

LITERARY TERMS HANDBOOK

ALLEGORY An *allegory* is a literary work with two or more levels of meaning—a literal level and one or more symbolic levels. The events, settings, objects, or characters in an allegory—the literal level—stand for ideas or qualities, such as goodness, tyranny, salvation, and so on. Dante's *Divine Comedy* (p. 612) is an allegory written in the Middle Ages, when allegorical writing was common. Many works can be read allegorically as well as literally, requiring a reader's effort to match every element at the literal level with a corresponding element at the symbolic level. Allegories are also written in the form of parables.

See also *Fable and Parable*.

ALLITERATION *Alliteration* is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in accented syllables. Derek Walcott uses alliteration in these lines from "Omeros" (p. 1203):

... higher than those hills / of infernal anthracite.

Especially in poetry, alliteration is used to emphasize and to link words, as well as to create musical sounds.

ALLUSION An *allusion* is a reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art. Writers often make allusions to the Bible, classical Greek and Roman myths, plays by Shakespeare, historical events, and other material with which they expect their readers to be familiar. Canto V of the *Inferno* by Dante (p. 629) contains an allusion to the story of Lancelot.

AMBIGUITY *Ambiguity* is the effect created when words suggest and support two or more divergent interpretations. Ambiguity may be used in literature to express experiences or truths that are complex or even contradictory.

See also *Irony*.

ANALOGY An *analogy* is an extended comparison of relationships. It is based on the idea or insight that the relationship between one pair of things is like the relationship between another pair. Unlike a metaphor, another form of comparison, an analogy involves an explicit comparison, often using the word *like* or *as*.

See also *Metaphor and Simile*.

ANAPEST See *Meter*.

ARCHETYPAL LITERARY ELEMENTS *Archetypal literary elements* are patterns in literature found around the world. For instance, the occurrence of events in threes is an archetypal element of fairy tales. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (p. 14) presents an archetypal battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Certain character types, such as mysterious guides, are also archetypal elements of traditional stories. According to some critics, these elements express in symbolic form truths about the human mind.

ASSONANCE *Assonance* is the repetition of vowel sounds in stressed syllables containing dissimilar consonant sounds.

See also *Consonance*.

BALLAD A *ballad* is a song that tells a story, often about adventure or romance, or a poem imitating such a song. Most ballads are divided into four- or six-line stanzas, are rhymed, use simple language, and depict dramatic action. Many ballads employ a repeated refrain. Some use incremental repetition, in which the refrain is varied slightly each time it appears.

BLANK VERSE *Blank verse* is unrhymed poetry usually written in iambic pentameter (see *Meter*). Occasional variations in rhythm are introduced in blank verse to create emphasis, variety, and naturalness of sound. Because blank verse sounds much like ordinary spoken English, it is often used in drama, as by Shakespeare, and in poetry.

See also *Meter*.

CARPE DIEM A Latin phrase, *carpe diem* means "seize the day" or "make the most of passing time." Many great literary works have been written with the *carpe diem* theme.

CHARACTER A person (though not necessarily a human being) who takes part in the action of a literary work is known as a character. Characters can be classified in different ways. A character who plays an important role is called a *major character*. A character who does not is called a *minor character*. A character who plays the central role in a story is called the *protagonist*. A character who opposes the *protagonist* is called the *antagonist*. A *round character* has many aspects to his or her personality. A *flat character* is defined by only a few qualities. A character who changes is called *dynamic*; a character who does not change is called *static*.

See also *Characterization and Motivation*.

CHARACTERIZATION *Characterization* is the act of creating and developing a character. A writer uses *direct characterization* when he or she describes a character's traits explicitly. Writers also use *indirect characterization*. A character's traits can be revealed indirectly in what he or she says, thinks, or does; in a description of his or her appearance; or in the statements, thoughts, or actions of other characters.

See also *Character and Motivation*.

CHOKA A traditional Japanese verse form, *choka* are poems that consist of alternating lines of five and seven syllables, with an additional seven-syllable line at the end. There is no limit to the number of lines in a *choka*. *Choka* frequently end with one or more *envoys* consisting of five lines of five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables. Generally, the *envoys* elaborate or summarize the theme of the main poem.

CLIMAX The *climax* is the high point of interest or suspense in a literary work. Often, the climax is also the crisis in the plot, the point at which the protagonist changes his or her understanding or situation. Sometimes, the climax coincides with the *resolution*, the point at which the central conflict is ended.

See also Plot.

COMEDY A *comedy* is a literary work, especially a play, that has a happy ending. A comedy often shows ordinary characters in conflict with their society. Types of comedy include *romantic comedy*, which involves problems between lovers, and the *comedy of manners*, which satirically challenges the social customs of a sophisticated society. Comedy is often contrasted with tragedy, in which the protagonist meets an unfortunate end.

