



Elements of Poetry

Words/Diction: The Building Blocks of Poetry

The words of poetry create rhythm, rhyme, meter, and form. They define the poem's speaker, the characters, the setting, and the situation, and they also carry its ideas and emotions. Words are sometimes ambiguous, and much literature is built on that ambiguity.

- *Denotation & Connotation.* Denotation is more like the dictionary definition meaning of a word while the connotation is a suggested or implied meaning of the word beyond its denotation. It is the baggage attached to the word. Example: "girl" might have little meaning beyond its denotation meaning, but "chick" has many connotations to it.
- *Levels of Diction (high, middle, low).* High Diction (formal diction): exactly follows the rules of syntax; it's characterized by complex words and a lofty tone Middle(neutral) diction: is more direct and uses correct language Low(Informal) Diction: Relaxed, conversational, and characterized by informal familiar language, and overall lazy words.
- *Diction: specific and concrete.* Specific refers to objects or conditions that can be perceived or imagined. Concrete describes conditions or qualities that are exact and specific.
- *Diction: general and abstract.* General signifies broad classes of persons, objects, and phenomena. Abstract refers to qualities that are rarefied and theoretical.

Imagery

Imagery is language that connect to our senses (*visual, auditory, smell, taste, touch*). Imagery words help the reader to recall and recombine images, sights, sounds tastes, smells, sensations of touch and motions. A single sensory description would be an "image," but multiple images that work together to communicate a mood or meaning is referred to as "imagery."

Figures of Speech/Figurative Language

Figures of speech, metaphoric language, figurative language, figurative devices and rhetorical figures are terms describing organized patterns of comparison that deepen, broaden, extend, illuminate, and emphasize meaning. A figure of speech is saying one thing but meaning another.

- *metaphor and simile.* Metaphor is a comparison that equates known objects or actions with something that is unknown or to be explained. Simile illustrates the similarity of something known to thing unknown or could be explained using the word "like" or "as." Whereas a metaphor merges identities, a simile focuses on resemblances. (Love is a rose = metaphor; love is like a rose = simile)
- *metaphoric analysis of vehicle and tenor.* The vehicle is the specific words, object or action described. It is literal and specific; it is the features and qualities of this literal object that are being carried over to give meaning and insight into the object or actions that are unknown (or what is called the tenor). The rose = the vehicle. What the rose implies love means = the tenor. To analyze metaphor, you have to closely examine the vehicle and make the inferential leaps from it to what the qualities of the vehicle imply about the tenor.
- *anaphora.* Anaphora is the repetition of a word or face repeatedly through the text or section of the text for weight and emphasis. An example from the book is "**What** the Hammer? **What** the chain? In **what** furnace was thy brain? **What** the anvil"

- *personification*. Where the poet gives human qualities to objects or places.
- *synecdoche and metonymy*. Synecdoche (“taking one thing as another”) is a device in which a part stands for the whole or a whole for a part: e.g. “all hands on deck.” Metonym (a “transfer of name”) substitutes one thing for another: e.g. saying “the White House” to mean the policies and activities of the President

Tone

Tone is the speaker or narrator’s attitude towards the subject. It is conveyed through the author’s diction (word choice) and by what manner the author approaches the subject

- *irony (verbal, situational, dramatic)*. Irony is a mode of indirection, a means of making a point by emphasizing a discrepancy or opposite. As an aspect of tone, it is a powerful way to convey attitudes.
- *Satire*. In satire the voice of the author or speaker cleverly attacks its subject, undercutting and spoofing through its indirection.

Form

- *Closed-Form Poetry* is written in specific and traditional patterns of lines produced through line length, meter, rhyme, and line groupings.
- *couplet & tercet, triplet, quatrain*. Couplet: Contains two rhyming lines and is the *shortest* distinct closed form. (e.i. "I sing/ each spring") They often tend to be *iambic tetra meter* (four stresses) or *iambic pentameter* (5 stresses). *Iambic pentra meter* can also be considered as a *heroic couplet* or *neoclassic couplet*. Tercet/triplet: consists of three line stanzas. A quatrain is a four-line stanza.
- *Sonnet*. Originating in Italy and derived from the Italian word, "Sonetto", a sonnet is traditionally a fourteen line poem that follows a strict rhyming pattern. The two main types of sonnets are the Italian (or Petrarchan) and Shakespearean sonnet.
- *Open-Form Poetry/ Free Verse* is free of the restrictions and patterns of close-formed verse. It is liberated from regular metrics and embraces spoken rhythms. Poets attempt to fuse form and content.
- *Visual poetry/shaped poetry* (shaped verse/concrete poetry), is poetry written in a way that the lines form a recognizable shape. The words, lines, and spaces, create a picture within the poem.

Symbolism and Allusion

- *Symbol*. A symbol has meaning in and of itself, but it is also understood to represent something else. It is a shorthand way of referring to extensive ideas or attitudes that otherwise would be inappropriate to include in the brief format of a poem. By definition, symbols work on multiple levels of meaning at once.
- *allusion* Allusion is a reference made by an author to another text or event in which the reader should gather meaning or previous knowledge into current context. These references may be made to other works, cultural heritage or ancient history. Allusions are a means of deepening the meaning of a text and a presupposed common knowledge between author and reader. They may consist of brief quotations from other works or references to historical events. They connect new literary material with a broader sense of cultural tradition.

***See chpts. 12-17 for more detailed descriptions of these different elements of poetry