

LITERARY ELEMENTS & LANGUAGE TERMS – SET #3A

Poetry Compilation

GENERAL TERMS

Antithesis- a figure of speech characterized by strongly contrasting words, clauses, sentences, or ideas, as in “Man proposes; God disposes.” Antithesis is a balancing of one term against another for emphasis or stylistic effectiveness. The second line of the following couplet by Alexander Pope is an example of antithesis:

*The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,
And wretches hang that jury-men may dine.*

Apostrophe- a figure of speech in which someone (usually, but not always absent), some abstract quality, or a nonexistent personage is directly addressed as though present. Following are two examples of apostrophe:

*Papa Above!
Regard a Mouse.*

-Emily Dickinson

*Milton! Thou shouldst be living in this hour;
England hath need of thee . . .*

-William Wordsworth

Parallelism- a similar grammatical structure within a line or lines of poetry. Parallelism is controlling principle of the poetry of Walt Whitman, as in the following lines:

*. . . Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to
connect them.
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.*

TYPES OF POETRY

Ekphrastic poem- a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the “action” of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning. A notable example is “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” in which the poet John Keats speculates on the identity of the lovers who appear to dance and play music, simultaneously frozen in time and in perpetual motion:

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Elegy- a sustained and formal poem setting forth the poet’s meditations upon death or another solemn theme. Examples include Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”; Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*; and Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”

Lyric poem- any short poem that presents a single speaker who expresses thoughts and feelings. Love lyrics are common, but lyric poems have also been written on subjects as different as religion and reading. **Sonnets and odes** are lyric poems.

sonnet- normally a fourteen-line iambic pentameter poem. The conventional Italian, or Petrarchan sonnet is rhymed *abba, abba, cde, cde*; the English, or Shakespearean, sonnet is rhymed *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*.

Narrative poem- a poem which tells a story or presents a narrative, whether simple or complex, long or short. **Epics and ballads** are examples of narrative poems.

POETIC FORMS

Traditional

- Follows fixed rules such as a specified number of lines
- Has a regular pattern of rhyme and rhythm
- Examples: epic, ode, ballad, sonnet, limerick, haiku

Organic

- Doesn't follow established rules for form.
- Doesn't have a regular pattern of rhythm and may not rhyme at all
- May use unconventional spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- Examples: free verse, concrete poetry

Line - Each individual line of a poem; the length of lines, where they break, and how they are punctuated all contribute to a poem's rhythm and meaning.

Stanza - A grouping of consecutive lines in a poem that form a single unit; analogous to a paragraph in prose

Refrain- a group of words forming a phrase or sentence and consisting of one or more lines repeated at intervals in a poem, usually at the end of a stanza.

Caesura- a pause, usually near the middle of a line of verse, usually indicated by the sense of the line, and often greater than the normal pause. For example, one would naturally pause after "human" in the following line from Alexander Pope:

To err is human, to forgive divine.

End-stopped- a line with a pause at the end. Lines that end with a period, a comma, a colon, a semicolon, an exclamation point, or a question mark are end-stopped lines.

*True ease in writing comes from Art, not Chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.*

Enjambment- the continuation of the sense and grammatical construction from one line of poetry to the next. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is notable for its use of enjambment, as seen in the following lines:

*. . . . Or if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd
Fast by the oracle of God,*

RHYTHMIC ELEMENTS

Rhythm - A pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry.

Meter- the repetition of a regular rhythmic unit in a line of poetry. The meter of a poem emphasizes the musical quality of the language and often relates directly to the subject matter of the poem. Each unit of meter is known as a foot.

Poetic foot- a group of syllables in verse usually consisting of one accented syllable and one or two unaccented syllables associated with it. The most common type of feet are as follows:

iambic u /
trochaic / u
anapestic u u /

dactylic / u u
pyrrhic u u
spondaic //

The following poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge illustrates all of these feet except the pyrrhic foot:

*Trochee trips from long to short.
From long to long in solemn sort
Slow Spondee stalks; strong foot! yet ill able
Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable.
Iambics march from short to long;
With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng.*

SOUND DEVICES - the techniques of deploying the sound of words, especially in poetry. The devices are used for many reasons, including to create a general effect of pleasant or of discordant sound, to imitate another sound, or to reflect a meaning.

Alliteration- the repetition of identical or similar consonant sounds, normally at the beginnings of words. "Gnus never know pneumonia" is an example of alliteration since, despite the spellings, all four words begin with the "n" sound.

Assonance- the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds. "A land laid waste with all its young men slain" repeats the same "a" sound in "laid," "waste," and "slain."

Cacophony- a harsh, unpleasant combination of sounds or tones. It may be an unconscious flaw in the poet's music, resulting in harshness of sound or difficulty of articulation, or it may be used consciously for effect. See, for example, the following line from Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

Consonance- the repetition of similar consonant sounds in a group of words. The term usually refers to words in which the ending consonants are the same but the vowels that precede them are different. Consonance is found in the following pairs of words: "add" and "read," "bill and ball," and "born" and "burn."

Euphony- a style in which combinations of words pleasant to the ear predominate. The following lines from John Keats' *Endymion* are euphonic:

*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.*

Onomatopoeia- the use of words whose sound suggests their meaning. Examples are "buzz," "hiss," or "honk."

Slant rhyme- rhyme that appears correct from spelling, but is half-rhyme from the pronunciation. Examples include "watch" and "match," and "love" and "move."

End Rhyme - Rhyme that occurs at the ends of lines of poetry The following lines contain end rhyme:

And be one traveler, long I stood / And looked down one as far as I could.

Internal rhyme- rhyme that occurs within a line, rather than at the end. The following lines contain internal rhyme:

*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping. . . suddenly there came a tapping. . . .*