

IB Glossary of Poetic Terms, Tropes and Figures

Section ONE: Entry-Level Terms, Tropes, Figures:

Accent The prominence or emphasis given to a syllable or word. In the word *poetry*, the accent (or stress) falls on the first syllable.

Alliteration The repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the beginning of words. Example: "Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood." Hopkins, "In the Valley of the Elwy."

Analogy: The means by which simile proceeds: comparison of things that are not identical (He stood as if he were an oak / Braced against the wind.)

Allusion: A comparison by reference to something outside the text, or to something not organically part of the text; i.e., "He came, like Rome, to see, and stayed to conquer."

Antagonist

A character or force against which another character struggles. Creon is Antigone's antagonist in Sophocles' play *Antigone*; Teiresias is the antagonist of Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

Archetype A fundamental human pattern that recurs in dream, ritual, myth, and literature. Archetypal criticism is indebted to the writings of Carl Jung, and had found its major literary exponent in Northrop Frye. In *Bless Me Ultima* by Anaya, Ultima is the archetype of the old wise crone or shaman or sage. For more on this, read Joseph Campbell "The Hero has a Thousand Faces."

Ballad A narrative poem written in four-line stanzas, characterized by swift action and narrated in a direct style. The Anonymous medieval ballad, "Barbara Allan," exemplifies the genre.

Blank verse A line of poetry or prose in unrhymed iambic pentameter. Shakespeare's sonnets, Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and Robert Frost's meditative poems such as "Birches" include many lines of blank verse. Here are the opening blank verse lines of "Birches": When I see birches bend to left and right / Across the lines of straighter darker trees, / I like to think some boy's been swinging them.

Character An imaginary person that inhabits a literary work. Literary characters may be major or minor, static (unchanging) or dynamic (capable of change). In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona is a major character, but one who is static, like the minor character Bianca. Othello is a major character who is dynamic, exhibiting an ability to change.

Characterization The means by which writers present and reveal character. Although techniques of characterization are complex, writers typically reveal characters through their speech, dress, manner, and actions. Readers come to understand the character Miss Emily in Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" through what she says, how she lives, and what she does.

Climax The turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story. The climax represents the point of greatest tension in the work. The climax of John Updike's "A&P," for example, occurs when Sammy quits his job as a cashier.

Complication An intensification of the conflict in a story or play. Complication builds up, accumulates, and develops the primary or central conflict in a literary work. Frank O'Connor's story "Guests of the Nation" provides a striking example, as does Ralph Ellison's "Battle Royal."

Conflict A struggle between opposing forces in a story or play, usually resolved by the end of the work. The conflict may occur within a character as well as between characters. Lady Gregory's one-act play *The Rising of the Moon* exemplifies both types of conflict as the Policeman wrestles with his conscience in an inner conflict and confronts an antagonist in the person of the ballad singer.

Contrast: A comparison by differentiation: Things are not alike (The lake was no more mirror than the sky is a pancake.)

Couplet A pair of rhymed lines that may or may not constitute a separate stanza in a poem. Shakespeare's sonnets end in rhymed couplets, as in "For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings / That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

Denouement The resolution of the plot of a literary work. The denouement of *Hamlet* takes place after the catastrophe, with the stage littered with corpses. During the denouement Fortinbras makes an entrance and a speech, and Horatio speaks his sweet lines in praise of Hamlet.

Dialogue The conversation of characters in a literary work. In fiction, dialogue is typically enclosed within quotation marks. In plays, characters' speech is preceded by their names.

Diction The selection of words in a literary work. A work's diction forms one of its centrally important literary elements, as writers use words to convey action, reveal character, imply attitudes, identify themes, and suggest values. We can speak of the diction particular to a character, as in Iago's and Desdemona's very different ways of speaking in *Othello*. We can also refer to a poet's diction as represented over the body of his or her work, as in Donne's or Hughes's diction.

Epic A long narrative poem that records the adventures of a hero. Epics typically chronicle the origins of a civilization and embody its central values. Examples from western literature include Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Exposition The first stage of a fictional or dramatic plot, in which necessary background information is provided. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, for instance, begins with a conversation between the two central characters, a dialogue that fills the audience in on events that occurred before the action of the play begins, but which are important in the development of its plot.

Falling action In the plot of a story or play, the action following the climax of the work that moves it towards its denouement or resolution. The falling action of *Othello* begins after Othello realizes that Iago is responsible for plotting against him by spurring him on to murder his wife, Desdemona.

Fiction An imagined story, whether in prose, poetry, or drama. Ibsen's Nora is fictional, a "make-believe" character in a play, as are Hamlet and Othello. Characters like Robert Browning's Duke and Duchess from his poem "My Last Duchess" are fictional as well, though they may be based on actual historical individuals. And, of course, characters in stories and novels are fictional, though they, too, may be based, in some way, on real people. The important thing to remember is that writers embellish and embroider and alter actual life when they use real life as the basis for their work. They fictionalize facts, and deviate from real-life situations as they "make things up."

Flashback An interruption of a work's chronology to describe or present an incident that occurred prior to the main time frame of a work's action. Writers use flashbacks to complicate the sense of chronology in the plot of their works and to convey the richness of the experience of human time. Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" includes flashbacks.

Foil A character who contrasts and parallels the main character in a play or story. Laertes, in Hamlet, is a foil for the main character; in Othello, Emilia and Bianca are foils for Desdemona.

Foreshadowing Hints of what is to come in the action of a play or a story. Ibsen's A Doll's House includes foreshadowing as does Synge's Riders to the Sea. So, too, do Poe's "Cask of Amontillado" and Chopin's "Story of an Hour."

Image A concrete representation of a sense impression, a feeling, or an idea. Imagery refers to the pattern of related details in a work. In some works one image predominates either by recurring throughout the work or by appearing at a critical point in the plot. Often writers use multiple images throughout a work to suggest states of feeling and to convey implications of thought and action. Some modern poets, such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, write poems that lack discursive explanation entirely and include only images. Among the most famous examples is Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro":

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

Imagery The pattern of related comparative aspects of language, particularly of images, in a literary work. Imagery of light and darkness pervade James Joyce's stories "Araby," "The Boarding House," and "The Dead." So, too, does religious imagery.

Irony A contrast or discrepancy between what is said and what is meant or between what happens and what is expected to happen in life and in literature. In verbal irony, characters say the opposite of what they mean. In irony of circumstance or situation, the opposite of what is expected occurs. In dramatic irony, a character speaks in ignorance of a situation or event known to the audience or to the other characters. Flannery O'Connor's short stories employ all these forms of irony, as does Poe's "Cask of Amontillado."

Metaphor A comparison between essentially unlike things without an explicitly comparative word such as like or as. An example is "My love is a red, red rose," from Burns's "A Red, Red Rose." Langston Hughes's "Dream Deferred" is built entirely of metaphors. Metaphor is one of the most important of literary uses of language. Shakespeare employs a wide range of metaphor in his sonnets and his plays, often in such density and profusion that readers are kept busy analyzing and interpreting and unraveling them. Compare Simile.

Motif, or topos is a recurring concept or story element in literature. It includes concepts such as types of incidents or situations, such as the aubade aubade or parting of lovers at dawn; plot devices, such as the lady's love token, which inspires courage in her lover, or the recognition tokens in plots of mistaken identity; or plot formulas, such as the "loathly lady" who later becomes a beautiful princess, or the "femme fatale" whose attraction proves deadly; and character types, such as the despairing lover, conquering hero, or wicked stepmother.

In a more narrow sense, "motif" is also used to describe recurring elements within particular works, such as phrases, descriptions, or patterns of imagery.

Myth The Greek term "mythos" means simply "story." In modern usage the term usually refers to a story that was or is part of the beliefs of a cultural group, and which explains the nature of the world and social conventions as the result of the influence of supernatural beings.

A story about a protagonist who is human rather than a supernatural being is usually referred to as a legend; and stories of supernatural beings which are independent of a comprehensive mythology are called folk tales. In modern literary theory, myths have been viewed as formulas embodying universal human experiences and ideas, or archetypes. Archetypes are expressed through the recurring patterns that occur in myth, ritual, and dreams as well as literature. In literature the patterns are seen in terms of genre, plot-types, character, thought, and so forth.

Northrop Frye argues, in the Anatomy of Criticism (1957), that there are four main narrative genres: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony (satire); these genres may be considered modes of the elemental myths associated with the cycle of birth and death in nature--spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

The term "myth" has various other uses in modern usage, for instance denoting a falsehood widely believed ("the myth of progress") or the imaginary realm of a literary work ("the mythical world of romance").

Narrator The voice and implied speaker of a fictional work, to be distinguished from the actual living author. For example, the narrator of Joyce's "Araby" is not James Joyce himself, but a literary fictional character created expressly to tell the story. Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" contains a communal narrator, identified only as "we." See Point of view.

Onomatopoeia The use of words to imitate the sounds they describe. Words such as buzz and crack are onomatopoeic. The following line from Pope's "Sound and Sense" onomatopoeically imitates in sound what it describes: When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labors, and the words move slow.

Most often, however, onomatopoeia refers to words and groups of words, such as Tennyson's description of the "murmur of innumerable bees," which attempts to capture the sound of a swarm of bees buzzing.

Pathos a Greek term for deep emotion, passion, or suffering. When applied to literature, its meaning is usually narrowed to refer to tragic emotions, describing the language and situations which deeply move the audience or reader by arousing sadness, sympathy, or pity. There are many examples in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, such as Cordelia's acceptance of defeat: "*We are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst.*"

Personification The endowment of inanimate objects or abstract concepts with animate or living qualities. An example: "The yellow leaves flaunted their color gaily in the breeze." Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud" includes personification.

Plot The unified structure of incidents in a literary work. See Conflict, Climax, Denouement, and Flashback.

Point of view The angle of vision from which a story is narrated. See Narrator. A work's point of view can be: first person, in which the narrator is a character or an observer, respectively; objective, in which the narrator knows or appears to know no more than the reader; omniscient, in which the narrator knows everything about the characters; and limited omniscient, which allows the narrator to know some things about the characters but not everything.

Protagonist The main character of a literary work--Hamlet and Othello in the plays named after them, Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Paul in Lawrence's "Rocking-Horse Winner."

Resolution The sorting out or unraveling of a plot at the end of a play, novel, or story. See Plot.

Rhyme The matching of final vowel or consonant sounds in two or more words. The following stanza of "Richard Cory" employs alternate rhyme, with the third line rhyming with the first and the fourth with the second: Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him;
He was a gentleman from sole to crown
Clean favored and imperially slim.

Rising action A set of conflicts and crises that constitute the part of a play's or story's plot leading up to the climax. See Climax, Denouement, and Plot.

Setting The time and place of a literary work that establish its context. The stories of Sandra Cisneros are set in the American southwest in the mid to late 20th century, those of James Joyce in Dublin, Ireland in the early 20th century.

Simile A figure of speech involving a comparison between unlike things using like, as, or as though. An example: "My love is like a red, red rose." (For more on the sophisticated simile, please see the IB-level section).

Stanza A division or unit of a poem that is repeated in the same form--either with similar or identical patterns or rhyme and meter, or with variations from one stanza to another. The stanzas of Gertrude Schnackenberg's "Signs" are regular; those of Rita Dove's "Canary" are irregular.

Style The way an author chooses words, arranges them in sentences or in lines of dialogue or verse, and develops ideas and actions with description, imagery, and other literary techniques. See Connotation, Denotation, Diction, Figurative language, Image, Imagery, Irony, Metaphor, Narrator, Point of view, Syntax, and Tone.

Subject What a story or play is about; to be distinguished from plot and theme. Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" is about the decline of a particular way of life endemic to the American south before the civil war. Its plot concerns how Faulkner describes and organizes the actions of the story's characters. Its theme is the overall meaning Faulkner conveys.

Subplot

A subsidiary or subordinate or parallel plot in a play or story that coexists with the main plot. The story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern forms a subplot with the overall plot of *Hamlet*. **Symbol** An object or action in a literary work that means more than itself, that stands for something beyond itself. The glass unicorn in *The Glass Menagerie*, the rocking horse in "The Rocking-Horse Winner," the road in Frost's "The Road Not Taken"--all are symbols in this sense.

Theme The idea of a literary work abstracted from its details of language, character, and action, and cast in the form of a generalization. See discussion of Dickinson's "Crumbling is not an instant's Act."

Tone The implied attitude of a writer toward the subject and characters of a work, as, for example, Flannery O'Connor's ironic tone in her "Good Country People." See Irony

Section TWO: IB-Level Terms, Tropes, Figures:

Accentual-Syllabic Verse in which the lines have a fixed number of syllables and a fixed number and pattern of accents. The iambic pentameter, for instance, has ten syllables and five metrical accents per line. Most of the major poetry in English from Chaucer to the present is accentual-syllabic, which is considered the standard mode of versification.

Acephalous A Greek word meaning "headless" and referring to a metrical line lacking its initial syllable. In English prosody, the word is most often applied to iambic lines missing their first unaccented syllable. You may also call this "clipped."

Aphaeresis A Greek word meaning "taking away." In poetry, it is a form of elision involving suppression of the first vowel or syllable of a word in order to maintain poetic rhythm. Ex: 'gainst instead of against or 'longing instead of belonging.

Allegory A symbolic narrative in which the surface details imply a secondary meaning. Allegory often takes the form of a story in which the characters represent moral qualities. The most famous example in English is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which the name of the central character, Pilgrim, epitomizes the book's allegorical nature. Kay Boyle's story "Astronomer's Wife" and Christina Rossetti's poem "Up-Hill" both contain allegorical elements.

Anapest (tri-syllabic) Two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one, as in com-pre-HEND or in-ter-VENE. An anapestic meter rises to the accented beat as in Byron's lines from "The Destruction of Sennacherib": "And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea, / When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee." The anapest is the REVERSE of the dactyl.

Anacoluthon: rhetorical device that can be loosely defined as a change of syntax within a sentence. More specifically, anacoluthons (or "anacoluthia") are created when a sentence abruptly changes from one structure to another. Anacoluthon is often used in stream of consciousness writing, such as that of James Joyce, because it is characteristic of informal human thought.

Anadiplosis: ("doubling back") the rhetorical repetition of one or several words; specifically, repetition of a word that ends one clause at the beginning of the next. **Men in great place are thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state; servants of fame; and servants of business. Francis Bacon*

Anaphora The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or lines. **We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender. Churchill.*

Antistrophe Repetition of the same word or phrase at the end of successive clauses. **"When I was a *child*, I spoke like a *child*, I thought like a *child*, I reasoned like a *child* (I Cor. 13:11)."** The ringing cadence of the word "child" is not only a "turning about" from one line to the next, **but serves to root our mind or set our mind on the idea.** The rhetorical device of **antistrophe**, which other scholars have used interchangeably with **epistrophe** (a "turning upon" something), **recognizes something very crucial about the nature of the human mind.** Simply put, our minds tend to wander off in their own directions, even when we hear a convincing or attractively-put argument. **Thus, our minds always need to be corraled, brought back to a center, re-focused.**

Antithesis A figure of speech in which words and phrases with opposite meanings are balanced against each other. An example of antithesis is "To err is human, to forgive, divine." (Alexander Pope)

Apostrophe A direct address—speaking to an absent human being, or to a (usually) personified thing or abstraction.

Assonance

The repetition of similar vowel sounds in a sentence or a line of poetry or prose, as in "I rose and told him of my woe." Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" contains assonantal "I's" in the following lines: "How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick, / Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself."

Asyndeton: lack of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words.

**We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty. J. F. Kennedy, Inaugural*

Bildungsroman: a German novelistic form which concentrates on the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development and growth of the protagonist usually from childhood to maturity.

The protagonists's journey usually contain the following events:

a) The protagonist grows from boy or girl to man or woman.

- b) The protagonist must have some reason to go on this journey. A loss or discontent must jar him or her at an early stage away from the home or family setting.
- c) The process of maturing is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the needs or desires of the hero and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order.
- d) Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who is then accommodated into society. The novel ends with an assessment by the protagonist of himself/herself and his/her new place in that society.
- e) The character is generally making a smooth movement away from conformity. Major conflict is self vs. society or individuality vs. conformity.
- f) There are themes of exile or escape

Cacophony: A jarring, jangling juxtaposition of words can be used to bring attention, too. Cacophony is discordant language that can be difficult to pronounce, as in John Updike's poem, "Player Piano":

*My stick fingers click with a snicker
And, chuckling, they knuckle the keys;
Light-footed, my steel feelers flicker
And pluck from these keys melodies.*

Caesura: From the Latin word caedere to "to cut", a caesura represents a pause in the sense or order of the words. Caesurae always occur between two words, one at the end and one at the beginning of a clause. Depending on where the caesura occurs, it may be described as strong or weak. In dactylic hexameter, the main caesura usually occurs in the third foot.

