

GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

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ABSTRACT WRITING: Writing that discusses vague topics like evil, love, etc. An "abstract" is a condensed version of a longer piece of writing that highlights the major points covered, concisely describes the content and scope of the writing, and reviews the writing's contents in abbreviated form.

ACADEMIC WRITING: Writing that is usually serious, intended for a critical and informed audience, based on closely-investigated knowledge, and presents ideas or arguments.

ACCENT/BEAT: The rhythmically significant stress in the expression of words, giving some syllables more importance than others. In words of two or more syllables, one syllable is almost always stressed more strongly than the other syllables. In words of one syllable, the degree of stress normally depends on the grammatical function; nouns, verbs, and adjectives are usually given more stress than articles or prepositions. The words in a line of poetry are usually arranged so the accents occur at regular intervals, with the meter defined by the placement of the accents within the foot.

AESTHETIC: The noun "aesthetic" means "that which appeals to the senses". Aesthetics also refers to a philosophy that discusses beauty and art. An aesthetic (also esthetic or æsthetic) is the concept of a particular school of philosophy that judges beauty and art by certain standards -- for example, "He despised the aesthetic of minimalism".

ALLEGORY: A narrative technique in which characters representing things or abstract ideas are used to convey a message or teach a lesson. Allegory is typically used to teach moral, ethical, or religious lessons but is sometimes used for satiric or

political purposes. (For example, Billy Budd represents good while Claggart represents evil.)

ALLITERATION: A poetic device where the first consonant sounds in words or syllables are repeated. The following description of the Green Knight from the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* gives an example of alliteration: And in guise all of green, the gear and the man:

A coat cut close, that clung to his sides
An a mantle to match, made with a lining
Of furs cut and fitted — the fabric was noble....
(Compare with ASSONANCE.)

ALLUSION: An implied or indirect reference to something assumed to be known, such as a historical event or person, a well-known quotation from literature, or a famous work of art, such as Keats' allusion to Titian's painting of Bacchus in "Ode to a Nightingale."

ANACHRONISM: Something misplaced in time like a typewriter which has been replaced by a computer.

ANALOGY: The comparison of two pairs which have the same relationship. The key is to determine the relationship between the first pair so you can choose the correct second pair. Part to whole, opposites, results of - are types of relationships you should find. Example: hot is to cold as fire is to ice OR hot: cold::fire: ice

ANAPESTIC METER: A metrical foot with two short or unaccented syllables followed by a long or accented syllable, as in inter-*VENE* or for a *WHILE*. William Cowper's "Verses Supposed to be Written by Alexander Selkirk," is a poem in which anapestic feet are predominately used, as in the opening line: I am *MON* | -arch of *ALL* | I sur-*VEY*

ANAPHORA: The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses, or paragraphs. One of the devices of repetition, in which the same phrase is repeated at the beginning of two or more lines.

ANECDOTE: A short story of an interesting or humorous incident. An anecdote is always based on real life, an incident involving actual persons, whether famous or not, in real places. However, over time, reuse may convert a particular anecdote into a fictional piece, one that is retold but is "too good to be true".

ANTAGONIST: The character (or group of characters, or, sometimes an institution) of a story who represents the opposition against which the heroes and/or protagonists must contend. In the classic story where the action consists of a hero fighting a villain, the two can be regarded as protagonist and antagonist,

respectively. However, authors have often created more complex situations. In some instances, the story is told from the villain's point of view; in such a story, the hero is regarded as the chief antagonist of the story.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM: This is used with God or gods. The act of attributing human forms or qualities to entities which are not human. Specifically, anthropomorphism is the describing of gods or goddesses in human forms that possess human characteristics such as jealousy, hatred, or love. Mythologies of ancient peoples were almost entirely concerned with anthropomorphic gods.

ANTICLIMAX: The intentional use of fancy language to describe the trivial or commonplace, or a sudden transition from a significant thought to a trivial one in order to achieve a humorous or satiric effect, as in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, Dost sometimes counsel take -- and sometimes tea." An anticlimax also occurs in a series in which the ideas or events ascend toward a climactic conclusion but terminate instead in a thought of lesser importance.

ANTIHERO: A protagonist who is noticeably unheroic. Anti-heroes can be awkward, obnoxious, passive, pitiful, obtuse, or just normal; but they are always, in some fundamental way, flawed, unqualified, or failed heroes. When the anti-hero is a central character in a work of fiction, the work will frequently deal with the effect that the flawed character has on other people. Additionally the work may depict how the character alters over time, either leading to punishment, un-heroic success or redemption.

ANTITHESIS: A figure of speech in which a thought is balanced with a contrasting thought in parallel arrangements of words and phrases, such as, "He promised wealth and provided poverty," or "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," or from Pope's *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*: "Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike" Also, an antithesis is the second of two contrasting or opposing parts.

APHORISM: A brief statement containing an important truth or fundamental principle. (For example, "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." (see EPIGRAM))

APOSTROPHE: A figure of speech in which an address is made to an absent or deceased person or a personified thing, as when a poet speaks to the moon.

