



Elements of Poetry II: Sound & Symbolism

by Anthony Starros, M.F.A.

Alliteration:

the repetition of similar sounds at the beginning of words.

“Five *m*iles *m*eandering with *m*azy *m*otion...”

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*

Assonance: (*near rhyme*)

the repetition of similar vowel sounds within words

"Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old *a*ge should burn and *a*ve at close of *a*y;
*R*age, *r*age, against the dying of the light...”

-Dylan Thomas

Consonance: (*near rhyme*)

the repetition of consonant sounds within words.

“His du*mb* war*m* co*m*fort to the heart,
A fount where dreams ascend...”

-Joseph Burrows, *The Road That Has No End*

Symbols:

pervasive and large metaphors that often relate to or reveal a poem's *theme*.

Conventional Symbols:

symbols that are widely understood by and accepted by most people.

water = fertility

serpents = evil

rain = melancholy

storms = destruction

Simile:

making a comparison of two things using the words “like” or “as.”

My wife's coffee is like a punch in the gut.



Metaphor:

making a more direct comparison of two things without using the words “like” or “as.”

My wife's coffee is a punch in the gut.



Denotation:

the exact and literal *dictionary* meanings of words.

The word "bird" denotes a small, winged creature.

Connotation:

associations that are related to certain words.

The word "bird" connotes freedom, flight, air, etc.

Personification:

when human characteristics are given to non-human things.

In "Mirror" by Sylvia Plath, for example, a mirror is given human abilities and attributes.

I am silver and exact.

I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see I swallow immediately

Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

I am not cruel, only truthful...

Cliché:

an expression, image, or idea that has become tired and trite from overuse, its freshness and clarity having worn off.

a broken heart

love is blind

a hollow soul

one true love

a weary heart

sands of time

baited breath

rise from the ashes

Allusion:

an indirect reference to art, music, literature, mythology, history, or popular culture ~ allusions can help further exemplify and reveal a poem's theme without too much added narrative.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Mirror– Sylvia Plath

The allusion here is to Greek mythology and Narcissus who falls in love with his reflection in a lake to his own detriment.

fin