

## GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS WITH EXAMPLES

**alliteration** - repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, e.g. 'funny face' or 'cowardly custard'.

**assonance** - repetition of the similar vowel sounds. These could be the same vowel sounds with different consonants, e.g. 'blue moon', 'funny tummy', or the same consonants with different vowel sounds, e.g. 'black block', 'sad Sid'.

**context** - something outside the text that affects its meaning, e.g. its historical context and/or its social context. Advances in science or transport, expectations of women, life expectancy, religious belief, whether or not there was a war on when it was written - these are examples of context.

**dialect words** - a dialect is a form of language spoken in a particular area or by a particular social group. 'dialect words' are examples of words or meanings that distinguish a dialect from standard English or from other dialects. This could be a word that only occurs in that dialect, e.g. 'mardy' in Yorkshire, West Midlands etc. meaning 'grumpy, surly'.

**direct address** - when a poem talks to us! E.g:

'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?'

- Sonnet, William Shakespeare

'Look in my face: my name is Might-Have-Been'

- Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'A Superscription'

**enjambement** - when a sentence runs over from one line of verse into the next. The word comes from the French word for leg: 'la jambe'.

This is a poem about a line of ants  
running along one twig and then another  
twig and the enjambement reflects the  
unending movement of the ants until one of them  
stops.

That was end-stopping.

So is this.

**form** - the shape of the poem. Some shapes have names, e.g. sonnet, ballad, dramatic monologue. Others do not, but there will always be something that binds the poem together: a particular rhythm, rhymes and so on. Think: why does this form, this shape, suit the subject and its treatment by the poet?

**free verse** - a poem with no regular rhythm or line length.

It can make you wonder: why do we call this a poem at all?

Isn't it just someone deciding when  
to start

a new line whenever they like

in a rather annoying and

pretentious

way?

**hyperbole** - deliberate exaggeration for effect. 'I've told you a thousand times!' is one annoying example.

**imagery** - language that describes something using at least one of the five senses. Often this will be a mental image, but imagery can also describe a sound, a smell, a taste &c. It is a very broad term indeed, and is also applied to figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

**literal and figurative language** -

**Literal language** means directly what it states. 'I laughed a lot' is literal.

**Figurative language** does not mean directly what it states. 'I laughed my head off' is figurative.

Note: metaphors, similes and personification are all examples of figurative language.

**metaphor** - an image which implies a comparison by stating that something is the thing it resembles. 'The sea was woman; the woman was the sea.' - Ray Bradbury, in his short story, 'The Shoreline at Sunset', about some boys who find a mermaid.

**non-standard English** - a variety of English other than standard, e.g. Caribbean, Cockney, Scouse. See 'dialect' above.

**onomatopoeia** - when the words sound like what they mean, e.g. 'buzz,' 'crash'. Movement may also be imitated, e.g. 'splishy-splashy fish'.

**personification** - describing something non-human as if it has human characteristics such as feelings. This could be an inanimate (non-living) object: 'the broken toaster spat crumbs at me'.

**rhyme scheme** - the way rhymes within a poem are organised.

**rhyming couplets** - two lines following each other which rhyme. In a play, a rhyming couplet is often said by a character who is very certain of something. This may be a bad decision he or she has just made!

**rhythm** - the arrangement of words to form a regular beat through a pattern of stresses. Rhythm is to poetry what the beat is to music.

**sibilance** - alliteration of the 's' sound, e.g. 'serious snakes stay sober'.

**simile** - a comparison between two things, using 'like' or 'as'.

'Her skin was soft as sable,  
Her eyes were wide as day,  
Her hair was blacker than the bog

**sonnet** - a poem of fourteen lines,

**stanza** - a clearly demarcated part of a poem. Another word for 'verse', really!

**structure** - how the poet has organised his or her work into patterns, e.g. the number of stanzas/verses and their length; the line lengths; the rhymes and the rhythms. E.g. 'This poem tells a story in three verses. The first two are the same length but the third is very short, reflecting the sudden death of the fish.'

**symbol** - something used to stand for or represent something else.

Note: a symbol is like a heavy-duty metaphor. It stands for something bigger than itself. E.g. the rose is often a symbol of love; the cross is a symbol of Christianity.

**tone** - the overall feeling or mood. From line four onwards, there are no pleasant adjectives, no rhymes and the rhythm is irregular. All this emphasises the change of tone from friendly to angry in this brilliant poem by me. :o)