

## A Glossary of Technical Terms to help you write a commentary

This glossary is by no means complete; add your own record of terms and their explanation for future reference.

Note: when pointing to a figure of speech in a text, you must always indicate why or to what effect the author has used it.

**alliteration** (noun): stylistic procedure by which successive words or expressions begin with the same letter or sound; by extension also the occurrence of a similar sound within adjacent or closely connected words.  
e.g. «Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes?» (Racine, *Andromaque*).

**allusion** (noun): evoking a person, object or idea without referring to him or it explicitly. [verb: to allude to]

**anaphora** (noun): repetition of the same word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases or lines.  
E.g. «De tous les deux côtés j'ai des pleurs à répandre;/ De tous les deux côtés mes désirs sont trahis» (Corneille, *Horace*).

**antithesis** (noun): the juxtaposition of two opposites or contrasting words or ideas.

**bathectic** (adjective): the effect is bathectic (from the Greek noun *bathos*, depth) when a low or ludicrous word or idea suddenly intrudes into an elevated text.  
E.g. Molière, *Le Tartuffe*, III, 1:  
Que la foudre sur l'heure achève mes destins,  
Qu'on me traite partout du plus grand des faquins  
S'il est aucun respect ni pouvoir qui m'arrête,  
Et si je ne fais pas quelque coup de ma tête!

**chiasmus** (noun): inversion in the second phrase of the word order (or the order of ideas) followed in the first. Hence: chiasmic (adjective).  
e.g. to stop too fearful and too faint to go.

The word *chiasmus* is derived from the Greek letter *chi* or *chi* (X), because if you write the two phrases underneath one another you can link the corresponding words or ideas crosswise, with a *chi*.

to stop	X	too fearful
too faint		to go

**euphemism** (noun): a word or phrase which expresses a blunt or harsh idea in a gentler, softer way, or by minimizing it.  
e.g. «to pass away» for «to die».

**genre** (noun): type of work, either in prose or with a distinctive metre, and a particular length and content. The rules that govern a particular genre may vary according to language or country, and may

change with time. Examples of literary genres are: (in verse) the epic, the sonnet, the epigram; (in prose) the novel, the novella; (in prose or verse, according to the period) tragedy, comedy. The adjective is *generic*.

**hendiadys** (noun): expression of a complex idea (e.g. a noun + adjective) by two words placed at the same level. These are usually connected by and (French: et). The term *hendiadys* is derived from the Greek *hen dia duoin*: one thing by two).  
e.g. «in gold and goblets» for «in golden goblets»; «nice and warm» for «nicely warm».  
e.g. «In temple rempli de voix et de prières» (i.e.: de prières exprime à haute voix) (Lamartine).

**hyperbole** (noun), hyperbolic (adjective): exaggerated statement not to be taken literally.

**irony** (noun), ironic or ironical (adjective): figure of style by which one says one thing but makes clear that one means another (often the opposite). In everyday use, we speak of irony when a speaker adopts another person's point of view or a laudatory tone for the purpose of ridicule. In literature, irony often refers to the use of language with an inner meaning for a privileged audience and an outer meaning for the person addressed.

-> **tragic irony** is a common literary device by which the author makes his characters utter a statement which the audience understands as ominous or prophetic but whose deeper significance is unsuspected by them.

**intertextuality** (noun): a relationship between two (or more) texts, which may include allusion or overt reference (reference by one to the other(s)), in which the later text is framed as a response to the earlier text.

**leitmotif**, **-if** (noun): in music and literature; theme associated throughout a piece or work with some person, situation, or sentiment; hence, a recurring phrase or image.

**litotes** (noun): ironical understatement, especially expression of an affirmative by the negative or its contrary;  
e.g. «je ne m'en ai point...» (Racine) for «j'avoue...».

**metaphor** (noun), metaphorical (adj.): the application of a name or descriptive term to a person or object, to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable. This substitution often happens on the basis of an implicit comparison.  
e.g. «ma flamme» for «mon amour» (because my love is like a flame).

**oxymoron** (noun): the pointed combination or juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory expressions.  
e.g. Faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Note: this is much more specific than an antithesis.  
**pathos** (noun): quality in speech or writing that excites pity or sadness. Adjective: pathetic.

-> **pathetic fallacy**: crediting inanimate things with human emotions.