

Glossary

Boldface words within definitions are themselves defined in the glossary.

acting the last of the four steps of **characterization** in a performed play.

action an imagined event or series of events; an event may be verbal as well as physical, so that saying something or telling a story within the story may be an event.

allegory as in **metaphor**, one thing (usually nonrational, abstract, religious) is implicitly spoken of in terms of something concrete, but in an allegory the comparison is extended to include an entire work or large portion of a work.

alliteration the repetition of initial consonant sounds through a sequence of words—for example, “While I *n*odded, *n*early *n*apping” in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven.”

allusion a reference—whether explicit or implicit, to history, the Bible, myth, literature, painting, music, and so on—that suggests the meaning or generalized implication of details in the story, poem, or play.

ambiguity the use of a word or expression to mean more than one thing.

amphitheater the design of classical Greek theaters, consisting of a stage area surrounded by a semicircle of tiered seats.

analogy a comparison based on certain resemblances between things that are otherwise unlike.

anapestic a metrical form in which each foot consists of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one.

antagonist a neutral term for a **character** who opposes the leading male or female character. *See* **hero/heroine** and **protagonist**.

antihero a leading **character** who is not, like a **hero**, perfect or even outstanding, but is rather ordinary and representative of the more or less average person.

archetype a **plot** or **character** element that recurs in cultural or cross-cultural **myths**, such as “the quest” or “descent into the underworld” or “scapegoat.”

arena stage a stage design in which the audience is seated all the way around the acting area; actors make their entrances and exits through the auditorium.

assonance the repetition of vowel sounds in a sequence of words with different endings—for example, “The *death* of the poet was kept from his poems” in W. H. Auden’s “In Memory of W. B. Yeats.”

aubade a morning song in which the coming of dawn is either celebrated or denounced as a nuisance.

auditor someone other than the reader—a **character** within the fiction—to whom the story or “speech” is addressed.

authorial time distinct from **plot time** and **reader time**, authorial time denotes the influence that the time in which the author was writing had upon the **conception** and **style** of the text.

ballad a narrative poem that is, or originally was, meant to be sung. Characterized by repetition and often by a repeated refrain (recurrent phrase or series of phrases), ballads were originally a folk creation, transmitted orally from person to person and age to age.

ballad stanza a common **stanza** form, consisting of a quatrain that alternates four-beat and three-beat lines; lines 1 and 3 are unrhymed iambic tetrameter (four beats), and lines 2 and 4 are rhymed iambic trimeter (three beats).

blank verse the verse form most like everyday human speech; blank verse consists of unrhymed lines in **iambic pentameter**. Many of Shakespeare’s plays are in blank verse.

caesura a short pause within a line of poetry; often but not always signaled by punctuation. Note the two caesuras in this line from Poe’s “The Raven”: “Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary.”

canon when applied to an individual author, *canon* (like *oeuvre*) means the sum total of works written by that author. When used generally, it means the range of works that a consensus of scholars, teachers, and readers of a particular time and culture consider “great” or “major.” This second sense of the word is a matter of debate since the literary canon in Europe and America has long been

