1st Semester Glossary of Literary Terms

Name:

Allusion. A brief (and sometimes indirect) reference in a text to a person, place, or thing—fictitious or actual. An allusion may appear in a literary work as an initial quotation, a passing mention of a name, or as a phrase borrowed from another writer—often carrying the meanings and implications of the original. Allusions imply a common set of knowledge between reader and writer and operate as a literary shorthand to enrich the meaning of a text.

Anaphora. One form of parallelism, anaphora is the repetition of a specific word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or verses especially for rhetorical or poetic effect.

- *What* the hammer? *What* the chain? / In *what* furnace was thy brain? / *What* the anvil? *What* dread grasp / Dare its deadly terrors clasp? –William Blake, "The Tyger"
- "…*we cannot* dedicate—*we cannot* consecrate—*we cannot* hallow—this ground." —Abraham Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address*
- "*It was the* best of times, *it was the* worst of times, *it was the* age of wisdom, *it was the* age of foolishness..." —-Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
- "*In every* cry of every man, / *In every* infant's cry of fear, / *In every* voice, in every ban,/ The mind-forged manacles I hear…" —William Blake, "London"

Antagonist. The most significant character or force that opposes the protagonist in a narrative or drama. The antagonist may be another character, society itself, a force of nature, or even—in modern literature—conflicting impulses within the protagonist.

Antithesis. Words, phrases, clauses, or sentences set up in deliberate contrast to one another. Antithesis balances opposing ideas, tones, or structures, usually to heighten the effect of a statement.

- To err is human; to forgive, divine. --Alexander Pope
- That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. --Neil Armstrong
- Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures. --Samuel Johnson

Apostrophe. A direct address to someone or something, either present or absent. In an apostrophe, a speaker may address an inanimate object, a dead or absent person, an abstract thing, or a spirit. Apostrophe is often used to provide a speaker with means to articulate thoughts aloud

- With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies! –Sir Philip Sidney

Archetype – An archetype is a situation, event, character-type, setting, or symbol that appears in myth and literature across different cultures and eras. The idea of the archetype came into literary criticism from the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who believed that all individuals share a "collective unconsciousness"—a set of primal concepts, symbols, or memories common to the human race that exists in our subconscious. Some examples of archetypes in literature are as follows:

- **Situational archetypes**: the journey; father-son conflict; the quest for identity or self-knowledge; the loss of Eden, paradise, or innocence; the quest for justice or vengeance; blindness vs. vision and discernment; the shadow or "dark side" of a person or a society; death and rebirth; the unhealable wound; the fall; the initiation, etc.
- **Character Archetypes**: the hero; the mentor; the knight in shining armor; the damsel in distress; the dragon, monster, beast, or creature of nightmare; the devil or demon figure; the scapegoat; the earth mother; the temptress or femme fatale; etc. An example of an archetypal character is the demon or devil who may appear in pure mythic form, but occurs more often in a disguised form, such as Abner Snopes in William Faulkner's "Barn Burning."
- **Symbolic Archetypes**: light vs. darkness; the maze; the crossroads; water; fire; ice; nature & wilderness vs. society and the mechanistic world; the battle between good and evil; the threshold or gateway to a new world; the underworld; etc.
- **For a more detailed description of archetypes in literature, open this document: Archetypes in Literature.**

Authorial intrusion (also called **Editorial Point of view).** The effect that occurs when a third-person narrator adds his or her own comments (which presumably represent the ideas and opinions of the author) into the narrative.

Bildungsroman. German for "novel of growth and development." A novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education; this genre of novel depicts a youth who struggles toward maturity, forming a worldview or philosophy of life. (Dickens' *Great Expectations* is a perfect example.)

Bathos. (Also see **Sentimentality.)** An unintentional lapse from the sublime to the ridiculous or trivial. Bathos can be described as an author's unsuccessful attempt to evoke *pathos* (or genuine emotion) in the reader; the author may choose details and language that are sentimental and, therefore, ineffective. (Bathos differs from anticlimax, in that the latter is a deliberate effect, often for the purpose of humor or contrast, whereas bathos occurs strictly through a failure on the author's part.)

