

Glossary of Literary and Critical Terms*

allegory A narrative or a descriptive technique in which objects, names, and qualities are employed in a more or less interrelated pattern that points beyond the surface level of a work to other, usually abstract, meanings.

alliteration The repetition of identical or nearly identical consonant sounds in two or more words in close or immediate succession. Depending on where the consonant sounds appear in a word, alliteration can be classified as either *initial* or *internal* (or *hidden*). See *consonance*.

allusion A reference (technically an indirect reference) to something real or fictitious outside of the work in which it appears. The reference is often taken from history, the Bible, mythology, or other literary works.

amphibrach See *meter*.

anapest See *meter*.

apostrophe In poetry, a figure of speech in which someone or something absent is addressed as if present, dead as if living, or inanimate as if animate.

assonance The repetition of identical or related vowel sounds which occur either initially or internally within a word.

ballad A narrative in verse written about popular subjects and intended for oral presentation, normally for singing.

ballad stanza A four-line stanza which often employs lines of alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, riming *abcb*.

blank verse A frequently employed verse form consisting of lines of unrimed iambic pentameter.

cacophony Sound patterns which are harsh and displeasing to the ear.

cadence Various rhythmic effects used in *free verse* as a substitute for regular meter. Such effects are so irregular that they are noticeable only within larger units of a poem, such as a stanza or a verse paragraph.

closed couplet See *couplet*.

connotation A word's suggested or implied meanings which, through time and usage, have become associated with it.

consonance The use of words having identical or related consonant sounds but different vowels. Compare *alliteration*.

couplet A unit of poetry consisting of two successive lines of verse usually of the same metrical length and with the same end rime.

dactyl See *meter*.

denotation The literal or dictionary meaning of a word.

diction An author's choice of words. Diction may be characterized as formal or informal; words may be complex or simple, old or new, long or short; and their origins and accumulated associations may give them particular or highly suggestive meanings.

dimeter See *meter*.

dramatic irony See *irony*.

dramatic poetry A broadly used term that denotes poetry rendered in some dramatic form or, at least, in a form that utilizes elements of dramatic technique. The term may also refer to poems whose method of presentation is partly or largely dramatic.

elegiac quatrain A variation of the standard quatrain in its use of a five-foot, rather than the regular four-foot, line; so named following Thomas Gray's employment of it in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

elegy A poem occasioned by the death of a specific person which expresses the pensive thoughts of a poet as he reflects on death and on other solemn subjects.

ellipsis The omission of one or more words or of an entire phrase or statement.

end rime See *rime*.

end-stopped line A line of verse that ends with a full pause, either punctuated or dictated by the rhythm of the poetic line.

epic A narrative poem of considerable length written in a serious tone and concerned with heroic characters and situations that illustrate the origins, history, and destiny of a race, culture, or nation.

epigram A type of very short poem that strives to capture in summary fashion a personal judgment, sentiment, or thought, often in a humorous or a satiric manner.

epitaph A short commemorative poem used to mark burial places or at least written as if this were the intention.

euphony A sound pattern that is pleasing to the ear.

extended figure (or **extended metaphor** or **extended simile**) The continuation of a figure of speech throughout several lines, occasionally throughout a stanza or an entire poem.

eye rime See *rime*.

feminine rime See *rime*.

figurative language (also called **figures of speech** or **tropes**) An imaginative departure from literal, straightforward statements in which two essentially dissimilar things are compared in a particular way.

fixed forms Specific types of poems that use traditionally accepted structures and conventions of composition; some examples are the sonnet, the limerick, the villanelle, and the sestina.

foot See *meter*.

form In poetry, form may designate commonly used types of verses and stanzas, but it may also indicate a particular kind of poem such as epic, ballad, ode, or sonnet.

free verse (sometimes called **vers libre**) A verse form lacking a regular metrical pattern or a definite rime scheme. For regular meter, it substitutes various

rhythmic effects that are usually so irregular that they are noticeable only within larger units such as a stanza or a verse paragraph.

heptameter See *meter*.

heroic couplet See *couplet*.

hyperbole See *overstatement*.

hexameter See *meter*.

iamb See *meter*.

image A word or a phrase that conveys a sensory impression, appealing to one or more of the senses-seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching.

imagery All of the images in a section of a literary work or in an entire work.

internal rime See *rime*.

irony Expresses a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, between what is presented and what actually is revealed-and thus between appearance and reality.

dramatic irony Expresses a discrepancy between what a character says or does and what the reader understands to be true; called "dramatic" because in the theater an audience often has access to knowledge that a character (or characters) on stage lack.

situational irony Expresses a discrepancy between what happens and what is really the situation, thus between expectation and fulfillment.

verbal irony Expresses one thing through speech when another thing, usually its opposite, is meant.

