# Literary Terms

### Act

**—one of the main structural divisions of a drama**. A play may consist of one or more acts. Elizabethan playwrights and editors were the first to divide their plays into five acts. In Shakespeare's England plays were performed without curtain or intermission, but today only one-act plays are commonly presented without intermissions, while full-length plays (multiple-act plays) are usually presented *with* intermissions.

### Action

**—the physical or mental events that occur in a narrative** (whether that narrative is presented in prose, drama, poetry, or any other artistic medium). Physical action is also called external or exterior action. Mental action, which refers to any kind of emotional, social, or perceptual alteration in characters, is often called internal or interior action.

### Allegory

**—a literary mode or work in which characters, settings, actions, and objects represent abstractions or in which the characters and actions correspond closely to actual people and happenings.** A satirical narrative like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) corresponds both to social events that were specific to Swift's own society and to some of the ordinary conditions of human experience and behaviour that are common to all ages. And John Bunyan's religious narrative *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), with its hero named Christian, who is traveling from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, allegorizes Bunyan's understanding of the condition of all mortals journeying through life. Some other famous allegorical works include the anonymously penned medieval morality play *Everyman,* Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm,* William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies,* and Arthur Miller's tragic drama *The Crucible.* As well, the parables of Jesus and the fables of Aesop are allegorical stories. Although allegory is most commonly applied to narratives, it can also appear in shorter lyrical contexts, poems that do not tell stories but whose elements are nevertheless related and metonymic; used this way, it is more commonly called a conceit. Walter Savage Landor's poem "Plays" is an example:

> Alas, how soon the hours are over
> Counted us out to play the lover!
> And how much narrower is the stage
> Allotted us to play the sage!
> But when we play the fool, how wide
> The theatre expands! beside,
> How long the audience sits before us!
> How many prompters! what a chorus!

### Alliteration

**—the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words.**

Examples

- Fifty-four fantastically frantic French fellows faced fifty-five feisty fish fryers.
- Theophilus Thurman thrust thirty-three thistles through the thick of his thumb.

- See sin in state, majestically drunk;
  Proud as a peeress, prouder as a punk.
  (Alexander Pope)

- . . . Bend
  Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
  (John Donne)

**Allusion**

**—a reference to any element from history, literature, or other media that the writer assumes readers will recognize.** An allusion functions as a symbol does, by suggesting in a compact form a broad range of meanings. Often, too, an allusion, as in the following example from the final lines of Wilfred Owen's anti-war poem "Dulce et Decorum Est," will invest a passage with immense ironic significance:

> If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
> Behind the wagon we flung him in,
> And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
> His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
> If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
> Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
> Bitten as the cud
> Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues—
> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children, ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
> *Pro patria mori.*

Owen would have assumed that many of his readers, who had studied Latin in English grammar schools, as he had, would be familiar with this quotation from the Roman poet Horace—*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori:* "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country."

**Ambiguity**

**—an intentional vagueness in writing that makes possible more than one interpretation.** A form of irony, deliberate ambiguity, like symbol and allusion, is a technique that helps a writer to achieve compression—that is, to communicate multiple meanings through the use of a single detail. As well, ambiguity when skillfully applied can imitate the very essence of human life, which is itself often frustratingly or delightfully ambiguous.

When Shakespeare's Cleopatra, speaking to the venomous serpent that she wishes to kill her, says,

> . . . Come, thou mortal wretch,
> With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
> Of life at once untie; poor venomous fool,
> Be angry, and despatch—

her speech is notably multiple in significance. For example, her word "mortal" means "fatal" or "death-dealing," and at the same time it reminds us that the serpent too is mortal or subject to death itself. "Wretch" is a word that expresses disgust or contempt, but at the same time conveys pity and affection; and indeed, Cleopatra will later refer to the serpent as the "baby at [her] breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep." As well, the two meanings of "despatch"—"make haste" and "send away" (a common euphemism for "kill")—are equally relevant. Finally, the neologism "intrinsicate" in the same passage exemplifies a special

type of ambiguity, the portmanteau word, a term brought into the field of linguistics by Humpty Dumpty, in his explicating to Alice the meaning of the opening lines of "Jabberwocky":

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

"Slithy," Humpty Dumpty explains, "means 'lithe' and 'slimy' . . . . You see it's like a portmanteau [an old-fashioned suitcase that opened up into two compartments]—there are two meanings packed up into one word." A **portmanteau word**, then, is **a word coined by fusing two other words**; thus Shakespeare's "intrinsicate" is a blend of "intrinsic" and "intricate."

**Anachronism**

**—in a period-based work, a detail that is out of its historical time.** It may be applied intentionally or accidentally. An anachronism may be obvious enough in, say, King Arthur's checking his wristwatch, and in a case like this it's probably used intentionally for comic effect. Or it may appear more subtly (and probably mistakenly), as in the case of a teenager in a story set in the 1960s saying that something she really likes is "awesome"; it wasn't until the 80s that the word *awesome* had come to be used as it is now.

**Analogy**

**—an expository technique in which a comparison is made between one quantity that is abstract and difficult to understand and another quantity that is concrete and easy to understand.** For example, a modern North American child might be able to understand something of the complex history of tensions between peoples in the Middle East if that history were explained to him in terms of encounters in schoolyards and sandboxes, environments with which the child is familiar. William Golding seems to have taken this analogical approach in his novel *Lord of the Flies,* in which he examines the chaotic, destructive nature of all humanity by reducing the world to one lonely little island in the sea and humanity to a group of confused schoolboys.

**Analysis**

**—refers (for our purposes) to literary criticism, which treats a text as a self-contained entity that can be better understood by examining in detail how its parts work in relation to the whole.** More generally, the term *analysis* can be used to refer to any kind of writing in which the author seeks to explain the workings of anything.

**Anecdote**

**—a short narrative episode embedded in an otherwise non-narrative work and used for the purpose of introducing a topic or leading toward a thesis.** In her essay "Confessions of Female Chauvinist Sow," Anne Roiphe uses several anecdotes to support her essay's main argument. As well, church sermons and other motivational addresses are often developed with anecdotal support.

**Antagonist**

**—the force that opposes the protagonist of a narrative in his or her attempt to achieve a goal.** The antagonist is often not reducible to a single entity; rather, it is commonly thought of as a force that is manifested throughout the text in various external and internal forms. For example, Hamlet's central

antagonist might be identified as Claudius, but several other circumstances and characters in the play—including Hamlet himself—function also as antagonists at various points.

**Antecedent action**

**—in a narrative, action that is understood to have occurred before the present action of the narrative has begun.** When it is necessary for the reader to understand what has happened in the past, this antecedent action is revealed in dialogue or exposition.

**Anti-climax** (Bathos)

**—the failure of a narrative or passage to fulfill its reader's expectations following a build-up of suspense toward an anticipated outcome.** Anti-climax may occur when a high-adventure story puts its hero in a seemingly impossible situation and then rescues that hero through a too-quick, too-improbable turn of events (see ***Deus ex machina***). Also, many television programs, especially poorly written ones that show major crisis situations being smoothed over in almost no time at all, may be described as having anticlimactic resolutions. The word *bathos* is more commonly reserved for moments of failed pathos, whether they are deliberately comic or the result of inept writing. When passages of high emotion suddenly collapse into the trivial, bathos is said to be at work. Alexander Pope, an eighteenth-century English poet, is a master of the bathetic turn of phrase. For instance:

> Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast,
> When husbands or when lap dogs breathe their last.

**Anti-hero**

**—a term often applied to a particular kind of protagonist commonly seen in modern works (but also in some old works too)—a character who, instead of showing largeness, dignity, and courage in the face of cruel fate, shows various decidedly ignoble qualities but still manages to excite our sympathy all the same.** Some famous anti-heroes in modern literature include Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's modern tragedy *Death of a Salesman* and Meursault from Albert Camus' novel *The Stranger.* Though the term *anti-hero* is ordinarily used to designate a protagonist in a serious work, it can also be usefully applied to such popular comic heroes as Archie Bunker and Homer Simpson.

**Antithesis**

**—the close placement of contrasting ideas, often in parallel grammatical structure.** The word *antithesis* literally means "opposite idea." As a rhetorical figure, it fits into the general category of juxtaposition. Antithetical statements are often effective not so much for the great cleverness or depth of the ideas they express, but because their opposing elements are neatly couched in complementary grammatical forms.

Examples

- He writes not of the heart but of the glands. (William Faulkner)
- When a man wantonly destroys one of the works of man, we call him a vandal; when he wantonly destroys one of the works of God, we call him a sportsman. (Robert Krutch)
- Because I could not stop for death— / —He kindly stopped for me.
  (Emily Dickinson)

- It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. (Charles Dickens)

**Aphorism (Adage / Maxim / Precept)**

**—a short, cleverly phrased statement (often in antithetical form) of what is regarded as a truth**.

Examples

- The joys of parents are secret, and so are their griefs and fears; they cannot utter the one, nor will they utter the other. (Francis Bacon)
- For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.
  (Alexander Pope)
- The cat loves fish but is afraid to get its feet wet.
- To err is human; to forgive, divine.
- Life may have no meaning. Or even worse, it may have a meaning of which I disapprove. (Ashleigh Brilliant)

**Apostrophe**

**—addressing (i.e. speaking directly to) someone absent as if he/she were present, or addressing something non-human as if it were alive and could reply to what is being said.** Apostrophe is a subtype of metaphor and a particular form of personification because it involves assigning human intelligence to something that does not have it.

Examples

- O judgement! thou art fled to brutish beasts.
  (Shakespeare)
- Hark to the whimper of the sea-gull;
  He weeps because he's not an ea-gull.
  Suppose you were, you silly sea-gull;
  Could you explain it to your she-gull?
  (Ogden Nash)
- Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.
  (William Wordsworth)

**Archaism**

**—a word or expression that has become obsolete in current common speech, one that is considered old-fashioned.** For several examples of archaisms, see "Appendix 1—Archaisms."

**Argument**

**—a mode of writing in which the writer's purpose is to influence the reader to accept a particular side of a debatable issue.** Argumentation is one of the four chief "forms of discourse," the others being exposition, narration, and description. Argumentation is often combined with exposition, though it differs technically in its aim, as exposition is meant to explain, while argument is meant to persuade.

**Audience**

**—the individual or group of people that a work addresses or to whom it appeals.**

**Aside**

**—in a play, a short passage spoken by a character either to him/herself or discreetly to another character or group of characters while, by theatrical convention, it is understood that certain others on stage are unable to hear what the character is saying or thinking aloud.** Though common in classical plays, asides and soliloquies do not ordinarily appear in modern realistic drama, as they are generally considered artificial or unrealistic.

**Assonance**

**—the repetition of similar vowel sounds in neighboring words.**

Examples

- m**a**d **a**s **a** h**a**tter
- fr**ee** and **ea**s**y**
- fl**y**ing in the br**igh**t sk**y**
- Thou still unravished br**i**de of qu**i**etness,
  Thou foster ch**i**ld of s**i**lence and slow t**i**me.
  (John Keats)

**Balance**

**—the expression of two ideas or images in parallel grammatical structures, for the purpose of emphasizing contrasting or similar ideas.**

Examples

- Suspicion is always hardening the cautious; disgust, repelling the delicate. (Samuel Johnson)
- Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. (Francis Bacon)
- I set myself adrift and her aloft.

**Cacophony** (Dissonance)

**—the use of words or phrases that are considered harsh and jarring in sound.** Cacophony, or dissonance, may occur through a writer's unintentional insensitivity to the sonic effects of his word choices, as in this unfortunate line from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach": "Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled." However, in writing that is praised by mature readers for its attention to thoughtful choices in both sound and sense, cacophony is likely to be seen as deliberate.

Examples

- The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard.
  (Robert Frost)

- Rats!
  They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
  Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
  Made nests inside men's Sunday hats.
  (Robert Browning)

- In the startled ear of night
  How they scream out their affright!
  Too much horrified to speak,
  They can only shriek, shriek
  Out of tune.
  (Edgar Allen Poe)

**Caesura**

**—a strong pause or break *within* a line of poetry.** In the following passage, the opening five lines of John Keats' "Endymion," caesura appears (at the punctuation marks) in lines 2, 3, and 4.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing.

Note that a verse line that *concludes* with a pause is said to be **end-stopped**. Lines 1 and 5 in the above passage are end-stopped.

**Caricature**

**—a character that is presented as a deliberate and comic distortion of a real person or stock character.** Typically, caricature is achieved through the absurd exaggeration of particular traits. In visual terms, caricature is apparent in the work of political cartoonists, whose drawings of well-known people may emphasize noses, eye shapes, body types, postures, and so on. In literature, caricature is commonly employed in works of satire and melodrama. For example, the satirical characters of *The Simpsons,* though many of them exhibit distinctive and credibly human characteristics, may be referred to as caricatures: Homer, the bumbling, self-serving, father figure; Mr. Burns, the greedy, tyrannical businessman; and Lisa, the precocious child with a social conscience. The characters of turn-of-the-century theatrical melodrama are also caricatures: the heartless villain twirling the ends of his black moustache as he threatens to

foreclose on some dear old lady's mortgage; the sweet-faced, pure-hearted girl who faces crisis with a soft sigh; and the honest, courageous, muscular hero who respects motherhood and the presidency.

