

SILABUS, SAP, DAN BAHAN AJAR

POETRY 1

PROYEK REKONSTRUKSI DAN PENINGKATAN
UNIVERSITAS NEGERI PADANG



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DISUSUN OLEH

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UNIVERSITAS NEGERI PADANG

2012



Syllabus

General Outline of the Course

Course	: Poetry 1	Credit Hour	: 2
Study Program:	English	Code	: ING 208
Faculty	: Arts and Languages		
Docent	: Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A. : Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A.		

Learning Outcomes

Main Competence:

Upon the completion of the course, students are expected to be able appreciate poetry, especially the ones written in English.

Supporting Competences:

1. Students are able to explain the nature of poetry
2. Students are able to identify the formal qualities of elements of poetry
3. Students are able to analyze thoughts or ideas conveyed in poetry

Soft skills/Character: Students are endowed with the ability to collaborate with others; express their opinion; show high commitment and passion in what they are doing; read between the lines and think critically.

Learning Matrix:

Week	Learning Outcomes	Learning Experience	Topic	Method	Assessment	References
1-5	Students are able to explain the nature of poetry	Students learns through interacting with reading materials given by the lecturer; discovering new knowledge through discussion with peers and share what they have got through a student led discussion	<p>1. The definition of poetry (week 1) 2. How to read poetry (week 2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences it has compared to other literary genre • May Swenson's "Southbound Freeway" <p>3. The tradition of poetry (week 3) 4. Types of poetry (week 3)</p> <p><i>Note:</i> <i>Week 4 and 5 are used for students lead presentation. Each times, three groups present their case.</i></p> <p><i>Poets for Presentation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eating poetry 2. Some People Like Poetry 3. Poetry 4. Literaria Autobioraphia 5. The New Poem 	Lecture, tutorial and discussion	<p>1. Informal writing by the students on the topics which have been covered 2. Students led presentation on the attitude, reception, and function of poetry</p>	<p>1 (pg. 15-16) 2 (pg. 20-30) 3 (pg. 521-522, 525 - 526, 555-559) 4 (pg. 5-8, 9-16) 5 (15-22, 268)</p>
6-13	Students are able to identify the formal qualities or elements of poetry	Students learn that poets use several techniques in creating poetry.	<p>1. Speaker (week 6) 2. Words (week 7) 3. Figurative Languages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphor and Simile, (week 7) • Personification, apostrophe, 	Lecture, and students forwarding their opinion	<p>1. Informal writing on the topic which have been</p>	<p>3 (pg. 566-585, 645-685, 589-608) 4 (pg. 25-29, 49-50, 73-79, 105-</p>

		they also learns about the creative use of language in poetry	<p>overstatement, understatement, metonymy, synecdoche, paradox, and pun. (week 8)</p> <p>4. Imagery (week 9)</p> <p>5. Irony and Tone (week 10)</p> <p>6. Sound and Rhythm (week 11)</p> <p><i>Note:</i> <i>Week 12 and 13 are used for student led presentation. Each time, three groups present their case.</i></p>		covered. 2. A 1-2 pages device paper	121, 85-95, 19-21, 33 -41, 145-175, 687- 707)
14-16	Students are able to analyze thoughts or ideas conveyed in poetry	Students learn that meanings and truths are not necessarily singular in a poem. And the same wisdom is also applicable in real life.	<p>1. ACCORDING TO MY MOOD (Benjamin Zephaniah) (Week 14)</p> <p>2. Language Barrier (Valerie Bloom) (Week 15)</p> <p>3. Background, Casually (Nissim Ezekiel) (Week 16)</p> <p>4. Do Not Say (Mohamad Bin Haji Saleh</p> <p>5. Sun-a-shine, Rain-a-fall (Valerie Bloom) (Week 14)</p>	Discussions in which students are encouraged to forward their opinion.	<p>1. A 3-4 pages paper to assess students' ability to discover ideas being conveyed in a poem and analyze it.</p> <p>2. Student led presentations on ideas conveyed in poems assigned to them</p>	6 (pg. 334) 7 (pg. 580-582, 708-710, 814)

References:

1. Frederik, J.T. 1988. *English poetry an introduction to Indonesian students*. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Proyek Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan: Jakarta.
2. Hillyer, R. 1971. *In pursuit of poetry*. McGraw Hill Book Company: New York.
3. Kirszner, L & Mandell, S. 2000. *Literature reading reacting writing*. Harcourt Brace: New York.
4. Kennedy, X.J. & Gioia, d. 2010. *An introduction to poetry*. Longman: New York.
5. Main, C.F, & Seng, P.J. 1961. *Poems*. Wordsworth Publishing Company: California
6. Philips, N (e.d.). 1996. *The new oxford book of children's verse*. Oxford University Press: Oxford
7. Thieme, J (e.d.). 1996. *The Arnold anthology of post-colonial literatures in english*. Arnold: London.

Lesson Plan

(SAP)

Course : Poetry 1

Credit Hour : 2

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Upon the completion of the course, students are expected to be able appreciate poetry, especially the ones written in English

Supporting Competence:

Students are able to explain the nature of poetry

Soft skills/Character: Students are endowed with the ability to collaborate with others; express their opinion; show high commitment and passion in what they are doing; read between the lines and think critically.

Topics:

1. The definition of poetry
2. How to read poetry
 - a. Differences it has compared to other literary genre
3. The tradition of poetry
4. Types of poetry

Lesson Plan

stage	Lecturer's Activities	Students' activities	Assessment	Media
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the overview of lesson in meeting 1-5. 2. Explain the benefit students can gain from their understanding of the nature of poetry 3. Explain the competences they should achieve by the end of meeting 5 	Listen to the lecture		Syllabus
Presentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read “Southbound Freeway” aloud 2. Activate students background knowledge on what they have known, heard, or read about poetry 3. Listen to and write down students’ response on the white board. 4. Elicits to students about the importance of poetry in societies 	<p>Listen to the lecturer Respond to the lecturer</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p>	Students led presentation on the definition, function, reception of poetry	Whiteboard PowerPoints slides PowerPoints slides

	<p>around the word.</p> <p>5. Explain to students the definition of poetry.</p> <p>6. Tutor students how to read Poetry. The poem used is May Swenson's "Southbound Freeway"</p> <p>7. Explain to students about the tradition of poetry</p> <p>8. Explain general divides in the type of poetry</p>	<p>Applying practical reading strategies just explained by the lecturer</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p>		<p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p>
Closing	<p>9. Close the session.</p> <p>a. Ask students questions on topics which have been covered</p> <p>b. Respond to students' answer</p> <p>c. Assign them to be prepared for student led presentation which will be held in the 4th and 5th week on the definition, function and reception of poetry.</p>	Respond to the questions		

Assessment Rubric:

1. Presentation rubric (evaluating students presentation) adopted from <http://www.ncsu.edu/midlink/rub.pres.html> (see appendix)

References:

1. Frederik, J.T. 1988. *English poetry an introduction to Indonesian students*. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Proyek Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan: Jakarta.
2. Hillyer, R. 1971. *In pursuit of poetry*. McGraw Hill Book Company: New York.
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4. Kennedy, X.J. & Gioia, d. 2010. *An introduction to poetry*. Longman: New York.
5. Main, C.F, & Seng, P.J. 1961. *Poems*. Wordsworth Publishing Company: California

Appendices:

1. PowerPoint slides print outs
2. Photocopied material forwarded to students in advance
3. Rubric to evaluate students' presentation

POETRY: DEFINED
Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A

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A CASE FOR POETRY

- o There are divides on the theory of poetry
 - To merely entertain (Hedonistic theory)
 - Art is for delight (Somerset Maugham)
 - To educate and entertain at the same time (Didactic theory)
 -Poetry is the bottom of a criticism of life...

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DEFINITION OF POETRY

- o Poetry has been important in the known human history
- o In ancient Japan and China, poetry was prized above anything else.
- o E.g. A samurai before his execution by his enemy pleaded to be given time to compose poetry, which was so moving and resulted in his liberation from his captor.

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3

DEFINITION OF POETRY

- o To the ancient Greeks and Romans, poetry was the medium to express their philosophy that no wonder classing like *Iliad* and *Aeneid* were written in verse
- o Don't forget that the Bible and the Koran were also written in verse

05/11/2012
ms.45v1

DEFINITION OF POETRY

- o It uses language to condense experience into an intensely concentrated package, with each sound, each word, each image and line carrying great weight.
- o Key words:
 - Experience
 - Compact language

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ms.45v1

HOW TO READ A POEM

- o To be able to understand or even contemplate on the message of anything the poem tries to convey, it is necessary for student to know what the poem says.
- o Problem for EFL learners:
- o English proficiency!

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ms.45v1

HOW TO READ A POEM

- o Thus, it is important to read actively
- o A reading strategy that involves readers with the text one is reading.
 - Previewing
 - Highlighting
 - Annotating

10/11/2012
max. depth

PREVIEWING

- o It is basically the activity in which readers survey the text.
- o As in surveying, readers are only expected to see what's on the surface or clear physical attributes in the poem like:
 - The title
 - Special prints : bold, italics, underline
 - Repeated words
 - Repeated images

10/11/2012
max. depth

HIGHLIGHTING

- o It is the process in which readers begin to mark the text they are reading.
- o During previewing, there might be questions on difficult words, or images, important ideas.
- o This is the time for readers to put down their questions on the marked page.

10/11/2012
max. depth

ANNOTATING

- o This is the time for readers to begin answering questions they have in highlighting activities.
- o The first thing to do is to deal with difficult words.
- o For those in EFL situation, this is their first barrier to the poem, so this is the most important thing to do.
- o This is the readers' deeper engagement with the text.



THE TRADITION OF POETRY

- o Poetic diction: words that writers of poets choose to use.
- o Decorum: the basis on which the poet chooses his diction from the general reservoirs of words.
- o Poetic license: The poet's freedom to bend the rule of language, diction, decorum, grammar in order to achieve certain effect.



THE TRADITION OF POETRY

- o Poetic convention:
- o Artificial and sometimes unrealistic devices that are accepted by common agreement between the artists and their public.
- o Poetry: Speaker, figurative language, sounds and rhythm, meter, etc



THE TRADITION OF POETRY

- o This section will talk exclusively about the tradition in Western Poetry.
- o Throughout the history there have been many poetic revolutions.
- o Yet, it all began with the tradition where Anglo-Saxon heroes' victories in wars were sung by the singers in verse

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THE TRADITION OF POETRY

- o Anglo-Saxon: the importance of similar stressed consonant sound—alliteration.
- o Continent's influence: the beginning of the reign of rhyme and the question about meter
- o Elizabethan poems: the importance hexameter; the development of blank verse.
- o The 17th century saw the rule of heroic couplet

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THE TRADITION OF POETRY

- o The 18th century witnesses Romantics poets overthrew the rigidity of the heroic couplet
- o The 19th century revolution took place in America led by Walt Whitman, who had managed to gather a big crowd of followers
- o The 20th century observe the crowd shifts to Ezra Pound and Robert Frost.

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THE TRADITION OF POETRY

- o Elizabethan: Pastoral and platonic and musical
- o The school of Donne: obsession with inner searching through symbols and metaphor
- o The 18th century was full of reason and wit
- o The romantics were busy looking for imagination.
- o The Victorian poets were obsessed with ethical and philosophical matters.

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TYPES OF POETRY

- o Lyric Poetry
 - Poems expressing the thought and feeling of a single speaker.
- o Narrative Poetry
 - Poems which tell stories
- o Dramatic Poetry
 - Poems or speech by a dramatic characters at a certain moment in a drama
- o Didactic Poetry
 - Poems written to teach

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**APPENDICES AND PHOTOCOPIED MATERIAL WHICH SERVES AS BOTH
TEACHING MATERIAL AND STUDENTS' WORK SHEET**

Part I

- ❖ What is poetry
 - Reading Poetry
 - Its differences from other literary genres
- ❖ The tradition of poetry
 - Types of poetry

Definitions of Poetry

Many theories about the nature and the aim of poetry have been formulated, but no single satisfactory definition seems to exist. Nevertheless, much can be learned by an examination of the definitions put forward by the great critics or poets. To enable the beginner to see his way clearly through the mass of material available, it is best to try to make a classification of the nature and the objectives of poetry.

S.H. Burton (1974:Chpt. 8) classified the theory of poetry into two main categories: the Hedonistic theory and the Didactic theory. Those who belong to the former school of thought believe that the objective of poetry is merely to give pleasure; and those who belong to the latter consider that poetry should teach beside giving pleasure.

There are, of course, many shades of opinions within these two classifications. The extreme statement of the hedonistic point of view was made by Oscar Wilde: 'There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book; it is either well or badly written.' And as if to support this idea, Somerset Maugham stated bluntly that 'Art is for delight.' On the other hand, there are statements like that of Dr. Samuel Johnson's:

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.... The pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

Matthew Arnold, who was another supporter of the didactic theory, stated :

'It is important to hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life.'

Each poet or critic can develop his own concept of poetry. In order to get an idea of what a writer thinks of poetry, here are some reflections on poetry, by a prominent 19th century British writer and critic, John Stuart Mill. (Barnet cs., 1960:55 ff)

The objects of poetry is to act upon emotion; poetry addresses itself to the feelings; poetry does its work by moving; poetry acts by offering interesting objects of contemplation-to the sensibilities.

— Many of the great poems are in narratives; and in almost all good

serious fictions there is true poetry. But there is a radical distinction between the interest felt in a story, and the interest excited by poetry. The interest felt in a story is derived from incident; the interest excited by poetry is from the representation of feelings.

— Poetry, which is the delineation of the deeper and more secret workings of human emotion, is interesting only to those to whom it recalls what they have felt, or whose imagination it stirs up to conceive what they could feel, or what they might have been able to feel, had their outward circumstances been different.

— Poetry is truth, and fiction also is truth; but they are different truths. The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly, and the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life.

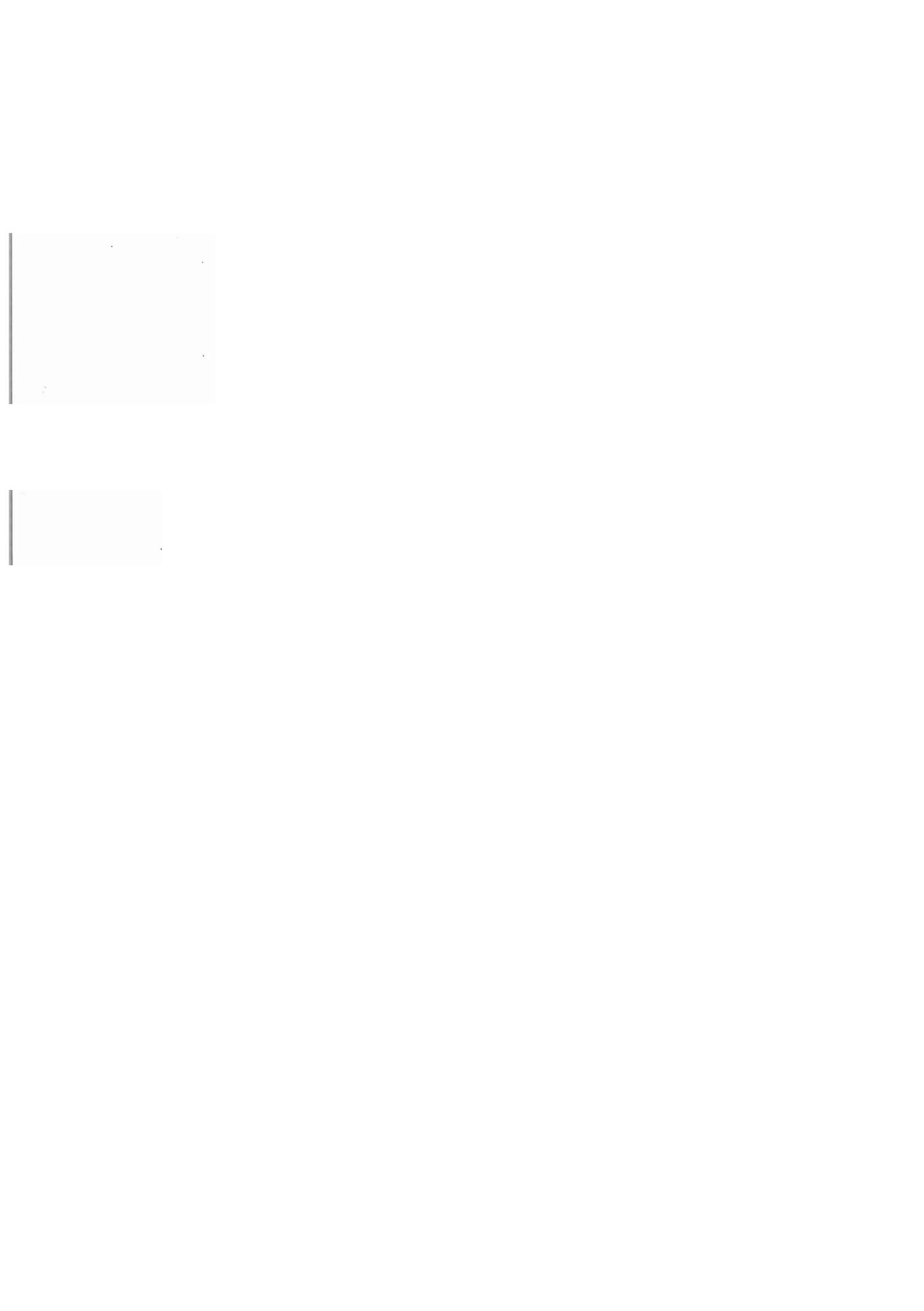
— Great poets are often ignorant of life. What they know has come by observation of themselves; they have found within them one highly delicate and sensitive specimen of human nature. Other knowledge of mankind is not indispensable to the poets.

— The novelists have to describe outward, not the inward man; they have to describe actions and events, not feelings. If a poet describes a lion he does not describe it as a naturalist would, whose concern was to state nothing but the truth. The poet describes it by using imagery, that is by suggesting the most striking likenesses and contrasts which might occur to a mind contemplating the lion, in the state of wonder, awe, or terror.

— Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind.

— All poetry is of the nature of soliloquy. Poetry is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation. The persons who have most feeling of their own, have the highest faculty of poetry.

— Science and poetry do not conflict because poetry makes no assertions about the external world. A scientific awareness that a cloud is a vapor of water subject to all the laws of vapors in a state of suspension, does not conflict with the poet's most intense feeling of the beauty of the cloud. And if the poet accurately records this emotion, his poem (about the cloud) is in a sense as 'true' as is the scientist's description of a cloud.



flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician—
nor is it valid
to discriminate against "business documents and
school-books";¹ all these phenomena are important. One must make a
distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is
not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
"literalists of
the imagination"²—above
insolence and triviality and can present
for inspection, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them," shall
we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

DEFINING POETRY

♦ ♦ ♦

Throughout history and across various national and cultural boundaries, poetry has held an important place. In ancient China and Japan, for example, poetry was prized above all else. One story tells of a samurai warrior who, when defeated, asked for a pen and paper. Thinking that he wanted to write a will before being executed, his captor granted his wish.

