
A CONCISE GLOSSARY OF CRITICAL TERMS

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Additional Syllable — See METRE.

Alexandrine — See METRE.

Allegory — A homogeneous narrative where the agents, and usually the settings, stand for moral qualities, general concepts or other abstract ideas. An allegory can be enjoyed both at the literal (story) level and at the moral (allegorical) level. Allegorical narratives include such diverse works as Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In *Le Roman de la Rose* the poet describes his falling in love in terms of entering a walled garden and picking a flower.

Alliteration — The repetition of the same consonant sound, especially at the beginning of words or of stressed syllables. Anglo-Saxon verse depended on alliteration and the repeated initial consonants marked the stressed syllables.

In a somer seson whan soft was the sonne,

I shope me in shroudes as I a shepe were

Ambiguity — In modern critical usage, a positive term referring to a word or phrase, consciously used to elicit a multiplicity of meanings. Ambiguity tends to be seen as the enriching quality which distinguishes poetry from other forms of discourse.

Ambivalence — The state of having more than one emotional attitude towards the same subject. We fear, condemn, admire, laugh at and laugh with the Pardoner all at the same time. An awareness of the possible ambivalent feelings should make the reader respond more completely to the literary work.

Anapaest — See METRE.

Anti-Climax — See BATHOS.

Antithesis — The balanced presentation of two ideas in sharp contrast to each other. To err is human, to forgive divine (Pope).

Apostrophe — A breaking off in the main narrative while some extraneous person or abstraction is directly addressed. The address to Geoffrey de Vinsauf in *The Nun's Priests's Tale* is an apostrophe.

Archetype — A situation or a plot pattern or a character which recurs frequently in literature or folklore and which sets up profound echoes and reverberations in the mind. Archetypes are inherited in the human mind from common ancestral experiences such as birth, death, love and struggle. These experiences are expressed in dreams and myths

as well as literature. Archetypal images contribute to the hallucinatory effect of Browning's 'Childe Roland' and to the Pardoner's *exemplum*, for example.

Atmosphere — The prevailing mood in a literary work represented by the setting, time and the conditions of the characters. The opening scene of *Macbeth* sets an atmosphere of danger and evil and the foreboding influence of the supernatural which runs through the whole play. A similar effect is achieved by the raging pestilence that is described at the beginning of the Pardoner's *exemplum*.

Assonance — 1. The repetition of a vowel sound in the same line or adjacent lines.

Life like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity;

2. A form of half-rhyme, marked by the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds, as in *fate/take*. Together with consonance (q.v.), assonance is an important element in the poetry of Wilfred Owen.

Augustan — A term used to describe a period when eminent literary works were being written by any particular nation. In English, the term covers the period 1702-1798; from the accession of Queen Anne to the publication of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. In general, Augustan writers preferred reason, excellence and finish to emotion, originality and spontaneity.

Ballad — 1. *Ballads of tradition* are usually short, dramatic and stylised anonymous narratives that use quatrains of alternate four and three stresses rhyming *abcb* as their basic stanza. Their particular ritualistic atmosphere (q.v.) is the result of their refrains, repetitions, swift narrative transitions and a strong sense of ironic inevitability. 'Sir Patrick Spens' is one such ballad.

2. The *literary ballad* is a narrative written in imitation of the form (q.v.) and spirit of the folk-ballad such as Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.

Bathos (or ANTI-CLIMAX) — a sudden and ludicrous descent from high and serious ideas to trivial ones.

Here thou, great ANNA! whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take — and sometimes tea. (Pope)

Blank Verse — Unrhymed iambic pentameters (See METRE).

Dramatic blank verse is the usual medium of English verse drama. Heroic blank verse is the usual medium of the English epic (q.v.). Until the twentieth century, blank verse was the main medium for unrhymed English verse.

Caesura — See METRE.

Caroline — The period of the reign of Charles I (1625-49).

Cliché — A phrase that has lost part of its original power to surprise and please through indiscriminate over-use. A thought or idea

can similarly be rendered trite.

Climax — 1. The arrangement of a sequence of ideas or expressions in ascending order of importance or emphasis. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested (Bacon).

2. The part of a poem or play with the greatest emotional impact.

Colloquial — Everyday vocabulary and diction. Poets such as Dryden, Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, over-reacting to the conscious poetic diction of earlier poets, recommended the use of colloquial diction in poetry.

