



Glossary of Literary Terms

- ACCENT.** The emphasis placed on syllables in the rhythm of a line of poetry.
- ACCENTUAL METER.** Accentual meter measures the rhythms in poetic verse based on the number of speech stresses per line. Different accents create different meanings, e.g., "government *by* the people, *for* the people, as opposed to government *by* the *people*, *for* the *people* . . ."
- ACT.** The major division in the action of a play. Smaller divisions within acts are called *scenes*.
- AFTERWORD.** A final passage or scene following the conclusion of a story or play, also called an *epilogue*. The afterword often presents the narrator's assessment of the overall meaning of the story.
- ALIENATION EFFECT.** An effect, such as a mask or a surreal setting, designed to prevent audiences from becoming emotionally involved in a play. This technique was used by the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht to move audiences to political action.
- ALLEGORY.** A narrative in which the characters, action, and dialogue work to represent an abstract concept. The fable of the ant and the grasshopper, for example, is an allegory advocating industriousness.
- ALLITERATION.** The repetition of a sound, usually the initial sound, in a sequence of words, such as "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen" (Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard").
- ALLUSION.** A reference, often to a historical figure, myth, or artwork, that exists outside the literary work. Allusions to the *Bible* are common in Western literature.
- AMBIGUITY.** A deliberate use of language to suggest multiple meanings. For example, Young Goodman Brown's adventure in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story of the same name may have been a dream, or may have actually occurred.
- AMPITHEATER.** Originating in classical Greece, a theater designed with a stage surrounded by tiers of seats arranged in a semicircle.
- ANALOGY.** A comparison between two apparently unlike things that share some common features; a reference to the familiar in order to help readers understand the unfamiliar.
- ANAPEST.** A metrical foot comprised of two short syllables and one long syllable, e.g., like a child, like a ghost.
- ANECDOTE.** A brief episode within a longer work, designed to make a point or illustrate an idea.

- ANTAGONIST.** The character who opposes the lead character, or protagonist. Occasionally, when the conflict is internal, the antagonist is actually another side of the protagonist's own personality.
- ANTICLIMAX.** A failure to achieve the anticipated high point in a narrative, usually resulting in disappointed expectations.
- ANTIHERO.** A main character who does not possess the normal positive qualities of a hero; antiheroes appear primarily in modern works.
- ANTISTROPHE.** With *strophe* and *epode*, a stanza in a Greek Ode. The antistrophe represents the reverse of the strophe.
- ANTITHESIS.** The balancing of one word or expression against a contrasting word or expression, as in "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*).
- APOSTROPHE.** An address either to a person who is dead or not present, to an inanimate object, or to an abstract concept, designed in part to provide insight into a character's thoughts.
- APPROXIMATE RHYME.** Also referred to as slant or near rhyme, these rhymes share sound qualities or sounds within words. An example of such a rhyme is the feminine or half rhyme. Approximate rhymes are often repeated strategically within a perfect rhyme scheme in order to achieve a particular affect, e.g., told, woe.
- APRON STAGE.** Popularized by Elizabethan theater, a stage that extends toward the audience, beyond the arch of the stage.
- ARCHETYPE.** A character, place, or event that represents a universal truth, often of mythic proportions. The archetype appeals to what psychologist Carl Jung referred to as the "collective unconscious," or the sublimated memories of an entire race.
- ARENA STAGE.** A stage that is surrounded on every side by the audience, with actors entering and exiting through the aisles.
- ARGUMENT.** An introductory statement to a longer work of prose or poetry that summarizes the main point of the work.
- ASIDE.** In drama, a monologue spoken by an actor directly to the audience, outside the hearing of other characters onstage. The aside was relatively common in Elizabethan drama, used to express a character's inner thoughts; in modern drama, it is sometimes used for humorous effect.
- ASSONANCE.** A pattern of identical or similar vowel sounds, usually in stressed syllables of words with different end sounds. For example, the "o" sound is repeated five times in this line from George Gordon, Lord Byron's "Childe Harold": "Roll on, thou deep and dark-blue ocean, roll!"
- ATMOSPHERE.** The general feeling evoked through setting or dialogue. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper," for example, the

early description of the narrator's house creates a sense of foreboding and unease in the reader.

AUBADE. A lyric poem in which two lovers express their regret over the coming of the dawn.

AUDITORY IMAGE. A mental perception that recalls a particular sound, specifically a word or words that refer to something heard.

AUGUSTAN AGE. The period of English literature encompassing the first half of the eighteenth century, featuring such writers as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, who emulated the work of figures in ancient Rome such as Virgil and Horace.

AUTHORIAL VOICE. An idealized projection of the author, or someone to whom the reader must give approval, that is the beliefs, attitude, and tone of the author, as opposed to the narrator or any other character in a work.

AVANT GARDE. Any form of writing that deliberately rejects tradition; instead employing thoroughly innovative style or subject matter.

BACCHIC. In classical Latin poetry, a foot consisting of a short syllable followed by two longs or a weak syllable followed by two strong syllables.

BALLAD. A song or poem that tells a story and often features a repeated refrain. Because the ballad was originally an oral rather than written form, a single ballad may appear in a number of different versions.

BEAST FABLE. A short tale illustrating a moral truth, featuring animals as the main characters. Aesop's tales, such as the tortoise and the hare or the fox and the grapes, are the most widely known beast fables.

BEAT. The pattern of stress in a poem.

BEGINNING RHYME. The rhyme located in the first syllables of a poem, e.g.,
Why should I have returned?

BILDUNGSROMAN. A novel, often autobiographical, that recounts the development of a character from childhood to maturity, for example, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

BIOGRAPHY. A full account of a person's life written by another. Biography moves beyond mere facts to create a portrait of the subject. *Autobiography* refers to such an account of the writer's own life.

BLANK VERSE. Unrhymed verse written in iambic pentameter. Considered to be the poetic form closest to normal speech patterns, blank verse is featured in Shakespeare's plays and in narrative poems such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

BLOCKING. The positioning of actors on a stage, including their movements and physical interaction. The director is responsible for blocking.

BOX SET. A stage designed to represent a room realistically, with three walls and an invisible fourth wall facing the audience.

BROADSIDE BALLADS. Popular in sixteenth-century England, cheaply printed ballads, speeches, and diatribes.

BURLESQUE. A comedy presented in the style of a lofty, serious work but featuring gross exaggeration and distortion.

CACOPHONY. A series of discordant or harsh sounds used to jar the senses of the audience, as in Thomas Hardy's antiwar poem "The Man He Killed":
"You shoot a fellow down / You'd treat if met where any bar is."

CAESURA. Any pause in a line of poetry, often in the middle of a line, sometimes used to create rhythmic effect, e.g., "Had we but world enough, and time."

CANON. Originally referring to the authenticated books of the Bible, now used to indicate those works considered by scholars to represent the best writing in a literary tradition, the masterpieces. Since the 1960s, many scholars have questioned more traditional interpretations of the canon because of the absence of works by women and writers from other marginalized groups. Canon may also refer to a comprehensive list of works by a specific author (e.g., the canon of Shakespeare).

CARPE DIEM. Latin for "Seize the day," a common theme in lyric poetry emphasizing the need to pursue sensual pleasure because life is short. The theme was prevalent in English love poems written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

CASTING. The selection of actors to play specific roles in drama.

CATASTROPHE. The conclusion of a tragic drama, in which the protagonist often dies. Based on Gustav Freytag's analysis of typical five-act plays, catastrophe follows introduction, rising action, climax, and falling action.

CATHARSIS. According to Aristotle, the purging of emotions at the end of a tragedy. During the play, audiences experience pity and fear as they identify with the tragic hero; a successful tragedy ends by reaffirming traditional human values, allowing the audience to experience catharsis.

CHARACTER. A person presented in either fiction or drama, whose behavior contributes to the plot and whose personality lends meaning to the narrative.

CHARACTERIZATION. The methods by which a writer brings a character to life, usually through the character's own words and actions, the responses of other characters, and the narrator's commentary.

CHORUS. In classical Greek drama, a group of actors set apart from the main action of the play, who commented regularly on the implications of the action. The chorus often wore masks and performed ritualized dance movements as they chanted.

CHRONOLOGY. The arrangement of time in a work. Some works follow a *linear* chronology, relating a story from beginning to end, while some begin *in medias res*, or in the middle, and move back and forth in time.