Conceit A fanciful poetic image or metaphor that likens one thing to something else that is seemingly very different. An example of a conceit can be found in Shakespeare's sonnet "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" and in Emily Dickinson's poem "There is no frigate like a book."

Consonance The repetition of similar consonant sounds, especially at the ends of words, as in *lost* and *past* or *confess* and *dismiss*.

Dactyl A metrical foot of three syllables, one long (or stressed) followed by two short (or unstressed), as in *happily*. The dactyl is the reverse of the anapest.

Elegy A poem that laments the death of a person, or one that is simply sad and thoughtful. An example of this type of poem is Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

Elision

The contraction, for metrical purposes, of two syllables into one or the slurring away of a syllable in order to preserve the meter and syllable count. The process may be as follows:

two vowels sitting side by side: tu•mul•chwus instead of tu•mul•choo•us

two vowels facing each other across a gap between words: Th'expense for The Expense

omission of a vowel, consonant or syllable: consid'rate for considerate

End-stopped line- A line of poetry where there is punctuation at the end. It is not necessary to have every line in the poem stopped this way, but the punctuation essentially stops the thought and allows the reader to catch a breath. This is used alongside caesura and enjambment in great poetry. Coleridge used this form in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner:

*It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
"By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?"*

Enjambment From the French enjambeur or enjambement: "running on or running over." The continuation of a complete idea (a sentence or clause) from one line or couplet of a poem to the next line or couplet without a pause. The reader must read through the line ending in order to determine the sense of a phrase or clause. An example of enjambment can be found in the first line of Joyce Kilmer's poem *Trees*: "I think that I shall never see/A poem as lovely as a tree." *Enjambment* comes from the French word for "to straddle."

Entwicklungsroman- A form of the **bildungsroman**, or coming of age story, except this form doesn't cover as much time in the protagonist's journey from childhood to adulthood, but instead focuses on one important incident that was instrumental in shaping him or her.

Euphony- Lines that are musically pleasant to the ear bring euphony. There is a harmony and a beauty to the language, which is what many poets are often after. Emily Dickenson's poem, "A Bird came down the walk" has this effect, as seen in the last stanza:

*Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam—
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.*

Fabliau A short, humorous or sarcastic piece of work. Chaucer's Miller's Tale is a fabliau.

Feminine rhyme A rhyme of two syllables, with a metrical accent falling on the first as in *ages/pâges*.
pleasure/leisure, longing/yearning.

Falling meter Poetic meters such as trochaic and dactylic that move or fall from a stressed (heavy) to an unstressed (lighter) syllable. The nonsense line, "Higgledy, piggledy," is dactylic, with the accent on the first syllable and the two syllables following falling off from that accent in each word. Trochaic meter is represented by this line: "Hip-hop, be-bop, treetop--freedom."

Figurative language A form of language use in which writers and speakers convey something other than the literal meaning of their words. Examples include hyperbole or exaggeration, litotes or understatement, simile and metaphor, which employ comparison, and synecdoche and metonymy, in which a part of a thing stands for the whole.

Foot A metrical unit composed of stressed and unstressed syllables. For example, an iamb or iambic foot is represented by "i", that is, an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. Frost's line "Whose woods these are I think I know" contains four iambs, and is thus an iambic foot.

Free verse Poetry without a regular pattern of meter or rhyme. The verse is "free" in not being bound by earlier poetic conventions requiring poems to adhere to an explicit and identifiable meter and rhyme scheme in a form such as the sonnet or ballad. Modern and contemporary poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries often employ free verse. Williams's "This Is Just to Say" is one of many examples.

Hamartia/Tragic Flaw: According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must fall through his or her own error, or hamartia. This term is also interpreted as "tragic flaw" and usually applied to overweening pride, or hubris, which causes fatal error.

The classic example of Aristotelian principles is Sophocles' Oedipus the King (ca. 428 B.C.); Shakespeare's Othello (1603-04) follows a similar pattern of pride, error, and self-destruction (though Oedipus merely mutilates himself on discovering his crimes, whereas Othello commits suicide). (See catharsis for more details.)

Recent scholarship has suggested that the interpretation of hamartia as a fatal flaw is itself flawed, and that the word more properly means any disproportion in the character's makeup that leads to downfall; thus an excess of a valuable or virtuous quality can in some circumstances be seen as hamartia.

Hyperbole

A figure of speech involving exaggeration. John Donne uses hyperbole in his poem: "Song: Go and Catch a Falling Star."

Iamb

An unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, as in to-DAY. See Foot.

Imagery: Language through the experience of sense.

a) Visual imagery: Sight. The most frequent type.

When all at once I saw a crowd,/ A host, of golden daffodils;/ Beside the lake, beneath the trees,/ Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

