

Course: English Literature (First Year)

Lesson One: An Introduction to Poetic Literary Devices

Semester: One

Lecturer: Dr Nihad LAOUAR

An Introduction to Poetic Literary Devices

Like prose, poems are written to convey a certain message. The meaning of these messages is portrayed through poetic devices that are summarized below:

1. **Speaker:** The speaker is the voice of the poem. It is important to note that the speaker is not always the poet himself/herself. When the poet creates a speaker other than himself/herself to narrate the poem, the speaker in this case is referred to as a **persona**.

2. **Audience:** an audience is the reader that the poem targets. The choice of the audience depends on the thematic concerns of the poem. Determining the audience of a poem helps readers understand its significance better. In this sense, the speaker can address:
 - themselves (this is referred to as dramatic monologue)
 - another character in a poem,
 - an absent or dead character (this is referred to as apostrophe)
 - readers in general

3. **Form:** the form of a poem is how the poem is structured, meaning the pattern of the poem. Traditional poetry has to stick to a specific set of rules about the form such as length, rhythm and rhyme. There are two basic forms of poetry: stichic poetry and strophic poetry.
 - *Stichic poetry* is the kind of poetry that is composed as a continuous sequence of verse of the same length with no breaks.

 - *Strophic poetry* is the kind of poetry in which lines are grouped together. These groups of lines are called stanzas which are separated by breaks unlike stichic poetry that is written in continuous lines.

- *Note:* Stanzas can come in different forms according to the number of lines that a stanza contains. For example, a stanza that has:

Two line is called **couplet**

Three lines is called **triplet**

Four lines is called **quatrain**

Six lines is called **sestet**

Seven lines is called **septet**

Eight lines is called **octave**

4. **Theme:** themes in poetry are grouped together under specific poetic forms. These forms are: Ode, elegy, ballad, pastoral, lyric, epic and love poems. Each of these forms of poetry expresses certain themes. For example,

- *Ode:* is a form of poetry that is written to express themes about glorifying and praising an individual, an idea or an object.
- *Elegy:* is a poetic form that articulates themes about sadness, grief or loss of a loved one. In others words, elegies are often written to mourn the dead.
- *Ballad:* ballad is a form of narrative verse and it is considered either poetic or musical. Originally, ballads used to be sung. They often express themes about tragic romance, supernatural or fantastic stories etc.
- *Pastoral:* poems that draw on rural setting; they are often descriptive of utopian pastoral life (nature).
- *Lyric:* lyric poems are subjective poems that express powerful feelings.
- *Epic:* this is a lengthy narrative poem that focuses on adventurous and heroic stories.
- *Love poem:* a poem that is filled with expressions of joy, despair, romance or unrequited love.

5. **Tone and Mood:** the **tone** of a poem refers to the feeling that a poet displays towards a given subject. **The mood** on the other hand indicates the prevailing atmosphere of the poem. These two literary devices are related; in that the tone of the speaker establishes the mood of the poem.

Figures of Speech: Figures of speech function as poetic devices. They are words or phrases used in their figurative form to create an effect.

1. Imagery: because poetry often deals with deep human emotions, the poet necessitates certain vivid and descriptive words that carry strong visual and sensory effects. So, imagery is the use of a vivid language to generate ideas and evoke certain mental images that are not only visual but also sensational. This also means that the aim of an image in poetry is to evoke sensory experience and emotional response from the reader. Below are some examples of images that tend to evoke the five senses:

- **Sight:** Smoke mysteriously puffed out from the clown's ears.
- **Sound:** Tom placed his ear tightly against the wall; he could hear a faint but distinct thump thump thump.
- **Touch:** The burlap wall covering scraped against the little boy's cheek.
- **Taste:** A salty tear ran across onto her lips.
- **Smell:** Cinnamon! That's what wafted into his nostrils.

2. Simile is used to describe something by comparing it to something else, using "like" and "as"

For example: And in the evening lamps would shine,

Yellow **as** honey, red **as** wine,

In the above verses taken from Walter De La Mare's poem *Tartary*, the poet uses simile to compare yellow to honey and red to wine.

3. Metaphor is a word or a phrase used to describe something as **if it were something else**. For example: "A wave of terror washed over him." Terror cannot be a wave and the word "wave" is used here to describe the feeling and evoke vivid sensations in the reader.

