

POETIC DEVICES GLOSSARY

Basic Terms

connotation: the implied or suggested meaning connected with a word

denotation: the dictionary meaning of a word

literal meaning: limited to the simplest, ordinary, most obvious meaning

figurative meaning: associative or connotative meaning; representational

meter: measured pattern of rhythmic accents in a line of verse

rhyme: correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse

Figurative Language

hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis (the opposite of understatement)

Example: "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

metaphor: comparison between essentially unlike things, or the application of a name or description to something to which it is not literally applicable

Example: "[Love] is an ever fixed mark, / that looks on tempests and is never shaken."

metonymy: a word or phrase that replaces the name of an object or concept for another to which it is related

Example: "We have always remained loyal to the crown" instead of "We have always remained loyal to the monarchy."

oxymoron: a combination of two words, phrases or concepts that appear to contradict each other

Example: bittersweet

paradox: a situation or phrase that appears to be contradictory but which contains a truth worth considering

Example: "In order to preserve peace, we must prepare for war."

personification: the endowment of inanimate objects or abstract concepts with animate or living qualities

Example: "Time let me play / and be golden in the mercy of his means"

pun: play on words, or a humorous use of a single word or sound with two or more implied meanings; quibble

Example: "They're called lessons . . . because they lessen from day to day."

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Figurative Language (cont.)

simile: comparison between two essentially unlike things using words such as “like,” “as,” or “as though”

Example: “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun”

allusion: a reference to a person, event, or work outside the poem or literary piece

Example: “Shining, it was Adam and maiden”

imagery: word or sequence of words representing a sensory experience (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory)

Example: “bells knelling classes to a close” (auditory)

irony: a contradiction of expectation between what is said and what is meant (verbal irony) or what is expected in a particular circumstance or behavior (situational), or when a character speaks in ignorance of a situation known to the audience or other characters (dramatic)

Example: “Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea”

symbol: an object or action that stands for something beyond itself

Example: white = innocence, purity, hope

Poetic Forms

blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter

closed: poetic form subject to a fixed structure and pattern

couplet: a pair of lines, usually rhymed

free verse: lines with no prescribed pattern or structure

heroic couplet: a pair of rhymed lines in iambic pentameter (tradition of the heroic epic form)

open: poetic form free from regularity and consistency in elements such as rhyme, line length, and metrical form

quatrain: four-line stanza or grouping of four lines of verse

stanza: unit of a poem often repeated in the same form throughout a poem; a unit of poetic lines (“verse paragraph”)

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Sound Devices

alliteration: the repetition of consonant sounds, particularly at the beginning of words

Example: “. . . like a wanderer white”

assonance: the repetition of similar vowel sounds

Example: “I rose and told him of my woe”

cacophony: harsh or discordant sounds, often the result of repetition and combination of consonants within a group of words. Writers frequently use cacophony to express energy or mimic mood.

onomatopoeia: the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe

Example: “crack” or “whir”

slant rhyme: (off rhyme, half rhyme, imperfect rhyme): rhyme formed with words with similar but not wholly identical sounds

Example: barn / yard

rhyme: correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse