

Glossary of literary terms

In this example, consonance contributes with alliteration to show the sound of the water: 'His rollrock highroad loaring down' ('Inversnaid', Hopkins).

dramatic monologue A long poem in which one speaker addresses an imaginary audience, such as Tennyson's 'Ulysses'.

elegy A poem of mourning for the dead, such as Jonson's 'On my first Sonne'.

end-stopped Finishing with a full stop or other punctuation to mark a pause at the end of a line of poetry. This example is from Goldsmith's 'The Village Schoolmaster':
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school.

enjambement Lines of poetry that are not end-stopped, but where the sense flows into the following line, are said to be enjambed. This device can be used to make blank verse sound natural, and to create other effects. Hopkins uses it in 'Inversnaid' to suggest the constant flow of water: '...the fleece of his foam/Flutes and...'

euphemism A phrase that attempts to avoid embarrassment or unpleasantness. For example, 'passed over' is a euphemism for 'died'.

first person Written from the writer's point of view. 'I' is used: 'I think my love as rare' ('Sonnet 130', Shakespeare).

hyperbole A deliberate overstatement to create an effect. Armitage says his new house has 'acres of walls' and 'prairies of...floors' ('Mother, any distance greater') to suggest that the task of decorating appears to him almost impossibly huge.

iambic pentameter Consisting of iambs — metrical feet made up of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed, such as 'I do'. Five iambs in a row make an **iambic pentameter**. This is a perfect example: 'To strive, to seek, to find and not to yeild' ('Ulysses', Tennyson).

irony Occurs in an expression that has two meanings — an obvious one, and an 'inner', possibly sarcastic, meaning for those in the know. Goldsmith used irony in 'The Village Schoolmaster': 'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too'. On the surface he is praising the skills of the schoolmaster, but we realise it is only faint praise — of course a schoolmaster should be able to write and do arithmetic!

metaphor An image that suggests that one thing is something else as a way of comparing them. Clare describes 'clouds sailing to the north' as if they were ships ('Sonnet'), to help us imagine them scudding through the sky. **Extended metaphor** A metaphor that continues over a number of lines or even the whole poem, such as the image of Armitage's mother being linked to him by means of a tape measure ('Mother, any distance greater').

alliteration The repetition of the first letter or sound of nearby words to create an effect. The strong alliteration in this example suggests the power of the eagle: 'He clasps the grag with crooked hands' ('The Eagle', Tennyson).

ambiguous This describes a word or phrase that has more than one meaning, or could be read in two ways. The description of the Duchess's death in 'My Last Duchess' is ambiguous: 'I gave commands;/Then all smiles stopped together.' We are not exactly certain *how* the 'smiles stopped', but we feel sure the Duke killed her.

archaic Describes words or phrases that are no longer in everyday use.

assonance The repetition of a vowel sound (or a similar vowel sound) in nearby words to create an effect. In this example the assonance on the long vowels 'o' and 'a' suggests the lengthy wait: 'The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs' ('Ulysses', Tennyson).

autobiographical Relating to the author's own life.

blank verse Lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter verse, as in Browning's 'My Last Duchess'. It is a traditional style in English literature; Shakespeare's plays are in blank verse.

caesura A break mid-way through a line of poetry, often to give a sense of balance, as in 'Tichborne's Elegy':

My tale was heard,/and yet it was not told,

My fruit is fallen,/and yet my leaves are green.

immense strength of the bird.

symbol A thing, usually a physical object, representing or suggesting something non-physical; for example, a tape measure to represent the mother-son bond ('Mother, any distance greater', Armitage).

syntax The grammatical construction of a sentence.

tenses **Past tense** is used for what has already happened: 'she smiled, no doubt, /When'er I passed her'. **Present tense** refers to what is happening now: 'I call/That piece a wonder'. **Future tense** describes what will happen: 'we'll go/Together down, sir.' (All these examples are taken from Browning's 'My Last Duchess'.)

theme An idea or subject explored by the poet; for example, grief.

third person From an observer's or an outsider's point of view. 'He' or 'she' is used: 'He kissed the child, and by the hand led,/And to his mother brought' ('The Little Boy Found', Blake).

trochaic Consisting of trochees — metrical feet made up of one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed, as in the line 'Batman, big shot, when you gave the order' ('Kid', Armitage).

vernacular Everyday language as used by ordinary people, especially slang.

word play Usually refers to double meanings (puns).

Nooooo at the wall' and 'Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks'.

oxymoron A contradictory phrase that sounds impossible on first hearing but which actually contains some truth, such as 'inhuman men' ('The Affliction of Margaret', Wordsworth).

pentameter A line consisting of five metrical feet; see also **iambic**, **trochaic**.

persona A role taken on by a writer. The writer pretends to be someone else and writes from that person's viewpoint. Examples include Wordsworth in 'The Affliction of Margaret' and Browning in 'The Laboratory'.

personification Talking about an object or an animal as if it were a human to create an effect, as in: 'Till stars are beginning to blink and peep' ('The Song of the Old Mother', Yeats).

pronouns Words like *it*, *its*, *they* used to avoid repeating the name of an object or objects. **Personal pronouns** are words like *I*, *you*, *he*, *she* used to avoid repeating the name of a person or people.

pun A play on words, such as 'bloody queer' in Armitage's 'My father thought it bloody queer.' The poet plays with the idea that 'queer' can mean both strange and homosexual.

quatrain A stanza of poetry that is four lines long. Browning's 'The Laboratory' is made up of 12 quatrains.

refrain A line (or lines) that recurs at the end of stanzas in a poem, such as 'And now I live, and now my life is done' in 'Tichborne's Elegy'.

rhetorical question A question that is asked for effect, without an answer really being expected: 'What would the world be, once bereft/Of wet and of wildness?' ('Inversnaid', Hopkins).

rhyme The repetition of the same sound at the end of nearby lines of poetry, such as 'wet'/'met' and 'face'/'place' in 'The Man He Killed' by Thomas Hardy. **Half-rhyme** is near rhyme, such as 'shackles'/'ankles' in Armitage's 'Those bastards in their mansions' and 'glitter'/'platter' in Duffy's 'Salome'. **Rhyming couplets** are pairs of iambic rhyming lines, such as the conclusion to Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 130': 'And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare/As any she belied with false compare.' **Heroic couplets** are long series of rhyming couplets, often used in dramatic monologues, so called because they were used by ancient Greek poets when writing heroic tales of battle.

second person Written as if directed at a particular person. 'You' is used, as in Armitage's 'Homecoming': 'midnight when you slip the latch'.