku, ode, and sonnet forms.

Narrative A poem that tells a story. Epics and ballads are among the many kinds of narrative poems.

Ode A relatively lengthy lyric poem that often expresses lofty emotions in a dignified style. Odes are characterized by a serious topic, such as truth, art, freedom, justice, or the meaning of life; their tone tends to be formal. There is no prescribed pattern that defines an ode; some odes repeat the same pattern in each stanza, while others introduce a new pattern in each stanza.

Sonnet A fixed form of lyric poetry that consists of fourteen lines, usually written in iambic pentameter. There are two basic types of sonnets, the Italian and the English.

Italian sonnet, also known as the **Petrarchan sonnet**, is divided into an octave, which typically rhymes *abbaabba*, and a sestet, which may have varying rhyme schemes. Common rhyme patterns in the sestet are *cdecde*, *cdecdd*, and *cdccdc*. Very often the octave presents a situation, attitude, or problem that the sestet comments upon or resolves, as in John Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."

English sonnet, also known as the **Shakespearean sonnet**, is organized into three quatrains and a couplet, which typically rhyme *abab cdcd efef gg*. This rhyme scheme is more suited to English poetry because English has fewer rhyming words than Italian. English sonnets, because of their four-part organization, also have more flexibility with respect to where thematic breaks can occur. Frequently, however, the most pronounced break or turn comes with the concluding couplet, as in Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" See also couplet, iambic pentameter, line, octave, quatrain, sestet.

POETIC STRUCTURES

Meter When a rhythmic pattern of stresses recurs in a poem, it is called meter. Metrical patterns are determined by the type and number of feet in a line of verse; combining the name of a line length with the name of a foot concisely describes the meter of the line. Rising meter refers to metrical feet which move from unstressed to stressed sounds, such as the iambic foot and the anapestic foot. Falling meter refers to metrical feet which move from stressed to unstressed sounds, such as the trochaic foot and the dactylic foot. See also accent, foot, iambic pentameter, line.

Accent (also known as **stress**) The emphasis, or stress, given a syllable in pronunciation.

Foot/Feet The metrical unit by which a line of poetry is measured. A foot usually consists of one stressed and one or two unstressed syllables.

Iamb An **iambic** foot, which consists of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, is the most common metrical foot in English poetry.

a BOOK | of VER-|ses UN-|der-NEATH | the BOUGH,
a JUG | of WINE, | a LOAF | of BREAD |- and THOU.

Trochee A **trochaic** foot consists of one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable.

DOU-ble | DOU-ble | TOIL and | TROU-ble
FI-re | BURN and | CAUL-dron | BUB-ble.

Anapest An **anapestic** foot is two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed one.

With the SHEEP | in the FOLD | and the COWS | in their STALLS.

Dactyl A **dactylic** foot is one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones.

LOVE a-gain, | SONG a-gain, | NEST a-gain, | YOUNG a-gain.

Spondee A **spondaic** is a foot consisting of two stressed syllables, but is not a sustained metrical foot and is used mainly for variety or emphasis.

HEARTBREAK, CHILDHOOD, DEAD-SET

Pyrrhic – A **pyrrhic** consists of two unstressed syllables. This type of foot is rare and is found interspersed with other feet.

Line A sequence of words printed as a separate entity on the page. In poetry, lines are usually measured by the number of feet they contain. The names for various line lengths are as follows:

monometer: one foot
dimeter: two feet
trimeter: three feet
tetrameter: four feet

pentameter: five feet
hexameter: six feet
heptameter: seven feet
octameter: eight feet

The number of feet in a line, coupled with the name of the foot, describes the metrical qualities of that line.

Monometer – The following is an example of iambic monometer ($\sim \prime$).

Thus I
Pass by
And die:
As One,
Unknown,
And gone:

(Herrick, Robert from "Upon His Departure")

Dimeter – The following is an example of trochaic dimeter (' ^ | ' ^).

Workers earn it,
Spendthrifts burn it,
Bankers lend it,
Forgers fake it,

(Armour, Richard from "Money")

Trimeter – The following is an example of iambic trimeter (^ ' | ^ ' | ^ ').

The idle life I lead
Is like a pleasant sleep,
Wherin I rest and heed
The dreams that by me sleep.

(Bridges, Robert from "The Idle Life I Lead")

Tetrameter – The following is an example of iambic tetrameter (^ ' | ^ ' | ^ ' | ^ ').

The hills, the meadows, and the lakes
Enchant not for their own sweet sakes;
They cannot know, they cannot care
To know that they are thought so fair.

(Leigh, Henry from "Not Quite Far")

Pentameter – The following is an example of iambic pentameter (^ ' | ^ ' | ^ ' | ^ ' | ^ ').

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

(Pope, Alexander from "An Essay on Criticism")

Stanza – A recurring grouping of two or more verse lines in terms of length, metrical form, and often, rhyme scheme. Stanzas are known by the number of lines they contain.

couplet: two lines

triplet: three lines

quatrain: four lines

quintet: five lines

sestet: six lines

septet: seven lines

octave: eight lines

Others are identified as nine-, ten-line stanzas, etc.

