

LIST OF POETIC TERMS

Allegory

A narrative, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to contain a “hidden meaning” (most often intentional) that is typically moral or political. An allegory is a figurative representation, not a literal representation, and it is often conflated with analogies, symbols, and metaphors. For the classic example, see Plato’s Allegory of the Cave (*The Republic*, Book VII)

Alliteration

A phrase or line of verse in which the words begin with the same sound or letter: *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.*

Analogy

A comparison between two things; a correspondence or partial similarity.

Assonance

The repetition of vowel sounds near enough to each other to create an echo and internal rhyming: “*And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side / Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride*” (Poe).

Cacophony

The unpleasant discordant effect of sounds or words; “bad-sounding.”

Caesura

A break between words within a metrical foot (i.e., in the middle of a line of verse): “*Five years have past; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters!*” (Wordsworth).

Connotation

The emotional, psychological, or social overtones of a word.

Consonance

The repetition of consonant sounds near enough to each other to create an echo and internal rhyming. Consonance is similar to alliteration, but unlike alliteration, consonance does not limit the repeated sound to the first syllable: “*Open her I flung the sbutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter, / Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking / Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou, I said, art sure no craven*” (Poe).

Denotation

The dictionary definition of a word.

Dissonance

The arrangement of cacophonous sounds in words or rhythmical patterns. For an example, see Walt Whitman’s “To A Locomotive in Winter.”

End-Stopped

A line of poetry in which the end of line coincides with the end of a grammatical unit (usually the sentence or clause): *“Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time” (Keats).*

Enjambment

A line of poetry that does not end with a grammatical break; a line that cannot stand on its own or make sense without the following line (see Wordsworth example for caesura above).

Euphony

The pleasant combination of sounds resultant from smooth-flowing meter and sentence rhythm (see Keats example for end-stopped above).

Figurative Language

The creative and artistic use of language in a non-literal sense; the creation of images through language. There are several common types of figurative language:

Metaphor – A comparison between two things using the word “is.”

Metonymy – A device whereby one thing is used as a substitute for another with which it is closely identified.

Hyperbole – An exaggerated statement not meant to be interpreted literally.

Oxymoron – Presenting contradictory terms in conjunction.

Pun – Word play in which the poet reveals that words with different meanings have similar sounds.

Simile – A comparison between two things using the words “as” or “like.”

Synesthesia – A union or fusion of separate sensations or feelings.

Synecdoche – A device in which a part stands for the whole.

Homonym

Two words having the same pronunciation but different meanings: *knew* and *new*.

Meter

The measure and rhythm of poetry. There are three major types of meter:

Accentual – pattern in number of stresses per line

Syllabic – pattern in number of syllables per line

Accentual-Syllabic – pattern in number of stresses and syllables per line

Metrical Foot

A measured unit of meter made up of stressed and unstressed syllables. These are the five most common types of metrical feet:

Iamb – unstressed syllable followed by stressed syllable (“begin”)

Trochee – stressed syllable followed by unstressed syllable (“after”)

Dactyl – stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables (“syllable”)

Anapest – two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable (“comprehend”)

Spondee – two stressed syllables in a row (“D-Day”)

Onomatopoeia

Words or sounds that imitate or suggest a sense of action: *bang, bow-wow, buzz, whoosh.*

Rhyme

The repetition of sounds in poetry to create aural and visual patterns that complement, complicate, and/or illuminate the rhythm, meter, and/or form of a poem. Alliteration, assonance, and consonance are types of **internal rhyme**, as opposed to a **rhyme scheme** which refers to the repetition of rhyme throughout a poem. Rhyme schemes are usually represented with letters that represent the patterns the rhymes make throughout the poem. For example, an English sonnet adheres to the following rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. There are several types of common rhymes:

Perfect Rhyme – Words are in complete aural correspondence: *madness/sadness, height/sight.*

Masculine Rhyme – A single stressed syllable rhyme (final syllable): *fight/tight, time/sublime.*

Feminine Rhyme – A stressed syllable rhyme followed by an unstressed syllable: *fever/cleaver*

Imperfect Rhyme – A rhyme between a stressed and unstressed syllable: *sing/sharing.*

Oblique Rhyme – Similar words that lack perfect correspondence: *found/kind, seen/fiend.*

Half-Rhyme – The matching of final consonants in words: *blade/blood, bent/cant.*

Sight Rhyme – A rhyme that looks similar but sounds different when spoken. Sight rhymes often result from changes in pronunciation over time: *eye/symmetry.*

Scansion

The graphic representation of meter

Stanza

Any unit of recurring meter and rhyme used in a poem. There are many different types of stanzas, but they can be generally distinguished as follows:

Couplet – Two lines

Triplet/Tercet – Three lines

Quatrain – Four lines

Quintain – Five lines

Sestet – Six lines

Octet – Eight lines

Synonym

A word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase: *shut/close.*

Syntax

Word order