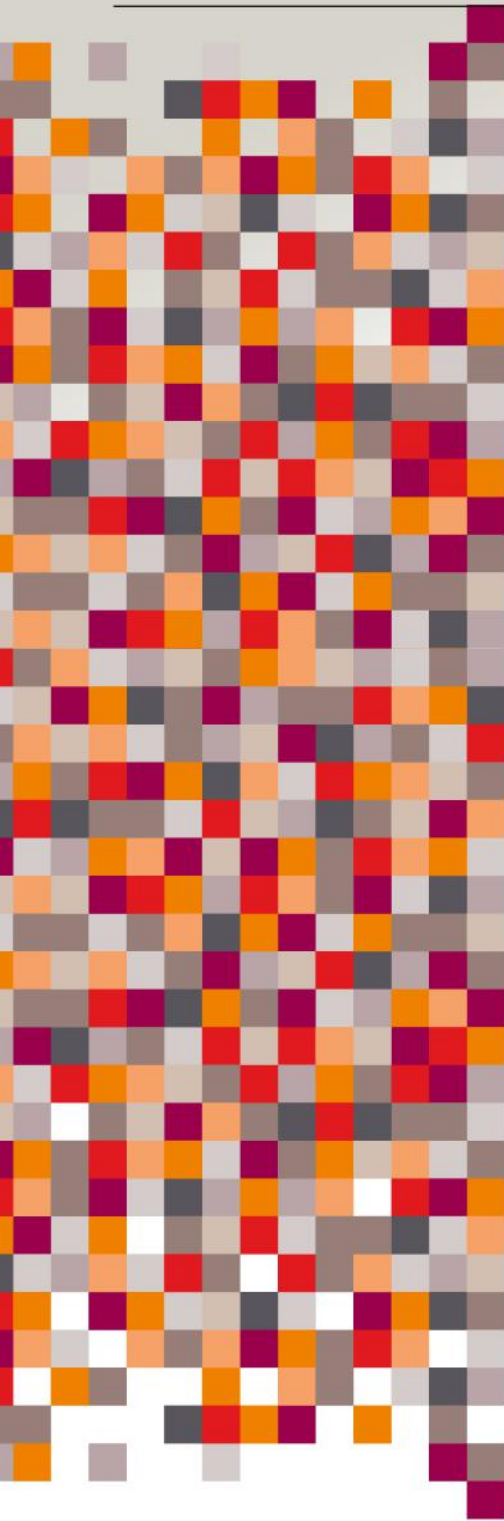


The Words of Literature



Poetry

Drama



Fiction

1

The Words of Poetry

Here are the basic words of poetry.



1 READ the following definitions of the basic words of poetry.

- 1 A line is a row of written or printed words.
- 2 A poem is a literary composition in which the words are chosen for their sound and imagery, and are arranged in separate lines.
- 3 Poetry is the art of writing poems.
- 4 A stanza is a group of lines forming a metrical unit in a poem.
- 5 The layout is the way in which words are arranged on a page.
- 6 Rhyme is the use of words with the same ending sound, especially at the ends of the lines of a poem.
- 7 Rhythm is a strong pattern of sound.

2 USE the correct form of the underlined words above to complete the following sentences.

- 1 The of that poem is very exciting.
- 2 One of the most famous by Shakespeare is 'To be, or not to be: that is the question'.
- 3 Seamus Heaney re-vitalised Irish in the 1960s.
- 4 You can 'house' with 'mouse' but not 'love' with 'more'.
- 5 This poem is composed of twelve lines divided into four three-line
- 6 Get students to write a little which they could recite.
- 7 The of your report is poorly organised.

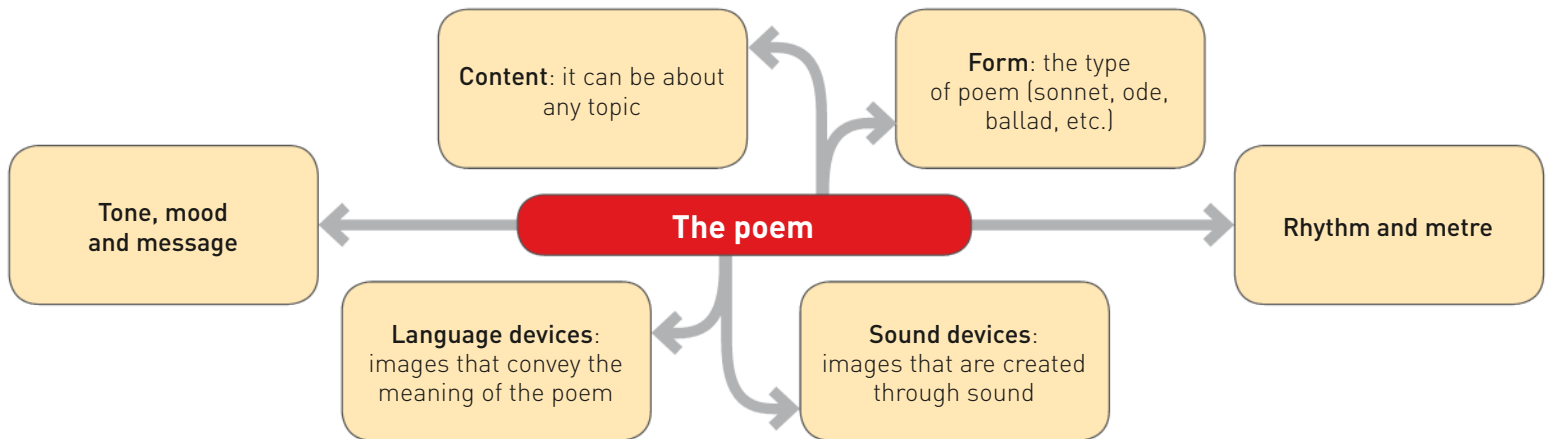
1.1 The basics of poetry

A composition in verse is called a **poem**. Its basic structural unit is the **line**. Lines can be arranged into different kinds of **stanzas**.

The types of stanzas are:

- the **couplet** (two lines);
- the **tercet** (three lines);
- the **quatrain** (four lines);
- the **sestet** (six lines);
- the **octave** (eight lines).

Poems consist of different elements that are combined together by the **poet** to offer an imaginative interpretation of a subject (→ Study Skill 4: Outline of a poetic text, p. 340).



1.2 Rhythm

Rhythm is a natural feature of language; although it is part of all good writing, it is most apparent in poetry, and gives it a distinct musical quality.

Unlike the Italian language, which is syllable-timed, English is **stress-timed**; therefore stress is always much more important to rhythm than syllables.