APOTHEOSIS: Elevating someone or something to a god-like status. Apotheosis is most commonly used to refer to the Roman pagan process whereby an Emperor was made into or recognized as a god. Some Roman emperors underwent

apotheosis upon their deaths. American presidents such as Washington and Lincoln have undergone apotheosis.

ARCHAISM: The use of deliberately old-fashioned language to create an effect. Their deliberate use can be subdivided into literary archaisms, which seeks to evoke the style of older speech and writing; and lexical archaisms, the use of words no longer in common use. Archaisms are kept alive by these uses and by the study of older literature.

ARCHETYPE: An archetype is an idealized model of a person, object, or concept from which similar instances are derived, copied, patterned, or emulated. (For example, Hercules is an archetype of strength and courage.)

ASIDE: A comment made by a stage performer that is intended to be heard by the audience but supposedly not by other characters.

ASSONANCE: The relatively close juxtaposition of the same or similar vowel sounds, but with different end consonants in a line or passage, thus a vowels rhyme, as in the words, "date" and "fade."(see ALLITERATION and CONSONANCE)

ATMOSPHERE: The emotional tone or background that surrounds a scene. This feeling is created in a literary work, partly by the description of the setting and partly by the description of objects. The style of the descriptions of either creates atmosphere too. A work may contain an atmosphere of horror, mystery, holiness, or childlike simplicity, to name a few, depending on the author's treatment of the work.

AUBADE: A song or poem with a theme of greeting the dawn, often involving the parting of lovers, or a call for a beloved to arise, as in Shakespeare's "Song," from Cymbeline.

BALLAD: A short poem that tells a simple story and has a repeated refrain. Ballads were originally intended to be sung. Early ballads, known as folk ballads, were passed down through generations, so their authors are often unknown. Later ballads composed by known authors are called literary ballads. An example of an anonymous folk ballad is "Edward," which dates from the Middle Ages. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and John Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" are examples of literary ballads.

BATHOS: Bathos is unintended humor caused by a mixed up combination of high drama and low comedy. The method that is most remembered now is the act of combining very serious matters with very trivial ones. The radical juxtaposition of the serious with the frivolous destroys the serious meaning of the work and creates humor.

BLACK HUMOR: (Also known as Black Comedy.) Writing that places gross elements side by side with humorous ones in an attempt to shock the reader, forcing him or her to laugh at the horrifying reality of a disordered world. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* is considered a superb example of the use of black humor. Other well-known authors who use black humor include Kurt Vonnegut, Edward Albee, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter.

BLANK VERSE: Poetry written without rhymes, but which retains a set metrical pattern, usually iambic pentameter (five iambic feet per line) in English verse. Since it is a very flexible form, the writer not being hampered in the expression of thought or syntactic structure by the need to rhyme, it is used extensively in narrative and dramatic poetry. In lyric poetry, blank verse is adaptable to lengthy descriptive and meditative poems. An example of blank verse is found in the well-known lines from Act 4, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. (see TRADITIONAL VERSE and FREE VERSE)

BOMBAST: Conceited, exaggeratedly learned and authoritative language. Speeches by politicians which just deal with surface issues are considered bombast by many.

BURLESQUE: Broad satire; taking tragic drama and exaggerating it into ridiculousness. High burlesque refers to a burlesque imitation where a serious style is applied to the commonplace. Low burlesque applies an irreverent, mocking style to a serious subject.

CACOPHONY: Unpleasant sounds in the jarring juxtaposition of harsh letters or syllables which are grating to the ear, usually inadvertent, but sometimes deliberately used in poetry for effect. (see EUPHONY)

CADENCE: The repeated rhythmical pattern in lines of verse; also, the natural tone or modulation of the voice determined by the alternation of accented or unaccented syllables.

CANTO: A major division of a long narrative poem, such as an epic, as distinguished from shorter divisions like STANZAS.

CARICATURE: A portrait (verbal or otherwise) that exaggerates a facet of an individual's personality or appearance.

CATHARSIS: A sudden emotional breakdown or climax that consists of overwhelming feelings of great pity, sorrow, laughter, or any extreme change in emotion. It results in renewal, restoration and revitalization. Catharsis is a form of emotional cleansing.

CHARACTERIZATION: Characterization is the method used by a writer to develop a character. The method includes (1) showing the character's appearance, (2) displaying the character's actions, (3) revealing the character's thoughts, (4) letting the character speak, and (5) getting the reactions of others. (see STOCK, FLAT, ROUND, STATIC, DYNAMIC CHARACTERS)

CHIASMUS: Parallel but reverse structure (i.e. Learned willingly, forgotten gladly)

CHORUS: In Greek drama, this is the group of citizens who stand outside the main action and comment on it as the play goes on.

CLASSIC: The adherence to the traditional standards that are universally valid and permanent. Classical style is usually grand in its simplicity with elaborate metaphors and allusions that enhance the symbolism. Epics such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are classic works.

