

*Dictionary  
of  
Poetic Terms*

Jack Myers  
Don Charles Wukasch

University of North Texas Press  
Denton, Texas

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## PREFACE

While the authors of this book are both poets, one is also a teacher and the other is, aptly enough, a heart surgeon. Our interest in compiling this dictionary began with questions that arose out of our own writing, with our being moved by poems we had read, and with our efforts to organize and articulate to ourselves and our students the techniques, terms, and theories we have learned through these endeavors. Over the years, the countless times we were stalled at certain points in our own writing forced us to produce a repertoire of techniques or “moves” in order to transcend the problems. The stock of wonderful models of poetry we had memorized by loving them came to serve as standards of excellence. And the simplest question from a student—Is a title important?—forced us to confront and develop ideas about composition and the creative writing process itself that inevitably linked up ancient ideas with modern assumptions. We mention the background of the book in order to stress both the focus of our attention and our faith in the poet’s essential job, learning the names of things, feelings, and states of being.

So, this dictionary attempts to define a critical vocabulary for the poet and the student of poetry. The work is extensive, the most comprehensive list of poetic terms that has yet been compiled. Its domain includes (1) traditional, familiar terms that are often bandied about in lecture courses without knowledge of the terms’ limitations and history (*persona, sonnet, allegory*), (2) contemporary workshop terms (*voice, deep image, leap*), (3) terms borrowed from other arts and disciplines (*crosscut, gestalt, architechtonics*), and (4) archaic or specialized jargon (*bdelygmia, epanorthosis, periergia*). Perhaps even more important is the fact that this book contains original material on topics such as *line endings, titles, cinematic techniques, defects in control, rhythm, thematic structures, juxtapositions, clichés, the prose poem, myth, and translation*, as well as contemporary strategies of development (*cut-and-shuffle, fill-in-the-blanks, definition and list poem, sandwich construction*). While we make no claims that this book will directly create better poets, our contention is that it will help to educate and stimulate the poet so that he or she can better articulate critical opinions and can have at hand more technical options and aesthetic directions. In this spirit we begin to answer the charge that contemporary poetry lacks a coherent body of poetics, and propose (in a somewhat defensive posture of aesthetic patriotism) that, despite the annoying and sometimes petty busyness of the current poetry scene, recent years may just be that Golden Age that Ezra Pound prophesied would make the fertile 1920s seem like “a tempest in a teapot.”

At first glance, the principles behind the selection of concepts in this dictionary may seem unclear. The book synthesizes many different disciplines—aesthetics, linguistics, lexicography, psychology, anthropology, history, and science, as well as the fields of theoretical and practical criticism. But the reader may find it helpful to think of the book as being three books between two covers: (1) a catalogue of definitions, (2) a companion-reader to traditional and contemporary poetry, and (3) a catalyst to the reader’s own

critical or creative writing. The reader will note that a major portion of the headwords in this dictionary were coined by Classical and Renaissance theorists to describe their understanding of the nature of language in reference to the imagination. We have intentionally restored these terms to modern usage because recent theorists (with the notable exceptions of I. A. Richards and Northrop Frye) have added little to poetics other than new understanding of old ideas. For example, the Chicago Critics' ideas are based almost entirely on the theories of Aristotle. Furthermore, American poets, on the whole, know less about the aesthetic and persuasive powers of language than did their counterparts in Renaissance Europe; and they, in turn, probably knew less than did their Classical counterparts. One of this book's aims, then, is to enlighten the contemporary poet by igniting his or her interest in ancient, modern, and contemporary ideas about poetry. As a companion-reader to poetry of the last 50 years, the book requires that we define some terms in an innovative way, and that we allow ourselves the freedom to expand these entries into analytical essays. In other instances, such as that of *organic composition*, we were surprised to find that a term that we thought was promulgated in the modern era actually has its roots in Romantic and pre-Romantic conceptions. In regard to the third and most elusive aim of this book, as a catalyst to writing, it is our hope that the reader will go beyond the facts presented here into the realm of memory and imagination and emerge with the treasure upon which this book is based, innovations in human expression.

JACK MYERS  
DON WUKASCH

## A NOTE ON THE ESSAYS AND APPENDIXES

Aside from being a comprehensive dictionary of poetry, this book also features essays, which collectively form a handbook. These entries consider ideas on contemporary technique, as well as traditional ideas on the theory, history, movements, and practice of poetry. The major essays include:

cinematic techniques	myth
cliché	rhythm
fractured narrative	sound system
juxtaposition	Surrealism
line ending	titles
metaphor	translation
meter	

Another feature worthy of mention is the inclusion of rhetorical and logical devices rescued from Renaissance texts. For a complete guide to these and other terms, see the appendixes.

