

AP ENGLISH GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

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ABSTRACT DICTION: See **DICTION**

ACTION: The bare events in a story. Action should not be confused with plot. Plot includes the meaning and purpose of the events. The action in *Hamlet*, for example, simply begins with the guards' visitation by the Ghost and ends with the carrying out of the dead Hamlet. The plot involves Hamlet's attempt to avenge a murder which took place before the play even begins.

ALLEGORY: An extended story which carries a deeper meaning below the surface. The story makes sense on a literal level but also conveys another more important meaning. The deeper meaning is usually spiritual, moral or political. An allegory (character, setting or action) is one-dimensional: it stands for only one thing. Parables, fables and satires are all forms of allegory. Famous allegories include: Dante's, *Divine Comedy*; Bunyan's, *Pilgrim's Progress*; and C.S. Lewis's, *Chronicles of Narnia*.

ALLITERATION: A literary device which creates interest by the recurrence of initial consonant sounds of different words within the same sentence, e.g.: the "s" and "h" sounds in: "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14b). Shakespeare uses alliteration liberally, e.g.: "malicious mockery" (*HAMLET*, 1.2); "Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brief" (*MND*, 3.1) The repetition calls attention to the phrase and fixes it in the reader's mind, and so is useful for emphasis as well as art.

ALLUSION: A literary device which creates interests through a brief, indirect reference (not a quotation) to another literary work, usually for the purpose of associating the tone or theme of the one work with the other. Many of the allusions in T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Wasteland*, refer to the Bible and to Milton's, *Paradise Lost*. Shakespeare's plays are full of Biblical allusions; e.g.: "It out-herods Herod" (*HAMLET*, 3.2); "But on this travail look for greater birth" ("*Measure for Measure*," cf. Matt. 7:1-2); "Come lady, die to live" (the Friar to Leonato and Hero in *Much Ado*, 4.1.212; 252; cf. "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" Jn. 12:24).

AMBIGUITY: When, for a higher purpose, an author intentionally suggests more than one, and sometimes contradictory, interpretations of a situation. When the different meanings are not intentional, they are considered to be "vague," rather than ambiguous. The character of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is ambiguous enough to have justified a wide range of conflicting literary interpretations, ranging all the way from villain to victim. This uncertainty adds interest and urgency to the play.

ANALOGY: A comparison between two things, or pairs of things, to reveal their similarities; sometimes expressed as a **SIMILE**, e.g.: "His head was like the dome of a cathedral." William Paley proposed the famous analogy in which he compared the world to a finely tuned watch, and argued that a watch (designed) requires a watchmaker (designer).

ANALYTICAL ESSAY: See **ESSAY**

ANAPHORA: Repeated words or phrases used to emphasize a point, especially at the beginning of successive sentences or paragraphs. Jesus used anaphora in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said" (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).

ANTAGONIST: The character in a story who opposes the hero, or protagonist. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the protagonist is Don John; in *Othello*, it is Iago.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM: A literary technique in which the author gives human characteristics to non-human objects, e.g. the speaking animals in the *Chronicles of Narnia* (C. S. Lewis), the Wind in the Willows (Kenneth Grahame), or the stories of Beatrix Potter.

APHORISM: A short, pithy and instructive statement of truth; e.g. "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton, 1887). From the Greek: "to speak out;" pron.: AF-or-izm. Also called a maxim, or apothegm (pron.: APP-eh-them). The Bible is full of aphorisms, e.g.: "pride goes before a fall" (Prov. 16:18); "a house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mt. 12:25); "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Mk. 4:24); "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mk.14:38); "let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Mt. 6:34).

APOSTROPHE: A literary device which consists of a rhetorical pause or digression to address a person (distant or absent) directly, e.g. "Save me ... ye heavenly guards!" (HAMLET); "O Come Sisters Three [the 3 Fates], come, come to me" (Thisby, MND, 5.1); "O my swineherd!" (ODYSSEY). From the Greek: "to turn away;" pron.: ah-PAW-stroh-fee.

ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY: See ESSAY

ASSONANCE: The close repetition of similar vowel sounds, in successive or proximate words, usually in stressed syllables. For example, there is assonance in every line of the popular nursery rhyme: "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are! Up above the world so high, Like a diamond in the sky."

BLANK VERSE: Unrhymed poetry written in iambic pentameter (See: METER).

BOOK REVIEW: See ESSAY

CATASTROPHE: The tragic conclusion of a story or play. The concluding action of a drama, especially a classical tragedy, following the climax and containing a resolution of the plot. For example, the catastrophe in Sophocles' play, Oedipus Rex, is the scene where Oedipus appears, just before his exile, and having just gouged out his eyes (as a way of punishing himself for what has happened). The point of catastrophe in a tragedy typically includes the death or moral destruction of the protagonist. The catastrophe in Shakespeare's tragedies always occurs in Act 5, and always includes the death of the protagonist. Consider the fates of Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, King Lear, and Othello.