See also Drama and Tragedy.

CONCEIT A *conceit* is an unusual and surprising comparison between two very different things. This special kind of metaphor or complicated analogy is often the basis for a whole poem. *Petrarchan conceits* make extravagant claims about the beloved's beauty or the speaker's suffering, with comparisons to divine beings, powerful natural forces, and objects that contain a given quality in the highest degree. See Petrarch's "Laura" (p. 675) for an example.

See also Metaphor.

CONFLICT A *conflict* is a struggle between opposing forces. Sometimes, this struggle is internal, or within a character. At other times, the struggle is external, or between the character and some outside force. The outside force may be another character, nature, or some element of society, such as a custom or a political institution. Often, the conflict in a work combines several of these possibilities.

See also Plot.

CONNOTATION *Connotation* refers to the associations that a word calls to mind in addition to its dictionary meaning. For example, the words *home* and *domicile* have the same dictionary meaning. However, the first has positive connotations of warmth and security, whereas the second does not.

See also Denotation.

CONSONANCE *Consonance* is the repetition of final consonant sounds in stressed syllables containing dissimilar vowel sounds. Following are some examples of consonance: *black/block; slip/slop; creak/croak; feat/fit; slick/slack*. When each word in the pair is used at the end of a line, the effect is one form of *slant rhyme*.

See also Assonance.

COUPLET A *couplet* is a pair of rhyming lines written in the same meter. A *heroic couplet* is a rhymed pair of iambic pentameter lines. In a *closed couplet*, the meaning and grammar are completed within the two lines.

See also Sonnet.

DACTYL See Meter.

DENOTATION *Denotation* is the objective meaning of a word—that to which the word refers, independent of other associations that the word calls to mind. Dictionaries list the denotative meanings of words.

See also Connotation.

DIALECT *Dialect* is the form of a language spoken by people in a particular region or group. Dialects differ from one another in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

DIALOGUE *Dialogue* is a conversation between characters. Writers use dialogue to reveal character, to present events, to add variety to narratives, and to interest readers. Dialogue in a story is usually set off by quotation marks and paragraphing. Dialogue in a play script generally follows the name of the speaker.

DIARY A *diary* is a personal record of daily events, usually written in prose. Most diaries are not written for publication; sometimes, however, interesting diaries or diaries written by influential people are published.

DICTION *Diction* is a writer's word choice. It can be a major determinant of the writer's style. Diction can be described as formal or informal, abstract or concrete, plain or ornate, ordinary or technical.

See also Style.

DIMETER See Meter.

DRAMA A *drama* is a story written to be performed by actors. It may consist of one or more large sections, called acts, which are made up of any number of smaller sections, called scenes.

Drama originated in the religious rituals and symbolic reenactments of primitive peoples. The ancient Greeks, who developed drama into a sophisticated art form, created such dramatic forms as tragedy and comedy.

Oedipus the King (p. 426) is a definitive example of Greek tragedy. The classical dramas of the Greeks and the Romans faded away as the Roman empire declined.

Drama revived in Europe during the Middle Ages. The Renaissance produced a number of great dramatists, most notably England's William Shakespeare. Molière's *Tartuffe* is a comedy of manners, a form of drama popular in the seventeenth century. Goethe's tragic *Faust* (p. 768) represents a peak of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Henrik Ibsen's

A Doll House (p. 864) began a trend toward realistic prose drama and away from drama in verse form. Most of the great plays of the twentieth century are written in prose.

Among the many forms of drama from non-Western cultures are the Nō plays of Japan, such as Zeami's *The Deserted Crone*.

See also *Comedy and Tragedy*.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE A *dramatic monologue* is a poem in which an imaginary character speaks to a silent listener. During the monologue, the speaker reveals his or her personality, usually at a moment of crisis.

ELEGY An *elegy* is a solemn and formal lyric poem about death. It may mourn a particular person or reflect on a serious or tragic theme, such as the passing of youth or beauty.

See also *Lyric Poem*.

END-STOPPED LINE An *end-stopped line* is a line of poetry concluding with a break in the meter and in the meaning. This pause at the end of a line is often punctuated by a period, comma, dash, or semicolon.

See also *Run-on Line*.

EPIC An *epic* is a long narrative poem about the adventures of gods or of a hero. A *folk epic* is one that was composed orally and passed from storyteller to storyteller. The ancient Greek epics attributed to Homer—the *Iliad* (p. 326) and the *Odyssey*—are folk epics. The *Aeneid* (p. 492), by the Roman poet Virgil, and *The Divine Comedy* (p. 612), by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri, are examples of literary epics from the Classical and Medieval periods, respectively. An epic presents an encyclopedic portrait of the culture in which it was produced.

