

A Short Note on Pun as a Literary Device

Pun refers to a figure of speech in which there is a play on words that are identical or similar in sound but sharply different in meaning. Pun has both comic and serious literary uses. Shakespeare used pun in both serious and comic ways. In his play Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio, bleeding to death, says, "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man". Here, the word "grave" has two meanings — one is the place where the dead body is buried, and the other meaning is becoming serious.

John Donne also played on words, but used it elaborately and seriously in his devotional metaphysical poems. In his poem "Hymn to God the Father", he used it seriously:

" I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by Thy self, that at my death Thy
Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore
And having done that, Thou hast done;
I fear no more.

In these lines, "Son" means both Christ and "sun". Similarly, the word "done" is an example of word-play on the name of the poet.

James Joyce is considered one of the prominent and compulsive users of pun in his works. In his novels like Finnegans Wake and Ulysses, he exploited this literary device thoroughly in order to achieve complex effect with multiple levels of meaning.