

# Literary Terms

# Packet

The terms in this packet will be used throughout the semester in literature discussions and on exams. Please memorize and be able to use and identify all terms in papers and on exams.

Some information in this packet came from Modern English by Arnold Lazarus, et.al. and A Dictionary of Literary, Dramatic, and Cinematic Terms by Sylvan Barnet, et.al.

## Allusion

A reference to someone or something that is known from history, literature, religion, politics or some other branch of culture. An example is Sandra Cisneros' "Straw into Gold," which is an allusion to the folktale about Rumpelstiltskin.

Example: "I have seen my head . . . brought in upon a platter" is an allusion to the execution of St. John the Baptist.

Example: "In the room women come and go, talking of Michelangelo" is an allusion to the famous artist Michelangelo.

Example: "No, I am not Prince Hamlet" is an allusion to Shakespeare's play, Hamlet.

Please write two sentences, each of which uses an allusion. Underline the allusion and then share with a neighbor.

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## Ambiguity

A technique by which a writer suggests deliberately two or more different and sometimes conflicting meanings in a work. Writers use ambiguity to make us think.

Example: In "Mystery of Heroism," Stephen Crane ends his story by not telling us if Collins came back with water or not.

Example: In "Weary Blues," Langston Hughes doesn't tell us exactly what happens to the blues player at the end.

## Aphorism

A brief, cleverly worded statement that makes a wise observation about life. Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack is a book of aphorisms. We see them also in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Example: "Let us die trying."--from Two Old Women.

Example: "Comedy is a tragedy plus time." Carol Burnett

Example: "Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist." Ralph W. Emerson

Please write two aphorisms that you have heard and share with a partner.

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and \_\_\_\_\_

## Apostrophe

Sometimes, apostrophe is confused with personification because it assumes an object can hear. But, an apostrophe is unique in that it is the addressing or speaking to a thing or object or to a person who is often not present. The persona of the poem directly addresses something.

"My lute, awake."                            "Romeo, wherefore art thou?"  
"Milton! thou shoud'st be listening at this hour."

Please write two examples of apostrophe:

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## Atmosphere or Mood

The mood or feeling is created in a piece of writing with the use of specific words and details. A story's atmosphere, for example, might be peaceful, festive, menacing, melancholy, etc. Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" has a sad mood. Nathaniel Hawthorne's "A Minister's Black Veil" has a suspenseful, ominous mood.

Think of two films you have seen. Please write the name of the film and its mood.

\_\_\_\_\_= \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_= \_\_\_\_\_

## Caesura (say-zhur-ah)

Caesura is simply a pause (comma) or break (dash, period, semi-colon) within a **line of poetry**. Pauses are usually indicated by punctuation. Writers use caesura to change thoughts or to emphasize the next few words of the line.

Example: "Comes a still voice.--

    Yet a few days, and thee"--Wm. Cullen Bryant

Example: "Are but the solemn decorations all

    Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,"--William

    Cullen Bryant

## Characterization

A character always has human traits, even if the character is an animal or a god. How a writer reveals the personality of a character is through characterization. A writer can reveal information about a character using the following:

- telling us directly what the character is like: "he was a selfish, sneaky man." (**direct characterization**)
- what a character does: "Tom stumbled as he came through the door and wiped the liquor from his lips." (**Indirect charac.**)
- what the character says: "Aw, I was only kidding. Give me back my gun." (**I.C.**)
- what the character thinks and feels: She thought how she had never felt so humiliated in her life. She knew he'd never ask her out. (**I.C.**)
- what other characters say about the character: "I don't like Happy. He is such a sexist and needs constant attention." (**I.C.**)

**Direct characterization** is when the writer directly describes the character, telling us about her.

**Indirect characterization** is the use of the last four techniques above. We have to infer what the character is like from the clues, just like we do in real life when we are getting to know someone.

A **dynamic character** is one who changes in some important way as a result of the plot.

A **static character** is one who does not change much in a story.

A **round character** has more dimensions to his/her personality. S/he is more complex, just like we are.

