**GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS**

**ALLEGORY** *A tale in prose or verse in which characters, actions, or settings represent abstract ideas or moral qualities*. Thus, an allegory has two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. The most famous allegory in English is John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim Progress* (1678). A well-known American allegory is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment.” A related form is the *parable*, a short, simple tale from which a moral lesson is drawn. Probably the most famous of all parables are those by Jesus in the New Testament.

**ALLITERATION** *The repetition of similar sounds, usually consonants, in a group of words.* Sometimes the term is limited to the repetition of initial consonant sounds. Alliteration serves several purposes: it is pleasing to the ear; it emphasizes the ideas these words express. Edgar Allan Poe frequently used alliteration, as in this line from the “The Raven”:

*D*oubting, *d*reaming *d*reams no mortal ever *d*ared to *d*ream before

Here, alliteration links the ideas of the dreaming, doubting, and daring.

**ALLUSION** *A reference to a person, a place, an event, or a literary work that a writer expects a reader to recognize.* Allusions may be drawn from literature, mythology, religion, history, or geography. An allusion to Greek mythology is found in this line from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “The Chambered Nautilus”:

In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings

Here, Holmes alludes to the Sirens, sea nymphs who enchanted sailors with their songs and lured them to their deaths. This allusion helps to evoke the mystery of the sea. The title of the Archibald MacLeish’s poem “Ars Poetica” alludes to a famous long poem of the same name by the Roman poet Horace.

**ANALOGY** *A comparison made between two things to show the similarities between them.* Analogies can be used for illustration(to explain something unfamiliar by comparing it to something familiar) or for argument (to persuade that what holds true for one thing holds true for the thing to which it is compared). Henry Wadsworth Longfellow draws an analogy for the sake of illustration in “The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls,” where he compares the repeated rise and fall of the tide to the passage of time and human life.

(P) **ANAPEST** *A poetic foot consisting of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable* ( **  ** ).

**ANECDOTE** *A very short story told to make a point*. Many anecdotes are humorous; some are serious. In his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin tells of a humorous anecdote about a man who prefers a speckled ax to a spotless one. The point of the anecdote is to explain his own flagging pursuit of virtue.

**ANTAGONIST** *A person of force opposing the protagonist in a drama or narrative.* The word *antagonist* comes from the Greek word meaning “ to struggle against.” In Herman Melville’s novel *Moby –Dick,* the white whale is Captain Ahab’s antagonist. Another famous antagonist is Professor Moriarty, Sherlock Holmes’s rival in Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective stories.

**APHORISM** *A terse, pointed statement expressing some wise or clever observation about life.*

Here is an example:

He that lives upon hope will die fasting.

-Benjamin Franklin

Some writers, especially essayists, are known for their *aphoristic style;* that is, their writing incorporates many aphorisms, or memorable statements. The essays of the English writer Francis Bacon are noted for their aphoristic style, as are the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson’s “Self –Reliance” abounds in famous aphorisms. Here are two well- known examples:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. . .

(P) **APOSTROPHE** *A figure of speech in which an absent or dead person, an abstract quality, or something inanimate or non-human is addressed directly*. Apostrophe is a common device in poetry. William Cullen Bryant uses an apostrophe when he addresses a bird in “To a Waterfowl”:

Whither, midst falling dew,

While glow the heavens with the last steps of

day,

Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue

Thy solitary way?

**ASIDE**  *In a drama, a short speech spoken by a character in an undertone or directly to the audience.*  An aside is meant to be heard by the audience, not by the other characters on stage. Occasionally in fiction, a character speaks in an aside. In Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab tries to persuade Starbuck, his first mate, to join in hunting the white whale. Ahab’s aside expresses his belief that he has won the reluctant Starbuck over:

“Speak, but speak ! - Aye, aye! thy silence, then, *that* voices thee. (Aside) Something shot from my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now without rebellion.”

(P) **ASSONANCE** *The repetition of a similar vowel sound, especially in poetry*. Assonance creates a musical effect and emphasizes certain sounds to create a mood. Here is an example of assonance from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells”:

From the m*o*lten g*o*lden n*o*tes

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY** *A person’s account of his or her own life.* An autobiography is generally written in narrative form and includes some introspection. Autobiographies are distinct from diaries, journals, and letters, which are not unified life stories written for publication. Autobiographies are also different from memoirs, which often deal, at least in part, with public events and important persons other than the author.

**BALLAD** *A story told inverse and usually meant to be sung.* Ballads are generally classified as *folk ballads* or *literary ballads*. Folk ballads have no known authors. They are composed anonymously and transmitted orally. Literary ballads are composed by known writers who imitate folk ballads. A well-known American folk ballad is “John Henry.” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote several literary ballads, among them “The Skeleton in Armor.”

**BIOGRAPHY** *A detailed account of a person’s life written by another person.* Many modern biographers strive to convey the historical and social background as well as the central events of a subject’s life. An *impressionistic biography* does not aim to give a clear account of someone’s life but rather to create an impression of that person’s by conveying his or her essence. John Dos Paassos’ novel *U.S.A.* contains many impressionistic biographies, including one of Henry Ford.

(P) **BLANK VERSE** *Verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter*. Blank verse is used in some of the greatest English and American poetry. Here are some blank verse lines from William Cullen Bryant’s “Thanatopsis”:

         

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch

       /  

About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

(P) **CAESURA** *A break or pause in a line of poetry, which contributes to the rhythm of the poem*. The caesura in these lines from William Cullen Bryant’s “Thantopsis” are indicated by double lines (//):

Go forth, //under the open sky, //and list

To Nature’s teachings, //while from all around—

Earth and her waters, //and the depths of air—

Comes a still voice—

**CATALOG** *A list of things, people, or events*. Poets often use catalogs to suggest largeness and inclusiveness. For example, in “Song of the Broad-Axe,” Walt Whitman uses a catalog to suggest America’s rapid industrial growth:

The shapes arise!

Shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets,

Shapes of two-threaded tracks of railroads,

Shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches,

Shapes of the fleets of barges, tows, lake and canal craft, river craft . . .

**CHARACTER** *A person-or an animal, a thing or natural force presented as a person -appearing in a literary work.* To make me the actions of a character believable, a writer must provide *motivation,* the stated or implied reason behind the character’s behavior. Characters may be motivated by external events or by inner needs or fears. In discussing fictional characters, critics distinguish between *round characters* and *flat characters.* A round character is well developed, usually with many traits. Readers feel that a round character might exist in life. A flat character has only one or two distinguished traits. *Stock* or *stereotyped characters* are character types that appear so often their nature is immediately familiar to a reader or to an audience.

**CHARACTERIZATION**  *The means by which a writer reveals a character’s personality.* Generally, a writer develops a character in one or more of the following ways: (1) through the character’s actions; (2) through the character’s speeches and thoughts; (3) through the physical description of the character; (4) through showing that other characters think or say about the character; (5) through a direct statement revealing the writer’s idea of the character.

**CHORUS** *In drama , one or more characters who comment on the action.* In classical Greek tragedy, the chorus was a group of people who commented on the downfall of the protagonist. In Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, the Stage Manager functions as the chorus.

(LP) **CLASSICISM** *A movement or tendency in art, literature, and music reflecting the principles manifested in the art of ancient Greece and Rome*. Classicism emphasizes the traditional and the universal, placing value on reason, clarity, balance, and order. Much of English and American writing of the eighteenth century reflects the classical influence; the Declaration of Independence is considered a model of classical prose. Classicism is traditionally opposed to Romanticism, which is concerned with emotions and personal themes.

**CLIMAX**  *The decisive point in a narrative or drama; the point of greatest intensity or interest.* The climax is usually the turning point in the protagonist’s fortunes or point of view.

**COMEDY** *In general, a literary work that ends happily.* Comedy is distinct from tragedy, which is generally concerned with a protagonist who meets an unhappy end. The American dramatists well-known for their comedies are S. N. Behrman and Neil Simon. Eugene O’Neill, although better known for his tragic plays, wrote one notable comedy, *Ah, Wilderness*.

(P) **CONCEIT** *A kind of metaphor that makes a comparison between two startling different things*. A conceit may be brief or it may provide the basis for an entire poem.

(P) **CONCRETE POETRY** *Poetry that uses the appearance of the verse lines on the page to suggest or imitate the poem’s subject.* The arrangement of lines in Denise Levertov’s “Merritt Parkway” suggests the flow of traffic on a highway. May Swenson’s “How Everything Happens” resembles a rising and falling wave.

(P) **CONFESSIONAL POETRY** *Poetry that makes frank, explicit use of incidents in the poet’s life.* Confessional poetry has been an important movement in modern American poetry since the publication in 1959 of Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*. Other important confessional poets are Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, and W.D. Snodgrass.

**CONFLICT** *A struggle between two opposing forces or characters in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem.* The struggle may be an *external conflict* (between two persons, between a person and society, between a person and nature), or it may be an *internal conflict* (between two elements struggling for mastery within a person). Many works present more than one conflict.

(P) **COUPLET** *Two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme.* An *iambic couplet* is a couplet written in iambic feet. Here are two couplets from John Greenleaf Whittier’s “Snowbound”:

The sun that brief December *day*

Rose cheerless over hills of *grey.*

And, darkly circled, gave at *noon*

A sadder light than waning *moon*.

(P) **DACTYL** *A poetic foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables* ( /   ).

**DENOUEMENT** *The outcome of a plot.* The denouement (from the French word for “unknotting”) is that part of the story, novel, play, or narrative poem in which the conflicts are resolved and the fortunes of the protagonist are decided.

**DESCRIPTION** *The type of writing that deals with the appearance of a person, an object, or a place.* Description is one of the major forms of description. Description works through images that appeal to the senses. In short stories and novels, description is often used to characterize or to create mood. In the following passage from “The Devil and Tom Walker,” Washington Irving indicates the miserliness and mean style of living of Tom walker and his wife through a description of their dwelling place:

They lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveler stopped at its door . . .

**DIALECT** *The characteristic speech of a particular region or social group.* Dialect differs from standard English in sentence structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Writers often use dialect to establish local color. Here is a humorous example of Western dialect from “ Mark Twain’s and the Public Reading”:

Well Smith he stood just there, and my grandfather he stood just here, you know, and he was a-bendin’ down just so, fumblin’ in the grass, and when the old ram see’d him in that attitude, he took it fur and invitation—and here he come! down the slope thirty mile and hour and his eye full of business.

**DICTION** *A writer’s choice of words, particularly for clarity effectiveness and precision.* Diction can be formal or informal, abstract or concrete. One aspect of a writer’s style, diction must be appropriate to a writer’s subject and audience. Words that are appropriate in informal dialogue might not be appropriate in a formal essay.

**DRAMATIC IRONY**  A reader or an audience perceives something that a character in the story or play does not know.

**EPIGRAM**  *A short witty statement in prose or verse.* Here are two examples:

A man being [is] sometimes more generous when he has but a little money than when he has plenty,

perhaps through fear of being thought to have but little.

-Benjamin Franklin

Nature fits all her children with something to do,

He who would write and can’t write, can surely review.

-James Russell Lowell

**EPIGRAPH**  *A quotation or motto at the beginning of a chapter, book, short story, or poem that makes some point about the work.* T.S. Eliot uses a quotation from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as the epigraph to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” In the passage, one of the damned consents to tell his story, believing it will never be repeated. Eliot suggests through his epigraph that Prufrock, the poem’s central character, is also making a shameful confession.

**EPITAPH** *An inscription on a gravestone or a short poem written in memory of someone who has died.* Many epitaphs, such as Benjamin Franklin’s “A Printer’s Epitaph,” are actually epigrams and are not intended for serious use as monument inscriptions.