CLASSICISM. A value system based on the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, focusing on such features as balance, simplicity, clarity, order, and reason.

CLICHÉ. A figurative expression that has become trite from overuse, such as "raging inferno" or "ship of state." In drama and fiction, a character or setting can be a cliché, such as the prostitute with a heart of gold or the dark and stormy night.

CLIMAX. The high point, or point of greatest tension, in the plot. Climax is sometimes referred to as the turning point.

CLOSED COUPLET. A couplet consisting of two rhymed lines of poetry expressing a complete thought, e.g.,

A dog starved at his Master's Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State

CLOSED FORM. Closed form refers to any poem that conforms to established conventions for rhyme, meter, or stanza form, such as a sonnet or haiku.

CLOSET DRAMA. A play written primarily to be read rather than performed onstage.

COLLOQUIAL DICTION. Language representative of ordinary people speaking informally, often using slang, such as the language in Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh."

COMEDY. Drama featuring a happy ending, designed to amuse the audience.

COMEDY OF MANNERS. Popular in late seventeenth-century England, drama that satirizes the behavior of sophisticated, high-society characters.

COMEDY OF THE ABSURD. A type of twentieth-century drama rooted in existentialism, portraying humans as isolated creatures living a meaningless existence. Such plays dismiss conventional plot, setting, and characterization.

COMIC RELIEF. A humorous character or scene, usually introduced in a serious play, whose jokes and buffoonery are intended as a brief break from the tension created by the main narrative. A character introduced for comic relief will often comment directly upon the absurdity of the protagonist's dilemma. Examples of such characters include the drunken porter in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

COMING-OF-AGE STORY. A narrative which takes as its subject the central character's emergence from childhood into some form of maturity; this emergence is often produced by a traumatic experience of the adult world. Examples of the coming-of-age story include Sharon Olds' "Rites of Passage" and Julia Alvarez's "Trespass."

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE. A form of improvised drama that developed in Italy during the fourteenth century, and that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Commedia dell'arte (or "comedy of the profes-

sion," pointing to its creation by professional performers) used stock characters and scenarios, usually farcical in nature, but required actors to embellish and develop their roles in order to maintain the attention of the audience.

COMPLICATION. In the Aristotelian model of a narrative's action, a complication occurs after the onset of the narrative's problem, interfering with the protagonist's attempts to restore the status quo or a state of equilibrium. Complications generally function to push the plot along and to heighten the audience's tension.

CONCEIT. An extended metaphor, often using an unusual image to show the resemblances between otherwise unlike things. Common conceits in Elizabethan poetry include the frequent comparison of the beloved to a flower or a garden. The "metaphysical" poets extended the conceit in ways that were often startling and provocative, such as John Donne's comparison between a flea bite and a sexual encounter in "The Flea."

CONCRETE DICTION. Language that describes qualities that can be perceived with the five senses. Concrete diction is defined in opposition to abstract language, which cannot be so perceived; an adjective such as "good" is thus abstract, while "sweet" is concrete.

CONCRETE POETRY. Poetry that is shaped on the page, often to resemble the object it describes. For example, George Herbert's "Easter Wings" creates those wings both typographically and through its imagery.

CONFESSIONAL POEM. A poem which focuses on its narrator's state of mind, often describing that state of mind in less-than-flattering terms. The chaos or trauma of the narrator's internal life is often intended as a metaphor for the world at large. Confessional poets include Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Robert Lowell.

CONFLICT. A struggle between two forces that drives a narrative's plot. The two forces in conflict can be two characters, a character and his or her environment or society, or two large social groups. Conflict can also be wholly internal to a character, as in narratives in which a character struggles with his or her psychological issues or conflicting desires.

CONNOTATION. The implied or figurative meaning that a word or image carries, as distinct from its literal or explicit meaning. Connotation often includes contextual or culturally specific overtones. For instance, "home" literally means the place one lives, but it often carries the connotations of safety and security. See denotation.

CONSONANCE. A pleasant combination of sounds; also, the repetition of consonants or groups of consonants, particularly at the ends of words. See also alliteration, assonance.

CONVENTIONS. Structures, devices, or other features that are traditional or expected within particular literary genres. For instance, an English sonnet's rhyme scheme is a convention; similarly, the *femme fatale* is a convention of hardboiled detective novels.

COSMIC IRONY. Irony related to a deterministic or fatalistic view of the world, usually implying that fate or some other cosmic force is toying with human lives.

COUPLET. Two successive lines of poetry of the same metrical length, usually rhyming, that form a complete unit.

COZY. A light English mystery novel, filled with suspense but typically avoiding gruesome bloodshed or terror. The detective in a cozy is generally an amateur sleuth, and often a sweet elderly lady likely not to seem a threat to a criminal. Agatha Christie's Miss Marple novels are typical of the genre.

CRISIS. The peak of a narrative's tension; the critical turning point of a narrative's action that usually leads to or produces its climax.

CRITICISM. The interpretive or analytical work performed by a serious reader of a text, in which the reader evaluates the textual evidence in order to more fully comprehend a text's meaning. Criticism is so named not because it is of necessity "negative," but rather because the critic asks difficult questions in performing such analysis.

CYBERPUNK. A sub-genre of science fiction, growing out of the work of writers including William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, often focused on a dystopian, heavily computerized near-future world. Cyberpunk combines the nihilism of the punk movement with an interest in the ways new technologies shape the future of human societies.

DACTYL. A three-syllable metrical foot composed of one stressed and two unstressed syllables. Examples include "strawberry" and "horrible."

DECORUM. Literary and dramatic appropriateness, particularly in terms of the use of appropriate language and form. Decorum is a key principle of classical rhetoric.

DENOTATION. The literal or explicit meaning that a word or image carries, as distinct from its implied or figurative meaning. Denotation usually disregards the cultural or contextual overtones of a term. Dictionary definitions are generally denotative. See connotation.

DENOUEMENT. The outcome or resolution of a narrative's action. "Denouement" derives from a French term meaning "unknotting" or "unwinding," and thus refers to the period after a narrative's climax, during which the status quo or equilibrium is restored.

DETECTIVE STORY. A branch of mystery stories focusing on the investigation of a crime. The genre of the detective story was established in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes, and was later revolutionized by

the work of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. The detective story frequently focuses as much on the psychology of the detective himself or herself as on the puzzle he or she is charged with solving.

DEUS EX MACHINA. Literally, "god from the machine," the device often used to resolve Greek drama, whereby a god would be lowered onto the stage in order to bring a divine end to the play's conflict. The term has come to be used to describe any improbable or unrealistic solution to a narrative's plot.

DIALECT. The language of a particular class, ethnic group, or region, as represented in literature. Dialect is a method of characterization that uses spelling, grammar, and word choice to represent the sounds of that character's speech, often with the intent of distinguishing the character from others in the narrative. A famous example of the use of dialect can be found in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

DIALOGUE. The lines spoken by a character in a work of fiction or drama, and particularly a conversation between two characters.

DICTION. The particular word choices made by an author. Diction may be formal or informal, concrete or abstract; diction is a major contributor to an author's style.

DIDACTIC POETRY. Poetry that is instructive in aim, seeking to teach its reader a lesson, or otherwise convince its reader of a particular argument.

DIMETER. A poetic line consisting of two metrical feet.

DISCOURSE. Traditionally, a formal verbal expression or exchange, taking place in either speech or writing. "Discourse" has been adopted as a key term in recent critical theory to describe the ways in which meaning, and particularly ideology, is disseminated within a culture through its uses of language.

DOCUMENTARY THEATER. A recent mode of theatrical production that brings together ethnographic research with performance, creating a play which is both factual and dramatic. The term usually implies that the dialogue has been taken verbatim from interviews. Documentary theater has roots in the Depression-era Federal Theater Project and the German "theater of fact" of the 1960s. Examples of documentary theater include Anna Devere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* and the Tectonic Theater Project's *The Laramie Project*.

DOGGEREL. Comic verse composed in a loose, irregular measure. "Doggerel" is today most often used in a derogatory fashion, to refer to crudely written or otherwise bad poetry.

DOUBLE ENTENDRE. A French term for "double meaning." A double entendre is a deliberately ambiguous phrase, usually conveying a secondary meaning of a humorously sexual nature.

DOUBLE PLOT. Two interwoven plots contained in one narrative. Often one plot is treated more centrally than the other, producing a main plot and a subplot. An example of such a double plot is contained in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, one with Lear at its center and the other revolving around Gloucester.