CHARACTER: A character is a person (or a non-human with a human personality, as with Aslan and many of the creatures in the Chronicles of Narnia) in a literary work. Character can also refer to the particular, unique traits of a person in a literary work. **CHARACTERIZATION** is the way in which an author presents and defines characters. A "flat character" is one who is stereotypical and lacks interest. A "round character" is one who is presented in greater depth, interest and detail. A character who does not undergo any change is called a "static character" (e.g., Tiny Tim in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"), while a character who undergoes some sort of trans-formation is called a "dynamic character" (e.g., Scrooge in the same work).

CHIASM: From Greek: "X-shaped; pron.: KEYE-az'm) A literary structure used by Homer and other writers, including some Biblical authors, in which parallel ideas are first stated in one order, and then repeated in reverse order. The most important point is placed in the middle, just before the reversal, to emphasize its importance. Notice how the covenant of circumcision sits in the middle of the following chiasm, like a pivot, or central idea, in Gen. 17:1-25:

- A Abram's age (1a)
- B The LORD appears to Abram (1b)
- C God's first speech (1b-2)
- D Abram falls on his face (3)
- E God's second speech (Abram's name changed, kings; 4-8)
- X God's Third Speech (the covenant of circumcision; 9-14)
- E' God's fourth speech (Sarai's name changed, kings; 15-16)
- D' Abraham falls on his face (17-18)

- C' God's fifth speech (19-21)
- B' God "goes up" from Abraham (22)
- A' Abraham's age (24-25)

Another example of chiasm is in Homer's Iliad, when Diomedes warns Glaucus not to act proud or irreverent toward the gods. The central point of the chiasm is the story of the foolish Lycurgus, who thought that he could fight the gods, and ended his life in misery (Book 6.142-168).

CLIMAX: The decisive moment and the turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story. This is the crucial part of the drama, the part which determines the outcome of the conflict. In Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" the climax occurs at the end of Marc Antony's speech to the Roman public. The climax represents the point of greatest tension or the breaking point. In Othello the climax occurs when Othello realizes his wife's innocence and what a horrible thing he's just done. Sometimes the point of climax is a matter of debate. For example, in Hamlet some think it occurs when Hamlet confirms that Claudius was his father's killer in Act 3, Sc. 2. Others think it occurs when he stabs Polonius in Act 3, Sc. 4. Still others say that it occurs when he finally kills Claudius, near the end of the play in Act 5, Sc. 2. What do you think?

CONCEIT: An unusual, elaborate or startling analogy; a poetic literary device which was common among the Metaphysical poets of the 17th century. A famous example is the metaphor used by John Donne in his poem, "The Flea," in which he pleads with his mistress not to leave him. He argues that she can save their relationship if she will just refuse to kill a flea: "Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare." Shakespeare satirized this literary device in Sonnet 130: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips' red."

CONCRETE DICTION: See **DICTION**

CONFLICT: The struggle between opposing forces that provides the central action and interest in any literary plot. The struggle between the Capulet and Montague families in Romeo and Juliet is a classic example of conflict. This conflict creates interest and presents a challenge or obstacle which cries to be overcome. In Homer's Odyssey, the conflict consists in a long series of obstacles which the hero must overcome in order to be reunited with his wife and son.

CONNOTATION: A literary device: a suggested, implied or evocative meaning. For example, an author may use the figurative meaning of a word for its effect upon the reader, as in the line: "he hath turned a heaven unto a hell!" The word "heaven" is used to designate a place of peace and joy, while "hell" is used to express agony and distress (Hermia, MND, I.1). In the line: "Dost thou look up?" the speaker is really asking: Are you looking for help from above, i.e. from heaven? (Leonato to the Friar in Much Ado, 4.1) [Compare: **DENOTATION**]

CONTEXT: Anything beyond the specific words of a literary work that may be relevant to the meaning of a literary work. Contexts may be economic, religious, social, cultural, historical, literary, biographical, etc. For example, in Shakespeare, contexts include the political rule of Queen Elizabeth and King James; the religious context of Calvinism; the social context of rivalry between the sexes; and the literary context of Renaissance literature. Awareness of these contexts is important for understanding and interpreting Shakespeare and almost every kind of literature.

DECONSTRUCTION: A movement in literary criticism which denies that literature has any objective, enduring, or universal meaning (cf. nihilism). The reduction of literary meaning to political motives, power struggles and subjective emotions.