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- dominated by the works of white men. During the last several decades, the canon in the United States has expanded considerably to include more works by women and writers from various ethnic and racial backgrounds.
- casting** the third step in the creation of a **character** on the stage; deciding which actors are to play which parts.
- centered (central) consciousness** a limited third-person **point of view**, one tied to a single **character** throughout the story; this character often reveals his or her inner thoughts but is unable to read the thoughts of others.
- character** (1) a fictional personage who acts, appears, or is referred to in a work; (2) a combination of a person's qualities, especially moral qualities, so that such terms as "good" and "bad," "strong" and "weak," often apply. *See* **nature** and **personality**.
- characterization** the fictional or artistic presentation of a fictional personage. A term like "a good character" can, then, be ambiguous—it may mean that the personage is virtuous or that he or she is well presented regardless of his or her characteristics or moral qualities.
- chorus** in classical Greek plays, a group of actors who commented on and described the **action** of a play. Members of the chorus were often masked and relied on song, dance, and recitation to make their commentary.
- classical unities** as derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, the principles of structure that require a play to have one action that occurs in one place and within one day.
- climax** also called the **turning point**, the third part of **plot structure**, the point at which the **action** stops rising and begins falling or reversing.
- colloquial diction** a level of language in a work that approximates the speech of ordinary people. The language used by characters in Toni Cade Bambara's "Gorilla, My Love" is a good example.
- comedy** a broad category of dramatic works that are intended primarily to entertain and amuse an audience. Comedies take many different forms, but they share three basic characteristics: (1) the values that are expressed and that typically present the conflict within the play are social and determined by the general opinion of society (as opposed to being universal and beyond the control of humankind, as in **tragedy**); (2) **characters** in comedies are often defined primarily in terms of their society and their role within it; (3) comedies often end with a restoration of social order in which one or more characters take a proper social role.
- conception** the first step in the creation of any work of art, but especially used to indicate the first step in the creation of a dramatic **character**, whether for written text or performed play; the original idea, when the playwright first begins to construct (or even dream about) a **plot**, the **characters**, the **structure**, or a **theme**.
- conclusion** the fifth part of **plot structure**, the point at which the situation that was destabilized at the beginning of the story becomes stable once more.
- concrete poetry** poetry shaped to look like an object. Robert Herrick's "Pillar of Fame," for example, is arranged to look like a pillar. Also called **shaped verse**.
- confessional poem** a relatively recent (or recently defined) **kind** in which the speaker describes a state of mind, which becomes a **metaphor** for the larger world.
- conflict** a struggle between opposing forces, such as between two people, between a person and something in nature or society, or even between two drives, impulses, or parts of the self.
- connotation** what is suggested by a word, apart from what it explicitly describes. *See* **denotation**.
- controlling metaphors** metaphors that dominate or organize an entire poem. In Linda Pastan's "Marks," for example, the controlling metaphor is of marks (grades) as a way of talking about the speaker's performance of roles within her family.
- conventions** standard or traditional ways of saying things in literary works, employed to achieve certain expected effects.
- cosmic irony** a type of irony that arises out of the difference between what a character aspires to and what so-called universal forces deal him or her; such irony implies that a god or fate controls and toys with human actions, feelings, lives, outcomes.
- criticism** *See* **literary criticism**.
- culture** a broad and relatively indistinct term that implies a commonality of history and some cohesiveness of purpose within a group. One can speak of southern culture, for example, or urban culture, or American culture, or rock culture; at any one time, each of us belongs to a number of these cultures.
- dactylic** the metrical pattern in which each foot consists of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones.
- denotation** a direct and specific meaning. *See* **connotation**.

descriptive structure a textual organization determined by the requirements of describing someone or something.

diction an author's choice of words.

discriminated occasion the first specific event in a story, usually in the form of a specific scene.

discursive structure a textual organization based on the form of a treatise, argument, or essay.

dramatic irony a plot device in which a character holds a position or has an expectation that is reversed or fulfilled in a way that the character did not expect but that we, as readers or as audience members, have anticipated because our knowledge of events or individuals is more complete than the character's.

dramatic monologue a monologue set in a specific situation and spoken to an imaginary audience.

dramatic structure a textual organization based on a series of scenes, each of which is presented vividly and in detail.

dramatis personae the list of characters that appears either in the play's program or at the top of the first page of the written play.

echo a verbal reference that recalls a word, phrase, or sound in another text.

elegy in classical times, any poem on any subject written in "elegiac" meter; since the Renaissance, usually a formal lament on the death of a particular person.

