

Allegory

A story, poem, or piece of visual art that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. An author might use allegory to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth, or a political or historical situation. Sometimes this device works by use of an extended metaphor that runs throughout. More usually, allegory is used to describe a story or fable that has a clear secondary meaning beneath its literal sense.

For example, Cailean T MacCoinnich's story *An Coigreach* may be seen as allegorical due to the appearance and disappearance of its somewhat mysterious Christ-like character.

Alliteration

The occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words. Using alliteration can focus the readers' attention on a particular section of text and can contribute to the rhythm and mood of a piece. Alliteration is commonly used in marketing, branding, and newspaper headlines because it is memorable and sticks in the mind of the reader. In a literary context, it is often used to reflect a particular feeling.

The purpose of alliteration is varied; from adding character to the writing, adding an element of 'fun' to a piece, or to reflect a particular feeling. It can also slow down the rhythm of a poem or reflect a sound and mood.

Eg: The repetition of the 's' sound in Sorley MacLear's "Latha Foghair" reflects the sounds of shells in battle — giving the poem a sinister feel: "**na sligean a' sianail**".

Another good example of alliteration can be seen in Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa's poem "An Ciùran Ceòban Ceò": "**Bha tlàths is tlachd a' tùirling anns a' chiùran cheòban cheò.**" And in Ruaraidh MacThòmais' poem, "Anns a' bhalbh mhadainn": "**sneachda mìn, marbhteach, mùchaidh:**"

Analogy

The comparison between one thing and another. Simile and metaphor are both forms of analogy; the illustration of one idea by a more familiar or accessible idea that is in some way parallel.

For example in the story "Bùrn" by Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn:

"Mhothaich e gun robh seòrsa de nèapraigear a' priobadh a-mach air oir pòcaid a sheacaid mar ghobh isein."

(He noticed there was a sort of a handkerchief sticking out of his pocket like the beak of a little bird.)

Assonance

The repetition of a pattern of similar vowel sounds within a sentence. Assonance is used to produce a form of rhyme throughout a whole sentence not just within a verse and it often enhances the musical effect of a piece.

For example in Anna Frater's poem, "Màiri Iain Mhurch' Chaluim":

"Air aghaidh fhuar a' chuain"

"s an sàl a' tighinn gu bàrr"

Characterisation

Characterisation is the way in which a writer introduces and describes a character. This is revealed by what the character says, does and thinks.

A good example of characterisation can be seen in Iain Crichton Smith's story "An Taghadh" where the different characters — Màiri, her three sons and the Commander all reveal the type of person they are through their words and actions.

Colon

There are three main uses of a colon:

- between two main clauses, where the second one explains or follows from the first.
Eg: Anna wanted to know why I hadn't replied to her text: I hadn't received it!
- To introduce a list. Eg. The following items are required for the school trip: packed lunch, waterproofs, warm clothes...
- Before a quotation and sometimes before direct speech.

Conflict

The opposition, disagreement or lack of harmony between two people/things/ideas. Conflict usually follows 3 regular formats:

- characters in conflict with one another
- characters in conflict with their surroundings
- characters in conflict with themselves.

An author may use conflict to: reveal character, create tension or to highlight a struggle that the reader may identify with. This in turn can spark the reader's interest; leaving them eager to discover which force will prevail.

Conflict is a very common device used by poets and authors. It can be seen in a great many Gaelic stories and poems.

For example:

"An Roghainn", Somhairle MacGill-Eain — war, inner conflict, conflict with providence, struggle with faith, struggle with the notion of fate vs free will.

"An Còmhradh", Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn — inner conflict within the mind of the character of the mother.

"An Taghadh", Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn — internal and external conflict. Conflict between all characters and within the setting of civil war.

"Duan an Fhògarraich", Gillebride Mac 'IlleMhaoil — conflict between homeless refugee and passer-by, inner conflict within the mind of the refugee, conflict of circumstance.

Connotation

If a word/phrase has different 'connotations' it means it has more than one meaning — one literal and one implied by the writer. A writer/poet may use connotation to create emotions, feelings, mood or tone.

Dialogue

A conversation between two or more people.

Dramatic Irony

A literary technique, originally used in Greek tragedy, by which the full significance of a character's words or actions may be clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character(s).