DRAMA. A genre of literary work, written in either prose or verse, in which characters enact a narrative through dialogue and pantomime. Most drama is written to be performed on the stage, though "closet" drama is intended to be read rather than performed.

DRAMATIC IRONY. A dramatic device in which the reader or spectator knows something about a situation that a character does not, with the result that the character either behaves inappropriately or expects an outcome that is opposed to that which the reader knows is forthcoming. Dramatic irony runs rampant in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, as Oedipus repeatedly curses the murderer of Laius, not knowing that he is in fact that murderer.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE. A poem narrated by an individual speaker who addresses either the reader or an implied listener. The poetry of Robert Browning includes many dramatic monologues, including "My Last Duchess."

DRAMATIC POETRY. Drama written in verse. Also, poetry that presents a character speaking directly to the reader or audience without additional authorial devices.

DYNAMIC CHARACTER. Also known as a round character; a complex character depicted as having psychological depth, particularly one who develops and changes over the course of a narrative. See flat character.

DYSTOPIA. Literally, "bad place." As opposed to a utopia (a good place, an idealized imaginary world), a dystopia is a nightmarish fictional future world, in which characters lead dehumanized, fear-filled lives. Dystopian narratives often focus on totalitarian regimes, and are often satiric commentaries on our own society. Examples of dystopian narratives include George Orwell's *1984* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

ECHO VERSE. A kind of literary resonance, in which a sound, or word, or image in a text recalls a similar effect in another text. As a poetic form dating back to late classical Greek poetry, the final syllables of the lines repeat in reply or commentary.

ELEGY. In classical literature, "elegy" referred only to poems written in strict elegiac meter, with alternating lines of hexameter and pentameter. Since the Renaissance, however, "elegy" has been used to describe any poem that conducts a sustained and formal lamentation, usually over the death of a particular person. The poem, usually longer than a lyric but not so long as an epic, generally contains a speaker and is delivered in the first person,

often uses classical allusions and motifs, and frequently traces the speaker's path from grief through acceptance to joy.

ELISION. The omission of a letter or syllable, often combining two words into one, for metrical effect.

END RHYME. Rhyme occurring in the final words or syllables of two or more lines of poetry, as opposed to internal rhyme, which occurs within a line.

END-STOPPED LINE. One of two major types of line breaks in poetry. End-stopped lines generally end in conjunction with the end of a phrase or a sentence. Contrast with enjambment.

ENGLISH SONNET. Also known as a Shakespearean sonnet. The English sonnet typically contains three quatrains and a couplet, with an abab/cdcd/efef/gg rhyme scheme.

ENJAMBMENT. One of two major types of line breaks in poetry. Enjambed lines break in mid-phrase, and thus do not contain a sustained pause at the end of a line. Contrast with end-stopped line.

ENVIRONMENTAL THEATER. A form of political theater, related to performance art, in which the performance moves out of the restricted space of the theater and into the public arenas of streets or parks, intentionally blurring the lines between performance and audience, and between reality and illusion.

ENVOY. Also spelled "envoi," a brief postscript to a poem or a piece of prose writing, which often dedicates the poem to its patron or sends it on its way into the world. "Envoy" is also a term for the short concluding stanza of a ballad or sestina.

EPIC THEATER. Commonly associated with Bertolt Brecht, a form of theater in which the style of acting, the inclusion of multimedia effects such as film and electronic sounds, and the presentation of rational argument are used to create a shock of realization in the audience. Epic theater operates through what Brecht called the "alienation effect," which works to distance the viewer from the play's characters, maintaining a constant awareness of the spectacle's unreality. By preventing the audience from identifying with the play's characters, Brecht hoped to engage them intellectually in thinking about the play's issues.

EPIGRAM. Originally, an inscription in verse on a building, monument, or coin. "Epigram" is now used to refer to short, often witty verse, usually with a surprising turn at the end.

EPIGRAPH. A quotation or verse taken from another poem, used to introduce a literary text.

EPIPHANY. The sudden revelation or dawning insight that a character frequently reaches at the climax of a short story, usually sparked by ordinary circumstances but of such power that it is understood to be life-changing.

The term was most notably used by James Joyce to describe the experiences of characters such as Gabriel, the young central figure in "The Dead."

EPISTLE. A poem that imitates the form of a personal letter. An example is Alexander Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot."

EPITAPH. Literally, an inscription on a gravestone. "Epitaph" is also used to describe a brief poem in memory of a dead person, as well as the final words spoken by a character before his or her death.

ESSAY. An interpretive or analytical piece of literary writing. Essays can be personal or critical in focus; the essay nearly always treats its subject from the limited point of view of the author.

EUPHEMISM. The substitution of a more pleasant or agreeable word or phrase for one that might be considered rude or offensive. For example, "passed away" is a euphemism for "dead."

EUPHONY. A grouping of words that produces a pleasant, soothing sound, as opposed to the harsh sounds of cacophony.

EXACT RHYME. Also known as "perfect rhyme," a rhyme in which the final vowel and consonant sounds are the same, as in "rhyme" and "crime." Homophones (such as "die" and "dye") are sometimes included in discussions of exact rhyme. Contrast with inexact or imperfect rhyme, eye rhyme, half rhyme, or slant rhyme.

EXODUS. The last piece of a Greek tragedy, including or following the final choral ode.

EXPLICATION. A detailed analysis of a piece of prose or poetry, one which attempts to account for the meaning and function of all of the elements of the text.

EXPOSITION. The early portion of a play or story's narrative structure in which the characters and situations are introduced. Exposition is also used to refer to any parts of a narrative that provide background information necessary to understanding the story.

EXPRESSIONISM. A style of art or literature, particularly associated with early twentieth-century Europe, in which the artist or writer focuses upon the expression of his or her internal feelings and emotions. Expressionist literature emphasizes the psychological and emotional aspects of the text.

EXTENDED METAPHOR. A sustained metaphor that is elaborated over the course of an entire stanza or poem.

EXTENDED SIMILE. A sustained comparison between two things, using "like" or "as" to draw the connection.

EYE RHYME. Words that give the appearance of rhyming when in print, but that are pronounced slightly differently, as in "bury" and "fury." Contrast with exact rhyme.

FABLE. A legendary tale usually including animals as characters, who display and represent human foibles, and often having a moral or instructional aspect to the telling. Fables are often humorous, and the animals often take on stylized traits—the tricky fox and the clever rabbit.

FAIRY TALE. A tale that constructs a world of the imagination often with ancient settings and/or characters of either royal or peasant background interacting. Many of the old fairy tales were transmitted orally before they were collected and written down. These stories usually contain magical elements, including supernatural creatures, and suggest a world where anything but the ordinary is likely to happen.

FALLING ACTION. In the plot of a narrative the action rises to a particular point (a climax) and then begins to fall to the inevitable conclusion. (Also referred to as the fourth part of plot structure.)

FALLING METER. Poetry includes regular beats that are divided into feet which include accented and unaccented syllables. Falling meter occurs in trochaic and dactylic meters when a foot ends with an unaccented syllable or two unaccented syllables. Trochaic: fearsome. Dactylic: tragedy.

FANTASY. A fantasy must have magic and magical characters, and these characters must find themselves in amazing and imaginative situations. The stories often unfold in worlds far away or long ago, and the characters often find themselves doing and experiencing things quite impossible in the ordinary world.

FARCE. A play that includes the boisterous and even crude types of action that happen when characters indulge in horseplay and sexual humor. Characters usually speak in colloquial terms and may even knock one another about and tumble down with and upon one another.

FEMININE RHYME. In poetic metrical feet, a foot that ends in an unaccented syllable is said to have feminine meter. Feminine rhyme occurs when two lines with feminine meter rhyme: Today comedy, tonight tragedy.

FICTION. A narrative shaped or made (from the Latin *ficio*, to shape or make) from the author's imagination. Parts of a fictional story, novel, or drama may refer to factual reality, but the story and characters arise from the musings of the creator.

FIGURATIVE. Referring to the use of figures of speech, that is, language that explains through metaphors or similes, comparing one thing to another in order to enhance or underscore the meaning.

FIGURES OF SPEECH. An image that relies on the comparative imagination of the reader or listener, e.g., cold as ice, mad as a hornet.

FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE. Literary works appear in a variety of voices. The speaker may be a master narrator who tells the story from outside of the characters' worlds, or the speaker may know about the characters'

thoughts but still not be in the story him or herself. Finally, the first person narrative speaks from the point of view of one character in the narrative. That person has complete control of the line of the narrative. Readers are dependent on the point of view of that narrator and must either trust or suspect the speaker throughout the narrative.

FIXED FORM. Poetic form may be either open or fixed. Fixed forms are those in which the poet decides to follow a particular form both for the effect on the reader and for the challenge of expressing the meaning through a controlled rhythm and rhyme scheme.

FLASHBACK. An interruption in the line of the narrative which occurs when a character suddenly remembers a past event so vividly that it takes over the line of action for a time. Flashbacks are used in both novels and film to enhance the story line or to add information that is necessary to the plot of the work. Often in stories of war or conflict, the character will suddenly find him or herself out of time and into an episode of memory. This memory may explain something in the current action or something in the motivation of the character.

FLAT CHARACTER. A character who usually carries the action of a narrative without adding emotional insight or plot development. E. M. Forster coined the term to describe a character with few traits. The parlor maid in a play or the sheriff in a cowboy movie may be a flat character if she or he is there merely to facilitate the scene.

FLEXIBLE THEATER. Also called experimental theater and sometimes referred to as a black box. The theater is small, often with space for 100–200 persons in the audience, often providing flexible seating and space, allowing for theater in the round, a proscenium arch or fourth wall, thrust staging, or other innovative designs.

FLY-ON-THE-WALL NARRATOR. A narrator who does not enjoy knowledge of the thoughts or feelings of the characters but tells what is seen from a distance. The narrator does not intrude in the action but also does not give emotional insight into the characters except through observation of action. This form of narration demands that the reader follow the narrator in the inferences that are made from the observations, though perhaps the reader may also be encouraged to guess at more than the narrator is revealing.

FOIL. A character that sets off or contrasts with another character maybe serving as a foil or opposite.

FOLK BALLADS. Ballads that were sung by minstrels for hundreds of years before being written down. They are usually in a set ballad form with set rhyme and often with a repeated chorus that begins to draw and hold the

listener in the story. Often, ballads exist in several forms since they changed as they were sung and passed on from minstrel to minstrel.

FOLK EPIC. An oral tradition that tells the story of a nation's heroes, the folk epic may have a variety of versions, as do the great Norse and Celtic legends, or the epic may have been recorded so long ago that one author claims the tale as in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

FOLKTALE. A tale that has been passed down by oral tradition, usually not having found a set form in the manner of a fairy tale.

FOOT. In poetry, the means of measuring meter. A foot has either two or three syllables with varying accents.

FORESHADOWING. In a narrative work, events are constructed so that early events will suggest later events in the development of the plot; thus a gun in the first act of a play suggests that someone will be shot in a later act. Without foreshadowing, the reader or audience might not be prepared for the outcome of the narrative.

FORM. Humans want to see order in the world, and authors and their readers or viewers are no exception. Thus a work of art will have some kind of form, whether that be a traditional plot or a more experimental shape. Poetry especially can be constructed in prescribed forms or can take more inventive shapes, but finally the form must be there as an essential part of the telling and understanding.

FORMULA LITERATURE. Literary works fall into genres that have more or less predictable forms. When the form controls the literary work to the extent that the outcome may be predictable or even obvious, the narrative work is considered to be formulaic, e.g., romance novels or westerns or action movies. The formula does not necessarily mean that the work is of less value, but when the formula so dominates the work that the creative element bends to the expected form or shape, then the work may not please the reader.

FOUND POEM. The poet may notice words in an ad or in a conversation, write them down, and then rearrange them into a pleasing and meaningful pattern, thus, a found poem.

FOURTH WALL. A proscenium "wall" located between the curtain and the orchestra used in modern experimental theater to create space outside the stage itself for movement and action.

FRAME NARRATIVE. In a story within a story, the outside story is the frame narrative or the story that enfolds the second narrative. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* tells the story of a group of characters, some of whom in turn are working on their own story, the acting out of the old tale of star-crossed lovers who meet at a wall. In this play the frame is the main narrative, and the internal narrative is entertaining and also linked

to the main plot. In other narratives, such as *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator tells his own story and then that of another trip to the same dark place, the second tale being the main narrative of the story.

FREE VERSE. Free verse has no prescribed form or meter, but free verse does have form, often a form found by the poet while composing. Meter and rhythm vary according to the needs and demands of the poem itself.

FREYTAG'S PYRAMID. In 1863 Gustav Freytag (*Technique of the Drama*) suggested that the five parts of classical drama suggest a pyramid, the rising action peaking at the climax and leading to the falling action; the five are exposition, complication (conflicting elements), climax, catastrophe, and resolution.

GENRE. The literary form that an author chooses to follow, assuming that the reader or viewer will enter into the agreed upon pattern. Thus if a work begins with a rhymed couplet and continues with more couplets, the reader quickly knows that the genre is poetry and reads accordingly. If a playgoer sees a very silly master of ceremonies appear before the curtain, the viewer will assume that the genre is dramatic comedy.

GOTHIC FICTION. The genre of fiction suggesting terror and suspense, often with the use of heavy medieval architecture (also referred to as Gothic). Horace Walpole is credited with the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, in 1764, but the Brontës and Poe have given the form its true shape.

HAIKU. An unrhymed form derived from Japan, requiring seventeen syllables in a set five, seven, five form and using imagery from nature; the poem often resolves into an observation about nature and meaning in the last line.

HALF-RHYME. In poetic form, the middle of the line and the end of the line rhyme.

HAMARTIA. The Greek word for error; but in drama the word has come to mean something more drastic. For example, Hamlet is too hesitant to think clearly about the political situation in which he finds himself. His hesitance is his fatal error that will lead to his death. This error is not one that the character intends to make but is rather a part of the personality that cannot be evaded or avoided but that will inevitably lead to disaster for all involved.

HARD-BOILED FICTION. The hard-boiled detective of either gender works in a dangerous world where criminals are vicious, deaths are violent, and only a tough character can survive and solve the crime. This world of fiction has evolved in the twentieth century as detective fiction moved from the polite mysteries of the drawing room and the tea parlor to the mysteries of the streets where everyone carries a weapon, and the criminals are most certainly not gentlemen or gentlewomen.

HEAVY-STRESS RHYME. A poetic rhyme involving a spondee (two accented syllables together) or a free-verse form that uses internal emphatic rhyme.

HEPTAMETER. A line of poetry that has seven feet, including seven primary stresses.

HERMENEUTICS. Originally meaning the close study and interpretation of the *Bible*, but in modern criticism it means the principles and systems used to interpret meaning in any text.

HERO/HEROINE. In Greek epics, the leading warriors were called by the term from which hero is derived (heros). The term came to mean the lead character in a narrative or drama, the character who saves the day or who triumphs over adversity. Heroine was used as a feminine term, but current usage applies hero to both genders.

HEROIC COUPLET. A couplet written in iambic pentameter, that is five feet per line, each foot being an iamb, or two beat syllable with the stress on the second syllable. The heroic couplet is a closed couplet, a form that sums up an idea in two lines, but the heroic couplet must follow the metric form as well. Heroic couplets often appear at the end of scenes in Shakespeare's plays to sum up the action of the scene and to send the actor off stage with an exact and effective closing line.

HEURISTIC. From the Greek word for the modern word *eureka* (*heureka*, meaning "I found it"), any method or technique that helps a writer or speaker come up with ideas for a topic or for developing a topic.

HEXAMETER. Poetic lines with six rhythmic feet are said to be written in hexameter.

HIGH COMEDY/VERBAL COMEDY. Comedy that derives its humor from witty and satirical conversations on the parts of the players. The comic wit is often at the expense of human foibles, especially in the Restoration form known as the comedy of manners in which romantic alliances among upper-class partners are played out through witty exchanges between the characters.

HUBRIS. From Greek drama, the term used to describe a character who is laid low by his pride and arrogance, inasmuch as these qualities make anyone unable to see his or her own weaknesses.

HUMOR. Occurs in literature in at least two distinct ways, one being the farcical action where actors or characters buffet one another about and speak in crude and colloquial language. The other form of humor occurs when more observant and reflective characters satirize the foibles of human nature.

HYMN. A song of praise, best shown by the psalms in the Judeo-Christian scriptures or by other poetic songs written in praise.