A **flat character** is one-dimensional and has only one or two personality traits. S/he usually can be summed up in a single phrase: loyal sidekick, nosy neighbor, etc.

A **foil** is a character who acts as a contrast to another character. Tom Sawyer, for example is a foil to Huck Finn. Horatio is a foil to Hamlet. Chid' is a foil to Sa'.

## Hyperbole--Understatement

Hyperbole or overstatement uses incredible exaggeration to create an effect (I could eat a horse). The opposite is **understatement**, which is an assertion that states less than what is true or real ("Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse."--Swift). Understatement can be used to make an ironic point or to provide humor.

Examples of Hyperbole: You know you're in Arizona when:

- You notice your car overheating before you drive it.
- You no longer associate bridges or rivers with water.
- You actually burn your hand opening the car door.
- No one would dream of using vinyl upholstery in a car.

**Understatement examples:**

- "Ah, a little bedtime snack! (to describe a 7-course meal)
- Elie Wiesel says, "I was fifteen." (After he experiences the Holocaust and sees a young boy hung)
- "Yes, it hurts a bit." (A young man tries to be brave when he has severed one of his fingers)

Please write two examples of hyperbole:

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and

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**Imagery**

The use of language to evoke or create a picture or a concrete sensation of a person, thing, place, or experience. These words appeal to our senses of taste, touch, sight, hearing, and smell. Example: "There was an old Negro woman with her **head tied in a red rag**, coming along a **path through the pinewoods**." "Her **eyes were blue with age**." "The air was sweetened by the summer roses."

**Irony**

In general, irony is the discrepancy between appearances and reality. Three main types of irony are:

1. **verbal irony** = sarcasm, when we say one thing but mean another.
2. **situational irony** = when there is a discrepancy between what is expected to happen or what would be appropriate to happen, and what really does happen. Ex. In "A Mystery of Heroism" by Stephen Crane, a soldier **risks his life for some water** but **fails to bring it back** to the people he got it for.
3. **dramatic irony** = is often used on stage. A **character** in a play or story **thinks one thing is true**, but the **audience or reader knows better**. Ex. In "Miniver Cheevy" by Edwin Arlington Robinson, Miniver thinks he is too refined for his time period, but we know he is foolish and somewhat pathetic.

**Examples:** The two old women were in better shape than the rest of the starving tribe.

The primary villain in The Crucible was never punished, but innocent people were.

Write two examples of irony and then check with a partner:

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## Inversion - Poetry + Prose

The reversal of normal word order in a sentence or phrase. The usual pattern for English sentences is subject-verb-complement (I am happy. He is a singer.) An inverted sentence reverses one or more of those elements. Long ago, poets used inversion to make rhyming their poems easier or to create a certain meter. In prose and poetry, inversion is now **used more for emphasis or to catch the reader's attention.**

Example: "In silent night when rest I took"--Anne Bradstreet  
"Happy I am."--Yoda  
"Nor in the embrace of ocean shall exist thy image."--Wm. C. Bryant

## Simile -- Metaphor: kissin' cousins

When using metaphors and similes, the writer is trying to work our brains and **help us make associations between objects.** Sometimes these can be fun, and sometimes, they are challenging. We will be identifying the following in the literature we read as well as showing how they help develop the theme of the works or the author's purpose.

A **simile** uses the words "as" or "like" or "than" to compare two essentially unlike things.

A **metaphor** does not use the as-like-than words, but, like its cousin, the simile, it compares two essentially unlike things.

A **direct metaphor** states the comparison directly: (Fame is a bee.)

An **implied metaphor** does not state the comparison directly. It implies it by attributing an action or description common to the compared object to the described object. (I like to see it lap the miles==the "it" is a train and "lap" refers to an animal.)

An **extended metaphor** continues the comparison for a bit.