("I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", Wordsworth)

b) Aural or auditory imagery: sound

Listen! You hear the grating roar/ Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,/ At their return, up the high strand,/ Begin, and cease, and then again begin,/ With tremulous cadence slow, and bring/ The eternal note of sadness in." ("Dover Beach", Matthew Arnold)

c) Olfactory imagery: Smell

The room is full of you! -- As I came in/ And closed the door behind me, all at once/ A something in the air, intangible,/ Yet stiff with meaning, struck my senses sick! --/ Sharp, unfamiliar odors have destroyed/ Each other room's dear personality./ The heavy scent of damp, funereal flowers, --/ The very essence, hush-distilled, of Death --/ Has strangled that habitual breath of home/ Whose expiration leaves all houses dead;/ And wheresoe'er I look is hideous change. ("Interim", St. Vincent-Millay)

d) Gustatory imagery: Taste

I have eaten/ the plums/ that were in/ the icebox/ and which/ you were probably/ saving/ for breakfast/ Forgive me/ they were delicious/ so sweet/ and so cold ("This Is Just to Say", William Carlos Williams)

e) Tactile imagery: Touch

When did the garden with its banked flowers/ start to smell like a funeral chapel,/ and the mild breeze passing our foreheads/ to feel like the back of a nurse's hand/ testing for fever? We used to be/ immortal in our ignorance, sending/ our kites up for the lightning, swimming/ in unknown waters at night and naked. ("Death's Blue-Eyed Girl", Pastan)

f) Organic imagery: Human sensations, hunger for example

Can I see another's woe,/ And not be in sorrow too?/ Can I see another's grief,/ And not seek for kind relief?
Can I see a falling tear,/ And not feel my sorrow's share?/ Can a father see his child/ Weep, nor be with sorrow filled?
("On Another's Sorrow", Blake)

Irony: For our IB study, we need to look at the different forms of irony.

- A. **Structural Irony:** involves the use of a naïve or deluded hero or unreliable narrator, whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances recognized by the author and readers. This irony thus flatters its reader's/audience's intelligence at the expense of a character (or fictional narrator). A similar sense of audience/reader's detached superiority is achieved by dramatic irony.
- B. **Dramatic Irony:** Dramatic Irony: what appears true to a character is not what the audience or reader knows to be true; for example, Duncan's belief that the Macbeths are praiseworthy hosts creates irony because we know that the Macbeths are planning to kill Duncan. Thus, with dramatic irony the audience knows more about a character's situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary to the character's expectation, and thereby giving a sharply different sense to some of the character's own statements; in tragedies, this is called "tragic irony."
- C. **Verbal Irony:** Verbal Irony: words that appear to mean one thing really mean the opposite. The opening sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is a famous example: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (part of the ironic implication is that a single woman is in want of a rich husband). In its lowliest form, verbal irony is sarcastic.
- D. **Situational Irony:** When what the characters or the readers expect to happen in the ploy is not what happens. An example of this is "The Necklace," by Guy de Maupassant. At the end of the story, Mme. Loisel discovers that the necklace she had lost and replaced at a cost of \$25,000 francs was a fake all along. Ten years of her life were spent replacing a necklace that cost \$400 francs.

Heroic couplet A stanza composed of two rhymed lines in iambic pentameter. Today we associate heroic couplets with carefully crafted verse on heroic or epic subjects. It can be misleading to use this phrase without knowledge.

Homophone When two words sound the same but have different meanings. Some examples are: made, maid/ read, red. Sometimes this is called *rime riche* (see rhyme in this section).

Hyperbaton: separation of words which belong together, often to emphasize the first of the separated words or to create a certain image.

Lyric A poem, such as a sonnet or an ode, that expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet. A lyric poem may resemble a song in form or style. Characterized by brevity, compression, and the expression of feeling, a lyric poem shows intense emotion. The anonymous "Western Wind" epitomizes the genre:

*Western wind, when will thou blow,/ The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms/ And I in my bed again!*

Masculine rhyme A rhyme that occurs in a final stressed syllable: *cat/hat, desire/fire, observe/deserve*.

Meter

The measured pattern of rhythmic accents in poems. Poetry is organized into lines, which consist of feet. A foot is a fixed arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables. The most common types of feet can be divided into those that are *binary* or *disyllabic* (consisting of two syllables) and those that are *ternary* or *trisyllabic* (consisting of three syllables). Those categories are further subdivided according to which syllable in the foot is stressed; see the separate discussion of disyllabic feet immediately below, and of trisyllabic feet further down the page.

Because there are two syllables in a disyllabic foot, there are two principal types of binary meter, depending on which of the two syllables is stressed. These are:

Iamb: When the second syllable is stressed and the first is not, the foot is called an *iamb*. The following lines from "Come live with me and be my love" (Christopher Marlowe, "Come live with me and be my love") consists of four iambs. Here are the lines with vertical bars dividing the feet and the stressed syllables highlighted:

Come live | with me | and be | my love
And we | will all | the pleasures prove

Note that the division of a line into feet is independent of the division into words. Thus, the two syllables of the word “pleasures” in the last line belong to different metrical feet: the first syllable of the word is the second syllable of the third iamb in the line and the second syllable of the word is the first syllable of the fourth iamb.

Trochee When the first syllable is stressed and the second is not, the foot is called a *trochee*. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “[Song of Hiawatha](#)” is written in trochees; here’s an example of the best-known section, with vertical bars dividing the feet and the stressed syllables highlighted:

By the | shores of | Gitche | Gumee,
By the | shining | Big-Sea-|Water,

Each line consists of four trochees.

Pyrrhic: Avoiding sing-song cadences Poetry in which every stress appears in its place can take on a tedious sing-song quality, and poets avoid that problem by introducing small variations into the meter of individual lines. A particularly common variation is the replacement of an individual iamb or trochee with a *pyrrhic*, a disyllabic foot in which neither syllable is stressed (or, at least, in which neither syllable is stressed very strongly). The following line from William Shakespeare’s [Richard III](#) is iambic, but with one pyrrhic substitution:

A horse! | a horse! | my king | dom for | a horse!

If you read this line naturally, as if it were prose, the preposition “for” would have no (or almost no) stress. The line thus consists of five two-syllable feet, all of which are iambs except the fourth, which is a pyrrhic. The line overall is felt to be iambic because of the overwhelming general iambic cadence, but sporadic pyrrhic substitutions here and elsewhere save that cadence from a relentless thumping and clunking that would distract from the natural rhythm of the language.