# PRONUNCIATION KEY

SYMBOLS	KEY WORDS	SYMBOLS	KEY WORDS
/a/	hat	/ur/	fur
/ä/	father	/ə/	ago, focus
/ā/	fate	/ər/	murder
/e/	flesh	/ch/	much
/ē/	he	/g/	good
/er/	air	/j/	gem
/i/	sit	/ng/	sing, drink
/ī/	eye	/ngg/	finger
/o/	proper	/s/	sell
/ô/	saw	/sh/	shoe, lotion
/ō/	nose	/th/	thin
/oi/	boy	/th/	than
/ö/	book	/v/	very
/oo/	move	/w/	work
/ou/	sound	/y/	yes
/u/	cup	/z/	zeal
		/zh/	azure, vision

No key words are needed for /b/, /d/, /f/, /h/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /r/, and /t/.

## FOREIGN SOUNDS

/kh/

Scottish: **loch** /lokh'/; German: **doch** /dôkh'/, **Johann Sebastian Bach** /bäkh'/

/kh/

German: **ich** /ikh'/, **nichts** /nikhts'/

/œ/

French: **feu** /fœ'/, **peu** /pœ'/; German: **schön** /shœn'/, **Goethe** /gœt'ə/

/Y/

French: **tu** /tY'/, **déjà vu** /dāzhä vY'/; German **grün** /grYn'/, **Walküre** /välkY'rə/

/N/

This symbol is not a sound but indicates that the preceding symbol is a nasal. French: /aN/ and /än/ in **vin blanc** /vaN' blän'/ and **ancien régime** /äNsyaN' räzhēm'/, /ôN/ in **bon** /bôN/ and **fait accompli** /fa'täkôNplē'/

# A

**abecedarius** (from Medieval Latin for “alphabetical”) a type of ACROSTIC in which each line or stanza begins with the letters of the alphabet in their normal order. For example, Chaucer’s *An ABC* begins its first stanza with the word “Almighty,” its second with “Bountee,” and its third with “Comfort.” A more difficult, line-by-line form, incorporating ALLITERATION, can be seen in Alaric Watts’ lines:

An Austrian army awfully array’d,  
Boldly by battery besieged Belgrade,  
Cossack Commanders cannonading come,  
Dealing destruction’s devastating doom.

Greek writers of the Alexandrian period, as well as Latin writers (e.g., Plautus), put the titles of their plays in the a. verses of the arguments. Ben Jonson imitated this device in *The Alchemist*. A folk version of a. can be seen in the children’s jump rope memory game:

A my name is Alice, my father’s name is Al,  
We come from America and we sell Apples.  
B my name is Betty, my father’s name is Ben,  
We come from Belgium and we sell Bottles.

See *light verse* in APPENDIX 1.

**absolutist criticism** a type of criticism that interprets works according to an external, standard set of principles. See CRITICISM. See also *criticism* in APPENDIX 1.

**abstract poetry** a term originated by Dame Edith Sitwell to describe poetry that uses sound, rhyme, and rhythm to communicate a feeling, rather than depending, as most poetry does, on the denotative or connotative meanings of the words. This type of poetry is called “abstract” because it uses sound in much the same way that abstract painting uses color, texture, and shape. Sitwell’s poem *Hornpipe* is an example of a.p.:

sky rhinoceros glum  
watched the courses of the breakers’ rocking-horses and with  
Claucis  
Lady Venus on the settee of the horsehair sea!

For related terms, see AMPHIGORY, NONSENSE VERSE, and TRANS-SENSE VERSE. See also *diction* in APPENDIX 1.

**abstract terms and concrete terms** *abstract terms*: terms that represent ideas or concepts and that are usually taken from *concrete terms*, which represent the sensuous and the particularity of things experienced or known. Abstract terms are usually broader and more general than concrete terms

and tend to describe a domain of thought. For example:

<i>abstract</i>	<i>general</i>	<i>concrete</i>
beauty	woman	Helen of Troy

Abstract terms are informative and non-sensory, though they might carry strong connotations (“liberty, freedom, brotherhood”). Although abstract terms are most often found in the more abstract realms of literature, such as philosophy, it is generally thought that some of the greatest effects in poetry can be brought about by mixing a.t.a.c.t., as in this example from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*: “How light and portable my pain seems now, / When that which makes me bend makes the King bow. . . .”

Over the years, different ages have favored one or the other of these forms of word choice. The 18th century expressed many of its images as abstractions, intellectualizations of concrete phenomena (fish, a finny tribe), whereas the 16th century heard Sidney in his *Defense of Poetry* (1583) hold the power of the concrete above abstraction. Generally speaking, Romantics have touted the specificity and immediacy of the concrete to express emotions and experience, and poetic rhetoricians and philosophers have found the uses of abstraction germane to their efforts.

In the 20th century, according to Northrop Frye, it is very common to find the phrasal formula of “the adjective noun of noun,” e.g., “the cold hand of death,” in which the first noun is concrete and the second is abstract. See *DICTION*. See also *diction* in APPENDIX 1.

