

LITERARY TERMS

SONNET:

Sonnet is a lyric poem, which consists of fourteen iambic pentameter lines linked by a definite rhyme scheme. In English literature sonnet is divided in two categories; (1) 'Italian' or 'Petrarchan' (named after the fourteenth century Italian poet, Petrarch). (2) The English sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet.

The Petrarchan sonnet falls into two parts: an octave (eight lines) rhyming abba abba and a sestet (six lines) rhyming cde cde or some variant, such as cdc cdc. Thomas Wyatt first introduced Petrarch's sonnet in England in the early sixteenth century. The Petrarchan form was later used by Milton, Wordsworth, D.J. Rossetti and other sonneteers. The Earl of Surrey and other English experimenters in the sixteenth century also developed a new form called the English or the Shakespearean sonnet. The stanza form in this type of sonnet is different from that of Petrarchan sonnet. This stanza falls into three quatrains and a concluding couplet: a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g g. There was one especially important variant, the Spenserian sonnet, in which Spenser links each quatrain to the next by a continuing rhyme: a b a b, b c b c, c d c d, e e. 'The Lotus' by Toru Dutt is a Petrarchan sonnet.

ELEGY:

In Greek and Roman literature, an Elegy was any poem composed in a special Elegiac meter; and in England, the term was often applied to any poem of solemn meditation. In present critical usage, however, an elegy is a formal and sustained poem of lament for the death of a friend, e.g, Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' which was written on the death of Arthur Hallam. Some times the term is more broadly used for meditative poems, such as Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. The Pastoral elegy which represents both the mourner and the one he mourns, who is usually a poet as Shepherd. Nature also joins in the mourning. Finally, the poet realizes that death is a reunion with God. The most notable English Pastoral elegies are Milton's "Lycidas", Shelley's "Adonais" and Arnold's "Thyrsis".

Goldsmith's 'An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog', is an example of a modified version of the conventional concept of Elegy. He mixes humour to make fun of the cunningness in human behaviour. Conventionally, an Elegy on the death of an animal would be impossible.

SIMILE:

Simile involves a direct comparison between two objects and can be recognized by the use of the words 'like' and 'as'. In a simile the objects brought for comparison should be of different species; for example, if the beautiful physical features of a girl are compared to those of a beautiful film actress cannot be cited as an instance of a simile, since both the objects belong to the same species: both are human beings. The dissimilarity of objects is necessary for a simile. Example: (1) As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean. (2) The ice is as green as emerald. (3) Her lips are as tender as petals of a rose.

The use of a simile enables the poet to convey his idea effectively. In the first example cited above the poet has related the real ship to a painted one so as to enable the reader to imagine how motionless the ship is. In the second example the image of the bright ice floating in the green water of the ocean has been created which gives impression of a shining emerald.

METAPHOR:

Metaphor is a figure of speech belonging to sense devices in English literature. It is rather like a simile except that the comparison is not direct but implied. The words 'like' and 'as' are not used as marks of identification. The poet does not say that one object is like another; he says it is another. The example "He is as cruel as a tiger" illustrates the use of a simile; but the example "He is the tiger of this town" illustrates the use of metaphor.

ALLITERATION:

Alliteration is a figure of speech belonging to sound devices in English literature. It involves repetition of the same sound at a frequent interval in the same line; for example, in the lines from 'The Ancient Mariner' by S.T. Coleridge "The fair

breeze blew, the white foam flew/ The furrow followed free" the repeated 'bs' and 'fs' make the lines run quickly and give impression of a ship travelling at high speed. At the same time the lines, when read aloud, create a great musical effect and sooth the ears of the listeners.

RHYME:

Rhyme is a figure of speech belonging to sound devices in English literature. It occurs at the line endings in poetry and consists of words, which have the same sound; the letter preceding the vowels must be unlike in sound; for instance, 'night' and 'sight' are true rhymes; but 'night' and 'knight' or 'right' and 'rite' are not. If rhymes are used too much, the poem becomes monotonous.

Blank verse uses the rhyme in a balanced manner. There is no excessive use of rhymed verse as we find in heroic couplets.