Moore quotes the *Diaries of Tolstoy* (New York, 1917): "Where the boundary between prose and poetry lies, I shall never be able to understand. . . . Poetry is verse; prose is not verse. Or else poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books."

² Reference (given by Moore) to W. B. Yeats's "William Blake and His Illustrations" (*Un Ideas of Good and Evil*, 1903): "The limitation of his view was from the very intensity of his vision; he was a too literal realist of the imagination as others are of nature; and because he believed that the figures seen by the mind's eye, when exalted by inspiration, were 'external existences,' symbols of divine essences, he hated every grace of style that might obscure their lineaments."

Instead of writing a will, however, the warrior wrote a farewell poem that so moved his captor that he immediately released him.

To the ancient Greeks and Romans, poetry was the medium of spiritual and philosophical expression. Epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* are written in verse, and so are dramas such as *Oedipus the King* (p. 1254). Passages of the Bible, the Koran, and the Hindu holy books are also written in poetry. Today, throughout the world, poetry continues to delight and to inspire. For many people, in many places, poetry is the language of the emotions, the medium of expression they use when they speak from the heart.

Despite the longstanding place of poetry in our lives, however, many people—including poets themselves—have difficulty deciding just what poetry is. Is a poem “pure energy / horizontally contained / between the mind / of the poet and the ear of the reader,” as Nikki Giovanni describes it? Or is a poem, as Archibald MacLeish says, “Dumb,” “Silent,” “wordless,” and “motionless in time”? Or is it simply what Marianne Moore calls “all this fiddle”?

One way of defining poetry is to say that it uses language to condense experience into an intensely concentrated package, with each sound, each word, each image, and each line carrying great weight. But beyond this, it is difficult to pin down what makes a particular arrangement of words or lines a poem. Part of the problem is that poetry has many guises: a poem may be short or long, accessible or obscure; it may express a mood or tell a story; it may conform to a familiar poetic form—a sonnet, a couplet, a haiku—or follow no conventional pattern; it may or may not have a regular, identifiable meter or a rhyme scheme; it may depend heavily on elaborate imagery, figures of speech, irony, complex allusions or symbols or repeated sounds—or it may include none of these features conventionally associated with poetry.

To further complicate the issue, different readers, different poets, different generations of readers and poets, and different cultures may have different expectations about poetry. As a result, they have different assumptions about poetry, and these different assumptions raise questions. Must poetry be written to delight or inspire, or can a poem have a political or social message? And must this message be conveyed subtly, embellished with imaginatively chosen sounds and words, or can it be explicit and straightforward? These questions, which have been debated by literary critics as well as by poets for many years, have no easy answers—and perhaps no answers at all. A haiku—short, rich in imagery, adhering to a rigid formal structure—is certainly poetry, and so is a political poem like Wole Soyinka’s “Telephone Conversation” (p. 5). To some Western readers, however, a haiku might seem too plain and understated to be poetic, and Soyinka’s poem might seem to be a political tract masquerading as poetry. Still, most of these readers would agree that the following lines qualify as poetry.

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This po
come tc
of lynn
a comp
pares tl
nally, t
poetic
their lo
Eve
net, me

1

READING A POEM

*Every good poem begins as the poet's
but ends as the reader's.*

—MILLER WILLIAMS

How do you read a poem? The literal-minded might say, "Just let your eye light on it"; but there is more to poetry than meets the eye. What Shakespeare called "the mind's eye" also plays a part. Many a reader who has no trouble understanding and enjoying prose finds poetry difficult. This is to be expected. At first glance, a poem usually will make some sense and give some pleasure, but it may not yield everything at once. Poetry is not to be galloped over like the daily news: a poem differs from most prose in that it is to be read slowly, carefully, and attentively. Not all poems are difficult, of course, and some can be understood and enjoyed on first encounter. But good poems yield more if read twice; and the best poems—after ten, twenty, or a hundred readings—still go on yielding.

POETRY OR VERSE

Approaching a thing written in lines and surrounded with white space, we need not expect it to be a poem just because it is verse. (Any composition in lines of more or less regular rhythm, often ending in rhymes, is verse.) Here, for instance, is a specimen of verse that few will call poetry:

Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November;
All the rest have thirty-one
Excepting February alone,
To which we twenty-eight assign
Till leap year makes it twenty-nine.

To a higher degree than that classic memory-tickler, poetry appeals to the mind and arouses feelings. Poetry may state facts, but, more important, it makes imaginative statements that we may value even if its facts are incorrect. Coleridge's error in placing a star within the horns of the crescent moon in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" does not stop the passage from being good poetry, though it is faulty astronomy. According to poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, poetry is "to be

heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning." There are other elements in a poem besides plain prose sense: sounds, images, rhythms, figures of speech. These may strike us and please us even before we ask, "But what does it all mean?"

This is a truth not readily grasped by anyone who regards a poem as a kind of puzzle written in secret code with a message slyly concealed. The effect of a poem (our whole mental and emotional response to it) consists of much more than simply a message. By its musical qualities, by its suggestions, it can work on the reader's unconscious. T. S. Eliot put it well when he said in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that the prose sense of a poem is chiefly useful in keeping the reader's mind "diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him." Eliot went on to liken the meaning of a poem to the bit of meat a burglar brings along to throw to the family dog. What is the work of a poem? To touch us, to stir us, to make us glad, and possibly even to tell us something.

READING A POEM

How to set about reading a poem? Here are a few suggestions. To begin with, read the poem once straight through, with no particular expectations; read open-mindedly. Let yourself experience whatever you find, without worrying just yet about the large general and important ideas the poem contains (if indeed it contains any). Don't dwell on a troublesome word or difficult passage—just push on. Some of the difficulties may seem smaller when you read the poem for a second time; at least, they will have become parts of a whole for you.

On the second reading, read for the exact sense of all the words; if there are words you don't understand, look them up in a dictionary. Dwell on any difficult parts as long as you need to.

If you read the poem silently, sound its words in your mind. Better still, read the poem aloud, or listen to someone else reading it. You may discover meanings you didn't perceive in it before. To decide how to speak a poem can be an excellent method of getting to understand it.

PARAPHRASE

Try to paraphrase the poem as a whole, or perhaps just the more difficult lines. In paraphrasing, we put into our own words what we understand the poem to say, restating ideas that seem essential, coming out and stating what the poem may only suggest. This may sound like a heartless thing to do to a poem, but good poems can stand it. In fact, to compare a poem to its paraphrase is a good way to see the distance between poetry and prose. In making a paraphrase, we generally work through a poem or a passage line by line. The statement that results may take as many words as the original, if not more. A paraphrase, then, is ampler than a summary, a brief condensation of gist, main idea, or story. (Summary of a horror film in *TV Guide*: "Demented biologist, coveting power over New York, swells sewer rats to hippopotamus-size.") Here is a poem worth considering line by line. The poet writes of an island in a lake in the west of Ireland, in a region where he spent many summers as a boy.

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

1892

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

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Though relatively simple, this poem is far from simple-minded. We need to absorb it slowly and thoughtfully. At the start, for most of us, it raises problems: what are *wattles*, from which the speaker's dream-cabin is to be made? We might guess, but in this case it will help to consult a dictionary: they are "poles interwoven with sticks or branches, formerly used in building as frameworks to support walls or roofs." Evidently, this getaway house will be built in an old-fashioned way: it won't be a prefabricated log cabin or A-frame house, nothing modern or citified. The phrase *bee-loud glade* certainly isn't commonplace language, but right away, we can understand it, at least partially: it's a place loud with bees. What is a *glade*? Experience might tell us that it is an open space in woods, but if that word stops us, we can look it up. Although the *linnet* doesn't live in North America, it is a creature with wings—a songbird of the finch family, adds the dictionary. But even if we don't make a special trip to the dictionary to find *linnet*, we probably recognize that the word means "bird," and the line makes sense to us.

A paraphrase of the whole poem might go something like this (in language easier to forget than that of the original): "I'm going to get up now, go to Innisfree, build a cabin, plant beans, keep bees, and live peacefully by myself amid nature and beautiful light. I want to because I can't forget the sound of that lake water. When I'm in the city, a gray and dingy place, I seem to hear it deep inside me."

These dull remarks, roughly faithful to what Yeats is saying, seem a long way from poetry. Nevertheless, they make certain things clear. For one, they spell out what the poet merely hints at in his choice of the word *gray*: that he finds the city dull and depressing. He stresses the word; instead of saying *gray pavements*, in the usual word order, he turns the phrase around and makes *gray* stand at the end of the line, where it rhymes with *day* and so takes extra emphasis. The grayness of the city therefore seems important to the poem, and the paraphrase tries to make its meaning obvious.

the poem, its theme. The theme isn't the same as the subject, which is the main topic, whatever the poem is "about." In Yeats's poem, the subject is the lake isle of Innisfree, or a wish to retreat to it. But the theme is, "I yearn for an ideal place where I will find perfect peace and happiness."

Themes can be stated variously, depending on what you believe matters most in the poem. Taking a different view of the poem, placing more weight on the speaker's wish to escape the city, you might instead state the theme: "This city is getting me down—I want to get back to nature." But after taking a second look at that statement, you might want to sharpen it. After all, this Innisfree seems a special, particular place, where the natural world means more to the poet than just any old trees and birds he might see in a park. Perhaps a stronger statement of theme, one closer to what matters most in the poem, might be: "I want to quit the city for my heaven on earth." That, of course, is saying in an obvious way what Yeats says more subtly, more memorably.

Limits of Paraphrase

A paraphrase never tells all that a poem contains, nor will every reader agree that a particular paraphrase is accurate. We all make our own interpretations and sometimes the total meaning of a poem evades even the poet who wrote it. Asked to explain a passage in one of his poems, Robert Browning replied that when he had written the poem, only God and he knew what it meant; but "Now, only God knows." Still, to analyze a poem as if we could be certain of its meaning is, in general, more fruitful than to proceed as if no certainty could ever be had. A useful question might be, "What can we understand from the poem's very words?"

All of us bring personal associations to the poems we read. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" might give you special pleasure if you have ever vacationed on a small island or on the shore of a lake. Such associations are inevitable, even to be welcomed, as long as they don't interfere with our reading the words on the page. We need to distinguish irrelevant responses from those the poem calls for. The reader who can't stand "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" because she is afraid of bees isn't reading a poem by Yeats, but one of her own invention.

Now and again we meet a poem—perhaps startling and memorable—into which the method of paraphrase won't take us far. Some portion of any deep poem resists explanation, but certain poems resist it almost entirely. Many poems by religious mystics seem closer to dream than waking. So do poems that purport to record drug experiences, such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (page 1032). So do nonsense poems, translations of primitive folk songs, and surreal poems. Such poetry may move us and give pleasure (although not, perhaps, the pleasure of intellectual understanding). We do it no harm by trying to paraphrase it, though we may fail. Whether logically clear or strangely opaque, good poems appeal to the intelligence and do not shrink from it.

So far, we have taken for granted that poetry differs from prose; yet all our strategies for reading poetry—plowing straight on through and then going back, isolating difficulties, trying to paraphrase, reading aloud, using a dictionary—are no different from those we might employ in unraveling a complicated piece of prose. Poetry, after all, is similar to prose in most respects. At the very least, it is written in the same language. Like prose, poetry shares knowledge with us. It tells us, for instance, of a beautiful island in Lake Gill, County Sligo, Ireland, and of

bly and pieces, Cummings suggests the flexibility of language and conveys the need to break out of customary ways of using words to define experience.

As the preceding discussion illustrates, defining what a poem is (and is not) is almost impossible. It is true that most poems, particularly those divided into stanzas, look like poems, and it is also true that poems tend to use compressed language. Beyond this, however, what makes a poem a poem is more a matter of degree than a question of whether or not it conforms to a strict set of rules. A poem is likely to use *more* imagery, figurative language, rhyme, and so on than a prose piece—but, then again, it may not.

READING POETRY

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Some readers say they do not like poetry because they find it obscure or intimidating. One reason some people have difficulty reading poetry is that it tends to present information in subtle (and therefore potentially confusing) ways; it does not immediately “get to the point” as journalistic articles or business letters do. One could certainly argue that by concentrating experience, poetry actually “gets to the point” in ways—and to degrees—that other kinds of writing do not. Even so, some readers see poetry as an alien form. They have the misconception that poetry is always filled with obscure allusions, complex metrical schemes, and flowery diction. Others, feeling excluded from what they see as its secret language and mysterious structure, approach poetry as something that must be deciphered. Certainly, reading poetry often requires hard work and concentration. Because it is compressed, poetry often omits exposition and explanation; consequently, readers must be willing to take the time to read closely—to interpret ideas and supply missing connections. Many readers are simply not motivated to dig deeply for what they perceive to be uncertain rewards. But not all poems are difficult, and even those that are difficult are often well worth the effort. (For specific suggestions about how to read poetry, see Chapter 12.)

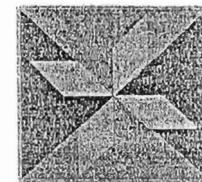
RECOGNIZING KINDS OF POETRY

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Most poems are either *narrative* poems, which recount a story, or *lyric* poems, which communicate a speaker’s mood, feelings, or state of mind.

NARRATIVE POETRY

Although any brief poem that tells a story, such as Edwin Arlington Robinson’s “Richard Cory” (p. 827), may be considered a narrative poem, the two most familiar forms of narrative poetry are the *epic* and the *ballad*.



Reading and Writing about Poetry

READING POETRY

• • •

Sometimes readers approach poetry purely for pleasure. At other times, reading a poem is the first step toward writing about it. The following guidelines, which focus on issues discussed elsewhere in this section of the text, may help direct your reading.

- ◊ Rephrase the poem in your own words. What does your paraphrase reveal about the poem's subject and central concerns? What is lost or gained in your paraphrase of the poem?
- ◊ Consider the poem's **voice**. Who is the poem's persona or speaker? How would you characterize the poem's tone? Is the poem ironic? (See Chapter 13.)
- ◊ Study the poem's **diction** and look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary. How does word choice affect your reaction to the poem? What do the connotations of words reveal about the poem? What level of diction is used? Is dialect used? Is word order unusual or unexpected? How does the arrangement of words contribute to your understanding of the poem? (See Chapter 14.)
- ◊ Examine the poem's **imagery**. What kind of imagery predominates? What specific images are used? Is a pattern of imagery present? How does imagery enrich the poem? (See Chapter 15.)
- ◊ Identify the poem's **figures of speech**. Does the poet use metaphor? Simile? Personification? Hyperbole? Understatement?

Metonymy or synecdoche? Apostrophe? How do figures affect your reading of the poem? (See Chapter 16.)

Listen to the **sound** of the poem. Are rhythm and meter regular or irregular? How do rhythm and meter reinforce the poem's central concerns? Does the poem use alliteration? Assonance? Rhyme? How do these elements enhance the poem? (See Chapter 17.)

Look at the poem's **form**. Is the poem written in closed or open form? Is the poem constructed as a sonnet? A sestina? A villanelle? An epigram? A haiku? Is the poem an example of concrete poetry? How does the poem's form reinforce its ideas? (See Chapter 18.)

- ◊ Consider the poem's use of **symbol**, **allegory**, **allusion**, or **myth**. Does the poem make use of symbols? Allusions? How do symbols or allusions support its theme? Is the poem an allegory? Does the poem retell or interpret a myth? (See Chapter 19.)
- ◊ Identify the poem's **theme**. What central theme or themes does the poem explore? How are the themes expressed? (See Chapter 11.)

ACTIVE READING

When you approach a poem that you plan to write about, you engage in the same active reading strategies you use when you read a short story or a play. When you finish recording your reactions to the poem, you focus on a topic, develop ideas about that topic, decide on a thesis, prepare an outline, and draft and revise your essay.

Catherine Whittaker, a student in an introduction to literature course, was asked to write a three- to five-page essay comparing any two of the seven poems about parents that appear in the exercise in Chapter 11 (pp. 531–536). Her instructor told the class that the essay should reflect students' own reactions to the poems, not the opinions of literary critics. As Catherine planned and wrote her paper, she was guided by the process described in Chapter 2, "Reading and Writing about Literature."

Previewing

Catherine began her work by previewing the poems, eliminating those she considered obscure or difficult and those whose portrait of the speaker's parent did not seem sympathetic.

This process helped Catherine to narrow down her choices. As she looked through "Those Winter Sundays," she was struck by words in the opening lines ("Sundays too . . ."; "blueblack cold"). She had the same reaction to "The squat pen rests; snug as a gun" in line 2 of "Digging." In each case, the words made Catherine want to examine the poem further.

She noticed too that both poems were divided into stanzas of varying lengths and that both focused on fathers. Keeping these features in mind, Catherine began a close reading of each poem.

Highlighting and Annotating

Catherine read and reread "Those Winter Sundays" and "Digging," she recorded her comments and questions. The highlighted and underlined words follow.

ROBERT HAYDEN
(1913–1980)

Those Winter Sundays

(1962)

Like all other days of the week?
Sundays [too] my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold, Why did he get
then with cracked hands that ached up before dawn?
from labor in the weekday weather made } What kind of
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him. father have?
Was there a large family?

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,

fearing the chronic angers of that house,
Were there problems in the family?

10 Speaking indifferently to him,

who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as

What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

*austere = without adornment
ornamentation,
simple, bare—simple
without luxury, harsh*

Was there --
mother around?

offices = duties
or functions
assigned
someone

SEAMUS HEANEY
(1939-)

Digging (1966)

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.
→ gun = snug?
Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away Is he thinking
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills about the past?
Where he was digging.

Like the
Poet's
pen?
10 The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked → Was this a
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

15 By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
20 Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away → The grandfather
was a hard worker.

} Two generations
could "handle a
spade." Can the
poet dig?

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

25 The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge → What does it make
Through living roots awaken in my head. him remember?
But I've no spade to follow men like them. → What are "men
like them" like?

Between my finger and my thumb
30 The squat pen rests. → Why is this repeated?
I'll dig with it.
→ Dig for what?

Almost like an
art of digging?

Catherine found the language of both poems appealing, and she believed her highlighting and annotating had given her some valuable insights. For example, she noticed some parallels between the two poems: both focus on the past, both portray fathers as hard workers, and neither mentions a mother.

WRITING ABOUT POETRY

PLANNING AN ESSAY

Even though Catherine still had to find a specific topic for her paper, her preliminary work suggested some interesting possibilities. She was especially intrigued by the way both poems depict fathers as actively engaged in physical tasks.