Characterization. All the techniques authors use to reveal character traits (whether the traits are obvious or subtle) to readers. Virtually every other literary technique that we study (beginning with diction) can contribute to characterization.

There are numerous ways you can think about the characters you meet in a story. Here are some terms to consider:

Protagonist – The central character in a literary work. The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story, often in conflict with the antagonist.
Antagonist – The most significant character or force that opposes the protagonist in a narrative or drama. The antagonist may be another character, society itself, a force of nature, or even—in modern literature—conflicting impulses within the protagonist.
Foil character – A character who bears key similarities and differences to the protagonist; while similar to the protagonist in certain ways, this character contrasts with the protagonist in a way that emphasizes important traits of the protagonist.
Round character –- A term coined by English novelist E.M. Forster to describe a complex character who is presented in depth and detail in a narrative. Round characters are multi-dimensional characters who change significantly during the course of a narrative. (Also known as a ***dynamic*** *character*.)
Flat character – A term coined by English novelist E.M. Forster to describe a character with only one outstanding trait. Flat characters are rarely the central characters in a narrative and are often based on stock characters. Flat characters stay the same throughout a story.
Stock character – A common or stereotypical character (often a cliché) that occurs frequently in literature. Examples of stock characters are the mad scientist, the battle-scarred veteran, or the strong-but-silent cowboy.
Antihero – A protagonist who is lacking in one or more of the conventional qualities attributed to a hero. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, for instance, the antihero may be buffoonish, cowardly, self-interested, or weak. The antihero is often considered an essentially modern form of characterization, a satiric or frankly realistic commentary on traditional portrayals of *idealized* heroes or heroines.
Sympathetic *character* – a character with whom we identify in some way—perhaps because we admire actions or attributes of the character, because we feel compassion for the character, because we recognize the common humanity we share with the character, etc.
Unsympathetic *character* – a character with whom we do not identify or whom we judge negatively because the character possesses qualities or commits actions that we dislike or that we cannot understand.

Connotation. The associations, feelings, and ideas that are brought to mind by a certain word. (Connotation is the opposite of dentotation, which is a word's dictionary definition.)

- "I went to the mall, and found that it was **infested** with children."

Couplet. A two-line stanza in poetry, usually rhymed, which tends to have lines of equal length.

Dialect. A particular variety of language spoken by an identifiable regional group or social class of persons. Dialects are often used in literature in an attempt to present a character more realistically and to express significant differences in class or background. For example, Charles Dickens employs dialect to characterize Joe Gargery and Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, and William Faulkner employs dialect to characterize Abner Snopes and the entire Snopes family in "Barn Burning."

Dialogue. The direct representation of the conversation between two or more characters.

Diction. Word choice or vocabulary, as well as and the specific connotations and effects of such words; the feelings and attitudes suggested by a particular word. Diction can refer to the class of words that an author decides is appropriate to use in a particular work. Concrete diction involves a highly specific word choice in the naming of something or someone. Abstract diction contains words that express more general ideas or concepts. (For example, more concrete diction would offer *boxer puppy* rather than *dog*.) Diction also refers to the level of language (*high* or *formal* vs. *low* or *informal* vs. *neutral*) and the overall use of language (such as clinical, jargon, vulgar, precise, moralistic, scholarly, etc.).

Didactic. A literary work that intends to teach a specific moral lesson or provide a model for proper behavior. This term is now used pejoratively (i.e., negatively) to describe a work in which the events seem manipulated in order to convey an uplifting idea, but much classic fiction has been written in the didactic mode—Aesop's *Fables*, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Dramatic monologue. A poem written as a speech made by a character at some decisive moment. The speaker is usually addressing a silent listener, as in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Robert Browning's "M y Last Duchess."

Editorial omniscience. When an omniscient narrator goes beyond reporting the thoughts of his or her characters to make a critical judgment or commentary, making explicit the narrator's own thoughts or philosophies. (Related to **Authorial intrusion**.)

