

# Handout of LITERARY TERMS

2004-2005

*Revised*

**Allegory** - A figurative work in which a surface narrative carries a secondary, symbolic or metaphorical meaning.

**Alliteration** is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words.

**Example:** sweet smell of success ; a dime a dozen, bigger and better, jump for joy sings a solitary song that whistles in the wind.

**Allusion** is a brief reference to a person, event, or place, real or fictitious, or to a work of art. Casual reference to a famous historical or literary figure or event.

An allusion may be drawn from history, geography, literature, or religion.

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

**Antagonist** a character in a story or poem who deceives, frustrates, or works against the main character, or protagonist, in some way.

**Aphorism** is a brief saying embodying a moral, a concise statement of a principle or precept given in pointed words. **Example:**  
Hippocrates: Life is short, art is long, opportunity fleeting, experimenting dangerous, reasoning difficult.

**Apostrophe** is when an absent person, an abstract concept, or an important object is directly addressed. **Example:**  
With how sad steps, O moon, thou climbest the skies. Busy old fool, unruly sun.

**Aside** an actor's speech, directed to the audience, that is not supposed to be heard by other actors on stage. An aside is usually used to let the audience know what a character is about to do or what he or she is thinking. For example, in *Othello*, Iago gives several asides, informing the audience of his plans and how he will try to achieve his goals. Asides are important because they increase an audience's involvement in a play by giving them vital information pertaining what is happening, both inside of a character's mind and in the plot of the play.

**Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds but not consonant sounds as in  
**Example:** fleet feet sweep by sleeping geeks.

**Cacophony** is harsh, discordant sounds. Opposite of [euphony](#). **Example:** finger of *birth-strangled* babe.

**Caesura** is a natural pause or break. **Example:** England - how I long for thee!

**Characterization** is the method used by a writer to develop a character. The method includes (1) showing the character's appearance, (2) displaying the character's actions, (3) revealing the character's thoughts, (4) letting the character speak, and (5) getting the reactions of others.

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

**Connotation** is an implied meaning of a word. Opposite of denotation.

**Example:**

Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy *rest* (burial)

**Consonance** is the repetition of consonant sounds, but not vowels, as in assonance. **Example:** lady lounges lazily , dark deep dread crept in

**Couplet** a rhymed pair of lines, which are usually of the same length.

**Denotation** ): the exact meaning of a word, without the feelings or suggestions that the word may imply. It is the opposite of connotation in that it is the dictionary meaning of a word, without attached feelings or associations. Some examples of denotations are:

1. **heart:** an organ that circulates blood throughout the body. Here the word "heart" denotes the actual organ, while in another context, the word "heart" may connote feelings of love or heartache.
2. **sweater:** a knitted garment for the upper body. The word "sweater" may denote pullover sweaters or cardigans, while "sweater" may also connote feelings of warmth or security.

**Dialogue** is the conversation between characters in a drama or narrative. A dialogue occurs in most works of literature. For example, many ballads demonstrate a conversation between two or more characters.

**Didactic** refers to literature or other types of art that are instructional or informative. In this sense *The Bible* is didactic because it offers guidance in moral, religious, and ethical matters. It tells stories of the lives of people that followed Christian teachings, and stories of people that decided to go against God and the consequences that they faced. The term "didactic" also refers to texts that are overburdened with instructive and factual information, sometimes to the detriment of a reader's enjoyment.

**End Rhyme** consists of two words that rhyme at the end of each sentence

*My weekend was like any other,  
I went to a movie with Mother.*

**Euphony** is soothing pleasant sounds. Opposite of [cacophony](#).

**Eye Rhyme** is something that looks like a rhyme but isn't. For example: cough  
("kof"), enough ("eenuf"), bough ("bow")

Set in the window, bringing memories  
Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,  
And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies

**Figurative Language** - a type of language that varies from the norms of literal language, in which words mean exactly what they say. Also known as the "ornaments of language," figurative language does not mean exactly what it says, but instead forces the reader to make an imaginative leap in order to comprehend an author's point.

**Frame story**- a story that provides a vehicle or frame for telling other stories. The frame in The Canterbury Tales is about a pilgrimage.

**Foreshadowing** is the use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later in literature.

**Genre**- a category in which literature is grouped.

**Gothic novel** - A novel in which supernatural horrors and an atmosphere of unknown terror pervades the action. The setting is often a dark, mysterious castle, where ghosts and sinister humans roam menacingly.

**Hyperbole** is an extravagant exaggeration. From the Greek for "overcasting," hyperbole is a figure of speech that is a grossly exaggerated description or statement. In literature, such exaggeration is used for emphasis or vivid descriptions.

**Iambic Pentameter** an unrhymed line of five [feet](#) in which the dominant accent usually falls on the second syllable of each foot (di dúm), a pattern known as an iamb. The form is very flexible: it is possible to have one or more feet in which the expected order of accent is reversed (dúm di). These are called [trochees](#).