**academic** (derived from the olive grove of *Academe*, where Plato met with his students in fourth century B.C. Athens) indicating a nonvocational school such as a university or college. As applied to poetry, the term is used pejoratively to refer to verse that is too formal, mannered, or tame. Modern academies (the Académie Française, the Royal Academy of Arts in England, the Real Academia Española in Spain, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters) propose to keep their respective languages accurate, to foster literature, and to recognize great writing. The famous “Platonic Academy” led by Marsilio Ficino in Florence, Italy, was modeled after Plato’s and generated the neo-Platonism doctrines in the late 15th century which affected much Renaissance English literature. See *WORKSHOP*.

**acatalectic** /-lek’-/ (from negative form of Greek “leaving off”) indicating a metrically complete line of verse. For example, an a. iambic tetrameter line is

Thě girl whó bróke mý héart ĩn tŵo.

The noun *acatalexis* indicates the use of an a. line. When an excess of syllables is employed in a conventional metrical pattern, the line is hypermetric (commonly found in trochaic verse). If a line is metrically incomplete, it is called *catalectic* and is a form of *TRUNCATION*. See also *CATALEXIS*.

**accent** (from Greek for “song added to speech”) the amount of emphasis placed on a syllable as it is pronounced. Although a. and *STRESS* are often used interchangeably, prosodists prefer to use a. to refer to language usage, and stress to refer to metrical qualities (see *METER*). In other words, a.

refers to a combination of pitch, force, loudness, and duration, while stress refers solely to force.

Four levels of accent are usually distinguished. A heavily accented syllable is called a *primary a.* (ˉ); a lighter or medium-accented syllable is called a *secondary a.* (˘); a very lightly accented syllable is called a *tertiary a.* ( ́); and an *unaccented syllable* is denoted by (˘). The word “*ēncýclōpédīā*” shows a combination of all four levels of accent. When two syllables are stressed equally, the occurrence is called *even a.* or *level stress*, as in the spondee “*mánkind.*”

In traditional Latin terminology, *ICTUS* is the name of the stress itself; *arsis* is the name of the unstressed syllable. In earlier Greek terminology, the terms were *thesis*, unstressed, and *arsis*, stressed.

Though there is disagreement among prosodists on the essential nature of *a.* (e.g., whether *DURATION*, or *QUANTITY*, is an element of *a.*), three basic types of *a.* are usually described: (1) *Etymological a.* (sometimes called *grammatical*, *lexical*, or *word a.*) is an emphasis given to a syllable or syllables in a word because of the word’s traditional pronunciation, derivation, or relationship of prefix and suffix to root. (2) *Rhetorical a.* (sometimes called *logical* or *sense a.*) is an emphasis that occurs because of the relative importance of the word in the context of the line. A rhetorical *a.* may vary depending upon the intended meaning:

Did you brínɡ the key?

Did you bring the káy?

Did yóu bring the key?

(3) *Metrical a.* (sometimes called *stress*) is an element in an abstract pattern of recurring emphasis in a conventional line of verse. If the metrical *a.* forces itself over the etymological *a.*, it is called a *wrenched a.*, a device often found in *folk ballads* and poems that imitate the style and manner of folk ballads, e.g., Coleridge’s “He loves to take to marineres / That come from a far countreé.” In general, metrical *a.* yields to rhetorical and etymological *a.* except in intentionally wrenched *a.* It should be noted, however, that some 18th and 19th-century conservative prosodists held that rhetorical *a.* yields to metrical *a.* See *PROSODY*, *RHYTHM*, and *SCANSION*. See also *ARSIS* and *THESIS* and *FOLK BALLAD*; also *meter* in *APPENDIX 1*.

**accentual-syllabic verse** (also called “*syllabic-stress meter*”) a type of poetry in which the metrical scansion takes into account both the number of stressed and the number of unstressed syllables in a line. It is the most commonly used system of measurement in English metrics. *A.-s.v.* groups syllables into units, each of which is called a *FOOT*. There can commonly be from one to eight feet in a typical line, though there are lines that contain up to twelve feet. *A.-s.v.* tends to vary the patterns of the strict forms listed above. The process of adding or subtracting syllables is called *SUBSTITUTION*. See also *ACCENT*, *ACCENTUAL VERSE*, *BLANK VERSE*, *METER*, *PROSODY*, *SCANSION*, and *STRESS*.

**accentual verse** poetry in which the metrical scansion takes into account only the stressed syllables. A line of *a.v.* may have any number of syl-

lables because only the stressed syllables are counted. There are usually four stresses and seven to nine syllables in a line, although Auden uses a three-stress line with six to eight syllables in *September 1, 1939*, and even in poems using a four-stress line there is much variation. In Coleridge's *Christabel*, for example, the second line, as well as other lines, uses a five-stress pattern:

There is not wind enough to twirl  
The oné réd léaf, the lást of its clán

Most Germanic and Anglo-Saxon poetry is a.v., and it remains one of the most widely used meters in English. The loose iambics of many modern poems, such as Yeats' *Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?*, could be described as a.v. In addition, a.v. is the basis for Hopkins' SPRUNG RHYTHM. The system of using stresses to regulate a line is called *stress prosody*. See also ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSE, ANGLO-SAXON VERSE, METER, and STRONG-STRESS METER.