Epigraph. A brief quotation preceding a story or other literary work, usually suggesting the subject, theme, or atmosphere the story will explore.

Epiphany. A moment of insight, discovery, or revelation by which a character's life is greatly altered. An epiphany generally occurs near the end of a story. The term, which means "showing forth" in Greek, was first used in Christian theology to signify the manifestation of God's presence in the world. This theological idea was first borrowed by James Joyce to refer to a heightened moment of secular revelation.

Figurative Language. Language that makes readers perceive something in a new way through the use of striking comparisons or new ways of seeing the subject (These include simile, metaphor, personification, irony, hyperbole, metonymy, synesthesia, synecdoche, etc.). Figurative language devices—such as simile, metaphor, and personification—are ways of helping readers perceive or understand something that is yet <u>unknown</u> by presenting it in terms of something <u>already known</u>. Such comparisons go beyond the literal language of imagery by making readers <u>conceive of or picture something</u> in a *new*, *original*, or *illuminating* way.

Foil Character. A character who bears key similarities and differences to the protagonist; while similar to the protagonist in certain ways, this character contrasts with the protagonist in a way that emphasize important traits of the protagonist

Form. The means by which a literary work conveys its meaning. Traditionally, form refers to the way in which an artist expresses meaning rather than the content of that meaning, but it is now commonplace to note that form and content are inextricably related. Form, therefore, is more than the external framework of a literary work. It includes the totality of ways in which it unfolds and coheres as a structure of meaning and expression.

Formalist criticism. A school of literary criticism that argues that literature may only be discussed on its own terms; that is, without outside influences or information. A key method that formalists use is close reading, a step-by-step analysis of the elements in a text.

Free verse. Verse that has neither regular rhyme nor regular meter. It often uses cadences rather than uniform metrical feet.

Hamartia. Greek for "error." An offense committed in ignorance of some material fact (without deliberate criminal intent) and therefore free of blameworthiness. A big mistake unintentionally made as a result of an intellectual error (not vice or criminal wickedness) by a morally good person.

Heroic couplet. In poetry and drama, **a pair of rhymed lines in Iambic pentameter** (lines that usually express a complete unit of thought). In the Middle Ages, Geoffrey Chaucer used the heroic couplet throughout his *Canterbury Tales*, but the heroic couplet became very popular during the Restoration and the Age of Reason (during the 17th and 18th centuries), when poets Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and others popularized it. Alexander Pope, in particular, used the heroic couplet throughout his English translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but he and others also used it in satirical *mock epics* (such as Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*).

Ex: *Then share thy pain, allow that sad relief; / Ah, more than share it, give me all thy grief.* (from Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard")

Hubris. Overweening pride, outrageous behavior, or the insolence that leads to ruin, *hubris* was in the ancient Greek moral vocabulary the antithesis of moderation or decency.

Hyperbole. Exaggeration used for emphasis. Hyperbole can be used to heighten effect, to catalyze recognition, or to create a humorous perception. "I've told you a million times" is an example of hyperbole.

Imagery. Language that appeals to specific senses, acting on the imagination via the body's perceptions, and creating key sensations that contribute to tone and mood. (Imagery can be *visual*, *auditory*, *tactile*, *olfactory*, *gustatory*, or even *kinesthetic*.) Authors often present characters, settings, situations, or events in ways that use vivid sensory language. When an author's language appeals to our senses in a powerful way and helps us "see" or sense something with particular vividness, the author is using imagery in a meaningful way. Often a single, specific image within a work—because of its importance in the plot or its relevance to character development or theme—can help to carry or compress the meaning of a work. Additionally, you can discuss the ***imagery*** of a work (rather than one single image) by describing how the different images created within a work progress in a certain way and suggest certain attitudes and even themes. Here is a useful pair of questions to consider about imagery in a story or poem:

- Is there one central image in the work that illuminates its central conflict and its moral concerns? How does this image accrue meaning throughout the work and contribute to the work's meaning and impact?
- Or, rather than one central image, does the work create a sequence of related images that illuminate the work's central conflict and its moral concerns? How does these related images accrue meaning and contribute to the work's meaning and impact?

