# Definitions of Poetic Devices

**Allegory:** A representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic, or pictorial form and can often be an extended metaphor for a specific historical or political event.

**Alliteration:** A stylistic device, or literary technique, in which successive words (more strictly, stressed syllables) begin with the same consonant sound or letter.

**Assonance:** The repetition of vowel sounds within a short passage of verse.

**Connotation:** The set of associations implied by a word in addition to its literal meaning.

**Consonance:** The repetition of consonant sounds in a short sequence of words.

**Dactyls:** An element of meter in poetry. In quantitative verse, such as Greek or Latin, a dactyl is a long syllable followed by two short syllable.

**Denotation:** The literal dictionary meaning(s) of a word as distinct from an associated idea or connotation.

**End Rhyme:** A rhyme in the final syllable(s) of a verse.

**End-stopped:** A feature in poetry where the syntactic unit (phrase, clause, or sentence) corresponds in length to the line.

**Enjambment:** The breaking of a syntactic unit (a phrase, clause, or sentence) by the end of a line or between two verses. Its opposite is end-stopping, where each linguistic unit corresponds with a single line.

**Extended Metaphor:** A metaphor which is drawn out beyond the usual word or phrase to extend throughout a stanza or an entire poem, usually by using multiple comparisons between the unlike objects or ideas.

**Figurative:** The use of words, phrases, symbols, and ideas in such as way as to evoke mental images and sense impressions.

**Foot:** A unit of rhythm or meter; the division in verse of a group of syllables, one of which is long or accented.

**Haiku:** A Japanese form of poetry consisting of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Traditionally, they contain either a direct or oblique reference to a season.

**Iambs:** A metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable or short syllable followed by a long syllable.

**Imagery:** The use of expressive or evocative images in poetry, art, literature, or music.

**Internal Rhyme:** Also called middle rhyme, a rhyme occurring within the line. The rhyme may be with words within the line but not at the line end, or with a word within the line and a word at the end of the line.

**Metaphor:** A rhetorical trope defined as a direct comparison between two or more seemingly unrelated subjects. This device is known for usage in literature, especially in poetry, where with few words, emotions and associations from one context are associated with objects and entities in a different context.

**Meter:** A measure of rhythmic quantity in poetry. The organized succession of groups of syllables at basically regular intervals in a line of poetry, according to definite metrical patterns. The unit of meter is the foot.

**Ode:** A form of stately and elaborate lyrical verse, usually of a serious meditative nature and having a formal stanzaic structure.

**Persona:** The speaker or voice of a literary work who is doing the talking. Thus persona is the “I” of a

narrative or the implied speaker of a lyric poem.

**Rhyme scheme:** The pattern established by the arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or poem, generally described by using letters of the alphabet to denote the recurrence of rhyming lines.

**Rhythm:** An essential of all poetry, the regular or progressive pattern of recurrent accents in the flow of a poem the rise and fall of stresses on words in the metrical feet.

**Sonnet:** A fixed form consisting of fourteen lines of 5-foot iambic verse at times following a strict rhyme scheme. The conventions associated with the sonnet have changed during its history.

**Sestina:** A verse form first used by the Provençal troubadours, consisting of six six-line stanzas and a three-line closing stanza, with the end words of the first stanza repeated in varied order as end words in the other stanzas and also recurring in the closing stanza.

**Slant Rhyme:** Sometimes known as half or off rhyme, a rhyme in which the sounds are similar, but not exact, often using consonance or assonance.

**Stressed:** To place emphasis on a syllable or word in pronouncing or in accordance with a metrical pattern.

**Syllable:** A unit of organization for a sequence of speech sounds and they can influence the rhythm of a language, its prosody, its poetic meter, its stress patterns.

**Symbol:** A symbol is a graphical, written, vocal or physical object that represents another, usually more complex, physical or abstract object, or an object property.

**Syntax:** The way in which linguistic elements (words and phrases) are arranged to form grammatical structure.

**Tension:** The artistically satisfying equilibrium of opposing forces in a poem, usually referring to the use of language and imagery, but often applied to other elements, such as dramatic structure, rhythmic patterns, and sometimes to the aesthetic value of the poem as a whole.

**Theme:** The central idea, topic, or didactic quality of a work.

**Tone:** The poet’s or persona’s attitude in style or expression toward the subject. Tone can also refer to the overall mood of the poem itself, in the sense of a pervading atmosphere intended to influence the readers’ emotional response and foster expectations of the conclusion.

**Trochee:** A metrical foot with a long or accented syllable followed by a short or unaccented syllable.

**Text Resources:** The American Heritage College Dictionary (4th ed.)

**Web Resources:** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry_terminology>

<http://www.poeticbyway.com/glossary.html>

For more help see the UWC Poetry Analysis handout.