**accidence** (from Latin for "chance") grammatically, the morphological INFLECTION of a word; also, any book setting down the basic principles of grammar.

**acephalous line** /əsef'-/ (*acephalous*, Greek for "headless"; also known as "initial truncation") a line of verse in conventional meter, usually iambic in which the first unstressed syllable of the line is left out as in Housman's second line of the following couplet:

Añd íf / mý wáys / ãre nó't / ãs théirs  
Lét / thēm mínd / théir ówn / ãffairs

(The term TRUNCATION refers usually to the omission of the last syllable.)

**Acmeism** /ak'mé-/ (from Greek for "utmost, a pinnacle of") a school of modern Russian poetry which strove for clarity, precision, and texture. It opposed specifically the unworldliness and vagueness of Symbolism which was the dominant mode of writing in Russian poetry at the turn of the 20th century. The *Acmeists* included notable poets such as Akhmatova, Gorodetsky, Gumilyov, Kuzmin, and Mandelstam—all of whom were closely associated with the magazine *Apollon*. They were craftpersons who concentrated on the technical aspects of a poem rather than its prophetic vision. Their aesthetic aloofness from social problems, which earned them the enmity of both Soviet critics and the avant-garde, may have helped to make the movement short-lived.

**acoustic scansion** (see SCANSION) the use of a machine, such as the oscillograph or kymograph, to record voice patterns.

**acronym** a form of abbreviation in which the initial (or other) letters of words are pronounced as a word, such as "AWOL" (*absent without leave*). See ACROSTIC. See also *forms* in APPENDIX 1.

**acrostic** (from Greek for "topmost" plus "line of verse") a puzzle poem whose variations of initial, medial, and terminal letters in each line form a hidden word or phrase when read vertically and/or horizontally. The genre was derived from early Greek and Latin texts whose authors, it is thought,

meant to devise verses that could easily be memorized and accurately passed on through the oral tradition. During the Middle Ages, the form was often used to spell out names or messages with religious significance. The common type of a. is the *true a.*, which employs a vertical reading of the initial letters of words:

Man  
Is  
Never  
Dead

A *telestich* focuses on the terminal letters of words or lines, and a *mesostich* highlights the medial letters. The following a. combines these forms and creates the same five words in each line with its vertical readings of the letters in their five positions:

H E A R T  
E M B E R  
A B U S E  
R E S I N  
T R E N D

A *cross a.* has an oblique ordering of the letters that uses the first letter of the first line, the second letter of the second line, etc., as exhibited in Poe's *A Valentine*. An *ABECEDARIUS* uses the alphabetical order of the letters, a form commonly found in the Hebrew Version of the Old Testament (see Psalm 119). Other forms include the *ACRONYM*. See *light verse* in APPENDIX 1.

**acyron** /as'ərən/ (from Greek for "incorrect in speech") a device of *POETIC LICENSE*, considered "tolerable" by Puttenham, that uses words whose meanings are opposite to those intended: "Murderers are always popular people" or "Sitting here is a waste of movement."

**adaptation** (from Latin for "to choose"; see *TRANSLATION*) the recasting of a work into a different medium. For instance, novels are frequently recast into plays. In poetry, the term usually refers to the process of changing the translation of a poem in order to make it a more successful poem in English. Ezra Pound's versions of Chinese poems are well known adaptations.

A. Poulin's a. of a Catawba poem indicates the power and precision that an a. can have, which, indeed, can be equal to an original poem. Poulin adapted this poem and others from Frank G. Speck's *Catawba Texts* (1934):

*Widow's Taboo*  
Your husband's dead  
No one will talk to you  
for one year your tongue  
will be in his mouth

An a. retains the action, characters, and much of the language and tone of the original. In this way, the term differs from the reworking of a source. See *IMITATION*.

**adjectival metaphor** a *METAPHOR* in the grammatical form of an adjective, e.g., in the cliché "Something smells *fishy* here."

**adonic** /əˈdɒnɪk/ (from Greek name for Venus' lover; from Phoenician for "lord") a metrical unit consisting of a dactyl and a spondee (˘˘˘/˘˘) or a dactyl and a trochee (˘˘˘/˘˘). It took its name from the cry for the god Adonis, as in Sappho's "O Ton Adonin." Some Greek proverbs were in adonics. Also, the fourth line of the SAPPHIC stanza is usually printed as an a., although ENJAMBMENT may make the third and fourth lines one metrical unit. Adonics were widely used by a number of Latin writers including Seneca who used the a. in longer runs of "lesser Sapphics." See METER.