Commonwealth — The period of Parliamentary rule under Cromwell (1649-60). This period is not particularly rich in literature.

Conceit — A striking parallel between two dissimilar things or situations. The poetry of Donne and the other metaphysical poets (q.v.) is marked by the use of conceits.

Connotation — The qualities, attributes and characteristics implied or suggested by a word, *in addition to* its accepted, primary meaning. (See also DENOTATION).

Consonance — 1. The correspondence of the same consonant sound in the same line or adjacent lines.

When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw. (Pope)

2. A form of half-rhyme, marked by the repetition of a similar pattern of consonant sounds as in blood/bleed. (See also ASSONANCE).

Convention — In literature, the agreement embodied in accepted usages, standards, etc. Most literary genres, stanza forms and types of diction (q.v.) have their particular conventions. The idea of genres itself is based upon conventional expectations.

Couplet — Two consecutive lines of verse which rhyme and usually have the same metre.

Dactyl — See METRE.

Denotation — The literal and factual meaning of a word. (See also CONNOTATION).

Diction — The choice of words to create a particular effect or tone (q.v.). It may be simple, homely, learned, pedantic, archaic, colloquial etc. (See also POETIC DICTION).

Didactic — Intended to teach or to present some moral, religious or political doctrine in a persuasive manner.

Dramatic Monologue — A poetic narrative spoken by a persona (q.v.) and revealing his thoughts, motives, desires, beliefs etc. It occurs usually at a salient moment of his life, or its recollection. Tennyson and Browning are the greatest exponents of this form in English.

Edwardian — The period of the reign of Edward VII (1901-10).

Elegy — In English verse elegy has come to mean any serious meditative poem particularly, but not exclusively, if it concerns itself with death. It often includes religious and moral reflections in addition to personal grief. Milton's 'Lycidas', Shelley's 'Adonais' and Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' were all inspired by the loss of a particular person, unlike Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard'. While the English elegy has not got any special metre, it often makes use of pastoral conventions (q.v.).

Elision — See METRE.

Elizabethan — The period of the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603). It marks the richest period of poetry and drama in English.

End-Stopping — See METRE.

Enjambement — See METRE.

Epic (or Heroic) Poem — A long, narrative poem on a serious subject written in an elevated style. Upon the actions of its hero often depends the fate of a race or a nation. The Epic is best represented in English by Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Euphemism — The substitution of a less distasteful word or phrase for a more truthful but shocking one. Lady Macbeth tells her husband that Duncan 'must be provided for'.

Fable — A short, didactic narrative in which animals and birds talk and act like human beings, like *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.

Form — Type of verse (sonnet, lyric, free verse etc.) most suitable to what the poet has to communicate; the shape of ideas and emotions in a poem.

Free Verse — A modern poetical form with no regular line length, rhyme or stanza pattern. The form or shape of the poem is created by the nature of its content. In the twentieth century it has become the most common metre for unrhymed verse.

Genre — Typical form or style of poets in a particular period. Epic, tragedy, elegy, pastoral, comedy, satire and lyric were the classical genres. The term can today be applied more loosely to other literary forms as the novel, the essay, the autobiography etc.

Georgian — A term usually reserved for the poets who were writing at the time of the accession of George V, and who were included in Edward Marsh's anthologies. Georgian poetry concerned itself with the sights and emotions of the countryside and the lyrical, nostalgic word patterns that can be formed from it. They included W.H. Davies and Rupert Brooke. As a movement it has fallen into critical discredit.

Half-Rhyme — See PARARHYME.

Heroic Couplet — Rhymed iambic pentameters. The metre of *The Canterbury Tales* and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

Hypallage (or Transferred Epithet) — The transference of an adjective from the noun it should qualify to another to which it does not properly refer. Even in common speech it appears in such phrases as 'a restless night' and 'the condemned cell'.

Hyperbole — A deliberate exaggeration for the sake of effect. Lady Macbeth remarks that not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten her little hand.

Idyll — An idealized story of happy innocence, in a pastoral form, often in verse.

Innuendo — The way of suggesting instead of openly stating one's meaning. e.g. Honesty is the best policy, but advertising also pays.

Irony — A complex mode of discourse that conveys meanings different from, and usually opposite to, the professed or obvious ones. It falls into two major categories: the verbal and the situational. When Mark Antony refers to Brutus as 'a honourable man' he is making use of verbal irony. Situational irony is often found in Shakespeare's great tragedies where the characters take actions that lead to unexpected conclusions.

