**LITERARY TERMS PACKET**

**POETRY TERMS**

**METER AND SCANSION**

**Meter** = the means by which rhythm is measured in verse; a rhythmic pattern

**Scansion** = the analysis of lines of poetry to identify their metrical pattern; the process consists of dividing verse into metrical feet by noting the sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables; describing the rhythms of poetry by dividing the lines into feet, marking the locations of stressed and unstressed syllables, and counting the syllables

**Foot** = the basic unit of meter in poetry; basic unit of rhythm; made up of a stressed syllable and one or more unstressed syllables

* **iambic foot** – most common foot in American and English poetry; one iamb contains 2 syllables: 1 unstressed syllable

followed by 1 stressed syllable; | u / |; (Ex. “garage,” “success,” or “before”)

* **trochaic foot** – one trochee contains 2 syllables: 1 stressed syllable followed by 1 unstressed syllable; | / u |; (Ex. “Caesar,”

“monkey,” or “falling”)

* **anapestic foot** – one anapest contains 3 syllables: 2 unstressed syllables followed by 1 stressed syllable; | u u / |; (Ex.

“interrupt,” or this line containing 4 anapestic feet in a row: “’Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house”

* **dactylic foot** – one dactyl contains 3 syllables: 1 stressed syllable followed by 2 unstressed syllables; | / u u |; (Ex.“merrily,” “graciously,” or “interstate”)
* **spondaic foot** – rare foot type in English poetry; one spondee contains 2 syllables: 2 stressed syllables; | / / |; (Ex. “shoe shine,” or “rocks, caves”)
* **pyrrhic foot** – rare foot type in English poetry; one pyrrhic contains 2 syllables: 2 unstressed syllables; | u u | amphibrachic – one amphibrach contains 3 syllables: 1 unstressed syllable followed by 1 stressed syllable followed by 1
* **unstressed syllable**; | u / u |; (Ex. “together,” or “forever”)

**Number of Feet** =

* monometer – 1 foot
* dimeter – 2 feet
* trimester – 3 feet
* tetrameter – 4 feet
* pentameter – 5 feet
* hexameter – 6 feet
* heptameter – 7 feet

**To Scansion** a line of poetry means to comment on the **type** of foot and the **number** of feet:

Ex. iambic pentameter = a line containing 10 syllables in all: 5 iambs (2 syllables each)

[ u / ] [ u /] [ u / ][ u / ]

I think that I shall never see = iambic tetrameter (4 iambic feet per line)

**RHYTHMIC DEVICES AND STRUCTURE**

**alexandrine** – an iambic hexameter line of verse

**cadence** – the beat of a poem; balanced, rhythmic flow

**canto** – a section of a long narrative poem (epics have 12 cantos)

**couplet** – two rhyming lines of poetry

**caesura** – punctuation which causes a pause in a line of poetry; used for emphasis

**end-stopped line** – a line that stops at the end with punctuation

**enjambment/run-on line** – continuing the flow of a poem from one line to the next without interruption (no pause)

**heroic couplet** – a pair of rhyming iambic pentameter lines

**metric foot** – basic measurement unit of rhythm/meter in poetry

**octave** – first 8 lines of a sonnet or verse

**refrain** – line, word, or phrase that is repeated

**rhyme royal** – a stanza form consisting of seven 5-stress lines (7 lines in iambic pentameter with rhyme scheme ababbcc)

**rhythm** – the “beat;” the pattern of recurrent strong and weak accents, vocalization and silence, and the distribution and combination of these elements

**sestet** – the last 6 lines of a sonnet; or, a 6-line poem

**sprung rhythm** – no strict alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables

**stanza** – a group of lines in a poem, seen as a unit

* couplet – a two-line stanza
* tercet – a three-line stanza
* quatrain – a four-line stanza
* cinquain – a five-line stanza
* sestet – a six-line stanza
* heptastich – a seven-line stanza
* octave – an eight-line stanza

**tercet** – a three-line verse

**volta** – the turning point of an Italian sonnet after/in the 8th line

**SONIC DEVICES** (not exclusively in poetry)

**alliteration** – use of the same consonant sounds at the beginning of words or each stressed syllable in a line of verse; "around the rock the ragged rascal ran" ; modern alliteration is predominantly consonantal; certain literary traditions, such as Old English verse, also alliterate using vowel sounds

**assonance** – repetition of vowel sounds usually at the beginning of words or of stressed syllables; ex: "that dolphin-torn, that gong tormented sea" (William Butler Yeats)

**assonantal** – of or relating to assonance

**cacophonous** – harsh sounding

**cacophony** – harsh sounding words used to produce an unpleasant effect/harsh sound

**consonance** – The repetition of consonants or of a consonant pattern, especially at the ends of words, as in blank and think or strong and string