CLIMAX: The decisive moment in a drama, the climax is the turning point of the play to which the rising action leads. This is the crucial part of the drama, the part which determines the outcome of the conflict. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* the climax occurs at the end of Marc Antony's speech to the Roman public. In the climax to the film *Star Wars*, the empire's death star is ready to destroy the rebel base. Luke Skywalker and rebel pilots attack the base, and after the deaths of some rebel pilots, Skywalker successfully fires his missile into the death star's vulnerable spot and destroys the death star, saving the rebel forces. (see CONFLICT)

COINAGE: A new word, usually invented by a poet or writer to create an effect. Sometimes a word is coined to describe a new literary technique. "Stream of Consciousness" is an example.

COLLOQUIALISM: A word used in everyday conversation that isn't formal "English" but is not going to disappear from common use like a slang word in time will.

CONCEIT: A complex METAPHOR, overly stressed or far-fetched, in which the subject is compared with a simpler topic usually chosen from nature or from a familiar context. Especially associated with intense emotional or spiritual feelings, they sometimes extend through the entire length of a poem. An example of a conceit is Sir Thomas Wyatt's "My Galley."

CONFLICT: Conflict is the struggle found in fiction. Conflict may be internal or external and is best seen in (1) Man in conflict with another Man; (2) Man in conflict in Nature; (3) Man in conflict with self.

CONNOTATION: The suggestion of a meaning by a word beyond what it explicitly denotes or describes. The word, home, for example, means the place where one lives, but by connotation, also suggests security, family, love and comfort. (see DENOTATION)

CONSONANCE: (Also known as Half Rhyme or Slant Rhyme.) Consonance occurs in Poetry when words appearing at the ends of two or more verses have similar final consonant sounds but have final vowel sounds that differ, as with "stuff" and "off."

Consonance is found in "The curfew tolls the knells of parting day" from Thomas Grey's "An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard." (Compare with ASSONANCE.)

COUPLET: Two successive lines of RHYMED poetry usually containing a single thought (see heroic couplet).

DACTYLIC METER: A metrical foot of three syllables, the first of which is long or accented and the next two short or unaccented, as in MER-rily or LOV-er boy, or from Byron's "The Bride of Abydos": KNOW ye the | LAND where the | CY-press and | MYR-tle

DECORUM: A character's speech corresponds with his/her social situation or a work is appropriate to its subject, its genre and its audience.

DENOTATION: The strict, literal, dictionary definition of a word, empty of all emotion, attitude or other influence. (see CONNOTATION)

DEUS EX MACHINA: A Latin term meaning "god out of a machine." In Greek drama, a god was often lowered onto the stage by a mechanism of some kind to rescue the hero or untangle the plot. By extension, the term refers to any artificial device or coincidence used to bring about a convenient and simple solution to a plot. This is a common device in melodramas and includes such fortunate circumstances as the sudden receipt of a legacy to save the family farm or a last-minute stay of execution. The deus ex machina invariably rewards the virtuous and punishes evildoers.

DICTION: The choice of words, phrases, sentence structures, and figurative language in a literary work; the manner or mode of verbal expression, particularly with regard to clarity and accuracy. The diction of a poem can range from colloquial to formal, from literal to figurative, or from concrete or abstract.

DIRGE: A poem of grief or lamentation, especially one intended to accompany funeral or memorial rites.

DISSONANCE: Harsh, incompatible sounds. Dissonance in poetry is the deliberate avoidance of assonance, i.e. patterns of repeated vowel sounds. Dissonance in poetry is similar to CACOPHONY and the opposite of EUPHONY.

DOGGEREL: Crude, simplistic verse, often in sing-song rhyme. Doggerel might have any or all of the following failings: trite, clichéd, or overly sentimental, forced or imprecise rhymes; faulty meter; misordering of words to force correct meter.

DRAMATIC VERSE: This occurs in a dramatic work, such as a play, composed in poetic form. The tradition of dramatic verse extends at least as far back as ancient Greece. It was probably used by Greek playwrights such as Euripides for its song-like effect and to make long passages easier to memorize. Shakespeare used it extensively. (see LYRIC and NARRATIVE VERSE)

ECHO: Repetition of words or phrases in a poem or in a piece of prose to create an effect.

ELEGY: A poem of sorrow, praise, and consolation, usually formal and sustained, over the death of a particular person; also, a thoughtful poem in mournful or sorrowful mood, such as, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," by Thomas Gray.

ENJAMBMENT: The continuation of the sense and, therefore, the grammatical construction of a sentence beyond the end of a line of poetry.

EPIC: A long narrative poem about the adventures of a hero of great historic or legendary importance. The setting is vast and the action is often given enormous significance through the intervention of supernatural forces such as gods, angels, or demons. Epics are typically written in a CLASSIC style of grand simplicity with elaborate metaphors and allusions that enhance the symbolic importance of a hero's adventures. Some well-known epics are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

EPIGRAM: A brief, sometimes satiric, couplet or quatrain which was popular in classic Latin literature and in European and English literature of the Renaissance and the neo-Classical era. Epigrams contain a single thought or event and are often witty or humorous. Coleridge wrote the following definition: "What is an epigram? A dwarfish whole, Its body brevity, and wit its soul."