DENOTATION: A literary device. The author uses an explicit or literal meaning of a word in order to emphasize a specific, important fact; e.g. "How now, my love! Why is your cheek so pale?" [lacking color and indicating fear or distress] (Lysander to Hermia, MND, I.1); "to marry," as "to officiate a wedding

ceremony," as opposed to "getting married" (Claudio to the Friar, *Much Ado*, 4.1). Sometimes an author will use the same word twice, first in a literal sense (denotation) and then in a figurative sense (connotation), e.g.: "His mock [insult] shall mock out [destroy] dear husbands" (*Henry V*, 1.2). [See CONNOTATION]

DENOUEMENT: From the French: "unknotting" (pron.: "day-new-MAW"). The final outcome or unraveling of the main dramatic complications in a play, novel, or other work of literature. Denouement is usually the final scene or chapter in which any necessary, and, as yet unmade, clarifications are made. It sometimes involves an explanation of secrets or misunderstandings. In *Hamlet*, the denouement takes place after the catastrophe of Hamlet's death. The stage is littered with corpses. Prince Fortinbras makes an entrance and Horatio speaks his sweet lines in praise of Hamlet. His words bring relief and comfort: "Good night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (5.2). In the drama *Othello*, there is a plot to deceive Othello into believing that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful to him. As a result of this plot, Othello kills his wife out of jealousy, the climax of the play. The denouement occurs soon after, when Emilia, who was Desdemona's mistress, proves to Othello that his wife was in fact honest, true, and faithful to him. Emilia reveals to Othello that her husband, Iago, had plotted against Desdemona and tricked Othello into believing that she had been unfaithful. Iago kills Emilia in front of Othello, and she dies telling Othello his wife was innocent. As a result of being mad with grief, Othello plunges a dagger into his own heart. Understanding the denouement helps the reader to see how the final end of a story unfolds, and how the structure of stories works to affect our emotions.

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY: See ESSAY

DEUS EX MACHINA: A plot device dating back to ancient Greek drama, when a conflict was resolved through a means that seems unrelated to the story (e.g. when a god suddenly appeared, without warning, and solves everything). The term is used negatively, as a criticism, when an author's solution to a conflict seems artificial, forced, improbable, clumsy or otherwise unjustified. From Latin: "God out of the machine" (pron.: "DEH-oos eks MAW-kih-naw).

DIALOGUE: The lines which are spoken by, or between, the characters in a narrative. The dialogue is important to reveal their CHARACTERIZATION and/or advance the PLOT. The dialogue may take place in a play, essay, story, or novel. Some literary works takes the form of such a discussion (e.g., Plato's *Republic*). In plays, dialogue often includes references to changes in the setting. Noticing such details is particularly important in classical drama and in Shakespeare's plays since explicit stage directions are often missing.

DICTION: The distinctive vocabulary of a particular author. "Concrete diction" refers to a use of words which are specific and "show" the reader a mental picture. "Abstract diction" refers to words which are general and "tell" something, without a picture. Notice the difference: (1) Abstract "Telling"- "Even a large male gorilla, unaccustomed to tourists, is frightened by people;" (2) Concrete "Showing"- "A four-hundred-pound male [gorilla], unaccustomed to tourists, will bolt into the forest, trailing a stream of diarrhea, at the mere sight of a person" (Craig B. Stanford, "Gorilla Warfare;" cited by R. Rambo).

DIGRESSION: A literary device in which the author creates a temporary departure from the main subject or narrative in order to focus on a related matter. There are several famous digressions in Homer, such as the "wall scene" in Book 3 of the *Iliad* when Helen surveys the armies from the top of the Trojan Wall. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* the central plot deals with the two couples: Lysander and Hermia; Demetrius and Helena. Therefore, every scene which switches over to Theseus and Hippolyta, or to Oberon and Titania (and the fairies, etc.), could be considered a "digression."

DOUBLE-ENTENDRE: From the French: "double meaning" (pron.: "DOO-bluh on-TAWN-dreh). A literary device which consists of a double meaning, especially when the second meaning is impolite or risqué. For example, when Guildenstern says: "her [Fortune's] privates we," his words can be interpreted either to mean, "ordinary men" (as in "private soldiers") or as "sexual confidants" (with a pun on "private

parts”).

ELEGY: A meditative poem in the classical tradition of certain Greek and Roman poems, which deals with more serious subject (e.g. justice, fate or providence). It often begins with an appeal to a muse for inspiration and includes ALLUSIONS to classical mythology. Other literary works may include elegiac [ell-leh-JI-ek] motifs, reminding the reader of the transitory nature of life.

EPIC: A long, grand, narrative (story-telling) poem about the brave, exemplary deeds of ancient heroes. A "primary" epic the oldest type, based upon oral tradition; a "literary" epic is written down from the start. Examples of the first type include Homer's, Iliad and the Odyssey, and the Anglo Saxon epic, Beowulf; examples of the second type include Virgil's, the Aeneid, Spenser's, Faerie Queene, and Milton's, Paradise Lost.

EPISTOLARY NOVEL: A novel which takes the form of letters which pass between the main characters; e.g. The Screwtape Letters, by C.S. Lewis.