**EPITHET** *A descriptive name or phrase used to characterize someone or something, such as “fair weather friend” or “Catherine the Great.”* Homer’s *Odyssey* is filled with epithets, such as “wine-dark sea” and “keen-edged sword.” In “The Crisis, Number 1,” Thomas Paine uses the epithets “ the summer soldier” and the “sunshine patriot” to characterize those who fail to serve their country in time of crisis.

**ESSAY** *A prose work, usually short, that deals with a subject in a limited way and expresses a particular point of view.* An essay is never a comprehensive treatment of a subject (the word comes from a French word, *essai,* meaning “attempt” or “try”). An essay may be serious or humorous, tightly organized or rambling, restrained or emotional.

The two general classifications of essay are the *informal essay* (also called the *familiar* or *personal* essay)and the *formal essay*. An informal essay is usually written as if the writer is talking informally to the reader about some topic using a conversational style and a personal or humorous tone. By contrast, a formal essay is tightly organized, dignified in style, and serious in tone. A *critical essay*, one kind of formal essay, deals with a particular work of art, a particular artist, or some issue concerning the arts.

**EXPOSITION** *The kind of writing that is intended primarily to present information.* Exposition is one of the major forms of discourse. The term exposition also refers to that part of a short story, a novel, a narrative poem, or a play, which gives the reader or the audience essential background information. The term *exposition* also refers to that part of a short story, a narrative poem, or a play that gives the reader or audience essential background information. In Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, the Stage Manager provides expositions throughout the play.

**FABLE** *A brief story that is told to present a moral, or practical lesson.*The best known fables are those attributed to Aesop. In the seventeenth century, the French writer La Fontaine wrote elegant, witty fables in verse. The American writer James Thurber wrote modern fables, which he called “fables for our time,” that often give new twists to the moral of older fables.

**FARCE** *A type of comedy based on a farfetched humorous situation, often with ridiculous or stereotyped characters.* The humor in farce is largely slapstick.

**FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE** *Language not intended to be interpreted in a literal sense.* Figurative Language consists of figures of speech. Emily Dickinson uses figurative language when she compares an abstract idea—hope--to a living creature--a bird:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers--

That perches in the soul-

And sings the tune without the words-

And never stops-at all-

This implied comparison is a metaphor, one kind of figurative language. Figurative language appeals tot he imagination, as the poem shows, and thus provides new ways of looking at the world.

**FIGURE OF SPEECH**  *A word or expression not meant to be interpreted in a literal sense.* More than two hundred different kinds of figures of speech have been classified, but the ones used most frequently in literature are hyperbole, metaphor, oxymoron, personification, simile, and synecdoche.

**FLASHBACK**  *A scene in a short story, a novel, a narrative poem, or play that in interrupts the action to show an event that happened earlier.* Many narratives present events as they occur in time—that is, in chronological order. Sometimes, however, a writer interrupts this natural sequence of events and “flashback” to tell the reader or audience what happened earlier in the story or in a character’s life. Often flashback takes the form of reminiscence.

**FOIL** *A character who sets off another character by contrast.*

**FOLKLORE** *Traditional songs, myths, legends, fables, fairytales, proverbs, and riddles composed anonymously and either written down or passed on by word-of-mouth from generation to generation.* Traditional ballads are a kind of folklore as are Indian songs and Negro spirituals.

(P) **FOOT** *A unit used to measure the meter, or rhythmic pattern, of a line of poetry*. A foot is made up of one stressed syllable and, usually, one or more unstressed syllables. A line of poetry has as many feet as it has stressed syllables. Four kinds of feet are common in English and American poetry:

The *iamb.* The iamb is the most common foot in English and American poetry. It consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The following line from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Divina Commedia I” consists of five iambic feet:

    - /  

The loud vo / ci / fer /a / tions of the street

The *trochee*. The trochee is the reverse of the iamb. It consists of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. This line from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” is in trochaic meter:

    /  /  

Once up / on a mid / night drear / y, as I

  /  

pon / dered / weak and wear / y

The *anapest*. The anapest is a foot of three syllables, two unstressed followed by a stressed syllable. This line from James Russell Lowell’s *A Fable for Critics* is an anapestic meter:

 -       - /

There is Haw / thorne with ge / nius so shrink / ing and rare

The *dactyl.* The dactyl, the opposite of the anapest, consists of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. The following line by the English poet Thomas Hood is in dactylic meter:

 -   - -

Take her up ten / der / ly

**FORESHADOWING** *The use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest what action is to come.* Writers use foreshadowing to create interest and build suspense. Sometimes foreshadowing also prepares the reader for the ending of a story.

**FORM**  *The structure and organization of a literary work, as distinct from its content, which is what the work is about.*

**FORMS OF DISCOURSE**  *A classification of writing into types, according to the writer’s main purpose.*  Four forms of discourse are **description, exposition, narration, and persuasion**.

(P) **FREE VERSE** *Unrhymed verse that has either no metrical pattern or in an irregular pattern.* Walt Whitman was the first poet in England to use free verse extensively. The following lines of free verse are from his poem “Song of Myself”:

The last scud of day holds back for me,

It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any

on the shadowed wilds,

It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

**GOTHIC** *A term that describes the use in fiction of grotesque, gloomy settings (often castles) and mysterious, violent, and supernatural occurrences to create suspense and awe.* The term is often used in reference to Gothic novels, which became popular in England in the eighteenth century. Many of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories contain Gothic elements.

(P) **HAIKU** *A Japanese verse form consisting of three lines and seventeen syllables.* The first line of a haiku consists of five syllables; the second line, seven; and the third line, five. A haiku usually focuses on an image that suggests a thought or emotion, as in the following example:

A bead of water

Clinging to a willow branch:

The first drop of rain!

The *Imagist* poets were influences by Oriental verse forms, particularly by the haiku and a related Japanese form, the **tanka**.