Choosing a Topic

One idea Catherine thought she might want to write about was the significance of the sons' attitudes toward their fathers: although both see their fathers as hard workers, the son in "Those Winter Sundays" seems to have mixed feelings about his father's devotion to his family, whereas the son in "Digging" is more appreciative. Catherine explored this idea in the two journal entries that follow:

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

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EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

1. What words in this poem are effective primarily because of their connotation?
2. Compare this poem with "Call It a Good Marriage." In which poem does the ending come as the greater surprise?

POETIC DICTION

The words that a poet or any other writer or speaker chooses to use are called his diction. Critics and poets have long been interested in the relationship between the diction of poetry and the diction of ordinary speech. In some ages they have held that the two dictions resemble each other closely; in others, they have held the opposite view. In the so-called Augustan Age of English poetry (about 1660-1790), for instance, the authors of serious poems avoided words that had acquired "low" or familiar associations from extensive use; in place of these they used fancier or more dignified expressions. Thus Smollett's "Ode to Leven-Water" (page 262) has *swain* for *shepherd*, *lave* for *wash*, and *scaly brood* for *school of fish*. Against such embellished diction some poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries protested. In 1800 Wordsworth asserted that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." He thought that a poem should not have a special kind of language, but that it should be written in "a selection of the language really spoken by men." Consequently when he wrote about a shepherd, he called him "a shepherd"; sheep he called "sheep." Expressions like "keeper of the fleecy people" he labeled as "poetic diction"—a term that always had a derogatory connotation to him.

But Wordsworth had his own notions of what poetic diction should be; his own diction is no less poetic merely because it differs from the diction of the poets that preceded him. The word *selection* in the passage just quoted ("a selection of the language really spoken by men") implies that Wordsworth did not consider the language of poetry identical with the spoken language. He knew that a good poet selects his words much more carefully than a casual talker ever does.

16 CHAPTER ONE

The term poetic diction, then, need not be a term of abuse; it may instead refer to the total differences between the language of poetry and the language of common speech at any given time. In our own day T. S. Eliot has said that every age has its own poetic diction.

DECORUM

The basis on which a poet selects his diction from the general supply of words is called decorum. E. E. Cummings follows a different decorum in each of the two following poems, with the result that the diction in one poem is very different from that in the other.

All in Green Went My Love Riding

All in green went my love riding

on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the merry deer ran before.

Fleeter be they than dappled dreams
the swift sweet deer
the red rare deer.

Four red roebuck at a white water
the cruel bugle sang before.

Horn at hip went my love riding
riding the echo down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the level meadows ran before.

Softer be they than slumbered sleep
the lean lithe deer
the fleet flown deer.

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THE WORDS OF A POEM

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✓
Four fleet does at a gold valley
the famished arrow sang before.

20

Bow at belt went my love riding
riding the mountain down
into the silver dawn.

25

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the sheer peaks ran before.

Paler be they than daunting death
the sleek slim deer
the tall tense deer.

30

Four tall stags at a green mountain
the lucky hunter sang before.

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

35

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
my heart fell dead before.

E. E. CUMMINGS

*Nobody Loses All the Time*

5

nobody loses all the time

i had an uncle named
Sol who was a born failure and
nearly everybody said he should have gone
into vaudeville perhaps because my Uncle Sol could
sing McCann He Was a Diver on Xmas Eve like Hell Itself which
may or may not account for the fact that my Uncle

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Sol indulged in that possibly most inexcusable
of all to use a highfalootin phrase
luxuries that is or to
wit farming and be
it needlessly
added

my Uncle Sol's farm
failed because the chickens
ate the vegetables so
my Uncle Sol had a
chicken farm till the
skunks ate the chickens when

my Uncle Sol
had a skunk farm but
the skunks caught cold and
died and so
my Uncle Sol imitated the
skunks in a subtle manner

or by drowning himself in the watertank
but somebody who'd given my Uncle Sol a Victor
Victrola and records while he lived presented to
him upon the auspicious occasion of his decease a
scrumptious not to mention splendiferous funeral with
tall boys in black gloves and flowers and everything and

i remember we all cried like the Missouri
when my Uncle Sol's coffin lurched because
somebody pressed a button
(and down went
my Uncle
Sol

and started a worm farm)

E. E. CUMMINGS

No one would ever make the mistake of thinking that a line or phrase quoted from one of these poems was taken from the other. The diction of the first poem is romantic and heraldic, as if it were a medieval troubadour's song or a description of a medieval tapestry. The diction of the second has the distinctive twang of American speech. Cummings would have violated decorum—that is, he would have had two conflicting bases for choosing his words in one poem—if he had used such adjectives as *scrumptious* and *splendiferous* in "All in Green." These words are facetious, and they are therefore appropriate in "Nobody Loses," a facetious poem. Decorum demands appropriate diction.

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Decorum of language is a very useful concept to a poet, for if he did not have a decorum he could not violate it. Poets in every age, but especially in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, have delighted in violating decorum. Donne, for instance, begins a love poem with language appropriate to back-fence argument: "For God's sake, hold your tongue!" This opening is much more unexpected than it would be if a decorum for love poems had not been established. The unexpected always depends for its existence on the expected.

To Any Member of My Generation

What was it you remember—the summer mornings
Down by the river at Richmond with a girl,
And as you kissed, clumsy in bathing costumes,
History guffawed in a rosebush. O what a warning—
If only we had known, if only we had known!
And when you looked in mirrors was this meaning
Plain as the pain in the centre of a pearl?
Horrible tomorrow in Teutonic postures
Making absurd the past we cannot disown?

Whenever we kissed we cocked the future's rifles
And from our wild-oat words, like dragon's teeth,
Death underfoot now arises; when we were gay
Dancing together in what we hoped was life,
Who was it in our arms but the whores of death
Whom we have found in our beds today, today?

GEORGE BARKER

Richmond (2): resort city up the Thames River a short distance from London. dragon's teeth (11): In Greek mythology, when Cadmus slew a dragon and sowed its teeth on a plain, armed men sprang up from them.

This poem opens nostalgically with an invitation to recall pleasant summer scenes of love-making by a river. Suddenly, in line 4, History is discovered lurking in a rosebush and watching the lovers like a dirty-minded old man. The reader is surprised, for he does not expect *History* to be followed by *guffawed*; decorum seems to require something more dignified. Yet this unexpected juxtaposition is essential to what the poem is saying: History gave a ribald jeer at the innocent young

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lovers, even as the coming of World War II mocked a whole generation. Barker is saying that his generation led their usual lives, ignorant of the coming war and unaware that they were soon to be swallowed up in it.

POETIC LICENSE

Poets are allowed—and take—much greater freedom with language than other writers and speakers. Poetic license, the right of a poet to deviate from standard practices in order to achieve a certain effect, allows him to ignore rules that prose writers customarily follow. Poetic license takes many forms. A poet may, for instance, invent new words or jam together old ones; he may leave their referents implied rather than stated. He may use a noun to do the work of an adjective or verb, an adjective to do the work of a noun. When Shakespeare's Cleopatra says of Caesar,

He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not
Be noble to myself

she is turning the noun *word* into a verb. Among modern poets E. E. Cummings especially uses this device:

What If a Much of a Which of a Wind

what if a much of a which of a wind
gives the truth to summer's lie;
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
and yanks immortal stars awry?
Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
(blow friend to fiend: blow space to time)
—when skies are hanged and oceans drowned,
the single secret will still be man

what if a keen of a lean wind flays
screaming hills with sleet and snow:
strangles valleys by ropes of thine
and stifles forests in white ago?

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Blow hope to terror; blow seeing to blind
(blow pity to envy and soul to mind)
—whose hearts are mountains, roots are trees,
it's they shall cry hello to the spring

what if a dawn of a doom of a dream
Blow this universe in two,
peels forever out of his grave
and sprinkles nowhere with me and you?
Blow soon to never and never to twice
(blow life to isn't: blow death to was)
—all nothing's only our hugest home;
the most who die, the more we live

E. E. CUMMINGS

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Poets also take liberties with syntax, the order of words in a sentence. There are even a few poems consisting entirely of words and phrases rather than of complete sentences. But the most common syntactical liberties are various kinds of inversions of prose order. "All in green went my love riding," writes Cummings, rather than "My love went riding all in green." Requirements of rhyme and rhythm often make it necessary to change the normal order of words, though excessive use of this license, as in the metrical paraphrase of Psalm 23 (see page 175), is a defect in a poem. A poet is supposed to be able to control the form of his poem; it should not control him.

EXERCISE 5

What kinds of poetic license are found in these poems?

To-day and Thee

The appointed winners in a long-stretch'd game;
The course of Time and nations—Egypt, India, Greece and Rome;
The past entire, with all its heroes, histories, arts, experiments,
Its store of songs, inventions, voyages, teachers, books,
Garner'd for now and thee—To think of it!
The heirdom all converged in thee!

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WALT WHITMAN

Spring and Fall: To a Young Child

Margaret, are you grieving
 Over Goldengrove unleaving?
 Leaves, like the things of man, you
 With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
 Ah! as the heart grows older
 It will come to such sights colder
 By and by, nor spare a sigh
 Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
 And yet you will weep and know why.
 Now no matter, child, the name:
 Sorrow's springs are the same,
 Nor mouth had, nor mind, expressed
 What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
 It is the blight man was born for,
 It is Margaret you mourn for.

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GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

PARAPHRASE

A bold use of poetic license, coupled with unfamiliar words, may make it difficult for a reader to grasp the sense of a poem. One useful way to help overcome the difficulty is to write a paraphrase. A paraphrase is a word-for-word rendering of a poem, or part of a poem, into clear prose. Although it is seldom necessary to paraphrase a whole poem, here, for purposes of demonstration, is a poem followed by a complete paraphrase.

Copy 4

On My First Daughter

Here lies to each her parent's ruth,
 Mary, the daughter of their youth;
 Yet all heaven's gifts, being heaven's due,
 It makes the father less to rue.
 At six months' end she parted hence
 With safety of her innocence;

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while? I suppose a good intention would be to communicate a stirring narrative, an original and important idea, or a reminiscent emotion to as many sensitive readers as possible, for a poet who desires to express only his personal idiosyncrasies (and there are many such) is no poet at all but an exhibitionist. All art, in spite of many modern tendencies to the contrary, is more or less enduring as its intention is more or less communal, granted that the receptive community is the intelligent and responsive part of the general population. That is a minority and always has been. The audience for verse is like a pyramid, the influence of critics increasing as we approach the tapering point at the top.

At the bottom of the pyramid is the unguided and sometimes uneducated part of the audience that loves rhymed platitudes and only occasionally, as it were by chance, deviates into appreciation of some solitary masterpiece. Rhymesters like Edgar Guest are the laureates of the many, who will vindicate their choice with almost passionate conviction against the claims of what they would call "high-brow" poetry. Once when Robert Frost was lecturing in Detroit, he made some jesting reference to Edgar Guest, forgetting that Detroit was his home town. At the end of the lecture an indignant dowager swept up to the platform. "What kind of car do you drive?" she asked belligerently. "A Ford," said Frost. "Mr. Guest," said she, "drives a Cadillac."

One solitary masterpiece often known to such people is Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Almost from the moment of its publication, this great poem captured the eager many and the discriminating few (with the exception of Dr. Johnson, whose prejudice against Gray was natural, almost prophetic, in view of the fact that in Gray's work were many buds that were to be among the flowers of romanticism a few decades later). Another popular masterpiece is Edward FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat*, but we can not put this in a class with the Elegy. It is quotable and at times magnificent, but the phrasing is almost too glib to be true, and much of its charm is in the exotic background, which convinces only for the moment, like stage scenery.

Just a little higher on the pyramid is the audience that loves the bad poems of good poets and hence does those poets a good deal of harm. The most conspicuous victim in our own times of such lethal enthusiasm is Edna Millay. Her popularity among people who chose

all the wrong things—the Bohemian (or Greenwich Village) pieces, especially that nauseating little bit beginning, "My candle burns at both ends," and some of the more absurd poems of passion, that might well have dragged her into oblivion along with Elinor Glynn and Ella Wheeler Wilcox—such popularity made conventional reviewers who aspired to be taken for critics afraid to risk their reputations by praising her. The fact is that she was, when freed of affectation and propaganda, a very fine poet, and nowhere more so than in the posthumous volume *Mine the Harvest*.

Before I ascend to the next step of the pyramid, the reader will, I hope, grant me a little digression. I have just spoken of Edna Millay as occasionally a "very fine" poet. There is an almost insurmountable difficulty in assigning poets to their relative places by means of adjectives. If we speak of a "great" poet, we are putting him in a very small company, and the word is often misapplied. Yet if we speak of a "good" poet, which ought to mean just what it says, nevertheless, we seem to be damning him with faint praise. Then there is the difficulty with the words "major" and "minor." Theoretically, a major poet should be one who, like Shakespeare, deals with major themes in substantial bulk, and a minor poet should be one who deals with minor themes within a small scope. Excellence may, again theoretically, be attributed to a minor as well as a major poet: Herrick is as good in his way as Shakespeare in his. But this distinction has, unfortunately, been lost, and if I should speak of Herrick as a minor poet, the reader would conclude that I meant second-rate. There is no solution for these adjectival problems, which I call to the reader's attention for his guidance in reading reviews and criticisms, including my own.

And now we may ascend to the next step of the pyramid. Here we find an audience of wide yet discriminating interest in poetry. These readers have, or desire to have, more information on the subject in order to enlarge the scope for their appreciation and give them more confidence in their own judgments. To this enlightened minority I address this book, and I need not describe it further.

At the apex of the pyramid is the small group of the elite, critics as well as poets. One of the most common foibles of mankind is the desire to be counted among the elite. Every member of the human race is a snob of one sort or another. Virgil's *Aeneid* presented the Emperor Augustus with princely Trojan ancestors, and Layamon's

Brut d'Angleterre did no less for the kings of England. In our own country every kind of organization exists for the veneration and display of ancestry, and more coats of arms adorn our hallways than ever the College of Heralds acknowledged. An ancestor of my own, writing shortly after the American Revolution, tells how itinerant peddlers went through New England selling coats of arms to the same men who, not a decade before, had been firing their flintlocks at the aristocracy they came to emulate.

It is not strange that the literary élite (and they have certain social overtones as well) should pour their influence down the pyramid and, in our time, set fashions in both poetry and criticism that have puzzled some, converted others, and, in any case, scared off so many readers who might have enjoyed poetry, that never before in history has the audience been so small or so uncertain of its own taste. This situation will be discussed more at length in my conclusion.

It is difficult to describe the ideal reader of poetry, because poetry itself is undefinable. It is like electricity, which is beyond though we still continue to light our lamps. It is like life itself, which remains a mystery, although, by the accumulation of we may learn to live well and wisely. So it is with the judgment of poetry: the continued familiarity with it develops an audience capable of an instinctive choice of the best.

The Development of Poetic Style

In the twentieth century there have been a number of revolutions in poetry that will go down in literary history, though some of the exemplars of them may not. For example, the "imaging" of Lowell is an item that history will have to record, but her own writings are a lifeless heap of labored and synthetic decorations. The audience that she attracted by her personal vigor and keenness has fallen away, and it is not likely that she will gain a new one. Many fashionable poets have suffered the same fate. No poet of his time was more popular than Abraham Cowley, who survives in literary history but is seldom read. Within thirty years his works were neglected, and in 1737 Pope could write, "Who now reads Cowley?" —a cruel but not inappropriate question.

With so many schools and experiments as we have at present, we are forced to go back and consider which qualities in poetry remain

true amid changes of taste, and which are merely passing phenomena. As a background for conclusions, let us look into the history of our poetry and consider the evolution of form and content, both in this passage and in chapters to come.

Anglo-Saxon verse was written in lines of four accents with a pause dividing the line into two halves. Each accent had an indeterminate number of weak syllables grouped around it. There was no rhyme, but alliteration, similar stressed consonant sounds, adorned the verse. Some two centuries before Chaucer, our verse began shifting its emphasis from the alliterative patterns of the Anglo-Saxons to the rhymed pattern of the Continent. The transitional poem, partly alliterated and partly rhymed, was Layamon's *Brut*, c. 1225. That was the first evolution into the rhymed and metered verse that we know.

Such changes do not necessarily involve discarding what has gone before. We still use alliteration, though not in a fixed scheme, and some of the syllabic freedom of Anglo-Saxon verse with a good deal more restraint, so that we have many irregularities that would be impossible in formal French verse. The meters that we know today, many of them established in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, supplanted the somewhat limited technique of ancient times, yet absorbed some of its principles.

Such evolution is like a natural growth, a survival of the fittest. Elements that aid or enrich expression are retained; the rest discarded.

The next experiment was a failure, yet influenced our verse. English verse, as we know, is measured by accents, classic verse by long and short syllables, or time meter.* Read the following line with as little accent or stress as possible and emphasizing the difference between the long and short syllables, and you will get some idea of a metric based on equal time units:

Golden the dreams from her childhood, bright on the lawn and the peachbough.

It is impossible to maintain this effect in our verse, for English is basically an accentual language. Some of the early Elizabethans did not agree, and attempted to substitute time meter for accent meter.

* Accentual meter is sometimes called *qualitative* verse; time meter, *quantitative* verse, but I have abandoned these terms as confusing and awkward.

Richard Stanyhurst tried it in his translation of the *Aeneid*, with comical results. I quote for the amusement of the reader this description of Dido dying on her funeral pyre:

Thrice did she endeavor to mount and rest on her elbow;
Thrice to her bed sliding she quails, with whirligig eyesight
Up to the sky staring, with belling screechery she roareth,
When she the desired sunbeams with faint eye receiveth.

Incited by an academic pedant named Gabriel Harvey, poets as capable as Spenser and Sidney made tentative experiments in classical time units. The Elizabethan public became greatly interested. When Queen Elizabeth visited a grammar school and asked the children what they would like her to talk about, they requested an example of the classic hexameter in English, to which the Queen replied, extemporizing:

Persius a crab-staff, bawdy Martial, Ovid a fine wag.

The hexameter is faulty, but the wonder is that it was requested or produced at all. In what school would our children demand a hexameter and what President would be able to accommodate them?

The musician-poet Thomas Campion brought matters to a head with his pamphlet, *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602), in which he not only discarded rhyme and accentual meter but provided examples of the classic forms transferred to English verse. This essay was answered by the gentle poet Samuel Daniel, in his *Defence of Rhyme* (1603), in which he wondered that a poet of such commendable rhymes as Campion should attack rhyme. Out of all this controversy, with its scores of attempts in time meter, just one poem, a superb poem, survives, Campion's *Rose-cheeked Laura*:

Rose-cheeked Laura, come;
Sing thou smoothly with thy beauty's
Silent music, either other
Sweetly gracing.

