

## A SELECTION OF LITERARY TERMS

**alliteration:** the same letter or sound occurring at the beginning of two or more words in succession: *sing a song of sixpence*

**allusion:** ('Anspielung') brief or indirect reference: "*He resents any allusion to his baldness.*"

**anaphora:** repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences

**antithesis:** the placing together of opposing words or ideas in order to show a contrast: "*Give me liberty, or give me death*" is an example of antithesis.

**apostrophe:** is an exclamatory rhetorical figure of speech, when a talker or writer breaks off and directs speech to an imaginary person or abstract quality or idea: "*O Captain! My Captain!*" - (title of Walt Whitman's poem)

**aside:** literary device in that an actor speaks to the audience; he/she is not heard by the other characters (see: 'soliloquy')

**blank verse:** type of poetry, distinguished by having a regular metre, but no rhyme

**caricature:** in literature, a description of a person using exaggeration of some characteristics and oversimplification of others

**catharsis:** The term in drama refers to a sudden emotional climax that evokes overwhelming feelings of great sorrow, pity, laughter or any other extreme change in emotion, resulting in restoration, renewal and revitalization in members of the audience.

### **characterization:**

· explicit: a character is portrayed by direct description of his outward appearance and by directly naming his human and mental qualities or abilities.

· implicit: a character is portrayed by what he does or by describing his environment. From what he does or from his surroundings one draws conclusions as to what kind of character it is.

**comic relief:** humorous episode in a serious or tragic context

**ellipsis:** omission of certain words, thus the meaning is condensed

**emotive language:** words/phrases that are used to affect the emotions

**euphemism:** substitution of an agreeable or less offensive expression in place of one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the listener: '*to pass away*' instead of '*to die*'

**external action:** sequence of outward, observable events (cf. internal action)

**figurative language,** imagery

· simile: a figure of speech used to make a comparison between two things, usually with the words "like" "than" or "as": *He ate like an animal.*

· metaphor: a metaphor is a rhetorical figure that describes a first subject as *being* or *equal* to a second subject in some way:

*All the world's a stage,*

*And all the men and women merely players;*

*They have their exits and their entrances; — (William Shakespeare, As You Like It, 2/7)*

· symbol: a concrete thing which stands for something abstract: *a scepter* is a symbol of *royal power*

· *personification*: a figure of speech that gives an inanimate object or abstract idea human traits and qualities: The flowers were suffering from the intense heat.

**hyperbole**: a figure of speech in which statements are exaggerated: *"He has a brain the size of a pea."*

**interior monologue**: a character's consciousness is presented directly to the reader

**internal action**: action that goes on inside a character's mind

**irony**: Generally two types of irony have to be distinguished: *verbal* and *dramatic*

· Verbal irony: a form of speech in which the opposite is meant from what is literally expressed. This type of irony uses praise to imply blame or words of blame to imply praise.

· dramatic irony: is to be seen when a character in a play expects the opposite of what his fate or destiny holds in store, but the reader or audience knows better, e.g. Willy Loman in 'Death of a Salesman' believes in his being popular and becoming rich, but the reader / audience knows that he is a failure and will never be rich.

### **means of presentation:**

An author can use different ways of how to present a story:

1. by simply objectively describing scenes or events in a story without being involved

2. by using direct or reported speech

3. by using the so called 'stream-of-consciousness' - technique. This again can be distinguished:

a. by interior monologue (usually present tense, first-person narrator, incomplete sentences)

b. by reported thought (usually past tense, conditional tense, third-person narrator)

The stream-of-consciousness-technique is characterized by the fact that ideas and thoughts come directly from the character's mind without the interference of introductory clauses like 'I think..' or 'He claimed..'

**metre**: regular pattern of stressed (´) and unstressed (-) syllables in a poem

feet: iamb (- ´) / trochee (´ -) / anapaest (-- ´) / dactyl (´ ´ -)

**mode of presentation:** There are two modes of presentation to be found in pieces of literature: the *panoramic* and the *scenic* modes.

The *panoramic* mode is employed when the author summarizes several events, whereas *scenic* mode is used when the author describes scenes in great detail.

**monologue:** see 'soliloquy'

**neologism:** invented or newly coined word

**onomatopoeia:** sounds imitating the thing they denote

**paradox:** apparently self-contradictory statement

**parallelism:** building up of a sentence using similar syntactic units -> effect of balance

**point of view:** the perspective through the story is told

· **first-person narrator**

can be the protagonist (=main character), who narrates a story in which he himself is directly involved. His point of view is usually limited to what he sees and has experienced.

But he can also be a character who is a witness of some event or incident which he then describes from his perspective. He is then not directly involved in the action of the story, he is rather an observer, a witness.

The functions of a first-person narrator:

He lends the story:

- credibility (he can be relied on what he says)
- authenticity (describes his own experiences)
- immediacy (he is close to the action)

· **third-person narrator:**

is not at all involved in the action of a story. He can be a *disguised narrator*, who presents things as they are seen through the eyes of a character. He usually has a *limited* point of view, which prevents him from seeing everything (e.g. other people's thoughts). He can also be an *omniscient narrator* who has total knowledge and can therefore describe and comment on all the characters and events in the story. This is why one can call his point of view unlimited.

The *functions* of a third-person narrator:

- he provides comprehensive, overall information
- he provides background information and gives comments

*omniscient narrator:* a narrator having full knowledge about characters and events

- total omniscience: the narrator knows everything about his characters
- selective omniscience: the narrator knows everything about some of his characters

**pun:** humorous play on words, making use of double meanings

**register:** level of language (e.g. formal, literary, poetic, colloquial, technical, legal, ...)

**rhetorical question:** question whose answer is taken for granted (-> reader is expected to accept the argument more readily)

**rhyme,** various types

- pair rhyme (aabb), cross rhyme (abab), embracing rhyme (abba)
- run-on-line, line with enjambment (line is not “end-stopped“ by grammar, punctuation, ...)

**sarcasm:** stating the opposite of an intended meaning especially in order to sneeringly, slyly, jest, mock, hurt or insult a person, situation or thing; extreme form of irony

**satire:** In satire, human or individual weaknesses or shortcomings are shown by means of ridicule, derision, irony, or other methods, ideally with the intent to bring about improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, the purpose of satire is not primarily humour in itself so much as an attack on something of which the author strongly disapproves.

**setting:** time and place in which a drama/novel/short story/poem takes place

**soliloquy (monologue):** character in a play speaks directly to the audience about his motives and feelings

- If a speech is addressed to another person or group of people, it is called a **monologue**.
- If a speech is addressed to the speaker himself, it is called a **soliloquy**.

Shakespeare, for example, used the soliloquy to great effect in order to reveal their characters' personal thoughts, emotions, and motives. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech may be the most famous soliloquy. There is a dramatic convention that soliloquies, like "asides" (see: above) to the audience, cannot necessarily be heard or noticed by the other characters, even if they are clearly delivered within earshot.

**sonnet:** lyric poem of fixed form (14 lines, specific rhyme scheme)

- Petrarchan Sonnet: octave and sestet (abbaabba cdecde / abbaabba cdcdcd)
- Shakespearean Sonnet: three quatrains, one couplet (abab cdcd efef gg)

**theme:** the central or dominating idea in a literary work (“what the work is about“)

**tragic flaw:** decisive weakness of the protagonist's character in a tragedy, which inevitably leads to the final catastrophe (source of tragic irony)

**understatement:** something is presented as being far less important than it actually is.

In Monty Python's ‘The Meaning of Life’, for example, an Army officer has just lost his leg. When asked how he feels, he looks down at his bloody stump and responds, "Stings a bit."