Impartial omniscience. Refers to an omniscient narrator who, although he or she presents the thoughts and actions of the characters, does not judge them or comment on them. (Contrasts with **Editorial omniscience**.)

In medias res. A Latin phrase meaning "in the midst of things" that refers to a narrative that begins midway in the events it depicts (usually at an exciting or significant moment) before explaining the context or preceding actions. In such a story, exposition is often bypassed and filled in gradually, either through dialogue, flashbacks or description of past events. As a result, works that employ *in medias res* often also use flashback and nonlinear narrative for exposition of earlier events in order to fill in the backstory. (For example, John Updike's "A&P" begins as follows: "In walks three girls in nothing but bathing suits. I'm in the third check-out slot, with my back to the door, so I don't see them until they're over by the bread.")

Interior Monologue. An extended presentation of a character's thoughts in a narrative. Usually written in the present tense and printed without quotation marks, an interior monologue reads as if the character were speaking aloud to himself or herself, for the reader to overhear. Interior monologue could be described as the author's presentation of the tangle of fugitive thoughts, memories, questions, fears, and desires that occur in a character's consciousness—and this "tangle" usually occurs as a response to sensory triggers. According to the unnovelist.com, interior monologue allows the reader "to eavesdrop on the inchoate, fragmented, and undisclosed thoughts of another—to listen as though we had equipped them with headphones plugged into the heads of our heroes."

Here are two famous examples of interior monologue by influential Modernist writers:

Be a warm day I fancy. Specially in these black clothes feel it more. Black conducts, reflects (refracts is it?) the heat.

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it always seemed to me when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which I can hear now, I burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as I then was) solemn, feeling as I did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen.

—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Ironic point of view. The perspective of a character or narrator whose voice or position is rich in ironic contradictions. For example, **dramatic irony** occurs when the reader knows or understands something that a character does not know or understand. Sammy, the narrator of John Updike's "A & P," is an ironic narrator because he doesn't understand his motivations or actions as well as Updike and (hopefully) the readers do. Sammy quits his job for reasons that are anything but clear to him and that are likely less noble than he imagines.

Irony. When a writer communicates attitude indirectly by creating a discrepancy between what she seems to be saying and what she is actually saying. Defined simply, irony is a means of making a point by emphasizing a discrepancy or incongruity between appearance and reality, between what "seems" and what "is." A writer may say the opposite of what she means (**verbal irony**), create a reversal between expectation and its fulfillment (**irony of situation)**, or give the reader crucial knowledge that a character lacks (**dramatic irony**), making the character's words have meaning to the audience that is not perceived by the character.

Lyric. A short poem expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker. Often written in the first person, lyric poetry traditionally has a song-like immediacy and emotional force.

Metaphor. A statement that one thing is something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not. By asserting that a thing is something else, a metaphor creates a close association between the two entities and usually underscores some important similarity between them. An example of a metaphor is "Richard is a pig."

Metonymy. Originally meaning "transfer of name," metonymy is a figure of speech in which the writer substitutes the name of something with the name of another thing *closely associated* with it. For instance, in saying "*The White House* decided to raise taxes," the writer would mean that either the president or the president's administration decided to raise taxes. Here's another example: "You will need permission from *the Crown* before you launch the fleet of ships." "The Crown" is an object that is *associated* with the King or Queen and that *represents* the power or authority of the monarch. (See also **Synecdoche**.)

Motif. A motif is an element that recurs significantly throughout a narrative; it is a pattern created by the repetition of an *image*, an *"echo" word*, an *action*, an *idea*, or a *situation* that points to some sort of meaning. (*Motif* was first commonly used as a musical term for a recurring melody or melodic fragment). A motif can also refer to an element that recurs across many literary works. In all different art forms (such as literature, the visual arts, and music), artists incorporate *motifs* into their works of art.