Lovely forms do flow
From consent divinely framèd:
Heav'n is music, and thy beauty's
Birth is heavenly.

These dull notes we sing
Discords need for helps to grace them;
Only beauty purely loving
Knows no discord;

But still moves delight,
Like clear springs renewed by flowing,
Ever perfect, ever in them-
Selves eternal.

Blank verse as the vehicle for drama was one of the most important developments in the Age of Elizabeth. I have described elsewhere its invention in the Earl of Surrey's translation of Virgil, its transformation in Marlowe's mighty line into a medium of such strength that it served as the foundation of Shakespeare's dramatic verse. Shakespeare's flexible technique not only evolved within itself but absorbed variations from other playwrights, notably, in his later plays, from Fletcher. Fletcher made extensive use of what is sometimes called the "monosyllabic feminine ending"; that is, unlike the normal feminine ending, like "feather," where the weak syllable is part of the last word, it employs two monosyllabic words: thus, from Fletcher's *The Wild-goose Chase*:

And I'll be short; I'll tell you because I love you,
and from Shakespeare's *Henry the Eighth*:

She shall be lov'd and fear'd; her own shall bless her.

On no other evidence than the prevalence of these endings in *Henry the Eighth*, some foolish scholars have assigned the play, or at least part of it, to Fletcher. This is nonsense; the play is Shakespeare's throughout. The most annoying aspect of that wrong attribution is that Shakespeare's beautiful song in *Henry the Eighth*, "Orpheus with his lute," is in many anthologies assigned to Fletcher, or to Shakespeare with a question mark.

Elizabethan dramatic blank verse established the form in a series of important works which have extended down to our own day in much of the work of E. A. Robinson and Robert Frost.

The next swing of the pendulum in English verse was John Donne's deliberate roughening of meter, distributing his accents

with wild freedom so that in many of his lines we have an unexpected jar when an accent pounds a syllable where the meter does not demand it, or a feeling of surprised emptiness where an accent is missing from its accustomed place. Ben Jonson remarked to William Drummond of Hawthornden that "Donne for not keeping of accent deserved hanging" and that "Donne himself for not being understood would perish." This prophesy nearly came true, for after his death Donne was almost entirely forgotten until his revival in the 1920s, since when he has been overpraised. His influence on modern English and American poetry has been enormous under the aegis of T. S. Eliot.

In the mid seventeenth century, Edmund Waller revolted against the looseness and roughness of Donne and his followers and imposed on English verse the tight, closed five-stress couplet, commonly called the Heroic Couplet, in which the verse is entirely smooth and each couplet has an independent syntax, never overflowing into any other. Waller's couplet, the vehicle for Dryden's long poems and the exclusive vehicle for Pope, ruled the eighteenth century, until once again the pendulum swung, and the Romantic poets overthrew it, and when they did write couplets, they delighted in opening them so that one would glide into another through whole paragraphs, as in Keats's *Endymion*:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothing...; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'erdarkened ways
Made for our searching....

And so forth. Perhaps Keats overdid it. Revolutionaries always go to extremes.

A single poem of great significance in the development of our verse is Coleridge's *Christabel*. Whether this poem was merely symp-

tomatic of Romantic freedom in general or directly influential on the work of other poets, we cannot know, but it embodied certain principles that are with us still. Coleridge noted that "the meter of *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle; namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four."

The verse easily absorbs these irregularities:

The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek—
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

It is not necessary to go into Coleridge's application of his principle and the fact that he did not always have the four accents and that the variety of the syllables ranged from four to thirteen. The two important points are that the principle was by no means "new" as Coleridge stated, and that from the time of the Romantic poets to the present day it has been accepted as one phase of poetic practice, especially in four-stress verse. Readers who have followed my exposition will easily recognize Coleridge's "new" principle as the fundamental rule in Anglo-Saxon verse. It was also used freely in Elizabethan song poetry. Modern poets avail themselves of this syllabic freedom, sometimes to excess. It is not, in general, applied to five-stress verse, though both Robert Bridges and his friend Gerard Manley Hopkins extended it to the pentameter (see pages 84 and 184).

The next revolt took place in America, and was, of course, Whitman's. I should not call Whitman's work free verse, however, but *dithyrambic* verse; that is, a basically metrical rhythm over which play extra syllables or long pauses where syllables are missing. The

meter changes from one kind to another with the greatest freedom. When he is writing at his lyric best, his meter is most noticeable, as for example:

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond where the child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot....

The accents here are muted, and the verse has almost the effect of classic dactylic meter. Again, we have a loose iambic effect in

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

We do not find completely non-metrical verse until we come to the work of Stephen Crane, Carl Sandburg, and William Carlos Williams, to name only three of the best known out of a large crowd.

Today there are innumerable varieties of experience in verse, from the free and incomprehensible *Cantos* of Ezra Pound to the strict traditionalism—classicism, one might say—of Robert Frost.

Modes of thought change as well as forms of poetry and the two are inextricably bound together. The Elizabethans were pastoral, Platonic, and steeped in music. The school of Donne was obsessed with inner searching of the self, and thought in terms of symbols and fantastic metaphors. The eighteenth century made reason its guide and wit its idiom. Pope and his school had an aversion to wild nature; they preferred parks and formal gardens and the elegance of the strict heroic couplet. The Romantic poet looked to imagination rather than reason as his guide and loved the solitudes of forest and hill, where, amid untrammeled Nature, he could feel akin to cosmic forces and tune his soul to immensity. The great Victorians were concerned with ethical and philosophical matters, with the exception of Browning's dramatic monologues, which, like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but from a far different angle, sprang from a sheer delight in observing people and the human comedy.

With all these changes of form and content behind us, it is not

surprising that modern poetry should abound in schools and innovators. In general, we have passed through our "metaphysical" period, and the influence of T. S. Eliot is on the decline. The trend now favors the elegance and precision of the eighteenth century.

In our quick and turbulent age, change will doubtless be more frequent than in the past, and the problem of the critic more complex. What roots should we look for to determine whether a poet is a living growth or a parasite without roots—like mistletoe, beloved by druids and young lovers but scarcely desired by the oak? How sha'll we distinguish between the fakirs and the prophets?

All that we can say is that the majority of the modern poets who give us satisfaction, such as Bridges, Frost, Robinson, Sassoon, Hodgson, and the great Irish school of Yeats, Stephens, and Gogarty, regard life, in spite of its dissonances, as essentially a harmony in which they are a part. They are at home in this world.

It is not true, as some critics contend, that attention to the past—both history and poetic tradition—dulls the perceptions to what is going on around one. In Robert Bridges' philosophical epic, *The Testament of Beauty*, the timelessness of the images is a delight. The poet gives us a picture of himself as he sits on his porch composing his "loose Alexandrines." As he writes, he sees an ouzel building her nest in the rafters. Or an aeroplane passes through the sky and into his poem. Or a steam thresher chatters in the field beyond. All these realistic and modern details he weaves into the timeless theme of his poem, which celebrates the gradual evolution of the spirit of man toward perfection.

We might say that all great poetry, of whatever age, has the power of moving on through the years, keeping pace with mankind through his ever-changing landscape. It is the second-rate, following the current vogue, that soon goes out of fashion. All great poetry is modern. "Chaucer's power of fascination is enduring," as Matthew Arnold noted. We can go back even farther than Chaucer and relive with the authors of antiquity the adventures, material and spiritual, which are with us in the flesh and music of their lines.

Most of our great poets have added to their native tradition a knowledge of the ancients. A recent example of one so influenced is A. E. Housman. His work is the tragic song of the English countryside and its simple folk. His diction depends for its effect al-

most wholly on words of native stock. His forms, too, are basic, usually variations of the folk ballad. But reading on, having followed him through Shropshire and through folk poetry, we strike a deeper root, one that goes back to the Greeks, their restraint, polish, and exalted stoicism. It is not surprising to learn that Housman lived a double life, as poet and as Classical scholar.

Or take Robert Frost. He sprang into fame as the exponent of northern New England in the cadences of its own idiom. Reading carefully, we hear the controlled music of his conversational style. His realism is not photographic; it is symbolic of the relation between man and nature and God, and the redeeming companionship between man and man. Most of his poems are dialogues between two people in the poem or between the poet and his reader. When we seek the roots that sustain his poetry, we at first find the obvious one, that of New England and Emerson, and there is another going back through English literature to the work of George Crabbe, and yet another that goes back to Greek literature and thought.

Frost is an excellent Greek scholar, and the light of Athens is on his philosophy. Some years ago at an academic gathering a student was arguing in favor of the rootless kind of poetry then in vogue and against formal education for the poet. He cited Frost as a poet who had developed through his inborn talent without recourse to the past. By good fortune, a professor of Greek, who had formerly taught Frost at Harvard, was among those present. He took us up into his study and produced his old records. Opposite Frost's name, across the page, recitation after recitation, test after test, was an unbroken series of *As*.

The deepest root of poetry penetrates so far that it loses itself in the entangled aspirations of mankind. A good poet is at home in his countryside and his world, and at one with the spirits and traditions of the past. These truths, however, are but aspects of the one truth that poetry is the highest expression of what is most natural to man in every phase of his life. The single idea of the poet is to create from disharmony, harmony; from formlessness, form, and to be glad in the work of his hands for its own sake, whether or not anyone will, in the future, remember his name.

When I resemble her to thee
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst thou sprung
In deserts where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die, that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee;
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!

EDMUND WALLER

1. Paraphrase line 2 and give synonyms for *resemble* (line 4), *deserts* (line 9) and *suffer* (line 14).
2. What does the speaker of the poem want? Trace the argumentative progression.
3. What is the theme? The tone?

CONVENTIONS AND TRADITIONS

Poems, like all other forms of art, have their conventions—artificial and sometimes unrealistic devices that are accepted by common agreement between the artist and his public. In the movies, for instance, the passage of time is sometimes indicated by a series of rapidly flashed pictures of newspaper headlines and easily recognized events. The audience may spend only a minute looking at the pictures, yet it agrees to accept that minute as equivalent to twenty-five years in the hero's life. Among the conventions of poems are rhyme, meter, fixed forms, symbols—in fact, any of the devices that make poems different from ordinary discourse. One kind of poem—necessarily excluded from this book because of its length—which makes elaborate use of conventions is

LYRIC POETRY

Originally, as its Greek name suggests, a *lyric* was a poem sung to the music of a lyre. This earlier meaning—a poem made for singing—is still current today, when we use lyrics to mean the words of a popular song. But the kind of printed poem we now call a *lyric* is usually something else, for over the past five hundred years the nature of lyric poetry has changed greatly. Ever since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, poets have written less often for singers, more often for readers. In general, this tendency has made lyric poems contain less word-music and (since they can be pondered on a page) more thought—and perhaps more complicated feelings.

What Is a Lyric Poem?

Here is a rough definition of a lyric as it is written today: a short poem expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker. Often a poet will write a lyric in the first person ("I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree"), but not always. A lyric can also be in the first person plural, as in Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" (page 322). Or, a lyric might describe an object or recall an experience without the speaker's ever bringing himself or herself into it. (For an example of such a lyric, one in which the poet refrains from saying "I," see Theodore Roethke's "Root Cellar" on page 86 or Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Pied Beauty" on page 90.)

Perhaps because, rightly or wrongly, some people still think of lyrics as lyre-strummings, they expect a lyric to be an outburst of feeling, somewhat resembling a song, at least containing musical elements such as rhyme, rhythm, or sound effects. Such expectations are fulfilled in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," that impassioned lyric full of language rich in sound. Many contemporary poets, however, write short poems in which they voice opinions or complicated feelings—poems that no reader would dream of trying to sing.

But in the sense in which we use it, *lyric* will usually apply to a kind of poem you can easily recognize. Here, for instance, are two lyrics. They differ sharply in subject and theme, but they have traits in common: both are short, and (as you will find) both set forth one speaker's definite, unmistakable feelings.

Robert Hayden (1913–1980)

Those Winter Sundays

1962

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.

10

Questions

1. Jot down a brief paraphrase of this poem. In your paraphrase, clearly show what the speaker finds himself remembering.
2. What are the speaker's various feelings? What do you understand from the words *chronic angers* and *austere*?
3. With what specific details does the poem make the past seem real?
4. What is the subject of Hayden's poem? How would you state its theme?

Adrienne Rich* (b. 1929)*Aunt Jennifer's Tigers**

1951

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

Compare

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" with Adrienne Rich's critical comments on the poem reprinted in the "Writing Effectively" section at the end of this chapter.

NARRATIVE POETRY

Although a lyric sometimes relates an incident, or like "Those Winter Sundays" draws a scene, it does not usually relate a series of events. That happens in a narrative poem, one whose main purpose is to tell a story.

Narrative poetry dates back to the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (composed before 2000 B.C.) and Homer's epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (composed before 700 B.C.). It may well have originated much earlier. In England and Scotland, storytelling poems have long been popular; in the late Middle Ages, ballads—or storytelling songs—circulated widely. Some, such as "Sir Patrick Spence" and "Bonny Barbara Allan," survive in our day, and folksingers sometimes perform them.

Evidently the art of narrative poetry invites the skills of a writer of fiction: the ability to draw characters and settings, to engage attention, to shape a plot. Needless to say, it calls for all the skills of a poet as well. In the English language today, lyrics seem more plentiful than other kinds of poetry. Although there has recently been a revival of interest in writing narrative poems, they have a far smaller audience than the readership enjoyed by long verse narratives, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline* and Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, in the nineteenth century.

Anonymous* (traditional Scottish ballad)*Sir Patrick Spence**

The king sits in Dumferling toune,
Drinking the blude-reid wine:
"O whar will I get guid sailor,
To sail this schip of mine?"

Up and spak an eldern knicht,^o
Sat at the kings richt kne:
"Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor
That sails upon the se."

The king has written a braid letter,
And signed it wi' his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence,
Was walking on the sand.

The first line that Sir Patrick red,
A loud lauch lauchèd he;
The next line that Sir Patrick red,
The teir blinded his ee.

"O wha^o is this has don this deid,
This ill deid don to me,
To send me out this time o' the yeir,
To sail upon the se!

"Mak haste, mak'haste, my mirry men all,
Our guid schip sails the morne."
"O say na sae,^o my master deir,
For I feir a deadlie storine.

"Late late yestreen I saw the new moone,
Wi' the auld moone in hir arme,
And I feir, I feir, my deir master,
That we will cum to harme."

O our Scots nobles wer richt laith^o
To weet^o their cork-heild schoone,
Bot lang owre^o a' the play wer playd,
Their hats they swam aboone.^o

O lang, lang may their ladies sit,
Wi' their fans into their hand,
Or ere^o they se Sir Patrick Spence
Cum sailing to the land.

O lang, lang may the ladies stand,
Wi' their gold kems^o in their hair,

knight 5

10

15

20

who

30

loath

wet; shoes

30

long before

above (their heads)

before 35

combs

Haf owre,[°] haf owre to Aberdour,
It's fiftie fadom deip,
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,
Wi' the Scots lords at his feit.

halfway over

SIR PATRICK SPENCE. 9 braid: Broad, but broad in what sense? Among guesses are plain-spoken, official, and on wide paper.

Questions

- That the king drinks "blude-reid wine" (line 2)—what meaning do you find in that detail? What does it hint, or foreshadow?
- What do you make of this king and his motives for sending Spence and the Scots lords into an impending storm? Is he a fool, is he cruel and inconsiderate, is he deliberately trying to drown Sir Patrick and his crew, or is it impossible for us to know? Let your answer depend on the poem alone, not on anything you read into it.
- Comment on this ballad's methods of storytelling. Is the story told too briefly for us to care what happens to Spence and his men, or are there any means by which the poet makes us feel compassion for them? Do you resent the lack of a detailed account of the shipwreck?
- Lines 25–28—the new moon with the old moon in her arm—have been much admired as poetry. What does this stanza contribute to the story as well?

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

"Out, Out—"

1916

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont.
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
And nothing happened: day was all but done.
Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them "Supper." At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off—

10

15

20

25

So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

30

"OUT, OUT—" The title of this poem echoes the words of Shakespeare's Macbeth on receiving news that his queen is dead: "Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (*Macbeth* 5.5.23–28).

Questions

- How does Frost make the buzz-saw appear sinister? How does he make it seem, in another way, like a friend?
- What do you make of the people who surround the boy—the "they" of the poem? Who might they be? Do they seem to you concerned and compassionate, cruel, indifferent, or what?
- What does Frost's reference to *Macbeth* contribute to your understanding of "Out, Out—"? How would you state the theme of Frost's poem?
- Set this poem side by side with "Sir Patrick Spence." How does "Out, Out—" resemble that medieval folk ballad in subject, or differ from it? How is Frost's poem similar or different in its way of telling a story?

DRAMATIC POETRY

A third kind of poetry is dramatic poetry, which presents the voice of an imaginary character (or characters) speaking directly, without any additional narration by the author.

A dramatic poem, according to T. S. Eliot, does not consist of "what the poet would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character." Strictly speaking, the term *dramatic poetry* describes any verse written for the stage (and until a few centuries ago most playwrights, like Shakespeare and Molière, wrote their plays mainly in verse).

Dramatic Monologue

The term *dramatic poetry* most often refers to the dramatic monologue, a poem written as a speech made by a character (other than the author) at some decisive moment. A dramatic monologue is usually addressed by the speaker to some other character who remains silent. If the listener replies, the poem becomes a dialogue (such as Thomas Hardy's "The Ruined Maid" on page 59) in which the story unfolds in the conversation between two speakers.

The Victorian poet Robert Browning, who developed the form of the dramatic monologue, liked to put words in the mouths of characters who were conspicuously nasty, weak, reckless, or crazy; see, for instance, Browning's "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (page 403), in which the speaker is an obsessively proud and jealous monk. The dramatic monologue has been a popular form among American poets, including Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, Randall Jarrell, Sylvia Plath,

anything under the sun. Like Dyer, John Milton described sick sheep in "Lycidas," a poem few readers have thought unpoetic:

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But, swell'n with wind and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread . . .

What makes Milton's lines better poetry than Dyer's is, among other things, a difference in attitude. Sick sheep to Dyer mean the loss of a few shillings and pence; to Milton, whose sheep stand for English Christendom, they mean a moral catastrophe.

■ WRITING *effectively*

Adrienne Rich on Writing

Recalling "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"

1971

I know that my style was formed first by male poets: by the men I was reading as an undergraduate—Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNeice, Stevens, Yeats. What I chiefly learned from them was craft. But poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know. Looking back at poems I wrote before I was 21, I'm startled because beneath the conscious craft are glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," written while I was a student, looks with deliberate detachment at this split. In writing this poem, composed and apparently cool as it is, I thought I was creating a portrait of an imaginary woman. But this woman suffers from the opposition of her imagination, worked out in tapestry, and her life-style, "ringed with ordeals she was mastered by." It was important to me that Aunt Jennifer was a person as distinct from myself as possible—distanced by the formalism of the poem, by its objective, observant tone—even by putting the woman in a different generation.