### Simile Examples:

as dry as bone  
as soft as silk  
as meek as a lamb  
as thin as a rail  
as deep as the ocean  
as quiet as an empty church  
as musical as a flute  
as bright as a full moon  
cheeks like roses  
laughed like a hyena

### Metaphor Examples

Ann is a walking encyclopedia.  
John's head is a computer.  
Tom's bark is worse than his bite.  
The arthritic car squeaked down the road.  
Her porcelain skin is flawless  
A gray-haired fossil greeted us at the door.  
The mountain of paper work grew steadily.  
Carla was a mermaid covered in seaweed.  
He is a snail at work.  
His books were starships.

Please write one example of simile:

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Please write one example of metaphor:

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## Metonymy

Metonymy is when the name of one thing is used for another which it suggests or is closely related to. For example, a letter said to be in Harrison Ford's "hand" means that the letter is in his handwriting. Or, when Lyndon Johnson and John F. Kennedy were competing for Democratic nomination for President, Johnson said the office needs a man with a little gray in his hair, gray meaning "age and wisdom." Often, we refer to the monarch as "the crown."

"Ten sail" stands for ten ships, "bread" in "gives us this day our daily bread" represents food.

Try it yourself: write two examples of metonymy and then check with a partner.

# 1 \_\_\_\_\_

# 2 \_\_\_\_\_

## Oxymoron

To create an oxymoron, we combine two contradictory or incongruous terms like "living death," "mute cry," or "true lies."

Examples:	act naturally	found missing
	resident alien	Advanced BASIC
	genuine imitation	good grief
	same difference	almost exactly
	alone together	government organization
	silent scream	living dead
	business ethics	soft rock
	military intelligence	new classic
	passive aggression	taped live
	extinct life	clearly misunderstood
	definite maybe	pretty ugly
	diet ice cream	exact estimate
	religious tolerance	airline food

Please write two yourself and then check with a partner:

and \_\_\_\_\_

## Parable

A parable is a relatively short story that teaches a moral or lesson about how to lead a good life. Hawthorne's "Minister's Black Veil" is an example of a parable.

## Paradox

A statement, often metaphorical, that seems to be self-contradictory but which has valid meaning. Ex. "In death, there is life." "I've a PhD, but I know nothing."

## Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is the **repetition of words or phrases that have similar grammatical structures**. The phrases usually begin with the same words but the ending of the phrase is different or vice versa.

Example: Abe Lincoln wrote about " a government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Example: "As from my tent . . . As slow I walk . . ." -- Walt Whitman

Example: "Then to the second I step . . . Then to the third.  
. . ." --Walt Whitman

Example: "He has refused . . . He has forbidden . . . He has called . . . He has dissolved . . ." --Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence.

## Personification

Most of you know personification well, the **giving human characteristics or feelings to non-human organisms, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas**. Remember a clue is in the word: we "person--ify" an object or animal, making it more of a human with human qualities.

Examples: Time's **cruel** hand.  
"The oak **shall send** his roots abroad."  
"Immortality **moaned** in pain."

Please write two examples of personification and check them with a partner.

and \_\_\_\_\_

## Point of View

Point of view is the **vantage point from which the writer tells the story**. The following are the main points of view:

1. **first-person point of view:** one of the characters in the story tells the story using first-person pronouns like I and We. We get to hear only the narrator's point of view. The narrator can be a **participating character or an observer**. Ex. William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily."
2. **third-person point of view:** an unknown, all-knowing narrator tells the story and zooms in on the thoughts and feelings of various characters or one character. We see the use of "he, she, they," etc. rather than the "I" pronoun. Ex. Velma Wallis' Two Old Women. The third person narrator may also be impersonal and objective telling the story with no comments on characters or events. This kind of narration uses mostly dialogue. The reader must infer what happens in these stories. Finally, the third person narrator may also have an editorial stance, giving his/her own opinion or assessment of something.  
Ex. Many of Hemingway's stories and some of Nadine Gordimer's.

## Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is a **question that is asked for an effect, not actually requiring an answer.**

Example: "Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction?" - Patrick Henry

Example: "What kind of fool do you think I am?"