**Imagery** is language that evokes one or all of the five senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching.

**Internal Rhyme** is rhyming within a line. **Example:** I awoke to black flak.  
The movie was *great*, lots of popcorn I ate

**Irony** is an implied discrepancy between what is said and what is meant ; a literary term referring to how a person, situation, statement, or circumstance is not as it would actually seem. Many times it is the exact opposite of what it appears to be. There are many types of irony, the three most common being verbal irony, dramatic irony, and cosmic irony. Verbal irony occurs when either the speaker means something totally different than what he is saying or the audience realizes, because of their knowledge of the particular situation to which the speaker is referring, that the opposite of what a character is saying is true.

Three kinds of irony:

1. *verbal irony* is when an author says one thing and means something else.
2. *dramatic irony* is when an audience perceives something that a character in the literature does not know.
3. *irony of situation* is a discrepancy between the expected result and actual results. **Example:**  
"A fine thing indeed!" he muttered to himself.

**L**ytic a lyric is a song-like poem written mainly to express the feelings of emotions or thought from a particular person, thus separating it from [narrative poems](#). These poems are generally short, averaging roughly twelve to thirty lines, and rarely go beyond sixty lines. These poems express vivid imagination as well as emotion and all flow fairly concisely. Because of this aspect, as well as their steady rhythm, they were often used in song. In fact, most people still see a "lyric" as anything that is sung along to a musical instrument.

**M**etaphor comparison of two unlike things using the verb "to be" and not using like or as as in a [simile](#). **Example:** He is a pig. Thou art sunshine.

**M**otif A recurrent thematic element in an artistic or literary work or a dominant theme or central idea.

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

**O**nomatopoeia is a word that imitates the sound it represents. **Examples:** splash, wow, gush, kerplunk "buzz," "crash," "whirr," "clang" "hiss," "purr," "squeak," "mumble," "hush," "boom."

**O**xymoron is putting two contradictory words together. **Examples:** hot ice, cold fire, wise fool, sad joy, military intelligence, eloquent silence,

Act naturally

Found missing

Resident alien

Advanced BASIC

**P**arody -

**P**aradox reveals a kind of truth which at first seems contradictory.

**Example:**

Stone walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage.

**P**oint of View - a way the events of a story are conveyed to the reader, it is the vantage point from which the [narrative](#) is passed from author to the reader. The point of view can vary from work to work.

**P**ersonification is giving human qualities to animals or objects. **Example:**  
a smiling moon, a jovial sun

**R**hyme Scheme is rhymed words at the ends of lines. **Example:**

Roses are red **a**  
Violents are blue **b**  
Sugar is sweet **c**  
And so are you. **B**

**S**atire -The use of humor to improve or point out the political or social problems in society.

**S**cansion is the dividing of verse (lines of poetry) into **feet** by indicating accents and counting syllables to determine the **meter** of a poem. It is a means of studying the mechanical elements by which the poet has established his rhythmical effects. The meter, once the scanning has been performed, is named according to the type and number of feet employed in a verse.

**S**etting - the time, place, physical details, and circumstances in which a situation occurs. Settings include the background, atmosphere or



environment in which [characters](#) live and move, and usually include physical characteristics of the surroundings. Settings enables the reader to better envision how a story unfolds by relating necessary physical details of a piece of literature.

**Simile** is the comparison of two unlike things using *like* or *as*. Related to metaphor **Example:**

He eats like a pig. Vines like golden prisons.

**Stanza** is a unified group of lines in poetry.

**Stream of Consciousness** - the unbroken flow of thought and awareness of the waking mind

\* 'interior monologue' an alternate term

\*a special mode of narration that undertakes to capture the full spectrum and the continuous flow of a character's mental process

\* sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts and memories, experiences, feelings and random associations

\* in a literary context used to describe the narrative method where novelists describe the unspoken thoughts and feelings of their characters without resorting to objective description or conventional dialogue

**Symbol** a symbol is a word or object that stands for another word or object. The object or word can be seen with the eye or not visible. For example a dove stands for Peace. The dove can be seen and peace cannot.

\*The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships.

\*A system of symbols or representations.

\*A symbolic meaning or representation. **Example:**

the bird of night (owl is a symbol of death)

**T**heme - a common thread or repeated idea that is incorporated throughout a literary work. A theme is a thought or idea the author presents to the reader that may be deep, difficult to understand, or even moralistic. Generally, a theme has to be extracted as the reader explores the passages of a work. The author utilizes the characters, plot, and other literary devices to assist the reader in this endeavor.

**T**one is the attitude a writer takes towards a subject or character: serious, humorous, sarcastic, ironic, satirical, tongue-in-cheek, solemn, objective.

*The tone set by the mayor, made the city a very tense and angry place to live and work.*

**V**erse is a line of poetry.

**V**ersimilitude The appearance of truth; the quality of seeming to be true or something that has the appearance of being true or real.

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