



English 11: World Literature

Glossary of Literary (Drama) Terms

In addition to these terms students should review elements of a plot map, types of characters, and common literary terms previously discussed in class.

act	A major division in a play. Often, individual acts are divided into smaller units ("scenes") that all take place in a specific location. A five act structure is a dramatic convention, but four three and two act plays are all used.
aside	In drama, a few words or a short passage spoken by one character to the audience while the other actors on stage pretend their characters cannot hear the speaker's words.
catharsis	An emotional discharge that brings about a moral or spiritual renewal or welcome relief from tension and anxiety. According to Aristotle, catharsis is the marking feature and ultimate end of any tragic artistic work.
climax	The moment in a play, novel, short story, or narrative poem at which the crisis reaches its point of greatest intensity and is thereafter resolved. It is also the peak of emotional response from a reader or spectator and usually the turning point in the action
comedy	In the original meaning of the word referred to a genre of drama during the Dionysia festivals of ancient Athens. Later, in medieval and Renaissance use, the word came to mean any play or narrative poem in which the main characters manage to avert an impending disaster and have a happy ending. Did not necessarily have to be funny, and indeed, many are serious in tone. It is only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that exclusive connotations of humor arose.
hamartia	A tragic flaw, especially a misperception, a lack of some important insight, or some blindness that ironically results from one's own strengths and abilities.
hubris	It is a negative term implying both arrogant, excessive self-pride or self-confidence, and also a hamartia (see above), a lack of some important perception or insight due to pride in one's abilities
monologue	Does not necessarily represent spoken words, but rather the internal or emotional thoughts or feelings of an individual. can also be used to refer to a character speaking aloud to himself, or narrating an account to an audience with no other character on stage
soliloquy	A monologue spoken by an actor at a point in the play when the character believes himself to be alone. The technique frequently reveals a character's innermost thoughts, including his feelings, state of mind, motives or intentions. It often provides necessary but otherwise inaccessible information to the audience. The dramatic convention is that whatever a character says to the audience must be true, or at least true in the eyes of the character speaking (i.e., the character may tell lies to mislead other characters in the play, but whatever he states in a soliloquy is a true reflection of what the speaker believes
tragedy	A serious play in which the chief character, by some peculiarity of psychology, passes through a series of misfortunes leading to a final, devastating catastrophe. According to Aristotle, catharsis is the marking feature and ultimate end of any _____
catastrophe	The "turning downward" of the plot in a classical tragedy. By tradition, the catastrophe occurs in the fourth act of the play after the climax.
dialogue	Conversation in a play, short story, or novel.

Elizabethan	Pertaining to the time when Elizabeth I reigned as queen of England. Elizabeth, born in 1533, reigned from 1558 until her death in 1603. <i>Elizabethan</i> may be used to describe the literature of the period (for example, Elizabethan poems and Elizabethan plays) or anything else associated with the age (such as Elizabethan costumes, Elizabethan customs, Elizabethan music, and so on).
dramatic Irony	Failure of a character to see or understand what is obvious to the audience. The most notable example of dramatic irony in all of literature occurs in <i>Oedipus Rex</i> , by Sophocles, when Oedipus fails to realize what the audience knows—that he married his own mother.
Exodus	In a drama of ancient Greece, the exit scene; the final part of the play
drama	Literary work with dialogue written in verse and/or prose and spoken by actors playing characters experiencing conflict and tension. The English word <i>drama</i> comes from the Greek word "dran," meaning "to do."
stage direction	The playwright's instructions about facial and vocal expression, movement, action, body language, stage appearance, lighting and similar matters.
cultural or universal symbols	Crosses, flags, snakes, and flowers are examples of symbols that are common throughout literature and are generally understood by the audience
contextual or private symbols	Symbols that develop within the context of a particular work. Meaning can only be acquired through context
nonrealistic setting	Setting is not lifelike, but rather nonrepresentational and symbolic
farce	Major purpose is to make audience laugh. Usually exaggerated emotions, actions, and dialogue. Plotting takes precedence over characterization
social or problem drama	Explores social problems and the individual's role in society. Can be comedy, drama or mixed.
melodrama	Resembles a tragedy, but takes a step back from tragic outcomes, usually a rescue occurs.

Dionysus	<p>Patron god of Greek drama; god of wine and vegetation. Dionysus, called Bacchus by the Romans, was the son of Zeus and one of the most important of the Greek gods. Dionysus died each winter and was reborn each spring, a cycle his Greek devotees identified with the death and rebirth of nature. He thus symbolized renewal and rejuvenation, and each spring the Greeks celebrated his resurrection with ceremonies that eventually included drama contests. The most prestigious of these festivals was the Greater Dionysia, held in Athens for five days and participated in by playwrights such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes</p>
<u>Chorus (Greek Play)</u>	<p>Bystanders in a Greek play who present odes on the action. A <i>parode</i> (or <i>parados</i>) is a song sung by the chorus when it enters. A <i>stasimon</i> is a song sung during the play, between episodes of action. The chorus generally had the following roles in the plays of Sophocles and other Greek playwrights: (1) <i>to explain the action</i>, (2) <i>to interpret the action in relation to the law of the state and the law of the Olympian gods</i>, (3) <i>to foreshadow the future</i>, (4) <i>to serve as an actor in the play</i>, (5) <i>to sing and/or dance</i>, and (6) <i>to give the author's views</i>. In some ways, the chorus is like the narrator of a modern film or like the background music accompanying the action of the film. In addition, it is like text on the film screen that provides background information or identifies the time and place of the action.</p>