

Glossary of Poetic Terms

The definitions in this glossary sometimes repeat and sometimes differ in language from those in the text. Where they differ, the intention is to give a fuller sense of the term's meaning by allowing the reader a double perspective on it. Page numbers refer to discussion in the text, which in most but not all cases is fuller than that in the glossary.

Accent In this book, the same as *stress*. A syllable given more prominence in pronunciation than its neighbors is said to be accented. 177–87

Allegory A narrative or description having a second meaning beneath the surface one. 88–89

Alliteration The repetition at close intervals of the initial consonant sounds of accented syllables or important words (for example, *map-moon, kill-code, preach-approve*). Important words and accented syllables beginning with vowels may also be said to alliterate with each other inasmuch as they all have the same lack of an initial consonant sound (for example, “*Inebriate of air am I*”). 164–68

Allusion A reference, explicit or implicit, to something in previous literature or history. (The term is reserved by some writers for implicit references only, such as those in “On His Blindness,” 125, and “In the Garden,” 130; but the distinction between the two kinds of reference is not always clear-cut.) 120–24

Anapest A metrical foot consisting of two unaccented syllables followed by one accented syllable (for example, *un-der-stand*). 178

Anapestic meter A meter in which a majority of the feet are anapests. (But see *Triple meter*.) 178, 185–86

Apostrophe A figure of speech in which someone absent or dead or something nonhuman is addressed as if it were alive and present and could reply. 65

Approximate rime (also known as *imperfect rime, near rime, slant rime, or oblique rime*) A term used for words in a riming pattern that have some kind of sound correspondence but are not perfect rimes. See *Rime*. Approximate rimes occur occasionally in patterns where most of the rimes are perfect (for example, arrayed-said in “Richard Cory,” 318), and sometimes are used systematically in place of perfect rime (for example, “Mr. Z,” 115). 165

Assonance The repetition at close intervals of the vowel sounds of accented syllables or important words (for example, *hat-ran-amber, vein-made*). 164–67

Aubade A poem about dawn; a morning love song; or a poem about the parting of lovers at dawn. 52, 301

Ballad A fairly short narrative poem written in a songlike stanza form. Examples: “The Two Ravens” (The Two Corbies), 12–14; “Ballad of Birmingham,” 14; “Edward,” 229; “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” 294; “Eutrick,” 325. Also see *Folk ballad*.

Blank verse Unrhmed iambic pentameter. 187

Cacophony A harsh, discordant, unpleasant-sounding choice and arrangement of sounds. 200–201

Caesura See *Grammatical pause* and *Rhetorical pause*.

Connotation What a word suggests beyond its basic definition; a word's overtones of meaning. 37–43

Consonance The repetition at close intervals of the final consonant sounds of accented syllables or important words (for example, *book-plaque-thicker*). 164–67

Continuous form That form of a poem in which the lines follow each other without formal grouping, the only breaks being dictated by units of meaning. 214–15

Couplet Two successive lines, usually in the same meter, linked by rime. 219

Dactyl A metrical foot consisting of one accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables (for example, *mē-ter-ly*). 178

Dactylic meter A meter in which a majority of the feet are dactyls. (But see *Triple meter*.) 178, 186

Denotation The basic definition or dictionary meaning of a word. 37–43

Didactic poetry Poetry having as a primary purpose to teach or preach. 235–36

Dimeter A metrical line containing two feet. 178

Dipodic foot The basic foot of *dipodic verse*, consisting (when complete) of an unaccented syllable, a lightly accented syllable, an unaccented

syllable, and a heavily accented syllable, in that succession. However, dipodic verse accommodates a tremendous amount of variety, as shown by the examples in the text. 192

Dipodic verse A meter in which there is a perceptible alternation between light and heavy stresses. See *Dipodic foot*. 192 •

Double rime A rime in which the repeated vowel is in the second last syllable of the words involved (for example, politely-rightly-spirited); one form of *feminine rime*. 171 (Question 5)

Dramatic framework The situation, whether actual or fictional, realistic or fanciful, in which an author places his or her characters in order to express the theme. 25–26

Dramatic irony See *Irony*.