**euphony** – the use of pleasant sounding or harmonious words

**euphonious** – pleasant sounding

**musicality** – musical quality of a poem (verse movement)

**onomatopoeia** – word whose sound suggests the meaning of the word

**rhyme** – the repetition of sounds at the ends of words

* **end rhyme** – at the ends of lines
* **internal rhyme** – within a line
* **exact rhyme** – use of identical rhyming sounds (Ex. love, dove); also called perfect rhyme
* **slant rhyme** – use of sounds that are similar but not identical (Ex. prove, glove); also called oblique, off, or approximate
* **feminine rhyme** – rhymes end on unstressed syllable
* **masculine rhyme** – rhymes end on stressed syllable
* **eye rhyme** – words are spelled alike but sound different
* **rhyme scheme** – a pattern in which the rhymed line-endings are arranged in a poem or stanza

**sibilant alliteration** – the repetition of “s” sounds

**sibilance** – the “s” sound

**POETRY TYPES and TERMS**

**apostrophilic verse** – verse style that incorporates an apostrophe

**aubade** – a piece sung or played outdoors at dawn, usually as a compliment to someone; a song or instrumental composition concerning, accompanying, or evoking daybreak; a poem or song of or about lovers separating at dawn; a poem or song about lovers who must leave each other in the early hours of the morning;

**ballad** – a simple narrative song, or, alternatively, a narrative poem suitable for singing

**ballad meter** – a narrative, four-line stanza with four strong beats in lines 1 and 3, three strong beats in lines 2 and 4, and lines 2 and 4 rhyme

**blank verse** – unrhymed iambic pentameter

**cavalier poetry** – sexual or at least secular (of the world)

**concrete poem** – poem’s shape relates to the meaning, topic, or theme of the poem

**doggere**l – crudely or irregularly fashioned verse, often of a humorous or burlesque nature; bad poetry

**elegiac** – relating to an elegy

**elegy** – a lyric poem about death and the loss of the past

**emblematic image** – poem shaped like a subject

**epic** – a long narrative poem about the deeds of a hero who rescues a group of people

* hero
* perilous journeys
* intervention of the gods
* epic similes (elevated writing
* style)
* long, eloquent speeches
* lofty tone (no humor)
* starts in medias res (middle)
* invocation of a muse
* battle scenes
* elements of the supernatural
* 12 cantos in length

**free verse** – no set meter or rhyme scheme

**haiku** – a 3-line Japanese love poem that has 5 syllables in the first line, 7 syllables in the second, and 5 syllables in the third

**limerick** – a poem with a five-line anapestic meter and rhyme scheme of aabba

**lyric poem** – brief poem expressing a personal emotion

**mock epic** – a comic imitation of epic form that treats a trivial subject as an important one (Ex. “The Rape of the Lock”)

**mock heroic style** – when language that is usually used to describe heroes is used to describe an obviously ordinary character

**narrative poem** – poetry that tells a story (Ex. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”)

**ode** – a free form of lyric; a song

**ottava rima** – verse of 8 lines with the rhyme scheme abababcc

**pastoral** – poem about the country or shepherds (Ex. “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”)

**platonic poetry** – spiritual, not-of-the-flesh poetry

**poetic justice** – the good are rewarded, and the bad are punished

**poetic license** – the liberties writers sometimes take with syntax, grammar, vocabulary, metrical devices, figures of speech, or racts to strengthen a passage of writing; (Ex. E.E. Cummings writes his name e e cummings) poetry / verse – language arranged in lines and stanzas

**psalm** – song or hymn of praise

**sonnet** – 14-line lyric poem that expresses emotion and has a rhyme scheme

* English/Shakespearean sonnet: ababcdcdefefgg (has three quatrains and a couplet)
* Italian/Petrarchan sonnet: abbaabbacdecde (has two parts: an 8-line octave presents the problem and a 6-line sestet gives the
* solution)

**speaker** – the imaginary voice assumed by the writer of the poem; the character who “tells” the poem

**Spenserian stanza** – rhyme scheme ababbcbcc; the first 8 lines are iambic pentameter; 9th line is iambic hexameter

**terza rima** – Italian sonnet form in which tercets are linked by aba, bcb, cdc, etc. (Ex. “Ode to the West Wind”)

**villanelle** – lyric verse with 19 lines; 5 tercets and 1 quatrain; lines 1, 6, 12, and 18 are the same; lines 3, 9, 15, and 19 are the same (Ex. “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night”)

**WRITING TERMS**

**SYNTACTICAL DEVICES**

**analysis** – the process of examining the components of a literary work

**backing** – supporting information

**balance** – when two items are perfectly parallel

**balanced sentence** – contains two matching word groups that are parallel and similar in length (Ex. If they fight, they are too few; if they are to die, they are too many.)

**cliché** – an expression such as “turn over a new leaf” that has been used so frequently it has lost its expressive power

**comma splice** – a run-on sentence that contains two independent clauses incorrectly joined only by a comma

**compound sentence** – two independent clauses joined properly with an appropriate conjunction and/or punctuation mark

**complex sentence** – at least one dependent clause and one independent clause

**concise** – directly stated, free from unnecessary elaboration

**concrete language** – language describing clear and tangible objects

**detail** – specific information (Ex. a fact)

**digression** – off-subject text

**essay** – a short composition on a single topic expressing the view or the interpretation of the writer on that topic

**ethical appeal** – relating to morals

**explication** – a close reading of a work that identifies and explains the figurative language and forms within the work

**exposition** – introductory information at the beginning of a work

**extended definition** – long definition

**fragment** – an incomplete sentence (lacks a subject, a verb, or both)

**fused sentence** – a run-on sentence that contains two or more independent clauses joined together without any proper punctuation marks or conjunctions

**generalization** – a nonspecific statement

**imperative** – expressing a command with “you” (sometimes understood)

**inversion** – dramatic changing of word order in a sentence

**inverted sentence** – usual word order reversed to give special emphasis to the idea (Ex. On the desk in plan view lie the secret documents.)