For example, Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn's story "A' dol dhachaigh" tells the story of a soldier returning home from the First World War on the ill-fated ship *The Iolaire*. The protagonist feels safe under the steer of the captain though the reader knows the voyage will end in disaster:

"Tha fhios aige-san dè tha e dèanamh, 's faodaidh sinne, ma thogras sinn, an leabaidh a thoirt oirnn."

(He knows what he is doing, and we can rest easy in our beds if we like.)

Ellipses

Ellipses usually suggest an omission of something: information, thought, or speech. They can also be used to indicate trailing off (aposiopesis) and to build tension and dramatic effect. For example, in the opening lines of Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn's story "An Còmhradh", the reader is left wanting to find out more:

"ach leis an fhirinn innse 's e Tormod fhèin bu chuireach . . ."

(but, if the truth be told, it was Tormod himself who was to blame . . .)

Furthermore, an ellipsis can suggest faltering or fragmented speech accompanied by confusion, insecurity, distress or uncertainty. This is true of the following example (again from "An Còmhradh") where the ellipses demonstrate the character's distress; he struggles to talk through tears when he is told he is dying:

"tha e ag ràdh gu bheil mi . . ."

("He says that I'm . . .")

"Seadh, a ghràidh?"

"What dear?"

"Gu bheil mi . . ." Cha mhòr gu faigheadh e air bruidhinn.

"That I'm . . ." He could barely speak.

"Gu bheil mi . . ."

"That I'm . . ."

". . . dol a . . ."

". . .going to . . ."

bhàsachadh!"

die!")

Ellipses can also have the effect of inferring something that is unsaid — leading the reader to make the assumption the writer wants them to make without having to spell it out. The following example is, again, from Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn's story "An Còmhradh":

"Dè b' urrainn dhomh a ràdh? Nach e 'n fhirinn a bh' aig a' mhinistear? Ach air mo shon-sa . . ."

(What could I say? Wasn't it the truth that the minister was speaking? But for me . . .)

Em dash (—)

The em dash is 3 times the length of a hyphen. It is in fact the width of a typesetter's M (hence the name em dash). It is used to create a strong break or pause in the structure of a sentence. Em dashes can be used in pairs like parentheses—that is, to enclose a word, or a phrase, or a clause—or they can be used alone to detach one end of a sentence from the main body. Dashes are particularly useful in a sentence that is long and complex or in one that has a number of commas within it.

**"Dòirt sìos do mhathas caomh, a Dhè —
na leig le olc buannachadh gu lèir."**

*Pour down your loving kindness, God —
do not let evil conquer completely.*

("Ùrnaigh na Bàin-Tigrich" Catrìona NicGumaraid)

Euphemism

A polite expression used in place of words or phrases that otherwise might be considered harsh or unpleasant to hear. Eg: Thin on top (bald), mature (old), passed away (died), bending the truth (lying). In some cases euphemisms are intentionally a less pleasant way of saying something and can be used for comic effect or when people are being impolite or sarcastic. This is sometimes known as *mock euphemism*. Eg: kicked the bucket (died), a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic (of questionable mental capacity).

Extended Metaphor

A common literary device, particularly in poetry, whereby a writer compares two unlike things and further develops that metaphor throughout all or part of the text.

For example, In Anna Frater's poem "Dà Rathad" she compares life experiences and journeys to roads that a person travels. By using an extended metaphor throughout the entire poem, she explicates that choosing a harder path gives greater rewards in life and widens ones horizons.

**"Carson a bu chòir dhomh gabhail
na slighe ceart, lom, fada?
Ged a tha an rathad air a bheil mi càrn
agus tha na clachan a' gearradh mo chasan,
agus tha dìreadh an leothaid
gam fhàgail gun anail,
chan e an aon rud
a tha mise coimhead romham
latha an dèidh latha.
Agus shuas air an leathad
chì mi timcheall orm,
chì mi gu bheil barrachd ann dhòmhs'
na slighe cheart, fhada, lom.
Tha thusa cumail do shùilean air an aon rud
ceart, dìreach air do bheulaibh —
agus chan fhaic thu gu bheil an saoghal
ag atharrachadh timcheall ort."**

Why should I follow
the long, smooth, straight road?
Although the road I take is crooked
and the stones cut my feet
and climbing the hill
leaves me breathless
I am not confronted
by the same prospect
day after day.
And up on the hill
I can see around me,
I can see that there is more in store for me
than a straight, long, smooth road.
You keep your eyes fixed on one point
right in front of you —
and you cannot see
that the world is changing around you.