An important element of rhythm is **metre**, which is the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. It is measured in **feet**, which are groups of at least two syllables, one of which is stressed. Poems without a metre are said to be written in **free verse**.

Articles, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, prepositions and pronouns – the so-called ‘grammatical words’ – are usually **unstressed words**. Adjectives, nouns, main verbs and adverbs – the so-called ‘content words’ – are usually **stressed words**.

Stressed and unstressed syllables inside a word or a line can combine into different patterns:

- the **unstress-stress** pattern (˘/ˊ) is called **iamb** and it is the most common foot in English poetry;
- the **stress-unstress** pattern (ˊ/˘) is called **trochee**.

For many centuries the iambic foot, particularly the **iambic pentameter** (generally corresponding to 10 syllables), has been the most common metre in English poetry.

Call me / but love, / and I'll / be new / baptisēd;
(William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* → T16)

Like other aspects of a poem, rhythm helps give form to its meaning. The quality of rhythm – regular and irregular, slow and fast, flowing and quick, smooth and hammering – is usually linked to the subject matter and emotional content of a poem.

Individual lines may contain slight variations on the metre the poet is using; these prevent the metre from sounding rigid and predictable.

1.3 Sound devices

RHYME

Poems are said to rhyme when the last word of two or more lines has the same ending sound (**end-rhyme**). Conventionally, rhyme has often been used to mark the end of the line of verse. When rhyme is used within the line, it is called **internal rhyme**.

Rhymes are identified by the letters of the alphabet. The pattern they create is called a **rhyme scheme**.

Unrhymed poetry based on iambic pentameter is known as **blank verse**. The use of blank verse achieves extreme flexibility, almost giving poetry the quality of everyday speech. This is why it is often found in Elizabethan drama, for example in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (→ p. 148).

RUN-ON LINE (ENJAMBEMENT)

Lines are usually **end-stopped**, but if a line ends in the middle of a phrase and the meaning break comes in the next line, we call this the **run-on line** or use the French word **enjambement**.

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,*
(William Wordsworth, *Daffodils* → T47)

CAESURA

It is a pause, usually in the middle of a line, and generally shown by a punctuation mark.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* → T21)

ASSONANCE

The repetition of the same vowel sound can 'colour' part of a poem with that vowel quality. When the repetition of the sound is in stressed syllables which are near to each other, the device is called assonance.

*Gave thee life & bid thee feed,
By the stream & o'er the mead;*
(William Blake, *The Lamb* → T42)

ALLITERATION

The repetition of the same initial consonant sound in consecutive words or words which are close together is called alliteration.

Words sometimes begin with the same letter but not the same sound; 'the whole world' is not alliteration.

bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood
(Anonymous, *Beowulf* → T2)

ONOMATOPOEIA

The formation and use of words whose sound illustrates their meaning is called onomatopoeia; such words, like *crack*, *screech*, *bang*, *snuffle*, are onomatopoeic words.

*How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night! [...]
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,*
(Edgar Allan Poe, *The Bells*)

REPETITION AND REFRAIN

Phrases or lines may be repeated in the course of a poem to create a musical effect. This device is called 'repetition' and sometimes 'refrain'. Refrains often come in ballads as questions repeated at the beginning of every stanza.

*O where ha' you been, Lord Randal my son?
And where ha' you been, my handsome young man?
I ha' been at the greenwood; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' hunting and fain wad lie down.*

(Anonymous, *Lord Randal* → T5)

1.4 Language devices

A poem conveys its meaning through words chosen and arranged in images, not only on the basis of the dictionary definition – **denotation** –, but in the light of the associations and feelings they evoke in the reader's mind – **connotation**. Poets often draw words from the same **semantic area**, such as nature, war, the law.

The type of vocabulary or syntax employed in a poem determines the **tone**, which is able to create a particular atmosphere and evoke peculiar moods. The tone of a poem may be: happy and melancholic, joyous and sad, calm and protesting, cold and humorous, resigned and passionate.

There are several **figures of speech** an author can use to communicate abstract concepts in terms of concrete images.

SIMILE

A simile is a comparison between two things, which is made explicit through the use of a specific word of comparison such as 'like', 'as', 'than' or 'resembles'. A simile is usually more striking if it compares two essentially unlike things. The functions of a simile are:

- to convey a more vivid idea of the scene or object;
- to make the meaning easier to understand;
- to introduce an element of surprise;
- to create an emotional response in the reader.

*This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning;*

(William Wordsworth, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* → T46)

The simile 'like a garment' compares London's early morning beauty to someone wearing a beautiful piece of clothing.

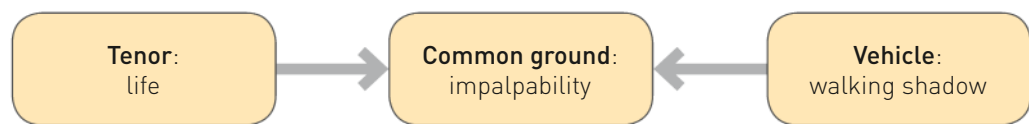
METAPHOR

Unlike simile, metaphor is a means of comparison between two things that are basically dissimilar without connective words such as 'like' or 'as'.

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,

(William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* → T27)

The critic I.A. Richards has pointed out the elements of a metaphor: the **tenor** (the subject of the metaphor) and the **vehicle** (what the subject is compared to). The analogy between them, the ideas they share, are called **common ground**.



This scheme can also be applied to the simile. Simile and metaphor have more or less the same functions, even if the latter has a stronger emotional impact due to its power to compress meaning in a single image.

PERSONIFICATION

Personification is a form of imagery which attributes the characteristics of a human being to abstract things, animals or inanimate objects.

*When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath*

(Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* → 1.10)

In these lines Chaucer speaks about the spring wind. Personification can be recognised by the use of the capital letter, the possessive adjective, and the noun and verb referring to human actions.

SYMBOL

A symbol is any thing, person, place or action that has a literal meaning and also stands for something else, such as a quality, an attitude, a belief or a value. For example, a rose is often the symbol of love and beauty; a skull is a symbol of death; spring and winter symbolise respectively youth and old age.

ALLEGORY

Allegory combines a number of different symbols into a totality, often a story. For example, in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (→ 1.13) the pilgrimage to Canterbury can be read as an allegory of the journey towards the celestial city.

OXYMORON

An oxymoron is the combination of two usually contradictory things. It is sometimes used to express extreme feelings.

dear enemy, sweet sorrow

HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole means exaggeration of a quantity, a quality or a concept. It is used in everyday language.