EPITHET: a picturesque tag or nickname associated with a certain character. Epithets can serve as a mnemonic device to remember and distinguish different characters. Homer also used epithets to fill out the syllables in a line of poetic meter. Most of the important people in the Iliad have a special epithet that serves as an extra name. Athena is the only one described as 'grey-eyed'. Homer often refers to the Greeks 'as the 'well-greaved' or 'brazen-clad Achaeans'. The title, 'lord of men,' is most often given to the leader of the Greek forces, Agamemnon. Achilles receives epithets based on the swiftness of his feet. Odysseus is 'much-suffering' and 'crafty'. Perhaps the most famous epithet in Homer is the one he used for the passage of time, 'rosy-fingered Dawn' (Odyssey, 2.1; cf. Iliad, 8.1; 11.1).

EPONYM: the person for whom something is named, such as the central characters of Hamlet and King Lear, from whom those plays take their titles.

ESSAY (Types): a short work of nonfiction prose in which a writer attempts to fulfill a specific purpose, as represented by the following basic types or forms of essay:

1. analytical essay- an attempt to identify an author's purpose and to evaluate his or her success in achieving it; often used as another name for a book review (See below)
2. argumentative essay- an attempt to convince an audience to think or act in a certain way based upon an appeal to reason (logos)
3. book review- an attempt to introduce an audience to a new or unfamiliar book by combining elements of an expository essay (briefly explaining the setting, main characters, plot), a persuasive essay (making judgments about the quality and importance of the book and sharing your reactions to it), and sometimes an analytical essay (evaluating the author's purpose and success)
4. descriptive essay- an attempt to enable an audience to feel a certain way by using words to create a mood or emotion
5. expository- an attempt to enable an audience to understand something unfamiliar through a clear explanation which sets forth a number of connected facts
6. letter to the editor- an attempt to introduce or respond to a current issue of civil importance by combining elements of an argumentative (rational) and persuasive (emotional) essay in a very brief format (100-150 words).
7. narrative- an attempt to enable an audience to understand something unfamiliar through a compelling story which sets forth a series of connected events
8. persuasive- an attempt to convince an audience to think or act in a certain way based upon emotional appeals (pathos)

EXPOSITORY ESSAY: See ESSAY

FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY: a standard essay format which sets forth the thesis in the first paragraph; supports the thesis in the following three paragraphs; and states the conclusion in the final paragraph.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: Descriptive language in which one thing is associated with another, through the use of **SIMILE**, **METAPHOR**, or **PERSONIFICATION** (e.g. "the man in the moon"). Hamlet refers to the ghost as "a king of shreds and patches."

FORESHADOWING: Hints of future events through unusual circumstances in the present; e.g. the appearance of the ghost at the beginning of Hamlet, the witches in Macbeth, the foul weather in King Lear, or the bird-signs in the Iliad.

FRAME STORY: The literary device of creating a larger story for the purpose of combining a number of shorter stories in a unity; e.g. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

FREE VERSE: A type of poetry which avoids the patterns of regular rhyme or meter. Rhyme may be used, but with great freedom. There is no regular meter or line length. The poet relies instead upon **DICTION**, **IMAGERY** and **SYNTAX** to create a coherent whole. Most contemporary poetry is written in free verse. However, it is not without its detractors. T. S. Eliot once said that: "No verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job," and Robert Frost remarked that writing free verse was like "playing tennis without a net". Free verse is not to be confused with **BLANK VERSE** which, although unrhymed, follows a definite form.

GENRE: A distinct classification in literature. From the Lat., "genus:" "type, kind;" pron.: "Zhawn-reh." A classification according to what different works have in common, in their structure and treatment of a subject. By correctly identifying the genre of a text, we can get a better idea of its author's intention and purpose. We can also deepen our sense of the value of any single text, by allowing us to view it comparatively, alongside other texts of the same type. In ancient Greece and Rome the primary genres were: epic; lyric (ode and ballad); drama (tragedy and comedy) and satire. Today the novel and short story have been added to those major classical genres, as well as numerous minor categories. The literary genres used by the College Board in their AP study guides are the following: autobiography and diary; biography and history; criticism; drama; essay and fiction (novel and short story); expository prose; journalism; political writing; science and nature writing.

HEROIC COUPLET: One of the most common forms of English poetry. It consists of two rhymed lines of iambic pentameter which together express a complete thought. Shakespeare's sonnets typically end with a heroic couplet, e.g.: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee;" (18); "For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds: Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds" (94).

