Literary Terms - The Play

Comedy: Any of various types of play or motion picture with a more or less humorous treatment of characters and situation and a happy ending.

Dramatic irony: Occurs when the audience or the reader knows more than do the characters.

Comic relief: A comic element is inserted in a tragedy for the purpose of relieving the tension on the audience or of sharpening the emotional effect of a tragic scene.

Aside: A comment made by a character in a drama which is supposed to be audible to the audience, not to other characters.

Pathetic fallacy: Occurs when nature coincides with the characters’ emotions or the mood of the play.

Foreshadowing: Allows the playwright to suggest, early in the action, what may not be fully realized until the final outcome (future).

Language: Playwrights also employ accents, idioms, jargon and clichés to define characters.

Symbolism: In drama, the use of language, character, or objects to represent or illuminate something else.

Nemesis: When the reader feels that the punishment of a character is peculiarly suited to his crimes, this is called retributive justice: nemesis.

Soliloquy: Lines in a drama in which a character reveals his thoughts to the audience but not to the other characters, by speaking as if to himself.

Monologue: A speech by one character in a play.

Sonnet: 14 line lyric poem (Shakespearean – 3 four line units or quatrains, followed by a concluding 2 line unite, or couplet; ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

Couplet: 2 consecutive line of poetry that rhyme; couplets often signal the EXIT of a character or end of a scene.

Foil: A character who is used as a contrast to another character; writer sets off/intensifies the qualities of 2 characters this way.

Pun: A play on the multiple meanings of a word, or on 2 words that sound alike but have different meanings.

Theme: The representation of a play’s central point or underlying message.

The Merchant of Venice is a comedy because the difficulties which must be overcome, as in every plot, are **successfully overcome**. The successes lend a cheerful **tone** to the play and provide a **happy ending**, and this is true of all comedies. It is based on exaggeration of human nature as well as mistaken identities, disguise, and confusion of events.