Duple meter A meter in which a majority of the feet contain two syllables. Iambic and trochaic are both duple meters. 178

End rime Rimes that occur at the ends of lines. 165

End-stopped line A line that ends with a natural speech pause, usually marked by punctuation. 187

English (or Shakespearean) sonnet A sonnet riming *abab cdcd efef gg*. Its content or structure ideally parallels the rime scheme, falling into three coordinate quatrains and a concluding couplet; but it is often structured, like the Italian sonnet, into octave and sestet, the principal break in thought coming at the end of the eighth line. 219–220 (Exercise 1)

Euphony A smooth, pleasant-sounding choice and arrangement of sounds. 200–201

Expected rhythm The metrical expectation set up by the basic meter of a poem. 184

Extended figure (also known as *sustained figure*) A figure of speech (usually metaphor, simile, personification, or apostrophe) sustained or developed through a considerable number of lines or through a whole poem. 69–70

Feminine rime A rime in which the repeated accented vowel is in either the second or third last syllable of the words involved (for example, ceiling-appealing, hurrying-scurrying). 164, 171 (Question 5)

Figurative language Language employing figures of speech; language that cannot be taken literally or only literally. 61–68, 79–89, 100–108

Figure of speech Broadly, any way of saying something other than the ordinary way; more narrowly (and for the purposes of this book), a way of saying one thing and meaning another. 61–68, 79–89, 100–108

Fixed form Any form of poem in which the length and pattern are prescribed by previous usage or tradition, such as *sonnet*, *limerick*, *vilanelle*, *haiku*, and so on. 217–21

Folk ballad A narrative poem designed to be sung, composed by an anonymous author, and transmitted orally for years or generations before being written down. It has usually undergone modification through the process of oral transmission. 13–14

Foot The basic unit used in the scansion or measurement of verse. A foot usually contains one accented syllable and one or two unaccented syllables, but the *monosyllabic foot*, the *spondaic foot* (*spondee*), and the *dipodic foot* are all modifications of this principle. 177–78

Form The external pattern or shape of a poem, describable without reference to its content, as *continuous form*, *stanzaic form*, *fixed form* (and their varieties), *free verse*, and *syllabic verse*. 214–221, 223. See *Structure*.

Free verse Nonmetrical verse. Poetry written in free verse is arranged in lines, may be more or less rhythmical, but has no fixed metrical pattern or expectation. 186–87

Grammatical pause (also known as *caesura*) A pause introduced into the reading of a line by a mark of punctuation. Grammatical pauses do not affect scansion. 184–85

Haiku A three-line poem, Japanese in origin, narrowly conceived of as a fixed form in which the lines contain respectively five, seven, and five syllables (in American practice this requirement is frequently dispensed with). Haiku are generally concerned with some aspect of nature and present a single image or two juxtaposed images without comment, relying on suggestion rather than on explicit statement to communicate their meaning. 223

Heard rhythm The actual rhythm of a metrical poem as we hear it when it is read naturally. The heard rhythm mostly conforms to but sometimes departs from or modifies the *expected rhythm*. 184

Heptameter A metrical line containing seven feet. 178

Hexameter A metrical line containing six feet. 178

Hyperbole See *Overstatement*.

Iamb A metrical foot consisting of one unaccented syllable followed by one accented syllable (for example, re-hearse). 178

Iambic meter A meter in which the majority of feet are iambs. The most common English meter. 178, 185–86

Iambic-anapestic meter A meter that freely mixes iambs and anapests, and in which it might be difficult to determine which foot prevails without actually counting. 186

Imagery The representation through language of sense experience. 49–52

Internal rhyme A rhyme in which one or both of the rhyme-words occur within the line. 164–65

Irony A situation, or a use of language, involving some kind of incongruity or discrepancy. 104. Three kinds of irony are distinguished in this book:

Verbal irony A figure of speech in which what is meant is the opposite of what is said. 104–106

Dramatic irony A device by which the author implies a different meaning from that intended by the speaker (or by a speaker) in a literary work. 106–107

Irony of situation (or situational irony) A situation in which there is an incongruity between actual circumstances and those that would seem appropriate or between what is anticipated and what actually comes to pass. 107–108

Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet A sonnet consisting of an octave rhiming *ababbba* and of a sestet using any arrangement of two or three additional rhymes, such as *cddcd* or *cdecde*. 218–19, 220 (Exercise 1)

Limerick A fixed form consisting of five lines of anapestic meter, the first two trimeter, the next two dimeter, the last line trimeter, rhiming *abba*; used exclusively for humorous or nonsense verse. 217–18, 221–22

Masculine rhyme (also known as single rhyme) A rhyme in which the repeated accented vowel sound is in the final syllable of the words involved (for example, dance-pants, scald-recalled). 164, 171 (Question 5)

Metaphor A figure of speech in which an implicit comparison is made between two things essentially unlike. It may take one of four forms: (1) that in which the literal term and the figurative term are *both named*; (2) that in which the literal term is *named* and the figurative term *implied*; (3) that in which the literal term is *implied* and the figurative term *named*; (4) that in which *both* the literal and the figurative terms are *implied*. 61–64

Meter Regularized rhythm; an arrangement of language in which the accents occur at apparently equal intervals in time. 176–87

Metonymy A figure of speech in which some significant aspect or detail of an experience is used to represent the whole experience. In this book the single term *metonymy* is used for what are sometimes distin-

guished as two separate figures: *synecdoche* (the use of the part for the whole) and *metonymy* (the use of something closely related for the thing actually meant). 65–66

Metrical pause A pause that supplies the place of an expected accented syllable. Unlike *grammatical* and *rhetorical pauses*, metrical pauses affect scansion. 193

Monometer A metrical line containing one foot. 178

Monosyllabic foot A foot consisting of a single accented syllable (for example, *shine*). 178

Octameter A metrical line containing eight feet. 178

Octave (1) An eight-line stanza. (2) The first eight lines of a sonnet, especially one structured in the manner of an Italian sonnet. 218

Onomatopoeia The use of words that supposedly mimic their meaning in their sound (for example, boom, click, plop). 198

Onomatopoeic language Language employing *onomatopoeia*.

Overstatement (or hyperbole) A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used in the service of truth. 101–104

Paradox A statement or situation containing apparently contradictory or incompatible elements. 100–101

Paradoxical situation A situation containing apparently but not actually incompatible elements. The celebration of a fifth birthday anniversary by a twenty-year-old man is paradoxical but explainable if the man was born on February 29. The Christian doctrines that Christ was born of a virgin and is both God and man are, for a Christian believer, paradoxes (that is, apparently impossible but true). 100

Paradoxical statement (or verbal paradox) A figure of speech in which an apparently self-contradictory statement is nevertheless found to be true. 100

Paraphrase A restatement of the content of a poem designed to make its *prose meaning* as clear as possible. 23–24

Pentameter A metrical line containing five feet. 178

Personification A figure of speech in which human attributes are given to an animal, an object, or a concept. 64–65

Petrarchan sonnet See *Italian sonnet*.

Phonetic intensive A word whose sound, by an obscure process, to some degree suggests its meaning. As differentiated from *onomatopoeic words*, the meanings of phonetic intensives do not refer to sounds. 198–99

Prose Nonmetrical language; the opposite of *verse*. 176

Prose meaning That part of a poem's *total meaning* that can be separated out and expressed through paraphrase. 131–34

Prose poem Usually a short composition having the intentions of poetry but written in prose rather than verse. 187

Quatrain (1) A four-line stanza. (2) A four-line division of a sonnet marked off by its rhyme scheme. 219

Refrain A repeated word, phrase, line, or group of lines, normally at some fixed position in a poem written in stanzaic form. 166, 175, 215–17

Rhetorical pause (also known as *caesura*) A natural pause, unmarked by punctuation, introduced into the reading of a line by its phrasing or syntax. Rhetorical pauses do not affect scansion. 184

Rhetorical poetry Poetry using artificially eloquent language, that is, language too high-flown for its occasion and unfaithful to the full complexity of human experience. 235