EPITAPH: A brief poem or statement in memory of someone who is deceased, used as, or suitable for, a tombstone inscription.

EUPHEMISM: The substitution of an comfortable or inoffensive expression to replace one that might offend or suggest something unpleasant, for example, "He is at rest." is a euphemism for "He is dead."

EUPHONY: Harmony or beauty of sound which provides a pleasing effect to the ear, usually sought-for in poetry for effect. It is achieved not only by the selection of individual word-sounds, but also by their arrangement in the repetition, proximity, and flow of sound patterns. (see CACOPHONY)

EXPOSITION: In drama, the presentation of essential information regarding what has occurred prior to the beginning of the play. In the exposition to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, two servants of the house of Capulet discuss the feud between their master and the house of Montague, thereby letting the audience know that such a feud exists and that it will play an important role in influencing the plot.

In the exposition to the film *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker sees a 3D holograph projection of the Princess Leia warning that she is a prisoner of Darth Vader and begging for help.

FALLING ACTION: The falling action is the series of events which take place after the CLIMAX of a story. The falling action of a drama leads to the conclusion. In the climax of Ibsen's, *An Enemy of the People*, Dr. Thomas Stockmann has been declared an enemy of the people. In the falling action, he and his family and supporters are harassed by the townspeople.

FARCE: A type of comedy characterized by a wide range of humor, weird incidents, and often vulgar subject matter. Much of the "comedy" in film and television could more accurately be described as farce. (Compare with BURLESQUE.)

FATE: The all but inevitable course of events. The irresistible power or agency that determines the future, whether in general or of an individual. It is a concept based on the belief that there is a fixed natural order to the universe.

FEMININE RHYME: A rhyme occurring on an unaccented final syllable, as in dining and shining or motion and ocean. Feminine rhymes are double or disyllabic rhymes and are common in the heroic couplet, as in the opening lines of Goldsmith's "Retaliation: A Poem": Of old, when Scarron his companions invited Each guest brought his dish, and the feast was united. (see MASCULINE RHYME)

FLASHBACK: A reference to an event which took place prior to the beginning of a story or play. In Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," the protagonist, Harry Street, has been injured on a hunt in Africa. Dying, his mind becomes preoccupied with incidents in his past. In a flashback, Street remembers

one of his wartime comrades dying painfully on barbed wire on a battlefield in Spain. (see FORESHADOW)

FLAT/ROUND CHARACTERS: Characters are flat when their personalities are undeveloped. Characters are round when their personalities have many facets, and the reader could predict what they might do in a specific situation.

FOIL: A character in a work of literature whose physical or psychological qualities contrast strongly with, and therefore highlight, the corresponding qualities of another character. In his Sherlock Holmes stories, Arthur Conan Doyle portrayed Dr. Watson as a man of normal habits and intelligence, making him a foil for the eccentric and wonderfully perceptive Sherlock Holmes.

FOOT: A unit of rhythm or meter; the division in poetry of a group of syllables, one of which is long or accented. For example, the line, "The boy | stood on | the burn | ing deck," has four iambic metrical feet. The most common poetic feet used in English verse are the IAMB, ANAPEST, TROCHEE, DACTYL, and SPONDEE.

FORESHADOWING: A device used in literature to create expectation or to set up an explanation of later developments. In Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the graveyard encounter at the beginning of the novel between Pip and the escaped convict Magwitch foreshadows the events that comprise much of the narrative. (see FLASHBACK)

FREE VERSE: A fluid form that conforms to no set rules of traditional poetry. The free in free verse refers to the freedom from fixed patterns of meter and rhyme, but writers of free verse employ familiar poetic devices such as assonance, alliteration, imagery, figures of speech etc., and their rhythmic effects are dependent on the syllabic cadences emerging from the context. (see TRADITIONAL and BLANK VERSE)

GENRE: A category of literary work which may refer to both the content of a given work — tragedy, comedy, pastoral — and to its form, such as poetry, novel, or drama. This term also refers to types of popular literature, as in the genres of science fiction or the detective story.

HEROIC COUPLET: Two successive lines of rhymed poetry in iambic pentameter, so called for its use in the composition of epic poetry in the 17th and 18th centuries. In neo-classical usage the two lines were required to express a complete thought, thus a closed couplet, with a pause at the end of the first line. Heroic couplets, which are well suited to antithesis and parallelism, are also often used for epigrams, such as Pope's: "You beat your pate, and fancy wit will come. Knock as you please--there's nobody at home."

HUBRIS: Excessive pride or ambition that leads to a character's downfall. Macbeth is a CLASSIC example.

HYPERBOLE: Deliberate exaggeration used to achieve an effect. In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth hyperbolizes when she says, "All the perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten this little hand."

IAMBIC METER: The most common metrical foot; it consists of two syllables, a short or unaccented syllable followed by a long or accented syllable, as in a-VOID or the RUSH, or from the opening line of John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale".

IMAGERY: A word or group of words in a literary work which appeal to one or more of the senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing, and smell. The use of images serves to intensify the impact of the work. The following example of imagery in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," uses images of pain and sickness to describe the evening, which as an image itself represents society and the psychology of Prufrock, himself.