## Symbol

A symbol is a **person, place, or event that has meaning in itself and that also stands for something more than itself.** Some symbols are public (dove = peace, Uncle Sam = United States, and skull + crossbones = death). Most symbols used in literature are personal symbols. One of the most common symbols in literature is the journey symbol, which can stand for a search for truth, redemption from evil, or discovery of the self and freedom. An example would be Huck Finn's symbolic journey down the Mississippi on a raft.

Examples: Melville's white whale in Moby Dick. Holmes' Old Ironsides ship. Poe's raven. Mr. Parris' candlesticks. Laura's glass menagerie. The two old women's fire. Biff's stealing the fountain pen. Willy's seeds. The young boy riding birch trees in "Birches."

## Tone

Tone is the **attitude a writer takes toward the subject s/he is writing about, the characters in it, or the audience.** Writers manipulate the language in order to show how they feel about what they are saying. It is different from mood, which is the world in which the characters move.

Example: "There was such speed in her little body/And such lightness in her footfall . . ." --John Crowe Ransom (admiring tone)

Example: "We remember the job we never had,/ Never could get,"/And can't have now . . ." --Langston Hughes (resentful tone)

Example: "If ever two were one, then surely we . . ." --Anne Bradstreet (loving tone)

# Poetic Terminology

## Alliteration:

The **repetition of the same or similar sounds in two or more words that are close together** like Poe's "ghastly, gaunt, ungainly bird." It is used to create musical effects, to establish mood, and to help us remember.

Examples: "Bring me my **b**ow of **b**urning gold."  
Too **b**ig for everything except the great **b**lack **b**oats of his **b**oots."  
"And thee the all-beholding **s**un shall **s**ee no more."  
"While I **n**odded, nearly **n**apping. . . "

Two of your own examples then check with a partner:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

## Assonance

The **deliberate repetition of internal vowel sounds** to create rhythm, mood, and emphasis on certain words.

Examples: "Tide" and "hide" are rhymes; "tide" and "mine" are examples of assonance.

Examples: "the rare and radiant maiden. . . "  
"and so all the night tide, I lie by the side"

Write two of your own examples then check with a partner:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

## Cadence

Unlike rhyme, cadence is the rhythmic fall of a person's voice as s/he reads a passage aloud. Cadence isn't created by a strict count of stressed syllables as we find in the meter of traditional poetry. Cadence is created with the use of repetition, assonance, parallel structure, and rhythms crafted by the poet.

Examples: "and went where he sat on a long and led him in and assured him." --Walt Whitman  
"I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable." W. Whit.  
"Life is too strong for you--/It takes Life to love Life."  
Edgar Lee Masters

## Free Verse

Cadence helps create free verse, a term used to describe **poetry that is not rhymed and metered**. Lines of free verse vary in length. In free verse we see repetition and parallel structure which create a natural rhythm that varies. A famous modern American poet, Robert Frost, had no use for free verse: "I would as soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down," he once said.

Examples: "I celebrate myself and sing myself,/And what I assume you shall assume." Walt Whitman  
"But still I chiseled whatever they paid me to chisel." Edgar Lee Masters.

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## Onomatopoeia

The invention or use of a **word whose sound echoes or suggests its meaning**. "Hiss," "buzz," "fizz," "clatter," and "tick tock" are onomatopoetic.

Examples: "They **click** upon themselves . . . as the stir **cracks** and crazes their enamel." Robert Frost  
"As of someone gently **rapping, rapping** on my chamber door." Edgar Allan Poe

Two of your own examples then check with a partner:

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

## Rhyme

The **repetition of sounds**, usually at the end of lines in verse.

Example: make/shake, miss/priss, step/prep. Rhyme is often used to draw our attention to certain words.