***Carpe diem***

**—a Latin phrase meaning "seize the day."** It refers to one of the most common motifs in literature and popular philosophy, namely the idea that, because life is short, one should be constantly living as exuberantly as possible, "seizing" as much delight and wisdom as he can before the night (death) falls. The concept of *carpe diem* is aptly expressed in this passage from Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time":

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

**Catharsis**

**—refers to the experience of feeling emotional release and cleansing.** The word *catharsis,* from the Greek word *kathairein,* which means "to clean," was used by Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.) in his description of the effects of literary (dramatic) tragedy. *Catharsis* refers to any emotional discharge that brings about a sense of moral or spiritual renewal, or even simply of welcome relief from anxiety. By this definition, the experience of feeling better after "a good cry" may be called cathartic. Some people speak of catharsis as an "emotional laxative." Though some scholars dispute the exact meaning of Aristotle's theory, the idea is roughly this: First we sympathize with a tragic hero. By participating vicariously in his suffering, we feel fear and pity. But the closer this hero comes to his destruction, the more he becomes reconciled to the unaccountably cruel forces that seem to have conspired against him; and though he is now physically beaten, he has achieved his epiphany, his understanding and acceptance of his place in the cosmic design. In effect, then, he is *not* beaten down, but instead is lifted up, spiritually exalted; and we share in his exaltation—that is, we are purged of fear and pity and transfer a sense of the hero's moral triumph to our own lives.

**Characterization**

**—the process by which a writer creates a character.** A writer ordinarily uses various methods of characterization, developing a character's nature not only by what he overtly *tells* us about the character, but also by what he *shows* us. For example, a character can be revealed through a depiction of his physical traits, his actions and reactions to events, his speech, his thoughts and feelings, his effects on other characters, and so on.

- **Direct characterization**
  **—when the writer tells us explicitly about a character's nature and motivation.**

- **Indirect characterization**
  **—when the writer shows a character acting and being acted upon and we must thereby infer the character's nature and motivation.**

- **Dynamic character**
  **—a character who undergoes a significant psychological change over the course of a narrative.**

- **Realistic character**
  **—a believably human character—one who is seen to be as complex and consistently real as any person in actual life (traditionally referred to also as a *round character*).**

- **Static character**
  **—a character who does not undergo a significant psychological change over the course of a narrative.** [Note that a character may be both static and realistic. Though protagonists or otherwise significant characters are most often shown as dynamic characters, minor (but nevertheless believable) characters typically go unchanged from beginning to end.]

- **Stock character**
  **—a stereotypical character—a standard and easily recognized functionary in the action of a narrative.** [Note that the terms *caricature* and *stock character* cannot always be used as synonyms. Though they are sometimes mere types, caricatures are usually distinctive enough that they cannot be seen as standard-issue characters.]

- **Four humors → personality types**
  One way of speaking about characters is to group them according to their *humors.* The term (which in this context has nothing to do with things that make us laugh) refers to a Renaissance view of human nature based on the theory that all matter in the universe was comprised of four basic elements—earth, air, water, and fire—and that all things (including humans) were composed of various forms and combinations of these elements, called *humors*. The human body, parallel in structure to the universe, contained four humors, essential life fluids that corresponded to the elements:

  - Blood = Air (with properties of heat and moisture)
  - Phlegm = Water (with properties of coldness and moisture)
  - Choler = Fire (with properties of heat and dryness)
  - Melancholy = Earth (with properties of coldness and dryness)

  Renaissance thinkers believed that all human personalities were made of these four humors in varying measures, with blood considered the most essential fluid. They believed also that no person in history, with the exception of Christ, had perfectly balanced humors. Everyone else varied from the perfect norm. But if one *could* achieve the perfect balance of humors he would, theoretically, achieve perfect healthiness of body, mind, and spirit. Based on the concept of humors, it was determined that there were four basic personality types, each dependent on the humor that ran dominant in the body. These types we may usefully apply to our assessment of characters in both old and modern literary works:

  **Sanguine personality** (blood dominant) = **sociable, outgoing, talkative, responsive, easy-going, lively, carefree**

  **Phlegmatic personality** (phlegm dominant) = **passive, careful, thoughtful, peaceful, controlled, reliable, even-tempered**

  **Choleric personality** (choler dominant) = **touchy, restless, aggressive, excitable, changeable, impulsive**

  **Melancholic personality** (melancholy dominant) = **moody, anxious, rigid, sober, pessimistic, quiet, reserved, unsociable**

**Chiasmus**

**—a form of balanced expression in which the syntactical elements of one phrase or clause are reversed in the following one.** Criss-cross phrasing.

Examples

- Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. (John F. Kennedy)

- Flowers are lovely; love is flowerlike.
  (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

- I asked for all things so that I might enjoy life, and was given life so that I might enjoy all things.

- Say what you mean and mean what you say.

- A mind is a terrible thing to waste, and a waist is a terrible thing to mind.

**Chorus**

**—in ancient Greek drama, a group of characters, often old men or women, who could both address the audience and interact with characters in the play**. In general, the chorus tended to function as a collective mouthpiece for the playwright.

**Clarity**

**—the quality of clearness in writing—where there is no ambiguity in a writer's intention.** In prose it is most effectively achieved through concrete, plain diction.

**Classic** (as a noun)

**—a work of literature that is recognized by the majority of mature readers to have superior qualities of form and or content.** The word *classic* is also used selectively to refer to a work of ancient Greece or Rome.

**Classicism**

**—refers to the classical style in literature and art—that is, a style associated with the artistic ideals of ancient Greece and/or Rome.** Broadly it is an approach strongly characterized by attention to form, with the general effects of unity (*integritas*), balance (*proportio*), and clearness (*claritas*).

**Cliché**

**—an expression or individual word choice that may once have been considered fresh and particularly expressive, but which has come to be so overused that it is no longer vivid or even truly meaningful.** To say, for example, that *education will open many doors for us and broaden our horizons* is not effective because the metaphors are "old hat," "dead as doornails," "yesterday's news." Such expressions are also called **dead metaphors.** The word *cliché* can also be used more generally to designate situations, images, patterns, actions, or other elements of literature that have become timeworn and tiresome. Writing that uses clichés is also described as **trite** or **hackneyed.**

**Climax**

**—the final and culminating event in the series of complications that make up a narrative's rising action.** It is often described as the point of greatest tension in a story. Though most commonly applied in discussions of narrative works, the word *climax* can also be used in reference to poetry—that is, to denote the point of greatest overall impact that the details of a lyrical work have built up to.

**Coherence**

**—a principle of writing which asserts that the elements of a work should relate clearly and logically to each other—that is, writing that flows smoothly and sensibly.** Note, however, that sometimes a writer will deliberately work to achieve a sense of *in*coherence, a particular form of ambiguity that seeks to imitate the sense of confusion that people often experience in actual life.

**Colloquialism**

**—a word or phrase that is acceptable in the ordinary conversation of a specific group of people or geographical region, but that is considered inappropriate in formal writing**. In a critical essay on the importance of Shakespeare's contribution to English literature, you would not say, for instance, *Shakespeare was a wicked play writer, and his sonnets were awesome too.*

**Comedy**

**—a narrative work in which the content is meant mainly to amuse us, as the characters and their crises engage our delighted interest, not our profound concern.** In reading or viewing a comedy, we feel mainly confident that regardless of how extreme the disasters are, the action will ultimately resolve happily for the characters. Though the term *comedy* applies normally to works written for the theatre or film, the comic form also informs other narrative vehicles, such as short stories, novels, and narrative poems, and comic details appear in non-narrative works as well.

**Comic relief**

**—the use of humorous characters, speeches, or scenes in an otherwise serious work (especially a work intended for the theatre or film).** Such elements are almost universal in Elizabethan tragedy. Sometimes they occur merely as intrusive bits of dialogue or horseplay for the purpose of alleviating tension and adding variety. In the best of plays, however, they are made integral to the plot and serve finally to intensify the serious intent of the drama. Examples of complex and richly effective comic relief in the tragedies of Shakespeare are the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet,* the drunken porter's scene in *Macbeth,* the speeches of the Fool in *King Lear,* and the roles of Mercutio and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet.*

**Complication**

**—an obstacle to the protagonist in his attempt to achieve his goal.** Its effect is to increase suspense in the narrative.

**Conceit**

**—a fanciful or unusually striking image in the form of an extended metaphor**. A conceit is not just the comparison of one thing to another thing (as in metaphor and simile), but a comparison of the various details of one thing to the analogous details of another thing. The expository (prose non-fiction) equivalent of a conceit is an analogy. The narrative (prose fiction) equivalent of a conceit is an allegory. A famous example of the poetic conceit is Thomas Wyatt's "My Galley Charged with Forgetfulness":

> My galley, chargèd[1] with forgetfulness
> Through sharp seas in winter nights doth pass
> 'Tween rock and rock; and eke[2] mine enemy[3], alas,
> That is my lord, steereth with cruelness,
> And every oar a thought in readiness,

As though that death were light in such a case.
An endless wind doth tear the sail apace
Of forcèd sighs and trusty fearfulness.
A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,
Hath done the wearied cords[4] great hinderance;
Wreathèd with error and eke with ignorance.
The stars[5] be hid that led me to this pain;
Drownèd is reason that should me consort[6],
And I remain despairing of the port.

[1] **chargèd:** laden, weighed down
[2] **eke:** also
[3] **mine enemy:** either the speaker's passion or Cupid, god of love
[4] **cords:** rigging ropes
[5] **stars:** metaphorically, the eyes of the woman who has rejected the speaker's love
[6] **consort:** accompany; a term used for a companion ship

*Wyatt's speaker*—An unhappy lover comparing his situation to that of a ship tossed in a storm.

*Paraphrase of the sonnet*—I am a sailing vessel fraught with forgetfulness (emotionally disoriented), sailing the stormy sea on a winter night between rocks. And my enemy (love) steers me with such cruelty that I would think even death an easier experience to endure than the state I am now in. The oars of this ship are my impulses to die. My constant, involuntary sighs—at once informed by hope and fear—are the wind that rips the sails. My tears are the rain that ruins the rigging (and, therefore, that can cause the ship to founder—i.e. me to behave foolishly). She who has brought me to this agonizing condition should be hidden away (*alternately*: She who has brought me to this state has left me alone). I can no longer be reasonable, for that guiding force in me has been killed. I fear now that I will never find a safe harbor (contentment in love).

*Speaker's tone*—The tone, which remains constant throughout the sonnet, is aptly described as one of desperate self-pity.

*Poet's theme*—The experience of unrequited love can leave one feeling lost, confused, and hopeless.

*A commentary on the sonnet*—Here the sonnet form works well by allowing the poet to tidily organize a conceit with which to develop his theme. Despite the compression that the sonnet form demands, Wyatt is able to turn out several nautical references—a galley, seas, obstacles to navigation, oar, wind, sails, rigging, stars (which aid navigation), drowning, consort, and port—all to serve his lament. Each reference says something about the despairing lover's loss of control. It is a delightful aesthetic irony that Wyatt should frame the chaotic states of a tempest-tossed ship and a tortured lover in the form of a sonnet, which is itself a highly organized, controlled structure; indeed, there seems to be something almost absurd about the dissonance between content and form.

**Conflict**

**—the struggle that grows out of the interplay of opposing forces in a narrative**. Conflict is the ground of suspense, and both conflict and suspense produce that pleasurable anxiety we associate with being washed in a good novel, short story, play, or film. At least one of the opposing forces in a conflict is usually a person, or if it is an animal or inanimate object it is treated as though it were a person (i.e. personified). This character, usually the protagonist, may be involved in conflicts conventionally identified as one or more of the following:

- **natural or cosmic conflict** (a struggle against the forces of nature or fate)
- **interpersonal conflict** (a struggle against another person or group of people)
- **social conflict** (a struggle against society)
- **internal / psychological conflict** (a struggle against self)

**Connotation**

**—the extra meanings that accompany a word aside from its denotation.** For example, the words *slender, svelte, skinny, slim, thin,* and *emaciated* all have the same denotation, but each connotes something different. Or consider the word *exotic,* which literally means "foreign," but also suggests the sense of one's being fascinated or delighted with something because it is distant, strangely beautiful, and mysteriously compelling.

**Consonance**

**—the repetition of initial, middle, and/or final consonant sounds in neighboring words.**

Examples

- last but not least (repetition of voiceless fricative *s* and voiceless plosive *t*; also alliteration of semi-vowel *l*)

- Wheneas in silks my Julia goes (repetition of both voiced and voiceless fricative *s*; also repetition of semi-vowel *l*)

- hatched, matched, and dispatched (repetition of combined sounds in "atched") [This phrase may also be identified as an example of parallel structure and an example of assonance.]

- "Out of this house"—said rider to reader,
  "Yours never will"—said farer to fearer,
  "They're looking for you"—said hearer to horror,
  As he left them there, as he left them there.
  (W.H. Auden)

**Consonant sounds**

Discussing the euphonious or cacophonous qualities of words is assisted by being able to identify by name various consonant sounds.