When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table.

IN MEDIAS RES: "In the midst of things" – standard of epic poetry where the action begins in the middle instead of at the beginning

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE: Writing that records the thinking that goes on inside a character's head; it is coherent as if character were talking.

INTERNAL RHYME: Rhyme within a line of poetry instead of at the end.

INVERSION: This is a changing of the usual order of words. It is found mostly in the work of older classical poets. But it is sometimes used by modern writers for the sake of emphasis. Emily Dickinson was fond of arranging words outside of their familiar order. For example in "Chartless" she writes "Yet know I how the heather looks" and "Yet certain am I of the spot." Instead of saying "Yet I know" and "Yet I am certain" she reverses the usual order and shifts the emphasis to the more important words. In these lines she calls attention to the swiftness of her knowledge and the power of her certainty switching the customary order of elements in a sentence or phrase to create an effect.

IRONY: A figure of speech in which there is a gap or difference between what is said or done and what is understood. There are four basic types:

VERBAL IRONY refers to spoken words only. For example, in *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony repeats the words "and Brutus is an honorable man" in the famous

“Friends, Romans, countrymen” speech. Mark Antony’s meaning, however, is that Brutus is completely dishonorable because Brutus, Caesar’s best friend, joined the other conspirators and plunged a knife into Caesar’s chest.

DRAMATIC IRONY involves more than just spoken words. Dramatic irony occurs when the meaning intended by a character's words or actions is opposite of the true situation. The contrast is between what the character says, thinks, or does and the true situation. Further, the character cannot see or understand the contrast, but the audience or reader can. For example, in *Othello*, dramatic irony occurs when Othello refers to Iago as “honest Iago.” Unknown to Othello, Iago is a villain who deceives him into thinking that Desdemona (Othello’s wife) has been unfaithful. For this, Othello unjustly kills his wife, believing the whole time in Iago’s honesty. Note the difference in examples for verbal and dramatic irony: Antony calls Brutus “honorable” and knows he is not honorable, while Othello calls Iago “honest” and does not know of Iago’s deceit.

SITUATIONAL IRONY defies logical cause/effect relationships and justifiable expectations. For example, if a greedy millionaire were to buy a lottery ticket and win additional millions, the irony would be situational because such a circumstance cannot be explained logically. Such a circumstance seems “unfair.” This sense of being “unfair” or “unfortunate” is a trademark of situational irony. Because people cannot explain the unfairness, it causes them to question whether or not the world makes sense.

COSMIC IRONY goes beyond being unfair and is morally tragic. Such irony is often so severe that it causes people to question God and see the universe as hostile. For example, if an honest, hardworking, and generous person buys a lottery ticket and wins ten million dollars, only to die in an auto crash two days later, the irony would reach tragic proportions. When situational irony reaches this scale, it is often called cosmic irony or irony of fate. Such irony typically suggests that people are pawns to cruel forces.

KENNING: A compound poetic phrase substituted for the usual name of a person or thing. For example the sea in Old English could be called 'sail-road', 'swan-road', 'bath-way' or 'whale-way'. In line 10 of the epic *Beowulf* the sea is called the 'whale-road'.

LAMENT: A poem of sadness or grief over the death of a loved one or over some other intense loss.

LAMPOON: A bitter, abusive satire in prose or verse attacking an individual. Motivated by spite, it is intended solely to offend and create distress.

LITOTES: Litotes is a kind of understatement, where the speaker or writer uses a negative of a word ironically, to mean the opposite. Litotes is to be found in English literature right back to Anglo-Saxon times. e.g.: She's not the friendliest person I know. (= she's an unfriendly person.)

LOOSE SENTENCE: Sentences whose main thought is completed by the beginning or middle of the sentence and whose ending only adds unnecessary material; for example, "The plane landed safely despite heavy winds and nearly impenetrable ground fog." The plane landing safely is the key piece of information. (see PERIODIC SENTENCE)

LYRIC VERSE: One of the three main groups of poetry, the others being narrative and dramatic. By far the most frequently used form in modern poetic literature, the term lyric includes all poems in which the speaker's expression of emotion predominates. Ranging from complex thoughts to the simplicity of playful wit, the power and personality of lyric verse is of far greater importance than the subject treated. Often brief, but sometimes extended in a long elegy or a meditative ode, the imagery of skillfully written lyric poetry causes the reader to recall similar emotional experiences. (see NARRATIVE and DRAMATIC VERSE)

MASCULINE RHYME: A rhyme occurring in words of one syllable or in an accented final syllable, such as "light" and "sight" or "arise" and "surprise." (see FEMININE RHYME)

MELODRAMA: A form of tasteless theater in which the hero is very, very good, the villain mean and rotten, and the heroine oh-so pure.

METAPHOR: a comparison of two unlike things using the verb "to be" and not using "like" or "as" as in a SIMILE. e.g.: He is a pig. Thou art sunshine.