**loose sentence** – a sentence that does not end with the completion of its main clause, but continues with one or more subordinate clauses or other modifiers; this sentence makes the essential meaning unclear until the end; (Ex: “She ironed again, faster now, as if the more she engaged her body in the work the less she would think.”) – See “periodic sentence” for a related term

**objective** -- not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts; unbiased: an objective opinion.

**objectivity** – judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices

**overloaded sentence** – excessive words in a sentence

**oversimplification** – to simplify to such an extent as to bring about distortion, misunderstanding, or error

**periodic sentence** – a sentence in which the main clause or its predicate is withheld until the end and thereby produces an effect of

**suspens**e; (Ex: Despite heavy winds and nearly impenetrable ground fog, the plane landed safely OR Unable to join the others at the dance because of my sprained ankle, I went to a movie.); See “loose sentence” for a related term

**rambling sentence** – wordy with many tangents

**rhetoric** – skill in the use of language

**run-on sentence** – two or more sentences put together incorrectly (either a comma splice or a fused sentence)

**semantics** – the study of the development and meanings of words

**simple sentence** – one independent clause

**structure** – the particular way in which parts of a written work are combined

**style** – the author’s choice and arrangement of words

**subject complement** – predicate adjective or predicate nominative

**thesis** – the main point of the paper

**transition / segue** – the smooth movement from one point to another

**unity** – every sentence works together to prove the main point

**LOGIC**

**ad hominem argument** – appealing to the feelings, not intelligence; an attack on a man’s character

**causal relationships** – logical cause/effect

**connotation** – the implied meaning of a word; the associations, images, or impressions carried by a word

**deductive reasoning** – to infer from the general conclusion

**denotation** – the dictionary definition of a word

**didactic** – instructive, teaching a lesson

**either/or reasoning** – one way or the other

**equivocation** – using intentional ambiguity to mislead

**incongruous / incongruity** – not fitting together; inconsistency

**inductive reasoning** – taking all the information to come to a conclusion (Ex. Perry Mason, Nancy Drew, CSI)

**inference / infer** – conclusion

**non sequitur** – an inference that does not follow from the premises; a statement that does not follow logically from anything previously said

**post hoc / ergo propter hoc** – logical fallacy that because one event follows another the former causes the latter

**refutation** – proving something wrong with logic

**straw man** – in logic, an argument or opponent set up so as to be easily refuted or defeated (to accuse people of attacking a straw man is to suggest that they are avoiding worthier opponents and /or more valid criticisms of their own position); in character development, a person whose importance or function is only nominal and who is set up as a cover or front to cover another's questionable activities

**syllogism** – a form of deductive reasoning consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion; for example, All humans are mortal, the major premise, I am a human, the minor premise, therefore, I am mortal, the conclusion. Reasoning from the general to the specific; deduction

**DRAMA TERMS**

**act** – a major division in a play

**aside** – in drama, lines spoken directly for the audience’s benefit (but not directly to the audience) and not meant to be heard by other characters

**blocking** – stage directions

**breaking the fourth wall** -- the fourth wall is the imaginary wall at the front of the stage in a proscenium theater, through which the audience sees the action in the world of the play; the term "breaking the fourth wall" in theatre generally means that a character is showing his/her awareness of the audience; (Ex: Tom in The Glass Menagerie talks to the audience, and thus both serves as a narrator and a character in the play)

**catastrophe** – the resolution of a tragedy

**chorus** – group of characters whose lines, originally sung, comment on the action of a play

**comedy** – an amusing literary work, especially a play, that has a happy ending

**drama** – a story acted out on stage

**dramatic monologue** – a single person, not the poet, is presented speaking at a critical moment to a silent companion; the reader learns about the protagonist through indirect characterization here

**monologue** – a speech told or performed by one person

**props** – the items used in a play by the actors; properties

**scene** – a division of an act; setting changes with scene

**stage directions** – directions in the play that tell the actors where to go and how to speak

**soliloquy** – speech made by an actor to himself when alone on stage

**tableau** – an interlude during a scene when all the performers on stage freeze in position and then resume action as before

**METAPHORICAL DEVICES and IMAGERY**

**allusion** – reference to something else (most commonly to mythology, the Bible, and Shakespeare):

* **Biblical allusion** – a reference to the Bible used in literature
* **mythological allusion** – a reference to mythology in literature
* **historical allusion** – a reference to a real, past event in literature
* **literary allusion** – a reference in one piece of literature to another piece of literature

**archetype** – universal symbol, theme, character, or motif that appears in the art of all cultures throughout time

**atavism** – giving something that is not an animal the characteristics of an animal; (Ex: Steinbeck describes Lennie’s hands as bear paws and describes him snorting water like a horse)

