

POETRY TERMINOLOGY part 1; GETTING AT MEANING or SENSE:

Exegesis = analysis of a poem

1. DICTION: Poet's word choice, the language of poetry which produces Tone or poet's attitude towards subject matter or the audience (See TONE Handout). It is affected by:

A. Denotation: Literal dictionary definition of a word or phrase, and

B. Connotation: the accumulation or emotional association a word/phrase, has gathered through its history, or acquired in a given setting: "The lady in red is standing on the corner." (she ain't no lady!")

C. Volta: A sudden shift in tone. (comes after the 8th line in Petrarchan sonnets)

D. Persona: the speaker, narrator who is not the author

2. IMAGERY: mental pictures created by words that appeal to the senses of sight (visual imagery), sound, (auditory), taste, (gustatory), touch (tactile, kinesthetic), and smell, (olfactory.) Imagery contributes greatly to mood. Mood=emotional effect on the reader. **Synesthesia** is using one sense with another as a description in imagery. "She smelled the purple of the rainbow."

3. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: Figures of speech that deal with something by comparing it to something else.

A. **Symbol:** any thing that stands for something else. Like a metaphor, but symbols don't name the two things being compared. i.e. a long journey = life, a path that diverges = life's choices, night = death, Spring = rebirth

B. **Metaphor:** Comparing two unlike, named things by asserting that something is, or is equal to, the other thing. i.e. "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Life = a stage, people = actors. **Extended Metaphor** is a metaphor that extends throughout the whole poem. Such as Whitman's "Oh Captain, My Captain." **Metaphysical Conceit** is a metaphor whose comparison is so bizarre or striking that it goes beyond what the physical world would dictate. Example: Jon Donne's "The Flea" comparing the life and death of a flea to premarital sex.

C. **Simile:** Comparing two unlike, named things using the words "like, as, or than." i.e. "My love is like a red, red rose." Love = rose

D. **Allusion:** referring, without lengthy explanation, to something in literature, history, or current events and comparing it to something else. Like Tarquin, Macbeth moves toward Duncan to ravish (murder) him. Roman Myths = amplified allusions.

E. **Metonymy:** the use of an attribute of an object, or something closely associated with it, to stand for the thing itself. i.e. "Death lays his icy hand on kings: Scepter and Crown must tumble down." Scepter and crown = the king himself.

F. **Synecdoche:** Substitutes a significant physical body part of something for the thing itself. i.e. "You loud mouths be quiet." Loud mouths = noisy people. "The farm hands came in and ate lunch." Farm hands = people who use their hands on the farm.

G. **Personification:** a non-human thing or idea is endowed with the qualities of a human being. i.e. "Death lays his icy hand on kings." An abstract concept, death, is given human gender, hands, and actions.

- H. **Apostrophe**: the poet speaks to a personified abstraction (love) or to an absent, usually dead, person (Milton). i.e. “Love, thou art cruel.” “Milton, though shouldst be living at this hour!”
- I. **Analogy**: An extended metaphor, giving several points of comparison. i.e. Whitman’s “O Captain, My Captain.”
- J. **Parable**: an analogy, usually associated with scripture, but not always. i.e. The Parable of the Good Samaritan.
- K. **Allegory**: a prose story or narrative poem that can be read on two or more levels. i.e. The Scarlet Letter.
- L. **Archetype**: a giant universal Pattern, Symbol, Image, Plot structure, Character type, Motif, or Theme that uses comparisons. These appear in almost all cultures, and in dreams of human beings.

4. RHETORICAL DEVICES: intellectual stratagems (tricks) rather than figure or image-making maneuvers which convey attitudes and underlying assumptions.

A. Hyperbole: Deliberate, often outrageous, exaggeration. Frequently ironic or humorous. i.e. “Hark, how my Celia, with the choice music of her hand and voice stills the loud wind.” (Impossible exaggeration, obviously sarcastic. She’s a loud mouth.)

B. Understatement: Opposite of hyperbole, the effect is almost always to magnify the matter discussed by implying that the means of expression is inadequate to the task. Frequently Sarcastic or Ironic. i.e. “We know they are very fond of war, a pleasure--like all pleasures—rather dear.” Rather dear is understatement: calling it a pleasure--which it certainly is not, produces verbal irony.

C. Litotes: an affirmative that is expressed by the negative form of its antonym, i.e. “not high” for “low.”

D. Ambiguity: Double meaning, usually producing humor, or enriching meaning.

1. **Pun**: the most common form of ambiguity, where a word is used with more than one possible meaning for a comic effect. i.e. Hamlet: “Whose grave’s this?” Gravedigger: “Mine sir.” Hamlet: “Then lie in it.” Gravedigger: “I am.” He should lie down in it and not tell lies.

2. **Paradox**: A statement which is either apparently self-contradictory or at odds with ordinary experience, and yet reveals a truth normally hidden. i.e. “Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage, “Yes they do, if you let them.

3. **Oxymoron**: a two-word paradox, two words that contradict each other, yet still reveal truth. i.e. “sweet sorrow,” “Jumbo shrimp,” “Bitter sweet,” “Military Intelligence” (just kidding).

E. Irony: the difference between appearance and reality, or expectations and outcomes. **Verbal Irony**=the difference between a speaker’s words and the meaning that is perceived by listeners. **Dramatic Irony**=when the reader/audience knows more than the unsuspecting character/actor. **Tragic Irony**=the situation that precedes the downfall of a heron in a tragedy, where he unknowingly condemns himself. **Cosmic Irony** or **Irony of Fate**=when a character has high aspirations but some Fate with a grim sense of humor tricks him: Irony is a TONE.