METER: The repetition of sound patterns that creates a rhythm in poetry. The patterns are based on the number of syllables and the presence and absence of accents. The unit of rhythm in a line is called a foot. Types of meter are classified according to the number of feet in a line. These are the standard English lines: **MONOMETER**, one foot; **DIMETER**, two feet; **TRIMETER**, three feet; **TETRAMETER**, four feet; **PENTAMETER**, five feet; **HEXAMETER**, six feet (also called the **ALEXANDRINE**); **HEPTAMETER**, seven feet. The most common English meter is the iambic pentameter, in which each line contains ten syllables, or five iambic feet, which individually are composed of an unstressed syllable followed by an accented syllable. Both of the following lines from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" are written in iambic pentameter: Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

METONYMY: A figure of speech involving the substitution of one noun for another of which it is an element or of which it is closely associated, e.g., "the kettle boils" or "he drank the cup." Metonymy is very similar to SYNECDOCHE.

MOOD: The **ATMOSPHERE** or feeling created by a literary work, partly by a description of the objects or by the style of the descriptions. A work may contain a mood of horror, mystery, holiness, or childlike simplicity, to name a few, depending on the author's treatment of the work.

MOTIF: A recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature. A motif may also be two contrasting elements in a work, such as good and evil. In the *Book of Genesis*, we see the motif of separation again and again throughout the story. In the very first chapter, God separates the light from the darkness.

NARRATION/ NARRATIVE VERSE: A collection of events that tells a story, which may be true or not, placed in a particular order and recounted through either telling or writing. One example is Edgar Allen Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." In this story a madman resolves to kill his landlord because he fears the man's horrible eye. (see **LYRIC** and **DRAMATIC VERSE**)

NEMESIS: The term has several possible meanings: (1) the principle of "poetic justice" by which good characters are rewarded and bad characters are appropriately punished; (2) the cause or deliverer of such justice, who exacts vengeance and meets out rewards, as, for example the Duke in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. In classical mythology, Nemesis was the patron goddess of vengeance; the expression often denotes a character in a drama who brings about another's downfall, so that Hamlet may be said to be Claudius's nemesis in Shakespeare's tragedy.

OBJECTIVITY: An impersonal, or outside, factual view of events. Objectivity may be considered as a synonym of a neutral, unbiased point of view. (see **SUBJECTIVITY**)

ONOMATOPOEIA: The use of words whose sounds express or suggest their meaning. In its simplest sense, onomatopoeia may be represented by words that mimic the sounds they denote such as "hiss" or "meow." At a more subtle level, the pattern and rhythm of sounds and rhymes of a line or poem may be onomatopoeic. A celebrated example of onomatopoeia is the repetition of the word "bells" in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Bells."

OXYMORON: The conjunction of words which, at first view, seem to be contradictory or incompatible, but whose surprising juxtaposition expresses a truth or dramatic effect, such as "cool fire," "deafening silence," "wise folly," etc.

PARABLE: A story intended to teach a moral lesson or answer an ethical question. In the West, the best examples of parables are those of Jesus Christ in the *New Testament*, notably "The Prodigal Son," but parables also are used in Sufism, rabbinic literature, Hasidism, and Zen Buddhism.

PARADOX: A statement which contains seemingly contradictory elements or appears contrary to common sense, yet can be seen as perhaps, or indeed, true when viewed from another angle, such as Alexander Pope's statement, in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, that a literary critic could "damn with faint praise."

PARODY: Refers to an imitation of a serious literary work or the signature style of a particular author in a ridiculous manner. A typical parody adopts the style of the original and applies it to an inappropriate subject for humorous effect. Parody is a form of satire and could be considered the literary equivalent of a caricature or cartoon. Henry Fielding's *Shamela* is a parody of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. (Compare with burlesque. See also SATIRE and CARICATURE.)

PARENTHETICAL PHRASE: A phrase set off by commas that interrupts the flow of a sentence with some commentary. A parenthetical phrase provides additional information for the reader, but it could be left out of the sentence without altering its basic message. e.g.: The police, although understaffed, manage to maintain the peace.

PASTORAL POETRY: Poetry idealizing the lives of shepherds and country folk, although the term is often used loosely to include any poem featuring a rural aspect.

PATHOS: When a work appeals to the audience's emotions causing feelings of dignified pity and sympathy.

PERIODIC SENTENCE: A sentence in which the main thought is not grammatically complete until it has reached its final phrase; for example, "Despite heavy winds and nearly impenetrable ground fog, the plane landed safely." The plane landing safely is the key piece of information. (see LOOSE SENTENCE))

PERSONA: The narrator in a non first-person novel. The persona is not the author, but the author's creation--the voice "through which the author speaks."

PERSONIFICATION: Figurative language in which distinctive human characteristics, e.g., honesty, emotion, volition, etc., are attributed to an animal, object, or idea, as "The haughty lion surveyed his realm." or "My car was happy to be washed." or "'Fate frowned on his endeavors." Personification is commonly used in ALLEGORY.