HYPERBOLE: From the Greek; pron.: high-PURR-beh-lee. Exaggeration for effect; e.g. "When sorrows come, they come not single but in battalions" (Hamlet, 4.5)

IMAGERY: The use of words to create pictures. An author can use lively description to create vivid pictures in the mind or appeal to other sensory experience; e.g. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Hamlet, 1.4). Cf. Shakespeare's description of incessant ocean waves to convey the inevitability of death: "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end" (Sonnet 60). Any figures of speech such as **SIMILES** and **METAPHORS** to visualize a mood, idea or **CHARACTER**. Imagery may involve all the senses, but usually involves the sense of sight.

IMAGE-AS-TEXT: The use of pictures to convey messages. This phrase, "image-as-text" refers to the power of pictures and symbols to persuade a reader (or viewer) to accept a certain point of view, or to elicit a response. Think, for example, of the way in which advertising attempts to convey specific messages through commercial images. Remember the maxim: "A picture is worth a thousand words."

INTERPRETATION: The general explanation of the meaning of a literary work. Literary interpretation may take into account any of the other terms in this glossary, especially **THEME**. When applied to poetry, interpretation may also be called "explication." The most familiar example of interpretation is literary criticism.

IRONY: Using a word or situation to mean the opposite of its usual or literal meaning, usually done in humor, sarcasm or disdain; e.g. "It's as easy as lying." A contradiction between what something appears to mean and what it really means. Shakespeare creates a rhetorical (verbal) irony when Hamlet expresses his anger at how quickly his mother married after his father's funeral: "Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral bak'd meats, Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (Hamlet, I.2). His words express praise for the (pretended) economy involved in the swift marriage. The obvious absurdity of this and other, similar ironic comments, convey the depth of Hamlet's grief and anger. Sophocles' created a dramatic or tragic irony in the structure of his play Oedipus Rex. The king exerts himself throughout the play in an effort to find his father's murderer; it turns out that the one he seeks is himself. In literature there are two primary types of irony, as just mentioned:

1. verbal or rhetorical irony, when a character says one thing and means something else (Hamlet).
2. dramatic irony is when an audience perceives something that a character in the literature does not know (Oedipus Rex).

JUXTAPOSITION: The arrangement of two or more ideas, characters, actions, settings, phrases, or words side-by-side or in similar narrative moments for the purpose of comparison, contrast, rhetorical effect, suspense, or character development. In Hamlet the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet creates an opportunity for us to see Hamlet's character development. Ophelia's role serves as a catalyst for Hamlet. Romeo and Juliet is full of structural juxtapositions between light and dark and between age and youth.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: See **ESSAY**

LYRIC: A type of poem which was originally a song meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, the lyre. It was associated with songs of celebration and dancing. Ancient examples include some of the Psalms of David, in the Old Testament, and some of the choral odes in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The **SONNET** is also considered a form of lyric poetry.

MALAPROPISM: A comic misuse of common words; e.g. "Condemned to everlasting redemption" (Much Ado About Nothing, 4.2).

MAXIM: See **APHORISM**

METAPHOR: A figure of speech in which one thing is equated with something else. A comparison of different things by speaking of them directly, as if they were the same; e.g. [The world] "'tis an unweeded garden" (Hamlet, 1.3) A comparison of two different things which states that the two are actually the same thing, often through a form of the verb "to be." One of the most famous metaphors is Shakespeare's, "All the world's a stage," a line from As You Like It, 2.7. It is one of the most common and powerful of all literary devices.

METER: Repeated patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry (from the Greek, "metron": "measure"). In English the most common patterns are these:

1. iambic, with measures of two syllables, in which the first is unaccented and the second is accented; e.g. "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (A. Tennyson, "Ulysses");
2. dactylic, with measures of three syllables, in which the first is accented, the other two are not, e.g.: "Rage, goddess, sing the rage, of Peleus' son, Achilles" (Homer, The Iliad);
3. trochaic, with measures of two syllables, the first accented and the second unaccented, e.g.: "'Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater" (Nursery Rhyme);

4. anapestic, with measures of three syllables, with the only accent on final syllable, e.g.: "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold" (Byron, Destruction of Sennacherib);

5. spondaic, with measures of two syllables, both of them accented, e.g.: "Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens and shades of death" (Milton, Paradise Lost).

The number of times these patterns are repeated in a single line is referred to as the number of metrical "feet": once: monometer; twice: dimeter; thrice: trimeter; four times: tetrameter; five times, pentameter; etc. The great epics of Greece and Rome were composed in dactylic hexameter (Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and Virgil's Aeneid) in their original languages (Greek and Latin). Shakespeare usually wrote in iambic pentameter, e.g.: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" (Sonnet 18). Today most poetry is characterized by FREE VERSE, a type of poetry which does not conform to a regular meter.

