

# Examples of key literary terms



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Key Literary Concepts This essay will look at the key literary concepts of satire, ambiguity, genre and imagination. Josephine's death at the end of Chopin's 1894 "The Story of an Hour" is satire on several different levels: in one complex, heavily-laden event, there is the subversion of different characters' expectations, as well as the more enlightened knowledge of the reader. Brently, who "did not even know" (Chopin, 22) that there had been an accident, expected to arrive home as usual, presumably without being greeted by his friend and sister-in-law; Louise and Richards, shocked themselves by the reports of Brently's death turning out to be false, probably assume that Josephine would be overjoyed by the safe return of her husband. In fact, this assumption is one that most people would make, given that the doctor's prognosis is that she died "of joy that kills" (Chopin, 25). The dramatic irony inherent in this judgment emphasizes the theme of propriety over actual emotion. Josephine felt not joy but grave disappointment at the moment of her heart attack (pun intended). Lines 114 to 128 in Tristan Bernard's 1915 French play, *I'm Going!*, also makes heavy use of satire to highlight the various chasms between Henri's expectations of Jeanne, Jeanne's behaviour, and the reality of a happy and trusting relationship. Jeanne appears to be acting normally, acquiescing to her husband's simple request to "show [him] the telegram" (Bernard, 125) she is sending to her friend. However, Henri insists that she is "not usually so obedient" (Bernard, 127), alerting the audience to the fact that such behaviour is not, apparently, normal for her. It is difficult to discern which character the audience is meant to support in this short exchange, because we cannot tell whether it is Jeanne deviating suspiciously from her norm, or Henri deviating from ours. This brings us to the literary concept of ambiguity,

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which Frost employs as a framing device in his much-quoted poem “ The Road Not Taken.” The speaker's satisfaction evident at the beginning of the poem is partnered with the “ sigh” (Frost, 16) of the final stanza to create an ambiguity as to the narrator's residual feelings about their choice. This ambiguity reflects the complexity of making life decisions, and explains the poem's great appeal even now, almost a century after its writing. Another poem, which is far from ambiguous, is Langston Hughes' 1951 “ Dream Boogie.” Instead we see the force of genre in this racially-charged cry for justice. Using poetry to call for equal rights is effective because it echoes the jazz music of Hughes' people, evoking a very particular voice in the reader's mind when this poem is read silently. The purpose of such pieces is to make the writer's voice heard, so Hughes' rhythm-driven choice of genre helps to communicate his message in a way which is both memorable and laden with history. Chopin's choice of genre also calls on, and joins, the long-standing tradition of a minority. Short stories have, historically, been the refuge of women writers who often needed to produce literature to support themselves – few could invest the time in novels, as the potential of a larger profit was a risk for someone with dependants. One modern short story writer said that she makes use of this genre because “ in 20 years, I've never had a day when I didn't have to think about someone else's needs” (Crown). Our brief, hour-long entry into Josephine's world tautens each emotion we are induced to feel, intensifying our experience with her even though it is a short one. The very dramatic nature of a short story makes the reader feel closer to the protagonist as they are forced into a situation with little introduction, just the passionate interior world of the character. The interior world of Walter Mitty in “ The Secret Life of Walter Mitty”, written in 1939 by <https://assignbuster.com/examples-of-key-literary-terms-essay-samples/>

James Thurber, is no less passionate but far more inventive than Josephine Mallard's. Mitty's imagination takes him variously to a serious surgical procedure, a court case, and several times to war, variously in the Navy, Air Force and in front of a firing squad. His imagination (or education!) is somewhat faulty, using a flower name to refer to a disease and misremembering the name of Count von Richthofen, but his frequent escape into fantasy worlds is recognizable, if exaggerated. The use of imagination in this piece is what makes it fun to read. The imaginative element of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" is not an internal device, but the responding reaction of the reader: the audience's imagination is what associates the "two roads [diverging] in a yellow wood (Frost, 1) with the nature of making decisions. Imaginatively we connect with Frost's idea that even the simplest choice can have vague but great repercussions. Works Cited Bernard, T. (1915). I'm Going! A Comedy in One Act. In Author of textbook (Ed.), Name of textbook (pp. Startpage-Endpage). Place of publication: Publisher. Chopin, K. (1894). The Story of an Hour. In Author of textbook (Ed.), Name of textbook (pp. Startpage-Endpage). Place of publication: Publisher. Crown, Sarah. (2009, December 11). Short stories: great literature. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/dec/11/women-short-story> Frost, R. (1916). The Road Not Taken. In Author of textbook (Ed.), Name of textbook (pp. Startpage-Endpage). Place of publication: Publisher. Hughes, L. (1951). Dream Boogie. In Author of textbook (Ed.), Name of textbook (pp. Startpage-Endpage). Place of publication: Publisher. Thurber, J. (1939). The Secret Life of Walter Mitty. In Author of textbook (Ed.), Name of textbook (pp. Startpage-Endpage). Place of publication: Publisher.