**conceit** – an elaborate metaphor which relates many aspects of an abstract idea to a concrete idea (Ex. the poem “Batter My Heart”)

**emblem** – something concrete that always represents the same abstract idea; different from symbol in that the meaning is fixed

**emotive imagery** – appealing to the emotions

**illusion** – mistaken perception of reality

**image** – a word or phrase that appeals to one or more of the senses

**imagery** – description that creates a picture in the reader’s mind, appeals to the senses, and evokes an emotional reaction

**imagism** – see Imagism in Literary Movements

**kenning** – a colorful metaphor appearing typically only in classic literature consisting of strung-together nouns and adjectives that stand for one thing without directly naming it (Ex. storm of swords = battle)

**light and dark imagery** – recurring images/imagery using light and dark for contrast, often to signify good and evil

**metaphor** – a direct comparison between two essentially unlike things (One thing is called another or said to be another.)

**metaphysical conceit** – an elaborate metaphor throughout the entire poem which focuses on the soul or spirit (Ex. “Batter My Heart”)

**metonymy** – a figure of speech in which something closely associated with a thing is substituted for the thing itself (Ex. “the crown” for the king; the “oval office” for the president); do not confuse with synecdoche

**mixed metaphor** – putting 2 or more metaphors together (Ex. All families have skeletons in their closets somewhere up their family tree.)

**personification** – giving an inanimate or nonhuman object human attributes

**simile** – a comparison of two unlike things using “like” or “as”

**symbol** – sign, word, phrase, image, or other object that stands for or represents something else; unlike emblem, the symbol’s meaning is not fixed but can change depending on context

**symbolism** – a general term which denotes the technique of using symbols in literature

**synecdoche** – a part of something is used to suggest the whole (Ex. She gives her hand in marriage.); also vice versa (England lost to Ireland, meaning the English rugby team lost to the Irish rugby team)

**IRONIC DEVICES**

**irony** – a technique of indicating, as through character or plot development, an intention or attitude opposite to that which is actually or outwardly stated; when what is expected to happen doesn’t

* **dramatic irony** – the author allows the reader or audience know something that the character does not; often, the character will say or do things that carry a significance of which he/she is not aware (in a tragedy, it is called tragic irony)
* **situational irony** – the situation turns out to be the opposite of what is expected; one understanding of a situation sharply contrasts to another; (Ex. a character speaks of how much he loves his friend, and yet his friend is suffering from what the character is doing)
* **verbal irony** – saying one thing but meaning/implying the opposite; an example of this is sarcasm
* **romantic irony** – when the writer continues to remind the reader about his/her presence in the work; this draws attention to the artifice of the writing and keeps the reader critically detached instead of completely accepting of the writing

**ambiguity** – uncertain, unclear meaning; double or even multiple meanings of a word or phrase

**ambivalent** – having contradictory feelings

**hyperbole** – extreme exaggeration for effect; (Ex. “I’ve told you a million times already.”)

**litotes** – an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by a negative statement (Ex. “He is not unfriendly.”)

**meiosis / understatement** – representation of a thing as less than it is; also called understatement; (Ex. Mercutio calling his wound “a scratch”)

**oxymoron** – the combining of two incongruous or contradictory terms; (Ex. “deafening silence,” “make haste slowly,” “cruel kindness,” “poor little rich girl,” “wise fool,” “same difference”)

**paradox** – a statement that seems false or self-contradictory but actually is true (“And all men kill the thing they love,” or “I always lie”)

**sarcasm** – a form of verbal irony where through exaggerated tone and context it becomes obvious that the speaker means the opposite of what he or she says

**RHETORICAL DEVICES**

**abstract language** – language describing ideas and emotion

**acronym** – initial letters of words in a phrase or words in lines of poetry that make a word; (Ex. “MADD” = Mothers Against Drunk Driving)

**anacoluthon** -- an abrupt change within a sentence from one syntactic structure to another, sometimes used for rhetorical effect; Ex. “I told him that if he didn’t stop drinking, what would become of him?” or “It makes me so – I just get angry!” analogy – a comparison of two things, often for the purpose of using something familiar to explain something unfamiliar

**anaphora** – deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive phrases, lines, verses, clauses, or paragraphs; for example, "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills" (Winston S. Churchill).

**antithesis** – opposite ideas that are together to emphasize one or both (direct contrast; opposition)

**antithetical** – opposite

**antithetical construction** – a “not…but” construction (Ex: Her hair was not red but purple.)

**aphorism** – epigram (tersely phrased statement of a truth or opinion; an adage; brief statement of moral principle)

**apostrophe** – speaking to an absent person or to an inanimate or non-human object as if it were human

**asyndeton** [uh-sin-di-ton] – omission of a conjunction where it normally goes (syntax); Ex. "From now on we are enemies, you and I -- because you choose for your instrument a boastful, lustful, smutty, infantile boy."

**chiasmus** – a reversal in the order of words in two otherwise parallel phrases; (Ex. “He went to the country, to the town went she,” or “Make a heaven of hell, and a hell of heaven,” or “Each throat/Was parched, and glazed each eye")

**colloquial/colloquialism** – conversational language, not formal language; everyday conversation, slang, regional dialect

**diction** – word choice for a desired effect or tone

**ellipsis** – the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding; (Ex. “To err is human; to forgive, divine.”)