Jacobean — The period of the reign of James I (1603-25).

Iamb — See METRE.

Imagery — On a basic level, imagery can be applied to the similes and metaphors that provide mental images to the reader. It can be used in a wider sense to include all objects and qualities which impress the senses. One can therefore refer to images which are tactile, visual, aural, etc.

Imagery can also be taken to include the non-verbal images that are to be found in dramatic representations, like the props and the stage effects that are connected with blood in *Macbeth*. In discussing imagery, the critic should distinguish between those images that are merely used as ornaments and those that are used *organically*. In the latter case imagery is adapted to the structure and theme (q.v.) of the play or poem and is entirely relevant to the context. In Shakespeare's mature plays, images are closely related to the situation, they fit the character using them and they are integrated with the theme, atmosphere and the exigencies of the action.

Lyric — From a song intended to be accompanied by a lyre, the lyric has come to mean a short poem directly expressing the poet's own thoughts and feelings. The ballad, ode, elegy and sonnet are often considered particular forms of lyrics.

Metaphor — A direct comparison stated or implied between two basically unrelated objects. e.g. The sea that bares her bosom to the moon (Wordsworth). Together with the simile (q.v.) metaphor is the writer's chief means of achieving concreteness and vitality of diction.

Metaphor is basic to the idea of language where words and ex-

pressions are metaphors whose original meaning has been dulled by constant use.

Metaphysical — The name given by Dryden in 1693 to a 'school' of poets writing in the first half of the seventeenth century because of their preference for intellectual imagery and conceits (q.v.). Donne, Herbert and Marvell are the most notable of the Metaphysical poets. Today this poetry enjoys high critical favour.

Metonymy — The substitution of the name of an attribute of a thing for the name of the thing itself. e.g. 'the crown' for 'the king'. As a figure of speech, metonymy is similar but distinct from synecdoche (q.v.).

Metre — The regular recurring pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. The unit of stress pattern is called a FOOT.

The most important disyllabic feet are:

the IAMB (an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed) *before*

the TROCHEE (a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed) *stiffen*

The most important trisyllabic feet are.

the ANAPAEST (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed)

as you wish

the DACTYL (a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed) *archery*
Lines of poetry are measured by the number of feet they contain.

A line with one foot is called a *monometer*.

A line with two feet is called a *dimeter*.

A line with three feet is called a *trimeter*.

A line with four feet is called a *tetrameter*.

A line with five feet is called a *pentameter*.

A line with six feet is called a *hexameter*.

A line with seven feet is called a *heptameter*.

A line with eight feet is called a *octameter*.

A line of six iambs (iambic hexameter) is called an ALEXANDRINE.

The dominant recurring pattern of feet determines the nature of the line. The most common lines in English Poetry are:

the Iambic line

I strove/ with none/ for none/ was worth/my strife.

the Trochaic line

Home art/ gone and/ta'en thy/wages.

the Anapaestic line

With a hey/and a ho/and a hey/nonino.

the Dactylic line

Half a league,/half a league,/half a league/onwards.

When the sense stops at the end of each line this is known as END-STOPPING.

'O where hae you been, Lord Randal, my son?

And where hae you been, my handsome young man?

In order to avoid a repetitive monotonous regularity, the poet

uses a number of devices. These include:
the CAESURA — A pause in the line.

And Death shall be no more; Death thou shalt die.
the ENJAMBEMENT — the sense carries over to the following line. This is also known as a *run-on line*.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so;

SUBSTITUTION — The use of a foot different from the regular pattern. e.g. The substitution of the initial trochee in the iambic pentameter:
Stiffen / the sin/ews, sum/mon up/ the blood.

ELISION — The suppression of an unstressed syllable to make the line conform to the metrical pattern.

Moving/ of th'earth/ brings harms/ and fears.

ADDITIONAL SYLLABLE — The addition of an extra stressed or unstressed syllable to the line. The former instance is known as a *Masculine ending*.

Tiger,/tiger,/ burning/ bright.

The latter instance is known as a *Feminine ending*.

By brooks,/ too broad,/ for leap/ing,

Mock Heroic — A genre that burlesques the epic (q.v.) style and manner. The *deliberate* mismatching of trivial matter and heroic manner is meant to ridicule the subject, not the epic form. Notable English mock epics include *The Nun's Priest Tale*, Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* and Pope's *Dunciad* and *The Rape of the Lock*.