English sonnet *see* Shakespearean sonnet.

enjambment running over from one line of poetry to the next without stop, as in the following lines by Wordsworth: "My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky."

epic a poem that celebrates, in a continuous narrative, the achievements of mighty heroes and heroines, usually in founding a nation or developing a culture, and uses elevated language and a grand, high style.

epigram originally any poem carved in stone (on tombstones, buildings, gates, and so forth), but in modern usage a very short, usually witty verse with a quick turn at the end.

expectation the anticipation of what is to happen next (*see* curiosity and suspense), what a character is like or how he or she will develop, what the theme or meaning of the story will prove to be, and so on.

exposition that part of the structure that sets the scene, introduces and identifies characters, and establishes the situation at the beginning of a story or play. Additional

exposition is often scattered throughout the work.

extended metaphor a detailed and complex metaphor that stretches through a long section of a work.

falling action the fourth part of plot structure, in which the complications of the rising action are untangled.

farce a play characterized by broad humor, wild antics, and often slapstick, pratfalls, or other physical humor.

figurative usually applied to language that uses figures of speech. Figurative language heightens meaning by implicitly or explicitly representing something in terms of some other thing, the assumption being that the "other thing" will be more familiar to the reader.

figures of speech comparisons in which something is pictured or figured in other, more familiar terms.

first-person narrator a character, "I," who tells the story and necessarily has a limited point of view; may also be an unreliable narrator.

flashback a plot-structuring device whereby a scene from the fictional past is inserted into the fictional present or dramatized out of order.

flat character a fictional character, often but not always a minor character, who is relatively simple; who is presented as having few, though sometimes dominant, traits; and who thus does not change much in the course of a story. *See* round character.

focus the point from which people, events, and other details in a story are viewed. *See* point of view.

foil one character that serves as a contrast to another.

formal diction language that is lofty, dignified, and impersonal. *See* colloquial diction and informal diction.

free verse poetry characterized by varying line lengths, lack of traditional meter, and nonrhyming lines.

genre the largest category for classifying literature—fiction, poetry, drama. *See* kind and subgenre.

haiku an unrhymed poetic form, Japanese in origin, that contains seventeen syllables arranged in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively.

hero/heroine the leading male/female character, usually larger than life, sometimes almost godlike. *See* antihero, protagonist, and villain.

heroic couplet rhymed pairs of lines in iambic pentameter.

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hexameter a line of poetry with six feet: “She comes, | she comes | again, | like ring | dove frayed | and fled” (Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes*).

high (verbal) comedy humor that employs subtlety, wit, or the representation of refined life. *See* low (physical) comedy.

hyperbole overstatement characterized by exaggerated language.

iamb a metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one.

iambic pentameter a metrical form in which the basic foot is an iamb and most lines consist of five iambs; iambic pentameter is the most common poetic meter in English: “One com | mon note | on ei | ther lyre | did strike” (Dryden, “To the Memory of Mr. Oldham”).

imagery broadly defined, any sensory detail or evocation in a work; more narrowly, the use of figurative language to evoke a feeling, to call to mind an idea, or to describe an object.

imitative structure a textual organization that mirrors as exactly as possible the structure of something that already exists as an object and can be seen.

implied author the guiding personality or value system behind a text; the implied author is not necessarily synonymous with the actual author.

informal diction language that is not as lofty or impersonal as formal diction; similar to everyday speech. *See* colloquial diction, which is one variety of informal diction.

initiation story a kind of short story in which a character—often but not always a child or young person—first learns a significant, usually life-changing truth about the universe, society, people, himself or herself.

in medias res “in the midst of things”; refers to opening a story in the middle of the action, necessitating filling in past details by exposition or flashback.

irony a situation or statement characterized by a significant difference between what is expected or understood and what actually happens or is meant. *See* cosmic irony, dramatic irony, and situational irony.

