

## Literary Terms

### I. General Terms:

#### Characters:

**Round**—Multidimensional (faults and all); the main or principal player(s)/character(s).

**Flat**—One dimensional, one-sided.

**Dynamic**—Changes.

**Static**—Doesn't change.

**Foil**—A minor character that provides contrast with one of the main characters.

**Plot:** What happens in a story.

**Exposition**—The beginning of a story that exposes the problem(s)/conflict(s)

**Rising Action**—Events leading up to the climax

**Falling Action**—Events following the climax

**Climax**—The peak of emotional intensity in a work. There are mini climaxes too.

**Denouement**—The resolution of the climax/conflict(s).

**Deus Ex Machina**—literally means “God out of the Machine.”

#### Point of View

**First Person**—“I” or “me”/“my”

**Second Person**—“You”

**Third Person:** “He”/“She”

**Omniscient**—godlike, all-knowing; multiple points of view at the same time; will go into more than one character's thoughts or feelings in the same sentence or paragraph.

**Limited Omniscient**—is usually limited to one character's thoughts or feelings, but can switch POV, usually at the start of a new section or chapter. There is also a limit to what the narrator knows, unlike the omniscient narrator who often knows everything.

**Objective**—No internal thought or feeling, only what can be seen from outside a character; not colored by bias or emotion.

**Subjective**—No internal thought or feeling, only what can be seen from outside a character; colored by bias or emotion.

**Unreliable Narrator**—Can't be trusted to tell the truth. Some are mentally incompetent, deranged, senile, naïve, etc.

**Indirect Narration**—The things we learn about characters or events that are said in **dialogue**.

**Direct Narration**—The things that are said by a narrator.

**Theme**—Not simply the subject of a literary work, but rather a statement that the text seems to be making about that subject. For example, the subject may be suffering. The theme, depending upon the author's view, might be that suffering is in God's plan and should therefore simply be accepted—or that it is a drain on an individual's spirit or mind and should therefore be avoided at all costs.

**Irony**—A contradiction or incongruity between appearance or expectation and reality.

**Dramatic Irony**—When the audience or reader knows something that one or more of the characters doesn't.

**Situational Irony**—Events or situations become ironic. An example is "The Gift of the Magi."

**Verbal Irony**—Something said becomes ironic. For example, "Yay, I'm the biggest loser! I just won a million dollars!"

**In Medias Res**—a literary term coined by Horace that means literally "in the middle of things." It is used to describe stories that begin in the middle the action rather than at the beginning of a character's life.

**Tone/Voice**—The narrator's attitude toward the characters and/or events.

**Metaphor**—A comparison between two unlike things.

**Simile**—A comparison between two unlike things, using "like" or "as."

**Personification**—Using human traits or qualities to describe something inhuman.

**Imagery**—the language a writer uses to convey a visual picture (or to create or represent any sensory experience).

**Hyperbole**—A gross exaggeration for dramatic effect. Example: I'm so hungry I could eat a horse! (That's also a cliché—avoid clichés)

**Metonymy**—The rhetorical or metaphorical substitution of one word for another because the two are associated. Example: a monarch is not the same thing as a crown, but we often refer to the monarch as "the crown" because the two are associated.

**Onomatopoeia**—A word that attempts to sounds like what it describes. Examples: Swoosh, meow, crack, buzz, etc.

**Apostrophe (invocation)**—is used for a kind of formal invocation. Sometimes the invocation is to an absent (or even dead) person: "Milton," writes Wordsworth, "thou shouldst be living at this hour;/ England hath need of thee." At other times, an inanimate object can be invoked: "O you gentle day sky!" Apostrophizing an inanimate object may involve [personifying](#) it.

### **Types of repetition**

**Consonance**—repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the ends of words.

Example: She **sells** sea **shells** at the sea shore.

**Alliteration**—The repetition of sounds in a sequence of words (often initial consonant sounds). Example: **S**he **s**ells sea **s**hells at the sea shore.