### Different kinds of rhyme:

**Perfect or exact rhyme** occurs when **differing consonant-sounds are followed by identically stressed vowel-sounds**. Examples: foe - toe, meet -fleet, buffer - rougher, fix - sticks

**Slant or near rhyme** is when only the final consonant sounds of the rhyming words are identical. Examples: soul - oil, firth - forth, trolley - bully

**Eye rhyme** is not really rhyme; it just looks like rhyme. Examples:  
cough - bough - rough.

### Placement of Rhyme

**End rhyme** has the rhyming word at the end of the line.

**Internal rhyme** has at least one of the rhyming words within the line. Example: "each narrow **cell** in which we **dwell**."

Write and identify two kinds of rhyme:

= \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

= \_\_\_\_\_

## Meter

Meter is the measurement of rhythm in poems and the rhythmic patterns resulting from combinations of heavy and light stresses on syllables. The symbol **U** represents light stress and the symbol **/** represents a heavier stress. "Scansion" is the process of measuring verse for the stress patterns. To "scan" a poem, we do the following:

1. identify the "foot" or syllabic pattern. A foot is two or more syllables that have various patterns of stressed and non-stressed syllables.
2. name the number of "feet" in the line.
3. describe the stanza pattern--if there is one.

Example: I think that I shall never see (iambic, four feet).

### Name of Foot      Meter      Example

iamb = **U**    **/**      iambic      today I saw the sky descending black and white

trochee = **/**    **U**      trochaic      daily. Let her live to earn her dinner

anapest = **U**    **U**    **/**      anapestic intervene. There are many who say that a dog  
has his day.

dactyl = **/**    **U**    **U**      yesterday. Take her up tenderly.

spondee -    **/**    **/**      spondaic. day break. Smart lad to skip betimes away.

Example: iambic pentameter = five pairs of **U** /  
trochaic tetrameter = four feet of **/** **U**

### Number of Feet in a Line:

monometer = one foot

pentameter = five feet

dimeter = two feet

hexameter = six feet

trimeter = three feet

heptameter = seven feet

tetrameter = four feet

octameter = eight feet

## Stanza Form

**A stanza is a group of lines.**

**couplet:** a stanza of two lines, usually with end rhyme.

**tercet:** a three-line stanza, usually with one rhyme.

**quatrains:** a four-line stanza, rhymed or unrhymed

**cinquain:** a five-line stanza.

**sestet:** a six-line stanza.

**heptastitch:** a seven-line stanza.

**octave:** an eight-line stanza.

## Types of Poems

**There are several types of poems.**

1. **lyric poem:** a short poem in which a speaker or persona expresses his/her emotions or makes a comment about life. The poem often begins by describing something and then commenting on it in the last line or lines. The speaker is often the poet. Examples are "Old Ironsides," "Annabel Lee," and "Mending Wall."
2. **dramatic poem:** a poem that tells a story and has one or more characters speaking, usually to each other. The speaker is not the poet. An example is "Death of the Hired Man."
3. **ballad:** a story told in song form which has been passed down by word of mouth. The usual theme is love, often tragic love. An example is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."
4. **elegy:** a melancholy or mournfully contemplative poem. If the elegy is for a funeral, it is called a **dirge**. Examples include "O Captain My Captain," and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed."
5. **ode:** a song in honor of gods or heroes or written for a specific purpose or occasion. Many odes are of Greek origin, but the English have also written several well known odes.
6. **sonnet:** a poem of fourteen lines. There are two kinds of sonnets:
  - a. Shakespearean - uses iambic pentameter and has three quatrains (four-line stanzas) and one couplet (two-line stanza) and has the rhyme pattern abab, cdcd, efef, gg. An example is "Design" by Robert Frost.
  - b. Italian = uses an eight-line stanza (octave) and a six-line stanza (sestet). The rhyme pattern is abba, abba, cde, cde, or cd, cd, cd. Example, "Cross of Snow" by Longfellow.
7. **haiku:** a three-line poem which makes a statement or observation about nature. The lines have 5--7--5 syllables.
8. **epic:** a long, serious poem that tells a story about a hero and his heroic companions, often set in the romantic past. The hero often has divine or superhuman traits. Examples are "The Iliad," "The Odyssey," and "Beowulf."