

THE ELEMENTS OF POETRY

GENRES (types of poetry)

NARRATIVE POETRY

The narrative poem, like narrative prose, tells a story or details action that leads to a climax. The poems range from very simple stories of a few stanzas, telling of one incident in the life of some person, to long tales of heroes, their hopes, beliefs and adventures. Ballads and epic poems are two examples of narrative poetry.

BALLAD: a simple narrative poem in four-line stanzas rhyming *abcb*.

EPIC POEM: a long story, often told in verse, involving heroes and gods. Grand in length and scope, an epic provides a portrait of an entire culture, of the legends, beliefs, values, laws, arts and ways of life of a people.

Homer's *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*

LYRIC POETRY

In a lyric poem a writer describes and shares an intense emotional experience. The poet discloses personal feelings, thoughts and fears. It is the most popular kind of poetry. It is a highly musical verse that expresses the emotions of a speaker. It could be about love or about people's experiences. It is always personal, emotional, and musical. Some examples of lyric poetry are the sonnet, the ode, the limerick, the cinquain, and the haiku.

SONNET: a rigid 14-line poem written in iambic pentameter. Variations in rhyme pattern are acceptable

Two Basic Forms

Petrarchan or Italian

8 lines—abba abba

6 lines—cdcdcd

or cde cde

Shakespearean or English

4 lines--abab

4 lines--cdcd

4 lines--efef

2 lines--gg

ODE: an elaborate lyric verse that deals seriously with a dignified, lofty theme. The form is usually a song in honor of gods or heroes, but is often a lyric poem characterized by elevated feelings.

TECHNIQUES OF POETRY: MEANING

THEME: A poem's theme is its central message—its general statement about life or people.

DICTION: The choice of words an author uses. Poets intentionally use words with multiple meanings and derive ambiguity and richness from the association of these words. When studying diction, consider:

- **DENOTATION** --- The standard dictionary meaning of a word, without associations or overtones.

- **CONNOTATION** -- The interpretations of a word beyond its literal definition. The emotional, psychological, or social overtones or implications that a word carries in addition to its dictionary meaning. If you look up the word *father* in the dictionary, the first definition you find is "male parent." For most people, however, the same word has additional meanings and carries other implications, such as love, protection, security, and sympathy. Thus, we talk about the *fatherland*, the *father* of our country, and a *fatherly* attitude.

tone: The author's attitude toward a subject or audience. To understand tone, we must analyze all the poetic elements: imagery, simile, metaphor, irony, overstatement, denotation, connotation, and so forth. Examples: bitter, humorous, joyous, ironic, satiric, serious, businesslike, ornate, somber, cynical, mocking, whimsical, sympathetic, desperate, exultant, calm resignation, admiration, etc.

IMAGERY: Words that name sense impressions of hearing, taste, touch, smell, and sight. The device is used by the poet to draw a picture in the reader's mind. Poets often use figures of speech to form imagery. Imagery makes a poem come alive.

TYPES OF IMAGERY:

- VISUAL -- images of sight
- AUDITORY -- images of sound
- OLFACTORY -- images of smell
- GUSTATORY -- images of taste
- TACTILE -- images of touch
- KINESTHETIC -- images of motion and activity (applies to human or animal activity)
- KINETIC -- images of motion and activity (applies to general motion of objects)

ALLEGORY: A work in which each element symbolizes, or represents, something else. For example, the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" is really a political allegory, representing people in government who were falling from power.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE, OR FIGURES OF SPEECH

A figure of speech is an expression that has more than a literal meaning. The following are examples of common figures of speech

- **PERSONIFICATION**

a figure of speech in which objects and animals have human qualities

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath.
Emily Dickinson, "A Certain Slant of Light"

- **HYPERBOLE**

a figure of speech involving gross exaggeration for rhetorical effect--overstatement

Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
Andrew Marvell, "To his Coy Mistress"

Our hands were firmly cemented.
John Donne, "The Ecstasy"

SESTET
(*six-line*)

O, young Lochnivar is come out of the west,
Through all the wide Border his steed was the best'
And save his good broadsword he weapons had none,
He rode all unarm'd, and he rode all alone.
So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war.
There never was knight like the young Lochnivar.
--Sir Walter Scott, "Lochnivar"

OCTAVE/OCTET
(*eight-line*)

Labor is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom, or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?
--William Butler Yeats, "Among School Children"

REFRAIN – The repetition of one or more phrases or lines at intervals in a poem, sometimes used to make a break between stanzas.