(LP) **HARLEM RENAISSANCE** *A flowering of black writing, art, and music in the 1920s.* Harlem, New York, was the center of this movement. The writers of this movement had several aims: to define and preserve the black heritage, to protest oppression of blacks, and to make other cultures aware of black life and culture. Among the best-known writers are Langston Hughes, Conutee Cullen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Arna Bontemps.

**HUMOR** *Sympathetically deals with foibles and incongruities of human nature.*

**HYPERBOLE**  *A figure of speech using exaggeration, or overstatement, for special effect.*  Walt Whitman uses hyperbole for dramatic emphasis in this line from “Song of Myself”:

And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. . .

Seba Smith uses hyperbole for humorous effect when he ridicules the claims of farmers from Ohio,

where the corn grows so tall they have to go up on a ladder to pick the ears off; and where a boy fell into the hole that his father dug a beet out of, and they had let down a bed cord to draw him up again. . .

(P) **IAMB**  *A poetic foot consisting of an unstressed syllable by a stressed syllable.*

(P) **IAMB PENTAMETER** *The most common verse line in English and American poetry.* It consists of five verse *feet* (*penta*-is from a Greek word meaning “five”), with each foot an *iamb*- that is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The following lines from Willliam Cullen Bryant’s “Thanatopsis” are written in iambic pentameter:

Thou go not, like the quarry at night

Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed

William Shakespeare’s plays are written almost entirely in iambic pentameter. Unrhymed pentameter is called blank verse.

**IMAGERY** *Words or phrases that create pictures, or images, in the reader’s mind.* Images are primarily visual; that is, they usually appeal to the reader’s sense of sight. Images can also appeal to other senses such as touch, taste, smell, and hearing.

**IMAGISM** *A movement in American and English poetry begun in 1912 by the American poet Ezra Pound.* Seeking to free poetry from stale conventions and vague high-flown language, Pound set forth the basic principles of Imagism. (1) direct concentration on the precise image;(2) use of precise words and the language of common speech (3) creation of new or rhythms (and the use of free verse);(4) complete freedom in choice of subject.

**INCONGRUITY**  *The joining of opposites to create an unexpected situation.*

**INVERSION** *The reversal of usual word order.* Inversion may be used to secure some kind of emphasis. In poetry inversion may be used for the sake of meter rhyme. An example of inversion is found in the opening lines of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s poem “Each and All.” Whereas the normal word order would be “yon red-cloaked clown in the filed thinks of three looking down from the hilltop,” Emerson inverts the order:

Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown

Of thee from the hilltop looking down

In the following line from Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall,” inversion emphasizes the first and last words in the line:

*Something* there is that doesn’t love a *wall*

**IRONY** *A contrast or an incongruity between what is stated and what is meant, or between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.* Three kinds of irony are (1) *verbal irony* in which a writer or speaker says one thing and means something entirely different; (2) *dramatic irony,* in which a reader or an audience perceives something that a character in the story or play does not know; (3) *irony of situation,* in which the writer shows a discrepancy between the expected result of some action or situation and its actual result.

**LOCAL COLOR** *The use of specific details describing the dialect, dress, customs, and scenery associated with a particular region or section of the country.*The purpose of local color is to suggest the unique flavor of a particular locale.

(P) **LYRIC** *A poem, usually a short one, that expresses a speaker’s personal thoughts and feelings.* As its Greek name indicates, a lyric was originally a poem sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, and lyrics to this day have retained a melodic quality. The **elegy**, the **ode**, and the **sonnet** are all forms of the lyric. Another kind of lyric is the *dramatic lyric*, in which emotions are attributed to an imaginary character, as in Ezra Pound’s “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter.”

**MELODRAMA** *A drama that has stereotyped characters, exaggerated emotions, and conflict that pits an all-good hero or heroine against an all- evil villain.* The good characters always win and the evil ones are always punished.

**METAPHOR** *A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things which are basically dissimilar.* “ Life is a dream,” “ Life is a vale of tears,” and “ Life is a hard road” are all examples of metaphor.

Many metaphors are implied, or suggested. An *implied metaphor* does not directly state that one thing is another, different thing. In her poem, “Upon the Burning of Our House,” Anne Bradstreet uses an implied metaphor when in referring to heaven, she speaks of the beautiful “house” above built by the mightiest “architect.” An extended metaphor is a metaphor that is extended throughout a poem. In Emily Dickinson’s “ Hope is the Thing with Feathers,” the metaphor is stated in the title and first line of the poem. The comparison of hope to a bird is then continued throughout the poem.

A *dead metaphor* is a metaphor that has become so commonplace that it seems literal rather than figurative. Some examples are the *foot* of a hill, the *head* of the class, a *point* in time, ant the *leg* of a chair. A *mixed metaphor* is the use of two or more inconsistent metaphors in one expression. When they are examined, mixed metaphors make no sense. Mixed metaphors are often unintentionally humorous: “The storm of protest was nipped in the bud” or “ To hold the fort, he’d have to shake a leg.”

(P) **METER** *A generally regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry*. The basic unit of meter is the **foot**, and the most commonly used feet in English and American poetry are the *iamb*, the *trochee*, the *anapest*, and the *dactyl*. In these lines from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “Old Ironsides,” the stressed syllables are marked (/ ) and the unstressed syllables are marked (  ):

/       

Nail to the mast her holy flag,

/    

Set every threadbare sail.

   /    /

And give her to the god of storms,

   /  /

The lightning and the gale.

**METONYMY** *A figure of speech in which something very closely associated with a thing is used to stand for or suggest the thing itself*. “ Three sails came into the harbor” is an example to metonymy; the word *sails* stands for the ships themselves. Other common examples of metonymy are *crown* to mean king, *hard hat* to mean a construction worker, and *White House* to mean the President.