Italian sonnet See *sonnet*.

limerick A fixed form of English poetry which usually consists of five short lines of anapests, riming aabba, and which is often humorous and frequently satiric.

lyric poetry A poem that expresses the feelings, attitudes, and thoughts of a poet or a persona within the work.

masculine rime See *rime*.

mask (or *persona*) The voice in a work through which an author speaks. In some cases, however, the thoughts, feelings, and actions or the mask or the *persona* are in opposition to the meaning of the work.

metaphor An implied comparison between two dissimilar things which relates and fuses one to the other by expressing an identity between them.

meter The more or less regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line, a stanza, or an entire poem. The process of determining the kinds and the number of such syllables in these units of poetry is called **scansion**; it also consists of determining the *rimes* or the *rime scheme*, when applicable.

A **foot** (pl., *feet*) is the basic unit of English verse and normally consists of one stressed and one or more unstressed syllables. In scanning verse, a short, slanted mark (/) indicates a stressed syllable, and a curved line (**U**) shows an unstressed one. The principal feet employed in English verse are the following.

iamb (adj., *iambic*) Consists of one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one: | **U** / |

trochee (adj., *trochaic*) Consists of one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one: | / **U** |

anapest (adj., *anapestic*) Consists of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one: | **U U** / |

dactyl (adj., *dactylic*) Consists of one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones: | / **U U** |

Iambic and anapestic feet are sometimes called *rising meters* because the movement is from unstressed to stressed units. Trochaic and dactylic feet are sometimes called *falling meters* because the movement is from stressed to unstressed units.

The basic variant feet, used normally for substitutions and variety, are the following.

monosyllable (adj., **monosyllabic**) Consists of one stressed syllable: | / |

spondee (adj., **spondaic**) Consists of two stressed syllables: | / / |

pyrrhic Consists of two unstressed syllables: | u u |

amphibrach (adj., **amphibrachic**) Consists of an unstressed, a stressed, and another unstressed syllable: | u / u |

The principal line lengths of English verse are the following.

monometer	one foot	pentameter	five feet
dimeter	two feet	hexameter	six feet
trimeter	three feet	heptameter	seven feet
tetrameter	four feet	octameter	eight feet

metonymy A figure of speech which is marked by the substitution of a thing or of a quality attributed to or closely associated with it for the thing itself crown for king, smoke for cigarette.

monometer See *meter*.

monosyllable See *meter*.

metrical romance A narrative poem of considerable length which treats love, intrigue, and chivalric adventures and romances. \

myth A story or a group of interrelated stories that people accept, for various reasons, as making important statements about the universe and human life that could not be made in any other way. Stories of pre-Hellenic Greek gods and goddesses are examples of myths.

mythology A fully developed pattern of interrelated myths, such as those of ancient Greece and Rome.

narrative poem Verses that tell a story, with characters, a setting, and various elements of plot, such as a rising action, a falling action, a conflict, and a resolution.

octameter See *meter*.

octave See *sonnet*.

ode A poetic form which originated in ancient Greece as verse spoken aloud by a chorus and accompanied by music. Traditionally, the ode, one of the *fixed forms* of poetry, has treated dignified, serious themes within a complex metrical framework.

off rime See *rime*.

onomatopoeia The suggestion of a word's meaning by its actual sound. Words such as *buzz*, *crash*, *hiss*, *sneeze*, and *squeak* approximate in sound their literal meanings.

overstatement (or **hyperbole**) A form of verbal irony which exaggerates something and thus represents it as more significant than it really is.

paradox Attempts to show that things which seem contradictory are the same or at least that they are ultimately related. Paradox reveals that opposites may be joined and resolved in ways that often defy explanation. Thus paradox is an apparent contradiction that actually proves true, though at another level or in a certain way.

paraphrase A restatement which retains the meaning, essential facts, and details of an original source, although the exact wording of that original source is changed.

pentameter See *meter*.

persona See *mask*.

personification The attribution of human characteristics to objects, animals, events, or abstract ideas.

Petrarchan sonnet see *sonnet*.

popular ballad See *ballad*.

pun A deliberate confusion of words that are alike in sound and/or spelling but are different in meaning, e.g., "The king, sir, is no *subject* for a pun."

pyrrhic See *meter*.

quatrain A four-line stanza, usually appearing with two- or three-foot line lengths. Many nursery rhymes, proverbs, hymns, and popular songs are composed in this popular and enduring form.

refrain A word or a group of words or verse lines repeated at regular intervals throughout a poem, often at the end of each stanza.

rhythm The repetition at measured intervals of stressed and unstressed syllables in order to establish a definite pattern of rising and falling inflections.

