

**Tragedy:**

“The representation of serious actions that lead to a disastrous end for the protagonist” (Kennedy, et al 174).

**Tragic Flaw:** “A fatal weakness or ignorance in the protagonist that brings him or her to a bad end” (Kennedy 175).

**Tragic Hero:** “A tragic hero is the central figure in a tragedy, the person whose misfortune and suffering constitute the tragic meaning of the play” (Kennedy 176).

**Characteristics of Aristotelian Tragedy:**

1. The plot must govern the whole drama—with a clear beginning, middle, and end. All events must be unified by the action.
2. The main character must be an “everyday” man, with whom the audience can relate, but must also be someone of high esteem/high standing in society.
3. The main character must have a “tragic flaw” that causes his downfall, brings about a negative change in fortune. This downfall is not circumstantial, but caused by the specific actions and defect in the main character. (Prestwick 2)

**Aristotle’s Tragic Hero:** An “everyday” man who is of good character, of high standing in society, and whose fall is due to his own action or fault (Kennedy 176).

**Allusion:** “A brief, sometimes indirect reference in a text to a person, place, thing, or prior text, be it fictitious or actual” (Kennedy 6).

“A reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize” (Prestwick 4).

**Archetype:** “A recurring symbol, character, landscape, or event found in myth and literature across different cultures and eras,” “a model from which writers create different versions or copies,” often related to the human condition (Kennedy 12).

**Aside:** words spoken by an actor in such a way that they are heard by the audience but supposedly not by the other actors. These words usually represent the inner thoughts of the speaker.

**Blank Verse:** unrhymed lines of poetry written in iambic pentameter

**Figurative Language:** words and phrases that have meanings different from their usual ones in order to create a poetic and/or literary effect.

**Foil:** a character whose qualities or actions usually serve to emphasize the actions or qualities of the protagonist, by providing a strong contrast.

**Hyperbole:** “exaggeration for emphasis; overstatement. *Example: I’ve told you a million times to . . .*” (Prestwick 4).

**Inference:** “the act of drawing a conclusion that is not actually stated by the author” (Prestwick 4).

**Irony:** a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. Types:

*Dramatic Irony*—the audience or reader knows more about the character’s situation than the character does and knows that the character’s understanding is incorrect.

*Structural Irony*—the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader’s incorrect ones.

*Verbal Irony*—a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm” (Prestwick 4).

**Malapropism:** misuse of a word for humorous effect.

**Metaphor:** a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other.

**Morality Play:** a medieval religious drama with the following characteristics:

- ~ Allegorical figures that are the personification of abstract qualities
- ~ Actions that can be recognized both literally and figuratively
- ~ A struggle of the soul of man from birth to death
- ~ A lesson or moral clearly stated at the end
- ~ A poetic form” (Prestwick 4).

**Motif:** An element that recurs significantly throughout a narrative . . . can be an image, idea, theme, situation, or action. Can also appear across multiple literary works (Kennedy 116).

Example: the motif of a JOURNEY in works from the *Odyssey* to *Huck Finn* to *Harry Potter*.

Motifs of *Hamlet*: ears and hearing, poison, misogyny, incest, disease

**Pun:** an expression that achieves emphasis or humor by utilizing a) two distinctly different meanings for the same word, or b) two similar sounding words.

**Revenge Tragedy:** plays based on acts of personal revenge, exhibiting the following characteristics: a) the ghost of a murdered family member who demands that the hero take revenge, b) the one seeking revenge must take the law into his own hands/commit an evil act which results in his own death, c) scenes involving real or pretended madness, d) a play within a play, e) a graveyard scene, f) much violence and many deaths.

**Simile:** a comparison between two different things using either like or as.

**Soliloquy:** lines in a play in which a character reveals thoughts to the audience, but not to the other characters; it is usually longer than an aside and not directed at the audience.

**Theme:** “The prevailing topic or issue conspicuously running through a literary work” (Kennedy 173).

Themes of *Hamlet*: Deception (appearance vs. reality), madness, spying, revenge

Sources:

Kennedy, X. J., Dana Gioia and Mark Bauerlein. *Handbook of Literary Terms: Literature, Language, Theory*, third edition. Pearson, 2005.

Prestwick House Literature Teaching Guide: *Dr. Faustus*. 2002.

Prestwick House Literature Teaching Guide: *Hamlet*. 1988.