I have told you a thousand times.

LITOTES

Litotes is the contrary to hyperbole, a rhetorical understatement in which the negative of the opposite meaning is used.

You will find him not ill-disposed. (= He will be favourably disposed.)

THE LANGUAGE OF SENSE IMPRESSIONS

In order to convey his/her perception of reality, the poet often employs words and expressions which generate visual, auditory, olfactory or tactile images. In other words, the poet uses the language of sense impressions, which includes nouns, adjectives and verbs. Finding the words referring to the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch – in a poem is important to re-create the poet's physical experience and to understand its contribution to the meaning of the poem. Verbs such as *to see, to look, to stare* introduce the sense of sight together with the adjectives referring to colours. Temperature, texture and materials convey touch, while verbs of sound are linked to hearing.

1.5 Satire, irony and humour

SATIRE

Satire is the use of humour, irony or exaggeration to criticise certain qualities or behaviour. Two ideas of satire come from Roman culture: one expresses a basic instinct for comedy through mockery of human beings; the other implies the desire of the poet/satirist to instruct his/her readers by setting moral standards to reform social conduct or denouncing everything in human nature that he/she finds distasteful. No sharp distinction can be made between these two kinds of satire since the tone of the satirist's attack can range from light humour to biting sarcasm according to the degree of indignation.

Satire has been used since the beginnings of English literature. For example, Chaucer (→ 1.13) satirised the corruption of the Church in *The Canterbury Tales*. The 18th century is considered the golden age of satire, with artists like William Hogarth (→ CLIL Art, p. 207), and authors like Alexander Pope (→ Text Bank 20), who attacked the social follies of the time, Henry Fielding (→ Text Bank 22-23) and Jonathan Swift (→ 3.11).

IRONY

Irony is used to add humour or emphasis. When irony is used as a literary tool, what is said is not a direct, open attack on the subject. The ironist wishes to surprise the reader; he/she does not want to change or reform, but simply to create awareness in the reader.

There are three kinds of irony.

1 Verbal irony, in which the writer says one thing and means something completely different. An example of verbal irony can be found in *The Prioress* (→ T7) from *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer:

*She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.*

2 Dramatic irony, in which the reader or the audience perceive something which a character does not know. An example of dramatic irony can be found in *Macbeth* Act I, Scene VI, in which Duncan visits Macbeth's castle where later he will be murdered:

DUNCAN *This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.*

3 Situational irony, in which a discrepancy between the expected results of a situation and its actual results is shown. An example of situational irony can be found in *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift, where there is a discrepancy between the Lilliputians' description of the objects they find on Gulliver's body and what they actually find (→ T38).

HUMOUR

Humour differs both from satire and from irony since it does not deride or hint at, but it simply evokes laughter as an end in itself. In other words, the humorist sees the faults of his/her subject but accepts them and laughs at them.

What follows is a poem by Britain's Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy (1955-) in which there are good examples of poetic devices.



Alliteration

Onomatopoeia

Assonance

Repetition

Metaphor

Simile

Language of the senses

Safe Sounds

CAROL ANN DUFFY

New and Collected Poems for Children (2009)

You like **safe sounds**:
the dogs **lapping** at their bowls;
the **pop** of a **cork**¹ on a **bottle** of **plonk**²
as your mother cooks;
5 the *Match of the Day* theme **tune**
and *Doctor Who-oo-oo*³.

Stanza

Safe sounds:
your name **called**, two happy syllables
from the **bottom** to the top of the house;
10 your **daft ring tone**⁴; the **low gargle**⁵
of hot water in bubbles. Half asleep
in the **drifting**⁶ **boat** of your bed,
you like to **hear the big trees**
sound like the sea instead.

Caesura



Run-on line / Enjambement

- 1 cork. Tappo di sughero.
- 2 plonk. Vino scadente.
- 3 *Match of the Day ... Doctor Who-oo-oo*. Programmi della TV britannica.
- 4 daft ring tone. Sciocca suoneria.
- 5 gargle. Gargarismo.
- 6 drifting. Alla deriva.

2

The Words of Drama

Here are the basic words of drama.



1 WRITE the words above next to their definition.

- 1 A part of a play in which the action remains in one place for a continuous period of time.
.....
- 2 A play that ends sadly.
- 3 The action of entertaining other people by dancing, singing, acting or playing music.
.....
- 4 A piece of writing that is intended to be acted in a theatre.
- 5 A play which is amusing.
- 6 The area in a theatre where actors perform.
- 7 The public at a theatre.
- 8 A person who writes a play.
- 9 A main division of a play.
- 10 Descriptions or instructions in the text of a play explaining how it should be performed.
.....
- 11 Written plays intended for performance on the stage.

2.1 The elements of drama

One of the most important features of drama is its non-repetitiveness: this is a consequence of the fact that any dramatic work is a collective event which involves various elements:

- a playwright → the **addresser**;
- a written text (the play) → the **message**;
- actors, director, designers, musicians → the **performance**;
- audience → the **addressee**.

Therefore drama implies a real moment of communication from author to audience through the actors, and it relies on the immediate response of the public. In addition, the same work can be performed in a different way according to the period and the sensibility of the director, the actors and the audience.

2.2 The structure of a dramatic text

A play usually consists of a number of **acts** divided into **scenes** (→ Study Skill 11: Outline of a dramatic text, p. 345). All Shakespearean plays, for example, are made up of five acts:

- Act 1: **introduction**;
- Act 2: **development**;
- Act 3: **crisis** or **turning point**;
- Act 4: **complication**;
- Act 5: **resolution**, or *denouement*, that is, the resolving of all difficulties.

Tragedies are generally introduced by a **prologue** spoken by the chorus or one of the characters from the play; the prologue provides information about the main characters or the subject of the play. Often an **epilogue** follows the play in order to request applause. It is usually performed/ spoken by a central character, as opposed to the classical epilogue, usually acted by an anonymous character or a masked performer.

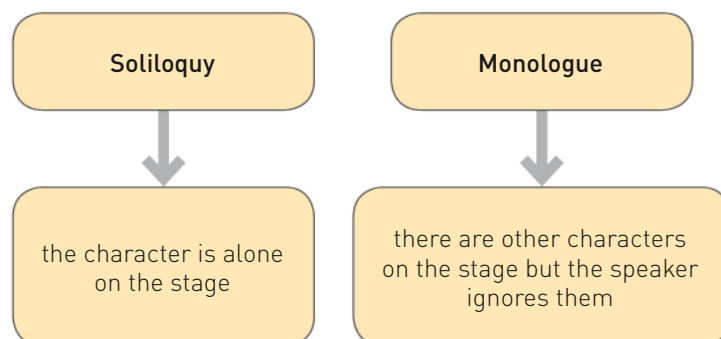
A **one-act play** has only one act and may include one or more scenes.