(LP) **MODERN** *In a broad sense modern is applied to writing marked by a strong and conscious break with tradition.* It employs a distinctive kind of imagination that insists on having its general frame of reference within itself. It believes we create the world in the act of perceiving it. Modern implies historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, loss, and despair. It rejects traditional values and assumptions, and it rejects equally the rhetoric by which they are sanctioned and communicated. It elevates the individual and inward over the social and the outward, and it prefers the unconscious to the self-conscious. In many respects, it is a reaction against **realism** and **naturalism** and the scientific postulates on which they rest. Although by no means can all modern writers be termed philosophical existentialist, existentialism has created a schema within which much of the modern temper can see a reflection of its attitudes and assumptions. The modern revels in a dense and often unordered actuality as it exists in the mind of the writer it has been richly experimental.

**MONOLOGUE** *An**extended speech by a character in a play, short story, novel, or narrative poem.* The speech may be made to other characters or, as in a soliloquy, represent the character thinking aloud.

**MOTIF** *A recurring feature (such as a name an image, or a phrase) in a work of literature.* a motif generally contributes in some way to the theme of a short story, novel, poem, or play. For example, Stephen Crane uses the following pattern of thought as a motif in “The Open Boat” to reinforce the theme of nature’s indifference to humanity:

If I am going to be drowned-if I am going to be drowned-if I am going to be drowned, why in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?

At times, *motif* is used to refer to some commonly used plot or character type in literature. The ugly duckling motif “refers to a plot that involves the transformation of a plain-looking person into a beauty.

**MYTH** *A story, often about immortal and sometimes connected with religious rituals that attempts to give meaning to the mysteries of the world.* The body of related myths is that is accepted by a people is known as a *mythology*. A mythology tells a people what it is most concerned about, where it came from, who its gods are, what its most sacred rituals are, and what its destiny is.

**NARRATION** *The kind of writing or speaking that tells a story.* Narration is one the major **forms of discourse**. A narrative may be book length, such as a novel, or it may be paragraph length, such as an anecdote. The short story, narrative poems, and plays are all examples of narration.

(P) **NARRATIVE POEM** *A poem that tells a story.* One kind of epic poem is the epic, a long poem which sets forth the heroic ideals of a particular people. The ballad is another kind of narrative poem. Examples of narrative poems in American literature are Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Skeleton in Armor,” and Robert Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man.”

**NARRATOR** *One who narrates, or tells, a story.*  *First Person Limited:* A story may be told by a *first–person* narrator, someone who is either a major or minor character in the story. *Third Person Omniscient:* A story may also be told by *third-person* narrator, who is not in the story at all. *Third Person Limited*: A story from the perspective of one character in the story, but not as if the character is telling the story directly. The word *narrator* can also refer to a character in a drama who guides the audience through the play, often commenting on the action and sometimes participating in it. In Thornton Wilder’s play, *Our Town*, the Stage Manager serves as a narrator.

(LP) **NATURALISM** *An extreme form of realism*. Naturalistic writers usually depict the sordid side of life and show characters who are severely, if not hopelessly, limited by their environment or heredity. The most highly regarded American naturalistic writers are Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Stephan Crane. John Steinbeck sometimes used naturalistic techniques. His novel *The Grapes of Wrath* shows a poor migrant family ruthlessly crushed by natural and social forces over which they have no control.

**NOVEL** *A book-length fictional prose narrative, having many characters and, often, a complex plot.* A related form is the *novella* a prose work longer than short story but shorter and less complex than a novel.

(P) **OCTAVE** *An eight-line poem or stanza*. Usually the term *octave* refers to the first eight lines of an *Italian sonnet*. The remaining six lines form a **sestet**.

(P) **ODE** *A complex and often lengthy lyric poem, written in a dignified formal style on some lofty or serious subject.* Odes are often written for a special occasion, to honor a person or a season, or to commemorate an event.

**ONOMATOPOEIA** *The use of a word whose sound in some degree imitates or suggests its meaning.* The names of birds are onomatopoetic, imitating the cries of the birds named: *cuckoo, whippoorwill, owl, towhee, bobwhite*. Some onomatopoetic words are *hiss, clang, rustle*, and *snap*.

**ORAL LITERATURE** *Literature not written down but passed from generation to generation through performance or word-of-mouth.* Indian songs and Negro **spiritual** are oral literature, as are traditional **ballads**.

**ORATORY** *Formal public speaking and literature that grows out of public speeches.* Two famous American orations are Patrick Henry’s “Speech in the Virginia Convention” and Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.”

**ORNATE STYLE** *A highly elaborate style of writing popular in England and America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.* Ornate style is characterized by difficult vocabulary, intricate sentence structure, complex figures of speech, and obscure allusions. A famous practitioner of ornate style was Cotton Mather.

**OXYMORON** *A figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory ideas or terms, as in “sweet sorrow,” “wise fool,” “living death,” and “honest thief.”* An oxymoron suggests a paradox, but it does very briefly, usually in two or three words.

**PARADOX**  *A statement that reveals a kind of truth, although it seems at first to be self-contradictory and untrue.* Emily Dickinson uses a paradox in the title of one of her poems: “Much Madness Is Divinest Sense.”

**PARALLELISM**  *The use of phrases, clauses,* or *sentences that are similar or complementary in structure or in meaning.*  These lines from Walt Whitman’s “Beat! Beat! Drums!” include parallel phrases, sentence structures, and meanings:

Beat! beat! drums!--blow! bugles! blow!

Make no parley--stop for no expostulation,

Mind not the timid--mind not the weeper or prayer,

Mind not the old man beseeching the young man

**PARODY** *The humorous imitation of a work of literature, art, or music.* A parody often achieves its humorous effect through the use of exaggeration or mockery. In literature, parody can be made of a plot, a character, a writing style, a sentiment, or a theme.

**PATHOS** *The quality in a work of literature that arouses a feeling of pity, sorrow, or compassion in the reader.*  The term is usually used to refer to situations in which innocent characters suffer through no fault of their own. Pathos is distinct from *sentimentality,* artificial or superficial emotion in a work of literature or art. Pathos is genuine whereas sentimentality is false.

