

Shades of Meaning

Meaning, from a layman's perspective, is a shared experience. It is the driving force behind communication and as such, two or more individual's ultimately share something. If one considers advertising, what makes advertising such a powerful marketing tool for businesses? A creative guru experiments with a language concept and crafts a short promo that appeals to the emotions of the consumers. The idea motivates us and we buy the given product(s). Advertising puts sound and movement to poetic language and plays on meaning.

Poetry, then, is centred around the bottled thoughts and emotions of a writer that are eventually shared after a period of contemplation. Those of us who write poems can identify with the emotional turnings as ideas stimulate our creative juices; and in some cases, we know the anguish that may be associated when these ideas are muddled by conflicting circumstances. Then suddenly there is a **birthing process** and the urge to write overwhelms the writer. Poetry is born. As such, the very essence of poetry forces the writer to do one of the following through his or her work:

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| a. Amuse | f. Express grief or sadness |
| b. Describe | g. Celebrate |
| c. Entertain | h. Communicate |
| d. Narrate | i. Philosophise |
| e. Inform | |

A reader may then need to ask himself or herself when analysing the written piece:

- a. **What** is the poem about?
- b. **Why** has the poem been written or what is the poet's **purpose**?
- c. **How** does the poet use language to express his or her views and achieve the desired effects?

The writer therefore seeks out a number of devices and strategies to put onto to paper, the exact emotion(s) that was/were experienced or was/were associated with the idea(s). This process attempts to engage the interpretative skills of a given reader or readers as, more often than not, the poet is never present to guide the process. The reader is therefore called upon to decipher if the poet intended a **literal meaning** or a **metaphoric/figurative meaning**.

The literal or dictionary meaning is known to us as the **denotative** meaning. It presents the straightforward, exact sense that is outlined in a dictionary. On the contrary, the approach that adds great richness to literary studies is the metaphoric/figurative meaning or the **connotative** meaning. Connotation reflects the ideas, moods or feelings that are associated with/attached to the word(s) by the reader. It can be positive, negative or neutral/unbiased. Of course, such interpretation will be coloured by the personal experiences of the reader. This explains why literary studies have become such a dynamic discipline - one where culture influences language and language influences culture.

A poet may chose to use any combination of the following strategies to convey his or her message: **symbols, metaphor, simile, irony, pun, allusion, personification, onomatopoeia, dialect**, among others. In some circles, the aforementioned would be considered as the **technique** used by the poet. It is the skill involved in analysing such techniques that allows a reader to derive the shades of meaning.