In Ancient Greek poetry and Latin poetry, lines followed certain metrical patterns, based on arrangements of heavy and light syllables. A heavy syllable was referred to as a longum and a light as a brevis (and in the modern day, reflecting the ancient terms, a longum is often called a "long syllable" and a brevis a "short syllable," potentially creating confusion between syllable length and vowel length). A syllable was considered heavy if it contained a long vowel or a diphthong (and was therefore "long by nature" — it would be long no matter what) or if it contained a short vowel that was followed by more than one consonant ("long by position," long by virtue of its relationship to the consonants following). An example: Arma virumque cano: "I sing of arms and of the man" (Virgil, The Aeneid).

METONYMY: A figure of speech in which something is referred to by one of its distinct characteristics; e.g. referring to the theater as "The Stage," the monarchy as "The Crown," or the judicial system as "The Bench." Another example: "the pen [power of the written word] is mightier than the sword [power of physical violence]."

MODERNISM: A literary movement in the early 20th century which prided itself on its novelty in breaking away from established rules and traditions.

MOOD: The atmosphere that pervades a literary work with the intention of evoking a certain emotion or feeling from the audience. In drama, mood may be created by sets and music as well as words; in poetry and prose, mood may be created by a combination of such elements as SETTING, VOICE, TONE and THEME. The moods evoked by the more popular short stories of Edgar Allen Poe, for example, tend to be gloomy, horrific, and desperate.

MOTIF: One of the key ideas or literary devices which supports the main THEME of a literary work. It may consist of a character, a recurrent image or verbal pattern. Destiny (to found a new city) is usually considered to be the main theme in Virgil's Aeneid; prophecies and dreams are supporting motifs which contribute to that theme.

NARRATIVE ESSAY: See ESSAY

NARRATOR and PERSONA: The narrator is the speaker in a work of prose. The persona is the speaker in a work of poetry. Not to be confused with or assumed to be the poet, the persona may be an animal or an inanimate object. The narrator of Mark Twain's novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, for example, is Huckleberry Finn. The narrator in the book of Proverbs is sometimes wisdom, personified. The narrator will differ according to the author's choice of VIEWPOINT.

NOVEL: An extended piece of prose fiction: a major category in literature. [See GENRE.]

ONOMATOPOEIA: The use of words which sound like what they describe; e.g. "buzz, whir, babble," for bees, saws, and gossip; e.g.: "There be more wasps that buzz about his nose" (Henry VIII, 3.2).

OXYMORON: A figure of speech that combines opposite qualities in a single term; e.g. open secret; original copy; definite maybe. Notice the oxymorons in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as Theseus speaks: "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus And his love Thisby; very tragical mirth.' Merry and tragical! tedious and brief! That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow" (5.1). From the Greek: *oxys*- sharp, keen; *moros*- foolish.

PARADOX: A statement that appears to be contradictory, but which reveals a deeper (or higher) truth. For example, one of the most important principles of good writing is this: "Less is more." It means that the most effective writing is clear and focused; everything extraneous is avoided. G.K. Chesterton was a master of paradox. He called it: "truth standing on its head to gain attention." As Chesterton used the term, a paradox can refer both to a true statement, which at first seems to be false; and to a false statement, which at first seems to be true. For example: "The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason." Another example is Christ's paradox: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it" (Lk. 9:24). About Darwinism, Chesterton commented: "It is absurd for the Evolutionist to complain that it is unthinkable for an admittedly unthinkable God to make everything out of nothing, and then pretend that it is more thinkable that nothing should turn itself into everything."

PARODY: A literary technique which imitates and ridicules (usually through exaggeration) another author or literary genre. For example, in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer parodies the medieval romance (of selfless, noble knights) in his *Tale of Sir Topaz*, and to a lesser extent in the *Knight's Tale* (where the heroes are imperfect, and their quarrel is more of a sibling rivalry). The *Nun's Priest's Tale* is "mock-heroic," another type of parody.

PERSONA: See NARRATOR.

PERSONIFICATION: Attributing human qualities to inanimate objects, to animals, things or ideas; e.g. "the man in the moon." Cf. ANTHROPOMORPHISM

PERSUASIVE ESSAY: See ESSAY

PLAGIARISM: Accidental or intentional intellectual theft in which a writer, poet, artist, scholar, or student steals an original idea, phrase, or section of writing from someone else and presents this material as his or her own work without indicating the source via appropriate explanation or citation

PLOT: The plot is the author's plan or scheme to accomplish some purpose. Plot is the unified structure of events and incidents (usually including "conflict," "climax" and "denouement") which expresses the author's purpose for writing. Aristotle insisted that the plot is the most important factor in any story; that it must include a beginning, a middle, and an end; and that its events be unified in a closely related whole. In order for a plot to begin, some sort of catalyst is necessary. While the temporal order of events in the work constitutes the "story," we are speaking of plot rather than story as soon as we look at how these events relate to one another and work together. While it is common for events to unfold chronologically, many stories structure the plot in such a way that the reader encounters happenings out of order. A common technique along this line is to "begin" the story in the middle of the action, a technique called beginning "in medias res" (Latin: "in the middle of things"). Some narratives involve several short episodes occurring one after the other (like chivalric romances), or they may involve multiple subplots taking place simultaneously with the main plot (as in many of Shakespeare's plays).