Rhythm Any wavelike recurrence of motion or sound. 176–87

Rime (or *rhyme*) The repetition of the accented vowel sound and all succeeding sounds in important or importantly positioned words (for example, old-cold, vane-reign, court-report, order-recorder). The above definition applies to *perfect rime* and assumes that the accented vowel sounds involved are preceded by differing consonant sounds. If the preceding consonant sound is the same (for example, manse-romance, style-stile), or if there is no preceding consonant sound in either word (for example, aisle-isle, alter-alar), or if the same word is repeated in the riming position (for example, hill-hill), the words are called *identical rimes*. Both *perfect rimes* and *identical rimes* are to be distinguished from *approximate rimes*. 164–67

Rime scheme Any fixed pattern of rimes characterizing a whole poem or its stanzas. 215–17

Run-on line A line which has no natural speech pause at its end, allowing the sense to flow uninterrupted into the succeeding line. 187

Sarcasm Bitter or cutting speech; speech intended by its speaker to give pain to the person addressed. 104

Satire A kind of literature that ridicules human folly or vice with the purpose of bringing about reform or of keeping others from falling into similar folly or vice. 104

Scansion The process of measuring verse, that is, of marking accented and unaccented syllables, dividing the lines into feet, identifying the metrical pattern, and noting significant variations from that pattern. 178–83

Sentimental poetry Poetry aimed primarily at stimulating the emotions rather than at communicating experience honestly and freshly. 234–35

Sestet (1) A six-line stanza. (2) The last six lines of a sonnet structured on the Italian model. 218

Shakespearean sonnet See *English sonnet*.

Simile A figure of speech in which an explicit comparison is made between two things essentially unlike. The comparison is made explicit by the use of some such word or phrase as *like*, *as*, *than*, *similar to*, *resembles*, or *seems*. 61

Single rime See *Masculine rime*.

Situational irony See *Irony*.

Sonnet A fixed form of fourteen lines, normally iambic pentameter, with a rhyme scheme conforming to or approximating one of two main types — the *Italian* or the *English*. 139, 218–21

Spondee A metrical foot consisting of two syllables equally or almost equally accented (for example, true-blue). 178

Stanza A group of lines whose metrical pattern (and usually its rhyme scheme as well) is repeated throughout a poem. 178, 215–17

Stanzaic form The form taken by a poem when it is written in a series of units having the same number of lines and usually other characteristics in common, such as metrical pattern or rhyme scheme. 215–17

Stress In this book, the same as *Accent*. But see 177 (footnote).

Structure The internal organization of a poem's content. See *Form*.

Sustained figure See *Extended figure*.

Syllabic verse Verse measured by the number of syllables rather than the number of feet per line. 196. Also see *Haiku*.

Symbol A figure of speech in which something (object, person, situation, or action) means more than what it is. A symbol, in other words, may be read both literally and metaphorically. 80–87

Synecdoche A figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole. In this book it is subsumed under the term *Metonymy*. 65–66

Terza rima An interlocking rhyme scheme with the pattern *aba bcb cdc*, etc. 228

Tetrameter A metrical line containing four feet. 178

Theme The central idea of a literary work. 23–24

Tone The writer's or speaker's attitude toward his subject, his audience, or himself; the emotional coloring, or emotional meaning, of a work. 145–49

Total meaning The total experience communicated by a poem. It includes all those dimensions of experience by which a poem communicates — sensuous, emotional, imaginative, and intellectual — and it can be communicated in no other words than those of the poem itself. 131–34

- Trimeter* A metrical line containing three feet. 178
- Triple meter* A meter in which a majority of the feet contain three syllables. (Actually, if more than 25 percent of the feet in a poem are triple, its effect is more triple than duple, and it ought perhaps to be referred to as triple meter.) Anapestic and dactylic are both triple meters. 178
- Triple rime* A rime in which the repeated accented vowel sound is in the third last syllable of the words involved (for example, gainfully-disdainfully); one form of *feminine rime*. 171 (Question 5)
- Trochaic meter* A meter in which the majority of feet are trochees. 178, 185-86
- Trochee* A metrical foot consisting of one accented syllable followed by one unaccented syllable (for example, bār-ter). 178
- Understatement* A figure of speech that consists of saying less than one means, or of saying what one means with less force than the occasion warrants. 102-104
- Verbal irony* See *Irony*.
- Verse* Metrical language; the opposite of *prose*. 176
- Villanelle* See 221 (Exercise 2).