Epic conventions are traditional characteristics of epic poems, including an opening statement of the theme; an appeal for supernatural help in telling the story (an invocation); a beginning *in medias res* (Latin: "in the middle of things"); catalogs of people and things; accounts of past events; and descriptive phrases.

EPIGRAM An *epigram* is a brief statement in prose or in verse. The concluding couplet in a sonnet may be epigrammatic. An essay may be written in an epigrammatic style.

EPIPHANY *Epiphany* is a term introduced by James Joyce to describe a moment of insight in which a character recognizes a truth. In Colette's "The Bracelet" (p. 1046), the main character's epiphany comes at the end of the story when she realizes she cannot recapture her past.

EPITAPH An *epitaph* is an inscription written on a tomb or burial place. In literature, epitaphs include serious or humorous lines written as if intended for such use. Catullus' "I Crossed Many Lands and a Lot of Ocean" (p. 508) is an example from classical literature.

ESSAY An *essay* is a short nonfiction work about a particular subject. Essays are of many types but may be classified by tone or style as formal or informal. An essay is often classed by its main purpose as descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative, or persuasive.

EXTENDED METAPHOR See *Metaphor*.

FABLE A *fable* is a brief story, usually with animal characters, that teaches a lesson or moral. The earliest known fables are those attributed to Aesop, a Greek writer of the sixth century B.C. Jean de La Fontaine continued this tradition during the Age of Rationalism with such fables as "The Fox and the Crow" (p. 720) and "The Oak and the Reed" (p. 723).

See also *Allegory and Parable*.

FICTION *Fiction* is prose writing about imaginary characters and events. Some writers of fiction base their stories on real events, whereas others rely solely on their imaginations.

See also *Narration and Prose*.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE *Figurative language* is writing or speech not meant to be interpreted literally. Poets and other writers use figurative language to paint vivid word pictures, to make their writing emotionally intense and concentrated, and to state their ideas in new and unusual ways.

Figurative language is classified into various *figures of speech*, including hyperbole, irony, metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, personification, simile, and synecdoche.

See also *the entries for individual figures of speech*.

FOLKLORE The stories, legends, myths, ballads, riddles, sayings, and other traditional works produced orally by a culture are known as *folklore*. Folklore influences written literature in many ways. "The Fisherman and the Jinnee," from *The Thousand and One Nights* (p. 92), is an example of folklore.

FOOT See *Meter*.

FREE VERSE *Free verse* is poetry not written in a regular, rhythmical pattern, or meter. Instead of having metrical feet and lines, free verse has a rhythm that suits its meaning and that uses the sounds of spoken language in lines of different lengths. Free verse has been widely used in twentieth-century poetry. An example is this stanza from Nguyen Thi Vinh's "Thoughts of Hanoi" (p. 1392):

Brother, we are men,
conscious of more
than material needs.
How can this happen to us
my friend
my foe?

GOTHIC *Gothic* is a term used to describe literary works that make extensive use of primitive, medieval, wild, mysterious, or natural elements.

HEPTAMETER See Meter.

HEXAMETER See Meter.

HYPERBOLE *Hyperbole* is a deliberate exaggeration or overstatement. In *Candide* (p. 732), Voltaire turns a philosophical idea into this figure of speech:

Pangloss taught metaphysico-theologico-cosmolonigology. He proved admirably that there is no effect without a cause and that in this best of all possible worlds, My Lord the Baron's castle was the best of castles and his wife the best of all possible Baronesses.

Hyperbole may be used for heightened seriousness or for comic effect.

See also Figurative Language.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER See Meter.

IMAGE An *image* is a word or phrase that appeals to one or more of the senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, or smell. In a famous essay on *Hamlet*, T. S. Eliot explained how a group of images can be used as an “objective correlative.” By this phrase, Eliot meant that a complex emotional state can be suggested by images that are carefully chosen to evoke this state.

See also Imagery.

IMAGERY *Imagery* is the descriptive language used in literature to re-create sensory experiences. Imagery enriches writing by making it more vivid, setting a tone, suggesting emotions, and guiding readers' reactions. The following lines from Boris Pasternak's “The Weeping Orchard” (p. 1032) show how a poet can use imagery to appeal to several senses in describing the aftermath of a storm:

Silence. No breath of leaf, nothing
in the dark but this weird
gulping, and flapping of slippers,
and sighs, broken by tears.

IRONY *Irony* is the general name given to literary techniques that involve surprising, interesting, or amusing contradictions. In *verbal irony*, words are used to suggest the opposite of their usual meaning. In *dramatic irony*, there is a contradiction between what a character thinks and what the reader or audience knows to be true. In *irony of situation*, an event occurs that directly contradicts expectations.