Narrative Voice. See **Tone.**

Organization. See **Structure.**

Oxymoron. A paradox reduced to two words, usually in an adjective-noun ("eloquent silence") or adverb-adjective ("inertly strong") relationship, and is used for effect, to emphasize contrasts, incongruities, hypocrisy, or simply the complex nature of reality. Examples: *wise fool, ignorantly learned, laughing sadness, pious hate*. Some others:

- I do here make *humbly bold* to present them with a short account of themselves and their art. . . . --Jonathan Swift
- The *bookful blockhead*, ignorantly read, / With loads of learned lumber in his head. . . . --Alexander Pope

Paradox is a "thought beyond a thought," a figurative device through which something apparently wrong or contradictory is shown to be truthful and non-contradictory.

- The Child is Father of the Man. –Wordsworth
- Nature's first green is gold. –Robert Frost

Parallelism or **parallel structures.** The repetition of the same grammatical form (i.e., repeating the same kind of word, phrase, or clause) to balance expressions, conserve words, build climaxes, and create emphasis, rhythm, or unity.

- "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall **pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe** to assure the survival and the success of liberty."— John F. Kennedy
- I set off on the four-mile walk to our forge; **pondering**, as I went along, on all I had seen, **and deeply revolving *that*** I was a common labouring-boy; ***that*** my hands were coarse; ***that*** my boots were thick; ***that*** I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; ***that*** I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally ***that*** I was in a low-lived bad way. — Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

Pathos. An author's use of techniques that arouse genuine pity, sympathy, or sorrow in the reader. Originally, Aristotle used the term *pathos* to identify a tragedy's central "scene of suffering," which he defined as "a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like." (In some respects, the opposite of *pathos* is ***bathos***.)

Persona. The person created by the author to tell a story or speak a poem. The actual author of the work often distances himself from what is said or told by adopting a persona—by adopting a personality different from his real one. Thus, the attitudes, beliefs, and degree of understanding expressed by a story's narrator or a poem's speaker may not be the same as those of the actual author. Some authors, for example, use narrators who are not very bright in order to create irony.

Personification. The metaphorical representation of an animal or inanimate object as having human attributes—attributes of form, character, feelings, behavior, and so on. As the name implies, a thing or idea is treated as a person:

- The ship began to creak and protest as it struggled against the rising sea.
- This coffee is strong enough to get up and walk away.
- Men say they love Virtue, but they leave her standing in the rain. --Juvenal

Plot. The particular arrangement of actions, events, and situations that unfold in a narrative. A plot is not merely the general story of a narrative, but the author's artistic pattern made from the parts of the narrative, including the exposition, complications, climax, and dénouement. How an author chooses to construct the plot determines the way the reader *experiences* the story. Manipulating a plot, therefore, can be the author's most expressive device when writing a story. The plotting allows the audience to see the causal relationship between the parts of the action.

Exposition – the opening portion of a narrative or drama. In the exposition, the scene is set, the protagonist is introduced, and the author discloses any other background information necessary to allow the reader to understand and relate to the events that are to follow.

Conflict – In Greek, ***agon***, or contest. The central struggle between two or more forces in a story. Conflict generally occurs when some person or thing prevents the protagonist from achieving his or her intended goal. Opposition can arise from another character, external events, preexisting situations, fate, or even some aspect of the main character's own personality. Conflict is the basic material out of which most plots are made.

Rising action – That part of a narrative, including the exposition, in which events start moving toward a climax. In the rising action, the protagonist usually faces the complications of the plot to reach his or her goal.

Climax – The moment of greatest intensity in a story, which almost inevitably occurs toward the end of the work. The climax often takes the form of a decisive, confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist. In a conventional story, the climax is followed by the resolution or dénouement, in which the effects and results of the climactic action are presented.

Falling Action – The events in a narrative that follow the climax and bring the story to its conclusion, or dénouement.

Dénouement – The **resolution or conclusion** of a literary work as plot complications are unraveled after the climax. (In French, *dénouement* means "unknotting" or "untying.")