HYPERBOLE. An overstatement used to stress a point.

- IAMB.** A poetic foot consisting of at least two syllables. An iamb is a foot with one accented and one unaccented set of syllables: beside or demand are words which demonstrate an iamb. This meter is common in English poetry, for it reflects the form of many English words.
- IDENTICAL RHYME.** Occurs when the same word is used for a rhyme in a poem.
- IDEOLOGY.** A system of beliefs and values belonging to an individual or to a group.
- IDIOM.** A particular means of expression used in a particular language. In American English one stands "in line," but in British English one stands "on line."
- IMAGE/IMAGERY.** In poetic writing the stress may be expressly on the image that is being described or envisioned. Imagery is also used in fiction to create a particular mood or impression. It is important to keep in mind that these images appeal to the senses, giving an evocative picture of that which is being described.
- IMAGISM.** This movement in American twentieth century poetry stressed the image above all, leaving behind the poetic forms that emphasized meter and rhyme. The imagists such as Ezra Pound owed much to the Japanese haiku form that stresses one vivid picture.
- IMPERFECT FOOT.** In poetic meter, a foot is usually one stressed and one unstressed syllable, or one unstressed and one stressed, two unstressed and one stressed, one stressed and two unstressed, or two stressed syllables. Any variation from these five patterns is considered an imperfect foot.
- IMPERFECT RHYME.** Imperfect rhyme, including slant rhyme, presents a rhyme that is almost a rhyme but not quite so: love/leave.
- IMPRESSIONISM.** In fiction, impressionism stresses the impact of the external world on the internal world of a character. Flannery O'Connor's intellectual characters often muse over the possible meanings of the various incidents that happen in rural southern Georgia.
- IN MEDIAS RES.** Literally translated from Latin to mean "in the middle of the circle." It is used to refer to an epic tale that begins in the middle of the story and then reveals the previous incidents. *Star Wars* was a movie series that began in medias res.
- INCREMENTAL REPETITION.** This poetic term refers to phrases or lines that occur regularly at particular points in a poem as do the choruses in ballads or the repeated lines in some set poetic forms such as a villanelle which repeats lines from the first stanza in set form throughout the poem.
- INEXACT RHYME.** Like imperfect rhyme, inexact rhyme refers to a poetic variation on the expected rhyme: heart/hearth; laugh/wrath.

- INITIATION STORY.** A story that provides the first experience of a person, usually young, who faces a great life experience for the first time, especially death, sex, or religious doubt and faith. James Joyce's collection of stories, *Dubliners*, includes these three types of initiation stories.
- INTERIOR MONOLOGUE.** In fiction, the place where a character muses over a problem or issue internally. This musing is written out in the voice of the character but is not spoken to another character.
- INTERNAL ALLITERATION.** Within the lines of a poem, vowels or consonants will be repeated so that the internal alliteration will strike the reader's or listener's ear almost unaware: the slippery snake hissed softly.
- INTERNAL RHYME.** Within the line of a poem, words will rhyme, affecting the ear more than the rhythm, as does a rhyme at the end of a line: with laugh the gaff was gone.
- INTERTEXTUALITY.** Texts constantly refer back to other texts, even when one text does not quote another. Speech and writing are full of references to well known stories or to the Bible or Shakespeare. Writers like the poet T. S. Eliot use intertextuality purposefully to emphasize meaning; at the end of his poem "Little Gidding" he quotes Dame Julian of Norwich, "And all shall be well and/All manner of things shall be well," but he does not reference the quote, assuming that his intended reader will know and understand the reference. Cited references demonstrate intertextuality as well, showing the relationship between the text being written and earlier writers on the subject.
- IRONY.** Occurs in a literary work when the text operates on at least two levels of meaning. Dramatic or tragic irony occurs when the audience has information that the characters do not, as in *Romeo and Juliet* when the audience knows that Juliet is not dead but Romeo thinks she is. Situational irony occurs when the story turns out to be the opposite of the expected as in *The Open Window* in which the woman telling the story to the visitor has created a false story that will shock the visitor when the truth is known. Cosmic irony occurs when the character can do nothing to change the fate that is prepared, and verbal irony occurs when the words spoken are the opposite of the meaning intended.
- ITALIAN SONNET.** The Italian or Petrarchen sonnet consists of an octet (eight lines) of iambic pentameter (five feet of unaccented and accented syllables) which presents the argument or dilemma and a sextet (six lines) that answer the argument or sorts out the dilemma. The lines are rhymed aaba/aaba and cdecde or cdcdcd.
- KINETIC IMAGERY.** Imagery in motion; thus a poem or story will show a vivid image in action.

- LIMERICK.** A short form of poetry including five anapestic lines (two unaccented and one accented syllables) rhymed aabba. Lines one, two, and five have three feet, and lines three and four have two feet.
- LINE.** In drama, refers to words spoken by a particular character. In poetry, a line is one specific line of poetry that can be either metric or set off in free verse for emphasis.
- LITERARY BALLAD.** A narrative poem written in calculated imitation of the form and style of traditional, anonymous ballads. Unlike traditional ballads, a literary ballad is not sung; it is written for sophisticated readers.
- LITERARY EPIC.** A careful, conscious emulation in writing by an individual author of earlier oral folk epic. Literary epics, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, frequently compare the present to the glorious past.
- LITOTES.** An indirect affirmation, usually understated, made by the denial of its opposite, such as "I was not a little hungry" to mean "I was very hungry."
- LOCAL COLOR.** The use in fiction of distinctive though typically superficial regional material intended to provide realistic background. Regional particularities can be expressed in specific types of setting, dialect, dress, custom or habit.
- LOW COMEDY/PHYSICAL COMEDY.** Characterized by boisterous activity or clownish behavior without intellectual appeal. Low comedy attempts to incite laughter by employment of jokes, gags, or slapstick humor.
- LYRIC.** A short, emotionally expressive poem by a single speaker. Commonly written in the first person, lyric poetry is frequently emotional, highlighting personal moods, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and states of mind. Lyric typically evokes a songlike or musical quality. In ancient Greece, "lyric" was sung to the accompaniment of a lyre.
- MADRIGAL.** Short, secular song, typically dedicated to love or pastoral themes, arranged in counterpoint for several voices without accompaniment. The madrigal originated in Italy during the fourteenth century and triumphed in England during the Elizabethan period.
- MAGIC REALISM.** Contemporary narrative that combines mundane events and descriptive details with fantastic and magical elements in a realistic framework. Though usually associated with Latin American fiction, magic realism has blossomed into an international trend.
- MALAPROPISM.** The mistaken, comic use of a word in place of another with which it shares a close resemblance. The inaccurate, inappropriate word choice derives from confusion between the two words. The term derives from the character Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals* (1775) by Richard Brinsley Sheridan.
- MASCULINE RHYME.** Rhyme consisting of single stressed syllables or of stressed final syllables in polysyllabic words.

- MEDITATION.** A contemplative essay or sermon.
- MELODRAMA.** A popular form of theater that features stereotyped characters, such as villains, heroes, and young lovers, engaged in sensational events, intrigue, and action. Melodrama presents suspenseful plots centered on exaggerated conflicts between good and evil. The term is often employed pejoratively to connote a lack of psychological depth and an excess of emotional excitement.
- METAFICTION.** A type of fiction that renounces the illusion of verisimilitude to explore or comment on, in a self-conscious and self-referential manner, its own fictional nature. Repudiating realism, metafiction concentrates on the role of author and reader in the creation and reception of fiction.
- METAPHOR.** A figure of speech, not meant to be factually true, in which one thing is compared or substituted for something else. Although the two things are not identical, they are associated in language to emphasize a similarity between them.
- METER.** A regular, recurring rhythm, or pattern of stresses and pauses, in lines of verse.
- METONYMY.** A figure of speech which substitutes the name of one thing with that of another with which it is closely associated in common experience. The use of the "White House" or "Oval Office" to refer to the United States presidency is a familiar example.
- MIME.** A non-literary performance that involves acting with movement and gesture, but without any words.
- MIMESIS.** Imitation or mimicry intended to represent or reproduce reality.
- MINIMALISM.** A form of contemporary fiction written in an austere style with a severe restriction of content and setting, such as the work of Raymond Carver.
- MISE EN SCÈNE.** French term referring to the elements of a dramatic production including costume, scenery, lighting, etc. In cinema, the term refers more specifically to the arrangement of action in front of the camera.
- MONOLOGUE.** A long speech by one person. In drama, the monologue provides the spoken thoughts of a single character. In fiction, an interior monologue can similarly represent the thoughts, not the actual spoken words, of a character.
- MONOMETER.** A verse line with one metrical foot.
- MONOSYLLABIC FOOT.** A unit of meter with a single syllable.
- MOOD.** The atmosphere or tone of a literary work, conveyed through diction, characterization, and setting.
- MORALITY PLAY.** A form of religious drama popular in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries consisting of moralized allegories. Featur-