PLAINT: A poem or speech expressing sorrow

PLOT: The structure of a story or the sequence in which the author arranges events in a story. It often includes the RISING ACTION, the CLIMAX, the

FALLING ACTION, and the RESOLUTION. The plot may have a **PROTAGONIST** who is opposed by **ANTAGONIST**, creating what is called **CONFLICT**. A plot may include **FLASHBACK** or it may include a **SUBPLOT** which is a mirror image of the main plot. A subplot in Shakespeare's *King Lear* is the relationship between the Earl of Gloucester and his sons which mirrors the relationship between Lear and his daughters. Unlike **THEME** which deals with the general idea or meaning of a work, plot deals with the action in a work.

POINT OF VIEW: The narrative angle from which a literary work is presented to the reader. There are four traditional points of view:

"**THIRD PERSON OMNISCIENT**" gives the reader a "godlike" perspective, unrestricted by time or place, from which to see actions and look into the minds of characters. This allows the author to comment openly on characters and events in the work.

"**THIRD PERSON**" presents the events of the story from outside of any single character's perception, much like the omniscient point of view, but the reader must understand the action as it takes place and without any special insight into characters' minds or motivations.

"**FIRST PERSON or "PERSONAL**" relates events as they are perceived by a single character. The main character "tells" the story and may offer opinions about the action and characters which differ from those of the author.

"**SECOND PERSON**" is much less common than omniscient, third person, and first person. In it, the author tells the story as if it is happening to the reader using the pronoun "you."

James Thurber employs the omniscient point of view in his short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is a short story told from the third person point of view. Mark Twain's novel *Huck Finn* is presented from the first person viewpoint. Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* is an example of a rare novel which uses the second person point of view.

PRELUDE: An introductory poem to a long work of verse.

PROTAGONIST: The central character of a story who serves as a focus for its themes and incidents and as the principal basis for its development. The protagonist is sometimes referred to in discussions of modern literature as the hero or anti-hero. Well-known protagonists are Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. (Compare with Antagonist.)

PYRRHIC METER: Common in classic Greek poetry, a metrical foot consisting of two short or unaccented syllables, as in the third foot of: The SLINGS | and AR | -rows of | out-RA | -geous FOR | -tune

REFRAIN: A stanza, line, part of a line, or phrase, generally important to the central topic, which is repeated verbatim, usually at regular intervals throughout a poem, most often at the end of a stanza, as in Spenser's "Prothalamion", or Villon's "Des Dames du Temps Jadis." Occasionally a single word is used as a refrain, as "nevermore" in Poe's "The Raven." Sometimes a refrain is written with slight variations from section to section, in which case it may be termed **INCREMENTAL REPETITION**.

REQUIEM: A song or prayer for the dead.

RESOLUTION: The part of a story or drama which occurs after the **CLIMAX** and which establishes a new norm, a new state of affairs-the way things are going to be from then on. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* climaxes with the death of the two lovers. Their deaths resolve the feud between the two families. In the play's resolution, Lords Capulet and Montague swear to end their feud and build golden monuments to each other's dead child.

RHAPSODY: The reading of a short epic poem or a longer epic abridged for recitation.

RHETORICAL QUESTION: A question intended to provoke thought, but not an expressed answer, in the reader. It is most commonly used in public speaking and other persuasive genres.

RHYME SCHEME: The pattern of rhyming in the ends of lines in a poem. It is usually referred to by using letters to indicate which lines rhyme. For example "abab" indicates a four-line stanza in which the first and third lines rhyme, as do the second and fourth. Here is an example of this rhyme scheme from "To Anthea, Who May Command Him Any Thing" by Robert Herrick:

Bid me to weep, and I will weep,
While I have eyes to see;
And having none, yet I will keep
A heart to weep for thee.

RHYMED VERSE: Verse that has a recurring pattern of sound. (see **RHYME SCHEME** and **INTERNAL RHYME**)

RISING ACTION: The part of a story which begins with the **EXPOSITION** and sets the stage for the **CLIMAX**. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, one of Othello's officers, Iago, plants a seed of doubt about Othello's wife's faithfulness in Othello's ear. This seed grows to the point where Othello becomes convinced that his wife is having an affair with his lieutenant, Michael Cassio. The play **CLIMAXES** with the murder of his wife by Othello in a jealous rage.

SATIRE: A work that uses mockery, humor, and wit to criticize and cause change in human nature and institutions. There are two major types of satire: "FORMAL" or "DIRECT" satire speaks directly to the reader or to a character in the work; "INDIRECT" satire relies upon the ridiculous behavior of its characters to make its point. Formal satire is further divided into two types: the "Horatian," which ridicules gently, and the "Juvenalian," which mocks its subjects harshly and bitterly. Voltaire's novella *Candide* is an indirect satire. Jonathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal" is a Juvenalian satire.

SEGUE: A transition or link from one thought or action to another.

SETTING: The time and place in which a story unfolds. The setting in Act 1, scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, is a public square in Verona, Italy. A drama may contain a single setting, or the setting may change from scene to scene.

SIMILE: A comparison, using "like" or "as", of two essentially dissimilar things, as in "coffee as cold as ice" or "He sounded like a broken record." The title of Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" contains a simile. (Compare with METAPHOR.)