Italian sonnet *see* Petrarchan sonnet.

limerick a light or humorous verse form of mainly anapestic verses of which the first, second, and fifth lines are of three feet; the third and fourth lines are of two feet; and the rhyme scheme is *aabba*.

limited point of view or limited focus a perspective pinned to a single character,

whether a first-person- or a third-person-centered consciousness, so that we cannot know for sure what is going on in the minds of other characters; thus, when the focal character leaves the room in a story we must go, too, and cannot know what is going on while our “eyes” or “camera” is gone. A variation on this, which generally has no name and is often lumped with the omniscient point of view, is the point of view that can wander like a camera from one character to another and close in or move back but cannot (or at least does not) get inside anyone’s head and does not present from the inside any character’s thoughts.

literary criticism the evaluative or interpretive work written by professional interpreters of texts. It is “criticism” not because it is negative or corrective, but rather because those who write criticism ask hard, analytical, crucial, or “critical” questions about the works they read.

litotes a figure of speech that emphasizes its subject by conscious understatement. An example from common speech is to say “Not bad” as a form of high praise.

low (physical) comedy humor that employs burlesque, horseplay, or the representation of unrefined life. *See* high (verbal) comedy.

lyric originally, a poem meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre; now, any short poem in which the speaker expresses intense personal emotion rather than describing a narrative or dramatic situation.

major (main) characters those characters whom we see and learn about the most.

meditation a contemplation of some physical object as a way of reflecting upon some larger truth, often (but not necessarily) a spiritual one.

memory devices also called *mnemonic devices*; these devices—including rhyme, repetitive phrasing, and meter—when part of the structure of a longer work, make that work easier to memorize.

metaphor (1) one thing pictured as if it were something else, suggesting a likeness or analogy between them; (2) an implicit comparison or identification of one thing with another unlike itself without the use of a verbal signal. Sometimes used as a general term for figure of speech.

meter the more or less regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry. This is determined by the kind of “foot” (iambic and dactylic, for example) and by the number of feet per line (five feet = pentameter, six feet = hexameter, for example).

minor characters those figures who fill out

- the story but who do not figure prominently in it.
- mode style**, manner, way of proceeding, as in “tragic mode”; often used synonymously with **genre**, **kind**, and **subgenre**.
- monologue** a speech of more than a few sentences, usually in a play but also in other genres, spoken by one person and uninterrupted by the speech of anyone else. *See soliloquy.*
- motif** a recurrent device, formula, or situation that deliberately connects a poem with common patterns of existing thought.
- myth** like **allegory**, myth usually is symbolic and extensive, including an entire work or story. Though it no longer is necessarily specific to or pervasive in a single **culture**—individual authors may now be said to create myths—myth still seems communal or cultural, while the symbolic can often involve private or personal myths. Thus stories more or less universally shared within a culture to explain its history and traditions are frequently called myths.
- narrative structure** a textual organization based on sequences of connected events usually presented in a straightforward chronological framework.
- narrator** the character who “tells” the story.
- occasional poem** a poem written about or for a specific occasion, public or private.
- octameter** a line of poetry with eight feet: “Once u | pon a | midnight | dreary | while I | pondered, | weak and | weary” (Poe, “The Raven”).
- octave** the first eight lines of the **Italian**, or **Petrarchan**, **sonnet**. *See also sestet.*
- ode** a lyric poem characterized by a serious topic and formal tone but no prescribed formal pattern. *See* Keats’s odes and Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.”
- oeuvre** the sum total of works verifiably written by an author. *See canon.*
- omniscient point of view** also called **unlimited point of view**; a perspective that can be seen from one **character’s** view, then another’s, then another’s, or can be moved in or out of any character’s mind at any time. Organization in which the reader has access to the perceptions and thoughts of all the characters in the story.
- onomatopoeia** a word capturing or approximating the sound of what it describes; *buzz* is a good example.
- orchestra** in classical Greek theater, a semi-circular area used mostly for dancing by the chorus.
- overplot** a main plot in fiction or drama.
- overstatement** exaggerated language; also called **hyperbole**.
- oxymoron** a **figure of speech** that combines two apparently contradictory elements, as in *wise fool* (*sophomore*).
- parable** a short fiction that illustrates an explicit moral lesson.
- paradox** a statement that seems contradictory but may actually be true, such as “That I may rise and stand, o’erthrow me” in Donne’s “Batter My Heart.”
- parody** a work that imitates another work for comic effect by exaggerating the style and changing the content of the original.
- pastoral** a poem (also called an **eclogue**, a **bucolic**, or an **idyll**) that describes the simple life of country folk, usually shepherds who live a timeless, painless (and sheepless) life in a world full of beauty, music, and love.
- pastoral play** a play that features the sort of idyllic world described in the definition for **pastoral**.
- pentameter** a line of poetry with five feet: “Nuns fret | not at | their con | vent’s nar | row room” (Wordsworth).
- persona** the voice or figure of the author who tells and structures the story and who may or may not share the values of the actual author.
- personification** (or *prosopopeia*) treating an abstraction as if it were a person by endowing it with humanlike qualities.
- Petrarchan sonnet** also called **Italian sonnet**; a **sonnet** form that divides the poem into one section of eight lines (**octave**) and a second section of six lines (**sestet**), usually following the *abbaabba cdecde* rhyme scheme or, more loosely, an *abbacddc* pattern.
- plot/plot structure** the arrangement of the **action**.
- plot summary** a description of the arrangement of the **action** in the order in which it actually appears in a story. The term is popularly used to mean the description of the history, or chronological order, of the action as it would have appeared in reality. It is important to indicate exactly in which sense you are using the term.
- plot time** the temporal setting in which the **action** takes place in a story or play.
- point of view** also called **focus**; the point from which people, events, and other details in a story are viewed. This term is sometimes used to include both **focus** and **voice**.
- precision** exactness, accuracy of language or description.
- presentation** the second step in the creation of a **character** for the written text and the performed play; the representation of the character by the playwright in the words and actions specified in the text.

