

Poetry Terms

alliteration: repetition of consonant sounds in closely associated words → "Full fathom five" (Shakespeare), "The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew" (S.T. Coleridge)

allusion: reference to a historical or literary person or event that suggests the meaning or generalized implication of details

assonance: repetition of vowel sounds in a sequence of words with different endings → "The death of the poet was kept from his poems" (Auden)

blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter

connotation: what is suggested by a word, apart from what it explicitly describes

controlling metaphor: metaphor that dominates or organizes an entire poem

denotation: a direct and specific meaning

extended metaphor: metaphor that dominates a large section of a poem

figure of speech: comparison in which something is figured in other terms

free verse: open verse, lacking meter, rhyme, or traditional form

heroic couplet: rhymed pairs of lines in iambic pentameter

hyperbole: a conscious exaggeration, not intended to be taken literally → "I walked a million miles today."

irony: the recognition of a reality different from appearance (may relate to statement, event, situation, or structure)

- **dramatic/tragic irony:** the words or acts of a character which carry meaning not perceived by the character but obvious to the audience
- **verbal irony:** intent is expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning → "I could care less."

litotes: a negative expression of the positive or an understatement → "We were not unjoyful." "You are not a bad cook."

metaphor: a comparison where one thing *becomes* another thing → "He is

the rock of Gibraltar." "My life is a roller coaster."

meter: the prevailing pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poem

metonymy: the substitution of the name of an object closely associated with the word for the word itself → "The pen is mightier than the sword."

motif: recurrent device, formula, or situation that deliberately connects a poem with common patterns of existing thought

onomatopoeia: the use of words in which the pronunciation suggests the meaning → hiss, slap, clap, slam, buzz

oxymoron: two contradictory terms next to each other → guest host, jumbo shrimp "O brawling love! O loving hate!" (Shakespeare)

paradox: a statement which seems contradictory or absurd but is actually true → "Much madness is divinest Sense" (Dickinson), "Less is more" (Browning), "And if you're lost enough you find yourself" (Frost)

parody: a composition imitating another, usually serious piece, designed to ridicule a work or its style or author

persona: character mask created by author

personification: figure of speech that endows animals, ideas, abstractions, and inanimate objects with human form or character → the leaves danced, "Once more the storm is howling" (Yeats)

rhythm: the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poem

satire: work or manner that holds up human failings to ridicule, using humor in an attempt to improve human institutions or humanity

simile: comparison using "like" or "as" → "her hair trickled like gravy over her skull" (Flannery O'Connor)

situation: context, what is happening when the poem begins

speaker: the person, not necessarily the author, speaking in the poem

stanza: section of poem separated by space between lines

symbol: something that is itself and also stands for something else → flag for country

synecdoche: a figure of speech in which a part signifies the whole → "All hands on deck!"

tone: the attitude the speaker takes toward the topic, an elusive quality which allows play on the gap between what is said and what is meant. depends on context, makes *irony* possible:

Fiction Terms

allegory: a form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself (represents one thing in the guise of another—an abstraction in that of a concrete image) → Vanity Fair in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

allusion: reference to a historical or literary person or event

archetype: symbol crossing cultural borders

auditor: projected listener (other than reader)

characterization: method/art/craft of presentation of fictional personages

- **protagonist:** main character...could be hero (perfect) or antihero (ordinary, average)
- **antagonist:** opponent of main character

in medias res: the idea that stories should begin "in the middle of things"

irony: the recognition of a reality different from appearance (may relate to statement, event, situation, or structure)

metafiction: a fiction engaging with, and/or commenting upon, the nature of fiction

narrator: the person telling the story/mediator--could be reliable or unreliable

parody: a composition imitating another, usually serious piece, designed to ridicule a work or its style or author

persona: character mask created by author

plot: arrangement of the action

- **exposition:** introduces the situation/conflict
- **rising action:** events complicate or intensify the conflict
- **climax:** turning point when conflict is confronted
- **falling action:** complications untangle
- **conclusion:** situation stabilizes

point of view: focus, point from which events are viewed

- **first person:** limited/internal
- **third person:** limited/external
- **omniscient:** unlimited/can see into all characters

satire: a work that blends a critical attitude with humor in an attempt to improve human institutions or humanity

setting: context in which the story occurs → environment, past, future, country, city, room, etc.

symbol: something that is itself and also stands for something else → flag for country

theme: generalizations from story...better to discuss "conflict(s)," "issue(s)," "question(s)"

tone: attitude narrator takes toward subject

sources: M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1993); C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1992); Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. 7th ed. (NY: Norton, 1998).

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