**Plosives**—so called because they are little explosions in the mouth. Air pressure is built up, then suddenly released with a pop. Plosives are commonly associated with cacophony.

**Voiced plosives:**

*b* as in *bob*

*d* as in *dad*
*g* as in *gag*

**Voiceless plosives:**

*p* as in *pop*
*t* as in *tot*
*k* as in *kick*

**Fricatives**—so called because their sounds involve friction. Air pressure is not stopped and suddenly released, as with plosive sounds, but the air stream is restricted by the articulators (lips, tongue, teeth). Voiced fricatives are generally considered cacophonous, especially when associated with plosives (e.g. *vacant: v* is the voiced fricative; *c* and *t* are voiceless plosives. *Vacant*'s sounds—with its fricative, two plosives and swallowed vowel in the second syllable—coupled with the word's connotations of dreariness and loss, make it to most ears a cacophonous word. Voiceless fricatives, with their whispering quality, are generally heard as euphonious sounds.

**Voiced fricatives:**

*z* as in *zoo*
*zh* as in *leisure*
*v* as in *velvet*
*th* as in *there*

**Voiceless fricatives:**

*s* as in *sauce*
*h* as in *he*
*f* as in *fluff*
*th* as in *thin*
*sh* as in *shell*

**Affricatives** (also called affricates)—a combination of plosive and fricative. The air stream is still restricted, as in pure fricatives, but lightly stopped and released, too, as in plosives. There are two affricatives in English speech: the **voiced *j*** as in *judge*, and the **voiceless *ch*** as in *church*. Affricates, like plosives, are generally considered cacophonous.

**Nasals**—sounds created by the resonance of sound in the nasal cavities. Nasals are said to have a warm, lulling quality and are therefore considered euphonious.

**Each nasal is a voiced sound:**

*n* as in *none*
*m* as in *mom*
*ng* as in *singing*

**Glides** (Semi-vowels)—may be described as "vowels with attitude." In forming glides, the articulators do not restrict air-flow as they do in the other categories of consonant sounds

**Each glide is a voiced sound:**

*l* as in *lull*
*w* as in *wow*
*r* as in *roar*

*y* as in *yo-yo*

**Context**

**—the part or parts of a passage preceding and/or following a particular segment of text and that significantly affect the meaning of that segment.** The surroundings of a statement often alter, extend, or qualify the intention that *seems* apparent in the statement itself. For example, a passage from Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* opens with the statement, "Hence it is that it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain." But it is unfair and unwise to quote Newman's definition without recalling the "almost" in the statement, for the context of the passage asserts that even one who "never inflicts pain" is not an ideal gentleman unless he exhibits certain other traits as well (for the complete text from which the passage is taken see "Appendix 2—'Definition of a Gentleman' by Cardinal Newman"). Note also that certain passages in the Bible and in many other great works of literature may seem cruel or obscene, but, *taken in context,* they have different meanings. And consider that one basic test for pornography is determining the general purpose and other specific details of an entire work, rather than focusing on one detail that appears profane or obscene. *Reading out of context* and *quoting out of context* are considered serious faults in literary criticism.

**Crisis**

**—in the action of a narrative, a significant turning point that occurs when opposing forces in a conflict interlock in a decisive ordeal on which the plot will turn.** *Crisis* is not a synonym for *climax,* which may be defined loosely as the final or culminating crisis of a narrative. As well, the term *crisis* is more fittingly applied to a discussion of conflict from a character's point of view, while *climax* refers technically to the reader's experience—that is, the reader's determination of a particular moment in the structure of a work.

**Deductive reasoning**

**— exposition in which the writer applies a known principle or established generalization to a single situation, believing that the principle will explain the situation.** In short, deduction is arguing from the general to the specific (the opposite of inductive reasoning).

**Denotation**

—the literal meaning, or dictionary definition, of a word apart from its emotional coloration (connotation).

***Deus ex machina***

**—in a narrative, any character, device, or turn of events suddenly introduced to resolve the conflict.** *Deus ex machina* is a Latin phrase meaning "god from the machine," and refers to the ancient Greek and Roman theatrical convention of bringing in a supernatural character, a deity, to intervene in the action of play—this by flying the actor onto the stage by the use of stage machinery.

**Development**

**—the strategies by which, and the extent to which, a writer supports the key idea(s) in an essay.**

**Dialogue**

**—any spoken exchange between characters in a narrative work.** The term is not limited to drama; it applies also to other narrative forms.

**Diction**

**—word choice.** Words are typically selected for precision of meaning, sound value, and connotation.

**Didactic tone**

**—describes the tone or style used by a writer whose purpose is to provide guidance, especially in moral matters.** The word *didactic* often carries negative connotations, being associated with such traits as prudery, arrogance, narrow-mindedness, or even hypocrisy.

**Discovery** (Epiphany / Peripety)

**—a point at which a character comes to a particular revelation or disclosure, especially a revelation about his true nature and the nature of the world.** The word ***epiphany*** is reserved for **an especially striking and sudden discovery of truth**—this as opposed to the more gradual, or incremental, realizations that characters commonly discover in most realistic narratives. The word ***peripety*** refers to **a special form of epiphany in which an unexpected reversal of fortunes occurs**. The term is most often associated with classical tragedy, but can be loosely applied to short stories with surprise endings, such as Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace" and "The Gift of the Magi." In critical responses to a narrative, a discussion of a character's discoveries will always tie closely to the theme(s) of the work.

**Emphasis**

**—an assigning of the appropriate degree of intensity or importance to a particular idea, image, or sonic quality in a work.**

**End-stopped line**

**—a line of poetry in which the end of a thought coincides with the end of the verse line.** The following two lines from a poem by Robert Browning are end-stopped:

> How could it end in any other way?
> You called me, and I came back to your heart.

**Enjambment**

**—the opposite of an end-stopped line, enjambment refers to a verse line that omits a pause at the end, allowing the line's thought to run seamlessly into the next line**. Here's an example, from the work of Percy Byshhe Shelley, of a passage with three enjambed lines:

> The awful shadow of some unseen power
> Floats through, unseen among us—visiting
> This various world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower.

**Epigraph**

**—a motto or quotation placed at the beginning of a work and bearing a significant connection to the central theme of the work.** Margaret Laurence's novel *The Stone Angel* includes as an epigraph a quotation of the famous refrain "Do not go gentle into that good night. / Rage, rage against the dying of the light" from Dylan Thomas' villanelle "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night."

**Epitaph**

**—a short composition, in verse or prose, in honor of one who has died.** The word *epitaph* is from Greek roots and means "upon the tomb." Many epitaphs are written as pieces of comic verse or prose—for instance, John Wilmot's epitaph on Charles II:

> Here lies our sovereign lord the king,
> Whose word no man relies on:
> Who never said a foolish thing—
> Nor ever did a wise one.

Or consider the following comic epitaph for a bank teller (which incidentally makes clever use of chiasmus):

> He checked his cash, and cashed in his checks,
> And left his window. Who is next?

**Epithet**

**—an adjective (or adjective phrase) used to define the special quality or function of a person or thing.** *Epithet* is derived from the Greek *epitheton*, meaning "something added." The term is often applied to an identifying phrase that stands in place of a noun, as in the case of Pope's "the glittering forfex," which refers to the scissors with which the Baron performs his heinous act in "The Rape of the Lock." The frequent use of derogatory adjectives and phrases in invective (abusive speech) has led to the mistaken belief that epithets are always vulgar, abusive words.

**Homeric epithets** are **adjectival terms, usually two-word compounds, like those used as formulas in referring to recurrent characters or objects in the narrative**—for example, "fleet-footed Achilles," "bolt-hurling Zeus," "rosy-fingered dawn," or "the wine-dark sea." Buck Mulligan, in James Joyce's *Ulysses,* parodies the Homeric epithet in his reference to "the snot-green sea." We often use fixed or conventional epithets in identifying historical or literary figures—for example, Alexander the Great, Hamlet the Melancholy Dane, or Patient Griselda.

**Equivocation**

**—a form of verbal irony (and therefore of ambiguity), it is a statement in which a speaker, in strictly logical terms, is telling the truth, but is nevertheless knowingly deceiving his hearer.** The word *equivocation* comes from roots that together make up the meaning "equal-voiced," and it is useful to think of an equivocator as one who is speaking with two mouths simultaneously—one mouth telling a truth, the other telling a lie. Much of the action of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* depends on the device of equivocation. When, for example, Macbeth says, trivially and agreeably, "'Twas a rough night," in response to Lennox's observation that last night's storm was terrific, he is on one level telling Lennox the truth. What he is *not* telling Lennox, however, is that for himself the roughness of the night had nothing to do with the weather but with his secret murder of the king of Scotland. In effect, then, he is telling the truth and lying at the same time—equivocating.

The inverse of equivocation is what we commonly refer to as the *white lie*—that is, a statement that is indeed untrue or that misrepresents one's actual feelings, though the intention of the statement is to save the hearer from embarrassment or pain.

**Euphemism**

**—a mild or inoffensive word or phrase used in place of one that some may find too direct or offensive.** Euphemism is also a form of verbal irony, for in most of its uses the speakers are deliberately saying something other than what they truly mean. Euphemism can be used to mask conditions that we find frightening, as in the case of saying *passed on* instead of *died,* or *has developed a condition* instead of *got cancer.* Euphemism can also prettify actions that some might consider vulgar. For instance, in Leo Tolstoi's short story "The Death of Ivan Ilych"—which is largely about the destructive effects of propriety, of too slavishly following the rules of polite society—he speaks of sex between Ivan Ilych and his wife as "conjugal caresses." And Granny Dearden could never say the word *toilet.* Compelled to refer to the thing at all, she called it by the name of the room that housed it—and not the *bathroom* either, presumably because that also was too coarse; rather, she called it the WC—short (and further euphemistic) for *water closet*. Military and business leaders are especially fond of euphemisms. They would rather use terms like *casualties* for *people killed,* and *ethnic cleansing* instead of *mass slaughter;* and they speak of *downsizing* to mean *firing hundreds of employees,* and *cash-flow concerns* when they mean *bloody well broke.* Poets, as it turns out, often avoid euphemisms, unless for pointedly ironic effects, being typically much too concerned with speaking truth to fall into the trap of euphemism. Perhaps one example, though: in his poem "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," Dylan Thomas repeatedly uses the phrase "that good night" (and with bitter irony) to stand as a euphemism for *death*.

**Euphony**

**—the use of words and phrases that are considered pleasant and harmonious in sound.**

Examples

- and walk with you through that lucent
  wavering forest of bluegreen leaves
  (Margaret Atwood)

- Morn, in the white wake of the morning star,
  Came furrowing all the orient into gold.
  (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

- Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
  Then, then (methinks), how sweetly flows
  That liquifaction of her clothes.

  Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
  That brave vibration each way free,
  How that glittering taketh me!
  (Robert Herrick)

**Exposition**

**—a form of non-fiction prose in which the writer's purpose is to explain through the presentation of ideas focusing on a certain topic.**

also

**—a term applied to passages in fiction that are intended to supply the background information necessary to advance a narrative.**

**Fable**

**—a short *allegorical* narrative intended to illustrate a fundamental moral lesson, usually developed with animal characters who may be either slightly or thoroughly personified.** The Greek Aesop is the most famous author of fables.

**Fallacy**

**—a flaw in the logic of an argument.** A writer might, for example, be guilty of making a sweeping generalization, which is fallacious because it suggests that the writer has not considered, or perhaps refuses to consider, the possibility of exceptions to the seeming rule.

**Farce**

**—a type of comedy designed simply to provoke simple, hearty laughter.** To achieve good old "belly laughs," the *farceur* relies heavily on caricature, exaggeration, improbability, broad verbal humor (often vulgar jokes), and physical horseplay (slapstick comedy). Though farce is normally associated with what we call low comedy, its elements can also be used effectively to serve complex, richly thoughtful works of high comedy, satire, and tragicomedy.

**Flashback**

**—an interruption in the present-tense action of a narrative, its function is to narrate (in a prose work) or to present (in a dramatic work) an episode that has occurred prior to the time when the narrative begins.** Flashbacks may occur minimally in a work, as is the case in most modern realistic novels and short stories; or they may be extensively used, as in, for example, Arthur Miller's modern tragedy *Death of a Salesman* and in Homer's ancient epic poem *The Odyssey*.

**Foil**

**—a character who emphasizes the nature of the protagonist by being presented as a contrasting, and sometimes rather complementary, character.** In *Hamlet,* Fortinbras and Laertes are foils to Hamlet. Though each of them lives in circumstances that are similar to Hamlet's, the essential nature of each man is contrary to Hamlet's. In his novel *Lord of the Flies,* William Golding indicates certain parallels in the experiences of Ralph and Jack, but the two characters remain fundamentally different, and because Ralph is considered the novel's protagonist, we say that Jack is Ralph's foil rather than saying that Ralph is Jack's foil.

**Foreshadowing**

**—any detail in a narrative that suggests an eventual outcome in the plot.** Foreshadows are hints that can take various forms—for instance, certain loaded words and phrases, images, characters, or events. Such details can help the reader to anticipate a significant turn of events. Foreshadowing is most effective when it is used subtly—that is, when it does not "give away the ending" of a narrative.

