

A Brief Guide to Poetry Terminology

Mr. Pogreba, Helena High

Words

Words can be divided up into three components:

- 1) **Sound**—the combination of tones and noises that make up a word
- 2) **Connotation**—what a word suggests beyond what it expresses. (The difference between childish and childlike, for example)
- 3) **Denotation**—the dictionary meaning of a word

Imagery

Representation through language of sense experience.

- Most commonly represents a visual image, but can also represent a smell, a taste, or even an internal sensation like hunger, thirst, or nausea.

Figurative Language

Figurative language—language using figures of speech, that cannot/should not be taken literally.

Broadly defined, a figure of speech is a way of saying something other than in the ordinary way.

- **Metaphor and Simile**: both a means of comparing two things that are unlike. The only difference is in phrasing—similes use phrases such as: like, as, resembles, or seems. In a metaphor the comparison is implied.
- **Personification**: giving the attributes of a human being to an animal, object, or concept.
- **Apostrophe**: addressing someone absent or dead or nonhuman as if that person or thing were present and could reply
- **Synecdoche**: a figure of speech in which a part is substituted for a whole or a whole for a part, as in 50 head of cattle for 50 cows, or the army for a soldier
- **Metonymy**: a figure of speech in which an attribute or a suggestive word is substituted for the name of something, as in “The Crown” for “the monarchy”
- **Symbol**: Roughly defined as something that means more than what it is. Something that stands in the place of another thing. A symbol can be as simple as the color red representing “stop” or as complex and culturally loaded as
- **Allegory** is a narrative or description that has a second meaning beneath the surface one. It is a less common literary device than it once was.
- **Paradox**: An apparent contradiction that is somehow true. Shock value that startles the reader.
- **Hyperbole**: Deliberate exaggeration for effect. (“You could have knocked me over with a feather”)
- **Irony**:
 - 1) **Verbal/Sarcasm**: Saying one Thing and meaning another
 - 2) **Dramatic**: device where the author implies a different meaning from the one intended by the speaker
 - 3) **Situational**: a situation where there is an incongruity between what is anticipated and what actually happens

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Musical Devices

- **Alliteration**: repetition of initial consonant sounds
- **Consonance**: repetition of final consonant sounds
- **Assonance**: repetition of vowel sounds
- **Rhyme**: repetition of the accented vowel sound and all succeeding sounds
 - **Internal**: Rhyme within a line
 - **End**: Rhymes at the end of lines
 - **Approximate Rhyme**: words with sound familiarity

Rhythm and Meter

Meter is consistent rhythm, something that we can tap our feet to. Meter comes from the term “to measure”

Foot: one accented syllable with one, two, three or zero unaccented syllables

Iamb: unstressed/stressed (Today)

Trochee: stressed/unstressed (Daily)

Anapest: Unstressed/unstressed/stressed (intervene)

Dactyl: Stressed/unstressed/unstressed (Yesterday)

Spondee: Stressed/stressed (True-blue)

Other Terms

Allusion: a reference to something in history or previous literature

Tone: A writer or speaker’s attitude toward his subject, her audience, or his/herself. It is the emotional coloring and emotional meaning of the words and phrases used.

Stanza: A group of lines within a poem (functions like a paragraph in prose)

Juxtaposition: Deliberately placing dissimilar things side by side for comparison

Free Verse: poetry in lines of irregular length, usually unrhymed.

Blank Verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter; that is, with every second syllable stressed.

Speaker: Distinct from the author of the poem. The writer may have chosen another “character” to be the speaker of the lines. Do not assume that biographical sounding poetry is necessarily from the author’s point of view.

Enjambment - a line of poetry in which the grammatical and logical sense run on, without pause, into the next line or lines.

Onomatopoeia - words (or the use of words) that sound like what they mean.