**PERSONIFICATION** *A figure of speech in which something nonhuman is given human qualities.*  In “Because I Could Not Stop for Death,” Emily Dickinson personifies death by depicting it as a person who drives a carriage and makes stops for passengers.

**PERSUASION** *The type of speaking or writing that is intended to make its audience adopt a certain opinion, perform an action, or do both.* Persuasion is one of the major **forms of discourse.** Modern examples of persuasion include political speeches, television commercials, and newspaper editorials.

**PLOT** *The sequence of events or actions in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem.* Plots may be complicated, loosely constructed or close knit. But every plot is made up of a series of incidents that are related to one another.

**Conflict**, a struggle of some kind, is the most important element in plot. Conflict may be *external* or *internal*, and there may be more than one form of conflict in a work. As the plot advances we learn how the conflict is resolved, either through the action or through major changes in attitudes or personalities of the characters. Action is generally introduced by the **exposition**, information essential to understanding the situation. The action rises to a crisis, or **climax**. This movement is called the *rising action*. The *falling action*, which follows the crisis, shows a reversal of fortune for the protagonist. In a tragedy, this reversal leads to disaster; in comedy, it leads to a happy ending. The **denouement**, or resolution, is the moment when the conflict ends and the outcome of the action is clear.

**POINT OF VIEW** *The vantage point from which a narrative is told.*  There are two basic points of view. (1) In the first-person point of view, the story is told by one of the characters in his or her own words, and the reader is told only what this character knows and observes. (2) In third-person point of view, the narrator is not a character in the story at all. The third-person narrator might tell a story from a *limited* point of view, focusing on only one character in the story. The third-person narrator might, on the other hand, be an all-knowing, or *omniscient*, observer who describes and comments on all the characters and actions in a story.

(LP) **POSTMODERN** *Postmodern has been applied to much contemporary writing, particularly with reference to experimental forms*. The fundamental philosophical assumptions of modernism, its tendency toward historical discontinuity, alienation, asocial individualism, solipsism, and existentialism continue to permeate contemporary writing, perhaps in a heightened sense. But the tendencies of the modernist to construct intricate forms, to interweave symbols elaborately, to create within themselves an ordered universe, have given way since the 1960s to a denial of order, to the presentation of highly fragmented universes in the created world of art, and to critical theories that are forms of phenomenology. Traditional forms, such as the novel, have given way to denials of those forms, such as the antinovel. The typical protagonist has become not a hero but an antihero.

**PROTAGONIST** *The central character of a drama, novel, short story, or narrative poem.* The protagonist is the character on whom the action centers and with whom the reader sympathizes most. Usually, the protagonist strives against an opponent, or antagonist. The protagonist may also strive against internal forces.

**PUN** *The use of a word or phrase to suggest two or more meanings at the same time, or the use of two different words or phrases that sound alike.* Puns are generally humorous. An example of the second type pf pun is this statement by the nineteenth-century English poet and humorist Thomas Hood: “ They went and told the sexton and the sexton tolled the bell.”

(P) **QUATRAIN** *Usually a stanza or poem of four lines.* However, a quatrain may also be any group of four lines unified by a rhyme scheme. Quatrains usually follow an *abab*, *abba*, or *abcb* rhyme scheme. Here is a quatrain from James Russell Lowell’s “The Courtin’ ”:

*a* God makes sech nights, all white an’ *still*

*b* Fur’z you can look or *listen,*

a Moonshine an’ snow on field an’ *hill,*

*b* All silence an’ all *glisten.*

(LP) **REALISM** *The attempt in literature and art to represent life as it really is, without sentimentalizing or idealizing it.* Realistic writing often depicts the everyday life and speech of ordinary people.

(P) **REFRAIN**  *A word, phrase, line, or group of lines repeated regularly in a poem, usually at the end of each stanza.* Refrains are often used in ballads and other narrative poems to create a songlike effect and to help build suspense. Refrains can also serve to emphasize a particular idea. Perhaps the most famous refrain in American literature is the line repeated at the end of several stanzas of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven”:

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

**REQUIEM** *A prayer, poem, or song for the repose of the dead*.

**REVELATION** *The focal point of many narratives.* In such narratives, all the details are organized to provide a moment of insight into a character or a situation.

**RHETORIC**  *The art of using language for persuasion.* Scholars have noted many rhetorical devices—elements of logic or style that help persuade. One of the most common is the *rhetorical question*, a question suggesting its own answer or not requiring an answer.

(P) **RHYME** *The repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem.* Examples are rover-shiver, song-long, and leap-deep. If the rhyme occurs at the ends of lines, it is called end rhyme. Here an example from John Greenleaf Whittier’s *Snowbound*:

All day the gusty north wind *bore*

The loosening drift its breath *before;*

Low circling round its southern *zone,*

The sun through dazzling snow-mist *shone*.

If rhyme occurs within a line, it is called *internal rhyme*. Here is an example of internal rhyme from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells”:

To the *rhyming* and the *chiming* of the bells!

*Approximate rhyme*, also called *slant rhyme* or *off rhyme*, is rhyme in which the final sounds of the words are similar but not identical (as opposed to exact rhyme). *Cook-look* is an exact rhyme; cook-lack is an approximate rhyme. Ralph Waldo Emerson uses approximate rhyme in his poem “Concord Hymn”:

On this green bank, by this soft stream,

We set today a votive *stone*;

That memory may their deed redeem,

When, like our sires, our sons are *gone*.