**Genre**

**—a category or type of artistic form, as determined by its own structure, technique, content, and so on.** In the world of literature we may speak of broad genre divisions, such as novel, short story, essay, poetry, and drama. And we may speak of genres within genres: for example, within the genre of the novel, romance, suspense, coming-of-age, and historical novels; within the genre of poetry, narrative and lyrical poetry; and within the genre of lyrical poetry, odes, elegies, sonnets, songs, and limericks.

**Hamartia**

**—the essential flaw in a tragic hero's nature.** Aristotle says that a tragic hero most effectively evokes our fear and pity if he is not thoroughly good but has about him an element of weakness, if he is indeed of greater mettle than most of us but is still shown to be human, and therefore fallible, and therefore destructible.

**Hubris**

**—a common form of hamartia, it refers to pride in the form of arrogant self-confidence.** It is the kind of arrogance that leads the hero to disregard a divine warning or to violate an important moral law. The word *hubris* is conventionally used in discussions of traditional tragic heroes, such as Oedipus and King Lear, but it can be used also to describe modern protagonists in other serious works, protagonists like Hagar Shipley in Margaret Laurence's novel *The Stone Angel* or Duddy in Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.*

**Humanism**

**—a philosophical orientation that focuses on the distinctively "human" world, as opposed to the divine, the material, or the pragmatic world.** In the sixteenth century, the word *humanist* was used to signify one who studied or taught in the *studia humanitatis,* or humanities, namely in the fields of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, as distinguished from fields less concerned with the moral and imaginative experience of humans, such as mathematics, natural philosophy, and theology. Typically, Renaissance humanism assumed the dignity and central position of humanity in the universe, and humanist academics of the time emphasized the study of classical imaginative and philosophical literature. Popular philosophy of the time stressed the primacy of reason (logic), the human faculty—this in opposition to the instinctual, or "animal appetites." Humanism, both in ages past and present, tends to focus on the need for rounded development of people's physical, intellectual, artistic, and moral powers, rather than focusing on strictly technical or narrowly specialized training.

**Hyperbole**

**—intentional overstatement or exaggeration**. It may be used for serious or comic purposes. Hyperbole is obvious enough in such expressions as "I laughed my head off" or "His arms dangled a mile out of his sleeves," but it can also be used in more subtle ways. Note, for example, Tennyson's "The Eagle." When his speaker says that the eagle is "close to the sun in lonely lands," he does not mean that it is literally close to the sun; rather, it seems merely, from the speaker's perspective, to be close. Here the suggestion is that the eagle and the sun are symbolically allied. As well, when Wordsworth reports that his daffodils "stretched in never-ending line," he is not reporting a reality either but an appearance. Hyperbole can be used so subtly and casually, in fact, that it seems to have the quality of its opposite, understatement, as in the case of Frost's lines "I shall be telling this with a sigh somewhere ages and ages hence."

**Imagery**

**—words or phrases that create mental pictures.** Imagery can be divided into two categories: literal and figurative. Literal images are those that objectively describe the physical details of something; for example, a room described literally might be *large and low-ceilinged, with dark furniture set against beige carpet and walls*. Figurative images create pictures too, but they move beyond objectivity to suggest symbolic or emotional values; a house described figuratively might be *shut up securely against the joys of the world, brooding behind high, darkly dusty hedges and wild growths of ivy*.

In ordinary parlance, the word *image* refers to something seen. But in discussions of literature the term can be applied to a passage that stands as an appeal to any physical sense. The critic, then, may speak of the following categories of imagery:

- **visual imagery** (of sight)
- **aural imagery** (of sound)
- **tactile imagery** (of touch)
- **kinetic** or **kinesthetic imagery** (of movement)
- **olfactory imagery** (of smell)
- **gustatory imagery** (of taste)

**Indeterminate resolution**

**—a narrative with a deliberately ambiguous conclusion—that is, one in which the reader is left to question whether the resolution of the conflict should be considered happy or sad.**

**Inductive reasoning**

**—exposition in which the writer examines specific pieces of evidence and from them draws a generalization.** In short, induction is arguing from the specific to the general (the opposite of deductive reasoning).

**Inference**

**—a conclusion drawn from facts that have been presented or statements made.**

**Initial incident**

**—the first significant event in the plot of a narrative, it is the occurrence that establishes the protagonist's goal.**

***In medias res***

**—a Latin phrase meaning "in the midst of things," it refers to the technique of beginning a narrative in the middle of a significant event for the protagonist.** Only later in the story, through the use of exposition or flashback, does the narrator fill in the information that would establish an after-the-fact initial incident and perhaps any number of complications that have led up to this point at which the narrative has begun. In fact, a story may actually begin at the point of what, in a more conventional telling of the tale, would be its climax or resolution. Some famous examples of this technique are found in epics. Book I of Homer's *Odyssey,* for example, opens ten years after the end of the Trojan War. The goddess Athena instructs Telemachus, Odysseus' son, to venture forth from Ithaca to find his father, who should have returned from the war ten years ago. Only later, in Book IX, do we learn of the adventures of Odysseus that

filled up the ten years between the end of the war and Telemachus' setting sail from Ithaca. An English epic that begins *in medias res* is John Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

**Interior monologue**

**—the technique of reporting a character's thoughts as the substance of a narrative or a part of it, stressing not what a character does overtly but what he is thinking and feeling.** The term is not as selective as it may seem to be; indeed, most stories told from a first-person point of view may be loosely considered interior monologues. An especially striking example of interior monologue—one in which the reader has a continually strong sense of "being inside the narrator's head"—is Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel.* As well, stream-of-consciousness narration is an obvious example of interior monologue.

**Invective**

**—direct denunciation or generally abusive address.** Shakespeare's plays often include delightful passages of invective, portions of dialogue in which one character rails against another—for instance, in *Henry IV 1,* Prince Hal calls the rotund Falstaff "this sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horseback-breaker, this huge hill of flesh." In *King Lear,* Kent abuses Oswald in this way:

> A knave; a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave, a whoreson, glass-gazing, super-serviceable finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd, in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch: one whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deniest the least syllable of thy addition.

**Invocation**

**—a poet's calling upon the appropriate muse to supply him with inspiration and eloquence in the development of his verse.** Milton's *Paradise Lost,* for example, opens with his invoking Urania, the muse of astronomy and sacred poetry, to help him compose his great epic. Milton associates her with the divine spirit that inspired "that shepherd," Moses, who received the Word of God and interpreted it for the Hebrews, "the chosen seed":

> Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
> Sing, Heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
> Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
> That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed
> In the beginning how the Heavens and Earth
> Rose out of Chaos; or if Sion hill
> Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
> Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
> Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song.

**Irony**

**—a general term describing the contrast or discrepancy between what *is* and what *appears to be* or between what *happens* and what *was expected*.** Irony is traditionally divided into three categories: verbal, dramatic, and situational. The terms are more commonly applied in discussions of fiction, poetry, and drama than in discussions of non-fiction prose.

- **Dramatic irony**
  **—a form of irony in which the speaker is <u>unaware</u> of the discrepancy between what he/she says and what is meant. Dramatic irony is also defined as a case of the reader's knowing more about circumstances than is known by the character(s).**

  <u>Examples</u>

  "A planet doesn't explode of itself," said dryly
  The Martian astronomer, gazing off into the air—
  "That they were able to do it is proof that highly
  Intelligent beings must have been living there."
  (Alfred Wheelock)

  I could not help but feel proud of the regularity of my ribs and my soldierly erectness as I lay at attention while the morning sun flickered in the hollow sockets of my eyes.

- **Verbal irony**
  **—a form of irony in which the speaker is <u>aware</u> of the discrepancy between what he/she says and what is meant.** Equivocation is one form of verbal irony. In fact, by definition, any kind of lie, from a white lie to a sarcastic remark to an act of perjury, may be considered a case of verbal irony. But note that the person who commits perjury and says that he is being only ironic is guilty not only of perjury, but of the worst sort of euphemism as well.

  <u>Example</u>

  No egg on Friday Alph will eat,
  But drunken he will be
  On Friday still. Oh, what a pure
  Religious man is he!

- **Situational irony**
  **—a form of irony in which there is a discrepancy between an outcome or condition and that which would be expected (i.e. by the reader and/or the characters); in such cases the actual outcome or condition is in some poetic sense appropriate.** A story with a "surprise ending" can be said, more formally, to have a situationally ironic resolution.

  Whenever Richard Cory went downtown,
  We people on the pavement looked at him:
  He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
  Clean-favored and imperially slim.

  And he was always quietly arrayed,
  And he was always human when he talked;
  But still he fluttered pulses when he said
  "Good morning," and he glittered when he walked.

  And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
  And admirably schooled in every grace:

In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

(Edwin Arlington Robinson)

**Juxtaposition**

**—a synonym for the word *contrast.*** The word *juxtaposition* refers to the technique of placing in relation to each other any two or more elements—words, phrases, ideas, images, syntactical patterns, characters, actions, etc—that stand not in obvious complementarity or likeness but in apparent difference, even dissonance.

**Litotes**

**—a form of understatement in which something is affirmed by stating the negative of its opposite.** For example, to say that a person is "no amateur" is to say that he *is* a professional. When, in *Lord of the Flies,* Piggy says to Ralph, "You can't half swim," he is using a British working-class litotic expression; in effect, Piggy is saying *You can swim very well.* Often litotes takes the form of a double negative, a "not un—" construction. For example, to say that Bill Gates is "not unknown" is to say, by way of double negative and understatement, that he is famous. Litotes may be thought of as a cousin of euphemism, as it is used *not infrequently* by bureaucrats to pad and soften their speech and *not insignificantly* to mislead their hearers.

**Lyrical text**

**—writing that focuses principally on the expression of images, secondarily on the expression of ideas, and not at all (or only slightly) on the recounting of events.**

**Malapropism**

**—a blunder in speech or writing caused by the substitution of a word for another that is similar in sound but different in meaning.** The term comes from the name Mrs. Malaprop, a character in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play *The Rivals,* who says such things as "If I reprehend anything in the world, it is the use of my oracular tongue" and "I would have her instructed in geometry that she might know something of the contagious countries."

Examples

- Damp weather is very hard on the sciences.
- Columbus was a great navigator who discovered America while cursing about the Atlantic.
- The climate of the Sarah is such that the inhabitants have to live elsewhere, so certain areas of the dessert are cultivated by irritation.
- The bowels are *a,e,i,o,u* and sometimes *y*.
- David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar.

Related to malapropisms are *spoonerisms,* so named for a certain Reverend Spooner, who, it is said, would often, though unintentionally, transpose words or parts of words from one part of a sentence to another, with humorous results. A well-known example is the reverend's having said, after finishing a wedding ceremony, "It is kisstomary to cuss the bride." Attributed also to Reverend Spooner is, "Mardon me, Padam, but this pie is occupewed. May I sew you to another sheet?"

**Melodrama**

**—a dramatic form typified by stock characters, exaggerated emotions, and a conflict that pits an all-good hero or heroine against an all-evil villain.** The good characters always triumph, and the evil ones are always punished. Originally melodramas were so called because melodies accompanied certain actions (*melos* means "song" in Greek), and each character was identified with a theme melody, which was played each time he or she entered the action.

**Metaphor**

**—refers to an implied comparison of two quantities that are superficially unlike each other but that on another level share important qualities—that is, one thing is actually said to be another thing.** From this premise, we may say that metaphor is a form of irony, for it always presents (at least in strictly logical terms) a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. In mathematical terms, it takes the form of *X is Y* (which itself is fundamentally illogical and, by definition, ironic). Many other figures of speech are variations of metaphor—for example, metonymy, personification, apostrophe, and symbol—but only metaphor takes this particular form of *X is Y*.

Examples

- Merry larks are ploughmen's clocks.
  (Shakespeare)

- The sun's a wizard.
  (Frost)

- My life is a shiny new penny cast into a bottomless wishing well.

**Metonymy** (and Synecdoche)

**—traditionally defined as *substitution of an idea,* it is the most commonly used form of metaphor.** In metonymy, an implied comparison is still being made, but in metonymy **one quantity stands in place of the quantity that is being described**, and the form of *X is Y* is not used; rather, *Y* stands alone, and *X* (being the described quantity) is a given. So, then, one may describe something in terms of absolute metaphor by saying that it is something else—for example, "The rain drops are a child's tears" (*X is Y*); but the same comparison expressed as a metonymy would not mention the rain, for it is implied, or understood, that the rain is the thing being described when one says "The sky pours down its sorrow." [Note, incidentally, that these examples of metaphor and metonymy are also personifications.]

Metonymy also includes the figure of **synecdoche**, in which **one element of a structure is used to represent the whole structure**—for example, in the nautical command "All hands on deck," "hands" substitutes for the sailors attached to those hands. And in the expression "The bullet has replaced the ballot," "bullet" substitutes for the violence and anarchy of which gunshots are so often a part, and "ballot" substitutes for the democracy and order that are achieved in part through the process of voting.