4. Alliteration: this is a literary technique where there is an occurrence of repetition of usually initial **consonant sounds** in two or more neighboring words or syllables. See the example below:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,--

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping.

The Raven by Edgar Allen
Poe

5. Assonance is a literary device in which the repetition of similar vowel sound takes place in two or more neighboring words in a line of a poem. See the example below:

Who knows why the cold wind blows
Or where it goes, or what it knows.
It only flows in passionate throes
Until it finally slows and settles in repose

The Cold Wind Blows by Kelly Roper

6. Consonance: refers to repetition of consonant sounds within a sequence of words in close proximity to each other.

See the example below:

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.

Robert Frost's *Out-Out*

7. Refrain: is the repetition of one or more phrases or lines at intervals in a poem, usually at the end of a stanza. See the example below:

It is magical, yes, this life that I live
Each day it gives something
Something it gives each day.
It is magical, absolutely magical the life that I live.

8. Personification: personification is a poetic device that entails the projection of human characteristics into inanimate objects in order to create powerful image. For example:

When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

William Wordsworth, *Daffodils*

As can be seen in the last line of this stanza, the daffodils are personified in that they are given a human characteristic that of "dancing"

9.Enjambment: is the continuation of the logic sense. This means to run the lines of a poem from one to the next without using any form of punctuation with the purpose of continuing the logic sense of an idea.

Example:

The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept
And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may
Lay think upon the bed on which I lay

10.Hyperbole: occurs when there is an outrageous exaggeration of statements to produce an effect or emphasis. For example: He weighs a ton.

Or, Her smile is as bright as the sun

11.Rhyme: Rhyme is the use of corresponding sounds in lines of writing. This can occur at the end of lines or in the middle. The most commonly resigned type of rhyme is full-end rhymes. These appear at the end of lines and rhyme perfectly with one another. It is usually used when the writer wants to make their poetry sound more musical than it already does.

*The structure of end words of a verse is called **rhyme scheme**. The rhyme scheme is the pattern of sounds that repeats at the end of a line. It can change line by line. So, the first sound is represented as **a**, the following sound is represented as **b**, the next sound is represented as **c** and so on. When the first sound is repeated in another line, it is also represented as **a** and so on. See the example below:

I wandered lonely as a <u>cloud</u> .	a
That floats on high o'er vales and <u>hills</u> ,	b
When all at once I saw a <u>crowd</u> ,	a
A host, of golden daffodils;	b
Beside the lake, beneath the <u>trees</u> ,	c
Fluttering and dancing in the <u>breeze</u> .	c

Note: Please note that the rhyme can also be internal which is the kind of rhyme that occurs in the middle of lines of poetry, instead of at the ends of lines. For example:

Standing **brave** in secret **caves**

We call to lost kids in the **crowd**

Lure and **save** these lonely **slaves**

Our hearts, are open growing **proud**

In this example, **brave** and **caves** are internal rhymes whereas **crowd** and **proud** are external rhymes.

12.Rhythm: is a pattern of sound movement. In poetry, the rhythm involves different patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. When we measure the rhythm of a poem, we need to look for meters and feet.

Meter: is pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of a poem.

Foot: is a unit of meter consisting of stressed and unstressed syllables and it has different types.

These are listed below:

Types of metrical feet: the standard types of feet in English poetry are iamb, trochee, dactyl, anapest and spondee. See the table below:

Stressed syllables are labeled with an accent mark: /

Unstressed syllables are labeled with a dash: –

Name	Pattern	Example
Iamb/Iambic	– /	Invite
Trochee/ Trochaic	/ –	Deadline
Dactyl / Dactylic	/ – –	Frequently
Anapest/Anapestic	– – /	To the beach
Spondee/ Spondaic	//	True Blue

Poets write in different patterns. We describe the pattern by naming the type and number of feet. Meter is measured by the number of feet in a line. Feet are named by Greek prefix number words attached to “meter.” For example, a line with five feet is called pentameter. Hence, a line of five iambs is known as “iambic pentameter” and this the most common metrical form in English poetry, and the one favored by William Shakespeare. The most common line lengths are listed in the table below:

Number of Feet	Name
One Foot	Monometer
Two Feet	Dimeter
Three Feet	Trimeter
Four Feet	Tetrameter
Five Feet	Pentameter
Six Feet	Hexameter
Seven Feet	Heptameter
Eight Feet	Octameter
