

Alliteration

(Latin 'repeating and playing upon the same letter') A figure of speech in which consonants, especially at the beginning of words, or stressed syllables, are repeated. It is a very old device indeed in English verse (older than rhyme) and is common in verse generally. It is used occasionally in prose. In Old English poetry alliteration was a continual and essential part of the metrical scheme and until the late Middle Ages was often used thus. However, alliterative verse becomes increasingly rare after the end of the 15th c. and alliteration – like assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia – tends more to be reserved for the achievement of the special effect.

There are many classic examples, like Coleridge's famous description of the sacred river Alph in *Kubla Khan*:

Five miles meandering with mazy motion

Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 3rd ed. London: Penguin, 1991, p. 25.