In those years formalism was part of the strategy—like asbestos gloves, it allowed me to handle materials I couldn't pick up bare-handed.

From "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision"



Adrienne Rich

THINKING ABOUT PARAPHRASING

A poet takes pains to choose each word of a poem for both its sound and its exact shade of meaning. Since a poem's full effect is so completely wedded to its exact

and pieces, Cummings suggests the flexibility of language and conveys the need to break out of customary ways of using words to define experience. As the preceding discussion illustrates, defining what a poem is (and what it is not) is almost impossible. It is true that most poems, particularly those divided into stanzas, look like poems, and it is also true that poems tend to use compressed language. Beyond this, however, what makes a poem a poem is more a matter of degree than a question of whether or not it conforms to a strict set of rules. A poem is likely to use *more* imagery, figurative language, rhyme, and so on than a prose piece—but, then again, it may not.

READING POETRY

♦ ♦ ♦

Some readers say they do not like poetry because they find it obscure or intimidating. One reason some people have difficulty reading poetry is that it tends to present information in subtle (and therefore potentially confusing) ways; it does not immediately "get to the point" as journalistic articles or business letters do. One could certainly argue that by concentrating experience, poetry actually "gets to the point" in ways—and to degrees—that other kinds of writing do not. Even so, some readers see poetry as an alien form. They have the misconception that poetry is always filled with obscure allusions, complex metrical schemes, and flowery diction. Others, feeling excluded from what they see as its secret language and mysterious structure, approach poetry as something that must be deciphered. Certainly, reading poetry often requires hard work and concentration. Because it is compressed, poetry often omits exposition and explanation; consequently, readers must be willing to take the time to read closely—to interpret ideas and supply missing connections. Many readers are simply not motivated to dig deeply for what they perceive to be uncertain rewards. But not all poems are difficult, and even those that are difficult are often well worth the effort. (For specific suggestions about how to read poetry, see Chapter 12.)

RECOGNIZING KINDS OF POETRY

♦ ♦ ♦

Most poems are either *narrative* poems, which recount a story, or *lyric* poems, which communicate a speaker's mood, feelings, or state of mind.

NARRATIVE POETRY

Although any brief poem that tells a story, such as Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" (p. 827), may be considered a narrative poem, the two most familiar forms of narrative poetry are the *epic* and the *ballad*.

Browning's "My Last Duchess," in which the poet creates a Renaissance Italian duke whose words reveal much more about himself than the aristocratic speaker intends.

Robert Browning (1812–1889)

My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessened so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,

1842

5

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—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. 'In, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet

• The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

55
50
55
MY LAST DUCHESS. Ferrara, a city in northern Italy, is the scene. Browning may have modeled his speaker after Alonzo, Duke of Ferrara (1533–1598). 3 Frà Pandolf and 56 Claus of Innsbruck: fictitious names of artists.

Questions

1. Whom is the Duke addressing? What is this person's business in Ferrara?
2. What is the Duke's opinion of his last Duchess's personality? Do we see her character differently?
3. If the Duke was unhappy with the Duchess's behavior, why didn't he make his displeasure known? Cite a specific passage to explain his reticence.
4. How much do we know about the fate of the last Duchess? Would it help our understanding of the poem to know more?
5. Does Browning imply any connection between the Duke's art collection and his attitude toward his wife?

DIDACTIC POETRY

More fashionable in former times was a fourth variety of poetry, didactic poetry: a poem written to state a message or teach a body of knowledge. In a lyric, a speaker may express sadness; in a didactic poem, he or she may explain that sadness is inherent in life. Poems that impart a body of knowledge, such as Ovid's *Art of Love* and Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*, are didactic. Such instructive poetry was favored especially by classical Latin poets and by English poets of the eighteenth century. In *The Fleece* (1757), John Dyer celebrated the British woolen industry and included practical advice on raising sheep:

In cold stiff soils the bleaters oft complain
Of gouty ails, by shepherds termed the halt:
Those let the neighboring fold or ready crook
Detain, and press into their cloven feet
Corrosive drugs, deep-searching arsenic,
Dry alum, verdigris, or vitriol keen.

One might agree with Dr. Johnson's comment on Dyer's effort: "The subject, Sir, cannot be made poetical." But it may be argued that the subject of didactic poetry

Presentation Rubric

2. Yuni Arinda
 3. Rezki Tivani
 4. Rahma Iis
 5. Aulia Fachli

4

Evaluating Student Presentations					
	Developed by Information Technology Evaluation Services, NC Department of Public Instruction				
	1	2	3	4	Total
Organization	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	
Subject Knowledge	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.	
Graphics	Student uses superfluous graphics or no graphics	Student occasionally uses graphics that rarely support text and presentation.	Student's graphics relate to text and presentation.	Student's graphics explain and reinforce screen text and presentation.	
Mechanics	Student's presentation has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	
Eye Contact	Student reads all of report with no eye contact.	Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.	Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.	Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.	
Elocution	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.	Student's voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.	Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.	
				Total Points:	

Lesson Plan

(SAP)

Course : Poetry 1 Credit Hour : 2

Study Program: English Code : ING 208

Faculty : Arts and Languages

Docent : Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.

: Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A.

Learning Outcomes

Main Competence:

Upon the completion of the course, students are expected to be able appreciate poetry, especially the ones written in English

Supporting Competence:

Students are able to identify the formal qualities or elements of poetry

Soft skills/Character: Students are endowed with the ability to collaborate with others; express their opinion; show high commitment and passion in what they are doing; read between the lines and think critically.

Topics:

1. Speaker
 2. Words
 3. Figurative Languages
 - Metaphor and Simile,
 - Personification, apostrophe, overstatement, understatement, metonymy, synecdoche, paradox, and pun.
 4. Imagery
 5. Irony and Tone
 6. Sound and Rhythm

Lesson Plan

stage	Lecturer's Activities	Students' activities	Assessment	Media
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the overview of lesson in meeting 6-13 2. Explain the benefit students can gain from their understanding of the formal qualities or elements of poetry 3. Explain the competences they should achieve by the end of meeting 13 	Listen to the lecture		Syllabus
Presentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read “Hawk Roosting” aloud 2. Activate students’ background knowledge on the speaker of a poem by asking them to guess who the “I” in the poem might be. 3. Listen to and write down students’ response on the white board. 4. Elicits to students about the difference between the poets and the character (person or voice or persona or mask) they use in their poem 5. Read “Cargoes” 6. Explain to students the importance 	<p>Listen to the recital Respond to the lecturer Listen to the lecture and work to figure out who the speaker of the poem assigned. Listen to the recital Listen to the lecture</p>	<p>Students led presentation on the elements of poetry assigned to them. A 1-2 pages device paper which is due to the end of meeting 13.</p>	<p>Whiteboard PowerPoints slides PowerPoints slides</p>

	<p>of words and their meaning in poetry. (denotative and connotative meaning of words).</p> <p>7. Tutor students how to dig out words' connotative meaning through context, especially those available in the text or things around the text</p> <p>8. Read "The Eagle" aloud</p> <p>9. Explain to students figure of speech or figurative languages used in poetry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Metaphor and simile b. personification apostrophe, overstatement, understatement, metonymy, synecdoche, paradox, and pun. <p>10. Read "Embrace" aloud</p> <p>11. Explain the use of image in poetry and types of imagery commonly grouped. After that the lecture will tutor them to find</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. visual imagery b. audio imagery c. tactile imagery d. other sensory experiences. 	<p>Working to find connotative meaning of specific words in poem assigned to them</p> <p>Listen to the recital</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p> <p>Students work to find figure of speech just explained in poems assigned to them.</p> <p>Listen to the recital</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p> <p>Work to find out sensory experience or imagery describe in poems assigned to them</p>	<p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p>
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	<p>11. Read “Making it in Poetry” aloud</p> <p>12. Explain that poetry employs Irony, manner of speaking that describe discrepancy.</p> <p>13. Explain to students about “tone” in poetry. Elicit to them some range of adjective that can describe the tone of the poem.</p> <p>14. Read “We Real Cool” aloud or play the audio tape of it.</p> <p>15. Elicit to them than in poetry sound could carry great weight (meaningful)</p> <p>16. Tutor them in :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. alliteration and assonance b. onomatopoeia c. rime <p>17. Elicit to students that poetry also explores rhythm, the heart of all natural phenomena.</p> <p>18. Tutor them to recognize metric system in poetry.</p>	<p>Listen to the recital.</p> <p>Listen to the lecture.</p> <p>Work to find out irony used in poems assigned to them</p> <p>Listen to the lecture.</p> <p>Work to find out irony used in poems assigned to them</p> <p>Listen to the recital /audio</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p> <p>Work to spot sound effect in poems assigned to them</p> <p>Listen to the lecture</p> <p>Work to recognize rhythm pattern in poems assigned to them</p>		<p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p> <p>PowerPoint slides</p> <p>Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.</p>
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	a. Iamb, trochee, Anapest, Dactyl, spondee, pyrrhic b. manometer, diameter, trimester, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, heptameter, heptameter, octameter.			
Closing	19. Close the session. a. Ask students questions on topics which have been covered b. Respond to students' answer c. Assign them to be prepared for student led presentation which will be held in the 12 th and 13 th week on the elements of poetry	Respond to the questions		

Assessment Rubric:

1. Presentation rubric (evaluating students presentation) adopted from <http://www.ncsu.edu/midlink/rub.pres.html> (see appendix)
2. Essay rubric adopted from <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/printouts/Essay%20Rubric.pdf>

References:

1. Kirschner, L & Mandell, S. 2000. *Literature reading reacting writing*. Harcourt Brace: New York.
2. Kennedy, X.J. & Gioia, d. 2010. *An introduction to poetry*. Longman: New York.

Appendices:

1. PowerPoint slides print outs
2. Photocopied material forwarded to students in advance
3. Rubric to evaluate students' presentation & essay

Appendices:

4. PowerPoint slides print outs
5. Photocopied material forwarded to students in advance



Formal qualities of Poetry

Delvi Wahyuni

05/11/2012 ms.dev4

1



Speaker

- Most of us can tell the difference between persons we meet in real life and those who inhabit work of art
- Some are unable to do it.
- Poetry readers tend to equate the poet with the voice in the poem
- Consider this

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1



Speaker

- An inscription on a grave stone of a baby
*Since I have been so quickly done for
I wonder what I was begun for.*
- It is impossible that the dead baby is the poet.
- So, the speaker in a poem is the persona,
a fictitious character, a creation, a mask.
- Speaker's job is to describe events,
feelings and ideas to readers.

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1

Words, words, words

- Every word has at least one denotation or definition in the dictionary.
- A word also has some connotations or overtones, suggestions and additional meaning that it gains from all the context in which we have met in the past.

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4

Words, words, words

- Thus, a word can say and at the same time suggest.
e.g. an anonymous Victorian jingle
Here's a little ditty that you really ought to know:
Horses "sweat" and men "perspire" but ladies only "glow."

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5

Figurative Languages

- Poetry is not necessarily the sole user of figurative languages.
- Day-to-day conversation sometimes also uses this kind of language.
- We exaggerate; we liken something with something else; we give inanimate object human-like qualities, etc

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6

Simile

- It is a comparison of two things
- Indicative words: like, as, than, resembles.
- Simile describe similarities, however things being compared must be dissimilar in kind.

E.g.

- your fingers are like sausages
- Her eyes resemble northern stars.

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7

Metaphor

- It is a statement that one thing is another thing.
 - Your fingers are sausages
- Implied metaphor: one that uses neither a connective nor the verb to be
- My love has red petals and sharp thorns.
- Mixed metaphor:
 - when there is a string of stale metaphor in the poem.
 - When the poet mixes different metaphor in the poem.

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8

Personification

- It is a figure of speech in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (truth, nature) is made human.

The wind

*The wind stood up and gave a shout.
He whistled on his fingers and
Kicked the withered leaves about
And thumped the branches with his hand
And said he'd kill and kill,
And so he will and so he will.*

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9

Apostrophe

- A way of addressing someone or something invisible or not ordinarily spoken to, e.g. an absent person or historical figures
- An "O" may be put in front of apostrophe to announce a serious and lofty tones.
- It usually goes hand in hand with personification.
- E.g. "Return Delight"
- "O, moon!"

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10

Overstatement and Understatement

- Overstatement or hyperbole: Emphasis with exaggeration to achieve certain effect.
 - Saying more than is meant
- "Every time I shake, some skinny gal loses her home"
- Understatement: Implying more than is said
 - Saying less than is meant
- "for the destruction ice/ Is also great/ And would suffice"

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11

Metonymy and Synecdoche

- Metonymy: the name of a thing is for that of another closely associated with it.
"The White House decided"
- Synecdoche: the substitution of the part for the whole.
"Give us today our daily bread"

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12

Paradox

- It occurs in a statement that at first strikes us as self-contradictory but that on reflection makes some sense.
- Consider how the Blind Milton describe his experience of seeing his dead wife in a dream

*But oh, as to embrace me she inclined,
I wake, she fled, and day brought back my
night.*

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13

Pun

- Complete term: *paronomasia* or play on words
- It reminds us of another word or other words of similar or identical sound but of very different denotation
 - The bigness of canon is skillful

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14

Imagery

- It's better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works (Ezra Pound)
- In a Station of the Metro*
- The apparition of these faced in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough*

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15

Imagery

- A word or sequence of words that refers to any sensory experience.
- Visual imagery: sight
- Auditory imagery : sound
- Tactile imagery: touch
- Odor, taste, bodily sensation like pain, the prickling of gooseflesh, the quenching of thirst, the perception of something cold

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16

Imagery

- Imagery is helpful in establishing the **atmosphere of mood** of the poem through connotation or emotional association it might engender.
- Synesthesia:
- A special use of imagery when one sense is described in a way that is more appropriate for another
 - E.g. When a sound is described with color.

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17

Irony

- It's a manner of speaking that implies a discrepancy.
- Or, discrepancy occurs between two layers of meaning
- Skillfully used, Irony is a powerful means to make pointed comment on a situation or of manipulating the a reader's emotion
- It is used to see the difference between the poet and the words of a fictitious character.

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Irony

- In order to make Irony work, readers must be able to see the disparity between what is said and what is meant.
- Observe this poem:

*Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the*

*And the frightened steed ran alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind*

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Irony

- Types of Irony
- Ironic point of view
- Dramatic irony
- Ironic point of view
- Situational irony
- Verbal irony
 - Sarcasm

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Tone

- It is how the poem addresses its readers:
- Cocksure, humble, sad, glad,
What is the tone of a poem?
- What attitude does the poet take toward
a theme or the subject conveyed in her
poem
- Affectionate, hostile, earnest, playful,
sarcastic, joyful, playful, serious, comic,
intimate, formal, relaxed, condescending,
or ironic

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Tone

- For poets, conveying the tone to readers is quite a challenging job.
- So, they use the help of some techniques like rhyme, meter, word choice, sentence structure, figure of speech and imagery

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Sound

- Sound as meaning:
- The sound must be seen as an echo to the sense (Alexander Pope)
- Sound is helpful in producing effect the poet with the reader have
 - Euphony: when the sound of words working together with meaning pleases mind and ear.
 - Cacophony: a harsh, discordant effect (also for the sake of meaning)

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Sound

- Onomatopoeia
- Alliteration and assonance
- Rime :
 - Exact rime
 - Slant rime
 - Consonance
 - End rime
 - Masculine
 - Feminine
 - Eye rime

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Rhythm

- It is the regular recurrence of sound.
- We use rhythm when we speak to emphasize something.
- We also pause.
- Some poems are grouped based on their rhythm.
- **Poetic rhythm:** the repetition of stresses and pauses

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Meter

- It is the recurrence of regular units of stressed and unstressed syllables.
- Meter must be appropriate for ideas expressed by the poem, and it should help to create a suitable poem.
- E.g.
 - A light, skipping is not suitable for an elegy, a poem about death
 - A slow heavy rhythm is not appropriate for an epigram, a short poem that makes a pointed comment in an unusually clear and witty manner

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Meter

- **Scansion** is the art of scanning the meter of the verse
- **Prosody** is the study of metrical structures in poetry
- Foot is a group of syllable with a fixed pattern of stressed and unstressed syllable.
- **Types of meter**
 - iambic
 - Anapestic
 - Trochaic
 - Dactylic

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27



Meter

Line lengths

- Monometer
- Diameter
- Trimeter
- Tetrameter
- Pentameter
- Hexameter
- Heptameter
- Octameter

- The raising meters
- The falling meters
- Accentual meters

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28

**APPENDICES AND PHOTOCOPIED MATERIAL WHICH SERVES AS BOTH
TEACHING MATERIAL AND STUDENTS' WORK SHEET**

Part II

❖ Poetry Formal Qualities/Element od

Poetry

- Voice
- Words
- Figurative languages
- Imagery
- Irony
- Tone
- Sound
- Rhythm

Speaker — Voice



the poet

THE PERSON IN THE POEM

The tone of a poem, we said, is like tone of voice in that both communicate feelings. Still, this comparison raises a question: when we read a poem, whose "voice" speaks to us?

"The poet's" is one possible answer; and in the case of many a poem that answer may be right. Reading Anne Bradstreet's "The Author to Her Book," we can be reasonably sure that the poet speaks of her very own book, and of her own experiences. In order to read a poem, we seldom need to read a poet's biography; but in truth there are certain poems whose full effect depends upon our knowing at least a fact or two of the poet's life. Here is one such poem.

Natasha Trethewey (b. 1966)

White Lies

The lies I could tell,
when I was growing up
light-bright, near-white,
high-yellow, red-honed
in a black place,
were just white lies.

I could easily tell the white folks
that we lived uptown,
not in that pink and green
shanty-fied shotgun section
along the tracks. I could act
like my homemade dresses
came straight out the window
of Maison Blanche. I could even
keep quiet, quiet as kept,
like the time a white girl said
(squeezing my hand), Now
we have three of us in this class.

But I paid for it every time
Mama found out.
She laid her hands on me,
then washed out my mouth
with ivory soap. This
is to purify, she said,
and cleanse your lying tongue.
Believing her, I swallowed suds
thinking they'd work
from the inside out.

MILIK PERPUSTAKAAN
KIRUSAN BAHASA DAN SASTRA INGGRIS
UNIVERSITAS NEGERI PADANG

2000

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Through its pattern of vivid color imagery, Trethewey's poem tells of a black child light enough to "pass for white" in a society that was still extremely race-sensitive. But knowing the author's family background gives us a deeper insight into the levels of meaning in the poem. Trethewey was born in Mississippi in 1966, at a time when her

record the race of her father—who was white and had been born in Nova Scotia—appeared the word “Canadian” (although her parents divorced before she began grade school, she remained extremely close to both of them). Trethewey has said of her birth certificate: “Something is left out of the official record that way. The irony isn’t lost on me. Even in documenting myself as a person there is a little fiction.” “White Lies” succeeds admirably on its own, but these biographical details allow us to read it as an even more complex meditation on issues of racial definition and personal identity in America.