Line Syllabotonic poetry is organized not only by the arrangement of stresses in the line, but also by the number of feet in the line. For example, a line that consists entirely of five iambs is called iambic pentameter (the Greek root *pent-* means ‘five’). Common lines include:

- Dimeter: two feet
- Trimeter: three feet
- Tetrameter: four feet
- Pentameter: five feet
- Hexameter: six feet
- Heptameter: seven feet
- *etc.*

As was noted in the discussion of the word “pleasures” in “Come live with me and be my love” above, meter is identified on the level of the line, not on the level of the word, which is to say that foot boundaries are independent of word boundaries. When we describe the meter of a poem, we describe the meter of the line, rather than the meter individual words would have in isolation.

As was noted above, lines that consist of disyllabic feet (iambs and trochees) are said to have binary meters. Lines that have stress on every third syllable are said to have ternary meters. The three principal types of ternary meter (distinguished by which of the three syllables bears stress) are:

Dactyl The first of the three syllables in the foot is stressed. Here’s an example from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “[Evangeline](#)” of dactylic hexameter, or six dactylic feet per line, with vertical lines dividing the feet and the stressed syllables highlighted:

This is the| forest pri | meval. The | murmuring | pines and the | hemlocks ...

Note that the last foot of this line is missing its last syllable. This omission of a trailing unstressed syllable is common in poetry; it is called *catalexis*, and lines where catalexis occurs are called *catalectic*. Catalexis is common in trochaic lines as well as in dactylic ones; the Pushkin fairy-tale poems that you read are trochaic, but with frequent catalexis.

Amphibrach The middle of the three syllables in the foot is stressed. Here's an example from Dr. Seuss's, "If I Ran the Circus" of amphibrach tetrameter with vertical lines dividing the feet and the stressed syllables highlighted:

And NOW comes| an act of| Enormous| Enormance!
No former| performer's| performed this| performance!

Anapest The last of the three syllables in the foot is stressed. Here's an example from Lord Byron's "[The Destruction of Sennacherib](#)" of anapest tetrameter, or four anapest feet per line, with vertical lines dividing the feet and the stressed syllables highlighted:

The Assy | rian came down | like a wolf | on the fold
And his co | horts were glea | ming in pur | ple and gold

Metonymy A figure of speech in which one word is substituted for another with which it is closely associated. For example, in the expression *The pen is mightier than the sword*, the word *pen* is used for "the written word," and *sword* is used for "military power."

Narrative poem

A poem that tells a story. See Ballad.

Octave

An eight-line unit, which may constitute a stanza; or a section of a poem, as in the octave of a sonnet.

Ode

A long, stately poem in stanzas of varied length, meter, and form. Usually a serious poem on an exalted subject, such as Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," but sometimes a more lighthearted work, such as Neruda's "Ode to My Socks."

Ottava rima: an eight line verse stanza rhyming abababcc. In English it is usually in iambic pentameter. It was introduced into English by Sir Thomas Wyatt in the 1530s, and was widely used for long verse narratives. Byron used the form in *Don Juan* (1819-24). Edmund Spenser produced a nine line modification of the form which ends with an alexandrine and rhymes ababbcbcc. for his *Faerie Queene* (1590-6). This is known as the **Spenserian stanza**, and was quite widely used by Wordsworth, Byron and Keats.

Partial rhyme: Also called off-rhyme, slant-rhyme, near-rhyme. Rhyme that is by conventional standards incomplete. Generally, the consonants match by not vowels, or vice versa. Example: ring/bubbling, or prefer/father

Pastoral A poem that depicts rural life in a peaceful, idealized way.

Pentameter A line of poetry that has five metrical feet.

Poetic justice This term was invented by the critic Thomas Rymer in the late seventeenth century to describe the proper moral resolution that he believed drama or narrative should have. That is, unlike the often random justice in real life, literary plots should end with the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil.

Obviously, such an outcome greatly narrows the scope of literature, for one thing making tragic error (hamartia) and catharsis impossible. It is the kind of ending which Aristotle blamed people for preferring, ascribing its preference to their "weakness." In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, it is highly ironic when Albany tries to establish some kind of poetic justice while Lear grieves over the body of the innocent Cordelia:

"All friends shall taste / The wages of their virtue, and all foes / The cup of their deservings."

Prosody The study of versification in general, including meter, rhyme and stanza and at times alliteration and onomatopoeia.

Quatrain

A four-line stanza in a poem, the first four lines and the second four lines in a Petrarchan sonnet. A Shakespearean sonnet contains three quatrains followed by a couplet.

Recognition

The point at which a character understands his or her situation as it really is. Sophocles' *Oedipus* comes to this point near the end of *Oedipus the King*; Othello comes to a similar understanding of his situation in Act V of *Othello*.

Refrain_ A line or phrase from a poem that is repeated at the end of each stanza, or at regular intervals. An example from Chaucer's poem "To Rosemonde": *Though ye to me ne do no dalliance*.

Register: a term designating the appropriateness of a given style to a given situation. Speakers and writers in specific situations deploy, for example, a technical vocabulary (e.g. scientific, medical, legal, theological, psychological), as well as other aspects of style customarily used in that situation. Literary effect is often created by switching register.

Reversal

The point at which the action of the plot turns in an unexpected direction for the protagonist. Oedipus's and Othello's recognitions are also reversals. They learn what they did not expect to learn.