Mood — The predominant emotional effect or feeling of a literary work; the impression left on the reader after a careful reading of the work.

Myth — One in a system of narratives (mythology) offering an explanation of religious phenomena. Myths are no longer believed in as true explanations of the phenomena they describe. A religion that is no longer generally believed in gives rise to myths, as in Egypt and Greece.

In contemporary critical usage, myth can refer to an invented set of symbols used by a writer, as in Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Narrative Verse — Verse which tells a story. It can include such diverse genres as epics, fables, mock epics, ballads, (qq.v.) etc. In most cases the story itself is only a pretext for the author to present a particular vision of life for the reader's evaluation.

Ode — A long lyric, often addressed to a person or to an abstraction, elevated in style and having an elaborate stanzaic structure. The two classical forms of the ode were the *Pindaric*, a very formal ode divided into three parts, and the *Horatian* which was less formal and consisted of a number of stanzas of complex structure. The latter form is best represented in English by Keats' odes. The Romantic poets employed the ode form for deep emotional meditation upon a natural scene (as in 'Ode to Autumn'), a human emotion ('Melancholy') or some

serious philosophical theme such as the immortality of the soul.

The third form is the *Irregular Ode* where each stanza has its own peculiar pattern of line lengths, number of lines, rhyme scheme and rhythm. Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' is the best known example of the *Irregular Ode* in English.

Onomatopoeia — The use of words to imitate or echo the sounds they suggest. e.g. Tennyson's 'murmur of innumerable bees'.

Oxymoron — The combination of two usually contradictory words in one expression. For example this line by Tennyson contains two oxymorons:

'And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true'.

Paradox — A truth presented under the guise of a contradictory statement as in Wordsworth's 'the child is father of the man'. A paradoxical statement appeals to whoever is prepared to discuss, think and reflect about truth. It discourages the ignorant and the superficial.

Paradox can also be a major feature of the structure (q.v.) of a literary work. Donne's sonnet 'Death be not proud' is a most celebrated example of paradoxical structure. Shakespeare's mature plays exploit the possibilities of verbal and structural paradox. The 'fair and foul' motif (q.v.) in *Macbeth* is one such example.

A literary work rich in paradox is valued as the ultimate reflection of human experiences since paradox is considered so intrinsic and important to human nature.

Pararhyme (or Half-Rhyme) — A form of incomplete rhyme (q.v.). (See also ASSONANCE and CONSONANCE).

Parody — a work that closely mimicks a serious composition in theme, phrase and rhythm.

Pastoral — An elaborate conventional literary form where the poet writes nostalgically of an idyllic countryside, where the weather is always fine and where the shepherds do no work but write poems. Originally of classical origin, this form was developed in England in plays and poems in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Elegies (q.v.) often have a pastoral background.

Pathetic Fallacy — A description of an inanimate object as though it had human sentiments and capacities. e.g. *The Cruel Sea*.

Persona — A projection of the poet into another distinct person. Chaucer the pilgrim from whose point of view we observe the goings-on in the *Canterbury pilgrimage* is an altogether different character from Chaucer the poet.

Poetic Diction — The language used in a poem to create its particular effects. The Augustans preferred 'words refined from the grossness of domestic use'. Wordsworth insisted that poetry should employ 'the real language of man in a state of vivid sensation'. Both are perhaps extremist views, and especially if followed by insensitive writers

can lead to unwelcome bathetic effects.

Most critics today use the term 'poetic diction' in a negative sense to refer to the mechanical language of many minor eighteenth century versifiers which led them to an unnatural and artificial phraesology.

Quatrain — A four line stanza with various possible rhyme schemes. This is the most common stanza in English.

Refrain — The repetition of a phrase, a line or a number of lines at the same point in each stanza. Refrains contribute to the hallucinatory quality of such genres as ballads, villanelles and Elizabethan love poems. Notable use of the refrain is made in Dylan Thomas 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night'.

Rhyme — Identity of sound between two words. It can be *single rhyme* as in *sill/will*, *double rhyme* as in *duty/beauty* or *triple rhyme* as in *tenderly/slenderly*. *Internal rhyme* consists of rhyming words in the middle and end of a particular line:

But now they are *silent*, not gamesome and *gallant*.

