Poetic Devices

This handout is designed to work in tandem with the UWC handout on Poetry Analysis. This list of poetic devices is not exhaustive. For more information, consult this handout’s source text, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, available under the Databases tab of the UT library website. All content below is paraphrased from *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, and the citations given refer to each entry’s author and the page number of print edition.

**Allegory:** a literary genre in which the entire narrative is symbolic and tends to include personified abstractions that guide the reader’s interpretation; or a symbolic pattern of images embedded in a work whose overall genre is not allegory; or a mode of reading that privileges interpretations of symbolic or figurative meaning (Teskey 37)

**Alliteration:** repetition of initial consonant sounds in successive words, key element to English poetry from the Middle Ages (Adams and Cable 40)

**Allusion:** intentional reference to another literary work or to a historical or fictional person, place, or event (Wetzsteon 42)

**Anapest:** type of metrical foot with two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable (Parker et al. 49)

**Apostrophe:** poetic address to an absent or unhearing entity, such as an inanimate object, animal, or deceased person (Waters 61)

**Assonance**: repetition of vowel sounds in proximate nonrhyming words (Adams and Cushman 94)

**Blank verse:** unrhymed lines of poetry, typically in iambic pentameter (Weismiller and Wright 145)

**Blazon:** poem that describes the parts of a whole, often used in the sonnet tradition (Silver et al. 150)

**Blues poem:** rooted in African American spirituals and work songs, uses common images such as trains and crossroads, expresses common themes of oppression and melancholy (Leonard 151)

**Connotation:** associative meanings implicit to a word, dependent upon context and cultural assumptions, as distinct from denotation (Furniss 298)

**Consonance:** repetition of consonant sounds in unrhymed syllables of proximate words, typically occurring in the final stressed syllable of the words (Adams and Stilling 299)

**Couplet:** two-line metrical unit, typically rhyming, called open when enjambed and closed when end-stopped (Brogan et al. 310)

**Dactyl:** type of metrical foot with one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables (Brogan 333)

**Denotation:** literal or dictionary definition of a word, as distinct from connotation (Furniss 298)

**Diction:** word choice in poetry (Cook 358)

**Elegy:** poetic form devoted to the subject of loss, death, and mourning (Braden and Fowler 397)

**End rhyme:** rhyme occurring at the end of a line of poetry, often assisting meter to create a semantic or structural closure (Brogan et al. 1185)

**End-stopped line:** poetic line that comes to a conclusion at the end of it, which can entail a conclusion of syntax, meter, or meaning (Preminger and Brogan 410)

**Enjambment:** poetic line whose syntax carries over to the next line; can be used more generally to describe any line not end-stopped (Brogan et al. 435)

**Extended metaphor (conceit):** an elaborate metaphor or simile, which can be called a conceit if the two things being compared are so dissimilar that the metaphor or simile is far-fetched (Martin 863)

**Eye rhyme:** two or more words that look as though they should have the same sound but do not, such as *rough* and *cough* (Brogan and Bill 475)

**Foot:** basic unit of meter; has to do with pattern of stressed beats or syllables (Devine et al. 493-5)

**Free verse:** poetic form that lacks regular meter and line length and may also lack rhyme (Cooper 522)

**Full rhyme:** repetition of sound of both the vowel and following consonant of two or more words (Brogan et al. 1190)

**Haiku:** Japanese poetic form appearing in Western languages in three lines, with syllables of five, seven, and five, respectively (Johnson 594)

**Iamb:** type of metrical foot with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable (Brogan and Bill 652)

**Imagery:** the use of language to evoke sense experience and create mental images in the reader (Foley 663)

**Internal rhyme:** rhyme occurring within a line of poetry (Brogan et al. 1185)

**Metaphor:** a figure of speech in which one word or phrase, the vehicle, is used to suggest an underlying meaning, the tenor, about the subject being described (Martin 863)

**Meter:** the idealized pattern of sound in poetry, resulting from repeated rhythms; typically described in terms of type and quantity of feet—for example, *iambic pentameter* describes a meter of five feet that each have one unstressed followed by one stressed syllable (Winslow 872)

**Metonymy:** figurative device in which an associated object is substituted for the suggested subject (Martin 876)

**Octave:** poetic stanza that is eight lines long; is used in various poetic forms, including the Petrarchan sonnet (Brogan and Campbell 969)

**Ode:** a form of lyric poetry that typically has a serious tone and is often used on ceremonious or formal occasions; two primary traditions are the Horatian ode, which is more private and contemplative, and the Pindaric ode, which is more public and celebratory (Lloyd and Bruch 971)

**Personification:** the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract ideas (Fowler 1025)

**Quatrain:** poetic stanza that is four lines long and typically rhyming in an *abab* pattern; is used in various poetic forms, including ballads, elegies, and Shakespearean sonnets (Brogan and Martin 1138-9)

**Rhyme:** the connection of two syllables through repetition of identical vowel and subsequent consonant sounds; the two paired words typically begin with differing consonant sounds (Brogan et al. 1184)

**Rhyme scheme:** the pattern of end rhyme in a poem, typically marked using lowercase letters, e.g. *abab* (Brogan and Rettberg 1194)

**Rhythm:** the movement of sound in poetry, experienced mentally and bodily through language’s pitch, timbre, duration, and volume; distinct from meter, which is more structured and quantifiable (Attridge 1195)

**Sestet:** refers to the final six lines of a Petrarchan sonnet; to be distinguished from a *sextain*, which is a six-line stanza in any other poetic form (Evans and Cushman 1296)

**Simile:** an explicit comparison using *like* or *as* between two unlike things to draw out an unexpected similarity (Brogan and Richmond 1306)

**Sonnet:** a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter; depending on the rhyme scheme, the sonnet may fit into three popular traditions: Petrarchan (Italian), Spenserian, and Shakespearean (English); the Petrarchan sonnet has an octave (*abbaabba*), a *volta* (turn in thought), and a sestet (*cdecde* or *cdcdcd*, typically); the Spenserian sonnet’s more interlocking rhyme scheme is *ababbcbccdcdee*; the Shakespearean sonnet has three quatrains (*ababcdcdefef*) and a couplet *(gg*) (Brogan et al. 1318)

**Speaker and Persona:** a poem’s speaker is the voice or perspective through which a poem is narrated, whether that be the poet, a character, or an inanimate object; the term persona is typically used when the speaker is not the poet and thus the poem cannot be taken as a sincere expression from the poet’s perspective (Izenberg 1024-5)

**Spondee:** type of metrical foot with two stressed syllables (Brogan 1351)

**Stanza:** unit of poetic lines, typically united through their rhyme scheme (Krier 1357)

**Stress:** typically regarded as synonymous with accent, an emphasized syllable (Hartman 2)

**Symbol:** a type of figurative language that typically represents an abstract idea through a material object (Friedman 1393)

**Synecdoche:** figurative trope in which a part is substituted for the whole (Martin 1400)

**Tone:** the poetic speaker’s implied emotions and attitudes (Marno 1441)

**Trochee:** type of metrical foot with one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable (Brogan 1462)

**Villanelle:** poem with 19 lines that are organized into five tercets (three-line stanzas) and one quatrain; the first tercet includes two lines (first and last) that serve as refrain lines, the second and fourth tercets end by repeating the poem’s first line, the third and fifth tercets end by repeating the poem’s third line, and the quatrain ends with both refrain lines (pattern = *A1bA2 abA1 abA2 abA1 abA2 abA1A2*) (Kane and French 1521)