LEGEND A *legend* is a widely told story about the past that may or may not be based in fact. A legend often reflects a people's identity or cultural values, generally with more historical truth than that in a myth. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (p. 14) from Sumeria and the *Shah-nama* from Persia are both based in part on legends. In Europe, the well-known German legend

of Johann Faust inspired novels and plays, including Goethe's *Faust* (p. 768).

See also Fable and Myth.

LYRIC POEM A *lyric poem* is a poem expressing the observations and feelings of a single speaker. Unlike a narrative poem, it presents an experience or a single effect, but it does not tell a full story. Early Greeks defined a lyric poem as that which was expressed by a single voice accompanied by a lyre. The poems of Archilochus, Callinus, Sappho (p. 376), and Pindar (p. 380) are lyric. Although they are no longer designed to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, lyric poems retain a melodic quality that results from the rhythmic patterns of rhymed or unrhymed verse. Modern forms of lyric poems include the elegy, the ode, and the sonnet.

METAPHOR A *metaphor* is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as though it were something else, as in “death, that long sleep.” Through this identification of dissimilar things, a comparison is suggested or implied. Octavio Paz uses the following metaphor in his poem “Fable” (p. 1194): “Insects were living jewels.” The metaphor suggests the similarities between insects and precious stones.

An *extended metaphor* is developed at length and involves several points of comparison. A mixed metaphor occurs when two metaphors are jumbled together, as in “The thorns of life rained down on him.”

A *dead metaphor* is one that has been so overused that its original metaphorical impact has been lost. Examples of dead metaphors include “the foot of the bed” and “toe the line.”

See also Figurative Language.

METER *Meter* is the rhythmical pattern of a poem. This pattern is determined by the number and types of stresses, or beats, in each line. To describe the meter of a poem, you must scan its lines. Scanning involves marking the stressed and unstressed syllables, as follows in this excerpt from “Carpe Diem” by Horace (p. 510):

Bē wīse! | Drīnk frēe, | ānd īn | sō shōrt | ā spāce
Dō nōt | prōtrāc | tēd hōpes | of life | embrāce:
Whīlst wē | āre tālk | īng, ēn | vīous tīme | doth slīde;
Thīś dāy's | thīne oŵn; | thē nēxt | māy bē | dēnīed.

As you can see, each stressed syllable is marked with a slanted line (´) and each unstressed syllable with a horseshoe symbol (˘). The stresses are then divided by vertical lines into groups called feet. The following types of feet are common in English poetry:

1. *Iamb*: a foot with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, as in the word *afraid*
2. *Trochee*: a foot with one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable, as in the word *heather*

3. **Anapest:** a foot with two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable, as in the word *disembark*
4. **Dactyl:** a foot with one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, as in the word *solitude*
5. **Spondee:** a foot with two stressed syllables, as in the word *workday*
6. **Pyrrhic:** a foot with two unstressed syllables, as in the last foot of the word *unspeakably*
7. **Amphibrach:** a foot with an unstressed syllable, one stressed syllable, and another unstressed syllable, as in the word *another*
8. **Amphimacer:** a foot with a stressed syllable, one unstressed syllable, and another stressed syllable, as in *up and down*

A line of poetry is described as *iambic*, *trochaic*, *anapestic*, or *dactylic* according to the kind of foot that appears most often in the line. Lines are also described in terms of the number of feet that occur in them, as follows:

1. **Monometer:** verse written in one-foot lines
2. **Dimeter:** verse written in two-foot lines
3. **Trimeter:** verse written in three-foot lines
4. **Tetrameter:** verse written in four-foot lines
5. **Pentameter:** verse written in five-foot lines
6. **Hexameter:** verse written in six-foot lines
7. **Heptameter:** verse written in seven-foot lines

A complete description of the meter of a line tells both how many feet there are in the line and what kind of foot is most common. Thus, the translated stanza from Horace's ode quoted at the beginning of this entry would be described as being made up of iambic pentameter lines. Poetry that does not have a regular meter is called *free verse*.

See also *Free Verse*.

METONYMY *Metonymy* is a figure of speech that substitutes something closely related for the thing actually meant. For example, in Genesis (p. 44), it is said, "By the sweat of your brow / Shall you get bread to eat." Here the word *sweat* represents hard labor.

See also *Figurative Language*.

MOCK EPIC A *mock epic* is a poem about a trivial matter written in the style of a serious epic. The incongruity of style and subject matter produces comic effects.

MODERNISM *Modernism* describes an international movement in the arts during the early twentieth century. Modernists rejected old forms and experimented with the new. Literary Modernists used images as symbols. They presented human experiences in fragments, rather than as a coherent

whole, which led to new experiments in the forms of poetry and fiction.

