

The Dictionary of Poetic Terms makes the obscure lexicon of poetry accessible and familiar. We moderns most often begin by writing from the heart, but to penetrate the craft, it helps to have the full arsenal of insight established by older writers and scholars available. For me personally, this book makes for fascinating reading, and sparks fresh ideas. If it can accomplish its stated aim, to help the writer develop taste and a sense of what is possible, then it is really a painless workout.

The dictionary has more than 1600 entries but is still pretty small and easy to carry with other books. It was written by Jack Myers and Don Wukasch, both poets, and published in 1985. I would give this volume a 4 out of 4 stars for what it is: a specialized dictionary.

In the preface, the authors say, “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.” This volume does in fact have a wonderful mastery of time honored and academic material and we reap the benefits through their modern-modern break down.

That quote mentioned titles because they have embedded a short essay on that subject with the other entries. There are a few others like it. Let's take a look at a representative short entry.

exuscitatio (Latin for “arousal, awakening”) a figure of PATHOS that excites an audience either positively or negatively through the speaker's tone, as in Keats':

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!

see figures of *pathos* in Appendix 2.

In that listing the word “pathos” is in all caps because it is given a dictionary entry. But instead let's follow the advice and look up “figures of pathos” in the appendix. Appendix 2 consists of lists of “rhetorical, poetical, and logical devices”; pathos being one example. If we look at what is given under category 6 pathos we find:

6. FIGURES OF PATHOS (FEELING OR EMOTION) AND ETHOS (ETHICS AND CHARACTER)

pathopoeia (emotion)

anamnesis	erotema
apocarteresis	erotesis
aposiopesis	eulogy

apostrophe
ara
bathos
bdelygmia
billingsgate
cataplexis
deesis
ecphonesis
epiphonema
epilexus

exuscitatio
medela
mempsis
mycterismus
optatio
paeanismus
paramythia
sarcasmus
threnos

figures of ethos (character)

comprobation
epitrope
eucharista
euphemism

onedismus
parrhesia
proclees
syngnome

It seems all these terms have a dictionary entry also. So, if we look up one, let's say from the list of terms under pathopoeia, we find:

deesis (Greek, denoting a relation to a “god”) a figure of emotional speech in which the speaker fervently desires something for the sake of God or mankind.

Just so you know, the other appendix, (1), has similar lists of entries categorized in such a way that one can easily tackle whole subjects. So for instance there are lists of cinematic terms, closure, and diction. There is also a bibliography for your complete scholastic pleasure.