RYTHM:

Poetry has much in common with music. When we read a poem aloud, it is nearly always possible to notice that sounds used follow a definite pattern and are meant to appeal to the ear. The rhythm of a poem must always help to convey the poet's intention and gives us indication of his mood; for example we notice in 'The Ancient Mariner' how the rythm of the lines "The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew / The furrow followed free", matches the speed of the ship. When the ship stops, the rythm changes and pace of the poem becomes much slower.

DRAMA:

In general, a work written to be performed by actors on a stage. Most dramatic works can be classified as tragedy or comedy.

Drama originated in ancient Greece, developing from religious ceremonies. The great classical writers of tragedy were Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides (in Greece) and the Roman philosopher, Seneca. Well-known comic writers of antiquity included the Greek, Aristophanes, and the Romans, Plautus and Menander.

Medieval drama developed from religious rituals commemorating the birth and resurrection of Christ. As it evolved, it took the form of mystery, miracle and

morality plays.

In England during the Renaissance, a revived interest in classical drama united with the traditions developed from medieval techniques to produce the vigorous and varied Elizabethan drama.

The English theaters were closed in 1642 by the Puritans. However, during the Restoration, drama was revived under the auspices of the court. In the eighteenth century, neoclassical plays and the comedy of manners flourished.

Melodrama and spectacle predominated in most nineteenth-century drama until the end of the century, when shorter plays stressing ideas, problems or situations began to appear.

This trend toward a more faithful and accurate representation of life continued into the twentieth century. Further developments included expressionism and the introduction of the theater of the absurd.

TRAGEDY:

Tragedy as a dramatic form refers to a serious play in which the hero becomes engaged in a conflict, experiences great suffering and is finally defeated and dies.

The classical conception of tragedy, as defined by Aristotle in his 'Poetics', involves a hero of noble stature whose fortunes are reversed as a result of a weakness ('Hamartia') in an otherwise noble nature. The Middle Ages, lacking knowledge of classical theory, conceived tragedy merely a tale of an eminent person passing from happiness to misery. He is shown as a victim of fate. In England, tragedy began in Elizabethan times. The chief influences, in so far as dramatic tradition and theory were concerned, were classical: the 'Poetics' of Aristotle and the tragedies of Roman Philosopher, Seneca. Senecan tragedy was written to be recited rather than acted. In the later part of the sixteenth-century, however, playwrights paid less attention to classical restriction, producing dramas that varied widely in form and structure. These plays culminated in Shakespeare's tragedies. "King Lear", "Hamlet", "Macbeth" are usually regarded as the highest achievements of English stage.

DRAMATIC IRONY:

Irony basically is contrast between appearance and reality. It is a device generally used by dramatist to provide universality to his drama. It is a contrast between two aspects of the same situation or remark. It may be found in a situation or dialogue where some of the characters are ignorant of certain facts, which are known to other characters and to the audience. Dramatic character says one thing and means the opposite of it. The character utters words but himself does not know the deep meaning of this utterance. Other characters and the audience know the meaning and understand the significance of these words.

Shakespeare has used this device more frequently and abundantly in '*Macbeth*.' The very first words uttered by Macbeth are Ironical. "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" because they startle the readers by recalling the words of the witches in the opening scene: "**Fair is foul and foul is fair.**" When king Duncan comes to the castle of Macbeth, he admires the atmosphere. Thus he is ignorant of the fact. The audience know that he is going to be murdered by Macbeth in the same castle. So the description of Macbeth's castle is highly ironical: "This castle hath a pleasant seat."

PLOT:

Plot may be defined as the plan or outline of the events of the story of a novel or drama. It forms the backbone of the play. The plot of a drama should include only those events that can be represented by characters on the stage. It is governed by the limitation of the stage. The novel has great freedom in this respect. A good plot is more than a mere sequence of events. Events are selected and arranged with a dramatic effect in such a way that irrelevances are emitted. For Aristotle, Plot is the life blood and soul of tragedy. He further says that it is possible to have tragedy without character but without Plot there can be no tragedy. Plot is essential for tragedy in the same way as a proper shape in the art of painting. Colours are lifeless until filled in a proper shape. Similarly, without a proper Plot, characters are lifeless. The plot must be true to the function of tragedy, i.e., to arouse the emotions of pity and fear and then to seek for their catharsis. To achieve this goal, the action of tragedy should be "complete in itself".