Rhetorical Figures: Linguistic effect can be perceptible to the mind and/or the eye. **Figures of thought** appeal to the mind by twisting language in a way that is strictly improper, but licensed by usage. Thus the word 'is' is used improperly in the sentence 'John is a lion', but the metaphorical usage is permissible. Or when we hear the sentence 'All hands on deck', we understand that the word 'hands' is being used as a **synecdoche** for sailors. Figures of thought are sometime called **tropes** (from a Greek word meaning 'turn', 'twist') or **conceits** (from a Latin word meaning 'concept', because the conceit appeals to the mind). Figures of speech are perceptible to the eye and the ear. Thus **rhyme** is a figure of speech, as is **alliteration** and **anaphora**. Figures of speech are sometimes called **schemes** (Greek 'forms').

Rhythm

The recurrence of accent or stress in lines of verse. In the following lines from "Same in Blues" by Langston Hughes, the accented words and syllables are underlined:

*I said to my baby,
Baby take it slow...
Lulu said to Leonard
I want a diamond ring*

Rhyme: When two or more words or phrases contain an identical or similar vowel-sound, and the consonant-sounds that follow are identical or similar (red and dead).

- a) **Feminine rhyme** occurs when two syllables are rhymed ('mother | brother').
- b) **Half-rhyme** occurs when the final consonants are the same but the preceding vowels are not. ('love | have').
- c) **Eye rhyme** occurs when two syllables look the same but are pronounced differently ('kind | wind' - although sometimes changes in pronunciation have made what were formerly perfect rhymes become eye rhymes).
- d) **Rime riche** occurs when the same combination of sounds is used in each element of the rhyme, but where the two identical sounding words have different senses ('maid | made'). This was in the medieval period regarded as a particularly perfect form of rhyme.
- e) **Leonine rhyme** occurs when the syllable immediately preceding the **caesura** rhymes with the syllable at the end of the line.

Rhyme Scheme A regularly recurring pattern of rhyme within a poem or stanza. It is recorded by using a letter of the alphabet to denote each rhyme, and noting the order in which the rhymes recur (aabbcc... is the most simply rhyme scheme of all, that of the couplet).

Rising meter Poetic meters such as iambic and anapestic that move or ascend from an unstressed to a stressed syllable. See Anapest, Iamb, and Falling meter.

Satire

A literary work that criticizes human misconduct and ridicules vices, stupidities, and follies. Swift's Gulliver's Travels is a famous example. Chekhov's Marriage Proposal and O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," have strong satirical elements.

Scansion The art of reading poetry vertically for rhyme scheme, horizontally for meter and sectionally for structure.

Sestet A six-line unit of verse constituting a stanza or section of a poem; the last six lines of an Italian sonnet. Examples: Petrarch's "If it is not love, then what is it that I feel," and Frost's "Design."

Simile (the sophisticated simile): a comparison between two objects or ideas which is introduced by 'like' or 'as'. The literal object which evokes the comparison is called the tenor and the object which describes it is called the vehicle. So in the simile 'the car wheezed like an asthmatic donkey' the car is the tenor and the 'asthmatic donkey' is the vehicle. Negative similes are also possible (as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun').

Epic similes are more extended similes, which might involve multiple points of correspondence between tenor and vehicle, where the original tenor gets put aside while the extended simile is in play.

Sonnet A fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter. It comes in three standard forms.

A. The **Shakespearean or English sonnet** is arranged as three quatrains and a final couplet, rhyming abab cdcd efef gg. The couplet generally introduced an unexpected sharp thematic or imagistic "turn". The form is often named after Shakespeare, not because he was the first to write in this form but because he became its most famous practitioner. This example, Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, illustrates the form:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds (a)
Admit impediments. Love is not love (b)
Which alters when it alteration finds, (a)
Or bends with the remover to remove. (b)

O no, it is an ever fixed mark (c)
That looks on tempests and is never shaken; (d)
It is the star to every wand'ring barque, (c)
Whose worth's unknown although his height be taken. (d)

Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks (e)
Within his bending sickle's compass come; (f)
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, (e)
But bears it out even to the edge of doom. (f)

If this be error and upon me proved, (g)
I never writ, nor no man ever loved. (g)

B. The **Petrarchan or Italian sonnet** divides into two parts: an eight-line octave and a six-line sestet, rhyming abba abba cde cde or abba abba cd cd cd.

The first known sonnets in English, written by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, used this Italian scheme, as did sonnets by later English poets including John Milton, Thomas Gray, William Wordsworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

This example, *On His Being Arrived to the Age of Twenty-three* by John Milton, gives a sense of the Italian Form:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth, (a)
Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year! (b)
My hasting days fly on with full career, (b)
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th. (a)
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth, (a)
That I to manhood am arrived so near, (b)
And inward ripeness doth much less appear, (b)
That some more timely-happy spirits indu'th. (a)

Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow, (c)
It shall be still in strictest measure even (d)
To that same lot, however mean or high, (e)
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven. (d)
All is, if I have grace to use it so, (c)
As ever in my great Task-master's eye. (e)

C. The **Spenserian sonnet** is arranged as a variant on the English form is the Spenserian sonnet, named after Edmund Spenser (c.1552–1599) in which the rhyme scheme is a-b-a-b, b-c-b-c, c-d-c-d, e-e. In a Spenserian sonnet there does not appear to be a requirement that the initial octave sets up a problem which the closing sestet answers as is the case with a Petrarchian sonnet. Instead, the form is treated as three quatrains connected by the interlocking rhyme scheme and followed by a couplet. The linked rhymes of his quatrains suggest the linked rhymes of such Italian forms as *terza rima*. This example is taken from Amoretti's poem "Happy ye leaves! whenas those lily hand..."