The pattern of end rhymes in a poem is called *rhyme scheme*. A poem’s rhyme scheme may be identified by assigning the letter *a* to the first rhyme, the letter *b* to the second rhyme, and so forth. For example, the first stanza of Poe’s “To Helen” has an *ababb* rhyme scheme:

*a* Helen, thy beauty is to *me*

*b* Like those Nicean barks of *yore,*

*a*  That gently, o’er a perfumed *sea*,

*b* The weary, way-worn wanderer *bore*

*b* To his own native *shore*

(P) **RHYTHM** *The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables into pattern.* Rhythm is the most apparent in poetry, though it is par of all good writing. Rhythm often gives poems a distinct musical quality, as in Sidney Lanier’s “The Marshes of Glynn”:

  /     /  -   

Vanishing, swerving, evermore curving again into sight,

   /    -   -  /    /

Softly the sand beach wavers away to a dim gray looping of light.

Poets also use rhythm to echo meaning. In these lines from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells,” a pounding rhythm suggests the persistent clanging of bells:

  

Bells, bells, bells—

          

In the clamor and the clangor of the bells.

Some poets who compose **free verse** use a kind of *organic rhythm*, which grows naturally out of the thoughts and feelings expressed in the poem.

(LP) **ROMANTICISM** *A movement that flourished in literature philosophy, music, and art in Western culture during most of the nineteenth century beginning as a revolt against classicism.* There have been different varieties of Romanticism in different times and places. Romanticism essentially upholds feeling and the imagination over reason and fact. Whereas **realism** attempts to show life as it really is, Romanticism attempts to show life as we might imagine it to be, or think it should be. Romanticism favors the picturesque, the emotional, the exotic, and the mysterious. One kind of Romanticism glorifies nature and upholds the notion that people are basically good and perfectible as in the **transcendentalism** of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Another kind investigates the dark side of the human soul, as in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe.

(P) **RUN-ON LINE** *A line of poetry that has no pause at its end but “runs on” naturally to the next line*. Run-on lines serve to vary the rhythm in a poem and to prevent a sing-song effect. In the following lines from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls.” The first is a run-on line:

The morning breaks; the steads in their stalls

Stamp and neigh as the hostler calls.

**SARCASM***. Verbal irony. The actual intent is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning.*

**SATIRE** *A kind of writing that holds up to ridicule or contempt the weaknesses and wrongdoings of individuals, groups, institutions, or humanity in general.* The aim of satirists is to set a moral standard for society, and they attempt to persuade the reader to see their point of view through the force of laughter.

(P) **SCANSION** *The analysis of verse in terms of meter.* Meter is measured in unites called *feet*. A foot consists of one stressed syllable and, usually, one or two unstressed syllables. A line of poetry is scanned by dividing it into feet and marking stressed and unstressed syllables. Here is a scanned line form William Cullen Bryant’s “Thantopsis”:

So líve, / thãt whén / thy sum / mons cómes / to joín

There are five feet in this line, and the rhythm is iambic (*iambic pentameter*). The other principal kinds of feet are the *trochee*, the *anapest*, and the *dactyl*. In addition to *pentameter*, the terms describing the number of feet in a line are *monometer* (one foot), *dimeter* (two feet), *trimeter* (three feet), *tetrameter* (four feet), and *hexameter* (six feet).

(P) **SESTET** *A six-line poem or stanza.* Usually the term *sestet* refers to the last six lines of an *Italian sonnet*. The first eight lines of an Italian sonnet form an **octave**.

**SETTING** *The time and place in which events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem occur.*  A setting may simply serve as a physical background, but a skillful writer may use the setting to establish a particular atmosphere in a work.

**SIMILE** *A figure of speech comparing the two essentially unlike things through the use of a specific word of comparison, such as* like, as, than, *or* resembles. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow uses a simile in the following lines from his poem “The Arsenal at Springfield” to convey the look of the stacked weapons in an arsenal:

This is the Arsenal. From floor to ceiling,

Like a huge organ, rise the burnished arms

**SOLILOQUY** *An extended speech, usually in a drama, delivered by as character alone on stage.* The character reveals his or her innermost thoughts and feelings directly to the audience, as if thinking aloud. Soliloquies are used occasionally by prose writers.

(P) **SONNET** *A lyric poem of fourteen lines, usually written in rhymed iambic pentameter*. Sonnets vary in structure and rhyme scheme, but are generally of two types: the *Petrarchan*, or *Italian, sonnet* and the *Shakespearean*, or *English, sonnet.* A sonnet usually expresses a single idea or theme. The Italian sonnet is a form that originated in Italy in the thirteenth century.

The Italian sonnet has two parts, and **octave** (eight lines) and a **sestet** (six lines). It is usually rhymed *abbaabba cdecde*. The two parts of the Italian sonnet play off of each other in a variety of ways. Sometimes the octave raises a question that the sestet answers. Sometimes the sestet opposes what the octave says or extends it. The Italian sonnet is often called the Petrarchan sonnet because the Italian poet Francesco Petrarch used it so extensively. Petrarch dedicated more than three hundred sonnets to a woman named Laura.

The Shakespearean sonnet, a form made famous by William Shakespeare, consists of three **quatrains** (four-line stanzas) and a concluding **couplet** (two rhyming lines), with the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg*. In a typical Shakespearean sonnet, each quatrain is a **variant** of the basic idea and the couplet draws a conclusion about it.

**SPIRITUAL** *A folk song, usually on a religious theme*. Many moving spirituals were written by black slaves. These spirituals have two levels of meaning: they express a yearning for both spiritual salvation and deliverance from slavery.

**STAGING** *All the devices except dialogue that a dramatist uses to communicate to an audience*. Important elements of staging include *scenery, costume, gesture* and *movement*, and *lighting.*

(P) **STANZA** *A unit of a poem that it longer than a single line*. Many stanzas have a fixed pattern—that is, the same number of lines and the same rhyme scheme. “The Beautiful Changes” by Richard Wilbur has a regular pattern. Each of the three stanzas has three lines with the rhyme scheme *abacdc*. Some poems do not repeat the same pattern in each stanza. Yet, each group of lines is still referred to as a stanza. “Song” by Adrienne Rich has four stanzas. But there is no regular pattern of line length or rhyme scheme.