POETRY: A type of literature that emphasizes metaphor and other figures of speech in lines which are arranged for emotional effect, usually according to meter. It is one of the two most basic types of literature. [Compare: PROSE]

POINT OF VIEW: See: VIEWPOINT

POST-MODERNISM: A term used for the pessimistic, contemporary worldview which began in the 1960s, rejecting tradition, resisting authority, and denying any final or enduring meaning and purpose in life (and literature). Postmodern literature tends to focus upon the way in which institutions and traditions use (and have used) their power to deny individuals and minorities of their freedom. Cf. Deconstruction.

PROSE: The ordinary use of language, without the artistic embellishments of rhythm, meter or rhyme. In general usage, prose is any form of language, written or spoken, which is not poetry.

PROTAGONIST and ANTAGONIST: A protagonist is the central character in a literary work. An antagonist is a character who is opposite to, or challenges, the protagonist. The protagonist of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, is the good Christian slave Uncle Tom; the antagonist to Uncle Tom is his evil owner, Simon Legree. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the protagonist, Aeneas, must struggle against the antagonist, Turnus.

PUN: A humorous use of words which sound alike; e.g. "A little more than kin and less than kind" (*Hamlet*, 1.2); "By noting of the lady" (*Much Ado*, 4.1).

PUNCTUATION: The distinctive use of punctuation by different authors. For example, some authors emphasize questions while others emphasize imperatives.

SATIRE: a literary tone used to ridicule or make fun of human vice or weakness, often with the intent of correcting, or changing, the subject of the satiric attack. Chaucer employs much satire in the *Canterbury Tales*.

SETTING: The locale, time, and **CONTEXT** in which the **ACTION** of a literary work takes place. "It was a dark and stormy night . . ." is an example of a setting (a cliché).

SIMILE: A comparison of different things by speaking of them as "like" or "as" the same; e.g. "thy two eyes, like stars." The simile "Oh, my love is like a red, red rose," for example, serves as the title and first line to a poem by Robert Burns.

SOLILOQUY: An extended speech in which a lone character expresses his or her thoughts; a dramatic monologue which allows the audience to "hear" what the character is "thinking." From Latin: "to speak alone;" pron.: so-LILL-eh-kwee.

SONNET: The sonnet is a fourteen-line lyric poem in predominantly iambic pentameter, with a formal rhyme scheme. Although there can be considerable variation in rhyme scheme, most English sonnets are written in either the Italian (Petrarchan) style or the English (Shakespearean) style.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A literary style which was first used (in English) by James Joyce in his novel, *Ulysses*. The writer expresses a character's thoughts and feelings as a chaotic stream, with no apparent order or logic. The text is held together through psychological association and realistic characterization.

SYMBOLISM: The use of words or objects to stand for or represent other things. When Hamlet asks, "Will you play upon this pipe?" he is expressing his awareness that his old "friends," Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, have been hired by his uncle as spies. They are attempting to manipulate Hamlet the way a musician manipulates an instrument. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Symbolism is more flexible than **ALLEGORY**. It may convey a number of meanings. The symbol of the great white whale in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, for example, may stand for the devil, nature, fate, or the Divine. In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the White Stag may stand for Jesus, and all of the (at this time) unfulfilled promises of God. Like the Stag, Jesus calls us to follow and promises us unending joys (in heaven). The stag was a symbol for Christ in the Middle Ages; the antlers have been compared to a tree of life; the whiteness of Lewis's stag adds a dimension of purity.

SYNECDOCHE: From the Greek: "to receive from; sense; interpretation; pron.: seh-NECK-deh-key. A figure of speech by which a part of something refers to the whole, as in "Give us this day our daily bread" (for basic necessities of life) or "fifty wagging tails" (for fifty dogs). In Sonnet 55 Shakespeare refers to art as "rhyme": "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outline this powerful rhyme." Synecdoche can also be used when a part is referred to as the whole, as in: "Use your head!" (for brain). [Compare: METONYMY]

SYNTAX: An author's distinctive form of sentence construction. Distinctive forms include: very long sentences; very short sentences; parallelism (e.g. "on the sea, in the air, etc.); and repetition of key words or phrases. A good author should be very intentional about his or her sentence construction. Very long sentences may be intended to suggest confusion or to simulate a rapid flow of ideas or emotions; or perhaps to illustrate the enormity or weight of a situation. Very short sentences may be intended to emphasize factuality or to stress a key idea. Parallelism may be used to create rhythm or stir emotion. Repetition may be used to stress a key idea or to convey an emotion. From the Greek: taxis- order, arrangement; sun- together.