**adverbial metaphor** a METAPHOR in the grammatical form of an adverb, e.g., "He ran *blindly* after his desires."

**adynaton** /ədɪˈnætən/ (also called "*impossibilia*") a natural expression of exaggeration. There are two basic types of a.: The "sooner than expected" type says something will happen sooner than someone thinks it will; the "impossible count" type refers to the number of grains of sand on the shore, stars in the sky, etc. Although a popular device in Greek and Latin poetry, the a. virtually disappeared during the Middle Ages except for the Old French "fatrasies" which dealt with impossible or ridiculous accomplishments. During the RENAISSANCE, Petrarchists used the a. to recount the cruelty of their ladies, or to affirm their love for their ladies. The device has not been very popular since the Renaissance. See HYPERBOLE and PETRARCHAN CONCEIT.

**aeolic** /ē·ol·ɪk/ (also spelled "eolic") originally, the name of the Greek dialect in which Sappho and Alcaeus wrote. Now a. is a name for a class of meters in which dactyls and trochees are brought closely together so that a CHORIAMB (˘˘˘˘) is formed. Prosodists disagree as to whether scansion of the a. is counted as choriambic or dactylic-trochaic and, alternately, iambic-anapestic. See ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSE and METER.

**aesthetic distance** (*aesthetic*, from Greek for "things pertaining to the senses"; sometimes called "*physical distance*" or "*psychic distance*") a term coined by E. Bullough in 1912 to describe the effect produced when an experience is objectified by a work of art independent from the personal experience of its creator. A.d. also refers to the degree of detachment and objectivity that a critical reader maintains in his evaluation and, in this way, keeps art separate from reality. A.d. is close to Keats' NEGATIVE CAPABILITY and Eliot's OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE.

Critics agree that a certain degree of objectivity is a necessary prerequisite for artistic or critical contemplation, but they disagree on the amount of objectivity required. Bullough, for instance, felt comfortable with the "utmost decrease" in a.d., while Ortega y Gasset held out for the "utmost increase." At any rate, every reader and poet must find a balance between *overdistancing*, that is, being coldly withdrawn, and *underdistancing*, that is, being overly subjective.

The degree of a.d. in a poet's work is part of his or her STANCE. Certain poets, such as T.S. Eliot and Donald Justice, choose to have a high degree of a.d., while others, such as W.C. Williams or Sylvia Plath, choose to have a low degree. See also CONFESSIONAL POETRY, DISTANCE AND INVOLVE-

MENT, LOCATION, and OBJECTIVITY VS. SUBJECTIVITY.

**Aestheticism** a school of poetry in England in the second half of the 19th century; also, a view of poetics that maintains the autonomy of art regardless of moral, social, political, and other practical considerations. The roots of the aesthetic movement lie in Germany in Kant's theory that aesthetic contemplation should be "disinterested," in Schiller's emphasis on form and "revelation of the universal in the particular," and in the ideas of writers such as Goethe and Schelling. Oscar Wilde, the prophet of English A., promoted the creed "Art for art's sake" (ARS GRATIA ARTIS). English PARNASSIANS (Dobson, Lange, and Gosse) also took up the cause, though in a less vociferous fashion. Keats in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is said to have made the paradigmatic statement on A.:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

But the English VICTORIANS such as Tennyson attacked the tenets of A. by writing:

Art for Art's sake! Hail, truest lord of Hell!  
Hail Genius, Master of the Moral Will!  
"The filthiest of all paintings painted well  
Is mightier than the purest painted ill!"  
Yes, mightier than the purest painted well,  
So prone are we toward the broad way to Hell.

Coleridge, Carlyle, and Emerson found an affinity with A., and Poe elevated it into "The Poetic Principle": "a poem written solely for the poem's sake" is the supreme work. The French SYMBOLISTS in their search for an Ideal Beauty and Ultimate Reality applied the poetics of A. not only to the work itself but also to its creator whom they considered to be a priest in "the religion of beauty." Pound and Eliot, interested in an objective and technical poetry, built their own form of aesthetics on those of the Symbolists and stressed the craft aspects of poetry writing. Ultimately, the most influential ideas arising out of A. are its emphasis on the autonomy of the artist in his endeavor, the independent existence of beauty as reflected in the form and content of a poem, and the importance of craft and technique in the writing of a poem. See FIN DE SIÈCLE. See also *criticism* in APPENDIX 1.

**aesthetic surface** the general effect that a poem's RHYTHM, PHRASING, SYNTAX, IMAGERY, LINEATION, TONE, and figures produce in combination. For example, the a.s. of Hopkins' *The Windhover* is rough, impacted, and clashing, while the a.s. of James Wright's *To a Blossoming Pear Tree* is smooth, clean, and clear. The a.s. of a poem takes into account the external appearance of the poem's inner theme, but the two could conceivably be in productive tension. See TEXTURE, TONE COLOR, and TYPOGRAPHICAL ARRANGEMENT. See also *melopoetics* in APPENDIX 1.