A stanza may be a short as the **couplet**, two rhyming lines. The **tercet**, or triplet, is a stanza of three lines, often with one rhyme. Robert Frost’s “Acquainted with the Night” is composed of four tercets and a final couplet. The **quatrain** is a four-line stanza with many patterns of rhyme and rhythm. Emily Dickinson excelled in this form. The typical ballad stanza is a quatrain in which only the second and fourth lines rhyme.

**STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS** *The style of writing that attempts to imitate the natural flow of a character’s thoughts, feelings, reflections, memories, and mental images, as the character experiences them.* The stream-of-consciousness technique enables a writer to delve deeply into a character’s consciousness-not only what the character thinks, but also how the character thinks. As a record of the spontaneous flow of a character’s consciousness, this technique makes no attempt to be logical or even clear. It simply attempts to follow the mind wherever it goes.

**STYLE** *A writer’s characteristic way of writing, determined by the choice of words, the arrangement of words in sentences, and the relationship of the sentences to one another.* Thus, one writer such as Abraham Lincoln, may write long, complex sentences, while another, such as Ernest Hemingway, writes terse ones. One writer may use few adjectives, while another uses many. Style also refers to the particular way in which a writer uses imagery, figurative language, and rhythm. Style is the sum total of qualities and characteristics that distinguish the works of one writer from those of another.

**SUSPENSE** *The quality of a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events.*  Suspense makes readers ask, “What will happen next?” or “ How will this work out?” and impels them to read on. Suspense is greatest when it focuses attention on a sympathetic character. Thus, the most familiar kind of suspense involves a character in mortal danger: hanging from the ledge of a tall building; tied to railroad tracks as a train approaches. But suspense may simply arise from curiosity as when a character must make a decision, or seek an explanation for something.

**SYMBOL** *Any object, person, place, or action that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger that itself, such as a quality, an attitude, a belief, or value.* A rose is often a symbol of love or beauty; a skull is often a symbol of death, and a dove usually symbolizes peace.

(LP) **SYMBOLISM** *A literary movement that arose in France in the last half of the nineteenth century and that greatly effected many English writers, particularly poets, of the twentieth century*. To the Symbolist poets, an emotion is indefinite and therefore difficult to communicate. Symbolist poets tend to avoid any direct statement of meaning. Instead they work through emotionally powerful symbols that suggest meaning and mood.

**SYNECDOCHE**  *A figure of speech in which part of a thing is used to stand for or suggest the whole.* An example is T.S. Eliot’s uses of “faces” to stand for “people” in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

**TALL TALE** *A humorous story that is outlandishly exaggerated.* Many tall tales are a part of folk literature, and many are associated with the American frontier of the early nineteenth century. Tall tales relate superhuman feats of strength, stamina, and cunning. One special from of the tall tale is the brag, in which the person bragging makes incredible claims.

**TANKA** *A Japanese verse form consisting of five lines and thirty-one syllables*. The first lone consists of five syllables; the second line, seven; the third line, five; the fourth line, seven; and the fifth line, seven. Like a related form, the **haiku**, the tanka often focuses on an image that suggests a thought or emotion, as in the following example:

The grass sends agents,

Their heads barely raised, to scout

The ground. Then it strikes!

Green spears march from lawn to lawn

Seizing the pliable sod.

**THEME**  *The general idea or insight about life that a writer wishes to convey in a literary work.* Not all literary works can be said to express a theme. Theme generally is not a concern in those works that are told primarily for entertainment; it is of importance in those literary works that comment on or presents some insight about the meaning of life.

In some literary works the theme is expressed directly, but more often theme is *implicit*—that is, it must be dug out and thought about. A simple theme can often be stated in a single sentence, but sometimes a literary work is rich and complex and a paragraph or even an essay is needed to state the theme.

**TONE**  *The attitude a writer takes toward his or her subject, and readers.* Abraham Lincoln, in “The Gettysburg Address,” writes about war in a solemn tone. Mark Twain, in *Life on the Mississippi*, writes of his personal experiences in a humorous, affectionate tone. Through tone, a writer can amuse anger, or shock the reader. Often the reader must figure out a writer’s tone in order to understand a literary work. for example, in “The Crop,” Flannery O’Connor’s gently mocking tone is a clue to how the reader should react to the character Miss Willerton.

**TRAGEDY** *In general, a literary work in which the protagonist meets an unhappy or disastrous end.*  Unlike comedy, tragedy often depicts the problems of a central character who is of significant or dignified stature. Through a series of events, this main character, the tragic hero or heroine, is brought to a final downfall. The causes of this down fall vary. In traditional dramas, the cause can be fate, a flaw in character, or an error in judgment. In modern dramas, the causes range from moral or psychological weakness to the evils of society. The tragic protagonist, though defeated, usually gains a measure to wisdom or self-awareness.

(LP) **TRANSCENDENTALISM** *A philosophy which holds that basic truths can be reached through intuition rather than through reason.* To arrive at such truths, according to transcendentalist philosophy, people must go beyond, or transcend, what their reason and their senses tell them. Transcendentalist thinkers, influenced by European Romanticism, stress the beauty of nature, the essential divinity of all people, and the primary importance of the human spirit. Transcendentalism was developed in the 1830’s and the 1840’s by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and the thinkers who met with them in Concord, Massachusetts.

(P) **TROCHEE** *A poetic foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable* (   )

**UNDERSTATEMENT** *A restrained statement in which less is said than is meant.* If it is ten degrees below zero and someone says, “It’s a bit cool out today,” that person is making an understatement.

**VERNACULAR** *The everyday spoken language of a people in a particular locality and writing that imitates or suggests such language.*

**WIT** *Recognition of similarities in seemingly dissimilar things*, such as word play, comparison, etc.

(P) Poetry terms

(LP) Literary periods or movements

Many thanks to Daisy Arce for retyping this packet and making it legible again.