Foreshadowing – In plot construction, the technique of arranging events and information in such a way that later events are prepared for, or shadowed, beforehand. The author may introduce specific words, images, or actions in order to suggest significant later events. The effective use of foreshadowing by an author may prevent a story's outcome from seeming haphazard or contrived.

Flashback – A scene relived in a character's memory. Flashbacks can be related by the narrator in a summary, or they can be experienced by the characters themselves. Flashbacks allow the author to include events that occurred before the opening of the story, which may show the reader something significant that happened in the character's past or give an indication of what kind of person the character used to be.

Epiphany – A moment of insight, discovery, or revelation by which a character's life is greatly altered. An epiphany occurs near the end of the story.

In medias res – A Latin phrase meaning "in the midst of things" that refers to a narrative device of beginning a story midway in the events it depicts (usually at an exciting or significant moment) before explaining the context or preceding actions.

Suspense – Enjoyable anxiety created in the reader by the author's handling of plot. When the outcome of events is unclear, the author's suspension of resolution intensifies the reader's interest—particularly if the plot involves characters to whom the reader or audience is sympathetic. Suspense is also created when the fate of a character is clear to the audience, but not to the character. The suspense results from the audience's anticipation of how and when the character will meet his or her inevitable fate.

Point of View. The perspective from which a story is told. There are many types of point of view, including the *first-person narrator* (a story in which the narrator is a participant in the action) and the *third-person narrator* (a type of narration in which the narrator is a nonparticipant).

- ***Third-person narrator*** – A type of narration in which the narrator is a nonparticipant. In a third-person narrative, the characters are referred to as "he," "she," or "they." Third-person narrators are most commonly omniscient, but the level of their knowledge may vary from *total omniscience* (the narrator knows everything about the characters and their lives), to *limited omniscience* (the narrator is limited to the perceptions of a single character), to *dramatic or objective* narration (in which the narrator reports only dialogue and action with no access to the characters' minds).
  - ***Omniscient narrator*** – Also called all-knowing narrator. A narrator who has the ability to move freely through the consciousness of any character. The omniscient narrator also has complete knowledge of all the external events in a story.
  - ***Limited omniscience*** – Also called third-person limited point of view. A type of point of view in which the narrator sees into the minds of some but not all of the characters. Most typically, limited omniscience sees through the eyes of one major or minor character. In limited omniscience, the author can compromise between the immediacy of first-person narration and the mobility of third-person.
  - ***Selective omniscience*** – The point of view that sees the events of a narrative through the eyes of a single character. The selectively omniscient narrator is usually a nonparticipant narrator.
  - ***Editorial omniscience*** – When an omniscient narrator goes beyond reporting the thoughts of his or her characters to make a critical judgment or commentary, making explicit the narrator's own thoughts or philosophies.
  - ***Impartial omniscience*** – Refers to an omniscient narrator who, although he or she presents the thoughts and actions of the characters, does not judge them or comment on them.

    - ***Dramatic point of view*** – Also known as ***Objective point of view***. A point of view in which the narrator merely reports dialogue and action with minimal interpretation or access to the characters' minds. The dramatic point of view, as the name implies, uses prose fiction to approximate the method of plays (where readers are provided only with set descriptions, stage directions, and dialogue, and thus must supply motivations based solely on this external evidence).
- ***First Person narrator*** – a narrator who is also a character and participant in the action. Such a character refers to himself or herself as "I" and may be a major or minor character in the story. His or her attitude and understanding of characters and events shapes the reader's perception of the story being told. (Note: Some first person narrators are also *innocent or unreliable*. See the terms below for definitions.)
    - ***Innocent narrator*** – Also called *naïve narrator*. A character who fails to understand all the implications of the story he or she tells. Of course, virtually any narrator has some degree of innocence or naiveté, but the innocent narrator—often a child or childlike adult—is used by an author trying to generate irony, sympathy, or pity by creating a gap between what the narrator knows and what the reader knows. Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn—despite his mischievous nature—is an example of an innocent narrator.
    - ***Unreliable narrator*** – A narrator who—intentionally or unintentionally—relates events in a subjective or distorted manner. The author usually provides some indication early on in such stories that the narrator is not to be completely trusted.
    - ***Ironic point of view*** – The perspective of a character or narrator whose voice or position is rich in ironic contradictions. For example, **dramatic irony** occurs when the reader knows or understands something that a character does not know or understand.