Rhyme increases the musicality of verse and serves to impart a feeling of completeness to stanzaic structures. (See also PARARHYME).

Romantic — In English literature the period from 1798, the date of the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, to 1837, the accession of Queen Victoria.

In general the Romantics believed in the intrinsic and innate goodness of man and therefore in the validity of his feelings. They valued Nature as a moral and aesthetic teacher and desired to free society from the restraining influences of the Church and the State.

Sarcasm — A form of humour where wounding, cutting remarks are made in order to inflict pain, whether the criticism is justified or not.

Satire — A form of humour which, by enlarging upon the faults of the self-satisfied, intends to amend their morals and manners. It can be aimed at an individual (Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*), a social class (Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*) or a nation or mankind itself (Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*).

Sentimentality — An excess of feeling where emotions are indulged in for their own sake and in a way that is out of all proportion to their very cause.

Simile — A comparison between two basically dissimilar things for purposes of explanation, allusion or ornament, usually introduced by words such as *like*, *as*, or *such*, e.g. *I sit down lifeless like a stone*.

Sonnet — A lyric in fourteen iambic pentameters of medieval Italian origin. Perfected by Petrarch (1304-74), the form was introduced into English in the sixteenth century. The two main patterns of the sonnet in English are:

The Petrarchan sonnet which is divided into an octave rhyming

abbaabba and a sestet that rhymes cdecde or cdedce. In the Miltonic variation there is not the traditional break in sense (*volta*) between the octave and the sestet.

The Shakespearean sonnet consists of three quatrains and a couplet. It rhymes ababcdcdefefgg.

Wordsworth, Keats and G.M. Hopkins wrote remarkable sonnets.

The beauty of the form lies in the rigid conventional pattern it imposes on the poet, whose ability lies in reconciling with it a freedom of expression, variety of rhythm, mood, tone and richness of imagery.

Sprung Rhythm — A form of rhythm, invented by G.M. Hopkins, where the line of verse is measured by the number of stressed syllables without taking the number of unstressed syllables into account.

Stress — The emphasis laid on a syllable or a word. The relation between weak and strong stresses determines the metre of a line of English verse.

Structure — The organization of the ideas and emotions in a poem that contribute to its coherent and satisfying form (q.v.).

Style — The characteristic method of writing of a poet or a school of poets. It refers to the choice of genre, diction, tone, imagery, metre, syntax etc.

Subject — The immediate plot or story line; what actually takes place as opposed to theme (q.v.).

Syllabics — A verse form where the number of syllables in each line determines its length. Syllabics does not distinguish between strong and weak syllables.

Symbol — A richly suggestive image or metaphor that succeeds in setting up deep reverberations in the conscious and subconscious mind. Symbols often have an arbitrary relationship with what they represent (e.g. the eagle and heroism) and therefore they appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect. In some cases symbols can be the personal creation of a writer. Both Blake and Yeats make use of such symbols.

Synecdoche — A figure of speech in which a part of an object or idea stands for the whole or the whole for the part. One can say 'a hundred sail' for 'a hundred ships' or 'England' when one means the eleven players of the national team.

Tension — The attunement of various distinct meanings or implications in a set of images or one structural complex. The essential 'meaning' of a poem emerges out of the careful consideration of the particular tensions.

Theme — The central idea of a work, which is capable of wider application than the subject (q.v.). *Macbeth* can be said to be about ambition and its tragic repercussions.

Tone — The dominant feeling or attitude behind a poem; the expression of the poet's attitude, and relationship with his subject and his audience. Occasionally it is used to refer to the specific moral outlook of the poem.

Trochee — See METRE.

Verse — 1. A synonym for poetry. e.g. *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*.

2. A synonym for mechanical, uninspired, superficial and unimaginative metrical writings as opposed to that of poetic merit. e.g. Nursery Rhymes are verse rather than poetry.

3. A synonym for all metrical writing as opposed to prose. e.g. Shakespeare's plays are mostly written in verse.

4. A synonym for a stanza (q.v.).

The meaning of the word is determined by the particular context.

Victorian — The period of the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901); as a term often used to refer to certain attitudes, beliefs or styles.

Wit — Cleverness, ability with words, facility of seeing similarity in dissimilar objects.

In Chaucer, wit is used as a synonym for wisdom. To the seventeenth century, it meant a comparison which 'compels interest by its far-fetched or outrageous quality'. By wit, the Augustans understood 'thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject'.