rime (also **rhyme**) In poetry, the repetition of identical or similar sounds; more specifically, the repetition of similar or identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables which are preceded by unlike consonants. When a consonant follows the stressed vowel sound, it must be the same consonant if true rime is to occur-*day/pay*.

beginning rime Rime which occurs in the first word of two or more lines.

consonantal rime A correspondence of sounds between consonants (sometimes merely a resemblance of sound), as in *matter/mutter*, *simple/supple*, *floor/flair*.

end rime Rime at the end of two or more lines of poetry.

feminine rime Rime occurring within a line of poetry.

masculine rime Rime which occurs in the final stressed syllables at the end of two or more lines, when the stressed syllables are preceded by different consonants-*bed/head*, *St. Ives/wives*.

sight (or eye) rime A variant of rime occurring not in the sound but simply in the spelling-*dew/sew*.

slant (or off) rime Rime in which final consonants sounds that are alike are preceded by vowel sounds that are different-*bard/heard*.

triple rime A correspondence of sound in three syllables, one stressed followed by two unstressed ones, as in *vainglorious* and *meritorious*. This rime is so pronounced and melodious that it is usually reserved for light or humorous verse.

rime scheme The pattern or order in which rimes occur in a poem, or in a part of a poem. In marking the rime scheme of a poem, a letter of the alphabet is given to each corresponding end rime, e.g., *abab, cdcd*.

scansion See *meter*.

sestet See *sonnet*.

Shakespearean sonnet See *sonnet*.

sight rime See *rime*.

simile An expressed direct comparison, almost always introduced by the word *like* or *as*, that shows a similarity between two dissimilar things by relating them in specific ways.

slant rime See *rime*.

song Verses adapted to musical expression.

sonnet One of the notable *fixed* forms of English poetry, the sonnet is a lyric poem traditionally consisting of fourteen lines with several alternate rime schemes and normally employing iambic pentameter but occasionally iambic tetrameter.

English (or Shakespearean) sonnet Derived from the Italian sonnet, this form contains three quatrains and a couplet, a rime scheme *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*, and an organization which provides great flexibility and which allows the treatment of different aspects of a situation, problem, or experience. The resolution in the couplet tends to be pointed and succinct.

Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet A sonnet consisting of two parts: the **octave**, eight lines riming *abbaabba*, which presents a situation, sets a problem, or gives an observation; and the **sestet**, six lines of variable rime scheme (for instance, *cdecde* or *cdccdc*), which usually offers a response, resolution, or closing appropriate to the subject.

Spenserian sonnet A variation of the English sonnet, the only difference being is use of five interrelated rimes, *abab, bcbc, cdcd, ee*, which link various elements of the poem closely together.

spondee See *meter*.

sprung rhythm Devised by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), it is essentially a way of organizing sounds in poetry by stressed syllables regardless of the number of unstressed syllables in a poetic foot or in a line.

stanza A group of two or more lines of poetry that have a demonstrated metrical integrity or a similar kind of organizational unity. Divisions into stanzas are normally indicated in print by an extra line or two of space and in oral reading by a heavy pause, or occasionally (as in a song) by a chorus or a refrain. In the technical sense, the term stanza is correctly employed only when the pattern of the lines is repeated in a poem.

style An author's use and arrangement of language, his selection of words, and the pacing and the patterning with which he puts words together.

symbol An example of figurative language in which one thing is used to suggest another. A symbol remains itself and yet stands for or suggests something else.

symbolism A literary movement which developed in the last part of the nineteenth century and which presented a direct challenge to realism. In drama, its chief characteristic is its use of symbols, which, as concrete manifestations of subtle emotions and thoughts, are ideal tools for play wrights in exploring the psychological dimensions and implications of character and action.

synecdoche A figure of speech in which the part is substituted for the whole, or the container for the contained.

tercet (or triplet) A group of three successive lines in poetry, usually of the same metrical length and frequently with the same end rime.

terza rima A three-line stanza whose first and third lines rhyme and whose second line rhymes with the first and third lines of the next stanza; thus the rhyme scheme is *aba, bcb, cdc*, and so on.

tetrameter See *meter*.

tone The attitude of an implied author, as expressed in a literary work, toward the subject, theme, and audience.

trimeter See *meter*.

triple rhyme See *rhyme*.

triplet See *tercet*.

trochee See *meter*.

tropes See *figurative language*.

understatement A form of verbal irony which represents something as less important than it really is in order to emphasize rather than to diminish the significance of a point or a situation.

verbal irony See *irony*.

verse One line or more of poetry. A verse line is usually defined according to the kind and the number of stressed and unstressed syllables it contains: iambic pentameter or anapestic tetrameter, for example.

verse paragraph In general, any marked division or section of poetry not ordered by a regular scheme of lines or rhymes; the term refers more specifically to units of *free verse*.

vers libre See *free verse*.