Hyperbole

Extreme exaggeration used to make a point. Hyperboles are comparisons, like similes and metaphors, but are extravagant and even ridiculous and not meant to be taken literally.

Eg: **Bha e uimhir ri muc-mhara.**

He was the size of a whale.

Imagery

Imagery includes the use of metaphor, simile, allusion, description — all comparing something real with something imagined. It serves the purpose of creating mental images and heightening the reader's sensory perception. The examples below show two different writers' use of sea imagery:

**“An gàire mar chraiteachan salainn
ga fhroiseadh bho ‘m bial,
an sàl ‘s am picil air an teanga,
‘s na sùilean cho domhainn ri fèath.”**

Their laughter like a sprinkling of salt
showered from their lips,
brine and pickle on their tongues,
And their eyes that were as deep as a calm

(“Clann-nighean an Sgadain”, Ruaraidh MacThòmais)

**“Ur guth sèimh, ur cainnt
ag èiridh ‘s a’ tuiteam mar thonn
air aghaidh fhuar a’ chuain
‘s an dràst’ ‘s a-rithist a’ briseadh
air creag bhiorach cuimhne;
‘s an sàl a’ tighinn gu bàr
ann an glas-chuan ur sùilean.”**

Your soft voice, your speech
rising and falling like waves
on the cold surface of the sea,
and now and again breaking
on the sharp rock of memory;
and the brine rises up
in the grey seas of your eyes.

(“Màiri Iain Mhurch’ Chaluim”, Anna Frater)

Irony

The literary technique of playing around with words, often through humour or sarcasm, so that the literary meaning is different to that which is being conveyed/implicit.

For example, in Alison Lang's story about a young girl making Christmas decorations in a sweatshop abroad, the irony of the line: **“ann an cànan nach robh i a’ tuigsinn: *Peace, Joy, Light, Hope*”** is palpable. The words Peace, Joy, Light and Hope are things that are alien to this young girl's life — she neither understands them linguistically or literally. Furthermore, the Christian message is deeply at odds with the poor girl's situation.

Italics

Italicization is used to identify or highlight words that are used differently from the standard. In literature, italicization is most commonly used for emphasis or to highlight foreign words or phrases. On some occasions, writers may also use italics to show dialogue or a quotation, though this is not so common.

***“poodle a’ dannsa mun casan;
bidh fhàileadh blàth a’ bhainne air falbh às na bàthchannan,
's iad làn thruinnsearan fuar cruaidh pottery”***

(“Ròdhag, Anns a’ Bhliadhna 2000”, Catriona NicGumaraid)

Italics are used above to distinguish the foreign English words *poodle* and *pottery*. They stand out from the others in the text, highlighting their incongruity with the traditional Gaelic culture of the poet’s native village.

The italicized text in the following example makes direct reference to The Declaration of Arbroath (a declaration of Scottish independence made in 1320):

<i>“m’ fhuil eileanach m’ fhuil Ghàidhealach. Fhad ‘s a bhitheas ceudnar againn beò cha chrùb sinn fo smachd na Beurla. Clag na h-abaid a’ seinn gach Sàbaid”</i>	my island blood my Gaelic blood. <i>As long as one hundred of us remain alive we will yield in no least way to English dominion. The abbey bell singing every Sunday</i>
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(“Aig Abaid Mhaol-Ros” Anna Frater)

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition is a literary device wherein the author places a person or idea parallel to another. A writer may use juxtaposition to create: comparison, contrast, suspense, character development etc for effect.

For example, in the story “An Taghadh” by Iain Mac a’ Ghobhainn, the character of Màiri is entirely juxtaposed with the character of the English Commander.

Metaphor

A common literary technique whereby a person, an idea or an object is described by referring to something else that has similar characteristics without using the words *like* or *as*.

The purpose of using a metaphor is to take a concept that we understand clearly and use it to better understand something else like nuances of emotions, experiences, images and so on.

Eg: The rope in Anna Frater's poem, "Màiri Iain Mhurch' Chaluim" is used as a metaphor for the poet's great grandfather who lost his life in the Iolaire disaster:

**"Agus bhris ur cridhe cuideachd
le call an ròpa chalma
air an robh grèim gràidheil agaibh
fhad 's a bha sibh a' sreap suas
nur leanabh."**

And your heart also broke
with the loss of the sturdy rope
which you had clung to lovingly
while you were growing up
as a child.