Pun. Wordplay based on words' having similar or identical sounds but different meanings or one word with multiple meanings

- "**Conception** is a blessing: but as your daughter may **conceive**, friend, look to 't." --*Hamlet* Act 2, scene 2)
  Note: *Conception* and *conceive* mean both "the forming of concepts" AND "the biological act of creating a child."
- "When my love swears that she is made of truth,/ I do believe her, though I know she **lies**…" --Shakespeare, Sonnet 138 (Note: The word "lies" can mean both "tells lies" and "lies with other men.")

Satire. An attack on human follies or vices, as measured against a religious, moral, or social standard. Satire seeks to arouse a reader's disapproval of a person or situation by ridicule—usually through comedy with the goal of exposing errors so that they may be condemned and, ideally, corrected.

Sentimentality. (also see Bathos). A negative description of the quality of a literary work that tries to convey great emotion but fails to give the reader sufficient grounds for sharing that emotion.

Setting. The environment in which the action of a fictional work takes place. Setting includes time period (such as the 1890's), the place (such as downtown Warsaw), the historical milieu (such as during the Crimean War), as well as the social, political, and perhaps even spiritual realities. The setting is usually established primarily through description, though narration is used also.

Simile. A comparison of two things, indicated by some connective, usually *like*, *as*, *than*, or a verb such as *resembles*. A simile usually compares two things that initially seem unlike but are shown to have a significant resemblance. "Cool as a cucumber" and "My love is like a red, red rose" are examples of similes.

Social Commentary. The act of using rhetorical means to provide **commentary** on issues in a society. This is often done with the idea of implementing or promoting change by informing the general populace about a given problem and appealing to people's sense of justice. Writers of fiction, drama, and even poetry incorporate social commentary into their work any time their work deals with an issue or problem within a society. Social commentary often takes the form of satire and often uses comedy to make its observations, but social commentary can also be serious in tone.

Stanza. From the Italian, meaning "stopping-place" or "room." A recurring pattern of two or more lines of verse, poetry's equivalent to the paragraph in prose. The stanza is the basic organizational principle of most formal poetry.

Stream of Consciousness. Not a specific technique, but a type of modern narration that uses various literary devices, especially **interior monologue**, in an attempt to duplicate the subjective and associative nature of human consciousness. Stream of consciousness often focuses on imagistic perception in order to capture the pre-verbal level of consciousness. See the opening lines of William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" below for an excellent example:

> The store in which the justice of the Peace's court was sitting smelled of cheese. The boy, crouched on his nail keg at the back of the crowded room, knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish - this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled coming in intermittent gusts momentary and brief between the other constant one, the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair

> and grief, the old fierce pull of blood. He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (our enemy he thought in that despair; ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!) stood, but he could hear them, the two of them that is, because his father had said no word yet:

Structure. The arrangement of materials within a work; the relationship of the parts of a work to the whole; the logical divisions of a work. (See also **Organization**.) The most common principles of structure are **series** (A, B, C, D), **contrast** (A vs. B, C vs. D), and **repetition** (AA, BB, etc.). Modernist author James Joyce happened to be a great fan of **chiasmus** (ABBA). While many stories follow a traditional chronological narrative structure, some authors choose to tell their stories in a different "order" or to organize their stories according to a less traditional principle.

Style. All the distinctive ways in which an author, genre, movement, or historical period uses language to create a literary work. An author's style depends on his or her characteristic use of diction, imagery, tone, syntax, organization, and figurative language. Even sentence structure and punctuation can play a role in an author's style.

Synecdoche. The use of a significant part of a thing to stand for the whole of it or vice versa. For example, in the statement "I need to buy a set of wheels," "set of wheels" stands for an entire car. Here's another example: The expression "The pen is mightier than the sword" uses synecdoche twice, as follows: Not only does "the pen" stand for "the written word," but "the sword" stands for "military aggression and force." (See also **Metonymy**.)