2.3 Dramatic techniques

Dialogue is the main support of drama since:

- it creates the action;
- it provides details about the characters and their relationships;
- it shows what a character thinks about another;
- it gives information about the past and can foreshadow subsequent events;
- it contributes to the development of themes and ideas that are important to the play.

Soliloquy and **monologue** are special conventions: in the former the character speaking is alone on the stage, in the latter there are other characters but the speaker ignores them.



These devices enable the playwright to let the audience know the character's:

- thoughts about a specific problem;
- plans for the future;
- feelings and reactions;
- explanation of what happens between scenes.

Asides are short comments made by a character for the audience alone, usually occurring in or between speeches. Their purpose can be:

- to reveal the nature of the speaker;
- to draw the attention of the audience to the importance of what has been said or to explain developments;
- to create humour by introducing the unexpected.

Stage directions are the instructions a playwright gives to the director and the actors about how a play should be staged. They provide information about:

- the setting;
- the characters' actions and movements;
- the style of acting.

2.4 Characters

The number of characters, which were called *dramatis personae* in the past, may vary but usually includes:

- a **hero**;
- a **heroine**;
- an **antagonist**, the protagonist's main opponent. The antagonist is usually the villain of the play, who performs all sorts of evil actions.

The hero is not necessarily 'heroic' in the sense of being brave and noble. For example, the hero of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a weak character full of doubts.

When analysing a character, you should take into consideration:

1 how the character is presented:

- through dialogue;
- through monologues and soliloquies;
- through asides;
- through stage directions, which may include a description of the character's personality, attitudes and values.

2 his/her development throughout the play:

- how he/she changes, why and when;
- his/her motivation to action;
- his/her relationship with other characters.

2.5 Language

The language of drama is particularly **intense** and **varied** because it can share the features of everyday speech, of poetry or of prose. Also a variety of points of view gives vitality to a dramatic text:

- the character's, depending on his/her knowledge of facts and his/her opinions;
- the playwright's: he/she does not interfere directly but determines the development of the story;
- the audience's, influenced by what they watch, hear and know.

What follows is an example of the use of dialogue and stage directions in contemporary drama. *The Zoo Story* (1959) is a one-act play by Edward Albee (1928-) with two characters, Peter and Jerry. Peter is a successful upper-middle class man in his early forties; he wears tweeds and smokes a pipe. Jerry is a carelessly dressed man in his late thirties who used to be handsome and slim. He lives in poverty in the Upper West Side and feels very lonely. They meet in New York City's Central Park on a Sunday afternoon in summer.

At Central Park

EDWARD ALBEE

The Zoo Story (1959)

[At the beginning PETER is seated on one of the benches. As the curtain rises, PETER is seated on the bench stage-right. He is reading a book. He stops reading, cleans his glasses, goes back to reading. JERRY enters.]

JERRY I've been to the zoo. [PETER doesn't notice.] I said, I've been to the zoo. MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!

PETER Hm? ... What? ... I'm sorry, were you talking to me?

JERRY I went to the zoo, and then I walked until I came here. Have I been walking north?

PETER [puzzled¹] North? Why ... I ... I think so. Let me see.

JERRY [pointing past the audience] Is that Fifth Avenue?

PETER Why yes; yes, it is.

JERRY And what is that cross street there; that one, to the right?

PETER That? Oh, that's Seventy-fourth Street.

JERRY And the zoo is around Sixty-fifth Street; so, I've been walking north.

PETER [anxious to get back to his reading] Yes; it would seem so.

JERRY Good old north.

PETER [lightly, by reflex] Ha, ha.

JERRY [after a slight pause] But not due north².

PETER I ... well, no, not due north; but, we ... call it north. It's northerly³.

JERRY [watches as PETER, anxious to dismiss⁴ him, prepares his pipe] Well, boy, you're not going to get lung cancer, are you?

PETER [looks up, a little annoyed, then smiles] No, sir. Not from this.

JERRY No, sir. What you'll probably get is cancer of the mouth, and then you'll have to wear one of those things Freud wore after they took one whole side of his jaw⁵ away. What do they call those things?

PETER [uncomfortable] A prosthesis⁶?

JERRY The very thing! A prosthesis. You're an educated man, aren't you? Are you a doctor?

PETER Oh, no; no. I read about it somewhere: Time magazine, I think. [He turns to his book.]

JERRY Well, Time magazine isn't for blockheads⁷.

PETER No, I suppose not.

JERRY [after a pause] Boy, I'm glad that's Fifth Avenue there.

PETER [vaguely] Yes.

JERRY I don't like the west side of the park much.

PETER Oh? [Then, slightly wary⁸, but interested.] Why?

JERRY [offhand⁹] I don't know.

PETER Oh. [He returns to his book.]

JERRY [stands for a few seconds, looking at PETER, who finally looks up again, puzzled] Do you mind if we talk?

PETER [obviously minding] Why ... no, no.

JERRY Yes you do; you do.

PETER [puts his book down, his pipe away, and smiling] No, really; I don't mind.

JERRY Yes you do.

PETER [finally decided] No; I don't mind at all, really.

1 *puzzled*. Perplesso.

2 *due north*. Diretto proprio a nord.

3 *northerly*. Diretto a nord.

4 *dismiss*. Congedare.

5 *jaw*. Mascella.

6 *prosthesis*. Pròtesi.

7 *blockheads*. Zucconi, teste di legno.

8 *slightly wary*. Un po' diffidente.

9 *offhand*. Bruscamente.