Another example can be seen in Gillebride Mac 'IlleMhaoil's song "Duan an Fhògarraich":

"Mo sgeul-sa 's i fodh' an tuil nan deòir."

My story which has been drowned in a flood of tears.

As a metaphor, drowning "in a flood of tears" may seem somewhat clichéd. However, when we consider that this is a poem about a refugee, the drowning metaphor has extra poignancy.

Mood

The mood of a piece of literature refers to the atmosphere a writer creates with his or her words/technique/characters/setting/actions/thoughts etc.

Onomatopoeia

A word that mimics the sound of the object or action it refers to. Eg: **brag** (bang), **gliog** (click/clink), **plub** (splash), **glug** (gurgle/sound of water in a vessel), **srann** (snore/buzz), **glung** (bong/dong), **brùchd** (burp).

Oxymoron

Two seemingly contradictory words that create an interesting juxtaposition and contain a concealed point. An oxymoron can be used to create a dramatic effect or to make the reader stop and consider something more carefully. An oxymoron is similar to a paradox; the effect of both is the same. However, while a paradox will consist of a sentence/a group of sentences, an oxymoron is a combination of two contradictory words. Eg: deafening silence, seriously funny, ill health etc.

Paradox

A statement that contradicts itself but may include a hidden truth.

Eg:

**“Chàirich iad a’ chreag
agus dh’fhàg sin toll.”**

They buried the rock
and that left a hole.

(“Màiri Iain Mhurch’ Chaluim”, Anna Frater)

Burying something doesn’t leave a hole; it does the opposite. However, a metaphorical hole has been left by the death and subsequent burial of Màiri’s father in the poem above.

Pathos

Language that makes the reader feel pity or sorrow.

For example, in Catriona NicGumaraid’s poem, “Ùrnaigh na Bàn-Tigrich” a Tigrean woman begs for salvation; that she and others may be delivered from starvation during the Ethiopian famine.

**“Adhlaicte an-diugh mo luaidh,
’s nach aithnich mise uaigh seach uaigh:**

My beloved was buried today
but I cannot tell one grave from the
next:

**measg mhiltean ’n Tigre tha e na shuain —
coimhead thusa, a Thighearna, oirnn le truas.”**

his resting place, is with thousands from Tigre —
look on us, Lord, with pity.

(“Ùrnaigh na Bàn-Tigrich”, Catriona NicGumaraid)

Personification

a technique whereby a human quality, emotion or characteristic is attributed to something that is inanimate or non-human. For example, in Anna Frater’s poem “Glaschu”:

“S math a ghlan iad d’ aodann:

They scrubbed your face well:

...

...

**’s tha do cheann dorch a-nis
ruadh is bàn is bòidheach.”**

and your dark head is now
red and fair and lovely.

Plot

Plot usually refers to the sequence of events and happenings that make up a story. There is usually a pattern, unintended or intentional, that threads the plot together.

Point of view

The narrator’s position in relation to a story being told. In essence, the point of view is how a story is told and who tells it. It enables the author to determine the angle and perception of the story, 1st Person, 2nd Person or 3rd Person. For example, the story “Latha Eile san Fhactaraidh” is told from a young girl’s point of view — 3rd Person.

Quatrain

A stanza or a complete poem consisting of four lines.

Quintain

A stanza or an entire poem consisting of five lines.

Repetition

Repeating words, phrases, lines, or stanzas.

Repetition can be used to emphasize a feeling or idea, create rhythm, and/or develop a sense of urgency. It is a way of producing deeper levels of emphasis, clarity, amplification, and emotional effect.

For example, in Sorley MacLean's poem "Latha Foghair", the repetition of the line "**sianar marbh ri mo ghualainn**" has the effect of highlighting or emphasising the horror of war.

Rhetorical question

A question posed to create a dramatic effect or make a point, rather than to get an answer. For example, in the closing line of Alison Lang's story "Latha Eile san Fhactaraidh":

"Oir dè an diofar a dhèanadh aon solas beag co-dhiù?"
(*Because what difference would one little light make?*)

This rhetorical question posed here is extremely significant as it underpins the entire moral premise of the story.

Rhyme scheme

The pattern of rhymes at the end of each line of a poem or song. This is usually referred to by using letters to indicate which lines rhyme. Lines designated with the same letter rhyme with each other.