Personas | “The speaker is not necessarily being

Most of us can tell the difference between a person we meet in life and a person we meet in a work of art—unlike the moviegoer in the Philippines who, watching a villain in an exciting film, pulled out a revolver and peppered the screen. And yet, in reading poems, we are liable to temptation.

When the poet says “I,” we may want to assume that he or she is making a personal statement. But reflect: do all poems have to be personal? Here is a brief poem inscribed on the tombstone of an infant in Burial Hill Cemetery, Plymouth, Massachusetts:

Since I have been so quickly done for,
I wonderly had I was begin for you.

We do not know who wrote those lines, but it is clear that the poet was not a short-lived infant writing from personal experience. In other poems, the speaker is obviously a persona, or fictitious character: not the poet, but the poet’s creation. As a grown man, William Blake, a skilled professional engraver, wrote a poem in the voice of a boy, an illiterate chimney sweeper. (The poem appears later in this chapter.)

Let’s consider a poem spoken not by a poet, but by a persona—in this case a mysterious one. Edwin Arlington Robinson’s “Luke Havergal” is a dramatic monologue, but the identity of the speaker is never clearly stated. In 1905, upon first reading the poem in Robinson’s *The Children of the Night* (1897), President Theodore Roosevelt was so moved that he wrote an essay about the book that made the author famous. Roosevelt, however, admitted that he found the musically seductive poem difficult. “I am not sure I understand ‘Luke Havergal,’” he wrote, “but I am entirely sure I like it.” Possibly what most puzzled our twenty-sixth president was who was speaking in the poem. How much does Robinson let us know about the voice and the person it addresses?

Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935)

Luke Havergal

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal.

1897

5

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that’s in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—
In eastern skies.

10

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

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Questions

1. Who is the speaker of the poem? What specific details does the author reveal about the speaker?
2. What does the speaker ask Luke Havergal to do?
3. What do you understand “the western gate” to be?
4. Would you advise Luke Havergal to follow the speaker’s advice? Why or why not?

No literary law decrees that the speaker in a poem even has to be human. Good poems have been uttered by clouds, pebbles, clocks, and cats. Here is a poem spoken by a hawk, a dramatic monologue that expresses the animal’s thoughts and attitudes in a way consciously designed to emphasize how different its worldview is from a human perspective.

Ted Hughes (1930–1998)

Hawk Roosting

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

1960

The convenience of the high trees!
The air’s buoyancy and the sun’s ray

5

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

10

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads—

15

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

20

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Questions

- Find three observations the hawk makes about its world that a human would probably not make. What do these remarks tell us about the bird's character?
- In what ways does Ted Hughes create an unrealistic portrayal of the hawk's true mental powers? What statements in the poem would an actual hawk be unlikely to make? Do these passages add anything to the poem's impact? What would be lost if they were omitted?

Here is a poem in which the speaker is something even more remote from humanity, something we ordinarily assume to have no thoughts or attitudes at all, but whose monologue offers an even more pointed contrast with human values.

Suji Kwock Kim (b. 1968)**Monologue for an Onion**

2003

I don't mean to make you cry.
I mean nothing, but this has not kept you
From peeling away my body, layer by layer,

Patron

5

The tears clouding your eyes as the table fills
With husks, cut flesh, all the debris of pursuit.
Poor deluded human: you seek my heart.

Hunt all you want. Beneath each skin of mine
Lies another skin: I am pure onion—pure union
Of outside and in, surface and secret core.

Look at you, chopping and weeping. Idiot.
Is this the way you go through life, your mind
A stonelss knife driven by your fanatical

10

Of lasting union—slashing away skin after skin
From things, ruin and tears your only signs
Of progress? Enough is enough.

15

You must not grieve that the world is glimpsed
Through veils. How else can it be seen?
How will you rip away the veil of the eye, the veil

That you are, you who want to grasp the heart
Of things, hungry to know where meaning
Lies. Taste what you hold in your hands: onion-juice,

20

Yellow peels, my stinging shreds. You are the one
In pieces. Whatever you meant to love, in meaning to
You changed yourself: you are not who you are,

Your soul cut moment to moment by a blade
Of fresh desire, the ground sown with abandoned skins.
And at your inmost circle, what? A core that is

25

Not one. Poor fool, you are divided at the heart,
Lost in its maze of chambers, blood, and love,
A heart that will one day beat you to death.

30

Questions

- How would you characterize the speaker's tone in this poem? What attitudes and judgments lie behind that tone?
- "I mean nothing" (line 2) might be seen as a play on two senses of *mean*—"intend" and "signify." Is the statement true in both senses?
- Suppose someone said to you, "The whole point of the poem is that vegetables have rights and feelings too, and humanity is being rebuked for its arrogance and insensitivity toward other species." How would you argue against that view?
- The speaker is obviously one tough onion, cutting humanity little or no slack. To what degree do you think the speaker represents the author's views? Explain your response.

A Classic Poem and Its Source

In a famous definition, William Wordsworth calls poetry "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquillity." But in the case of the following poem, Wordsworth's feelings weren't all his; they didn't just overflow spontaneously; and the process of tranquil recollection had to go on for years.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud**

1807

I wandered lonely as a cloud.
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake beneath the trees

4

SAYING AND SUGGESTING

To name an object is to take away three-fourths
of the pleasure given by a poem. . . .
to suggest it, that is the ideal.

—STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

To write so clearly that they might bring "all things as near the mathematical plainness" as possible—that was the goal of scientists, according to Bishop Thomas Sprat, who lived in the seventeenth century. Such an effort would seem bound to fail, because words, unlike numbers, are ambiguous indicators. Although it may have troubled Bishop Sprat, the tendency of a word to have multiplicity of meaning rather than mathematical plainness opens broad avenues to poetry.

DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

Every word has at least one denotation: a meaning as defined in a dictionary. But the English language has many a common word with so many denotations that a reader may need to think twice to see what it means in a specific context. The noun *field*, for instance, can denote a piece of ground, a sports arena, the scene of a battle, part of a flag, a profession, and a number system in mathematics. Further, the word can be used as a verb ("he fielded a grounder") or an adjective ("field trip," "field glasses").

A word also has connotations: overtones or suggestions of additional meaning that it gains from all the contexts in which we have met it in the past. The word *skeleton*, according to a dictionary, denotes "the bony framework of a human being or other vertebrate animal, which supports the flesh and protects the organs." But by its associations, the word can rouse thoughts of war, of disease and death, or (possibly) of one's plans to go to medical school. Think, too, of the difference between "Old Doc Jones" and "Theodore E. Jones, M.D." In the mind's eye, the former appears in his shirtsleeves; the latter has a gold nameplate on his door.

That some words denote the same thing but have sharply different connotations is pointed out in this anonymous Victorian jingle:

Here's a little ditty that you really ought to know:
Horses "sweat" and men "perspire," but ladies only "glow."

The terms *druggist*, *pharmacist*, and *apothecary* all denote the same occupation, but apothecaries lay claim to special distinction.

Poets aren't the only people who care about the connotations of language. Advertisers know that connotations make money. Nowadays many automobile dealers advertise their secondhand cars not as "used" but as "pre-owned," as if fearing that "used car" would connote an old heap with soiled upholstery and mysterious engine troubles. "Pre-owned," however, suggests that the previous owner has kindly taken the trouble of breaking in the car for you. Not long ago prune-packers, alarmed by a slump in sales, sponsored a survey to determine the connotations of prunes in the public consciousness. Asked, "What do you think of when you hear the word *prunes*?" most people replied, "dried up," "wrinkled," or "constipated." Dismayed, the packers hired an advertising agency to create a new image for prunes, in hopes of inducing new connotations. Soon, advertisements began to show prunes in brightly colored settings, in the company of bikinied bathing beauties.

In imaginative writing, connotations are as crucial as they are in advertising. Consider this sentence: "A new brand of journalism is being born, or spawned" (Dwight Macdonald writing in the *New York Review of Books*). The last word, by its associations with fish and crustaceans, suggests that this new journalism is scarcely the product of human beings.

Here is a famous poem that groups together things with similar connotations: certain ships and their cargoes. (A *quinquireme*, by the way, was an ancient Assyrian vessel propelled by sails and oars.)

John Masefield (1878–1967)

Cargoes

1902

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory,
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.^o

Portuguese coins 10

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

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To us, as well as to the poet's original readers, the place-names in the first two stanzas suggest the exotic and faraway. Ophir, a vanished place, may have been in Arabia; according to the Bible, King Solomon sent expeditions there for ivory, gold,

pure gold, also for ivory, apes, peacocks, and other luxury items. (See I Kings 9–10.) In his final stanza, Masefield groups commonplace things (mostly heavy and metallic), whose suggestions of crudeness, cheapness, and ugliness he deliberately contrasts with those of the precious stuffs he has listed earlier. For British readers, the Tyne is a stodgy and familiar river; the English Channel in March, choppy and likely to upset a stomach. The quinquireme is rowing, the galleon is dipping, but the dirty British freighter is *bunting*, aggressively pushing. Conceivably, the poet could have described firewood and even coal as beautiful, but evidently he wants them to convey sharply different suggestions here, to go along with the rest of the coaster's cargo. In drawing such a sharp contrast between past and present, Masefield does more than merely draw up bills-of-lading. Perhaps he even implies a wry and unfavorable comment on life in the present day. His meaning lies not so much in the dictionary definitions of his words ("moidores": Portuguese gold coins formerly worth approximately five pounds sterling") as in their rich and vivid connotations.

*Poems / Songs / by
William Blake (1757-1827)*

London

1794

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning church appalls
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new born infant's tear
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.

Here are only a few of the possible meanings of four of Blake's words:

- *chartered* (lines 1, 2)

Denotations: Established by a charter (a written grant or a certificate of incorporation); leased or hired.

Connotations: Defined, limited, restricted, channeled, mapped, bound by law; bought and sold (like a slave or an inanimate object); Magna Carta; charters given to crown colonies by the King.

Other words in the poem with similar connotations: Ban (prohibition); (2) a churchman's curse or maledict; order summoning a king's vassals to fight for him movement. Chimney-sweeper, soldier, and harlot Interpretation of the lines: The street has had mapped which it must go; the Thames has had laid down Street and river are channeled, imprisoned, en London).

• *black'ning* (line 10)

Denotation: Becoming black.

Connotations: The darkening of something once light, the defilement of something once clean, the deepening of guilt, the gathering of darkness at the approach of night.

Other words in the poem with similar connotations: Objects becoming marked or smudged (marks of weakness, marks of woe in the faces of passers-by; bloodied walls of a palace; marriage blighted with plagues); the word *appalls* (denoting not only "to overcome with horror" but "to make pale" and also "to cast a pall or shroud over"); midnight streets.

Interpretation of the line: Literally, every London church grows black from soot and hires a chimney-sweeper (a small boy) to help clean it. But Blake suggests too that by profiting from the suffering of the child laborer, the church is soiling its original purity.

• *Blasts, blights* (lines 15, 16)

Denotations: Both *blast* and *blight* mean "to cause to wither" or "to ruin and destroy." Both are terms from horticulture. Frost *blasts* a bud and kills it; disease *blights* a growing plant.

Connotations: Sickness and death; gardens shriveled and dying; gusts of wind and the ravages of insects; things blown to pieces or rotted and warped. Other words in the poem with similar connotations: Faces marked with weakness and woe; the child becomes a chimney-sweep; the soldier killed by war; blackening church and bloodied palace; young girl turned harlot; wedding carriage transformed into a hearse.

Interpretation of the lines: Literally, the harlot spreads the plague of syphilis, which, carried into marriage, can cause a baby to be born blind. In a larger and more meaningful sense, Blake sees the prostitution of even one young girl corrupting the entire institution of matrimony and endangering every child.

Some of these connotations are more to the point than others; the reader of a poem nearly always has the problem of distinguishing relevant associations from irrelevant ones. We need to read a poem in its entirety and, when a word leaves us in doubt, look for other things in the poem to corroborate or refute what we think it means. Relatively simple and direct in its statement, Blake's account of his stroll through the city at night becomes an indictment of a whole social and religious order. The indictment could hardly be this effective if it were "mathematically plain," its every word restricted to one denotation clearly spelled out.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)*Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock*

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.

1923

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Questions

1. What are *beaded ceintures*? What does the phrase suggest?
2. What contrast does Stevens draw between the people who live in these houses and the old sailor? What do the connotations of *white night-gowns* and *sailor* add to this contrast?
3. What is lacking in these people who wear white night-gowns? Why should the poet's view of them be a "disillusionment"?

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000)*Southeast Corner*

The School of Beauty's a tavern now.
The Madam is underground.
Out at Lincoln, among the graves
Her own is early found.
Where the thickest, tallest monument
Cuts grandly into the air
The Madam lies, contentedly.
Her fortune, too, lies there,
Converted into cool hard steel
And right red velvet lining;
While over her tan impassivity
Shot silk is shining.

1945

10

SOUTHEAST CORNER. 3 Lincoln: cemetery in Chicago where a number of prominent African Americans, including Gwendolyn Brooks herself, are buried.

Questions

1. What view of its subject does this poem implicitly take, and through what words is it conveyed?

E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)*next to of course god america i*

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

Questions

1. How many allusions in this poem can you identify? What do all the sources of those allusions have in common?
2. Look up the origin of *jingo* (line 8). Is it used here as more than just a mindless exclamation?
3. Beyond what is actually said, what do the rhetoric of the first thirteen lines and the description in the last one suggest about the author's intentions in this poem?

Robert Frost (1874–1963)*Fire and Ice*

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Questions

1. To whom does Frost refer in line 1? In line 2?
2. What connotations of *fire* and *ice* contribute to the richness of Frost's comparison?

Timothy Steele (b. 1948)*Epitaph*

Here lies Sir Tact, a diplomatic fellow

1926

1923

1979

Questions

1. To what famous saying does the poet allude?
2. What are the connotations of golden? Of yellow?

Diane Thiel (b. 1967)**The Minefield**

2000

He was running with his friend from town to town.
 They were somewhere between Prague and Dresden.
 He was fourteen. His friend was faster
 and knew a shortcut through the fields they could take.
 He said there was lettuce growing in one of them,
 and they hadn't eaten all day. His friend ran a few lengths ahead,
 like a wild rabbit across the grass,
 turned his head, looked back once,
 and his body was scattered across the field.

5

My father told us this, one night,
 and then continued eating dinner.

10

He brought them with him—the minefields.
 He carried them underneath his good intentions.
 He gave them to us—in the volume of his anger,
 in the bruises we covered up with sleeves.
 In the way he threw anything against the wall—
 a radio, that wasn't even ours,
 a melon, once, opened like a head.
 In the way we still expect, years later and continents away,
 that anything might explode at any time,
 and we would have to run on alone
 with a vision like that
 only seconds behind.

15

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Questions

1. In the opening lines of the poem, a seemingly small decision—to take a shortcut and find something to eat—leads to a horrifying result. What does this suggest about the poem's larger view of what life is like?
2. The speaker tells the story of the minefield before letting us know that the other boy was her father. What is the effect of this narrative strategy?
3. How does the image of the melon reinforce the poem's intentions?

Ron Rash (b. 1953)**The Day the Gates Closed**

2002

We lose so much in this life.
 Shouldn't some things stay, she said,

no human sound, the poplars
 and oaks cut down so even
 the wind had nothing to rub
 a whisper from, just silence
 rising over the valley
 deep and wide as a glacier.

Questions

1. What do you think the title means, and what does it contribute to your understanding of the poem?
2. How does the first line set a keynote for what follows?
3. What mood is created by the imagery and tone of the poem? Be as specific as possible in your responses.
4. How does the simile of the glacier in the last line tie into the theme?

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)**Tears, Idle Tears**

1847

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
 Tears from the depth of some divine despair
 Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
 In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
 And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
 That brings our friends up from the underworld,
 Sad as the last which reddens over one
 That sinks with all we love below the verge;
 So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

10

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
 The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
 To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
 The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
 So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

15

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
 And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
 On lips that are for others; deep as love,
 Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
 O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

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Richard Wilbur (b. 1921)**Love Calls Us to the Things of This World**

1956

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
 And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul

As false dawn.

Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.
Now they are rising together in calm swells
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

10

Now they are flying in place, conveying
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden
They swoon down into so rapt a quiet
That nobody seems to be there.

The soul shrinks

15

From all that it is about to remember,
From the punctual rape of every blessed day,
And cries,

"Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven."

20

Yet, as the sun acknowledges
With a warm look the world's hunks and colors,
The soul descends once more in bitter love
To accept the waking body, saying now
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,

25

"Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
Of dark habits,

keeping their difficult balance."

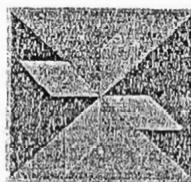
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LOVE CALLS US TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD. Wilbur claimed that his title was taken from St. Augustine, but in a recent interview he admitted that neither he nor any critic has ever been able to locate the quotation again. Whatever its source, however, the title establishes the poem's central idea that love allows us to return from the divine world of the spirit to the imperfect world of our everyday lives. Wilbur's own comments on the poem appear after the questions that follow here.

Questions

1. What are the angels in line 5? Why does this metaphor seem appropriate to the situation?
2. What is "the punctual rape of every blessed day?" Who is being raped? Who or what commits the rape? Why would Wilbur choose this particular word with all its violent associations?
3. Whom or what does the soul love in line 23, and why is that love bitter?
4. Is it merely obesity that make the nuns' balance "difficult" in the two final lines of the poem? What other "balance" does Wilbur's poem suggest?
5. The soul has two speeches in the poem. How do they differ in tone and imagery?
6. The spiritual world is traditionally considered invisible. What concrete images does Wilbur use to suggest its visible presence?

CHAPTER 13



Voice

What makes a poem significant? What makes it memorable? Passion and thought, emotionally charged language, fresh imagery, surprising use of metaphor . . . yes. But also, I think, the very sure sense that the moment we enter the world of the poem we are participating in another episode of the myth-journey of humankind; that a voice has taken up the tale once more. The individual experience as related or presented in the poem renews our deep, implicit faith in that greater experience. A poem remains with us to the extent that it allows us to feel that we are listening to a voice at once contemporary and ancient. This makes all the difference.