JERRY It's ... it's a nice day.
 PETER [*stares*¹⁰ *unnecessarily at the sky*] Yes. Yes, *it is; lovely*.
 45 JERRY I've been to the zoo.
 PETER Yes, *I think you said so ... didn't you?*
 JERRY You'll read about it in the papers tomorrow, if you don't see it on your TV tonight. You have TV, haven't you?
 PETER Why yes, we have two; one for the children.
 50 JERRY You're married!
 PETER [*with pleased emphasis*] Why, certainly.
 JERRY It isn't a law, *for God's sake*.
 PETER No ... no, of course not.
 JERRY And you have a wife.
 55 PETER [*bewildered*¹¹ *by the seeming lack of communication*] Yes!
 JERRY And you have children.
 PETER Yes; two.
 JERRY Boys?
 PETER No, girls ... both girls.
 60 JERRY But you wanted boys.
 PETER Well ... naturally, every man wants a son, but ...
 JERRY [*lightly mocking*¹²] But *that's the way the cookie crumbles*¹³?
 PETER [*annoyed*] I wasn't going to say that.
 JERRY And you're not going to have any more kids, are you?
 65 PETER [*a bit distantly*] No. No more. [*Then back, and irksome*¹⁴.] Why did you say that? How would you know about that?
 JERRY The way you cross your legs, perhaps; something in the voice. Or maybe I'm just guessing¹⁵. Is it your wife?
 PETER [*furious*] That's none of your business! [*A silence.*] Do you understand?
 70 [*JERRY nods*¹⁶. *PETER is quiet now.*] Well, you're right. We'll have no more children.
 JERRY [*softly*] *That is the way the cookie crumbles.*
 PETER [*forgiving*] Yes ... I guess so.

10 *stares*. Fissa.
 11 *bewildered*. Confuso.
 12 *lightly mocking*. Leggermente beffardo.
 13 *that's ... crumbles*. Così va il mondo.
 14 *irksome*. Irritante.
 15 *I'm just guessing*. Provo a indovinare.
 16 *nods*. Annuisce.



- Stage direction providing information about the setting
- Stage direction providing information about the characters' actions and movements
- Stage direction providing information about the style of acting
- Character's point of view
- I'm sorry* Peter's polite, formal language shows the character's attitude and background
- you're not* Jerry's colloquial, informal language shows the character's attitude and background
- The dialogue provides information about the characters' relationship
- The dialogue provides information about the character's past
- Humorous play on words

2.6 The tragedy

The tragedy became a popular type of drama starting with ancient Greece. Its protagonists were not everyday people and they suffered a fall from a high status, often due to a tragic flaw. Classical tragic plays usually have the following elements:

- the **prologue**, which sets the scene of the story, introduces the characters and the main themes; in some tragedies, for example in *Romeo and Juliet* (→ T14), it is spoken by a chorus, which in classical Greek drama is a group of actors who comment on the main action or advise the main characters;
- the **Aristotelian unities**: one time, one action and one place;
- the concept of **catharsis** (a Greek word which means 'purification'), a process in which strong emotions are experienced by the audience;
- the **heroes/heroines** are often kings, princes and warriors;
- the hero/heroine falls from a position of power or strength and the play often ends with his/her **death**;
- his/her fall may be due to **inner weakness** (known as tragic flaw – ambition, weakness, jealousy), **external circumstances** (fate) or a combination of these, which leads him/her to suffering, madness or suicide. In this case the character is called a tragic hero because he/she experiences his/her own destruction;
- there is generally a **villain** who is guilty of some action which he must expiate through death.

Greek tragedies treated a serious subject matter with a solemn style and elevated language, while English Renaissance tragedies tended to mix tragic with comic.

What follows is an example of a monologue from Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* (→ p. 134), where Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, expresses his sorrow and sense of unease about his father's death and the immediate re-marriage of his mother Gertrude to his uncle Claudius.



that **Alliteration**
flesh **Assonance**



Enjambement

Repetition

Metaphor: Hamlet compares the world around him to a garden that is overgrown with weeds and not looked after

Symbol: Hyperion is the Sun god and is the symbol of Hamlet's father; the satyr is a lascivious character and is the symbol of Hamlet's uncle

Rhetorical question

Simile: Gertrude's desire for her husband used to increase in the same way that your appetite increases when you are eating

An excellent king

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Hamlet (1601)

Act I, Scene II

O, that **this too, too solid flesh** would melt,
Thaw¹ and resolve itself into a dew²!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon³ 'gainst **self-slaughter!** O God! God!
5 How weary⁴, stale⁵, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all **the uses of this world!**
Fie⁶ on't! ah fie! 'tis an **unweeded⁷ garden,**
That grows to seed; things rank⁸ and gross in nature
Possess it merely⁹. That it should come to this!
10 But **two months dead: nay¹⁰, not so much, not two:**
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion¹¹ to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem¹² the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly¹³. Heaven and earth!
15 **Must I remember?** why, she would hang on him¹⁴,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month –
Let me not think on't – Frailty¹⁵, thy name is woman! –



Character's feelings and reactions



Explanation of what happens between scenes



Thoughts about a specific problem

1 Thaw. Si scioglierebbe.

2 resolve ... dew. Si trasformerebbe in rugiada.

3 canon. Legge.

4 weary. Sfiniti.

5 stale. Stantii.

6 Fie. Vergogna.

7 unweeded. Incolto.

8 rank. Fetide.

9 merely. Semplicemente.

10 nay. (Arc.) No.

11 Hyperion. Nella mitologia greca era uno dei Titani, spesso identificato con il dio Sole.

12 beteem. Permettere.

13 roughly. Aspramente.

14 would hang on him. Era solita pendere dalle sue labbra.

15 Frailty. Debolezza (morale).

2.7 The comedy

Classical comedy began in ancient Greece with the aim of amusing and entertaining the audience. The comedy has maintained some fixed features through the centuries:

- it generally deals with **ordinary characters** set in **everyday situations** in an amusing way;
- it usually begins with misfortunes; classical comedy begins and ends with **happy resolution**;
- the **playwright** is generally the **mouthpiece** of the vices and follies of the society he/she belongs to;
- specific **sets of comic characters** are developed: they do not evolve in the course of the play and their names sometimes reveal their nature;
- the plot is mainly based on **love** and relies on **witty dialogue** and deliberate misunderstandings, plays on words and disguise.

The following table summarises the main features of comedy and tragedy.

Comedy	Tragedy
It generally deals with ordinary characters set in everyday situations in an amusing way.	The heroes/heroines are never common people but kings, princes and warriors. They are not free but dominated by fate. There is generally a villain who is guilty of some action which he must expiate through death.
It usually begins with misunderstandings but does not end with the death of the main character(s).	It usually starts with misfortunes, wrongs or violation of accepted rules. It ends with the death of one or more of its characters.
It has a humorous language and frequent plays on words. The playwright generally mocks the vices and follies of the society he/she lives in.	It has a solemn style and elevated language.
Specific sets of comic characters are developed: they do not evolve in the course of the play and their names sometimes reveal their nature.	The hero/heroine sometimes presents a flaw – ambition, weakness, jealousy – which leads him/her to suffering, madness or suicide. In this case the character is called a tragic hero because after coming close to success and showing courage, he/she experiences his/her own destruction.
The plot is mainly based on love and relies on witty dialogue.	The main themes are ambition, revenge, jealousy and hatred. There is frequent use of monologue and soliloquy.