Syntax. Sentence-structure and word-order within sentences. Syntax refers to length of sentences (i.e., brevity vs. expansiveness of sentences); types of sentences (e.g., simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, loose, and periodic sentences); intentional use of nonstandard constructions, such as run-ons and fragments; as well as the noteworthy ways in which writers arrange words within sentences (such as inverted syntax, polysyndeton, asyndeton, parallelism, etc.).

> Note: Modern and contemporary writers often shape the syntax of sentences to mirror what is happening in their characters' minds—i.e., to capture the way in which a character perceives or experiences an event. (Faulkner's "Barn Burning" provides a good example of this technique.)

Theme. Theme is the main thought or idea expressed by a work. While the theme of a *fable* is its moral and the theme of a *parable* is its teaching, *the theme of a short story or novel is its* ***implied view*** *of life and conduct*. However, unlike the fable and parable, *most fiction is not designed primarily to teach or preach*.

> Because writers of plays, poems, and stories are usually not systematic philosophers, it is not appropriate to go "message hunting" as though their works contained nothing but ideas. Indeed, there is great benefit and pleasure to be derived just from savoring a work—following the patterns of narrative and conflict, getting to like the characters, understanding the work's implications and suggestions, and listening to the sounds of the author's words—to name only a few of the reasons for which literature is treasured. Nevertheless, ideas are vital to understanding and appreciating literature: Writers have ideas and want to communicate them. However, the theme of a story is often presented in an indirect fashion; readers must often infer the major ideas of a work from the details of character and action that compose the story. The kind of literary works that have the most merit thematically do not explore trite clichés, and their meaning cannot be reduced to a simple moral or a pithy saying about life. They are more likely to be original ways of looking at old problems, fresh interpretations of common experience, or complicated and even contradictory observations about life and human nature.

Tone. Tone is a literary technique that encompasses the writer's attitudes implied in a literary work—both toward the subject portrayed in the text (i.e., the situation, the experiences, and the characters in the text) **and toward the audience**.

- Tone may be formal, informal, intimate, solemn, somber, playful, serious, ironic, condescending, or many other possible attitudes.
- Often, the tone of a work is best described as a combination of attitudes, for example:
  - *ironic amusement*
  - *objective detachment*
  - *bitter sarcasm*
  - *urgent exhortation*
  - *restrained sorrow*

> The tone of a work often changes and evolves; **tone can shift** in important ways throughout the movement of a piece—which is another reason why paying attention to structure is so important.
>
> In non-fiction, the tone is generally the writer's. However, since works of imaginative literature portray characters who may not share the attitude of the author, the tone in a literary work is often a complex, multi-layered entity because it conveys not only the attitude of the author, but also the attitude of one or more characters. In many literary works, the

author's attitude is often implied (rather than being conveyed in a straightforward, direct way). Hence, we must make inferences from textual details and look for possible irony (or indirection and incongruity) on the author's part.

Note: A synonym for tone is the term **narrative voice**—a term that factors in all these complexities of attitude.

Transferred epithet. A figure of speech in which an epithet (or a modifier, such as an adjective) grammatically modifies a noun *other than* the person or thing it is actually describing (also known in rhetoric as *hypallage*). A transferred epithet often involves shifting a modifier from the animate to the inanimate, as in these phrases: "a fun day," "a sleepless night," and "the weary road." (Note: The person's *experiences* were fun. The *person* was sleepless. The *person walking* on the road was weary.)

Verisimilitude. The quality in a literary work of appearing true to life. In fiction, verisimilitude is usually achieved by careful use of realistic detail in description, characterization, and dialogue.

Understatement. Expressing an idea with less emphasis or in a lesser degree than is the actual case. The opposite of hyperbole. Understatement is employed for ironic emphasis. Example:

- "The grave's a fine and private place, / But none, I think, do there embrace." —Andrew Marvell
- "Last week I saw a woman flay'd, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse." --Swift