props articles and objects used on the stage.

proscenium arch an arch over the front of a stage; the proscenium serves as a “frame” for the action on stage.

protagonist the main character in a work, who may be male or female, heroic or not heroic. *See* antagonist, antihero, and hero/heroine. *Protagonist* is the most neutral term.

protest poem a poetic attack, usually quite direct, on allegedly unjust institutions or social injustices.

psychological realism a modification of the concept of realism, or telling it like it is, which recognizes that what is real to the individual is that which he or she perceives. It is the ground for the use of the centered consciousness, or the first-person narrator, since both of these present reality only as something perceived by the focal character.

reader time the actual time it takes a reader to read a work.

realism the practice in literature of attempting to describe nature and life without idealization and with attention to detail.

red herring a false lead, something that misdirects expectations.

referential when used to describe a poem, play, or story, *referential* means making textual use of a specific historical moment or event or, more broadly, making use of external, “natural,” or “actual” detail.

reflective (meditative) structure a textual organization based on the pondering of a subject, theme, or event, and letting the mind play with it, skipping from one sound to another or to related thoughts or objects as the mind receives them.

represent to verbally depict an image so that readers can “see” it.

rhetorical trope traditional figure of speech, used for specific persuasive effects.

rhyme scheme the pattern of end rhymes in a poem, often noted by small letters, e.g., *abab* or *abba*, etc.

rhythm the modulation of weak and strong (or stressed and unstressed) elements in the flow of speech. In most poetry written before the twentieth century, rhythm was often expressed in regular, metrical forms; in prose and in free verse, rhythm is present but in a much less predictable and regular manner.

rising action the second of the five parts of plot structure, in which events complicate the situation that existed at the beginning of a work, intensifying the conflict or introducing new conflict.

rite of passage a ritual or ceremony marking

an individual’s passing from one stage or state to a more advanced one, or an event in one’s life that seems to have such significance; a formal initiation. Rites of passage are common in initiation stories.

round characters complex characters, often major characters, who can grow and change and “surprise convincingly”—that is, act in a way that you did not expect from what had gone before but now accept as possible, even probable, and “realistic.”

sarcasm a form of verbal irony in which apparent praise is actually harshly or bitterly critical.