**Assonance**—The repetition of vowel sounds in a sequence. sounds. Example: She sells sea shells at the sea shore.

**Connotation**—The association(s) evoked by a word beyond its literal meaning.

**Denotation**—The primary, literal meaning of a word.

## **II. Poetic Terms:**

**Foot:** A unit of rhythm or meter; the division in verse of a group of syllables, one of which is long or accented.

**Meter** (rhythm)—the more or less regular pattern of accented and unaccented syllables in poetry.

**Ballad:** A form of verse to be sung or recited and characterized by its presentation of a dramatic or exciting EPISODE in simple narrative form. A **Ballad Stanza** has a rhyme scheme of ABCB.

**Couplet:** Two lines of VERSE with similar END-RHYMES.

**Enjambment**—The continuation of the sense and therefore the grammatical construction beyond the end of a line of verse or the end of a couplet.

**End Rhyme**—a rhyme occurring in the terminating word or syllable of one line of poetry with that of another line, as opposed to internal rhyme.

**Endstopping**—a line of verse in which a logical or rhetorical pause occurs at the end of the line, usually marked with a period, comma, or semicolon.

**Eye rhyme:** two words with similar spelling, but with different pronunciation: for example, “laughter” and “slaughter,” “mow” and “how.”

**Internal Rhyme:** Also called *middle rhyme*, a rhyme occurring *within* the line. The rhyme may be with words within the line but not at the line end, or with a word within the line and a word at the end of the line.

### III. Terms specific to Epic Poetry

**Epic Poetry**—Long, formal narrative poem written in an elevated style that recounts the adventures of a hero of mythic proportions.

**Invocation**—A direct and explicit request for help in writing/storytelling.

**Epithet**—An adjective or phrase applied to a noun to accentuate a certain trait or characteristic. Examples: “the man skilled in all ways of contending” or “the red-haired king.”

**Epic Hero**—a man of great stature and significance with two traditional virtues: wisdom and bravery.

**Epic Simile** (also known as “Homeric Simile”)—An extended or elaborate simile in which the image used in comparison is described at such length that it obscures the subject of the comparison. Unlike a regular simile which uses “like” or “as” to compare the two unlike things, the key comparison words in an epic simile are “so” or “just so.”

### IV. Dramatic Terms:

**Aside**—Something a character says under his or her breath on stage that the audience understands is meant to be heard by the audience but not by one or more characters on stage.

**Catharsis**—The purging of emotion that takes place when witnessing both comedy and tragedy, but more commonly during a tragedy.

**Tragic flaw**—The trait in a tragic hero that is responsible for his or her rise and fall from power.

**Hubris**—Excessive pride; the most common of all the tragic flaws.

**Comedy**—An amusing and entertaining work that ends happily and presents the “lighter side” of life (often about common people in common language).

**Tragedy**—A serious form and often somber drama that ends in disaster and focuses on a character who undergoes unexpected personal reversals (often about persons of distinction and written in an elevated style of writing).

**History**—One of Shakespeare's plays that concerns itself with English Tudor history.

**Prologue**—Occurs before the action of the play begins; one or more of the characters comments on what is about to take place.

**Epilogue**—Occurs after the action of the play has taken place; one or more of the characters comments on what has taken place.

**Monologue**—A long, dramatic speech given by one character

**Soliloquy**—A long, dramatic speech spoken when a character is alone on stage.

**Chorus**—Comments on the action/events of the play; the status quo.

## V. Rhetorical Devices

**Anaphora**--Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, sentences, or lines.

### Examples

**This** royal throne of kings, **this** sceptred isle,  
**This** earth of majesty, **this** seat of Mars,  
**This** other Eden, demi-paradise,  
**This** fortress built by Nature for herself

**Pathetic Fallacy**—“. . . the tendency to credit nature with human emotions. In a larger sense the pathetic fallacy is any false emotionalism resulting in a too impassioned description of nature. It is the carrying over to inanimate objects of the moods and passions of a human being” ([Source](#) : Harmon & Holman, 379).