

Literary Terms and Devices: Wordplay and Comparisons

Pun	A play on two words similar in sound but different in meaning. E.g., the word “fancy” (meaning both “desire” and “imagination”) .
Oxymoron	Using contradiction in a manner that oddly makes sense on a deeper level. The richest literary oxymora seem to reveal a deeper truth through their contradictions. E.g., “cruel kindness”, or “living death”.
Hyperbole	Exaggeration or overstatement. E.g., “I told you a million times”.
Simile	An analogy or comparison implied by using an adverb such as like or as. E.g., “It came o’er my ear like the sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets”.
Metaphor	A comparison or analogy stated in such a way as to imply that one object is another one, figuratively speaking. E.g., “This flea is you and I” (“Flea” being a metaphor for sexual union).
Personification	Animals, ideas, and inanimate objects are given human character, traits, abilities, or reactions. E.g., “The ocean heaved a sigh” or “The sun smiled at us”.
Metonymy	A metonymy is a word or phrase that is used to stand in for another word. Sometimes a metonymy is chosen because it is a well-known characteristic of the word. E.g., “The pen is mightier than the sword”, or “Methinks he creep’d in at mine eyes.”