**Poetry Glossary**

**1. Basic Terms**

**denotation:** the dictionary meaning of a word

**connotation:** the implied or suggested meaning connected with a word

**literal meaning:** limited to the simplest, ordinary, most obvious meaning

**figurative meaning:** associative or connotative meaning; representational

**meter:** measured pattern of rhythmic accents in a line of verse

**rhyme:** correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse

**2. Figurative Language**

**apostrophe:** a direct address of an inanimate object, abstract qualities, or a person not living or present.  
  
*Example:* "Beware, O Asparagus, you've stalked my last meal."

**hyperbole:** exaggeration for emphasis (the opposite of understatement)  
  
*Example:* "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

**metaphor:** comparison between essentially unlike things without using words OR application of a name or description to something to which it is not literally applicable  
  
*Example:* "[Love] is an ever fixed mark, / that looks on tempests and is never shaken."

**metonymy:** a closely related term substituted for an object or idea  
  
*Example:* "We have always remained loyal to the crown."

**oxymoron:** a combination of two words that appear to contradict each other  
  
*Example:* bittersweet

**paradox:** a situation or phrase that appears to be contradictory but which contains a truth worth considering  
  
*Example:* "In order to preserve peace, we must prepare for war."

**personification:** the endowment of inanimate objects or abstract concepts with animate or living qualities  
  
*Example:* "Time let me play / and be golden in the mercy of his means"

**pun:** play on words OR a humorous use of a single word or sound with two or more implied meanings; quibble  
  
*Example:* "They're called lessons . . . because they lessen from day to day."

**simile:** comparison between two essentially unlike things using words such as "like," as," or "as though"  
  
*Example:* "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"

**synecdoche:** a part substituted for the whole  
  
*Example:* "Friends, Romans, countrymen: lend me your ears"

**3. Poetic Devices**

**irony:** a contradiction of expectation between what is said and what is meant (verbal irony) or what is expected in a particular circumstance or behavior (situational), or when a character speaks in ignorance of a situation known to the audience or other characters (situational)  
  
*Example:* "Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea"

**imagery:** word or sequence of words representing a sensory experience (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory)  
  
*Example:* "bells knelling classes to a close" (auditory)

**synesthesia:** an attempt to fuse different senses by describing one in terms of another  
  
*Example:* the sound of her voice was sweet

**symbol:** an object or action that stands for something beyond itself  
  
*Example:* white = innocence, purity, hope

**alliteration:** the repetition of consonant sounds, particularly at the beginning of words  
  
*Example:* ". . . like a wanderer white"

**assonance:** the repetition of similar vowel sounds  
  
*Example:* "I rose and told him of my woe"

**elision:** the omission of an unstressed vowel or syllable to preserve the meter of a line of poetry  
  
*"Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame"*

**onomatopoeia:** the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe  
  
*Example:* "crack" or "whir"

**allusion:** a reference to the person, event, or work outside the poem or literary piece  
  
*Example:* "Shining, it was Adam and maiden"

**4. Poetic Forms**

**open:** poetic form free from regularity and consistency in elements such as rhyme, line length, and metrical form

**closed:** poetic form subject to a fixed structure and pattern

**stanza:** unit of a poem often repeated in the same form throughout a poem; a unit of poetic lines ("verse paragraph")

**blank verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter

**free verse:** lines with no prescribed pattern or structure

**couplet:** a pair of lines, usually rhymed

**heroic couplet:** a pair of rhymed lines in iambic pentameter (tradition of the heroic epic form)

**quatrain:** four-line stanza or grouping of four lines of verse

**sonnet** fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter with a prescribed rhyme scheme; its subject is traditionally that of love

**English (Shakespearean) Sonnet:** A sonnet probably made popular by Shakespeare with the following rhyme scheme: **abab cdcd efef gg**

**Italian (Petrarchan) Sonnet:** A form of sonnet made popular by [Petrarch](file:///\\petra) with the following rhyme scheme: **abbaabba cdecde OR cdcdcd**

Its first octave generally presents a thought, picture, or emotion, while its final sestet presents an explanation, comment, or summary.

**5. Meter**

**stress:** greater amount of force used to pronounce one syllable over another

**pause:** (caesura) a pause for a beat in the rhythm of the verse (often indicated by a line break or a mark of punctuation)

**rising meter:** meter containing metrical feet that move from unstressed to stressed syllables

**iambic (iamb):** a metrical foot containing two syllables--the first is unstressed, while the second is stressed

**anapestic (anapest):** a metrical foot containing three syllables--the first two are unstressed, while the last is stressed

**falling meter:** meter containing metrical feet that move from stressed to unstressed syllables

**trochaic (trochee):** a metrical foot containing two syllables--the first is stressed, while the second is unstressed

**dactylic (dactyl):** a metrical foot containing three syllables--the first is stressed, while the last two are unstressed

**spondee:** an untraditional metrical foot in which two consecutive syllables are stressed

**iambic pentameter:** a traditional form of rising meter consisting of lines containing five iambic feet (and, thus, ten syllables)