satire a literary work that holds up human failings to ridicule and censure.

scanning/scansion *Scansion* is the process of scanning a poem, analyzing the verse to show its meter, line by line.

second-person narrator a character, “you,” who tells the story and necessarily has a limited point of view; may be seen as an extension of the reader, an external figure acting out a story, or an auditor; may also be an unreliable narrator.

sestet the last six lines of the Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet. *See* also octave.

sestina an elaborate verse structure written in blank verse that consists of six stanzas of six lines each followed by a three-line stanza. The final words of each line in the first stanza appear in variable order in the next five stanzas, and are repeated in the middle and at the end of the three lines in the final stanza, as in Elizabeth Bishop’s “Sestina.”

set the design, decoration, and scenery of the stage during a play.

setting the time and place of the action in a story, poem, or play.

Shakespearean sonnet also called an English sonnet; a sonnet form that divides the poem into three units of four lines each and a final unit of two lines (4+4+4+2 structure). Its classic rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg*, but there are variations.

shaped verse another name for concrete poetry; poetry that is shaped to look like an object.

simile a direct, explicit comparison of one thing to another, usually using the words *like* or *as* to draw the connection. *See* metaphor.

situation the context of the literary work’s action, what is happening when the story, poem, or play begins.

situational irony in a narrative, the incongruity between what the reader and/or character expects to happen and what actually does happen.

- skene** a low building in the back of the stage area in classical Greek theaters. It represented the palace or temple in front of which the **action** took place.
- soliloquy** a monologue in which the **character** in a play is alone and speaking only to him- or herself.
- sonnet** a fixed verse form consisting of fourteen lines usually in **iambic pentameter**. *See* **Italian sonnet** and **Shakespearean sonnet**.
- spatial setting** the place of a poem, story, or play.
- speaker** the person, not necessarily the author, who is the voice of a poem.
- Spenserian stanza** a stanza that consists of eight lines of **iambic pentameter** (five feet) followed by a ninth line of **iambic hexameter** (six feet). The rhyme scheme is *ababbcbcc*.
- spondee** a metrical foot consisting of a pair of stressed syllables ("Dead set").
- stage directions** The words in the printed text of a play that inform the director, crew, actors, and readers how to stage, perform, or imagine the play. Stage directions are not spoken aloud and may appear at the beginning of a play, before any scene, or attached to a line of dialogue. The place and time of the action, the design of the set itself, and at times the characters' actions or tone of voice are dictated through stage directions and interpreted by the group of people that put on a performance.
- stanza** a section of a poem demarcated by extra line spacing. Some distinguish between a stanza, a division marked by a single pattern of **meter** or rhyme, and a verse paragraph, a division governed by thought rather than sound pattern.
- stereotype** a **characterization** based on conscious or unconscious assumptions that some one aspect—such as gender, age, ethnic or national identity, religion, occupation, marital status, and so on—is predictably accompanied by certain **character** traits, actions, even values.
- stock character** a **character** that appears in a number of stories or plays, such as the cruel stepmother, the braggart, and so forth.
- structure** the organization or arrangement of the various elements in a work.
- style** a distinctive manner of expression; each author's style is expressed through his/her diction, rhythm, imagery, and so on.
- subgenre** a division within the category of a **genre**; *novel*, *novella*, and *short story* are subgenres of the genre *fiction*.
- subject** (1) the concrete and literal description of what a story is about; (2) the general or specific area of concern of a poem—also called **topic**; (3) also used in fiction commentary to denote a **character** whose inner thoughts and feelings are recounted.
- subplot** another name for an **underplot**; a subordinate **plot** in fiction or drama.
- suspense** the expectation of and doubt about what is going to happen next.
- syllabic verse** a form in which the poet establishes a precise number of syllables to a line and repeats it in subsequent **stanzas**.
- symbol** a person, place, thing, event, or pattern in a literary work that designates itself and at the same time figuratively represents or "stands for" something else. Often the thing or idea represented is more abstract, general, non- or superrational; the symbol, more concrete and particular.
- symbolic poem** a poem in which the use of symbols is so pervasive and internally consistent that the larger referential world is distanced, if not forgotten.
- syntax** the way words are put together to form phrases, clauses, and sentences.
- technopaegnia** the art of "shaped" poems in which the visual force is supposed to work spiritually or magically.
- temporal setting** the time of a story, poem, or play.
- terza rima** a verse form consisting of three-line **stanzas** in which the second line of each stanza rhymes with the first and third of the next.
- tetrameter** a line of poetry with four feet: "The Grass | divides | as with | a comb" (Dickinson).
- tetrameter couplet** rhymed pairs of lines that contain (in classical **iambic**, **trochaic**, and **anapestic** verse) four measures of two feet or (in modern English verse) four metrical feet.
- theme** (1) a generalized, abstract paraphrase of the inferred central or dominant idea or concern of a work; (2) the statement a poem makes about its subject.
- third-person narrator** a **character**, "he" or "she," who "tells" the story; may have either a **limited point of view** or an **omniscient point of view**; may also be an **unreliable narrator**.
- thrust stage** a stage design that allows the audience to sit around three sides of the major acting area.
- tone** the attitude a literary work takes toward its **subject** and **theme**.
- topic** (1) the concrete and literal description of what a story is about; (2) a poem's general or specific area of concern. Also called **subject**.