SOLILOQUY: Talking to oneself; the words of a person speaking to himself/herself, whether alone or in the presence of others. It gives the feeling of being unspoken reflections.

SPONDAIC METER: In poetry meter, a foot consisting of two long or stressed syllables occurring together. This form is quite rare in English Verse, and is usually composed of two monosyllabic words. It is impossible to construct a whole, serious poem with spondees. Consequently, spondees mainly occur as variants within, say, an anapestic structure. For example (from G. K. Chesterton, *Lepanto*):

White founts falling in the courts of the sun
And the *Soldan* of Byzantium is *smiling* as they *run*;

STANZA: A division of a poem made by arranging the lines into units separated by a space. Each stanza is usually of a corresponding number of lines and a recurrent pattern of meter and rhyme. A poem with such divisions is described as having a stanzaic form, but not all verse is divided in stanzas.

STATIC/DYNAMIC CHARACTER: A static character is one that does not undergo important changes in the course of the story, remaining essentially the same at the end as he or she was at the beginning. A dynamic character, in contrast, is one that does undergo an important change in the course of the story. More

specifically, the changes that we are referring to as being "undergone" here are not changes in circumstances, but changes in some sense *within* the character in question -- changes in insight or understanding (*of* circumstances, for instance), or changes in commitment, in values. (see FLAT/ROUND CHARACTERS)

STEREOTYPE: a group concept, held by one social group about another. It is often used in a negative or prejudicial sense and is frequently used to justify certain discriminatory behaviors. However, it may express sometimes-accurate folk wisdom about social reality. Often a stereotype is a negative caricature or inversion of some positive characteristic possessed by members of a group, exaggerated to the point where it becomes repulsive or ridiculous.

STOCK CHARACTER: Character types of a genre, e.g., the heroine disguised as a man in Elizabethan drama, the confidant, the hardboiled detective, the tightlipped sheriff, the girl next door, the evil hunters in a Tarzan movie, ethnic or racial stereotypes, the cruel stepmother and Prince Charming in fairy tales.

SUBJECTIVITY: Uses the interior point of view from a single observer. (see OBJECTIVITY)

SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF: A willingness of a reader or viewer to ignore minor inconsistencies or unbelievable behavior so as to enjoy a work of fiction.

SYMBOLISM: A device in literature where an object represents an idea. In William Blake's "The Lamb," the speaker tells the lamb that the force that made him or her is also called a lamb:

Little lamb, who made thee?
Little lamb, who made thee?
Little lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little lamb, I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a lamb;

The symbol of the lamb in the above lines corresponds to the symbolism of the lamb in Christianity wherein Christ is referred to as The Lamb of God.

SYNECDOCHE: A figure of speech in which a part of something stands for the whole or the whole for a part, as "wheels" for "automobile" or "society" for "high society." (see METONYMY)

THEME: An ingredient of a literary work which gives the work unity. The theme provides an answer to the question - What is the work about? There are too many possible themes to recite them all. Each literary work carries its own theme(s). The theme of Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" is loneliness. Shakespeare's

King Lear contains many themes, among which are blindness and madness. Unlike PLOT which deals with the action of a work, theme concerns itself with a work's message or contains the general idea of a work.

THESIS: The main position of an argument.

TONE: Tone expresses the author's attitude toward his or her subject. Since there are as many tones in literature as there are tones of voice in real relationships, the tone of a literary work may be one of anger or approval, pride or piety - the entire range of attitudes. Here is one literary example: The tone of John Steinbeck's short novel *Cannery Row* is nonjudgmental. Mr. Steinbeck never expresses disapproval of the actions of Mack and his band of bums. Rather, he treats them with constant kindness.

TONGUE IN CHEEK: A style of humor in which things are said only half seriously, or in a subtly mocking way. To say something in a tongue-in-cheek way is to speak with irony. Good examples of films that are made in a tongue-in-cheek way are *An American Werewolf in London*, *Scream*, or *True Lies*. Note that these films are still faithful to their genre (horror and spy, respectively) and are not out-and-out PARODIES such as *Airplane!*

TRADITIONAL VERSE: Poetry that contains specific regularly occurring rhythm and rhyme.

TRAGIC FLAW: In a tragedy, the quality within the hero or heroine which leads to his or her downfall.

Examples of the tragic flaw include Othello's jealousy and Hamlet's indecisiveness, although most great tragedies defy such simple interpretation.

TRAGIC IRONY: When a character's good intentions produce the opposite effect of what is expected (For example, Oedipus tries to avoid the prophesy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, and his avoidance causes these things to occur.) (see IRONY)

TRANSFERRED EPITHET: An adjective that doesn't logically match its noun but fits METAPHORICALLY (i.e.. Blind mouth)

TRAVESTY: A grotesque parody (see BURLESQUE).

TROCHAIC METER: A metrical foot with a long or accented syllable followed by a short or unaccented syllable, as in ON-ly or TO-tal, or the opening line of Poe's "The Raven:" ONCE up- | ON a | MID-night | DREAR-y, | WHILE I | PON-dered, | WEAK and | WEAR-y

UTOPIA: An idealized place. An imaginary community where people live in happiness and peace.