

Aphorismus

Definition of Aphorismus

Aphorismus is borrowed from a Greek word that means “marking off,” “banishment,” or “rejection.” It is a [figure of speech](#) that brings into question the meaning of words, in case the words are used inappropriately. Aphorismus often appears as a [rhetorical question](#) used to create a difference between the current situation being discussed and the general idea of the subject. Aphorismus examples are found both in casual conversations and in literary pieces.

Difference Between Aphorismus and Aphorism

Aphorismus should not be confused with “[aphorism](#),” because aphorismus is challenging the meaning of words by pointing out a question such as,

“I am Pozzo! (*Silence*.) Pozzo! (*Silence*.) Does that name mean nothing to you? (*Silence*.) I say does that name mean nothing to you?”

(*Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett).

However, *aphorism* is a totally different figure of speech, which is a brief statement containing personal truth, or a phrase that conveys a principle of thought. In these lines, Francis Bacon has said:

“Praise is the reflection of the virtue. But it is the reflection glass or body which giveth the reflection.”

(*Of Praise*, by Francis Bacon).

Examples of Aphorismus in Literature

Example #1: *Broken Love* (By William Blake)

“He scents thy footsteps in the snow
Wheresoever thou dost go,
Thro’ the wintry hail and rain.
When wilt thou return again?

Dost thou not in pride and scorn
Fill with tempests all my morn,
And with jealousies and fears
Fill my pleasant nights with tears?

‘O’er my sins thou sit and moan:
Hast thou no sins of thy own?
O’er my sins thou sit and weep,
And lull thy own sins fast asleep.”

Blake uses different lines that appear as rhetorical questions at the ends of each [stanza](#). Here, the [speaker](#) expresses his feelings to his lover, who finally repudiates his love. Hence, he asks questions like, “Is she not the cause of his mourning?” This calls into question the meaning of the ideas or words.

Example #2: *A Dream* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

“Ah! what is not a dream by day
To him whose eyes are cast
On things around him with a ray
Turned back upon the past?

That holy dream – that holy dream,
While all the world were chiding,
Hath cheered me as a lovely beam
A lonely spirit guiding.

What though that light, thro’ storm and night,

What could there be more purely bright
In Truth's day-star?"

Poe also uses aphorismus in this poem. At the end of the first and third stanzas, there is a rhetorical question that is about the meaning of the ideas discussed before these lines, and the two questions are shown in bold.

Example #3: *Paradise Lost* (By John Milton)

"If such astonishment as this can seize
Eternal spirits; or have ye chos'n this place
After the toyl of Battel to repose
Your wearied vertue, for the ease you find
To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?
Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
To adore the Conquerour?"

Milton makes a difference between the current situation, "To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n," and about the general idea of the subject, by calling into question its meaning. It helps in laying emphasis on the meaning.

Example #4: *Richard II* (By William Shakespeare)

"For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends: subjected thus,
How can you say to me I am a king?"

This is among the perfect examples of aphorismus. The speaker explains his living standard, then raises a question about how he can be called a king because he lives like a common man. The [comparison](#) is made between the two situations by challenging the meaning of phrase "I am a king."

Function of Aphorismus

The role of aphorismus is to emphasize the meanings of a sentence or phrase by challenging or raising questions about it. It brings into question the underlying meanings words and phrases, since the meaning of words can have a variety of connotations that help extend and enrich the language. Therefore, the role of aphorismus is important in literary texts, to challenge meanings by questioning one of its forms. Also, it makes a phrase memorable and arouses emotions by raising questions.