**elliptical** – characterized by extreme economy of expression or omission of superfluous elements, bordering cryptic

**epigram** – short, witty statement

**epithet** – a descriptive adjective or phrase used to characterize someone or something; (Ex. “The Great Emancipator” for Lincoln)

**euphemism** – the use of a mild or pleasant sounding word or expression in place of a harsh or unpleasant sounding one (Ex. “peace keepers” for war missiles; “passing away” for dying; “ethnic cleansing” for genocide)

**figurative language** – writing or speech not meant to be taken literally but for effect

**idiom** – an expression whose meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up; a manner of speaking peculiar to a certain group of people; (Ex. “kick the bucket,” “hang your head,” “keep tabs on,” “it’s raining cats and dogs”)

**imperative** – expressing a command with “you” (sometimes understood)

**inversion** – dramatic changing of word order in a sentence

**inverted sentence** – usual word order reversed to give special emphasis to the idea (Ex. On the desk in plan view lay the secret documents.)

**jargon** -- the language, esp. the vocabulary, peculiar to a particular trade, profession, or group; Ex. medical jargon or sports jargon

**loose sentence** – essential meaning made unclear in the beginning (Ex. “She ironed again, faster now, as if the more she engaged her body in the work the less she would think.”)

**malapropism** – a humorous misuse of a word; (Ex. "We cannot let terrorists and rogue nations hold this nation hostile or hold our allies hostile."—George W. Bush)

**paralipsis** – the technique of pretended or apparent omission in order to highlight or stress something; a figure of speech by which a speaker artfully pretends to pass by what he really mentions; (Ex. “I won’t even mention the fact that he forgot his own mother’s birthday!”)

**parallelism** – the repeated use of the same grammatical structure in a sentence, phrase, or series of sentences; also the similarities between elements in a narrative (like two characters, two plots, two events, etc.)

**periphrasis** – the use of an unnecessarily long, indirect, or roundabout form of expression; circumlocution; (Ex. “I find myself quite without the necessary writing utensil this morning!” for “I don’t have a pencil.”)

**point of view** – vantage point from which the work is told; perspective of the speaker or narrator

* **first-person** – the narrator tells the story from his/her own point of view and refers to him/herself as “I.” peripheral – the narrator tells the story as a bystander character, not one immediately in the action of the story central – the narrator is the main character thoughts: 1st or 3rd person
* **third-person** – narrator remains outside the story and describes the characters in the story using proper names and the third-person pronouns “he,” “she,” “it,” and “they”
  + **omniscient** – narrator knows all of the actions, feelings, and motivations of all the characters
  + **limited omniscient** – narrator know the actions, feelings, and motivations of only one (usually) or a handful of characters
* **objective** – narrator reports neutrally on the outward behavior of the characters but offers no interpretation of their actions or their inner states; pioneered by Ernest Hemingway
* **unreliable narrator** – narrator is revealed over time to be an untrustworthy source of information

**objective** – narrator reports neutrally on the outward behavior of the characters but offers no interpretation of their actions ortheir inner states; pioneered by Ernest Hemingway

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**polysyndeton** [pol-ee-sin-di-ton] – putting in extra conjunctions to emphasize each word; Ex. “here and there and everywhere”

**pun** – humorous play on words (words that sound similar) to suggest two meanings at the same time

**repetition** – repeating a word, phrase, or idea for emphasis

**rhetorical question** – a question posed for emphasis of a point, not for the purpose of getting an answer

**spoonerism** – reversal of sounds in two words, usually by accident and with humorous effect; (in allusion to the Rev. William A. Spooner (1844-1930), warden of New College, Oxford, who was famous for such mistakes); (Ex. “Let me sew you to your sheet” for “Let me show you to your seat,” or “well-boiled icicle” for “well-oiled bicycle”

**stream-of-consciousness narration** – narrator conveys a subject’s thoughts, impressions, and perceptions exactly as they occur, often in disjointed fashion and without the logic and grammar of typical speech and writing

**syllepsis** – zeugma

**syntax** – sentence structure

**tongue in cheek** – expressing a thought in a way that appears to be sincere but is actually joking

**wit** – quickness and cleverness

**zeugma** – a construction in which a word governs two or more other words but agrees in number, gender, or case with only one, or has a different meaning when applied to each of the words, as in He lost his coat and his temper. (Ex. “Great Anna…dost sometimes counsel take – and sometimes tea.” or “Mr. Pickwick took his hat and his leave.”)