JOHN HAINES, "The Hole in the Bucket"

I have been ruminating about "personal poems"—I am inclined to agree that one turns back to less personal poems yet you surely would not remove Shakespeare's sonnets, all of Donne, much of Yeats, all of Emily Dickinson, Sappho, Millay, Wylie (or most), Wyatt from the canon, would you? The trouble is that one does not choose what one is to write about; poetry is a seizure, and not done on will. The point is I think that a "personal" poem has to go deep enough to touch' the *universal*: the "I" is only a device like any other. This is not to argue—as I agree that it would be better if the muse provided more *less personal* poems.

MAY SARTON, "Among the Visual Days"

Someone writing a poem believes in a reader, in readers, of that poem. The "who" of that reader quivers like a jellyfish. Self-reference is always possible that my "I" is a universal "we," that the reader is my clone. That sending letters to myself is enough for attention to be paid. That my chip of mirror contains the world.

But most often someone writing a poem believes in, depends on, a delicate, vibrating range of difference, that an "I" can become a "we" without extinguishing others, that a partly common language exists to which strangers can bring their own heartbeat, memories, images. A language that itself has learned from the heartbeat, memories, images of strangers.

ADRIENNE RICH, *What Is Found There*

• • •

EMILY DICKINSON
(1830-1886)

I'm Nobody! Who Are You?
(1891)

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you—Nobody—Too?
Then there's a pair of us?
Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!
How dreary—to be—Somebody!
How public—like a Frog—
To tell one's name—the livelong June—
To an admiring Bog!

THE SPEAKER IN THE POEM

In fiction, the author's careful choice and arrangement of words enable readers to form an impression of the narrator and to decide whether he or she is sophisticated or unsophisticated, trustworthy or untrustworthy, innocent or experienced. Like fiction, poetry depends on a **speaker** who describes events, feelings, and ideas to readers. Finding out as much as possible about this speaker can help readers to interpret the poem. For example, the speaker in Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" seems at once shy and playful. The first stanza of the poem suggests that the speaker is a private person, perhaps with little self-esteem. As the poem continues, however, the voice becomes almost defiant. In a sense the speaker's two voices represent two ways of relating to the world. The first voice expresses the private self—internal, isolated, and revealed through poetry; the second expresses the public self—external, self-centered, and inevitably superficial. Far from being defeated by shyness, the speaker claims to have chosen her status as "nobody."

One question readers might ask about "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" is how close the speaker's voice is to the poet's. Readers who conclude that the poem is about the conflict between a poet's public and private responsibilities may be tempted to see the speaker and the poet as one. But this is not necessarily the case. Like the narrator of a short story, the speaker of a poem is a **persona**, or mask, that the poet assumes. Granted, in some poems little distance exists between the poet and the speaker. Without hard evidence to support a link between speaker and poet, however, readers should not assume they are one and the same.

In most cases the speaker is quite different from the poet. And even when the speaker's voice conveys the attitude of the poet, it may do so

Epic poems recount the accomplishments of heroic figures, typically including expansive settings, superhuman feats, and gods and supernatural beings. The language of epic poems tends to be formal, even elevated and often quite elaborate. Epics span many cultures—from the *Odyssey* (Greek) to *Beowulf* (Anglo-Saxon) to *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Babylonian). In ancient times, epics were handed down orally; more recently, poets have written literary epics, such as John Milton's 1667 *Paradise Lost* and Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott's 1990 *Omeros*, which follow many of the same conventions.

The **ballad** is another type of narrative poetry with roots in an oral tradition. Originally intended to be sung, a ballad uses repeated words and phrases, including a refrain, to advance its story. Some—but not all—ballads use the **ballad stanza**. For examples of traditional ballads in this text, see "Bonny Barbara Allen" (p. 776) and "Western Wind" (p. 778). Dudley Randall's "Ballad of Birmingham" (p. 609) and Gwendolyn Brooks's "The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie" (p. 856) are examples of contemporary ballads.

LYRIC POETRY

Like narrative poems, lyric poems take various forms.

An **elegy** is a poem in which a poet mourns the death of a specific person, as in Robert Hayden's "Homage to the Empress of the Blues" (p. 807), about the singer Bessie Smith. Another example of this type of elegy is A. E. Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" (p. 640).

An **ode** is a long lyric poem, formal and serious in style, tone, and subject matter. An ode typically has a fairly complex stanzaic pattern, such as the **terza rima** used by Percy Bysshe Shelley in "Ode to the West Wind" (p. 829). Another ode in this text is "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (p. 813).

An **aubade** is a poem about morning, usually celebrating the coming of dawn. An example is Philip Larkin's "Aubade" (p. 815).

An **occasional poem** is written to celebrate a particular event or occasion. An example is Miller Williams's poem for President Clinton's second inaugural in 1997.

A **meditation** is a lyric poem that focuses on a physical object, using this object as a vehicle for considering larger issues. Edmund Waller's "Go, Lovely Rose" (p. 842) is a meditation.

A **pastoral**—for example, Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (p. 536)—is a lyric poem that celebrates the simple, idyllic pleasures of country life.

Finally, a **dramatic monologue** is a poem whose speaker addresses one or more silent listeners, often revealing much more than he or she intends. Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (p. 583) and "Porphyria's

only indirectly. In "The Chimney Sweeper" (p. 779), for example, William Blake assumes the voice of a child to criticize the system of child labor that existed in eighteenth-century England. Even though the child speaker does not understand the conditions that cause his misery, readers sense the poet's anger as the trusting speaker describes the conditions under which he works. The poet's indignation is especially apparent in the biting irony of the last line, in which the victimized speaker innocently assures readers that if all people do their duty, "they need not fear harm."

Sometimes the poem's speaker is anonymous. In this case—as in William Carlos Williams's "Red Wheelbarrow" (p. 648), for instance—the first-person voice is absent and the speaker remains outside the poem. At other times, the speaker has a set identity—a king, a beggar, a highwayman, a sheriff, a husband, a wife, a rich man, a chimney sweep, a child, a mythical figure, an explorer, a teacher, a faithless lover, a saint, or even a flower, an animal, or a clod of earth. Whatever the case, the speaker is not the poet, but rather a creation that the poet uses to convey his or her ideas. (For this reason, poems by a single poet may have very different voices. See Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" [p. 673] and "Morning Song" [p. 596] for example.)

In the following poem, the poet assumes the mask of a fictional character, Gretel from the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel."

LOUISE GLÜCK
(1943-)

Gretel in Darkness (1971)

This is the world we wanted. All who would have seen us dead
Are dead. I hear the witch's cry
Break in the moonlight through a sheet of sugar: God rewards.
Her tongue shrivels into gas. . . .

Now, far from women's arms
And memory of women, in our father's hut
We sleep, are never hungry.
Why do I not forget?
My father bars the door, bars harm
From this house, and it is years.

No one remembers. Even you, my brother.
Summer afternoons you look at me as though you meant
To leave, as though it never happened. But I killed for you:
I see armed firs, the spires of that gleaming kiln come back, come
back—

Nights I turn to you to hold me but you are not there.

Am I alone? Spies

Hiss in the stillness, Hansel we are there still, and it is real, real,
That black forest, and the fire in earnest.

The speaker in this poem comments on her life in the years after her encounter with the witch in the forest. Speaking to her brother, Gretel observes that they now live in the world they wanted: they live with their father in his hut, and the witch and the wicked stepmother are dead. Even so, the memory of the events in the forest haunt Gretel and make it impossible for her to live "happily ever after." The "armed firs," the "gleaming kiln," and "the black forest" break through the "sheet of sugar" that her life has become.

By assuming the persona of Gretel, Glück is able to convey some interesting and complex ideas. On one level, Gretel represents any person who has lived through a traumatic experience. Memories of the event keep breaking through into the present, frustrating her attempts to reestablish her belief in the goodness of the world. The voice we hear is sad, alone, and frightened: "Nights I turn to you to hold me," she says, "but you are not there." Although the murder Gretel committed for her brother was justified, it seems to haunt her. "No one remembers," laments Gretel, not even her brother. At some level, she realizes that by killing the witch she has killed a part of herself, perhaps the part of women that men fear and consequently transform into witches and wicked stepmothers. The world that is left after the killing is the father's and the brother's, not hers, and she is now alone in a dark world haunted by the memories of the black forest. In this sense, Gretel—"Now, far from women's arms / And memory of women"—may be the voice of all victimized women who, because of men, act against their own best interests—and regret it.

As "Gretel in Darkness" illustrates, a title can identify a poem's speaker, but the speaker's own words can provide much more information. This is the case in the following poem, where Spanish words help to define the poem's frame of reference and to characterize the speaker.

LEONARD ADAMÉ
(1947-)

My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum (1973)

in her house
she would rock quietly and hum

until her swelled hands
calmed

5 in summer
she wore thick stockings
sweaters
and grey braids
(when "el cheque"¹ came
10 we went to Payless
and I laughed greedily
when given a quarter)

mornings,
sunlight barely lit
15 the kitchen
and where
there were shadows
it was not cold
she quietly rolled

20 flour tortillas—
the "papas"²
cracking in hot lard
would wake me

she had lost her teeth
25 and when we ate
she had bread
soaked in "café"³

always her eyes
were clear

30 and she could see
as I cannot yet see—
through her eyes
she gave me herself

she would sit
35 and talk
of her girlhood—
of things strange to me:
México
epidemics

40 relatives shot
her father's hopes
of this country—
how they sank
with cement dust
45 to his insides

now
when I go
to the old house
the worn spots
50 by the stove
echo of her shuffling
and
México
still hangs in her
55 fading
calendar pictures

In this poem, the speaker is an adult recalling childhood memories of his grandmother. Spanish words—*el cheque*, *tortillas*, *papas*, and *café*—identify the speaker as Latino. His easy use of English, his comment that talk of Mexico is strange to him, and his observation that he cannot yet see through his grandmother's eyes suggest, however, that he is not completely in touch with his ethnic identity. At one level, the grandmother evokes nostalgic memories of the speaker's youth. At another level, she is a living symbol of his ties with Mexico, connecting him to the ethnic culture he is trying to recover. The poem ends on an ambivalent note: even though the speaker is able to return to "the old house," the pictures of Mexico are fading, perhaps suggesting the speaker's assimilation into mainstream American culture.

Direct statements by the speaker can also help to characterize him. In the poem that follows, the first line of each stanza establishes the identity of the speaker—and defines his perspective.

LANGSTON HUGHES
(1902-1967)

Negro
(1926)

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

¹ The check.

² Potatoes.

³ Coffee.

I've been a slave:
 s Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
 I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:
 Under my hand the pyramids arose.
 I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

10 I've been a singer:
 All the way from Africa to Georgia
 I carried my sorrow songs.
 I made ragtime.

I've been a victim:
 15 The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
 They lynch me still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro:
 Black as the night is black,
 Black like the depths of my Africa.

Here the speaker, identifying himself as "a Negro," assumes each of the roles African-Americans have historically played in Western society—slave, worker, singer, and victim. By so doing, he gives voice to his ancestors who, by being forced to serve others, were deprived of their identities. By presenting not just their suffering, but also their accomplishments, the speaker asserts his pride in being black. The speaker also implies that the suffering of black people has been caused by economic exploitation. Romans, Egyptians, Belgians, and Americans all used black labor to help build their societies. In this context, the speaker's implied warning is clear: except for the United States, all the societies that have exploited blacks have declined, and long after these empires have fallen, black people still endure.

In each of the preceding poems, the speaker is alone. The following poem, a **dramatic monologue**, presents a more complex situation in which the poet creates a complete dramatic scene. The speaker is developed as a character whose distinctive personality is revealed through his words as he addresses a silent listener.

ROBERT BROWNING
 (1812-1889)

My Last Duchess (1842)

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's¹ hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
 "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
 20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame

¹ "Brother" Pandolf, a fictive painter.

35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let

40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence

50 Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune,² though,

55 Taming a sea horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck³ cast in bronze for me!

The speaker is probably Alfonso II, duke of Ferrara, Italy, whose young wife Lucrezia, died in 1561 after only three years of marriage. Shortly after her death, the duke began negotiations to marry again. When the poem opens, the duke is showing a portrait of his late wife to an emissary of an unnamed count who is there to arrange a marriage between the duke and the count's daughter. The duke remarks that the artist, Frà Pandolf, has caught a certain look upon the duchess's face. This look aroused the jealousy of the duke, who thought that it should have been for him alone. According to the duke, the duchess's crime was to have a heart "too soon made glad," "Too easily impressed." Eventually the duke could stand the situation no longer; he "gave commands," and "all smiles stopped together."

Much of what readers learn about the duke's state of mind comes from what is implied by his words. As he discusses the painting, the duke unintentionally reveals himself to be obsessively possessive and jealous, referring to "my last Duchess," "my favor at her breast," and "my gift of nine-hundred-years-old name." He keeps the picture of his late wife well

God of the sea.

An imaginary—or unidentified—sculptor. The count of Tyrol's capital was at Innsbrück, Austria.

hidden behind a curtain that no one draws except him. His interest in the picture has little to do with the memory of his wife, however. In death, the duchess has become just what the duke always wanted her to be: a personal possession that reflects his good taste.

The listener plays a subtle but important role in the poem: his presence establishes the dramatic situation that allows the character of the duke to be revealed. The purpose of the story is to communicate to the emissary exactly what the duke expects from his prospective bride, and from her father. As he speaks, the duke conveys only the information that he wants the emissary to take back to his master, the count. Although he appears vain and superficial, the duke is actually extraordinarily shrewd. Throughout the poem, he turns the conversation to his own ends and gains the advantage through flattery and false modesty. Notice, for example, that he claims he has little skill in speaking when actually he is cleverly manipulating the conversation. The success of the poem lies in the poet's ability to develop the voice of this complex character, who embodies both superficial elegance and shocking cruelty.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: THE SPEAKER IN THE POEM

LESLIE MARMON SILKO
(1948-)

Where Mountain Lion Lay
Down with Deer
(1973)

I climb the black rock mountain
stepping from day to day
silently.

I smell the wind for my ancestors
pale blue leaves
crushed wild mountain smell.

Returning

up the gray stone cliff
where I descended

a thousand years ago.

Returning to faded black stone.

where mountain lion lay down with deer.

It is better to stay up here

watching wind's reflection
in tall yellow flowers.

READING AND REACTING

1. Who is speaking in line 4? In line 9? Can you explain this shift?
 2. From where is the speaker returning? What is she trying to recover?
 3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** The poet is of Native American descent. Is it important for you to know this information about her? How does information about the poet's ancestry affect your interpretation of the poem?
 4. **Critical Perspective** In her 1983 essay "Answering the Deer," Native American poet and critic Paula Gunn Allen observes that the possibility of cultural extinction is a basic reality Native Americans must face. Native American women writers, says Allen, face this fact directly, but with a kind of hope:

The sense of hope . . . comes about when one has faced ultimate disaster time and time again over the ages and has emerged . . . stronger and more certain of the endurance of the people, the spirits, and the land from which they both arise and which informs both with life. Transformation, or more directly, metamorphosis, is the oldest tribal ceremonial theme. . . . And it comes once again into use within American Indian poetry of extinction and regeneration that is ultimately the only poetry any contemporary Indian woman can write.

Does Silko's poem address the issue of cultural extinction and possibility of regeneration or metamorphosis? How?

Related Works: "Two Kinds" (p. 450), "Windigo" (p. 767), "Nikki-Ro" (p. 804), *Fences* (p. 1347)

3

WORDS

We all write poems; it is simply that poets are the ones who write in words.

—JOHN FOWLES

LITERAL MEANING: WHAT A POEM SAYS FIRST

Although successful as a painter, Edgar Degas found poetry discouragingly hard to write. To his friend, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, he complained, "What a business! My whole day gone on a blasted sonnet, without getting an inch further . . . and it isn't ideas I'm short of . . . I'm full of them, I've got too many . . ."

"But Degas," said Mallarmé, "you can't make a poem with ideas—you make it with words!"

Like the celebrated painter, some people assume that all it takes to make a poem is a bright idea. Poems state ideas, to be sure, and sometimes the ideas are invaluable; and yet the most impressive idea in the world will not make a poem, unless its words are selected and arranged with loving art. Some poets take great pains to find the right word. Unable to fill a two-syllable gap in an unfinished line that went, "The seal's wide _____ gaze toward Paradise," Hart Crane paged through an unabridged dictionary. When he reached S, he found the object of his quest in spindrift: "spray skinned from the sea by a strong wind." The word is exact and memorable.

In reading a poem, some people assume that its words can be skipped over rapidly, and they try to leap at once to the poem's general theme. It is as if they fear being thought clods unless they can find huge ideas in the poem (whether or not there are any). Such readers often ignore the literal meanings of words: the ordinary, matter-of-fact sense to be found in a dictionary. (As you will see in the next chapter, "Saying and Suggesting," words possess not only dictionary meanings—denotations—but also many associations and suggestions—connotations.) Consider the following poem and see what you make of it.

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)

This Is Just to Say

1934

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

5

10

Some readers distrust a poem so simple and candid. They think, "What's wrong with me? There has to be more to it than this!" But poems seldom are puzzles in need of solutions. We can begin by accepting the poet's statements, without suspecting the poet of trying to hoodwink us. On later reflection, of course, we might possibly decide that the poet is playfully teasing or being ironic; but Williams gives us no reason to think that. There seems no need to look beyond the literal sense of his words, no profit in speculating that the plums symbolize worldly joys and that the icebox stands for the universe. Clearly, a reader who held such a grand theory would have overlooked (in eagerness to find a significant idea) the plain truth that the poet makes clear to us: that ice-cold plums are a joy to taste.

To be sure, Williams's small poem is simpler than most poems are; and yet in reading any poem, no matter how complicated, you will do well to reach slowly and reluctantly for a theory to explain it by. To find the general theme of a poem, you first need to pay attention to its words. Recall Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (page 7), a poem that makes a statement—crudely summed up, "I yearn to leave the city and retreat to a place of ideal peace and happiness." And yet before we can realize this theme, we have to notice details: nine bean rows, a glade loud with bees, "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore," the gray of a pavement. These details and not some abstract remark make clear what the poem is saying: that the city is drab, while the island hideaway is sublimely beautiful.

Poets often strive for words that point to physical details and solid objects. They may do so even when speaking of an abstract idea:

Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour;
Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die:
 Lord, have mercy on us!

In these lines by Thomas Nashe, the abstraction beauty has grown petals that shrivel. Brightness may be a general name for light, but Nashe succeeds in giving it the weight of a falling body.

DICTION

If a poem says *daffodils* instead of *plant life*, *diaper years* instead of *infancy*, we call its diction, or choice of words, concrete rather than abstract. Concrete words refer to what we can immediately perceive with our senses: *dog*, *actor*, *chemical*, or particular individuals who belong to those general classes: *Bonzo the fox terrier*, *Clint Eastwood*,

hydrogen sulfate. Abstract words express ideas or concepts: *love, time, truth*. In abstracting, we leave out some characteristics found in each individual, and instead observe a quality common to many. The word *beauty*, for instance, denotes what may be observed in numerous persons, places, and things.