- ing a variety of personifications, morality plays showcase the struggle for the Christian soul and communicate simple messages of salvation.
- MOTIF.** Any element that is repeated and developed throughout a narrative. Motif also refers to an element that recurs in many different literary works. Motifs encompass a wide variety of possible elements such as image, idea, situation, action, incident, or theme.
- MOTIVATION.** The explicit or implicit reason provided for the actions of a character. In drama or fiction, motivation defines what a character desires.
- MULTICULTURALISM.** In literary studies, the attention to work produced by or about cultural "minorities."
- MYSTERY PLAY.** A popular, religious medieval play on biblical themes.
- MYTH.** Traditional, anonymous story derived from oral tradition usually involving supernatural or heroic figures. Adopting a cosmic perspective, myths offer accounts of origins of human, social, and natural phenomena in boldly imaginative terms. It is believed that the fictional narratives of myth embody the popular ideas, values, and belief systems of cultures that create them.
- MYTHOPOEIC.** A term employed to describe writing that uses myth as a source or that bears a strong resemblance to myth especially in subject matter.
- NARRATIVE.** The ordered account of a true or fictitious event, or of connected events. Narrative selects and arranges the recounting of these events in a particular sequence.
- NARRATIVE BALLAD.** A common form of narrative poetry.
- NARRATIVE POEM.** A class of poem that tells a story.
- NARRATIVE STRUCTURE.** See "plot."
- NARRATOR.** The voice or character who relates the story of the narrative. The narrator is different than the author. The degree of participation, perspective, and personality of the narrator varies greatly though the narrator generally provides information and commentary on other characters and events.
- NATURALISM.** An extreme, deliberate form of realism in fiction or drama in which human characters are inevitable products or passive victims of the natural or social environment or of a particular genetic inheritance. Writers promoting naturalism strove for precise, objective recording of reality capable of demonstrating laws of causality, and aspired to scientific status for their researched, detailed accounts of behavior.
- NEAR RHYME.** See "slant rhyme."
- NEOCLASSICAL COUPLET.** Due to its popularity during the Neoclassical Period (a.k.a. the Augustan Age), the neoclassical couplet is another name for a heroic couplet (two successive rhyming lines of iambic pentameter).

- NEOCLASSICAL PERIOD.** See "Augustan Age."
- NEW COMEDY.** In ancient Greece, a form of comedy developed between 400–300 B. C. E. New comedy, frequently associated with Menander, is witty and offers unexpected plot twists.
- NOVEL.** Extended fictional prose narrative of book length. As a genre, the novel is enormously open and flexible, admitting innumerable exceptions. The novel is distinguished from the short story by its greater number of characters, variety of scenes, and span of time covered.
- NOVELLA.** Novel or narrative story of intermediate length, longer than a short story but less complex than a novel.
- OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE.** The external expression of an interior mood or feeling by the deliberate use of a specific object, scene, or event to evoke a particular emotion.
- OBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW.** The dramatic third person point of view, when the narrator reports on events and speech, but does not comment on the thoughts of other characters.
- OCCASIONAL POEM.** A poem expressly written for or inspired by a specific, typically significant, event.
- OCTAMETER.** A verse line with eight metrical feet.
- OCTAVE.** An eight line stanza. Octave indicates the first eight verse line section of sonnets.
- OCTOSYLLABIC COUPLET.** A type of couplet with eight syllables per line.
- ODE.** A formal, elaborate lyric poem of exalted style and serious, elevated tone.
- OEDIPUS COMPLEX.** Term used to describe child's attraction to the parent of the opposite sex; applied most frequently to the attraction of male children to a mother figure, often including overtones of jealousy directed at the father.
- OFF RHYME.** See "Inexact rhyme."
- ONE-ACT PLAY.** A shorter dramatic work, most one-act plays take place in a single location, focus on a limited number of characters, and depict a single, powerful incident. Like a short story or a poem, the characterization, setting, and themes must be presented efficiently and, consequently, one-acts sometimes seem less subtle than longer plays.
- ONOMATOPOEIA.** The attempt to label a thing by forming a word from sounds associated with it.
- OPEN FORM.** Free verse without any formal scheme including meter, rhyme, or stanza pattern.
- ORCHESTRA.** In classical Greek drama, the orchestra was the space separating the audience and the players on the stage. The chorus would perform in this space.

- ORGANIC FORM.** A concept that equates literature to living organisms in so far as both, it is believed, are created by a natural growth process. Value is placed on the entire literary work itself, whereby the "whole" exceeds the "sum" of its parts.
- ORGANIC UNITY.** Belief in the indissoluble synthesis of form and content in a literary work.
- OXYMORON.** A condensed paradox combining two contradictory terms, such as bittersweet.
- PANTOMIME.** Dramatic entertainment employing gesture, posture, and facial expression without speech to convey meaning, mimic action, and express feeling.
- PARABLE.** Brief, usually allegorical, tale intended to teach a moral or lesson. Typically the moral is only implied and consequently open to different interpretations.
- PARADOS.** In classical Greek drama, the section of the play that allowed the chorus to enter and comment on the events described in the prologue.
- PARADOX.** A statement or expression playing on words that initially seems self-contradictory, but which provokes reflection on ways or contexts in which it might seem valid. Also called an "oxymoron."
- PARALLELISM.** Arrangement of words, phrases or similarly constructed clauses or sentences in sequence or in a similar grammatical or structural way that suggests a recognizable correspondence between them.
- PARAPHRASE.** Restatement of the meaning or sense of a passage in different words often with the intention of clarification.
- PARODY.** Mocking or exaggerated imitation of distinctive features of a literary work, author, or style for comic, humorous effect.
- PARTICIPATORY DRAMA.** A form of drama in which audience members are encouraged to join in the action taking place around them, such as the popular *Tony and Tina's Wedding*.
- PASTORAL.** Derived from the Latin word for "shepherd," the pastoral is a literary mode that celebrates the virtues of rural, agrarian life and love. Also called "idylls."
- PATHOS.** This Greek word for passions has come to designate any element of a text that evokes sympathetic feelings in the reader or audience.
- PENTAMETER.** A line of poetic verse that consists of five metrical feet.
- PERFECT RHYME.** A rhyme in which the rhymed sounds precisely correspond, as in cat/hat, master/plaster, or dedicate/medicate.
- PERIPETEIA.** As defined by Aristotle in *Poetics* (350 B.C.E.), peripeteia or "peripety" denotes a sudden, often tragic, reversal in the fortunes of a protagonist.

- PERSONA.** Derived from the Latin word for the mask, the term "persona" refers to any speaker or narrator of a literary text.
- PERSONIFICATION.** Also known as "anthropomorphism," personification is the attribution of human characteristics to an inanimate object or phenomenon.
- PETRARCHAN SONNET.** Named after the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca, also known as Petrarch (1304–1374), the Petrarchan or Italian sonnet is a poem that consists of fourteen lines divided into two sections—the eight line octave and the six line sestet. The octave rhymes abbaabba and presents some kind of problem or conflict that is conventionally resolved in the sestet (rhymed cdecde). Also see "Italian sonnet."
- PHONETIC.** This term applies to transcriptions of words or letters that reflect the sound of spoken language.
- PICARESQUE.** Originating in fifteenth-century Europe, this literary genre concerns the escapades and misadventures of a wandering rascal ("pícaro" is the Spanish word for rogue). Picaresque narratives are generally satiric, episodic, and involve minimal character development. Prominent examples include Le Sage's *Gil Blas* (1715), Henry Fieldings's *Tom Jones* (1749), and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759).
- PICTURE POEM.** As its name implies, a poem with its lines arranged in the form of a visual image.
- PIDGIN.** Derived from a Chinese pronunciation of the English word "business," a pidgin is a language heuristically developed by speakers of mutually unintelligible languages for purposes such as commerce and trade.
- PLAY.** A literary text intended for dramatic performance.
- PLOT.** The series of events unfolded throughout the course of a narrative. A conventional plot is organized in terms of conflict, climax, resolution, and denouement.
- POETIC DICTION.** The highly elevated and formalized language that rejects everyday speech in favor of literary devices such as archaism (outmoded words and expressions), epithets (personalized adjectival phrases, as in Alexander the Great), and circumlocution (roundabout or indirect description).
- POINT OF VIEW.** The perspective from which a story is told. Third-person omniscient and first-person narration are the most common points of view.
- PREFACE.** A short introduction that explains the purpose or intent of a given literary text.
- PROLOGUE.** Originally applied to the introductory speech of a Greek tragedy, this term has come to signify the preface of any literary text.
- PROPAGANDA.** Any literature written with the intention of recruiting its readers to a given social, political, or religious cause.