tradition an inherited, established, or customary practice.

traditional symbols symbols that, through years of usage, have acquired an agreed-upon significance, an accepted meaning. *See* archetype.

tragedy a drama in which a **character** (usually a good and noble person of high rank) is brought to a disastrous end in his or her confrontation with a superior force (fortune, the gods, social forces, universal values), but also comes to understand the meaning of his or her deeds and to accept an appropriate punishment. Often the **protagonist's** downfall is a direct result of a fatal flaw in his or her character.

trochaic a metrical form in which the basic foot is a **trochee**.

trochee a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one ("Homer").

turning point the third part of plot structure, the point at which the **action** stops rising and begins falling or reversing. Also called **climax**.

underplot a subordinate plot in fiction or drama. Also called a **subplot**.

understatement language that avoids obvious emphasis or embellishment; **litotes** is one form of it.

unity of time one of the three unities of drama as described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Unity of time refers to the limitation of a play's action to a short period—usually the time it takes to present the play or, at any rate, no longer than a day. *See* **classical unities**.

unlimited point of view also called **omniscient point of view**; a perspective that can be seen from one **character's** view, then another's, then another's, or can be moved

in or out of any character's mind at any time. Organization in which the reader has access to the perceptions and thoughts of all the characters in the story.

unreliable narrator a **speaker** or voice whose vision or version of the details of a story are consciously or unconsciously deceiving; such a **narrator's** version is usually subtly undermined by details in the story or the reader's general knowledge of facts outside the story. If, for example, the narrator were to tell you that Columbus was Spanish and that he discovered America in the fourteenth century when his ship the *Golden Hind* landed on the coast of Florida near present-day Gainesville, you might not trust other things he tells you.

verbal irony a statement in which the literal meaning differs from the implicit meaning. *See* **dramatic irony** and **situational irony**.

verse paragraph *see* **stanza**.

villain the one who opposes the hero and heroine—that is, the "bad guy." *See* **antagonist** and **hero/heroine**.

villanelle a verse form consisting of nineteen lines divided into six **stanzas**—five tercets (three-line stanzas) and one quatrain (four-line stanza). The first and third lines of the first tercet rhyme, and this rhyme is repeated through each of the next four tercets and in the last two lines of the concluding quatrain. The villanelle is also known for its repetition of select lines. A good example of a twentieth-century villanelle is Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night."

voice the acknowledged or unacknowledged source of a story's words; the **speaker**; the "person" telling the story.

word order the positioning of words in relation to one another.