Hence, the plot must have the beginning, the middle, and the end. Aristotle instructed that the events should be constructed in such a way that they have a unity. At the end it should give the picture of a united whole. The rising events should slowly lead to the crisis or climax.

COMEDY:

A form of drama that is intended to amuse and that ends happily. Since comedy strives to amuse, both wit and humor are utilized. The range of appeal is wide, varying from the crude effects of low comedy, to the subtle and idealistic reactions aroused by some high comedy.

English comedy developed from native dramatic forms growing out of the religious drama, the morality plays and interludes, and the performances of wandering entertainers, such as dancers and jugglers. In the Renaissance, the rediscovery of Latin comedy and the effort to apply the rules of classical criticism to drama significantly affected the course of English comedy. Foreign influences have also been important at times, such as the French influence on Restoration comedy or the Italian influence on Jacobean pastoral drama.

In medieval times, the word comedy was applied to non-dramatic literary compositions marked by a happy ending and by a less exalted style than was found in tragedy (e.g., Dante's Divine Comedy).

SHORT STORY:

A short story is a work of prose fiction. It differs from the anecdote – the simple and unelaborated narration of a single incident – in that it organizes the action, thought, and interactions of its character into the artful pattern of a plot, which has a beginning and develops through middle to some sort of denouement at the end. The plot form may be comic or tragic or romantic or satiric. It may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism or naturalism.

In the tale or "Story of incidents", the focus of interest is on the course and outcome of the events, as in Poe's 'The Gold Bug' or other tales of detection. The short story, however, differs from the novel in the dimension which Aristotle calls

`magnitude'. Poe, who is sometimes called the originator of the short story as a specific genre, was at any rate its first critical theorist. He defines what he called the 'prose tale' as a narrative that can be read at one sitting from one half hour to two hours and this is limited to "A certain unique or a single effect" (Review of Hawthorne's Twice-told tales).

ESSAY:

The essay refers to any brief composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or persuade us to accept a thesis on any subject whatever. The essay is addressed to a general rather than a specialised audience; as a result, the essay discusses its subject matter in non technical fashion, and often with a liberal use of such devices as anecdote, illustration, and humour to enhance its appeal.

A usual distinction is often made between the formal and informal essay. The formal essay is relatively impersonal : the author writes as an authority on the subject and examines it in an ordered and thorough fashion. Examples will be found in the serious articles on current topics and issues in any of the magazines, addressed to a thoughtful audience. In the informal essay the author assumes a tone of intimacy with his audience and tends to be concerned with everyday things rather than with public affairs or specialised topics and writes in a relaxed, self-revelatory and often whimsical fashion.

The Greeks, Theophrastus, and Plutarch, and the Romans, Cicero and Seneca, wrote essays long before the genre was given its standard name by Montaigne's great French *Essais* in 1550. The title signifies 'attempts' and was meant to indicate tentative and unsystematic nature of Montaigne's discussion. Francis Bacon, late in 16th century

inaugurated the English use of the term in his own series of Essays. Pope adopted the term for his expository compositions in verse and wrote the Essay on Criticism and the Essay on Man. Later on Addison and Steele, Hazlitt and Lamb contributed a great deal in the development of the essay.

PROBLEM PLAY:

Problem play is a fairly recent dramatic device which was popularized by Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen. The problem play depicts a particular social problem (e.g., women's right, slavery, drug, abuse etc) and attempts chiefly to arouse interest in the problem to explore it. The issue may be one of the inadequacies allowed to a woman in the middle class 19th century family (Ibsen's *A Doll's House*) or of the morality of prostitution, regarded as a typical economic aspect in a capitalist society (Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*); or of the crisis among the relations between black and white men and women in present day America (in numerous current dramas and films); or of the presentation of a political conflict (*The Apple Cart*).

One subtype of the problem play is the discussion play in which the social issue is not incorporated into a plot, but expounded in the dramatic give and take of a sustained debate among the characters (Shaw's *Man and Superman*). There are other terms like thesis play and propaganda play which are often linked with the type of the problem play. All these types are essentially didactic forms.