

## Figures of Speech

Figures of speech must not be confused with parts of speech. The latter define the type of word being used, such as a noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, verb, participle, preposition, conjunction. Figures of speech are so called because their presence in a line of prose or poetry tends to shape the line by lending some subtlety of sound or sense which enhances the meaning of the line. The following list offers examples from the poems contained in this book. The student should be able to recognize and identify the figures, as well as offer an explanation of how the figures work in general and how the figures add to the meaning of the text or context in which they are found.

**Alliteration:** a series of words which begin with the same letter; subdivisions include consonance and assonance:

miserunt mihi muneri Fabullus (Cat. 12.15)

Note not only *miserunt* and *mihi*, but also *muneri*.

cum suis vivat valeatque moechis (Cat. 11.17)

*Vivat* and *valeat* begin with the same letter.

**Anaphora:** repetition of the same word:

O factum male! O miselle passer! (Cat. 3.16)

Note the repetition of "O."

da mi basia mille, deinde centum,

dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,

deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum. (Cat. 5.7-9)

In this example *dein* and *deinde* are repeated for emphasis.

**Anastrophe:** placing the object of a preposition before rather than after that preposition's occurrence in the line:

oraclum Iovis inter aestuosi (Cat. 7.5)

*Oraclum* is the object of *inter* but precedes it.

**Antithesis:** the side by side placement of words opposite in meaning; this may also be called **contraposition**:

mutuis animis amant amantur (Cat. 45.20)

The active and passive forms of the same verb are counterposed.

**Apostrophe:** the direct address of a person, place or thing as present when absent:

Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas

meas esse aliquid putare nugas (Cat. 1.3-4)

Cornelius is addressed and personalized when he is clearly not present.

Amastri Pontica et Cytore buxifer (Cat. 4.13)

The city of Amastris and the mountain Cytorus are addressed.

**Assonance:** repetition of similar vowel sounds either medial or final:

tam gaudet in se tamque se ipse miratur (Cat. 22.17)

Observe the repetition of *se* and its appearance in the word *ipse*.

Advenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias (Cat. 101.2)

Note the repetition of *-as*.

**Asyndeton:** the absence of connectives between words, clauses, phrases:

quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,

cui primum digitum dare appetenti (Cat. 2.2-3)

Notice that no connectives join the three relative clauses.

sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura (Cat. 8.11)

The two imperatives are not joined by a connective.

**Chiasmus:** an arrangement of pairs of words which, when written as separate lines, form the pattern A B B A; when lines are drawn connecting these common elements, the Greek letter X (chi) is formed; hence the term chiasmus denotes that formation:

a b b a

et acris solet incitare morsus (Cat. 2.4)

*Acris* modifies *morsus*, *solet* governs *incitare*.

a b b a

quem plus illa oculis suis amabat (Cat. 3.5)

*Illa* is the subject of *amabat*; *oculis* and *suis* modify one another.

a b b a

Caesaris visens monimenta magni (Cat. 11.10)

*Caesaris* is modified by *magni*; *visens* governs *monimenta*.

**Consonance:** the repetition of the same consonantal sound medially or finally:

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus

flamma demanat, sonitu suo

tintinant aures, gemina teguntur

lumina nocte. (Cat. 51.9-12)

Note the use of the "t" sound throughout these lines, especially the onomatopoeic *sonitu . . . tintinant*.

**Ellipsis:** the elimination of a word which is easily understood or derived from the context or from association with a nearby line:

... meus sodalis—  
 Cinna est Gaius, —is sibi paravit.  
 verum, utrum illius an mei, quid ad me? (Cat. 10.29–31)  
 Note the forms of the verb “to be” omitted in line 31.

**Hendiadys:** the use of two words with very similar meaning in order to assert one idea emphatically:

vix mi ipse credens Thuniam atque Bithunos  
 liquisse campos et videre te in tuto. (Cat. 31.5–6)  
*Thuniam* and *Bithunos campos* refer to the same place; by saying one the other is implied.

**Homeoteleuton:** a series of words which end in the same sounds:

et quantum est hominum venustiorum (Cat. 3.2)  
 The syllables *-tum*, *-num*, *-iorum* all end in the same sound “*um*.”