You are going to read an extract from one of the most famous of Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) comedies, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). The wealthy Algernon Moncrieff is in his flat in London's fashionable West End. Lane, his servant, is preparing tea. Mr Jack Worthing, a friend of Algernon's and known to him as Ernest, arrives.

My name is Ernest

OSCAR WILDE

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)

Act I

ALGERNON Bring me that cigarette case¹ Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

LANE Yes, sir. [*LANE goes out.*]

JACK Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish
5 to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard² about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward³.

ALGERNON Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up⁴.

JACK There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.
[*Enter LANE with the cigarette case on a salver*⁵. *ALGERNON takes it at once.*
LANE goes out.]

ALGERNON I think that is rather mean⁶ of you, Ernest, I must say. [*Opens case and examines it.*] However, it makes no matter⁷, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

1 cigarette case. Portasigarette di metallo.

2 Scotland Yard. Sede della Polizia Metropolitana di Londra.

3 reward. Ricompensa.

4 hard up. Al verde.

5 salver. Vassoio da portata.

6 mean. Meschino.

7 it ... no matter. Non importa.

- 8 **whatsoever.** Proprio, veramente.
 9 **hard-and-fast.** Rigida.
 10 **happens to be.** Si dà il caso che sia.
 11 **Tunbridge Wells.** Tranquilla cittadina nel sud-est dell'Inghilterra.
 12 **make out.** Capire.
 13 **earnest.** Onesta, sincera.
 14 **cards.** Biglietti da visita.
 15 **B. 4, The Albany.** Un esclusivo gruppo di appartamenti per uomini soli vicino a Piccadilly Circus.
 16 **old boy.** Vecchio mio.
 17 **have ... out.** Confessare l'intera storia; farti togliere qualcosa (un dente).
 18 **false impression.** Falsa impressione; impronta (in odontoiatria).
 19 **Bunburyist.** Persona fittizia.
 20 **pray.** Spera di.



- LANE** Stage directions provide information about the setting and the characters' movements
- Ordinary characters set in everyday situations in an amusing way
- Deliberate misunderstandings: the protagonist is Ernest in the city, and Jack in the country
- Paradoxes
- Puns
- Witty dialogue

- JACK** Of course it's mine. [*Moving to him.*] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever⁸ to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.
- ALGERNON** Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast⁹ rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.
- JACK** I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.
- ALGERNON** Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name.
- JACK** Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be¹⁰ my aunt.
- ALGERNON** Your aunt!
- JACK** Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells¹¹. Just give it back to me, Algy.
- ALGERNON** [*retreating to back of sofa*] But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [*Reading.*] 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.'
- JACK** [*moving to sofa and kneeling upon it*] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [*Follows ALGERNON round the room.*]
- ALGERNON** Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out¹². Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.
- JACK** It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.
- ALGERNON** You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest¹³ looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards¹⁴. Here is one of them. [*Taking it from case.*] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany¹⁵. I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else. [*Puts the card in his pocket.*]
- JACK** Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.
- ALGERNON** Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy¹⁶, you had much better have the thing out¹⁷ at once.
- JACK** My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression¹⁸.
- ALGERNON** Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist¹⁹; and I am quite sure of it now.
- JACK** Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?
- ALGERNON** I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.
- JACK** Well, produce my cigarette case first.
- ALGERNON** Here it is. [*Hands cigarette case.*] Now produce your explanation, and pray²⁰ make it improbable. [*Sits on sofa.*]

3

The Words of Fiction

Here are the basic words of fiction.



1 WRITE the words above next to their definition.

- 1 The class of literature comprising works of imaginative narration, especially in prose.
.....
- 2 The pattern of events that make up a story.
- 3 A brief fictional work of prose.
- 4 The voice that tells the story.
- 5 The place and time in which the action of a story happens.
- 6 A person represented in a story.
- 7 The main subject of a story.
- 8 A main division of a book, treatise or the like, usually bearing a number or title.
.....
- 9 The angle from which the story is told.
- 10 A lengthy and complex piece of prose with a series of events and characters.

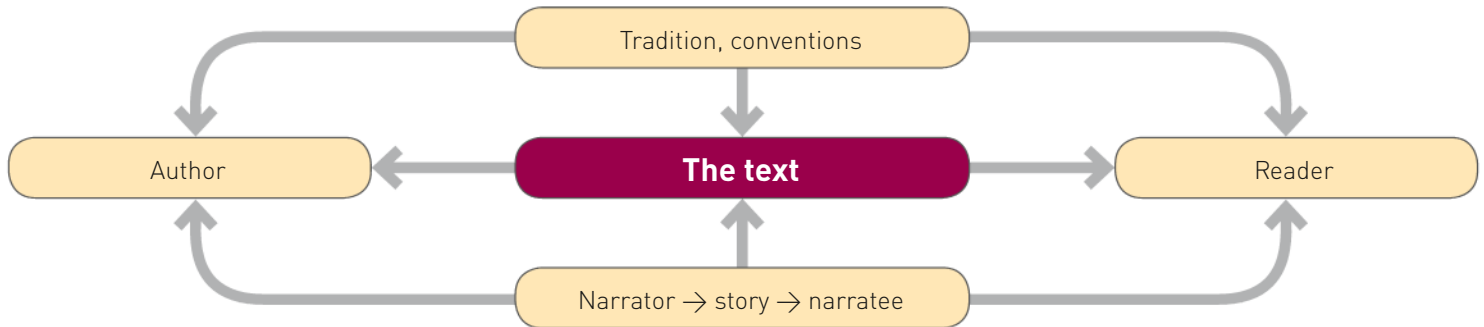
3.1 The features of a narrative text

The commonest form of **fiction** as a genre, the **novel**, emerged in its modern form in 18th-century Europe. In England, in particular, the novel was associated not with the aristocracy, but with the rising middle classes (→ 3.8). The novel is written in **prose**, rather than verse, even if it can include poetic elements.

The novel is a **narrative**: in other words, it 'tells' a story. It has **characters**, **action** and a **plot**. It involves people who act in a context ruled by some sort of connective logic like chronology or cause-and-effect.

The novel involves the exploration of an issue of human importance whose complexity requires a certain length.

Whenever we read a narrative text, we should bear in mind that it implies a complex form of communication on several levels, as exemplified in the diagram below.



The author belongs to a tradition of shared conventions and codes, and addresses the reader of his/her time, but at the same time he/she addresses an ideal reader of no specific time or place. At a deeper level there is a communication process within the text, where the **narrator** is the speaking voice and the **narratee** the addressee of the narration (→ Study Skill 13: Outline of a narrative text, p. 347).