Eg The stanza below from Catriona NicGumaraid's poem "Ùrnaigh na Bàn Tigrich" has the rhyme scheme **aabb**

**"Cheus riaghaltas eile Crìosd air crann,
's tha luchd-brèig gar biathadh 's sinn gu gann.
Dòirt sìos do mhathas caomh, a Dhè —
na leig le olc buannachadh gu lèir."**

Rhythm

The measured flow of words and phrases in verse or prose as determined by the relation of long and short or stressed and unstressed syllables.

Semi colon

The main function of a semi colon is to mark a break that is stronger than a comma but not as final as a full stop. A semi colon is used between two main clauses that balance each other and are too closely linked to be made into separate sentences.

For example: In India some people speak Hindi; some speak Urdu.

Setting

In essence, setting refers to where an event (story/poem/song) takes place. This is not confined to the purely physical but can also include historical and cultural settings, social circumstances, mood etc. It basically helps in establishing where and when and under what circumstances a story is taking place.

For example, in Iain Moireach's "Feòil a' Gheamhraidh" the story incorporates historical and cultural setting as well as creating a sombre mood when a sheep is slaughtered.

Simile

A figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind usually using like or as.

Eg:

"Dh'èirich mo chridhe mar cheo"

My heart rose like smoke

("Deòirean", Anna Frater)

"Bha a gàire mar earrach fon chlogaid shneachd."

Her laugh was like springtime
under the helmet of snow

("An Duine Dubh", Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn)

Stanza

A group of lines forming the basic recurring metrical unit in a poem; a verse.

Suspense

A state of uncertainty, curiosity or anticipation as to what will happen next. A writer will use suspense to keep the reader's interest in a story as it builds to a climax.

For example, in the story "An Taghadh", by Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn, the suspense in this story is maintained throughout as the character of the mother ruminates on her decision of which of her three beloved sons she must choose to be put to death by enemy soldiers.

Symbol

A thing that represents or stands for something else — especially a material object representing something abstract. As a literary device, symbols can contain several layers of meaning — often concealed at first sight. Eg: In Ruairidh MacThòmais' poem "Anns a' Bhalbh Mhadainn", the sheep suffocating in the aftermath of a snow storm is symbolic of the suffocation of Gaelic in an English-dominant world:

<p>"Chaill sinn na caoraich bha muigh air mòintich Nuair thaom an stoirm ud a-nuas 'eallach, ... sneachda min, marbh-teach, mùchaidh: dhèanadh mo chridhe iollach nam faicinn air a' chlàr bhan sin ball buidhe 's gun tuiginn gu robh anail a' Ghàidheil a' tighinn am mullach"</p>	<p>We had lost the sheep that were out on the moor when that storm unloaded its burden ... of fine, deadly, smothering snow: my heart would rejoice were I to see and understand that the breath of the Gael was coming to the surface.</p>
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Symbolism

The art of using an object or a word to represent an abstract idea. An action, person, place, word, or object can all have a symbolic meaning.

Theme

The main subject of a literary piece.

Eg: love, tragedy, sacrifice, war, hardship, loss, struggle, etc. Themes are usually closely related to the feelings a poet/writer is trying to convey.

Tone

The tone of a piece of literature is the perspective or attitude that the writer uses with regards to a specific character, place or development. Tone can depict a multitude of emotions; from serious, grim, and disapproving to amusing, ironic and lighthearted. The tone of a piece of writing helps the reader understand the writer's feelings towards a particular topic and this in turn influences the reader's understanding. For example, Gillebrìde Mac'IlIbhaoil's song "Duan an Fhògarraich", about an ignored homeless refugee on a city street, has a melancholic tone.

Transferred epithet

A figure of speech in which an epithet (or adjective) grammatically qualifies (describes) a noun other than the person or thing it is actually describing.

Transferred epithet is very common in everyday speech; *a sleepless night* or *a wonderful day* are two such examples. In the former example, it is not the night that didn't sleep; it was the person. Similarly, in the latter, the day itself wasn't wonderful; but the events or experiences had by the person were.

The following example is taken from "Bùrn is Mòine 's Coirc", a poem by Ruairidh MacThòmais.

"An cridhe gòrach	The foolish heart
a' falpanaich mu na seann stallachan ud"	lapping along these ancient rocks.

It is not the *heart* that is foolish; rather the man that is. His foolishness (the epithet) has thus been transferred onto the heart.