Examples

- The pen is mightier than the sword. [*pen* = reason, intelligence // *sword* = brute aggression]
  (Edward Bulwer-Lytton)

- We have given our hearts away. [*hearts* = compassionate, imaginative responses to life]
  (William Wordsworth)

- Out, out, brief candle. [*candle* = life]
  (Shakespeare)

**Mixed metaphor**

**—the combined use of two or more inconsistent metaphors in one expression.** When they are examined, they make no sense and are often unintentionally humorous. A mixed metaphor often appears in the form of a hybrid cliché, which is the combining of two or more dead metaphors, as in the following examples:

- The storm of protest was nipped in the bud.
- To hold the fort, he'd have to shake a leg.
- A virgin forest is one where the hand of man has never set foot.
- You're barking up the wrong goose chase.
- That's a horse of a different feather.
- The sword of Damocles is hanging over Pandora's box.
- The sacred cows have come home to roost.

**Mood**

**—the dominant feeling of a work or passage within a work.** Mood is often developed, at least in part, through descriptions of settings. Such descriptions help to create an emotional climate that serves to establish our attitudes and expectations of a work and therefore prepares us to receive its theme(s). For example, in "Across the Bridge" Graham Greene develops an atmosphere of decay and boredom through descriptions of the dusty, shabby town in which the story is set.

**Motif**

**—a recurring and symbolically significant element—for example, a word, phrase, pattern, name, image, or idea—in a literary work.** A motif generally contributes in some way to our understanding of a work's theme(s). For example, a motif in D. H. Lawrence's short story "The Rocking-Horse Winner," is the word *luck*. The narrative's protagonist, a boy named Paul, discovers that he has the power to predict race-horse winners. However, this becomes an ironic kind of luck, for Paul grows obsessed with his power and is finally destroyed by it. As well, motifs often take the form of repeated images. In *Macbeth,* for example, recurrent images of light and dark, of ill-fitting clothes, and of false faces are all motivic in the play. Sometimes *motif* is used to refer to some commonly used plot pattern or character type that appears I various works. For example, the "ugly-duckling motif" refers to a plot that involves the transformation of a plain person into an extraordinary one. Two other frequently used motifs are the "Romeo and Juliet motif"

(about doomed lovers) and the "Cinderella motif" (about the person who begins in oppression, but through patience and virtue is rewarded with social triumph).

**Motivation**

**—the reasons, either stated directly or implied, for a character's behavior.** To make a narrative credible, a writer must imbue characters with motivations—external and/or internal forces— sufficient to explain what they do.

**Narrative text**

**—writing that focuses principally on the recounting of events.**

**Narrator**

**—the teller of story.**

**Naturalism**

**—a particular form of realism, that seeks to offer an even more accurate (and usually bleaker) picture of life than does realism.** But naturalism is not only, like realism, a special selection of subject matter and a special literary method; it is a narrative mode that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a certain philosophical thesis which holds that humanity belongs entirely within the order of physical nature, and that individuals do not have souls or any other connections with a supposed spiritual world beyond ordinary matter. Naturalism asserts that the human is merely a higher-order animal whose character and experiences are determined by two kinds of *natural* forces: heredity and environment. A man or woman, therefore, inherits personal traits and compulsive instincts, especially hunger and sex, and is helplessly subject to the social and economic forces inherent in the family, the class, and the world itself into which he or she is born.

**Neoclassicism**

**—a revival in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the classical standards of order, balance, and harmony in literature.** John Dryden and Alexander Pope were major exponents of the neoclassical school.

**Neologism** (Coined word)

**—a word that a writer invents or one that he forms by combining existing words** (portmanteau words)**, or a word used out of its ordinary context** (as in the case of synaesthesia). Lewis Carroll's famous nonsense poem "Jabberwocky," from *Alice through the Looking Glass,* makes extensive use of neologisms:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jub-jub bird, and shun

The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tum-tum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! and through and through!
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Dylan Thomas, too, was fond of neologisms, often using strikingly out-of-context words, in concert with curious imagery, to create unexpected and delightful effects, as in this description of a spring morning on a London street:

> It was a shooting green spring morning, nimble and crocus, with all the young women treading the metropolitan sward, swinging their milk-pail handbags, gentle, fickle, inviting, accessible, forgiving each robustly abandoned gesture of salutation before it was made or imagined, assenting, as they reveled demurely towards the manicure salon or the typewriter office, to all the ardent unspoken endearments of shaggy strangers and the winks and pipes of clovenfooted sandwichmen. The sun shrilled, the buses gamboled, policemen and daffodils bowed in the breeze that tasted of buttermilk. Delicate carousel plashed and babbled from the publichouses which were not yet open. I felt like a young god. I removed my collar studs and opened my shirt. I tossed back my hair. There was an aviary in my heart, but without any owls or eagles. My cheeks were cherried warm. I smelt, I thought, of sea-pinks. To the sound of madrigals sung by slim sopranos in water-filled valleys where I was the only tenor, I leapt onto a bus. The bus was full. Carefree, open-collared, my eyes alight, my veins full of the spring as a dancer's shoes should be full of champagne, I stood, in love and at ease and always young, on the packed lower deck. And a man of exactly my own age—or perhaps he was a little older—got up and offered me his seat. He said, in a respectful voice, as though to an old justice of the peace, "Please, won't you take my seat?" and then he added "Sir."

**Objective tone**

**—writing in which one aims at appearing impartial or neutral, through logic, literalness, and clarity.** Objectivity is the aim in the writing of news reports, scientific documents, analytical and argumentative essays, and so on.

**Onomatopoeia**

**—the use of words that imitate the sounds of the actions to which they refer.** Onomatopoeia is obvious enough in examples like *hiss, buzz, splash,* and *snap.* But note that onomatopoeia can be used more subtly, as in the Tennyson's "The moan of doves in immemorial elms / And murmuring of innumerable bees." Here ("hear") the consonance of nasal sounds (*m, n,* and *ng*) and the voiced fricative *s* in "doves," "elms," and "bees" suggests the lulling drone of bees in a treed garden.

**Organization** (i.e. of prose non-fiction works and passages)

- **Cause-effect order—exposition arranged according to an awareness of the action-reaction relationships between ideas and/or events.**
- **Chronological order—exposition arranged according to a sense of ordinary time sequence.**
- **Climactic order—exposition arranged according to the placement of details in rising order of importance.**
- **Comparison / Contrast order—exposition arranged according to an analysis of the similarities and/or differences between related elements.**
- **Spatial order—exposition arranged according to an awareness of the relationships between objects in a visual field.**

**Oxymoron**

**—a contradictory phrase, usually in the form of an adjective followed by what would appear to be a mismatch of a noun.** Closely related to paradox, *oxymoron* is often defined as a condensed paradox—"condensed" because, whereas a paradox makes an actual statement, oxymoron expresses only a concept, a fragment of a statement.

<u>Examples</u>

- eternal moment
- filled emptiness
- soundless noise
- cold fire
- sweet sorrow
- pleasing pain
- heavy lightness
- military intelligence
- responsible government
- jumbo shrimp
- Progressive Conservative
- thrilling English class
- alone together
- exact estimate
- definite maybe
- peace force
- clearly misunderstood

**Parable**

**—a short allegorical narrative intended to illustrate a fundamental moral lesson, though, in contrast to the fable, it is developed with human rather than animal characters.** The most famous parables in literature are those attributed to Christ in the New Testament.

**Paradox**

**—a form of verbal irony, taking the form of a self-contradictory statement.** On the surface, its expression is that of a logical impossibility, but at another level it makes sense. The value of paradox is in its shock quality; its seeming absurdity startles the reader into attention and thus underlines the truth that lies at the heart of the statement. Alexander Pope was using paradox when he wrote that a literary critic of his time would "damn with faint praise."

Examples

I have come to the conclusion
she said
that when we fall in love
we really fall in love with ourselves—
that we choose particular people
because they provide
the particular mirrors
in which we wish to see

And when did you discover
this surprising bit of knowledge
he asked
After I had broken a few
very fine mirrors
she said
(Nelle Fertig)

Facing west from California's shores,
Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity,
the land of migrations, look afar.
(Walt Whitman)

I'm going nowhere fast.

**Parallel structure**

**—arranging the parts of a composition—words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and even larger organizational units—in orders that are similar.** The purpose is to emphasize ideas that are equally important and to create a climactic rhythm. Here's an example of parallel phrasing taken from Cardinal Newman's "Definition of a Gentleman":

> He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles; he submits to pain, because it is inevitable; to bereavement, because it is irreparable; and to death, because it is his destiny.

**Paraphrase**

**—a rewording of the thought or meaning expressed in a literary work.** A paraphrase is similar to a **synopsis**—that is, **a condensed retelling of a narrative.** To compose a paraphrase or a synopsis of a work is *not* to critically interpret or evaluate it; nevertheless, expressing a work in one's own words can prove a useful first step in understanding that work.

**Parody**

**—a composition in which one imitates and exaggerates the characteristic style and/or content of a particular work, writer, or genre of writing.** Though satire usually makes use of parody, the two terms are not synonymous, as parody is mockery only for the sake of mockery, while satire is mockery for the sake of advancing a serious theme.

**Pathos**

**—the quality in a work of literature that evokes the reader's feelings of sorrow and pity at the suffering of characters.** The term is usually used in reference to innocent characters who suffer through no fault of their own, as in the example of Lady Macduff and her son's being murdered at Macbeth's order. Though we can certainly register a sense of pathos even when characters cause their own suffering, as in the case of, say, Oedipus or King Lear.

**Persona**

**—the personality or voice assumed by a writer in the composition of an imaginative / fictive work** (though a writer may also assume a "character" in the composition of non-fiction works as well). The persona is the voice through whom the writer filters his work, especially in the case of a narrative—for example, the wounded lover, they outraged veteran, the triumphant hero, the cuckolded husband, the timid schoolgirl, and so on. Playwrights in particular must be adept at assuming personae (*personae* is the plural form of *persona*) and switching from one to another.

**Personification**

**—the technique of giving the attributes of a human being to an animal, object, or abstraction**. Personification is subtype of metaphor because it involves an implied comparison between two unlike quantities.

Examples

- The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls. (Alfred Lord Tennyson)
- Death stands above me whispering low. (Walter Savage Landor)
- Thus, though we cannot make our sun stand still, yet we will make him run. (Andrew Marvell)
- Sky lowered, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
  Wept at completing of the mortal sin.
  (John Milton)

**Plot**

**—the arrangement of a story's events—its "action skeleton."**

**Poetic forms**

- **Ballad (Popular ballad / Folk ballad / Traditional ballad)**
  **—has come to take various forms, but originally a song, transmitted orally, that told a story.** Ballads were first generated, and sustained in variant versions, by illiterate peoples, but were later seized upon, refined, and regularized by artistic writers. Typically the folk ballad is dramatic and impersonal. The narrator (commonly a third-person voice) begins with a suspenseful episode, develops the story swiftly by means of action and dialogue (sometimes by means of dialogue alone), and tells it without expressing personal feelings or attitudes.

- **Concrete poetry**
  **—poems in which the text is presented on the page in such a way that it visually imitates a physical object or a shape symbolic of an abstraction** (also called pattern poems or emblem poems). George Herbert's "Easter Wings" is an example of concrete poetry:

  Lord, who created'st man in wealth and store,
  Though foolishly he lost the same,
  Decaying more and more,
  Till he became
  Most poor:
  With thee
  O let me rise
  As larks, harmoniously,
  And sing this day thy victories:
  Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

  My tender age in sorrow did begin:
  And still with sicknesses and shame
  Thou didst so punish sin,
  That I became
  Most thin.
  With thee
  Let me combine,
  And feel this day thy victory:
  For if I imp my wing on thine,
  Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

- **Dramatic monologue**
  **—a poem written "in character."** It has these characteristics: 1) the writer assumes a persona—i.e. he does *not* speak in his own voice, but in the voice of a character he has created; 2) this speaker addresses and interacts with one or more other fictional hearers, but they are not shown directly to the reader—i.e. we know about their presence and their responses only from clues in the words of the speaker; 3) the central focus of the monologue is not so much in what the speaker talks about as it is in what he reveals about his own motivations and behaviors.

  A famous example of the dramatic monologue is Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," which is set in the castle of the Duke of Ferrara, the speaker of the poem, a powerful Italian nobleman of the Renaissance. The duke is showing a painting of his first wife to an envoy who has been sent to arrange the details of a second marriage.

  That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
  Looking as if she were alive. I call
  That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
  Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my Lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat"; such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart . . . how shall I say? . . . too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good; but thanked
Somehow . . . I know not how . . . as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your Master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, Sir! Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.

- **Elegy**
  **—a lyric poem that serves as a lament for the passing of someone loved or something sacred to its speaker.** Traditionally the focal point of an elegy is death, but it is characteristic of the form that

the tone will shift from initial bitterness to latter acceptance, even joy in the certainty of resurrection. The following stanzas open Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient starry reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a moldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

- **Epic**
  **—a long narrative poem telling about the deeds of a great hero and reflecting the values of the society from which it originates.** Many epics were drawn from an oral tradition and were transmitted by song and recitation before being written down. Two of the most famous epics of Western civilization are Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. The great epic of the Middle Ages is *The Divine Comedy* by the Italian poet Dante. The two most famous English epics are the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* which uses some of the conventions of the classical epic. The **mock epic**, the best example of which is Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock,* is **a comic form that treats a trivial subject in the grand, heroic style of a classical epic.**

- **Epigram**
  **—a terse statement (usually only two to four lines), often antithetical in form, satiric in tone, and lively in rhythm** (note, for example, how the anapestic lilt of the following couplet, gives it a witty spin).

