

Poetry Notes

“Word Groups”

- Traditionally, lines in a poem start with a capital letter.
- lines in poetry are grouped into *stanzas*- the word is Italian for “little room”. Stanzas are separated by an extra space.
- Not all poems are built from multiple stanzas- a great deal of modern and contemporary poems (particularly American) are built with continuing lines with no stanza breaks.
- End-stopped lines do just that- the phrase ends at the same place and time the line does. Remember, end-stopped lines read like complete **phrases** or thoughts, not necessarily like complete sentences.

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight in middle June,
And then I found Davis.

-Edgar Lee Masters, *Lucinda Matlock*

- Enjambment- enjambment is the continuation of a phrase from one line to another. They don't “stop” at the end of the line like the end-stopped ones.

On the street
Slung on his shoulder is a handle half way across,
Tied in a big knot on the scoop of the cast iron
Are the overalls faded from sun and rain in the ditches;

-Carl Sandburg, *The Shovel Man*

“Word Sounds”

- Alliteration- the repetition of **consonant** sounds at the beginnings of words or stressed syllables within words. (**P**eter **P**iper **p**icked a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers...)
- Assonance- the repetition of vowels sounds in nearby words
Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster child of silence and slow time...

-Ode on a Grecian Urn, J. Keats

- Consonance- a repetition of two or more consonant sounds in a sequence but the vowel sound changes (**live-love, lean alone, pitter-patter**)
- Onomatopoeia- words that try, on the page, to represent the sounds they are describing. Somehow the sound the word makes imitates the sound of the action or the effect itself (bang, crash, whack, zing, etc.).
- Rhyme- vowel sounds repeated in words, at the end of lines (end rhyme) or within single lines in two or more words (internal rhyme). The **rain** in **Spain** falls **mainly** on the **plain**.

“Word Meaning”

There are levels to the meaning of words as well, particularly in poetry, where often a great deal is said and meant with very few words. There are two basic levels of meaning or definition for words: denotative and connotative. The **denotation** of a word is its dictionary definition or definitions. It is what is exactly meant by the word. The **connotation** of a word refers to what the word suggests beyond just what it expresses. The word heart refers to the organ in your body that pumps blood, on a **denotative** level, but on a **connotative** level also might suggest kindness, empathy, goodness, etc. depending on how it is used.

Diction

Diction is basically how people speak. This can be seen in writing as well. Diction will reflect either the language choices of the writer him/herself, or, on a deeper level, can reflect the speech patterns and character of the narrator or speaker within the poem. Diction refers to the selection of words and how they are used, **not** the way the words are combined-that's STYLE. Diction revolves around vocabulary; the words a person knows, and usage, what the speaker/writer intends the word to mean and how he/she says it. There are four levels of usage: **formal, informal, colloquial, and slang**. You can tell a great deal about what's going on in a poem by taking notice of the diction the poem uses. What kind of voice does it give to the speaker in the poem? What relation does the diction have with the situation in the poem, the emotions conveyed, or the ideas or concepts that there? What effect does the diction have on those things? Would the poem be radically different if the diction were changed?

Imagery

Imagery can be, at its simplest, the "pictures" that words paint for the reader inside his or her head. Imagery depends on **figurative language** to get that job done. The "big three" in the figurative language gang are **metaphor, simile, and personification**.

- **Metaphor**- a metaphor connects two things that on the surface may have nothing in common, giving thing #2 some of the qualities or characteristics of thing #1.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless...

-*Sailing to Byzantium*, William Butler Yeats

- **Simile**- similes have similar functions, comparing distinctly different things and setting up a relationship between them. You can recognize a simile by its use of **like** or **as**.

Oh my love's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
Oh my love's like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.

-*A Red, Red Rose*, Robert Burns

- **Personification**- personification is the act of taking an inanimate object and giving it human qualities. Describing a tree's branches as arms, lifted towards the sky, is an example.

Symbol

A symbol is something that means more than just what it is- it represents something else at the same time. Robert Frost used a fork in a real road in a real forest to symbolize a decision that must be made between two paths in life. Not only do you "see" the road in his poem as a real road, but by the end of the piece you realize that the road itself symbolizes something greater, that has nothing to do with taking a walk in the woods.

Tone

Tone refers both to an attitude towards the subject and the poem's audience, and also to the *mood* of the piece itself and the devices that are used to create that mood. We might be able to refer to the tone of the poem itself, as playful, serious, somber, formal or informal, etc, while also referring to the poet's use of diction, rhyme, imagery, alliteration, etc. to talk about the *mood* the poem suggests/creates.