MONOLOGUE A *monologue* is a speech or performance given entirely by one person or by one character.

See also *Dramatic Monologue* and *Soliloquy*.

MOOD *Mood*, or atmosphere, is the feeling created in the reader by a literary work or passage. Mood may be suggested by the writer's choice of words, by events in the work, or by the physical setting. Julio Cortázar's "House Taken Over" (p. 1182) begins with a description of the narrator's life that sets a mood of comfort and routine. He later introduces an element of unknown danger that contrasts with and finally overcomes the pleasant mood at the beginning.

See also *Setting and Tone*.

MOTIVATION *Motivation* is a reason that explains or partially explains a character's thoughts, feelings, actions, or speech. Characters may be motivated by their physical needs; by their wants, wishes, desires, or dreams; or by their beliefs, values, and ideals. Effective characterization involves creating motivations that make characters seem believable.

MYTH A *myth* is a fictional tale, originally with religious significance, that explains the actions of gods or heroes, the causes of natural phenomena, or both. Allusions to characters and motifs from Greek, Roman, Norse, and Celtic myths are common in English literature. In addition, mythological stories are often retold or adapted.

See also *Fable and Legend*.

NARRATION *Narration* is writing that tells a story. The act of telling a story is also called narration. The *narrative*, or story, is told by a character or speaker called the *narrator*. Biographies, autobiographies, journals, reports, novels, short stories, plays, narrative poems, anecdotes, fables, parables, myths, legends, folk tales, ballads, and epic poems are all narratives, or types of narration.

See also *Point of View*.

NARRATIVE POEM A *narrative poem* is a poem that tells a story in verse. Three traditional types of narrative poems are ballads, epics, and metrical romances. The *Shah-nama*, the *Iliad* (p. 326), the *Aeneid* (p. 492), and the *Song of Roland* (p. 556) are epic narrative poems. Poets who have written narrative poems include Alexander Pushkin, Victor Hugo, and Wole Soyinka.

NATURALISM *Naturalism* was a literary movement among writers at the end of the nineteenth century and during the early decades of the twentieth century. The Naturalists depicted life in its grimmer details and viewed people as hopeless victims of natural laws.

See also *Realism*.

NEOCLASSICISM *Neoclassicism* was a literary movement of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries in which writers turned to classical Greek and Roman literary models. Like the ancients, many Neoclassical writers dealt with themes related to proper human conduct. The most popular literary forms of the day—essays, letters, early novels, epigrams, parodies, and satires—reflected this emphasis.

See also Romanticism.

NOVEL A *novel* is an extended work of fiction that often has a complicated plot, many major and minor characters, a unifying theme, and several settings. Novels can be grouped in many ways, based on the historical periods in which they are written (such as Victorian), on the subjects and themes that they treat (such as Gothic or regional), on the techniques used in them (such as stream of consciousness), or on their part in literary movements (such as in Naturalism or Realism). A *novella* is not as long as a novel but is longer than a short story.

OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE See Image.

OCTAVE See Stanza.

ODE An *ode* is a long, formal lyric poem with a serious theme. It may have a traditional structure with stanzas grouped in threes, called the *strophe*, the *antistrophe*, and the *epode*. Odes often honor people, commemorate events, or respond to natural scenes. The ancient Greek poet Pindar is famous for odes such as "Olympia 11" (p. 380), praising victorious athletes.

See also Lyric Poem.

ONOMATOPOEIA *Onomatopoeia* is the use of words that imitate sounds. Examples of such words are *buzz*, *hiss*, *murmur*, and *rustle*. In the line ". . . to hear / Rasps in the field," from Wole Soyinka's "Season" (p. 1344), *Rasps* is onomatopoeic. Onomatopoeia creates musical effects and reinforces meaning.

ORAL TRADITION *Oral tradition* is the body of songs, stories, and poems preserved by being passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. Folk epics, ballads, myths, legends, folk tales, folk songs, proverbs, and nursery rhymes are all products of the oral tradition.

See also Ballad, Folklore, Legend, and Myth.

OXYMORON An *oxymoron* is a figure of speech that fuses two contradictory ideas, such as "freezing fire" or "happy grief," thus suggesting a paradox in just a few words.

See also Figurative Language and Paradox.

PARABLE A *parable* is a short, simple story from which a moral or religious lesson can be drawn. The most famous parables are those in the New Testament. Leo Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" (p. 835) echoes a biblical parable.

PARADOX A *paradox* is a statement that seems to be contradictory but that actually presents a truth. Wole Soyinka's "Season" (p. 1344) presents this paradox, "Rust is ripeness, rust / And the wilted-corn plume. . . ." Because rust is often associated with metallic corrosion, the statement seems contradictory. However, in the context of the color of harvested crops, the statement makes sense. Because a paradox is surprising or even shocking, it draws the reader's attention to what is being said.