- PROPS.** A shortened form of the word "properties," the physical objects used to create the setting or "mise en scène" of a stage drama.
- PROSE POEM.** A poetic text written in prose form.
- PROSODY.** The collective formal techniques of poetry, including rhythm and meter, versification, and diction.
- PROTAGONIST.** The main character—whether hero or anti-hero—of any given literary text.
- PSALMS.** Worship songs, most particularly the collection of 150 sacred songs of praise collected in the Biblical Book of Psalms.
- PULP FICTION.** The collective name for sensational crime, adventure, and science-fiction stories printed on cheap "pulp" paper and published in popular magazines of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.
- PUN.** A kind of word-play that depends upon identical or similar sounds among words with different meanings.
- PYRRHIC.** Within the context of poetic technique, a metrical unit with two consecutive unstressed syllables.
- QUANTITATIVE METER.** A type of meter based on the interplay between "long" and "short" syllables rather than stressed and unstressed syllables. Common to Greek and Latin poetry, quantitative meter concerns the duration of the spoken word.
- QUATRAIN.** A verse paragraph that consists of four lines.
- RAP.** This sub-genre of Rhythm and Blues music involves heavily vernacular lyrics spoken with the accompaniment of music. Also known as hip-hop, rap music was developed by African-American artists throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s.
- REALISM.** Originating in eighteenth-century Europe, this literary mode promotes faithful representation of human life and experience. Realist texts reject idealistic and fantastic subject matter in favor of detailed, accurate description and frank treatment of pessimistic themes.
- RED HERRING.** A distraction meant to divert the reader from a central point or issue. This tactic is particularly relevant for mystery fiction, in which the writer often frustrates the reader's attempt to arrive at a solution.
- REFRAIN.** Sometimes called the chorus, the refrain is a recurring line or set of lines in a poem or song.
- REGIONALISM.** Attention to the ways in which geographical location influences or emerges from a given literary text or set of texts. Also see "Local color."
- RESOLUTION.** The outcome or conclusion of a narrative conflict. A literary work that withholds clear resolution may be termed an "open-ended" narrative.
- RESTORATION PERIOD.** The interval between 1660–1700, following restoration of the British monarchy. In 1649, Oliver Cromwell successfully led a revolution against King Charles I; these strict Puritan rebels banned

- theatrical performance, which they considered worldly and decadent. When the monarchy was restored in 1699, King Charles II reopened England's theaters, giving rise to the bawdy "Restoration Comedy."
- REVENGE TRAGEDY.** Originating in England during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, revenge tragedy is a dramatic genre that concerns the protagonist's self-destructive attempts to avenge the death of a loved one. Notable examples include Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.
- REVERSAL.** A radical change in the situation of a literary character. See also "peripeteia."
- RHETORIC.** A term used to describe the collective techniques of persuasive writing.
- RHYME.** Concurrence of similar or identical sounds within different words.
- RHYME ROYALE.** Invented by Chaucer in the fourteenth century, the rhyme or "rime" royale is a type of poetic stanza which adheres to iambic pentameter and a fixed rhyme scheme of ababccdd.
- RHYME SCHEME.** The pattern of repeated words-sounds throughout the course of an entire poem or stanza.
- RHYTHM.** With respect to any literary text, rhythm refers to the sound-patterns created by organization of stressed and unstressed or long and short syllables.
- RISING ACTION.** With respect to conventional narrative structure, the term rising action describes the series of events that build tension and lead to a climax.
- RISING METER.** A metrical foot—such as an iamb or anapest—that concludes with a stressed syllable.
- RISING RHYME.** Also known as a "masculine rhyme," a rising rhyme concludes with a stressed syllable.
- ROMANCE.** Originally applied to medieval narratives of courtly love, the term has come to designate any adventure story that concerns fantastic situations and exotic settings.
- ROMANTICISM.** A nineteenth-century European artistic movement that stresses individualism, personal spiritual development, and human interactions with nature. Often favoring lyric poetry, Romantic writers favor intimate autobiographical themes and radical formal innovations.
- RONDEL.** Related to the rondeau, a rondel is a fourteen line poem that holds only two rhyming sounds. In this type of poem, the same two lines are repeated at the beginning, middle, and end of the poem.
- ROUND CHARACTERS.** Realistic literary characters distinguished by depth, psychological complexity, and even self-contradiction.

RUN-ON LINE. A line of verse that concludes without a natural pause or "caesura." This disjunction between syntax and versification often creates a feeling of anxiety or discomfort.

SATIRE. A literary text that uses comedy toward the end of derision.

SCANSION. The process of determining a poem's rhythmic pattern through recognition of stressed and unstressed syllables.

SCENE. Either the physical set of a play or one of the discrete narrative units that comprises an act in a play.

SELECTIVE OMNISCIENCE. Applies to a narrator that reveals only the perspective of a single character.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY. Most pronounced in metafiction, the quality of self-awareness in a literary text. A self-reflexive text underscores and celebrates its own status as a work of fiction.

SENTIMENTALITY. A style of writing that appeals to human sympathy and emotion rather than reason. This literary mode originated in eighteenth-century England; notable examples include Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

SESTET. The last six lines of an Italian sonnet. This conclusive stanza conventionally offers a resolution or response to the problem posed by the poem's first eight lines, which are known as the octave.

SESTINA. A thirty-six line poem that consists of three stanzas: six sestet and a final three-line "envoy." The sestina form also requires that the six words found at the end of the first sestet's lines variously recur at the end of the following sestet's lines and in the envoy.

SET. The physical elements that represent the setting of a dramatic production.

SETTING. The time and place in which a narrative takes place.

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET. The Shakespearean or English sonnet consists of three quatrains and a conclusive couplet; its most common rhyme scheme is abab/cdcd/efef/gg. In contrast to the octave/sestet structure of the Italian, the Shakespearean form posits a thematic break between the twelfth and thirteenth lines of the poem. Also see "English Sonnet."

SHAPED VERSE. A poem printed in such a way that its visual shape reflects its content.

SHORT STORY. A work of prose-fiction that consists of 15,000–20,000 words.

SIGNIFYIN'(G). Within various African-American communities, "signifyin'(g)" represents the practice of appropriating, parodying, and otherwise transforming cultural elements of the dominant or mainstream group. African-American slaves, in particular, found signifyin'(g) a valuable form of resistance culture.

SIMILE. In poetry, a figure of speech whereby two unlike objects are compared to each other with the word *like* or *as*, e.g., "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun."

SITUATIONAL IRONY. A type of irony in which an action differs markedly from audience expectations, resulting in surprise and sometimes discomfort. Herman Melville uses situational irony in *Benito Cereno*, for example, as readers discover at the end of the novella that the reality of the situation is the complete opposite of their (and the protagonist's) perceptions.

SKENE. A wooden structure used by actors in fifth century B.C.E. Greek dramas, it typically represented a palace or temple. The skene was located in the back of the stage, allowing the actors to switch costumes when changing roles.

SLANT RHYME. Also referred to as near rhyme, in slant rhyme the sound of the words is nearly alike. This is because such rhymes share the same vowel sound but have different consonant sounds, e.g., scored and word.

SOLILOQUY. A speech given by a character in a play revealing the character's state of mind or motivation.

SONNET. Meaning little sound or song, one of the most popular poetic forms, particularly for poems dealing with love. It is comprised of fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter. Also see "Italian Sonnet" and "English Sonnet."

SPEAKER. In poetry, the speaker refers to the voice of the poem, the self or persona created by the author.

