

# Invective

## Definition of Invective

The term invective denotes speech or writing that attacks, insults, or denounces a person, topic, or institution. It involves the use of abusive and negative language. The tool of invective is generally employed in both poetry and [prose](#), to reiterate the significance of the deeply felt emotions of the writer.

## Invective Examples in Prose

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### Example #1: *King Lear* (By William Shakespeare)

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An example of the manner of use of invective in prose can be witnessed through Shakespearean writing in *The [Tragedy](#) of King Lear*. In Act 2, Scene II of *King Lear*, Kent declares that Oswald is:

“A knave, a rascal; an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave ... and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pandar, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch ...”

Just mark the use of words against a person in quick succession. This is called invective. It is a bit different from abuse, as you can see it yourself.

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### Example #2: *Gulliver's Travels* (By Jonathan Swift)

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“I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered

to crawl upon the surface of the earth.”

Swift’s quote above highlights the use of some fascinating and impressive invective.

## **Invective in Poetry**

The use of invective in poetry has its origins in Greece. However, it was popularly employed as a tool in poetry in Rome. Historically, poets have made use of the tool of invective so as to denounce or abuse political and public figures in a sardonic or satirical tone. In early times, writers found it convenient to anonymously publish their invectives.

However, some Grecians, such as Cicero and Juvenal, owned the use of invectives they wrote. The invectives written by them, especially by Catullus, are quite explicit. Back then, invectives had a rhetorical [context](#), however modern use of the tool of invective emphasizes to create a harsh impression.

Some of the well-known invective poems include *Invective Against Swans*, by Wallace Stevens, *An Invective Against Gold*, by Anne Kelligrew, and *The Moralistic*, which was written during the 1600s.

One of the most famous invective poems ever written is *Invective Against the Bumblebee*, by New Jersey poet Diane Lockward.

The stanzas written below are taken from Diane Lockward’s poem *Invective Against the Bumblebee*, and serve to illustrate the manner in which the tool of invective is employed in the narration of poems.

“Escapee from a tight cell, yellow-streaked  
sex-deprived sycophant to a queen,  
you have dug divots in my yard  
and like a squatter trespassed in my garage.  
I despise you for you have swooped down  
on my baby boy, harmless on a blanket of lawn,  
his belly plumping through his orange stretch suit,  
yellow hat over the fuzz of his head.  
Though you mistook him for a sunflower,

for he weeps in my arms, trembles, and drools,  
finger swollen like a breakfast sausage.  
Now my son knows pain.  
Now he fears the grass.  
Fat-assed insect! Perverse pedagogue!  
Henceforth, may flowers refuse to open for you.  
May cats chase you in the garden.  
I want you shellacked by rain, pecked by shrikes,  
mauled by skunks, paralyzed by early frost.  
May farmers douse your wings with pesticide.  
May you never again taste the nectar  
of purple clover or honeysuckle.  
May you pass by an oak tree just in time  
to be pissed on by a dog.”

## Function of Invective

Invective is one of the most commonly used devices in the modern poetic framework. The tool of invective can be used in a variety of ways, to highlight the depth of the writer’s emotions for the cause at hand. For instance, the use of high invective involves formal language and creative expression, which creates an entirely different impact than that of low invective, which concerns the use of stock words and images.

The tool of invective also acts as an opportunity for the [speaker](#) to convey his heartfelt bitter emotions toward people in power, or other such annoyances. Invective is not, however, a powerful tool of [persuasion](#) as sometimes is thought, but is a device employed to get a sort of reaction from the interlocutor.