  But to practice strict candor, you'll have to agree,
  Would quite often be foolish and painful to see.

- **Haiku**
  **—imported from the Japanese, it is a "snapshot lyric" that represents the poet's impression of a natural object or scene, viewed in a particular season or month, and achieved in seventeen syllables—commonly five in the first line, seven in the second, and five again in the third.** Here's one example:

  saturated mist
  clear jewel on the leafpoint
  drip. the river starts

- **Limerick**
  **—a comic, often bawdy lyric form written in five short lines with a "jingly" rhythm and a rhyme scheme of *aabba*.** The limerick is a form that was popularized by the English artist and humorist Edward Lear (1812-1888). The following works are by the famous poet A. Nonymous:

There once was a man from afar
Who bought a flamenco guitar.
When he painted it pink
It made others think
That his English was way below par.

There once was a woman named Bright
Who traveled much faster than light.
She set out one day
In a relative way,
And returned on the previous night.

- **Ode**
  **—a complex, often lengthy lyric form exemplified by a dignified, formal style and focused on some lofty, serious subject.** Odes are often written for special occasions, to honor persons, seasons, or important events. Two famous examples are Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which follows:

  Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
  Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
  Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
    A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
  What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
    Of deities or mortals, or of both,
      In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
  What men or gods are these? What maidens loath?
    What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
      What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

  Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
    Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
  Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
    Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
  Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
    Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
      Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
  Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
    She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
      Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

  Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
    Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
  And, happy melodist, unwearièd,
    Forever piping songs forever new;
  More happy love! more happy, happy love!
    Forever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
      Forever panting, and forever young;
  All breathing human passion far above,
    That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
      A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

  Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
    To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
  Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
    And all her silken flanks with garlands dressed?
  What little town by river or seashore,

Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul, to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral.
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

- **Pastoral** (Idyll)
**—a type of poem that deals in an idealized way with shepherds and simple country life.** The word *pastoral* comes from the Latin word for shepherd, *pastor.* Two companion pastorals are Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." Raleigh's poem, written as a mocking response to Marlowe's poem, might more aptly be called an *anti*-pastoral poem, in part because of its rejection of shallow idealism.

***The Passionate Shepherd to His Love***
by Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,
Or woods or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies;
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair-linèd slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy-buds
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my Love.

***The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd***
by Sir Walter Raleigh

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When rivers rage, and rocks grow cold,
And Philomel becometh dumb;
The rest complain of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields:
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten;
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last, and love still breed,
Had joys no date, nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

- **Sestina**
**—a lyric of six six-line stanzas and a three-line envoi (brief closing comment). The sestina is a highly formalized, complicated verse form involving a codified pattern of end-word repetitions in each stanza.** "Sestina" by Elizabeth Bishop is an example of the form:

September rain falls on the house.
In the failing light, the old grandmother
sits in the kitchen with the child
beside the Little Marvel Stove,
reading the jokes from the almanac,
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house
were both foretold by the almanac,
but only known to a grandmother.
The iron kettle sings on the stove.
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child

is watching the teakettle's small hard tears
dance like mad on the hot black stove,
the way the rain must dance on the house.
Tidying up, the old grandmother
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac
hovers half open above the child,
hovers above the old grandmother
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.
She shivers and says she thinks the house
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.
I know what I know, says the almanac.
With crayons the child draws a rigid house
and a winding pathway. Then the child
puts in a man with buttons like tears
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother
busies herself about the stove,
the little moons fall down like tears
from between the pages of the almanac
into the flower bed the child
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.
The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove
and the child draws another inscrutable house.

- **Sonnet**

**—a fourteen-line lyric poem that follows a particular rhyme scheme and is usually written in *blank verse.***

**English (Shakespearean) sonnet**

**—divided into four distinct parts: three quatrains and a concluding rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme is usually *abab cdcd efef gg*.** Normally the three quatrains offer three separate examples of, or statements on, a theme. The couplet makes a final statement that is often epigrammatic and provides a climactic finish to the sonnet.

***Sonnet 116***

William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, though his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

**Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet**

**—consists of an octave with a rhyme scheme *abbaabba* and a sestet with a rhyme scheme either *cdecde, cdedce,* or *cdccdc*.** The octave generally presents a situation or position on a subject, sometimes in the form of a question. The sestet then responds to the octave, offering some significant comment or suggesting an answer to the question posed.

***On First Looking into Chapman's Homer***

John Keats

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his desmesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

- **Psalm**

**—a song or lyric in praise of God.** *Psalm* refers usually to one of the one hundred and fifty sacred lyrics in the *Book of Psalms* in the Bible. "Psalm 23" is among the most well-recognized of these lyrics:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

- **Villanelle**

**—a traditional French form characterized by a complex, artificial structure. It consists of five tercets (three-line stanzas) followed by a quatrain (four-line stanza). The entire poem contains only two rhymes (*aba aba aba aba aba abaa*) and key lines are repeated as follows: line 1 as the sixth, twelfth, and eighteenth; line 3 as the ninth, fifteenth, and nineteenth.** "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas is the most famous example of a villanelle in English literature:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words have forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

**Point of view** (Narrative vantage)

**—applied to non-fiction, it refers to the area and level of authority of the writer in relation to his subject.**

also

**—applied to fiction, it refers to the vantage-point from which one tells a story.** Traditionally four points of view are associated with narrative works.

- **First-person narration**
  **—a point of view from which a narrator reports while participating in the action of the story.**

- **Objective narration**
  **—a third-person point of view from which a narrator reports only the outward, or observable, actions of all characters equally.**

- **Omniscient narration**
  **—a third-person point of view from which a narrator reports the outward actions and inward processes of all characters equally.**

- **Limited-omniscient narration**
  **—a third-person point of view from which a narrator reports the outward actions and inward processes of the protagonist, but reports only the outward actions of other characters.**

In addition to identifying a work's point of view as being one of the four types listed above, we may further categorize narrative vantage, especially within the range of first-person stories:

- **Reliable narrator**

**—a narrator whose perception and interpretation of events largely coincide (we presume) with the writer's own.** In absorbing a reliable narrator's account of events, we feel that we can take him at his word—that is, we can believe that he is giving us a truthful rendition of the action he reports.

- **Unreliable narrator**
  **—an ironic narrative approach, for it involves a discrepancy between what is said (i.e. by the character-narrator) and what is meant (i.e. by the writer); this is a narrator whose perception and interpretation of events do not, for the most part, coincide with the writer's own.** In absorbing an unreliable narrator's account of events, we must often infer the writer's meaning, knowing that his "real" ideas are indeed far removed from what his narrator would have us believe.

- **Naïve narrator**
  **—a narrator—often a child; sometimes a mentally or experientially impaired adult—whose perception and interpretation of events is limited by lack of experience.** The naïve narrator, generally, is unreliable only insofar as he is unable to tell us any more than his life experience will allow him to understand, not that he is prone to misinterpret or willfully mislead us. In registering a naïve narrator's story, we usually have the sense that he is learning much as he goes.

**Prologue**

**—a short preface to a relatively long work, usually a drama.** The prologue of a play may be spoken by a character who, before entering the action of the play in order to interact with its other characters, addresses the audience directly. More commonly, though, the prologue is spoken by a chorus figure—one whose task is to serve, in effect, as a liaison between the audience and the characters. The speaker of the prologue from *Romeo and Juliet* does not function as a character in the play. Here is his speech:

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
> The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
> And the continuance of their parents' rage,
> Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,
> Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage,
> The which if you with patient ears attend,
> What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

**Prose**

**—a general term to describe writing (fiction or non-fiction) that is not poetic.** The basic structural units of prose are the sentence and the paragraph, as opposed to the line and the stanza, which are the basic structural elements of poetry. Prose is employed, then, in everything from novels to essays to stereo instructions to letters from Aunt Matilda to the definitions in this glossary.

**Protagonist**

**—the central character of a narrative.** The word is derived from Greek roots and means "first combatant."

**Pun**

**—a rhetorical device that depends for its effect on the multiple meanings of certain words.** The use of pun is based on the artistic principle that ambiguous expression is often more effective than unequivocal expression, for life itself is often frustratingly ambiguous—that is, what seems true in one context is utterly false in another, or what is false is often at the very same time true. Pun, therefore, is a simple, frequently powerful means of showing in language the paradoxical nature of life.

Examples

- "I feel ill," said Tom gravely.
- "Oh, this? It's nothing," said Captain Hook off-handedly.
- To England I'll steal, and there I'll steal.
- "Out, sword, and to a sore purpose." < paronomasia
- They went and told the sexton,
  And the sexton tolled the bell.

**Realism**

**—a literary mode in which the writer seeks to present life as it really is.** Realism stands in opposition to romanticism, which, broadly speaking, focuses on life as we might wish it to be—more picturesque, more adventurous, more heroic than it actually is most of the time. To achieve his effects, the realist story teller prefers for his protagonist an ordinary citizen of Middletown, living on Main Street, perhaps, and employed, say, in a plumbing fixtures store. In other words, the writer deliberately selects the average, the commonplace, rather than the rarer aspects of life. His characters, therefore, are often working-class people who are not endowed with obviously exceptional attributes; who live through such ordinary experiences as childhood, adolescence, love, marriage, parenthood, infidelity, and death; and who frequently find life rather dull and unhappy, though it may be brightened by touches of beauty, joy, and even heroism.

**Resolution**

**—in a narrative, the action following the climax.** The term *resolution* is synonymous with *falling action* and *denouement*.

**Rhetoric**

**—the art of verbal expression.** Rhetoric embraces the rules of good writing, but goes beyond mere correctness by focusing on such matters of artistry as diction, figurative language, argument, and organization.

**Rhetorical question**

**—a question not followed by nor inviting a reply.** In effect, a rhetorical question is an ironic form of a statement. Sometimes, to suggest an especially spirited rhetorical question—perhaps one informed by extreme anger or one in which the speaker is thoroughly elated—the question will be punctuated with an exclamation point rather than a question mark.

Examples

- What kind of world would we live in if people did not have dreams? If people did not strive for what they believe in?
- Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses!
- Could we be having a better time!
- Is this not the height of absurdity?

**Rhyme**

- **Approximate rhyme (Imperfect rhyme)**
  **—the rhyming of sounds that are similar but not identical (given a significant discrepancy between vowel or consonant sounds).** As in:

  air = are
  move = love
  novel = lover

- **Masculine rhyme**
  **—the rhyming of single-syllable sounds.** As in:

  air = fair
  move = groove
  love = shove

- **Feminine rhyme**
  **—the rhyming of multi-syllable sounds.** As in:

  weary = dreary
  movie = groovy
  novel = hovel

- **Internal rhyme**
  **—the rhyming of sounds within a single line of verse.** As in:

  For sterile wearience and drearience,
  Depend, my boy, on experience.

  'Twas the night on the marge of Lake LaBarge I cremated Sam McGee.

  One, two! One, two! and through and through!
  The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
  He left it dead, and with its head
  He went galumphing back.

- **Interlocking rhyme**
  **—a rhyme scheme in which an unrhymed line in one stanza rhymes with one or more lines in the following stanza.** Interlocking rhyme occurs in the Italian verse form terza rima. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" makes use of interlocking rhyme. Here are its first five stanzas:

  O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
  Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead

Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow and black and pale and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odors plain and hill.

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!

**Rhythm / Meter**

All smooth-flowing language has rhythm; verse, or metrical language, only regularizes it. All metrical language is therefore rhythmic, but not all rhythmic language is metrical. *Meter* originally meant "measure"; verse is language in which the recurrent elements of rhythm exhibit patterns that can be identified and measured.

In English the basis of verse is accent or stress. In all words of more than a syllable, one syllable will tend to be pronounced with more emphasis than the others; in all sentences, some words receive more emphasis than others. This emphasis—a combination of pitch, loudness, and duration—is accent or stress. Although various and variable degrees of stress occur in any utterance, for purposes of metrical analysis only two are generally recognized—stressed and unstressed.

English prosody commonly recognizes four principal rhythms—**iambic, trochaic, anapestic,** and **dactylic**—and eight meters—**monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, heptameter,** and **octameter**.