**CHARACTER TERMS**

**antagonist** – the person or thing that opposes the protagonist

**antihero** – a protagonist who carries the action of the literary piece but does not embody the classic characteristics of courage, strength, and nobility (Ex. Meursault in The Stranger)

**archetypal character** – a character that occurs in all cultures and times

**anthropomorphism / anthropomorphize** – giving a god human shape, attributes, and affection

**Byronic hero** – a hero figure with an inextricable mixture of good and evil, selflessness and sin, darkness and moodiness caricature – a description or characterization that exaggerates or distorts a character’s prominent features, usually to elicit mockery

**characters –**

* **protagonist** – the character the reader supports; the main character in the story
* **antagonist** – the character that opposes the protagonist
* **primary** – the main characters
* **secondary** – all other characters beside the main, primary characters
* **stock character** – a stereotypical character; a type
* **flat character** – a character with one or limited characteristics
* **round character** – a character with many characteristics
* **static character** – does not grow or develop
* **dynamic character** – a character who does grow and develop; has a multi-faceted personality
* **conventional character** – character with traits that are traditional or expected
* **foil** – a character that contrasts another character

**characterization** – the act of creating and developing a character

* **direct characterization** – the author clearly comments upon the personality of the character
* **indirect characterization** – the readers figure out the personality of a character by his/her mannerisms, speech, actions, and appearance

**confidant** -- a character in a drama or fiction, such as a trusted friend or servant, who serves as a device for revealing the inner thoughts or intentions of a main character

**cuckold** – an old man whose young wife is unfaithful

**doppelganger** – a ghostly double of a living person that haunts its living counterpart

**foil** – something that makes something else look better or worse by comparison

**hubris** – shortcoming or defect in the Greek tragic hero (overbearing pride, presumption, and arrogance)

**persona** – personality of a character

**protagonist** – the main character in the story

**stock character** – a common character type that recurs throughout literature; notable examples include the witty servant, the scheming villain, the femme fatale, the trusty sidekick, the old miser, and so on; a stock character that holds a central place in a culture’s folklore or consciousness may be called an archetype

**straw man** – in logic, an argument or opponent set up so as to be easily refuted or defeated (to accuse people of attacking a straw man is to suggest that they are avoiding worthier opponents and /or more valid criticisms of their own position); in character development, a person whose importance or function is only nominal and who is set up as a cover or front to cover another's questionable activities

**PLOT TERMS**

**achronological plot** – plot where events are not arranged in the sequence in which they occur

**anecdote** – the brief narration of a single event or incident

**anachronism** – a person, thing, custom, or idea existing out of its proper time in history

**annotation** – note added to a passage

**anticlimactic** – relating to an abrupt decline from the important to the trivial

**anticlimax** – an effect that spoils a climax

**archetypal theme** – a theme that occurs in all cultures and times (Ex. good vs. evil)

**atmosphere** – prevailing mood of a literary work

**balance** – two items (characters, plot lines, events, words) perfectly parallel

**bathos** – an anticlimax where an abrupt, unintended, unexpected transition exists in style from the lofty and exalted to th commonplace, trivial, or excessively sentimental, producing a ludicrous effect; sometimes used for humor, more often see as weak, poor judgment of the writer

**carpe diem** – seize the day; live for the moment (Ex. “To His Coy Mistress”)

**catharsis** – a purging of emotions; emotional release

**chronological plot** – plot where events are arranged in the sequence in which they occur; straightforward story

**climactic** – relating to the point of highest interest in action

**climax** – the highest point of interest or intensity in the work

**comic relief** – humor that provides a release of tension and breaks up a more serious episode

**denouement** – closing action; the final resolution of the intricacies of a plot, as of a drama or novel

**deus ex machina** – an improbable coincidence, intervention, or plot twist (“god from a machine”) that solves the problems of the novel or play improbably

**dialogue** – conversation between characters

**epiphany** – Eureka! a sudden flash of insight; a startling discovery; a dramatic realization (often spiritual or life-changing)

**flashback** – interruption of a narrative by the introduction of an earlier event or by an image of a past experience

**foreshadowing** – the author’s hints and clues that preview future events, themes, etc.

**in medias res** [ĭn mē'dē-əs rās'] – beginning a story in the middle of the action

**mood** – emotion that a work evokes in a reader

**motif** – a recurring image, word, phrase, action, idea, object, or situation that appears throughout a specific piece of literature

**narration** – writing that tells a story (narrative, the story; narrator tells the story)

**narrative elements / plot diagram** – exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement

**non-sequitur plot** – defies traditional logic by presenting events without any clear sequence and characters without any clear motivation

**plot** – also called storyline; the plan, scheme, or main story of a literary or dramatic work, as a play, novel, or short story; consists of the exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action

**setting** – the time and place of the action

**stream of consciousness technique** – chaotic flow of half-formed and discontinuous thoughts, memories, sense impressions, random associations, images feelings, and reflections that constitute a character’s “consciousness”

**subplot –** a secondary plot that is of less importance to the overall story but may serve as a point of contrast or comparison to the main plot; (Ex. the subplot involving Gloucester and his sons in Shakespeare’s King Lear)

**suspense** – usually pleasurable anxiety or apprehension resulting from an uncertain, undecided, or mysterious situation within a literary work

**theme** – a truth about life; central idea, concern or purpose in a literary work; (Ex. The perpetual conflict between good and evil)

**thematic contrasts** – poems with the same subject but different attitudes (Ex. “To Helen” and “Helen”)

**tone** – the writer’s attitude toward his/her subject and/or reader; the general atmosphere created in the story

* **optimistic** – a positive outlook on life
* **pessimistic** – a negative outlook on life
* **cynical** – having or showing the attitude that is distrustful of human nature and motives
* **nostalgic** – a sentimental remembrance of the past, usually childhood