CAESURA – a break or pause in a line of verse

TECHNIQUES OF POETRY: SOUND

RHYME – the likeness of sound existing between words.

- **END RHYME** – the use of rhyming words at the ends of lines
- **INTERNAL RHYME** – the use rhyming word within lines.

EXAMPLE: Small feet were *pattering*, wooden shoes *clattering*.

- **EXACT RHYME** – perfect rhyming words, where both the vowel and the consonant sounds rhyme

Miniver Cheevy, child of *scorn*,
Grew lean while he assailed the *seasons*;
He wept that he was ever *born*,
And he had *reasons*.

- **NEAR RHYME, OR SLANT RHYME** – the use of rhyming sounds that are similar but not identical, as in *rave* and *rove*; *bleak* and *broke*; *could* and *solitude*.
- **EYE RHYME** – rhyme that depends on spelling rather than on sound –
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

RHYME SCHEME – the pattern or sequence in which rhymes occur. First sound is labeled *a*, second is *b*, third is *c*, etc. When the first sound is repeated within the verse label it *a* also. Here is how it's done:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,	a
Old time is still a-flying;	b
And this same flower that smiles today	a
Tomorrow will be dying.	b

Robert Herrick, "To the Virgins to Make Much of Time"

ALLITERATION -- repetition of beginning consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words, as in *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers*.

CONSONANCE -- the repetition of consonant sounds preceded by different vowel sounds in neighboring words, as in *wind* and *round*

ASSONANCE -- the repetition of vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds in neighboring words, as in *praised* and *plains*. Generally, assonance occurs in accented words or syllables

ONOMATOPOEIA – the use of words or phrases that sound like the things to which they refer.

Examples: The howling wind, the wailing woman, the buzz of a bee; the gurgling brook; the hiss of a snake; meow, boom, clink, etc.

TECHNIQUES OF POETRY: METER

RHYTHM -- The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables.

METER -- The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry. Two popular types of patterns are iambic (unstressed and stressed) and trochaic (stressed and unstressed).

IAMB, OR IAMBIC FOOT (-- /) – rising foot consisting of two syllables. The first one is unstressed; the second one is stressed--AFRAID. The meter most commonly used is iambic. Iambic is the meter that most nearly approximates the rhythm of ordinary speech. It is the rhythm commonly used by rap artists and by Shakespeare. The most common iambic line length is pentameter, or five feet. Thus a line of five iambic feet is called *iambic pentameter*. **Basically 10 syllables per line...**

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
William Shakespeare, Sonnet 73

A complete description of the meter of a line includes both the term for the type of foot that predominates in the line and the term for the number of feet in the line. The most common English meters are iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter. Please note that not all of the types of meters are defined here.

BLANK VERSE – unrhymed iambic pentameter

FREE VERSE -- avoids traditional patterns of organization and does not rely on meter, rhyme, line length, or stanzas to produce order. It often presents radical variations in line length and has no rhyme scheme or distinct stanzas at all.

OTHER RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

An extraordinary but literal use of language to achieve a particular effect. Common rhetorical techniques used in poetry include the following:

- **CONTRAST:** To compare in order to show unlikeness or differences, note the opposite natures, purposes, etc. In William Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, the speaker contrasts his mistress to various accepted symbols of adoration:

My mistress eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun:
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

- **IRONY:** The conflict between what seems and what is derives from this clash between appearance and reality.
- **PARADOX:** A statement that is contradictory, yet expresses a type of truth.
"My only love sprung from my only hate!"
"She speaks, yet she says nothing." – Romeo & Juliet
- **PARALLELISM:** a rhetorical technique in which a poet emphasizes the equal value or weight of two or more ideas by expressing them in the same grammatical form, as in the phrase "with hope, with joy, and with love
- **REPETITION:** A phrase or word within the poem is used again and again to stress a point, to link and emphasize ideas, to give the poem balance, or to make a break between verses.
- **RHETORICAL QUESTION:** a question asked for effect but not meant to be answered because the answer is clear from the context as in Christina Rossetti's lines "Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I."