**aetiologia:** See ENTHYMEME.

**affective fallacy** a term originally used in a 1946 essay in *The Verbal Icon* by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley in which a.f. is defined as an

error in evaluating a poem by its effects—especially emotional effects—on the reader. Agreeing that the a.f. is an error of subjective judgment, the school of NEW CRITICISM warned that using this type of standard would lead one to subordinate the objective merits of a work to its emotional, psychological, and historical effects. But other critics, such as David Daiches (*Literary Essays*, 1965), maintain that there is much value in utilizing the a.f. since the response by the reader can be traced back to the techniques of the poem. Aristotle’s theory of CATHARSIS, which calls for a vicarious emotional purge on the part of an empathetic audience, is a well-known example of the a.f. See also CLASSICAL FALLACY, EXPRESSIVE FALLACY, IMITATIVE FALLACY, INTENTIONAL FALLACY, PATHETIC FALLACY, and REDUCTIVE FALLACY.

**Age of Sensibility** an 18th- and early-19th-century movement within NEO-CLASSICISM that promoted pathos, instinct, and compassion (over the anti-theoretical Rationalist values of the 17th century) as keys to understanding literature and human nature. In addition, this humanist philosophy called for a return to the rustic or pastoral life, as opposed to the more formal and refined urban sensibility, in order to restore the lost harmony between man and nature, among members of society, and between man and himself. See ROMANTICISM and SENSIBILITY.

**alba** (Provençal for “dawn,” literally “white”) a lyrical song or poem usually expressing the regret of lovers that dawn has come to separate them. There is no prescribed fixed metrical form, but conventionally the word “alba” ends each stanza. The term itself grew out of the watchman’s cry that day had arrived. The earliest examples are from the Provençal and 12th-century French. Ovid inspired the TROUBADOURS who created the distinct literary genre. Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Reeve’s Tale* contain albas. See AUBADE.

**alcaics** /alkā’iks/ a quantitative verse form of four quatrains with four long syllables in each line. The form was invented by Alcaeus in the sixth century B.C., and since it is based on QUANTITATIVE METER rather than accentual verse, there are no true English a., only imitations as in Tennyson’s poem *Milton*:

O mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies,  
O skilled to sing of Time and Eternity,  
God-gifted organ-voice of England,  
Milton, a name to resound for ages.

The Roman poet Horace used a. some 37 times, and Swinburne also composed in the meter. Specifically, the first two lines of an alcaic are hendecasyllabic, line three is a nine-syllable line, and the fourth line is decasyllabic. See *forms* in APPENDIX 1.

**alcmanic verse** /-mā’nik/ quantitative metrical form featuring a dactylic tetrameter catalectic line (˘˘/˘˘˘/˘˘˘/˘˘˘/). It is named after the seventh-century B.C. poet Alcman. Latin and Greek dramatic verse used the form in dactylo-epitrite or pure dactylic periods. Horace also used the meter. See QUANTITATIVE METER. See also *forms* in APPENDIX 1.

**aleatory poetry** /ālēatory/ (from Latin *aleatorius*, chance, die) a method of writing poetry that is dependent on chance, luck, indeterminacy, or the random application of certain formal requirements. For instance, the poet/composer John Cage wrote a poem according to the number of irregularities on a piece of typing paper he had, which in this case happened to be 122; so he called his “122 Words. . .” and its subject is how a poem evolves. Poets such as Marcia Southwick use word “cut-outs” from printed matter and then rearrange the words for their most serendipitous possibilities. The French Surrealists invented the poetry game *CADAVRE EXQUIS*, which was meant to instill wildness and oddness within the conventions of grammar and syntax. See *CHANCE IMAGERY*, *CHANCE POETRY*, *DADA*, *Surrealism*, and *game forms* under *forms* in *APPENDIX 1*.

**Alexandrine** /-drin/ or /-drīn/ a six-foot, 12-syllable line form that became the dominant meter in France. The French version of the meter, perfected by Racine in the 17th century, usually contains four stresses, two main stresses falling on the sixth and last syllables, one or two lighter stresses with no fixed position, and a fixed medial *CAESURA*. The term originated either from Lambert le Tort’s *Roman d’Alexandre*, a 12th-century romance based on Alexander the Great, or from the poetry of Alexandre Paris. Verlaine stretched the form toward *FREE VERSE*, and English examples of the meter are in iambic hexameters. Spenser used it as the concluding line of each stanza in *The Faerie Queene* (see *SPENSERIAN STANZA*). Pope humorously described the occasional sluggishness of the form by saying: “A needless alexandrine ends the song, / That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.” See *forms* in *APPENDIX 1*.