Happy ye leaves! whenas those lily hands, (a)
Which hold my life in their dead doing might, (b)
Shall handle you, and hold in love's soft bands, (a)
Like captives trembling at the victor's sight. (b)

And happy lines! on which, with starry light, (b)
Those laming eyes will deign sometimes to look, (c)
And read the sorrows of my dying sprite, (b)
Written with tears in heart's close bleeding book. (c)

And happy rhymes! bathed in the sacred brook (c)
Of Helicon, whence she derived is, (d)
When ye behold that angel's blessed look, (c)
My soul's long lacked food, my heaven's bliss. (d)

Leaves, lines, and rhymes seek her to please alone, (e)
Whom if ye please, I care for other none. (e)

Spondee

A metrical foot represented by two stressed syllables, such as KNICK-KNACK.

Stichic/Strophic: A poem is stichic when the lines are of different lengths. It's opposite is strophic (stanzaic), where the lines are arranged in stanzas or groups of even lines.

Syntax

The grammatical order of words in a sentence or line of verse or dialogue. The organization of words and phrases and clauses in sentences of prose, verse, and dialogue. In the following example, normal syntax (subject, verb, object order) is inverted:

"Whose woods these are I think I know."

Synecdoche

A figure of speech in which a part is substituted for the whole. An example: "Lend me a hand."

Trochee

An accented syllable followed by an unaccented one, as in FOOT-ball.

Spondee A metrical foot of two syllables, both of which are long (or stressed).

Stress The prominence or emphasis given to particular syllables. Stressed syllables usually stand out because they have long, rather than short, vowels, or because they have a different pitch or are louder than other syllables.

Syncope: A form of elision involving the suppression or omission of a sound from the middle of a word, such as ta'en for taken, o'er for over, mem'ry for memory.

Tetrameter A line of poetry that has four metrical feet. Because the four-beat line is relatively emphatic and easy to hear, the tetrameter accommodates different types of rhythm than pentameter does, even though the pentameter encourages a greater range of tone and modulation within iambic rhythm.

Tragic Flaw: see Hamartia.

Trochee A metrical foot of two syllables, one long (or stressed) and one short (or unstressed). An easy way to remember the trochee is to memorize the first line of a lighthearted poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which demonstrates the use of various kinds of metrical feet: "Trochee/ trips from/ long to/ short." (The stressed syllables are in bold.) The trochee is the reverse of the iamb.

Trope A figure of speech, such as metaphor or metonymy, in which words are not used in their literal (or actual) sense but in a figurative (or imaginative) sense.

Turn. The turn is a part of the sonnet. A sonnet can be thematically divided into two sections: the first presents the theme, raises an issue or doubt, and the second part answers the question, resolves the problem, or drives home the poem's point. This change in the poem is called the turn and helps move forward the emotional action of the poem quickly, as fourteen lines can become too short too fast.

Volta: Also called a **turn**, a volta is a sudden change in thought, direction, or emotion near the conclusion of a sonnet. This invisible volta is then followed by a **couplet** (in English sonnets) or a **sestet** (in Italian sonnets). Typically, the first section of the sonnet states a premise, asks a question, or suggests a theme. The concluding lines after the volta resolve the problem by suggesting an answer, offering a conclusion, or shifting the thematic concerns in a new direction.

Section THREE: **BEYOND IB Terms, Tropes, Figures for the BRILLIANT:**

Aubade

A love lyric in which the speaker complains about the arrival of the dawn, when he must part from his lover. John Donne's "The Sun Rising" exemplifies this poetic genre.

Convention

A customary feature of a literary work, such as the use of a chorus in Greek tragedy, the inclusion of an explicit moral in a fable, or the use of a particular rhyme scheme in a villanelle. Literary conventions are defining features of particular literary genres, such as novel, short story, ballad, sonnet, and play.

Elegy

A lyric poem that laments the dead. Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays" is elegiac in tone. A more explicitly identified elegy is W.H. Auden's "In Memory of William Butler Yeats" and his "Funeral Blues."

Epigram

A brief witty poem, often satirical. Alexander Pope's "Epigram Engraved on the Collar of a Dog" exemplifies the genre:

*I am his Highness' dog at Kew;
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?*

Euphemism _ The substitution of something that might be offensive or hurtful with something more innocuous. "She is at rest" is a euphemism for "She died." Euphemisms are not necessarily "better," and in fact can deflate language, but if a character uses euphemisms all the time, for instance, that says something about that character.

Litotes A figure of speech in which a positive is stated by negating its opposite. Some examples of litotes: *no small victory, not a bad idea, not unhappy*. Litotes, which is a form of understatement, is the opposite of hyperbole.

Pleonasm: use of superfluous or redundant words, often enriching the thought.

*No one, rich or poor, will be excepted.

Polysyndeton *Figure of addition and emphasis which intentionally employs a series of conjunctions (and, or, but, for, nor, so, yet) not normally found in successive words, phrases, or clauses; the deliberate and excessive use of conjunctions in successive words or clauses.*

"In years gone by, there were in every community men and women who spoke the language of duty **and** morality **and** loyalty **and** obligation." -- William F. Buckley

Syllepsis: use of a word with two others, with each of which it is understood differently.

*We must all hang together or assuredly we will all hang separately. Benjamin Franklin

Tercet

A three-line stanza, as the stanzas in Frost's "Acquainted With the Night" and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." The three-line stanzas or sections that together constitute the sestet of a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet.

Zeugma I include this because it's a rare but beautiful type of comparison. A zeugma (pronounced "zoog-ma") is a word that is used twice, bringing up two different connotations. My favorite is from Paul Simon's song, "Duncan" where he sings, "Holes in my confidence, holes in the knees of my jeans." The first "holes" is metaphorical, the second, literal. A zeugma can also be a single word used to modify in two different ways. "On his fishing trip, he caught three salmon and a cold."