STORY AND PLOT

A narrative text is made up of a sequence of events, the **story**, that are not always presented in chronological order. The author can combine them in different ways using flashbacks, anticipation of events, digressions or by omitting details of the story. This original sequence of events is the **plot**.

The pattern the author imposes on the action of the novel generally includes four stages:

- the **introduction** of the situation;
- the **breakdown** of the initial situation;
- the **development** of the story to the **climax**;
- the **end**, where the initial situation can be restored or changed.

Studying a narrative text does not simply mean reading it, but being conscious in your reading of some elements that can help you preserve details that would otherwise be lost. Below are some suggestions of the sorts of things you might look out for and notice while you are reading a novel.

SETTING

The setting is the **place** and the **time** of the story.

Place settings can be interior or exterior and deal with the description of the landscape, interiors and objects. Time settings usually refer to the time of the day, the season, the year; but it is important to be aware of the context within which the action of a novel takes place, so social and historical factors are also important.

THE CINEMATIC TECHNIQUE

The so-called 'cinematic' novelists anticipated the cinema, since their works were published before film had evolved as a narrative medium. Throughout the 19th century, novelists cultivated the 'camera eye' and 'camera movement', moving into their subjects using a zoom-like effect followed by close-ups from the city into the street, from the street into the house, taking the reader from room to room.

The wide, panoramic, aerial views are characteristic ways of introducing an action; they may be 'bird's-eye', that is, not too high, simply from elevated ground. The narration resembles motion-pictures as it unfolds in a series of images in which the characters and objects are described and seen in different positions, sometimes in quick succession, since people move up into the middle distance or foreground, or alternatively recede and diminish. Elements like clouds, mist or rain are often combined with a receding shot to create what in a film are scenes that fade or dissolve.

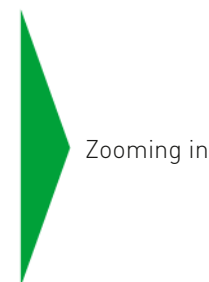
What follows is an extract from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe (→ 4.6).

The door

ANN RADCLIFFE

The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)

A return of the noise again disturbed her; it seemed to come from that part of the room which communicated with the private staircase, and she instantly remembered the odd circumstance of the door having been fastened¹, during the preceding night, by
 5 some unknown hand. Her late alarming suspicion concerning its communication also occurred to her. Her heart became faint² with terror. Half raising herself from the bed, and gently drawing aside the curtain, she looked towards the door of the staircase, but the lamp that burned on the hearth³ spread⁴ so feeble a light through
 10 the apartment, that the remote parts of it were lost in shadow. The noise, however, which she was convinced came from the door, continued. It seemed like that made by the un-drawing of rusty bolts⁵, and often ceased, and was then renewed more gently, as if the hand that occasioned it was restrained⁶ by a fear of discovery. While
 15 Emily kept her eyes fixed on the spot, she saw the door move, and then slowly open, and perceived something enter the room, but the extreme duskiness⁷ prevented her distinguishing what it was.



1 fastened. Chiusa a chiave.

2 became faint. Fu sul punto di svenire.

3 hearth. Focolare.

4 spread. Diffondeva.

5 un-drawing of rusty bolts. L'apertura dei catenacci arrugginiti.

6 restrained. Controllata.

7 duskiness. Oscurità.

3.2 Narrator

An essential element of a narrative text is the **speaking voice**, that is, the narrator. The narrator is not the author of a book; the author is a person, with his/her own experiences, personality and ideas. The narrator is the voice that tells the story and gives the point of view from which the story is told. The narrator may be **internal** or **external**. The internal narrator is a character in the story, either the protagonist or a witness. The external narrator may be a voice outside the story that describes events he/she has not taken part in.

The narrator can also be **first-person** or **third-person**.

FIRST-PERSON NARRATOR

The first-person narrator employs the '**I** mode'; it can coincide with a character in the story or the protagonist who tells about his/her life. The choice of this narrator can have the following functions:

- to bring the reader close to the mind and feelings of the narrator;
- to convey an impression of reality;
- to restrict the reader's perspective.

THIRD-PERSON NARRATOR

The third-person narrator tells the story from the **outside**. He/She can be **obtrusive** when he/she makes personal remarks and digressions or provides a comment on the society of the time, or on some of the characters. The obtrusive narrator takes away the illusion of reality and reduces the emotional intensity of what is being told by focusing on the act of narrating. The narrator is **unobtrusive** when he/she shows what happens but does not interfere with the story; he/she acts like a camera.

OMNISCIENT NARRATOR

The omniscient narrator is one that **knows the feelings and thoughts** of every character in the story. By using an omniscient narrative, an author can bring all the characters to life and allow different voices to interpret the events while also keeping a distance. Omniscience is often a feature of third-person narration.

NARRATIVE MODES

The author chooses the way to tell his/her story between **dialogue**, **description** or **narration**. These modes are usually interwoven according to the writer's aims.

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is the **angle(s)** from which the scene is described and the story told. It is influenced by the kind of narrator. It can be the point of view of one of the characters or it can be neutral. It can remain fixed or change within the narration.

What follows are the opening lines of the novel *Angela's Ashes* (1996) by Frank McCourt (1930-2009), where the narrator introduces his family on their departure from New York to live in Limerick, Ireland.

Back to Ireland

FRANK MCCOURT

Angela's Ashes (1996)



New York Setting in place; the setting in this extract is almost a protagonist of the story

the Feast Setting in time

Irish Setting in a social/historical context

First-person narrator

The town of Limerick is described through the language of the senses

My father and mother should have stayed in **New York** where they met and married and where I was born. Instead, they returned **to Ireland** when I was four, my brother, Malachy, three, the twins, Oliver and Eugene, barely¹ one, and my sister, Margaret, dead and gone.

5 When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while². Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable **Irish childhood**, and worse yet is the miserable **Irish Catholic childhood**.

10 People everywhere brag and whimper³ about the woes⁴ of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: **the poverty**; the shiftless loquacious⁵ alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning⁶ by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; **the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years**.

Above all - **we were wet**.

15 **Out in the Atlantic Ocean** great sheets of rain gathered to drift slowly up⁷ the **River Shannon** and **settle forever in Limerick**. The rain dampened⁸ the city from the Feast of the Circumcision to New Year's Eve. It created a cacophony of hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes, consumptive croaks⁹. [...]

From October to April the walls of Limerick glistened¹⁰ with the damp.

1 **barely**. Appena.
2 **is hardly worth your while**. Non varrebbe la pena.
3 **brag and whimper**. Si vanta e si lamenta.