SPECTACLE. In drama, a scene often included for its spectacular effect.

SPENSERIAN STANZA. A form created by Edmund Spenser for *The Faerie Queen*, comprised of nine lines, the first eight written in iambic pentameter, and the ninth written in iambic hexameter.

SPONDEE. The spondee in poetry is composed of a metric foot of two accented syllables, often created for emphasis, e.g., "oh joy!"

STAGE BUSINESS. In drama, refers to any nonverbal action intended to capture the audience's attention and reveal the feelings of a character.

STAGE DIRECTIONS. In the text of a play, the directions that represent the playwright's view of the positions of the actors on the stage and their physical expressions.

STANZA. The basic unit of a poem typically comprised of two or more lines. A stanza operates much as the paragraph does in prose.

STATIC CHARACTER. A character who does not grow or change throughout a narrative.

STEREOTYPE. An unrealistic character based on assumptions about common traits of a certain group (e.g., women, homosexuals, Asians). Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, is a stereotype of the long-suffering, docile African slave.

STOCK CHARACTER. A kind of character, usually one-dimensional, appearing regularly in certain types of literature: the wicked stepmother in fairy tales, for example.

STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS TECHNIQUE. A technique in modern fiction designed to approximate the uncensored, disorganized flow of thought running through the mind of a character. Two of the most notable examples of the technique are James Joyce's *Ulysses* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.

STRESS. In poetry, the emphasis given a syllable often for metrical, or musical, purposes, e.g., *project* and *project* are different words depending on the stress and part of speech.

STROPHE. In poetry, strophe often refers to a stanza that does not have a regular metrical or rhythmic pattern.

STRUCTURE. Pertaining to any genre, the structure of a work refers to the arrangement of its elements.

STYLE. The term used to capture an author's way of expressing. Style is conveyed through the author's use of language, such as diction, syntax, metaphor and other figurative language.

SUBJECT. Refers to what a literary work is about, as distinct from its meaning.

SUBPLOT. A secondary plot within a larger story, normally related to and often reflective of the main plot.

SUMMARY. The summary of a work captures its main idea and the subtopics that develop the idea. Summaries come in various forms and lengths.

SURREALISM. The movement in literature and art founded by the poet Andre Breton in the early twentieth century. This movement attempted to capture the deepest recesses of the unconscious and dream-life through imagery that explored, as described by Arthur Rimbaud, "the reasoned disorder of the senses." For example: "Chicago/The trams make a noise like doughnut batter/dropped in oil."

SUSPENSE. The tension and anticipation that develops in the audience with regard to the plot, usually focusing on what will happen to the main character.

SYLLABIC VERSE. Poetry in which an established number of syllables in a line is repeated in subsequent lines, e.g., "Do not go gentle into that good night . . . Though wise men at their end know dark is right."

SYMBOL. A symbol in a work of art is an element that stands for something beyond its literal meaning in the text. It embodies an idea, such as the way in which the white whale in *Moby-Dick* is invested with meaning.

SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT. A literary movement that began in France during the late nineteenth century with writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine, focusing on the mysteriousness of life, and relying on suggestion and symbol rather than explicitness and description.

SYNECDOCHE. A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part signifies the whole or the whole signifies the part, e.g., in the phrase "All hands on deck," hands stand for people.

SYNESTHESIA. From the Greek, a term meaning "perceiving together." The experience of two or more senses stimulated simultaneously when only one of them is being addressed; for example, "seeing" a color while hearing an actual sound (visualizing the color blue while hearing the Blues played on instruments).

SYNESTHESIS. In literature, refers to the description of one kind of sense in terms of another, such as "sweet as moonlight."

SYNOPSIS. A summary of the main points of an artistic work. In a short story, novel, or play, it relates the main plot line.

SYNTAX. Syntax refers to the way words are put together in sentences. The syntax of a sentence can make significant contributions to an author's style, e.g., "Ask not what your country can do for you . . ."

TERCET. In poetry, a three line stanza, each line ending in the same rhyme. For example:

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

TERMINAL REFRAIN. A terminal refrain is that which appears at the end of each stanza of a poem, such as the "Nevermore" refrain in Poe's "The Raven."

TERZA RIMA. A three-line stanza in which one rhyme is used in the first and third lines and the rhyme in the second line is used in the first and third lines of the next stanza. It is also referred to as an overlapping or interlocking rhyme scheme, e.g.,

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.
I have looked down the saddest city lane,
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

TETRAMETER. In poetry, a meter consisting of four metrical feet, e.g., "Had we but world enough, and time,/This coyness, lady, were no crime . . ."

THEME. In poetry, fiction, or drama, the theme is the dominating idea in a work. For example, one might say that the theme of *Romeo and Juliet* is the problem of star-crossed love.

THESIS. Associated mainly with the essay, the thesis represents the writer's main idea or attitude toward the subject of the writing.

THRUST STAGE. In theatre, a thrust stage is a stage where the audience is seated on three sides of the acting area.

TONE. Tone signifies the mood of a work of literature. The mood may be ironic, sad, joyful, or pensive.

TRAGEDY. A drama in which the main characters suffer a catastrophic end for the purpose of arousing pity on the part of the audience. Often a tragedy involves the downfall of a person of great significance.

TRAGIC FLAW. In tragedies, the tragic flaw represents the defect in the hero that is the cause of his downfall.

TRAGIC IRONY. A tragic irony is that which conspires against the hero in spite of his best efforts to avoid his fate.

TRAGICOMEDY. A play that uses the elements of a tragedy, but ends happily, such as in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

TRILOGY. A trilogy is a long literary work in three parts, each part standing on its own. William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion* are referred to as The Snopes Trilogy.

TRIMETER. In poetry, a meter consisting of three metrical feet. For example:

The idle life I lead
Is like a pleasant sleep,
Wherein I rest and heed
The dreams that by me sweep.

TRIOLET. A French poetic form of eight lines and using only two rhymes. The first two lines are repeated as the last two lines. Here is a playful example of this lyric form:

Easy is the triolet,
If you really learn to make it!
Once a neat refrain you get,
Easy is the triolet.
As you see!—I pay my debt
With another rhyme. Deuce take it,
Easy is the triolet,
If you really learn to make it!

TRIPLE RHYME. A triple rhyme occurs when the rhyming stressed syllable is followed by two unstressed syllables, e.g., "meticulous" and "ridiculous."

TROCHEE. A foot comprised of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. Here is an example of an unrhymed trochaic:

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

UNDERSTATEMENT. A figure of speech making something appear less important or true than it really is. Understatement is used to intensify meaning of a statement, as well as for the purposes of irony, sarcasm, or humor. It

is the opposite of hyperbole., e.g., "Nor are thy lips ungraceful, Sire of men, / Nor tongue ineloquent."

UNITIES. The unities refer to the qualities of good plots, which possess unity of action, time, and place. Unity of action adheres to a sense of cause and effect inevitability. Unity of time adheres to the natural cycle of twenty-four hours. Unity of place adheres to consistency of location.

UNIVERSAL SYMBOL. The notion that a literary work may have some organizing principle, by virtue of its symbolism, to which all parts are related.

UNRELIABLE NARRATOR. A narrator whose judgment cannot be trusted by the reader, either because of the narrator's naivete, prejudices, emotional state, or mental age. In Eudora Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O.," for example, Sister's emotional instability, coupled with her hatred of her family, makes her an unreliable narrator.

UTOPIA. From the Greek word meaning "no place," a type of fiction that describes an ideal—or utopian—world.

VERBAL IRONY. A figure of speech in which the implied meaning of something differs from the literal meaning, such as in a sarcastic remark.

VERISIMILITUDE. Pertains to the qualities that make a work of fiction true to life. A work achieves verisimilitude when events, characters, situations, and places are plausible to the reader.

VERS LIBRE. A Latin term meaning free verse, or poetry without any consistent, fixed form or pattern.

VERSE PARAGRAPH. A verse paragraph appears in a poem lacking stanzaic form, that is, the lines are not grouped together within a regular, recurring pattern.

VILLANELLE. A nineteen-line poetic form in six stanzas. It uses only two rhymes and repeats two of its lines according to a set pattern.

VOICE. Refers to the attitude of the author as conveyed through the style or tone of the speaker in a work of literature.

WELL-MADE PLAY. A term that applies to the logical inevitability within so-called problem plays, farces, or comedies of manners.