

"They're looking for you"—said *hearer* to *horror*,
As he left them there, as he left them there.¹

Assonance is the repetition of identical or similar vowels—especially in stressed syllables—in a sequence of nearby words. Note the recurrent long *i* in the opening lines of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820):

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster child of silence and slow time. . . .

The richly assonantal effect at the beginning of William Collins' "Ode to Evening" (1747) is achieved by a patterned sequence of changing vowels:

If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song,
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy pensive ear. . . .

For a special case of the repetition of vowels and consonants in combination, see *rhyme*. For references to *alliteration* in other entries, see pages 106, 127, 198.

alliterative meter: 10; 198, 252.

allusion: Allusion is a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage. In the Elizabethan Thomas Nashe's "Litany in Time of Plague,"

Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye,

the unidentified "Helen" in the last line alludes to Helen of Troy. Most allusions serve to illustrate or expand upon or enhance a subject, but some are used in order to undercut it ironically by the discrepancy between the subject and the allusion. In the lines from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) describing a woman at her modern dressing table,

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble,²

the *ironic* allusion, achieved by echoing Shakespeare's phrasing, is to the description of Cleopatra's magnificent barge in *Antony and Cleopatra* (II. ii. 196ff):

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burn'd on the water.

¹Lines from "O where are you going?" from *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems 1927-1957* by W. H. Auden, ed. by Edward Mendelson. Copyright © 1934 and renewed 1962 by W. H. Auden. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc., and Faber & Faber Ltd.

²Lines from "The Waste Land" from *Collected Poems 1909-1962* by T. S. Eliot. Copyright © 1964, 1963 by T. S. Eliot. Reprinted by permission of Faber & Faber Ltd.

For discussion of a poet who makes persistent and complex use of this device, see Reuben A. Brower, *Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion* (1959); see also John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (1981); Edwin Stein, *Wordsworth's Art of Allusion* (1988); Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (2002).

Since allusions are not explicitly identified, they imply a fund of knowledge that is shared by an author and the audience for whom the author writes. Most literary allusions are intended to be recognized by the generally educated readers of the author's time, but some are aimed at a special coterie. For example, in *Astrophel and Stella*, the Elizabethan *sonnet sequence*, Sir Philip Sidney's punning allusions to Lord Robert Rich, who had married the Stella of the sonnets, were identifiable only by intimates of the people concerned. (See Sonnets 24 and 37.) Some modern authors, including Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, include allusions that are very specialized, or else drawn from the author's private reading and experience, in the awareness that few if any readers will recognize them prior to the detective work of scholarly annotators. The current term *intertextuality* includes literary echoes and allusions as one of the many ways in which any text is interwoven with other texts. See Joseph Pucci, *The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in Western Literary Tradition* (1998); and Gregory Machacek, "Allusion," *PMLA*, Vol. 122 (2007).

ambiance: (ām' bēāns), 18.

ambiguity: In ordinary usage "ambiguity" is applied to a fault in style; that is, the use of a vague or equivocal expression when what is wanted is precision and particularity of reference. Since William Empson published *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), however, the term has been widely used in criticism to identify a deliberate poetic device: the use of a single word or expression to signify two or more distinct references, or to express two or more diverse attitudes or feelings. **Multiple meaning** and **plurisignation** are alternative terms for this use of language; they have the advantage of avoiding the pejorative association with the word "ambiguity."

When Shakespeare's Cleopatra, exciting the asp to a frenzy, says (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V. ii. 306ff.),

Come, thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and dispatch,

her speech is richly multiple in significance. For example, "mortal" means "fatal" or "death-dealing," and at the same time may signify that the asp is itself mortal, or subject to death. "Wretch" in this context serves to express both contempt and pity (Cleopatra goes on to refer to the asp as "my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep"). And the two meanings of "dispatch"—"make haste" and "kill"—are equally relevant.

A special type of multiple meaning is conveyed by the **portmanteau word**. "Portmanteau" designates a large suitcase that opens into two equal compart-

ments, and was introduced on semantics in Lewis Carroll to Alice the meaning of

"Twas
Did gy

"Slithy," Humpty Dumpty like a portmanteau—the Joyce exploited this device to sustain the multiple meanings in *Finnegans Wake* (1939). "I easily freudened"; "freud combines "young" and (Compare *pun*.) "Différance" Jacques Derrida, is a postmodernist who explores diverse meanings of the *deconstruction*.)

By his analysis of ambiguity developed especially expanded awareness of the fact is that the quest for ambiguity is drawn, and sometimes carried

For related terms see Empson's theory and Contemporary Criticism Crane (1952). For referer

American literature, period:

American Renaissance: 2

anachronism (anāk' rōnizm)

anagnorisis (anagnō' rīsīs):

anapestic (anapēs' tik): 195

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annals: 47.

antagonist (in a plot): 265.