**LITERARY GENRES**

**allegory** – the representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic, or pictorial form

**bildungsroman** -- a type of novel concerned with the education, development, and maturing of a young protagonist

**burlesque** – mockery or exaggeration; an artistic composition, esp. literary or dramatic, that, for the sake of laughter, vulgarizes lofty material or treats ordinary material with mock dignity

**comedy** – a play, movie, etc., of light and humorous character with a happy or cheerful ending; a dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion

**comedy of manners** – a comedy satirizing the attitudes and behavior of a particular social group, often of fashionable society

**didactic literature** – literature that seeks as its primary goal to instruct

**epistolary novel** – a novel in letter form written by one or more characters (Ex. Dracula or The Color Purple)

**exemplum** – a tale that illustrates a moral truth (Ex. “The Pardoner’s Tale”)

**farce** – a comic drama with exaggerated, ridiculous, and/or stereotypical characters and farfetched humorous situations (Ex. The Three Stooges)

**fiction** – untrue prose, poetry, or play

**folklore** – the stories, legends, myths, ballads, riddles, sayings, and other traditional works produced orally by illiterate or semiliterate peoples

**folktale** – an account, legend, or story that is passed along orally generation to generation

**genre** – kind; type (Poetry, prose, and drama are the three major genres in literature)

**legend** – widely told story about the past that may or may not be based in fact

**melodrama** – a drama, such as a play, film, or television program, characterized by exaggerated emotions, stereotypical characters, and interpersonal conflicts that focuses more on plot than characterization; critics see this now as manipulative or hokey

**myth** – a fictional tale, originally with religious significance, that explains the actions of gods and goddesses or heroes and the causes of natural phenomena

**novel** – extended work of fiction, has plot, major/minor characters, unifying theme and several settings

**novella/novelette** -- a fictional prose narrative that is longer and more complex than a short story; a short novel

**nonfiction** – true prose, poetry, or play

**oral tradition** – body of songs, stories, and poems preserved by being passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth

**parable** – a story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle (often a fictitious story)

**parody** – humorous imitation of a serious work

**picaresque novel** – originating in Spain, a popular subgenre of prose fiction which is usually satirical and depicts in realistic and often humorous detail the adventures of a roguish hero of low social class who lives by his or her wits in a corrupt society

**prose** – writing not in verse form; ordinary written language

**romance** – a story that presents remote or imaginative incidents rather than ordinary, realistic experience (originally referred to medieval tales of the deeds and loves of noble knights and ladies)

**satire** – a kind of writing that holds up to ridicule or contempt the weaknesses and wrongdoings of individuals, groups, institutions, or humanity in general

* **Horatian satire** – after the Roman satirist Horace: a satire in which the voice is indulgent, tolerant, amused, and witty; the speaker holds up to gentle ridicule the absurdities and follies of human beings, aiming at producing in the reader not the anger of a Juvenal, but a wry smile
* **Juvenalian satire** – after the Roman satirist Juvenal: a formal satire in which the speaker attacks vice and error with contempt and indignation; Juvenalian satire in its realism and its harshness is in strong contrast to Horatian satire short story – short piece of prose fiction (usually containing fewer than 10,000 words), having few characters and aiming at unity of effect

**tragedy** – a work that ends in a catastrophe for the main character(s)

* hero is capable of great suffering
* hero has tragic flaw (hubris)
* hero becomes ruined or dies
* catharsis occurs at the end
* it arouses the emotions of pity, fear, awe, and wonder
* explores the relationship of gods and mortals

**LITERARY DEVICES AND TERMS**

**aposiopesis** – a breaking-off of speech, usually because of rising emotion; (Ex. “Touch me one more time, and I swear—”)

**apotheosis** – elevation to divine status

**apotheosize** – to elevate to divine status

**bourgeois** – (adj) relating to the middle class; (n) a middle class person

**bourgeoisie** – the middle class

**cliché** – any overused expression

**consistent control** – unity

**convention** – a widely used and accepted device or technique, as in drama, literature, or painting; Ex. the theatrical convention of the aside; the poetic convention of using iambic pentameter

**cumulative** – all encompassing

**dark humor** – humor directed at sad, tragic, or solemn matters; morbid or dark humor

**dead pan irony/humor** – acting serious and pretending to mean what you say

**deconstruction** – text has no fixed meaning

**dialect** – a particular way of speech determined by location

**distortion** – an exaggeration or stretching of the truth to achieve a desired effect

**enumerate** – to specify one after another; count off, name, or list (Ex. A Modest Proposal)

**epigraph** – a citation from some author, or a sentence framed for the purpose, placed at the beginning of a work or of its separate divisions and setting forth a theme

**epitaph** – an inscription on a tombstone or monument in memory of the person buried there; a brief literary piece commemorating deceased person

**eulogy** – speech of praise

**grim humor** – humor about serious subjects

**grotesque** – disgusting, ugly, or distorted

**gothic** – extensive use of primitive, medieval, wild, mysterious, or natural elements; often depiction of horrifying events set in gloomy castles