**Hyperbole:** extraordinary exaggeration:

Verani, omnibus e meis amicis  
 antistans mihi milibus trecentis (Cat. 9.1–2)  
 Here Catullus suggests he has 300,000 friends.

**Litotes:** the assertion of something by denying its opposite:

non sane illepidum neque invenustum (Cat. 10.4)  
 The *non* qualifies *illepidum* and *invenustum*. The translation is then “not unadmirable or uncharming.”

si non illepidum neque invenustum est (Cat. 36.17)  
 This is a repetition of the above in a later poem.

Salve, nec minimo puella naso  
 nec bello pede nec nigris ocellis  
 nec longis digitis nec ore sicco  
 nec sane nimis elegante lingua (Cat. 43.1–4)

**Metonymy:** the use of one word to suggest another:

pleni ruris et inficetiarum (Cat. 36.19)  
*Ruris* means country and here suggests crudity.

**Onomatopoeia:** the matching of sound to sense:

ad solam dominam usque pipiabat (Cat. 3.10)

The verb *pipiabat* creates the sound of the bird's chirping.

tunditur unda (Cat. 11.4)

The sound of the wave pounding on the shore is recreated by *-und-* in the verb and the following word *unda*.

loquente saepe sibilum edidit coma. (Cat. 4.12)

The sounds of the initial "s" suggest the sound of breezes through the branches of the tree.

**Personification:** treating the inanimate as animate:

Phaselus ille, quem videtis, hospites, / ait (Cat. 4.1-2)

The boat is given the ability to speak.

velim Caecilio, papyre, dicas (Cat. 35. 2)

Catullus imagines that his papyrus has the ability to speak.

**Polyptoton:** repetition of key words with slight changes in the endings of the words:

gemelle Castor et gemelle Castoris. (Cat. 4.27)

Both the nominative and genitive forms of the proper noun *Castor* appear in this line.

tam te basia multa basiare (Cat. 7.9)

The noun *basia* appears as a cognate in the present infinitive *basiare*.

ebrioso acino ebriosioris. (Cat. 27.4)

Both the positive and comparative forms of the adjective are used.

**Polysyndeton:** the excessive use of connectives:

Salve, nec minimo puella naso

nec bello pede nec nigris ocellis

nec longis digitis nec ore sicco

nec sane nimis elegante lingua (Cat. 43.1-4)

The connective *nec* is repeated numerous times above.

**Rhetorical Question:** a question which does not expect an answer:

scelesta, vae te! quae tibi manet vita?  
quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?  
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?  
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis? (Cat. 8.15–18)

Note the series of questions.

**Synchysis:** an arrangement of pairs of words which forms the pattern A B A B; the parallel nature of the connection of these common elements leads to the term parallel word order:

a b a b  
at mi nullus erat nec hic neque illic (Cat. 10. 21)  
In this example the correlative conjunctions *nec* and *neque* are associated, as are the adverbs *hic* and *illic*.

a b a b  
Minister vetuli puer Falerni (Cat. 27.1)  
Here *minister* aligns with *puer* and *vetuli* modifies *Falerni*.

**Syncopation or Syncope:** the contraction of words such as the genitive plural of the second declension and the third person plural of the perfect indicative active:

donarunt Veneres (Cat. 13.12)  
*Donarunt* is the contracted form of *donaverunt*.

**Synecdoche:** a part of something which is used to suggest the whole (*pars pro toto*):

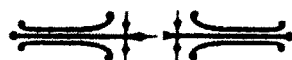
neque ullius natantis impetum trabis (Cat. 4.3)  
*Trabis* means ship beam, which suggests ship.

**Tricolon:** grouping adjectives, nouns, phrases or clauses in threes:

narrantem loca, facta, nationes (Cat. 9.7)  
Places, deeds, and nations form a tricolon.

**Zeugma:** one word used simultaneously in both a literal and a figurative way:

et me recuravi otioque et urtica. (Cat. 44.15)  
The verb *recuravi* means to heal emotionally (i.e., figuratively) by the use of *otio*, and to heal physically (i.e., literally) by the use of *urtica*.





CARPET-MOSAIC OF THE NINE MUSES, THIRD CENTURY A.D.,  
FOUND IN TRIER, GERMANY.