Couplet Two consecutive lines of poetry that usually rhyme and have the same meter.

A **heroic couplet** is a couplet written in rhymed iambic pentameter.

Ballad stanza A four-line stanza, known as a quatrain, consisting of alternating eight- and six-syllable lines. Usually only the second and fourth lines rhyme (an abcb pattern).

Coleridge adopted the ballad stanza in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Verse A term used to describe poetic lines composed in a measured rhythmical pattern, that are often, but not necessarily, rhymed. The verse forms based on meter and rhyme are *rhymed verse*, *blank verse*, and *free verse*.

Rhymed Verse – consists of verse with end rhyme and usually with a regular meter.

That time of year thou may'st in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

(Shakespeare, from "Sonnet 73")

Blank verse Unrhymed iambic pentameter. Blank verse is the English verse form closest to the natural rhythms of English speech and therefore is the most common pattern found in traditional English narrative and dramatic poetry from Shakespeare to the early twentieth century. Shakespeare's plays use blank verse extensively.

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

(Shakespeare, from *Julius Caesar*)

Free verse Also called open form poetry, free verse refers to poems characterized by their nonconformity to established patterns of meter, rhyme, and stanza. Free verse uses elements such as speech patterns, grammar, emphasis, and breath pauses to decide line breaks, and usually does not rhyme.

The voice of the last cricket
across the first frost
is one kind of good-by.
It is so thin a splinter of singing.

(Sandburg, Carl from "Splinter")

Rhyme The repetition of identical or similar concluding syllables in different words, most often at the ends of lines. Rhyme is predominantly a function of sound rather than spelling; thus, words that end with the same vowel sounds rhyme, for instance, day, prey, bouquet, weigh, and words with the same consonant ending rhyme, for instance vain, feign, rein, lane.

End rhyme is the most common form of rhyme in poetry; the rhyme comes at the end of the lines.

It runs through the reeds
And away it proceeds,
Through meadow and glade,
In sun and in shade.

(Southey, Robert from "The Cataract of Lodore")

Internal rhyme places at least one of the rhymed words within the line, as in "Dividing and gliding and sliding" or "In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud."

Masculine rhyme describes the rhyming of single-syllable words, such as "grade" or "shade". Masculine rhyme also occurs where rhyming words of more than one syllable, when the same sound occurs in a final stressed syllable, as in "defend" and "contend", "betray" and "away".

Feminine rhyme consists of a rhymed stressed syllable followed by one or more identical unstressed syllables, as in "BUT-ter" and "CLUT-ter"; "GRAT-itude" and "ATT-itude"

Near rhyme (also called off rhyme, slant rhyme, and approximate rhyme), the sounds are almost but not exactly alike. A common form of near rhyme is consonance, which consists of identical consonant sounds preceded by different vowel sounds: "home" and "same"; "worth" and "breath".

Eye rhyme – describes the use of words that may look alike but do not rhyme at all, such as "bough" and "cough", or "brow" and "blow".

Rhyme scheme describes the pattern of end rhymes. Rhyme schemes are mapped out by noting patterns of rhyme with lowercase letters: the first rhyme sound is designated a, the second becomes b, the third c, and so on. The rhyme scheme for the following stanza is *aabb*.

When my mother died I was very young,	<i>a</i>
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,	<i>a</i>
Could scarcely cry "'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"	<i>b</i>
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.	<i>b</i>

(Blake, from "The Chimney Sweeper")

ADDITIONAL POETRY TERMS

Anaphora See **General Terms**

Anastrophe See **General Terms**

Caesura A pause within a line of poetry that contributes to the rhythm of the line. A caesura can occur anywhere within a line and need not be indicated by punctuation. In scanning a line, caesuras are indicated by a double vertical line (| |).

Chiasmus See **Syntax**

End-stopped line A poetic line that has a pause at the end. End-stopped lines reflect normal speech patterns and are often marked by punctuation. The first line of Keats's "Endymion" is an example of an end-stopped line; the natural pause coincides with the end of the line, and is marked by a period:

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

Enjambment (also known as a **Run-On Line**) In poetry, when one line ends without a pause and continues into the next line for its meaning. This is also called a run-on line.

"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:

Epistrophe See **Syntax**

Rhythm A term used to refer to the recurrence of stressed and unstressed sounds in poetry. Depending on how sounds are arranged, the rhythm of a poem may be fast or slow, choppy or smooth. Poets use rhythm to create pleasurable sound patterns and to reinforce meanings. Rhythm in prose arises from pattern repetitions of sounds and pauses that create looser rhythmic effects. See also **meter**.

Scansion The process of measuring the stresses in a line of verse in order to determine the metrical pattern of the line. See also line, meter.

Terza rima An interlocking three-line rhyme scheme: aba, bcb, cdc, ded, and so on. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" are written in terza rima.