**allegory** /al’-/ (from Greek *allos*, for “other,” and *agorevein*, for “to speak”) a form of *NARRATION* that functions as a *TROPE*, lying somewhere between *PERSONIFICATION* and *METAPHOR*, in which persons, objects, settings, or actions are represented as physical entities referring to a second order of abstractions that lies outside of the text. For example, the character Despair in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* embodies and vivifies the notion of despair, and in Psalm 23 the Lord is represented as a shepherd and the speaker as one of his flock. As a form of metaphor, the a. implies its *tenor* and elaborates its *vehicle* for the purpose of moral instruction. The allegorical characters, objects, settings, and actions (Greed meets Generosity) tend to be literal, one-dimensional, sharply outlined, and rigid in the order of ideas they represent. On the other hand, a *SYMBOL* tends to be suggestive, containing multiple levels and a conglomeration of resonant qualities. A. differs from simple *ALLUSION* and *AMBIGUITY* in that it offers a running commentary rather than a single, static identity.

In some forms of a., the narrative is equal to or more important than the order of ideas outside the text; but in the *simple a.*, as in the *FABLE*, the abstract commentary has more importance. The *complex a.*, usually involving historical or political characters and events, places heavy emphasis on its external narrative and thus develops a strong tone of irony. Other forms of a. are the *PARABLE*, which is a story expressing a religious truth; the *FABLE*, in which animals reveal some truth about the foibles and follies of man; and the *SATIRE*, which, as in *Gulliver’s Travels*, attempts to better

the human condition through wit and humor. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, some of Milton's work, and many of the plays of Shakespeare are considered allegories, as well as many modern poems including Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* and Alan Dugan's *Love Song: I and Thou*. Twentieth-century critics have noted various unconscious types of a., such as psychological allegories and religious-myth allegories. See APOLOGUE, BEAST EPIC, and EXEMPLUM. See also *figurative expressions* in APPENDIX 1.

**alliteration** (from Latin for "to letter"; also called "*parimion*" ["the figure of like letter"]) repetition of consonants, vowels, and/or syllables in close proximity within a line. A. is deliberately used for the sake of melody (EUPHONY or CACOPHONY) and RHYTHM. The most common form of simple a. is BEGINNING RHYME or HEAD RHYME which occurs at the beginning of words and is usually consonantal, as in "Love laments loneliness," or as in James Agee's "Not met and marred with the year's whole turn of grief / But easily on the mercy of the morning / Fell this still folded leaf."

Less emphatic forms take place in the middle of words (see POLYPTOTON and at the end of words (see HOMOEOTELEUTON). Most commonly found in accentually based languages, and rare in quantitative ones, a. is a chief feature of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English verse. But in contemporary poetry, the device has atrophied into ornament and is often used as a vehicle for SATIRE in LIGHT VERSE.

More complex forms include *parallel* or *crossed a.* in which two different systems of a. are interwoven, as in Coleridge's "The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew"; and *suspended a.* in which a consonant-and-vowel-combination in one word is reversed in a succeeding word, as in Longfellow's "Herds of fallow deer were feeding." Whenever the unstressed syllables of words are *alliterated*, it is called *submerged* or *thesis a.* Gerard Manley Hopkins, among modern poets, shows the most original and integral use of the device. See also ALLITERATIVE METER and ANGLO-SAXON VERSE; also *melopoetics* in APPENDIX 1.

**alliterative meter** /alit'-/ a structural feature of Old Germanic poetry, used to link and emphasize important words within the metrical units. Each line is divided into two half-lines (or HEMISTICH UNITS) of two stresses by a decisive pause or CAESURA. At least one and usually both of the two stressed words in the first half-line alliterate with the first stressed word of the second half-line; e.g., *Beowulf*, lines 205-209:

Háefde se góða	Gáeta leóða
cémpan gécorone	páre pe he cénoste
findan mihte;	fiftyna sum
súndwudu sóhte,	scg wísade,
lágucroeftig món	landgemeyrcu.

Each consonantal sound is considered to alliterate only with another occurrence of the same sound, but any vowel or diphthong is considered to alliterate with any other vowel or diphthong.

No one knows the origin of a.m., but one may assume that it arose as a

MNEMONIC DEVICE to aid in oral recitation. In English, a.m. reached its most widespread use during the Anglo-Saxon period (see ANGLO-SAXON VERSE). During the Middle English period, the strict a.m. gave way to a less systematic verse which tolerated more freedom. Sometimes in 14th-century poetry such as *The Pearl* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a.m. is loosely combined with intricate rhyme patterns. At the end of the Middle Ages, with the assimilation of French and classical syllabic meters into English poetry, a.m. disappeared for hundreds of years. In the modern age, English and American poets have rediscovered its primitive charm. Examples of modern poems that use a.m. include Ezra Pound's *The Seafarer*, C. Day Lewis' *As One Who Wanders into Old Workings*, Richard Eberhart's *Brotherhood of Men*, W.H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*, and Richard Wilbur's *Junk*. See also ALLITERATION.