THEME: A theme is an author's insight about life. It is the main idea or universal meaning, the lesson or message of a literary work. A theme may not always be explicit or easy to state, and different interpreters may disagree. Common literary themes involve basic human experiences such as: adventure; alienation; ambition; anger; betrayal; coming-of-age; courage; death; the testing of faith; overcoming fear; jealousy; liberation; love; loyalty; prejudice; the quest for an ideal; struggling with fate; truth-seeking; vengeance. One of the greatest themes in literature is the "quest," the search to attain some noble goal or purpose. Examples include the great epics, Beowulf, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid. The primary theme in the Chronicles of Narnia is a common quest to answer Aslan's call and fulfill His various tasks. Invariably, the quest involves adventure and requires courage. C. S. Lewis alluded to the legends of King Arthur in several of his works, embracing the knight on a quest as a metaphor for the Christian life.

THEMES IN SHAKESPEARE: Many of the themes in Shakespeare are rooted in a Biblical worldview; e.g.: Coriolanus: PRIDE; Prov. 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;" Hamlet: REVENGE; "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" Rom. 12:19; "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" Matt. 26:52; Henry V; Henry VI: CHIVALRY; Jn. 15:13: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" King Lear: VANITY: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Eccles.1:2; Measure for Measure: JUDGING; Matt. 7:1-2: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged... the measure you give will be the measure you get." Macbeth: AMBITION; Matt. 16:26; Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25: "For what does it profit it man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul;" Much Ado about Nothing: FALSE APPEARANCES: "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment," Jn. 7:24; "The LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" 1 Sam. 16:7; Merchant of Venice: MERCY: "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment" Jas. 2:13; Othello: JEALOUSY: "For where you have envy... there you find disorder and every evil" Jas. 3:16; The Tempest: POWER: "A man's mind plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" Prov. 16:9

TONE: The writer's attitude, mood or moral outlook toward the subject and/or readers, e.g.: as angry, cynical, empathetic, critical, idealistic, ironic, optimistic, realistic, suspicious, comic, surprised, sarcastic or supportive; e.g. in Hamlet, when Shakespeare puts these words in the mouth of Polonius: "Brevity is the soul of wit," Shakespeare's tone is clearly ironic and comic, since Polonius is a long-winded fool.

UNDERSTATEMENT: A statement which says less than is really meant. It is a figure of speech which is the opposite of HYPERBOLE. Hyperbole exaggerates; understatement minimizes. In Much Ado About Nothing, when Benedick says, "This looks not like a nuptial," he is greatly understating the fact that what was supposed to be a joyful wedding has turned into bitter hostility, a veritable nightmare for Hero (Much Ado, 4.1). This literary technique is also called litotes [lye-TOE-teez], from the Greek:

litos- “plain, simple, meager.” It also applies when an affirmative is stated as the negative of its contrary, as when “good” is expressed as “not bad.”

VIEWPOINT: The intellectual or emotional perspective held by a NARRATOR or PERSONA (not to be confused with the author) in connection with a story. Here are the main possibilities:

1. FIRST PERSON PARTICIPANT - the story is narrated by one of the main characters in the story (e.g. Mark Twain's, Huckleberry Finn).
2. FIRST PERSON OBSERVER - the story is narrated by a minor character, someone plays only a small part in the plot (e.g. Emily Bronte's, Wuthering Heights).
3. THIRD PERSON OMNISCIENT - the story is narrated not by a character, but by an impersonal author who sees and knows everything, including characters' thoughts (e.g. the Iliad, Odyssey and Aeneid).
4. THIRD PERSON LIMITED - the story is narrated by the author, but he/she focuses on the thinking and actions of a particular character.
5. OBJECTIVE- the story describes only what can be seen, as a newspaper reporter.

VOICE: An author's distinctive literary style, basic vision and general attitude toward the world. This “voice” is revealed through an author's use of SYNTAX (sentence construction); DICTION (distinctive vocabulary); PUNCTUATION; CHARACTERIZATION and DIALOGUE. The voice of an author may cover a wide range of possibilities (e.g. “victim,” “judge,” “friend,” “coach,” “spy,” “opponent,” “cheerleader,” “critic,” “alien”).

* Sources which have been used for reference in the creation of this glossary include: "Guide to Literary Terms," enotes.com; "Glossary of Fiction Terms," McGraw-Hill Higher Education Online; "Glossary of Literary Terms," Robert H. Harris; “Literary Terms and Definitions,” Dr. L. K. Wheeler, Carson-Newman College; “Glossary of Literary Terms,” the Reading/Writing Center, Hunter College; J.A. Cuddon, The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms (1991); Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms (1967); Chris Baldick, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (2001); A Guide to the Study of Literature: A Companion Text for Core Studies 6, Landmarks of Literature, English Department Brooklyn College; Eng. 1001: Using Effective Diction, Randy Rambo.