**interior monologue** – narrative that focuses on the inner emotions of one character

**invective** – abusive speech

**juxtapose** – to place close together or side by side, esp. for comparison or contrast

**juxtaposition** – an act or instance of placing things close together or side by side, esp. for comparison or contrast

**memento mori** – Latin phrase that means “remember that you must die” (theme); an object, as a skull, serving as a reminder of death or mortality

**metamorphosis** – a radical change in a character, either physical or emotional

**metaphysical** – focusing on the spirit or soul

**neologism** – a new word, meaning, usage, or phrase; (Ex: the word “tintinnabulation” created by Poe for his poem “The Bells”)

**paradigm** – model or pattern

**paragon** – a model of excellence

**pathetic fallacy** – giving inanimate objects excessive emotionalism (Ex. “Ode on a Grecian Urn”)

**pathos** – quality of life, art, or literature that evokes feelings of pity and compassion in the reader (Ex. “The Scarlet Ibis”)

**pedantic** – making a show of learning

**permutation** – major or fundamental change; a transformation

**phoenix** – mythological bird who rose from the ashes of destruction

**physiognomy** – the art of discovering one’s character from outward appearance (especially from facial features)

**red herring** – false clue that purposely leads the reader astray (draws attention away from the central issue)

**secular** – not controlled by the church; worldly; of the flesh

**shift** – a movement from one thought or idea to another; a change

**synaesthesia** – the description of one kind of sense impression by using words that normally describe another; the mingling of the senses; (Ex. "loud shirt", "bitter wind" or "prickly laugh”)

**tabula rasa** – the idea that humans are born with a blank slate (John Locke’s philosophy); anything existing undisturbed in its original pure state

**ubi sunt motif** – lamenting the transitory nature of life and beauty; “where are [those who were before us?]”

**undercutting** – trick of making a character unconsciously demonstrate his flaws (Ex. “My Last Duchess”)

**verisimilitude** – the appearance of truth in a work of fiction

**LITERARY MOVEMENTS**

\***Puritanism** – literary period characterized by basic tenets of the Puritan faith:

• Divine Mission

• Providence

• Innate and Total Depravity

• Plainness

• Grace

• Fiction is Lies

• Election

• Atonement Through Christ’s Crucifixion

**\*Classicism (Neoclassical)** – literary movement of renewed interest in classical art forms; also relates to the Age of Reason, The Enlightenment, the Classical period of America (18th and 19th centuries); characterized by the following:

* Reason/logic is all important; it governs life and society; Reason valued over Imagination
* Clarity and order are valued
* Nature and human nature are governed by fixed unchanging laws
* Nature = self-contained machine; i.e., a watch; natural events are easily explained away by logic

**\*Romanticism** – literary movement with the following characteristics:

* glorification of nature
* glorification of common man
* glorification of the ideal
* deals with the supernatural
* emphasizes exotic and far-away places
* stresses emotion over reason
* finds the past important
* emphasizes the imagination, freedom, rights of the individual, and rural life

**\*Transcendentalism** – in New England transcendentalism, a spiritual essence or vital force (the Oversoul) in the universe in which all souls participate and that therefore transcends individual consciousness; this movement consists of the following characteristics:

* God is the Oversoul (term coined by Emerson)
* every individual at birth has a divine spark (a tiny part of the Oversoul in it)
* society and the world corrupt the child

**Regionalism** – writing presents the distinct culture of an area, including its speech, customs, landscape, and history

**\*Realism** – the presentation in art of details from actual life

**\*Naturalism** – literary movement with the following characteristics:

* man is a puppet dangled by fate
* man in powerless against the environment
* man is driven by the fundamental or animal urges of food, shelter, and/or mating

**Imagism** – A literary movement launched by British and American poets early in the 20th century (between 1909 and 1917) that advocated that poetry should use free verse, incorporate common speech patterns, create new rhythms, have complete freedom in subject matter, and present a clear, concentrated, and precise image; movement was a reaction to Victorian sentimentalism

**\*Modernism** – a literary period in America from 1914-1945 (during, between, and a bit after the World Wars); typical elements and themes from Modernist literature are as follows:

* works begin arbitrarily, advance without explanation, and end without clear resolutions
* structure exists, but it lies beneath the surface; the reader must dig for it
* works consists of segments or fragments
* works contain dramatic shifts in perspective
* works are highly imagistic and symbolic
* typical themes:
  + an opposition to dehumanizing elements of the mechanized world
  + affirming the dignity of human beings in an increasingly grim and ambiguous time
  + seeing the modern age as the “Age of Anxiety”
  + general disillusionment (with family structure, politics, love, etc.)
  + the nature and possibilities of human relationships to redeem us

**Magical Realism** – a chiefly literary style or genre originating in Latin America that combines fantastic or dreamlike elements with realism

**Victorian** – A descriptive term for the time when Victoria was queen of England, from 1837 to 1901. The Victorian period in England is known as a time of industrial progress, colonial expansion, and public fastidiousness in morals. The Victorian period in the United States had many of the same characteristics. People of this era are characterized by their prudishness and observance of social conventionalities.