- **Iambic** rhythm, one unit of which is called an **iamb**, consists of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable—as in **beat BEAT.** e.g. *trapeze*

- **Trochaic** rhythm, one unit of which is called a **trochee**, consists of one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable—as in **BEAT beat.** e.g. *color*

- **Anapestic** rhythm, one unit of which is called an **anapest**, consists of two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable—as in **beat beat BEAT.** e.g. *interject*

- **Dactylic** rhythm, one unit of which is called a **dactyl**, consists of one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables—as in **BEAT beat beat.** e.g. *following*

- **Spondaic** rhythm, one unit of which is called a **spondee**, consists of two stressed syllables—as in **BEAT BEAT.** e.g. *tom-tom*

The number of repetitions of a rhythmic pattern within a line is identified as follows:

- **monometer—one**

- **dimeter—two**

- **trimeter—three**
- **tetrameter—four**
- **pentameter—five**
- **hexameter—six**
- **heptameter—seven**
- **octameter—eight**

Examples

- But the touch / of the hand / and the sound / of the voice
  **Anapestic tetrameter** (because there are four anapests in the line)

- We passed / the School, / where Child / -ren strove
  At re / -cess—in / the Ring—
  We passed / the Fields / of Gaz / -ing Grain—
  We passed / the Sett / -ing Sun
  **Iambic tetrameter** in lines 1 and 3 (because there are four iambs in each line)
  **Iambic trimeter** in lines 2 and 4 (because there are three iambs in each line)

- I will / labor / for Thy / Kingdom,
  Help our / lads to / win the / war,
  Send white / feathers / to the / cowards,
  Join the / Women's / Army / Corps.
  **Trochaic tetrameter** (because there are four trochees in each line, though the pattern is broken slightly at the end of lines 2 and line 4)

- Love's not / Time's fool, / though ro / -sy lips / and cheeks
  Within / his bend / -ing sick / -le's com / -pass come.
  **Iambic pentameter** (because there are five iambs in each line).

**The following verse by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a handy device for remembering the four principal rhythms of English poetry:**

Trochee / trips from / long to / short. **(trochaic)**
From long / to long / in sol / -emn sort, **(iambic)**
Slow spon / -dee stalks: / strong foot! / yet ill / able **(spondaic in first four measures, or feet)**
Ever to / come up with / dactyl tri / syllable. **(dactylic)**
Iam / -bics march / from short / to long. **(iambic)**
With a leap / and a bound / the swift An / -apests throng. **(anapestic)**
One sylla / -ble long, with / one short at / each side **(amphibrachs in first three feet)**
Amphibrach / is haste with / a stately / stride. **(amphibrach)**

Of course it's easier to read without the accents marked. Here it is:

Trochee trips from long to short.
From long to long in solemn sort,

Slow spondee stalks: strong foot! yet ill able
Ever to come up with dactyl trisyllable.
Iambics march from short to long.
With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng.
One syllable long, with one short at each side
Amphibrach is haste with a stately stride.

- **Blank verse**
  **—poetic lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter.** It is the most common metrical form in English poetry and is said to most closely approximate the usual dominant rhythm of ordinary English speech. Here is a brief passage of blank verse from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure:*

  Thus can the demi-god, Authority,
  Make us pay down for our offence by weight.
  The words of heaven: "On whom it will, it will;
  On whom it will not, so"; Yet still 'tis just.

- **Free verse**
  **—poetic lines without obvious patterns in meter, rhyme, line length, or stanza form.** The following poem, "General Delivery, South River, Ontario" by Fiona Leckenby, is written in free verse:

  when it is dawn
  he wakes up
  eyes open
  quickly
  slowly
  he remembers
  in the
  thaw
  between lines
  he is pacing

  behind the door from kettle to sock
  a word drops
  behind the window sock to coffee cup

  under the roof
  with the shade
  and bulb

  he
  holds
  it all
  together
  with thin
  thread
  movement
  the sweater
  with the shirt still inside
  plaid colors woven
  and a coarse veil

  he opens the door

when everything is done
when he has dressed
and smoked
the radio quiet
he opens the door

there is an unsailable ocean

swelling from the doorstep

it is bridged by trains

north south

islanded by trees

fished by birds

when he breathes
it is cold

my dad
lives—
in a place
I have

never seen

**Rising action**

**—following the initial incident, it is the series of complications that lead up to the climax and resolution of a narrative.**

**Romanticism**

**—a literary mode in which subjectivity and imaginative, sensual responses to life are prized over objectivity, rules, logic, and fact.**

**Satire**

**—a form of writing (in either narrative or non-narrative forms) in which the writer holds up to ridicule and contempt the weaknesses and wrongdoings of individuals, groups, institutions, or humanity in general.** Although satire commonly makes use of the same devices employed in caricature and parody, it seeks to do more than merely mock people for the sake of mockery. The aim of the satirist is to set a moral standard for society, and he attempts to persuade the reader to see his point of view through the force of laughter. Many sketch-comedy shows, such as *Saturday Night Live* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus,* often present satirical scenes. And news-parody works, such as *The John Stewart Show* (on TV) or *The Onion* (in print and on the web—see http://www.theonion.com/), are also grounded in satire. Perhaps the most famous satirical narrative in English literature is Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift is also the author of various satirical essays, one of which follows at the end of the glossary (see "Appendix 3—'A Modest Proposal' by Jonathan Swift").

**Scene**

**—one of the units of action within an act of a drama**. An act may consist of any number of scenes. New scenes are typically signaled by obvious changes in action—for example, changes in time or place, or the entrances or exits of significant characters. In some works, both old and modern, scene divisions are formally marked and numbered. More commonly, though, especially in modern plays, scenes blend into each other without obvious indications made by playwrights or editors.

**Setting**

**—the time and place in which the events in a narrative occur.** A setting may serve simply as the physical background of a work, or, when established by a skillful writer, it may generate strong mood values and provide key symbolic details that support the work's theme(s).

**Simile**

**—an explicit (obvious) comparison; one quantity is directly said to be similar to another**.

Examples

- Hard and serious, like a young bear, inside his teller's cage. (Alden Nowlan)
- He'd fly but as a god toward the sun. (Irving Layton)
- The stream as frothed and gold as lager. (Jack Matthews)

**Soliloquy**

**—in drama, an extended speech delivered by a character alone onstage.** Here the character reveals directly to the audience the kind of thoughts and feelings that he is not likely to reveal to any other character in the play. One of the most famous soliloquies in English dramatic literature is Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow" speech, in which he expresses a profoundly bitter vision of life:

> Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

**Stanza forms**

- **Ballad stanza**
  **—a type of four-line stanza common in folk ballads.** The first and third lines have four stressed words or syllables; the second and fourth lines (which also contain end-rhymes) have three stresses. Ballad meter is usually iambic. The number of unstressed syllables in each line may vary. Here is a ballad stanza from the Scottish folk ballad "Get Up and Bar the Door":

Then by the door, there came two gentlemen,
  At twelve o'clock at night,
And they could neither see house nor hall,
  Nor coal nor candlelight.

- **Couplet**
  **—two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme.** When these lines are written in iambic pentameter, they are together called a **heroic couplet.** In the plays of Shakespeare, a scene is often closed with a heroic couplet, as in these scene-enders from *Macbeth:*

  Away, and mock the time with fairest show;
  False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

  Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
  That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

  Make all our trumpets speak; give them breath—
  Those clamorous harbingers of blood and death.

- **Octave**
  **—an eight-line poem or stanza.** *Octave* often refers to the first eight lines of an Italian sonnet. In the sonnet below (Wyatt's "My Galley Charged with Forgetfulness"), note that no division is marked between the first eight lines and the last six lines; nevertheless, the first eight lines are called the octave, and the last six are called the sestet.

  My galley, chargèd with forgetfulness
  Through sharp seas in winter nights doth pass
  'Tween rock and rock; and eke mine enemy, alas,
  That is my lord, steereth with cruelness,
  And every oar a thought in readiness,
  As though that death were light in such a case.
  An endless wind doth tear the sail apace
  Of forcèd sighs and trusty fearfulness.
  A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,
  Hath done the wearied cords great hinderance;
  Wreathèd with error and eke with ignorance.
  The stars be hid that led me to this pain;
  Drownèd is reason that should me consort,
  And I remain despairing of the port.

- **Ottava Rima**
  **—a form of eight-line stanza written in iambic pentameter and with a rhyme scheme of *abababcc.*** Lord Byron's *Don Juan* is written in ottava rima. Here is one of its stanzas:

  But I, being fond of true philosophy,
    Say very often to myself, "Alas!
  All things that have been born were born to die,
    And flesh (which Death mows down to hay) is grass;
  You've passed your youth not so unpleasantly.
    And if you had it o'er again—'twould pass!
  So thank your stars that matters are no worse.
  And read your Bible, sir, and mind your purse."

- **Quatrain**

**—a group of four lines of verse following any one of various rhyme schemes—for example, *abab, abba,* or *abcb.*** Commonly the term *quatrain* refers to a stanza within a poem, but it may also refer to a complete poem made up of four grouped lines. Here's a quatrain, in a rhyme scheme of *abab* from William Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal":

A slumber did my spirit seal;
  I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
  The touch of earthly years.

- **Refrain**
  **—a word, phrase, line, or group of lines repeated regularly in a poem, usually at the end of each stanza.** Refrains are common in ballads and other kinds of narrative poems to create a songlike rhythm, to help build suspense, or to emphasize an important idea. The following work, a song with obvious refrains, is from Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It:*

  It was a lover and his lass,
    With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonny no,
  That o'er the green cornfield did pass
    In the springtime, the only pretty ringtime,
  When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding:
  Sweet lovers love the spring.

  Between the acres of the rye,
    With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonny no,
  These pretty country folks would lie,
    In the springtime, the only pretty ringtime,
  When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding:
  Sweet lovers love the spring.

  This carol they began that hour,
    With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonny no,
  How that a life was but a flower
    In the springtime, the only pretty ringtime,
  When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding:
  Sweet lovers love the spring.

  And therefore take the present time,
    With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonny no,
  For love is crowned with the prime
    In the springtime, the only pretty ringtime,
  When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding:
  Sweet lovers love the spring.

- **Sestet**
  **—a six-line poem or stanza.** Often the term *sestet* is used to refer to the last six lines of an Italian sonnet, even though the separation between sestet and octave is often not marked by a break in the poem's layout in print. [See the example under **Octave**.]

- **Terza Rima**
  **—an Italian verse form consisting of a series of three-line stanzas in which the middle line of each stanza rhymes with the first and third lines of the following stanza, as follows: *aba bcb cdc,* etc.** This pattern is also called interlocking rhyme. The terza rima form is used in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." Here's a passage from it:

  Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:

What if my leaves are falling like its own!
What if the tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit!  Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy!  O wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

**Stream of consciousness**

**—a mode of narration in which the writer tries to capture the scope and flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations**. Here is a sample of stream-of-consciousness narration from James Joyce's *Ulysses,* a passage in which a character wanders along a Dublin street, observing and musing:

Pineapple rock, lemon platt, butter scotch. A sugar-sticky girl
shoveling scoopfuls of creams for a christian brother. Some school
treat. Bad for their tummies. Lozenge and comfit manufacturer to
His Majesty the King. God. Save. Our. Sitting on his throne,
sucking red jujubes white.

**Style**

**—the general texture of a work or a writer's distinctive voice—the way that he expresses ideas by the use of diction, tone, figurative language, etc.**

**Subjective tone**

**—a term describing writing in which the writer expresses personal beliefs or thoughts.** When writing subjectively, one is not bound to strict logic or unambiguous expression.

**Subplot**

**—in the context of a larger story, it is a smaller complex of action that makes up a secondary story.** A subplot may be an interesting story in itself, but its principal function is to enhance our understanding of the main plot of the narrative.

**Surrealism**

**—a movement among modern artists influenced by Freudian theories and concerned with the subconscious mind as it reveals itself in dreams.** Surrealism deals in areas regarded as beyond the control of the conscious, rational mind, and its materials are presented according to dream (or nightmare) logic, which is what most of us would ordinarily regard as utterly *il*logical. Surrealism is often associated with seriously dark and unsettling works, but can be employed in whimsical contexts too—for instance, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass;* though these works are narrated in conventional ways, and their protagonist, Alice, is eminently rational, many of the stories' images and actions may be deemed surreal.

**Suspense**

**—the quality of a narrative that makes the reader, in any degree, uncertain or tense about the outcome of events.** To be in suspense is to be asking *What will happen next?* Defined in this way, we might say that the term *suspense* can be loosely applied to non-narrative works as well. For instance, when we are interested to know what will be the culminating impact of a series of images in a poem, or when we are curious to know what turns an essay's argument will take, we are roughly in a state of suspense.

**Symbol**

**—an element in a work that represents something other than what it literally is.** *Conventional symbols* (e.g. *water = life* or *white = purity*) are generally acknowledged as having standard values in various works. *Contextual symbols* are those developed within a work and having a meaning specific to that work. For example, in his essay "The Bird and the Snake," Loren Eisely endows huge slabs of rock with symbolic weight; in the context of his essay, the rocks stand for the condition of permanence in the universe, contrasting the brief lifespan of humans.

**Symbolism**

**—a literary movement that arose in France in the last half of the nineteenth century and that greatly influenced many English writers, particularly poets of the twentieth century; its essential idea is that certain mysterious feelings and ideas can be communicated only through symbols that represent and evoke those meanings.** "Sailing to Byzantium" by Irish poet W. B. Yeats is an example of symbolist writing. [Note incidentally that the poem's stanzas are examples of *ottava rima.*]

**Sailing to Byzantium**[1]

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,[2]
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,[3]
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling[4]
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

[1] **Byzantium:** now Istanbul, Turkey, the ancient seat of the Eastern Roman Empire and the Greek Christian Church. For Yeats, it symbolized a unification of artistic and spiritual values.
[2] **sages . . . wall:** Wise men and saints are depicted in gold mosaic on the walls of Byzantine churches in Ravenna, Italy, and Sicily, which Yeats had visited in 1924.
[3] **perne in a gyre:** spin in a spiraling motion. A *pern* is a spool. For Yeats, this is an image of historical cycles.
[4] **such . . . enameling:** Yeats wrote, "I have read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang."