**allostrophæ** /ali-ós'trofə/ (from Greek for "composed of irregular strophes") Milton's term describing verse composed in stanzas of variable lengths. His preface to *Samson Agonistes* explains that the form is in contrast to the fixed atrophic forms of the ODE. See *forms* in APPENDIX 1.

**allonym** /al'-/ (from Greek for "other-named") a pen name of an author or a work published under a name that is not that of the author, as "*Publius*" marked the collaboration of Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison in *The Federalist*, a series of papers that helped bring about the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. The term is related to the general term *pseudonym*. See NOM DE PLUME.

**allusion** (from Latin for "touching lightly upon a subject") in a literary work, a brief reference, implied or explicit, to a well known character, event, or place, or to another artistic work. Sometimes the reference may be to a little-known work or to highly specialized knowledge, as evident in the works of Ezra Pound and other Modernists such as Robert Lowell. The purpose of using the device is to share knowledge in an economical way and to enrich the work at hand.

Extended allusions can be divided into five basic types. The *topical a.* refers to recent events, such as Auden's *The Shield of Achilles* which uses a description of the results of the Trojan war to refer obliquely to the results of World War II. The *personal a.* refers to the author's own biography, such as Milton's *On His Blindness* and Robert Penn Warren's many poems about his boyhood in Kentucky. The *metaphorical a.* uses its reference as a *vehicle* for the poetic *tenor* it acquires in its new context; e.g., Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* acquires its symbolic meaning through the emphasis of the importance of the decision that has been made. The *imitative a.* parodies another work, as Donald Justice's *Counting the Mad* parodies *This Little Piggy*. The *structural a.* mirrors the structure of another work, as James Joyce's *Ulysses* mirrors *The Odyssey*.

**altar poem** (see CARMEN FIGURATUM) a shaped poem or *visual poem* in the form of an altar, as in George Herbert's *The Altar*. See CONCRETE POETRY. See also *forms* in APPENDIX 1.

**ambience** (from Latin for "to go about all sides"; see ATMOSPHERE) the quality of

an environment or age. See also mood; also *dramatic terms* in APPENDIX 1.

**ambiguity** (from Latin for “to wander about, to waver”) a word, phrase, or idea whose multiple meanings leave the reader in doubt as to the exact interpretation. The unintentional use of a. is seen as a stylistic defect characterized by imprecision and diffused reference. As an intentional device, a. has been used to impart chordal richness and largeness to language. Often it is achieved grammatically through the indefinite use of pronouns and abnormal word order; stylistically it is realized through the use of puns and compression of language. For example, Hotspur’s speech in *Henry IV* mentions “crack’d crowns” which refers to (1) broken coins, (2) fractured heads, and (3) deposed royalty.

In 1930 William Empson collected and categorized the various interpretations critics had assigned to Shakespeare’s work. He developed from these a controversial list of ambiguities in his book *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. They include: (1) “details of language that are effective in several ways at once”; (2) “alternative meanings that are ultimately resolved into the one meaning of the author”; (3) “two seemingly unconnected meanings that are given in one word”; (4) “alternative meanings that act together to clarify a complicated state of mind in the author”; (5) “a simile that refers imperfectly to two incompatible things and by this ‘fortunate confusion’ shows the author discovering his idea as he writes”; (6) “a statement that is so contradictory or irrelevant that the reader is made to invent his own interpretation”; and (7) “a statement so fundamentally contradictory that it reveals a basic division in the author’s mind.” Some critics have seen Empson’s types of a. as being wrong or unhelpful. Another classification of a. was done in 1953 in France by J.D. Hubert, whose work is based on Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil*.

Terms similar to a., but which don’t convey a negative character, are AMPHIBOLOGIA, MULTIPLE MEANING, and PLURISIGNATION. See *figurative expressions* and *meaning* in APPENDIX 1.

**ambition** (from French for “going round or about”) a poet’s intended range, depth, and levels of meaning in a poem. See the related term RISK.

**amoeban verses** (*amoeban*, from Greek for “interchanging or responsive verses”) alternating verses, couplets, or stanzas between two speakers, the first of whom introduces a theme and the second of whom enriches or elaborates it. The form was chiefly found in the pastoral poetry of Theocritus and Virgil. See *forms* in APPENDIX 1.

**amphibologia** (from Greek for “reasoning via ambiguity”; also known as “*amphiboly*”) an AMBIGUITY in the sense or phrasing of words caused by either grammatical looseness or the multiple meanings of words, as in “I prayed for you frequently moping, / You wanted me barely coping.” Or, “A dark horse has won the triple crown” (meaning, that in a race the horse’s color was dark, or it wasn’t expected to win; or a Cardinal has become the Pope who wears the triple crown). Also prophecies such as those told by the witches in *Macbeth* are a type of a. See *devices of poetic license* in APPENDIX 2, and *figurative expressions* in APPENDIX 1.