

## Glossary of Poetic Terms

### TONE & DICTION

*Tone* = The mood or manner of expression in a poem, which conveys an attitude toward the poem's subject. It may be playful, reverent, sarcastic, solemn, or any other possible attitude. Sometimes a poem presents a single tone, but more often poems mix tones of voice, altering the mood as the lines progress and the poem reaches its resolution.

*Persona* = Latin for "mask." A fictitious character created by an author to be the speaker of a poem.

*Irony* = a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. *Verbal irony* is a mode of expression in which the speaker says the opposite of what is really meant. *Dramatic irony* presents a situation in which the larger implications of a speaker's words are unrealized by that speaker but seen by the poet and the reader/audience. *Cosmic irony* presents a contrast between the speaker's position or aspiration and the treatment he or she receives at the hands of fate.

*Diction* = word choice or vocabulary. Diction refers to the class of words that an author chooses as appropriate for a particular poem.

--*concrete* = words that refer to what we can immediately perceive with our senses (i.e. plum, cricket, house)

--*abstract* = words that express ideas or concepts (i.e. love, time, truth)

Levels of Diction:

--*Formal* = the heightened, impersonal language of educated persons, usually only written, but possibly spoken on dignified occasions

--*General* = the ordinary speech of educated native speakers, more studied than colloquial but not pretentious

--*Colloquial* = the casual or informal but correct language of ordinary native speakers, conversational in tone

--*Vulgate* = The lowest level of diction, the language of the common people; speech not much affected by schooling

Denotation vs. Connotation:

--*Denotation* = literal, dictionary meaning of a word

--*Connotation* = overtones or suggestions of additional meanings that a word may carry beyond its denotative meaning

## **IMAGE & METAPHOR**

*Image* = a word or series of words that refers to any sensory experience.

The following terms help us describe specific kinds of imagery:

Visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory.

(see) (hear) (touch) (smell) (taste)

*Metaphor* = A statement that one thing *is* something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not.

- “the ability to see similarity in dissimilars” (Aristotle)
- “to see one thing in the terms of another” (Frost)

--Extended Metaphor: After the essential comparison is made, the poet “plays” with it, expanding the properties of the vehicle in a continuous way, implying expansion of the tenor’s locus of meaning

--Local Metaphor: The establishment of more than one comparison, ideally all relating to the unifying theme of the poem.

## **SOUND & RHYTHM**

*Euphony* = The harmonious effect when the sounds of words connect with the meaning in a way pleasing to the ear and mind.

*Cacophony* = A harsh, discordant sound; the opposite of euphony.

*Onomatopoeia* = An attempt to represent a thing or action by a word that imitates the sound associated with it.

*Alliteration* = The repetition of a consonant sound.

*Assonance* = The repetition of a vowel sound.

*Rime* = Two or more words that contain an identical or similar vowel and consonant sound. Rimes can be *exact* or *slant*. Sometimes a rime appears at the end of lines (*end rime*); more often, they appear within lines (*internal rime*).

*Stress* = An emphasis, or **accent**, placed on a syllable in speech; the high point in a syllabic meter: *ta*.

*Pause* = An unstressed syllable, creating a low point in a syllabic meter: *dum*.

*Rhythm* = The recurring pattern of stresses and pauses in a poem: ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum . . . .

*Meter* = When stresses recur at fixed intervals, creating a predictable pattern of sound, such as iambic or trochaic; line-lengths also factor into meter, the most common being tetrameter and pentameter, determined by the number of stressed syllables per line.

*Caesura* = a pause anywhere in a poetic line, or at the end of the line.

*End-stopped line* = a line of verse that ends in a full pause, often indicated by a mark of punctuation.

*Run-on line* = a line of verse that does not end in punctuation but carries on grammatically into the next line; also called **enjambment**.

*Scansion* = the art of determining the metrical pattern of verse in a poem by counting syllables, marking the accents, and indicating caesuras.

## **FORM**

*Closed Form* = Sometimes called a “fixed form” because the poem follows a set of rules that create some sort of pattern, such as a sonnet, or a haiku, or villanelle. Poems in closed form tend to look regular and symmetrical.

*Verse* = any composition in lines of more or less regular rhythm. Contrast to *prose*, which relies solely upon sentence structure as its basic unit of thought.

*Stanza* = a recurring pattern of two or more lines of verse. The poetic equivalent to a paragraph in prose. A basic organizational principle in many poems.

*Couplet* = a two-line stanza.

*Tercet* = a three-line stanza.

*Quatrain* = a four-line stanza.

*Sonnet* = a traditional and widely-used verse form, especially popular for love poetry. The **sonnet** is a fixed form of 14 lines, traditionally written in iambic pentameter. The Italian form is usually made up of an *octave* (the first 8 lines) and a *sestet* (6 lines). The English form is a variation, usually made up of three *quatrains* and a concluding *couplet*. The turning point, or *volta*, in a sonnet signals a shift in tone as the poem resolves.

*Open Form* = poems that have neither a rhyme scheme nor a basic meter, but instead seek a format that reinforces the subject matter in an organic manner.

## **MYTH & SYMBOL**

*Myth*: A traditional narrative of anonymous authorship that arises out of a culture's oral tradition.

*Archetype*: A recurring symbol, character, landscape, or event found in myth and literature across different cultures and eras, one that appears so often that it evokes a universal response.

*Symbol* = a person, place, or thing that suggests meanings beyond its literal sense.