See also Figurative Language and Oxymoron.

PARODY A *parody* is a humorous imitation of another work or of a type of work.

PASTORAL *Pastoral* refers to literary works that deal with the pleasures of a simple rural life or with escape to a simpler place and time. The tradition of pastoral literature began in ancient Greece with the poetic idylls of Theocritus. The Roman poet Virgil also wrote a famous collection of pastoral poems, the *Eclogues*.

PENTAMETER See Meter.

PERSONA *Persona* means, literally, "a mask." A *persona* is a fictional self created by an author—a self through whom the narrative of a poem or story is told.

See also Speaker.

PERSONIFICATION *Personification* is a figure of speech in which a nonhuman subject is given human characteristics. Effective personification of things or ideas makes their qualities seem unified, like the characteristics of a person, and their relationship with the reader seem closer.

See also Figurative Language and Metaphor.

PLOT *Plot* is the sequence of events in a literary work. The two primary elements of any plot are characters and a conflict. Most plots can be analyzed into many or all of the following parts:

1. The *exposition* introduces the setting, the characters, and the basic situation.
2. The *inciting incident* introduces the central conflict.
3. During the *development*, the conflict runs its course and usually intensifies.
4. At the *climax*, the conflict reaches a high point of interest or suspense.
5. The *denouement* ties up loose ends that remain after the climax of the conflict.
6. At the *resolution*, the story is resolved and an insight is revealed.

There are many variations on the standard plot structure. Some stories begin *in medias res* ("in the middle of things"), after the inciting incident has already occurred. In some stories, the expository material appears toward the middle, in

flashbacks. In many stories, there is no denouement. Occasionally, the conflict is left unresolved.

POETRY *Poetry* is one of the three major types, or genres, of literature, the others being prose and drama. Poetry defies simple definition because there is no single characteristic that is found in all poems and not found in all nonpoems.

Often, poems are divided into lines and stanzas. Poems such as sonnets, odes, villanelles, and sestinas are governed by rules regarding the number of lines, the number and placement of stressed syllables in each line, and the rhyme scheme. In the case of villanelles and sestinas, the repetition of words at the ends of lines or of entire lines is required. However, some poems are written in free verse. Most poems make use of highly concise, musical, and emotionally charged language. Many also use imagery, figurative language, and devices of sound like rhyme.

Types of poetry include *narrative poetry* (ballads, epics, and metrical romances); *dramatic poetry* (dramatic monologues and dramatic dialogues); *lyrics* (sonnets, odes, elegies, and love poems); and *concrete poetry* (a poem presented on the page in a shape that suggests its subject).

POINT OF VIEW The perspective, or vantage point, from which a story is told is its *point of view*. If a character within the story narrates, then it is told from the *first-person point of view*. If a voice from outside the story tells it, then the story is told from the *third-person point of view*. If the knowledge of the storyteller is limited to the internal states of one character, then the storyteller has a *limited point of view*. If the storyteller's knowledge extends to the internal states of all the characters, then the storyteller has an *omniscient point of view*.

PROSE *Prose* is the ordinary form of written language and one of the three major types of literature. Most writing that is not poetry, drama, or song is considered prose. Prose occurs in two major forms: fiction and nonfiction.

PROTAGONIST The *protagonist* is the main character in a literary work. In R. K. Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day" (p. 1366), the protagonist is the astrologer.

PYRRHIC *See* Meter.

QUATRAIN *See* Stanza.

REALISM *Realism* is the presentation in art of details from actual life. During the last part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, Realism enjoyed considerable popularity among writers in the English-speaking world. Novels often dealt with grim social realities and presented realistic portrayals of the psychological states of characters.

See also Symbolism.

REFRAIN A *refrain* is a regularly repeated line or group of lines in a poem or song.

See also Ballad.

REGIONALISM *Regionalism* is the tendency to confine one's writing to the presentation of the distinct culture of an area, including its speech, customs, and history.

RHYME *Rhyme* is the repetition of sounds at the ends of words. *End rhyme* occurs when rhyming words appear at the ends of lines. *Internal rhyme* occurs when rhyming words fall within a line. *Exact rhyme* is the use of identical rhyming sounds, as in *love* and *dove*. *Approximate, or slant, rhyme* is the use of sounds that are similar but not identical, as in *prove* and *glove*.

RHYME SCHEME *Rhyme scheme* is the regular pattern of rhyming words in a poem or stanza. To indicate a rhyme scheme, assign a different letter to each final sound in the poem or stanza. The following lines from Morris Bishop's translation of Petrarch's "Laura" (p. 675) have been marked.

She used to let her golden hair fly free	a
For the wind to toy and tangle and molest;	b
Her eyes were brighter than the radiant west.	b
(Seldom they shine so now.) I used to see	a
Pity look out of those deep eyes on me.	a

RHYTHM *See* Meter.

ROMANCE A *romance* is a story that presents remote or imaginative incidents rather than ordinary, realistic experience. The term *romance* was originally used to refer to medieval tales of the deeds and loves of noble knights and ladies. From the eighteenth century on, the term *romance* has been used to describe sentimental novels about love.

ROMANTICISM *Romanticism* was a literary and artistic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In reaction to Neoclassicism, the Romantics emphasized imagination, fancy, freedom, emotion, wildness, the beauty of the untamed natural world, the rights of the individual, the nobility of the common man, and the attractiveness of pastoral life. Important figures in the Romantic Movement include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo, and Heinrich Heine.

RUN-ON LINE A *run-on line* is a line that does not contain a pause or a stop at the end. The flow of words carries the reader to the following line. A poet may use run-on lines to avoid creating a sing-song effect, in which each line is separated from the next by a pause.

See also End-Stopped Line.

SATIRE *Satire* is writing that ridicules or holds up to contempt the faults of individuals or groups. Although a satire is often humorous, its purpose is not simply to make readers laugh but also to correct the flaws and shortcomings that it points out.

SCANSION *Scansion* is the process of analyzing the metrical pattern of a poem.

See also *Meter*.

SESTET See *Stanza*.

SETTING The *setting* is the time and place of the action of a literary work. A setting can provide a backdrop for the action. It can be the force that the protagonist struggles against and thus the source of the central conflict. It can also be used to create an atmosphere. In many works, the setting symbolizes a point that the author wishes to emphasize. In Albert Camus's short story "The Guest" (p. 1224), the setting is a lonely desert plateau in an Arab country occupied by France. Fearing an Arab insurrection, and unable to spare anyone for a long trip, the local French police ask a schoolteacher to take an Arab suspect to the authorities. Such a situation would only arise in an isolated colonial area. The setting also adds a grim atmosphere and conveys a theme—human freedom. In the following scene, a character must choose between two directions:

They reached a level height made up of crumbly rocks. From there on, the plateau sloped down, eastward, toward a low plain where there were a few spindly trees and, to the south, toward outcroppings of rock that gave the landscape a chaotic look.

Daru surveyed the two directions. There was nothing but the sky on the horizon. Not a man could be seen.

See also *Mood and Symbol*.

SHORT STORY A *short story* is a brief work of fiction. The short story resembles the longer novel, but it generally has a simpler plot and setting. In addition, a short story tends to reveal a character at a crucial moment, rather than to develop a character through many incidents.

SIMILE A *simile* is a figure of speech that compares two apparently dissimilar things using *like* or *as*. Many similes appear in the *Iliad* (p. 326), including the following:

And swift Achilles kept on coursing Hector, nonstop as a hound in the mountains starts a fawn from its lair, hunting him down the gorges, down the narrow glens.

By comparing apparently dissimilar things, the writer of a simile surprises the reader into an appreciation of the hidden similarities of the things being compared.

See also *Figurative Language*.

SOLILOQUY A *soliloquy* is a long speech in a play or in a prose work made by a character who is alone and thus reveals private thoughts and feelings to the audience or reader.

See also *Monologue*.

SONNET A sonnet is a fourteen-line lyric poem with a single theme. Sonnets are usually written in iambic pentameter. The *Petrarchan*, or *Italian*, *sonnet* is divided into two parts, an eight-line octave and a six-line sestet. The octave rhymes *abba abba*, while the sestet generally rhymes *cde cde* or uses some combination of *cd* rhymes. The octave raises a question, states a problem, or presents a brief narrative, and the sestet answers the question, solves the problem, or comments on the narrative.

The *Shakespearean*, or *English*, *sonnet* has three four-line quatrains plus a concluding two-line couplet. The rhyme scheme of such a sonnet is usually *abab cdcd efef gg*. Each of the three quatrains usually explores a different variation of the main theme. Then, the couplet presents a summarizing or concluding statement.

See also *Lyric Poem and Sonnet Sequence*.

SONNET SEQUENCE A *sonnet sequence* is a series or group of sonnets, most often written to or about a beloved. Although each sonnet can stand alone as a separate poem, the sequence lets the poet trace the development of a relationship or examine different aspects of a single subject.

See also *Sonnet*.

SPEAKER The *speaker* is the imaginary voice assumed by the writer of a poem; the character who "says" the poem. This character is often not identified by name but may be identified otherwise. For instance, in the opening line of an ancient Egyptian poem (p. 37), the lovelorn speaker's desire for attention is made clear in the opening:

I think I'll go home and lie very still,
feigning terminal illness

Recognizing the speaker and thinking about his or her characteristics are often central to interpreting a lyric poem.