**Synaesthesia**

**—a figure of speech in which one kind of sensory response is fused with another.** For example, an odor might be described in terms of a color, as in the observation made by John Proctor (a character in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*), "Lilacs have a purple smell." Or a sound might be described in terms of color and touch, as is seen when Thomas Mendip (of Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning*) says, "I am sure that yellow and wet whistling was a blackbird." John Keats uses synaesthesia in his poem "Ode to a Nightingale" when he calls for a drink of cool wine "Tasting of Flora and the country green / Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth." Here, tasting is represented in terms of sight ("Flora"), color ("the country green"), motion ("Dance"), sound ("Provencal song"), and heat ("sunburnt mirth").

**Syntax**

**—the ordering of sequences of words into phrases, clauses, and sentences.**

One of the first considerations in discussing the syntax of a passage is sentence length. The effectiveness of sentences and the passages they comprise depends partly on their lengths and levels of complexity. Rhythm, tone, and readability (i.e. the ease or difficulty with which a passage is understood at first reading) are all affected by sentence length. For example, a passage built mainly of short, simple sentences is likely to have an insistent, predictable rhythm, a staccato beat; accordingly, its tone is likely to be one of practicality or urgency; and it will probably have a degree of easy readability. Conversely, a selection made mostly of long, complicated sentences tends to a legato beat, more slow moving, even ponderous; its tone may lean to the pensive or didactic; and it is likely to be less readable than a passage with varied sentence lengths.

Sentence lengths can be classified in simple terms:

- **telegraphic**: shorter than five words
- **short**: about five words
- **medium**: about eighteen words
- **long/involved**: thirty or more words

You should also be able to identify different sentence types. To do so will bring extra weight to your discussions of syntax in given passages. More importantly, though, an awareness of sentence types will bring rhythm and variety to your own writing. [Note that some of the terms in the following section appear elsewhere in the glossary.]

- **Loose sentence**
  **—the main idea (i.e. the subject and verb of the sentence) comes first; then details are added.**

  We reached Montreal / that night / after a rough flight / and some hair-raising experiences.

  [Note that the continual use of loose sentences will make your writing sound simplistic and rhythmically tedious.]

- **Periodic sentence**
  **—the main idea is delayed until the end of the sentence, following the minor details.**

  That night, after a rough flight and some hair-raising experiences, we reached Montreal.

  [Note that this version of the sentence, by comparison with the loose version above, is climactic and emphatic; the details build to create suspense in the sentence.]

- **Parallel sentence**
  **—the items in a series are put in the same grammatical form.**

  John and Jane had *a heavenly wedding*, *an earthly marriage*, and *a hellish divorce*.

  [Note that occasionally writers will deliberately break parallelism to draw emphasis to a point or to suggest subtly a condition of disorder or anomaly. Your own objective writing should always follow the principle of parallel structure when you have two or more phrases in a series.]

- **Balanced sentence**
  **—two complementary or congruent ideas are expressed in perfect parallelism (often separated by a semi-colon).**

  He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

- **Antithetical sentence**
  **—two opposite ideas are set in strong contrast to each other (may or may not be expressed in balanced form).**

  A wedding is a taste of heaven; a divorce is a glut of hell. (syntactically balanced)
  OR
  A marriage is made in heaven, but divorce makes for a helluva time. (syntactically unbalanced)

  To err is human; to forgive, divine. (second independent clause is **elliptical**)

- **Inverted sentence**
  **—the usual subject-verb order of the sentence is reversed to the less common verb-subject order (sometimes gives a quality of formality, forced lyricism, or archaism).**

    Tender is the night.

    Blessed are the meek.

    Gone are the days of wine and roses.

- **Juxtaposition**
  **—ideas or images not commonly associated are set together, for the effect of irony.**

    He was the most hideous creature imaginable, and she couldn't have loved him more.

    They were foolish, mulish, religious donkeys.

    Her heart is a crystal toy; his mind, a ticking bomb.

- **Rhetorical question**
  **—a question that does not invite an answer; it has the effect of a strong statement (sometimes punctuated with an exclamation point rather than a question mark).**

    Are we not men?

    Fools, have you not eyes to see, ears to hear!

    Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

**Theme**

**—a statement that concisely summarizes the principal idea(s) that a writer is trying to express through his work, it is a sentence that expresses a broad truth about human nature or behavior—truth, that is, from the writer's point of view.** In the case of a short story, it is derived from a consideration of the various elements of the story but expressed without reference *to* the story. Therefore, one would not say of "The Three Little Pigs," for example, that its theme is this: *The third little pig survives because he has the foresight and good sense to build a house strong enough to withstand the assault of the wolf*. As well, a theme is always offered as a descriptive, not a prescriptive, statement; that is, the critic must not moralize or make rules about how humans ought to live their lives. One would not, for instance, offer a truism like the following as a theme for "The Three Little Pigs": *In life, a person should always be prepared for the assaults of unexpected and powerful forces*. Still, each of the preceding would-be statements of theme has the core of something correct, and a bit of blending and revision of the two would stand a suitable statement of theme for "The Three Little Pigs." Something like this: *Foresight and good sense can be helpful in defending against unexpected and powerful forces*.

**Thesis**

**—the controlling idea of a non-fiction prose work**. Sometimes the thesis is stated directly, usually in the opening paragraph; sometimes the statement of the thesis is delayed until later in the body or in the conclusion; sometimes the thesis is not directly stated but implied.

**Tone**

**—the implied attitude of the writer or persona toward his subject matter or audience.** Speakers have attitudes toward themselves, their subjects, and their audiences—and, intentionally or intuitively, they choose their words, pitches, and modulations accordingly. These heard qualities, in concert, all add up to a speaker's tone. In a writer's address, however, tone must be detected without the aid of the ear (though it's a good idea to read works aloud, trying to approximate the "right" tone of voice); that is, the reader must understand the way—whether playfully, pompously, confidently, sarcastically, or whatever—a piece is meant to be heard. The reader must catch what Robert Frost calls "the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination." Sometimes it seems that we merely *sense* the tone of a passage; we don't know *why* the tone is what it is, but we do know *what* it is. In fact, though, we are responding, if only unconsciously, to deliberate choices made by the writer. The trick, of course, for the sake of written analysis, is to bring unconscious awareness to consciousness, and that is achieved in part by considering the sentence constructions of a passage. But many readers feel that a more fruitful approach to analyzing tone is to look at a writer's diction (i.e. his individual word choices).

Especially important in your discussion of tone is to identify *whose* tone is apparent:

- In the case of essays and other non-fiction prose, which are almost always delivered in the voices of their authors, or in the case of poems whose speakers are the poets themselves, you are talking about the **writer's** or **essayist's** or **poet's tone.**
- For poems that are written "in character," you are discussing the **speaker's tone**.
- Drama, which takes the form of monologue or dialogue, sees you commenting on the **character's tone**.
- Prose fiction (novels and short stories)—whether the point of view is first-, second-, or third-person—requires that you refer to **the narrator's tone**.

**Topic**

**—the subject of a work.** Be careful not to confuse the topic of a work—i.e. what it's about—with the argument or thesis of the work—i.e. the position the writer takes in regard to his topic.

**Topic sentence**

**—a sentence that contains the main idea of the paragraph in which it appears.** It usually appears as the first sentence of the paragraph, though it may appear later; sometimes the main idea of a paragraph is only implied.

**Tragedy**

**—a narrative work in which the content is meant to provoke thoughtful reflection on the most profound experiences of the human condition, and involving actions that turn out disastrously for the protagonist.** The structure of a tragedy, whether classical or modern, may be broadly discussed in terms of three phases: *purpose, passion,* and *reconciliation.*

- **Purpose**

A tragedy typically begins with a crisis—a challenge to the hero's mettle (i.e. physical, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual strength). For example, in *Macbeth,* the Weird Sisters deliver prophesies that stir Macbeth's ambition. In *Hamlet*, the young prince must avenge his murdered father. And in *Oedipus Rex,* Oedipus is charged with ridding Thebes of the plague that besets it. At this inciting, or initial, incident the hero takes his stand, for good or ill, against the established order, an order of either divine or human design. He is a man (there are few women who are tragic heroes in classical drama) of pride and stature who is willing to assert himself out of his own free will. But his stand is taken at a terrible price: the immediate price is isolation (though from this isolation he gains his identity, a variation on the Promised Land theme in mythology); the ultimate price is destruction (though this destruction affirms his nobility and assures his immortality). Insofar as a man is able to courageously assert himself and his belief in the rightness of his actions apart from the established order, he becomes a tragic hero. He is no mere victim for whom we feel simple sympathy when he dies. Rather, he is an admirably audacious Prometheus stealing fire from Olympus, and when he dies and is figuratively reborn, we die and rise with him. This idea is not new to the Christian who looks in faith to Christ, who may be read in some measure as the tragic hero of the Gospel narratives. Various conditions may drive the hero to his self-assertion—love, duty, pride (also called hubris), arrogance, ambition, foolishness, emulation (as in the saints' emulation of Christ or in John Merrick's emulation of the "ideal man")—but it is his strength of will in which we glory, his free choice to risk all for his belief.

- **Passion**

  Before he achieves reconciliation, the tragic hero endures tremendous suffering and struggle, through which he must question the basis of his own being and see the foundation of his world shaken. Hamlet, for instance, sees that "the time is out of joint," and seriously considers committing suicide. But of course the hero cannot take the easy way out; he is after all fighting for his soul. His only commitment can be to his yet-undiscovered identity. And even in the resolving of events, when the hero looks with direct eyes on his own death, he goes bravely into battle; "Bear-like [he] must fight the course."

- **Reconciliation**

  This is the phase of clarity—when the meaning becomes clear, when the trial reaches judgment and sentence, when the isolated man becomes reconciled to the world he has opposed. By his suffering he has learned to be both an individual and a part of the universe that he has opposed or that has opposed him. He sees no longer chaos but order. He knows in effect that he "had it coming," and recognizes that fate in its indirect, apparently cruel way has a dependable moral order. And broken though he is, he accepts his fate with dignity and serenity. Through the deep humility of suffering, the tragic hero achieves his epiphany and finds a bond with all of suffering humanity. It is at this moment that a hero like John Merrick can say, in echo to Christ, "It is finished."

**Transitions**

**—words, phrases, sentences, sometimes whole paragraphs, that relate ideas in sequence to each other.** Here is a list of some common transitional devices that can be used to cue your reader in a given way.

- **To Add:**
  and, again, and then, besides, equally important, finally, further, furthermore, nor, too, next, lastly, what's more, moreover, in addition, first (second etc.),

- **To Compare:**
  whereas, but, yet, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary, by comparison, where, compared to, up against, balanced against, but, although, conversely, meanwhile, after all, in contrast, although this may be true

- **To Prove:**

because, for, since, for the same reason, obviously, evidently, furthermore, moreover, besides, indeed, in fact, in addition, in any case, that is

- **To Show Exception:**
  yet, still, however, nevertheless, in spite of, despite, of course, once in a while, sometimes

- **To Show Time:**
  immediately, thereafter, soon, after a few hours, finally, then, later, previously, formerly, first (second, etc.), next, and then

- **To Repeat:**
  in brief, as I have said, as I have noted, as has been noted

- **To Emphasize:**
  definitely, extremely, obviously, in fact, indeed, in any case, absolutely, positively, naturally, surprisingly, always, forever, perennially, eternally, never, emphatically, unquestionably, without a doubt, certainly, undeniably, without reservation

- **To Show Sequence:**
  first (second, etc.), next, then, following this, at this time, now, at this point, after, afterward, subsequently, finally, consequently, previously, before this, simultaneously, concurrently, thus, therefore, hence, next, and then, soon

- **To Give an Example:**
  for example, for instance, in this case, in another case, on this occasion, in this situation, take the case of, to demonstrate, to illustrate, as an illustration, to illustrate

- **To Summarize or Conclude:**
  in brief, on the whole, summing up, to conclude, in conclusion, as I have shown, as I have said, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently

**Understatement**

**—a form of irony (usually verbal irony) in which an image or idea is given emphasis by having less importance attached to it than we might normally expect.** It is striking, for instance, to hear someone say, "One nuclear bomb can ruin your whole day" or "Yes, this World War II stuff was nasty business, wouldn't you say?" Also, the powerful situational irony with which "Richard Cory" concludes is a good example of understatement.

Examples

You, of course, are a rose,
But were always a rose.
(Robert Frost)

Travelling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason
—her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

(William Stafford)

**Unity**

**—a principle of writing founded on the idea that each part of a work should relate to a single purpose.**

**Verisimilitude**

**—that quality in a literary work that makes it seem believable**—as though what happens in the fictional world of the work could just as well have taken place in real life.