4 **woes**. Dolori, problemi.
5 **shiftless loquacious**. Inetto chiacchierone.
6 **moaning**. Che si lamenta.
7 **to drift ... up**. Per risalire lentamente.

8 **dampened**. Bagnava.
9 **cacophony ... croaks**. Cacofonia di tossi secche, raspi bronchiali, ansimi asmatici, gracchi tubercolotici.
10 **glistened**. Luccicavano.

3.3 Characters

Characters are the people who appear in a novel and represent the most important ingredient in the world of fiction. The presentation of a character can be **direct** (through the description which the writer makes of his/her personality and appearance) or **indirect** (when the reader has to discover what the character is like from his/her actions, reactions, feelings and thoughts). The two methods of presentation are often mixed by authors in order to create portraits that are realistic but also provide a psychological insight into the inner life of their characters.

Depending on their role in the story, there can be **major** and **minor** characters. A further distinction can be made between **round** and **flat** characters. Flat characters can also be called 'types' or 'caricatures'. They are built around a single psychological trait or quality and they do not change throughout the story. However, this does not mean they are always less important than round characters. Round characters grow and develop as the narration unfolds and influence the development of the story. They are more complex than 'types' and have more than one facet to their characters.

What follows are the opening lines of the novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817) by Jane Austen (→ 4.16), where the author introduces the heroine, Catherine Morland.

Not born to be a heroine

JANE AUSTEN

Northanger Abbey (1817)

Chapter I

No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in **her** infancy would have supposed **her** born to be an heroine. [...] **She** had a thin awkward¹ figure, a **sallow**² skin without colour, dark **lank**³ hair, and strong features – so much for **her** person; and **not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind**. **She** was fond of all boy's plays, and **greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse⁴, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush**. **Indeed she had no taste for a garden; and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief⁵** [...] Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet; so, at eight years old she began. She learnt a year, and could not bear it⁶; and **Mrs. Morland, who did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste, allowed her to leave off**. **The day which dismissed the music-master was one of the happiest of Catherine's life**. Her taste for drawing was not superior; though whenever she could obtain the outside of a letter from her mother or seize upon any other odd piece of paper, she did what she could in that way, by drawing houses and trees, hens and chickens, all very much like one another. Writing and accounts she was taught by her father; French by her mother: her proficiency in either was not remarkable, and she shirked⁷ her lessons in both whenever she could.

1 awkward. Goffa.

2 **sallow**. Giallastra.

3 **lank**. Lisci e flosci.

4 **nursing a dormouse**. Aver cura di un ghiro.

5 **mischief**. Birichinata.

6 **bear it**. Sopportarlo.

7 **shirked**. Si sottraeva.



Description of the character

Direct presentation of the character: Catherine was plain and did not look like a heroine; she liked boy's games like cricket and she disliked girls' accomplishments

Narration

her Third-person omniscient narrator

Neutral point of view

An example of Austen's irony: here the target is contemporary literature, particularly the heroines of sentimental and Gothic novels

Catherine had no taste for flowers and did not reflect her mood in the natural landscape

3.4 Theme

The theme is the idea the author tries to convey by means of the story; it can be **explicit** or **implicit**, that is to say, it can be either consciously intended and indicated by the author, or discovered by the reader/critic as an element in the novel of which even the author was unaware. The theme contains the **message** whose interpretation leads to an understanding of the meaning of the text.

When you deal with a theme, the first step is its definition. Secondly, it is interesting to compare different points of view on the topic. The final aim, however, is to reach awareness about the subject so as to express personal opinions, particularly with reference to personal experiences.

Every literary work has a **main theme** which can be divided into **sub-themes** or **motifs**. In order to explore how an author has used any of the conventions of the literary genres to convey his/her theme(s), you may follow these guidelines.

- Analyse the title, which can sometimes provide key words to identify the main theme of a text.
- Focus on the influence the setting has on the presentation of the theme.
- Discuss how the main characters' actions and thoughts help the reader to explore a central theme in the text. You may discover that even minor characters are important in the development of sub-themes or motifs.
- Locate meaningful symbols in the text and explain how each of them contributes to the development of a theme or motif.

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott (1832-88) is considered a classic of American literature and tells the story of the four March sisters, who are coping with many difficulties together with their mother while their father is away fighting in the American Civil War. In the text that follows they wake on Christmas Day to the realisation that presents will be few and feasting limited compared to the past, but they are determined to make the best of life.

A Merry Christmas

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Little Women (1868-69)

Chapter 2



- The theme of love between the sisters
- The sub-theme of life being more difficult than before
- The sub-theme of the girls' devotion to their mother

Jo was the first to wake in the gray dawn of Christmas morning. No stockings hung at the fireplace, and for a moment she felt as much disappointed as she did long ago, when her little sock fell down because it was crammed so full of goodies¹. Then she remembered her mother's promise and, slipping² her hand under her pillow, drew out a little crimson-covered³ book. She knew it very well, for it was that beautiful old story of the best life ever lived, and Jo felt that it was a true guidebook for any pilgrim going on a long journey. She woke Meg with a 'Merry Christmas,' and bade her⁴ see what was under her pillow.

A green-covered book appeared, with the same picture inside, and a few words written by their mother, which made their one present very precious in their eyes. Presently Beth and Amy woke to rummage⁵ and find their little books also, one dove-colored⁶, the other blue, and all sat looking at and talking about them, while the east grew rosy with the coming day.

In spite of her small vanities, Margaret had a sweet and pious nature, which unconsciously influenced her sisters, especially Jo, who loved her very tenderly, and obeyed her because her advice was so gently given.

'Girls,' said Meg seriously, looking from the tumbled⁷ head beside her to the two little night-capped⁸ ones in the room beyond, 'Mother wants us to read and love and mind these books, and we must begin at once. We used to be faithful about it, but since Father went away and all this war trouble unsettled us, we have neglected many things. You can do as you please, but I shall keep my book on the table here and read a little every morning as soon as I wake, for I know it will do me good and help me through the day.'

Then she opened her new book and began to read. Jo put her arm round her and, leaning cheek to cheek, read also, with the quiet expression so seldom seen on her restless face.

1 it was ... goodies. Era piena zeppa di leccornie.

2 slipping. Facendo scivolare.

3 crimson-covered. Dalla copertina color cremisi.

4 bade her. Le ordinò.

5 to rummage. Per frugare.

6 dove-colored. Color tortora.

7 tumbled. Scompigliata.

8 night-capped. Coperte da cuffie da notte.