See also *Persona and Point of View*.

SPONDEE See *Meter*.

STANZA A *stanza* is a group of lines in a poem, which is seen as a unit. Many poems are divided into stanzas that are separated by spaces. Stanzas often function like paragraphs in prose. Each stanza states and develops one main idea.

Stanzas are commonly named according to the number of lines found in them, as follows:

1. *Couplet*: a two-line stanza
2. *Tercet*: a three-line stanza
3. *Quatrain*: a four-line stanza
4. *Cinquain*: a five-line stanza
5. *Sestet*: a six-line stanza
6. *Heptastich*: a seven-line stanza

7. *Octave*: an eight-line stanza

See also Sonnet.

STYLE *Style* is a writer's typical way of writing. Determinants of a writer's style include formality, use of figurative language, use of rhythm, typical grammatical patterns, typical sentence lengths, and typical methods of organization. For example, Yehuda Amichai's colloquial style in a poem such as "From the Book of Esther I Filtered the Sediment" (p. 1320), is an innovation in Hebrew literature.

See also Diction.

SURREALISM *Surrealism* is a movement in art and literature that emphasizes the irrational side of human nature. It focuses on the imaginary world of dreams and the unconscious mind. Originating in France following World War I, Surrealism was a protest against the so-called Rationalism that led the world into catastrophic war. Surrealism can be found in Latin American poems such as Octavio Paz's "Fable" (p. 1194).

SYMBOL A *symbol* is a sign, word, phrase, image, or other object that stands for or represents something else. Thus, a flag can symbolize a country, a spoken word can symbolize an object, a fine car can symbolize wealth, and so on. In literary criticism, a distinction is often made between traditional or conventional symbols—those that are part of our general cultural inheritance—and *personal symbols*—those that are created by particular authors for use in particular works.

Conventional symbolism is often based on elements of nature. For example, youth is often symbolized by greenery or springtime, middle age by summer, and old age by autumn or winter. Conventional symbols are also borrowed from religion and politics. For example, a cross may be a symbol of Christianity, or the color red may be a symbol of Marxist ideology.

SYMBOLISM *Symbolism* was a literary movement of nineteenth-century France. The Symbolist writers reacted against Realism and stressed the importance of emotional states, especially by means of symbols corresponding to these states. The Symbolists were also concerned with using sound to achieve emotional effects. Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine are among the best-known Symbolist poets. Many twentieth-century writers around the world were influenced by the Symbolist movement.

See also Realism.

SYNECDOCHE *Synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to stand for the whole. For example, one might speak of "hands" to refer to the crew of a ship, "wheels" to refer to a car, or "the law" to refer to the whole criminal justice system.

See also Figurative Language.

TANKA *Tanka* is a form of Japanese poetry consisting of five lines of five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables. Tanka is the most prevalent verse form in traditional Japanese literature. Tanka often tell a brief story or express a single feeling or thought.

TETRAMETER See Meter.

THEME *Theme* is the central idea, concern, or purpose in a literary work. In an essay, the theme might be directly stated in what is known as a thesis statement. In a serious literary work, the theme is usually expressed indirectly rather than directly. A light work, one written strictly for entertainment, may not have a theme.

TOPE *Tone* is the writer's attitude toward the readers and toward the subject. It may be formal or informal, friendly or distant, personal or pompous. The tone of Gabriela Mistral's poem "Fear" (p. 1102) is, not surprisingly, fearful.

See also Mood.

TRADITION In literary study and practice, a *tradition* is a past body of work, developed over the course of history. A literary tradition may be unified by form (the tradition of the sonnet), by language (literature in Spanish), or by nationality (Japanese literature). A tradition develops through the acknowledgment of works, forms, and styles as classic. Writers participate in a tradition if only by following conventions about the suitable forms and subjects for literature. They make conscious use of the tradition when they use references, stories, or forms from old literature to give authority to their work.

TRAGEDY *Tragedy* is a type of drama or literature that shows the downfall or destruction of a noble or outstanding person, traditionally one who possesses a character weakness called a *tragic flaw*. The *tragic hero* is caught up in a sequence of events that inevitably results in disaster. Because the protagonist is neither a wicked villain nor an innocent victim, the audience reacts with mixed emotions—both pity and fear, according to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who defined tragedy in the *Poetics*. The outcome of a tragedy, in which the protagonist is isolated from society, contrasts with the happy resolution of a comedy, in which the protagonist makes peace with society. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (p. 426) is a Greek tragedy.

See also Comedy and Drama.

TRIMETER See Meter.

TROCHEE See Meter.