Ezra Pound gave a famous piece of advice to his fellow poets: "Go in fear of abstractions." This is not to say that a poet cannot employ abstract words, nor that all poems have to be about physical things. Much of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* is concerned with time, eternity, history, language, reality, and other things that cannot be physically handled. But Eliot, however high he may soar for a larger view, keeps returning to earth. He makes us aware of things.

Marianne Moore (1887–1972)

Silence

1924

My father used to say,
 "Superior people never make long visits,
 have to be shown Longfellow's grave
 or the glass flowers at Harvard.
 Self-reliant like the cat—
 that takes its prey to privacy,
 the mouse's limp tail hanging like a shoelace from its mouth—
 they sometimes enjoy solitude,
 and can be robbed of speech
 by speech which has delighted them.
 The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence;
 not in silence, but restraint."
 Nor was he insincere in saying, "Make my house your inn."
 Inns are not residences.

• 5

10

Questions

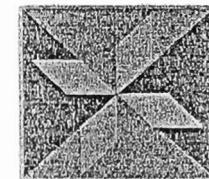
1. Almost all of "Silence" consists of quotation. What are some possible reasons why the speaker prefers using another person's words?
2. What are the words the father uses to describe people he admires?
3. The poem makes an important distinction between two similar words (lines 13–14). Explain the distinction Moore implies.
4. Why is "Silence" an appropriate title for this poem?

Robert Graves (1895–1985)

Down, Wanton, Down!

1933

Down, wanton, down! Have you no shame
 That at the whisper of Love's name,
 Or Beauty's, presto! up you raise
 Your angry head and stand at gaze?



Word Choice, Word Order

◆ ◆ ◆

The poet's love of language must, if language is to reward him with inlooked-for miracles, that is, with poetry, amount to a passion. The passion for the things of the world and the passion for naming them must be in him indistinguishable.

DENISE LEVERTOV, "Origins of a Poem"

What is known in a poem is its language, that is, the words it uses. Yet those words seem different in a poem. Even the most familiar will seem strange. In a poem, each word, being equally important, exists in absolute focus, having weight it rarely achieves in fiction. . . . Words in a novel are subordinate to broad slices of action or characterization that push the plot forward. In a poem, they are the action.

MARK STRAND, Introduction to *Best American Poems of 1991*

I like *mountain* and *prairie* and *sky*. When I write poetry, I use such words and I also use abstract words. But it is difficult to give you a list of favorite words because words become vital—they come alive—within a certain context. A given word is extremely important and vital in one context and not very interesting in another. It depends upon what's around the word. The environment. Although some words are naturally interesting, in my opinion. Like some creatures. The fox, I think, is a creature of almost immediate interest to most people. Other words are not as immediately interesting, or are even negatively received. Like some other creatures. The lizard, for example, is a creature most people wouldn't ordinarily care about. But in its natural habitat and in its dimension of wilderness, the lizard can be seen as a beautiful thing. Its movements are very wonderful to watch. Similarly, you can take almost any word and make it interesting by the way in which you use it.

N. SCOTT MOMADAY, in *Ancestral Voices*

◆ ◆ ◆

SIPHO SEPAMLA
(1932-)

Words, Words, Words¹

We don't speak of tribal wars anymore
we say simple faction fights
there are no tribes around here
only nations
5 it makes sense you see
'cause from there
one moves to multinational
it makes sense you get me
'cause from there
10 one gets one's homeland
which is a reasonable idea
'cause from there
one can dabble with independence
which deserves warm applause
15 —the bloodless revolution

we are talking of words
words tossed around as if
denied location by the wind
we mean those words some spit
20 others grab
dress them up for the occasion
them on the lap of an audience
we are talking of those words
that stalk our lives like policemen
25 words no dictionary can embrace
words that change sooner than seasons
we mean words
that spell out our lives
words, words, words
for there's a kind of poetic licence
doing the rounds in these parts

Words identify and name, characterize and distinguish, compare and contrast. Words describe, limit, and embellish; words locate and measure.

¹ Publication date is not available. This title is possibly an allusion to Hamlet 2.2.183.

Without words, there cannot be a poem. Even though words may be elusive and uncertain and changeable, "tossed around as if / denied location by the wind" and "can change sooner than seasons," they still can "stalk our lives like policemen." In poetry, as in love and in politics, words matter.

Beyond the quantitative—how many words, how many letters and syllables—is one much more important consideration: the *quality* of words. Which are chosen, and why? Why are certain words placed next to others? What does a word suggest in a particular context? How are the words arranged? What exactly constitutes the right word?

WORD CHOICE

In poetry, even more than in fiction or drama, words tend to become the focus—sometimes even the true subject—of a work. For this reason, the choice of one word over another can be crucial. Because poems are brief, they must compress many ideas into a few lines; poets know how much weight each individual word carries, and so they choose with great care, trying to select words that imply more than they state.

A poet may choose a word because of its sound. For instance, a word may echo another word's sound, and such repetition may place emphasis on both words; it may rhyme with another word and therefore be needed to preserve the poem's rhyme scheme; or, it may have a certain combination of stressed and unstressed syllables needed to maintain the poem's metrical pattern. Occasionally, a poet may even choose a word because of how it looks on the page. Most often, though, poets select words because they help to communicate their ideas.

At the same time, poets may choose words for their degree of concreteness or abstraction, specificity or generality. A *concrete* word refers to an item that is a perceivable, tangible entity—for example, a kiss or a flag. An *abstract* word refers to an intangible idea, condition, or quality, something that cannot be perceived by the senses—love, patriotism, and so on. *Specific* words refer to particular items; *general* words refer to entire classes or groups of items. As the following example illustrates, whether a word is specific or general is relative; its degree of specificity or generality depends on its relationship to other words:

Poem → closed form poem → sonnet → seventeenth-century sonnet → Elizabethan sonnet → sonnet by Shakespeare → "My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun"

Sometimes a poet wants a precise word, one that is both specific and concrete. At other times, however, a poet might prefer general or abstract

language, which may allow for more subtlety—or even for intentional ambiguity.

Finally, a word may be chosen for its **connotation**—what it suggests. Every word has one or more **denotations**—what it signifies without emotional associations, judgments, or opinions. The word *family*, for example, denotes “a group of related things or people.” Connotation is a more complex matter, however, because a single word may have many different associations. In general terms, a word may have a connotation that is positive, neutral, or negative. Thus, *family* may have a positive connotation when it describes a group of loving relatives, a neutral connotation when it describes a biological category, and an ironically negative connotation when it describes an organized crime family. Beyond this distinction, *family*, like any other word, may have a variety of emotional and social associations suggesting loyalty, warmth, home, security, or duty. In fact, many words have somewhat different meanings in different contexts. When poets choose words, then, they must consider what a particular word may suggest to readers as well as what it denotes.

In the poem that follows, the poet chooses words for their sounds, their relationships to other words, and their connotations.

WALT WHITMAN
(1819–1892)

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer (1865)

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and
measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much
applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

This poem might be paraphrased as follows: “When I grew restless listening to an astronomy lecture, I went outside, where I found I learned more just by looking at the stars than I had learned inside.” But the paraphrase

is obviously neither as rich nor as complex as the poem. Through careful use of diction, Whitman establishes a dichotomy that supports the poem’s central theme about the relative merits of two ways of learning.

The poem can be divided into two groups of four lines. The first four lines unified by the repetition of “When,” introduce the astronomer and his tools: “proofs,” “figures,” and “charts and diagrams” to be added, divided, and measured. In this section of the poem, the speaker is passive: he sits and listens (“I heard”; “I was shown”; “I sitting heard”). The repetition of “When” reinforces the dry monotony of the lecture. In the next four lines, the choice of words signals the change in the speaker’s actions and reactions. The confined lecture hall is replaced by “the mystical moist night-air,” and the dry lecture and automatic applause give way to “perfect silence”; instead of sitting passively, the speaker becomes active (he glides, wanders); instead of listening, he looks. The mood of the first half of the poem is restrained: the language is concrete and physical, and the speaker is studying, receiving information from a “learn’d” authority. The rest of the poem, celebrating intuitive knowledge and feelings, is more abstract, freer. Throughout the poem, the lecture hall contrasts sharply with the natural world outside its walls.

After considering the poem as a whole, readers should not find it hard to understand why the poet selected certain words. Whitman’s use of “lectured” in line 4 rather than a more neutral word like “spoke” is appropriate both because it suggests formality and distance and because it echoes “lecture-room” in the same line. The word “sick” in line 5 is striking because it connotes physical as well as emotional distress, more effectively conveying the extent of the speaker’s discomfort than “bored” or “restless” would. “Rising” and “gliding” (6) are used rather than “standing” and “walking out” both because of the way their stressed vowel sounds echo each other (and echo “time to time” in the next line) and because of their connotation of dreaminess, which is consistent with “wander’d” (6) and “mystical” (7). The word “moist” (7) is chosen not only because its consonant sounds echo the *m* and *st* sounds in “mystical,” but also because it establishes a contrast with the dry, airless lecture hall. Finally, line 10, “perfect silence” is a better choice than a reasonable substitute like “complete silence” or “total silence,” either of which would suggest the degree of the silence but not its quality.

In the next poem, the poet also pays careful attention to word choice.

WILLIAM STAFFORD
(1914–1993)

For the Grave of Daniel Boone (1957)

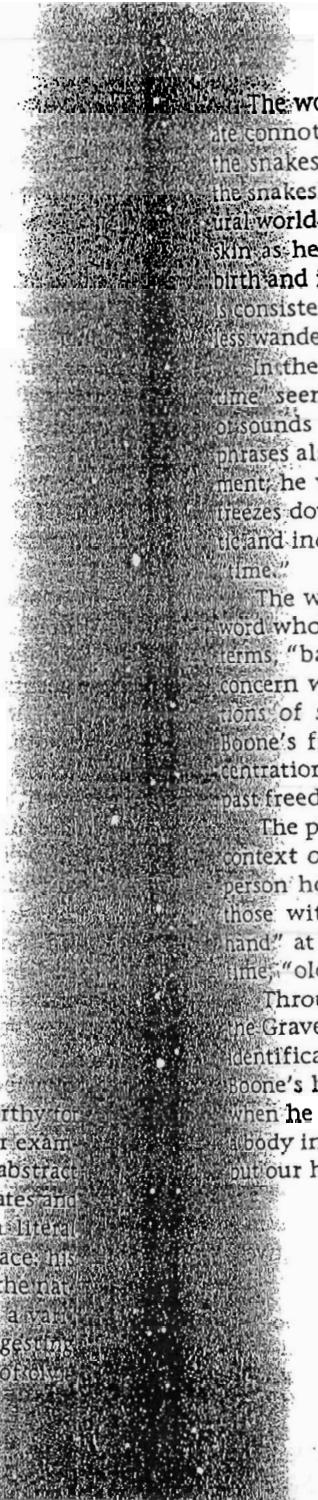
The farther he went the farther home grew.
Kentucky became another room;
the mansion arched over the Mississippi;
flowers were spread all over the floor.
5 He traced ahead a deepening home,
and better, with goldenrod:

Leaving the snakeskin of place after place,
going on—after the trees
the grass, a bird flying after a song.
10 Rifle so level, sighting so well
his picture freezes down to now,
a story-picture for children.

They go over the velvet falls
into the tapestry of his time,
15 heirs to the landscape, feeling no jar:
it is like evening; they are the quail
surrounding his fire, coming in for the kill;
their little feet move sacred sand.

Children, we live in a barbwire time
20 but like to follow the old hands back—
the ring in the light, the knuckle, the palm,
all the way to Daniel Boone,
hunting our own kind of deepening home.
From the land that was his I heft this rock,
25 Here on his grave I put it down.

A number of words in "For the Grave of Daniel Boone" are noteworthy for their multiple denotations and connotations. In the first stanza, for example, "home" does not mean Boone's residence; it connotes an abstract state, a dynamic concept that grows and deepens, encompassing states and rivers while becoming paradoxically more and more elusive. In literal terms, Boone's "home" at the poem's end is a narrow, confined space: his grave. In a wider sense, his home is the United States, particularly the natural landscape he explored. Thus, the word "home" comes to have a variety of associations to readers beyond its denotative meaning, suggesting both the infinite possibilities beyond the frontier and the realities of civilization's walls and fences.



The word "snakeskin" denotes "the skin of a snake"; its most immediate connotations are smoothness and slipperiness. In this poem, however, the snakeskin signifies more, because it is Daniel Boone who is "leaving the snakeskin of place after place." Like a snake, Boone belongs to the natural world—and, like a snake, he wanders from place to place, shedding his skin as he goes. Thus, the word "snakeskin," with its connotation of rebirth and its links to nature, passing time, and the inevitability of change, is consistent with the image of Boone as both a man of nature and a restless wanderer, "a bird flying after a song."

In the poem's third stanza, the phrases "velvet falls" and "tapestry of time" seem at first to have been selected solely for their pleasing repetition of sounds ("velvet falls"; "tapestry of time"). But both of these paradoxical phrases also support the poem's theme. Alive, Boone was in constant movement; he was also larger than life. Now he has been reduced; "his picture freezes down to . . . / a story-picture for children" (11–12), and he is as static and inorganic as velvet or tapestry—no longer dynamic, like "falls" and "time."

The word "barbwire" (in line 19's phrase "barbwire time") is another word whose multiple meanings enrich the poem's theme. In the simplest terms, "barbwire" denotes a metal fencing material. In light of the poem's concern with space and distance, however, "barbwire" (with its connotations of sharpness, danger, and confinement) is also the antithesis of Boone's free or peaceful wilderness, evoking images of prisons and concentration camps and reinforcing the poem's central dichotomy between past freedom and present restriction.

The phrase "old hands" (20) might also have multiple meanings in the context of the poem. On one level, the hands could belong to an elderly person holding a storybook; on another level, "old hands" could refer to those with considerable life experience—like Boone, who was an "old hand" at scouting. On still another level, given the poem's concern with time, "old hands" could suggest the hands of a clock.

Through what it says literally and through what its words suggest, "For the Grave of Daniel Boone" communicates a good deal about the speaker's identification with Daniel Boone and with the nation he called home. Boone's horizons, his concept of "home," expanded as he wandered. Now, when he is frozen in time and space, a character in a child's picture book, a body in a grave, we are still "hunting our own kind of deepening home," but our horizons, like Boone's, have narrowed in this "barbwire time."

6

FIGURES OF SPEECH

*All slang is metaphor,
and all metaphor is poetry.*

—G. K. CHESTERTON

WHY SPEAK FIGURATIVELY?

"I will speak daggers to her, but use none," says Hamlet, preparing to confront his mother. His statement makes sense only because we realize that *daggers* is to be taken two ways: literally (denoting sharp, pointed weapons) and nonliterally (referring to something that can be used like weapons—namely, words). Reading poetry, we often meet comparisons between two things whose similarity we have never noticed before. When Marianne Moore observes that a fir tree has "an emerald turkey-foot at the top," the result is a pleasure that poetry richly affords: the sudden recognition of likenesses.

A treetop like a turkey-foot, words like daggers—such comparisons are called figures of speech. In its broadest definition, a figure of speech may be said to occur whenever a speaker or writer, for the sake of freshness or emphasis, departs from the usual denotations of words. Certainly, when Hamlet says he will speak daggers, no one expects him to release pointed weapons from his lips, for *daggers* is not to be read solely for its denotation. Its connotations—sharp, stabbing, piercing, wounding—also come to mind, and we see ways in which words and daggers work alike. (Words too can hurt: by striking through pretenses, possibly, or by wounding their hearer's self-esteem.) In the statement "A razor is sharper than an ax," there is no departure from the usual denotations of *razor* and *ax*, and no figure of speech results. Both objects are of the same class; the comparison is not offensive to logic. But in King Lear's "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child," the objects—snake's tooth (fang) and ungrateful offspring—are so unlike that no reasonable comparison may be made between them. To find similarity, we attend to the connotations of *serpent's tooth*—biting, piercing, venom, pain—rather than to its denotations. If we are aware of the connotations of *red rose* (beauty, softness, freshness, and so forth), then the line "My love is like a red, red rose" need not call to mind a woman with a scarlet face and a thorny neck.

Figures of speech are not devices to state what is demonstrably untrue. Indeed they often state truths that more literal language cannot communicate; they call

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

1851

The Eagle

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azur-e world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

This brief poem is rich in figurative language. In the first line, the phrase *crooked hands* may surprise us. An eagle does not have hands, we might protest; but the objection would be a quibble, for evidently Tennyson is indicating exactly how an eagle clasps a crag, in the way that human fingers clasp a thing. By implication, too, the eagle is a person. *Close to the sun*, if taken literally, is an absurd exaggeration, the sun being a mean distance of 93,000,000 miles from the earth. For the eagle to be closer to it by the altitude of a mountain is an approach so small as to be insignificant. But figuratively, Tennyson conveys that the eagle stands above the clouds, perhaps silhouetted against the sun, and for the moment belongs to the heavens rather than to the land and sea. The word *ringed* makes a circle of the whole world's horizons and suggests that we see the world from the eagle's height; the *wrinkled sea* becomes an aged, sluggish animal; *mountain walls*, possibly literal, also suggests a fort or castle; and finally the eagle itself is likened to a thunderbolt in speed and in power, perhaps also in that its beak is—like our abstract conception of a lightning bolt—pointed. How much of the poem can be taken literally? Only *he clasps the crag, he stands, he watches, he falls*. The rest is made of figures of speech. The result is that, reading Tennyson's poem, we gain a bird's-eye view of sun, sea, and land—and even of bird. Like imagery, figurative language refers us to the physical world.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

1609

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair⁵ from fair sometimes declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

fair one

ownest, have 10

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Howard Moss (1922-1987)**Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?**

1976

Who says you're like one of the dog days?
 You're nicer. And better.
 Even in May, the weather can be gray,
 And a summer sub-let doesn't last forever.
 Sometimes the sun's too hot;

5

Sometimes it is not.

Who can stay young forever?
 People break their necks or just drop dead!
 But you? Never!
 If there's just one condensed reader left
 Who can figure out the abridged alphabet,

10

After you're dead and gone,
 In this poem you'll live on!

SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A SUMMER'S DAY? (MOSS). Dog days: the hottest days of summer. The ancient Romans believed that the Dog-star, Sirius, added heat to summer months.

Questions

1. In Howard Moss's streamlined version of Shakespeare, from a series called "Modified Sonnets (Dedicated to adapters, abridgers, digesters, and condensers everywhere)," to what extent does the poet use figurative language? In Shakespeare's original sonnet, how high a proportion of Shakespeare's language is figurative?
2. Compare some of Moss's lines to the corresponding lines in Shakespeare's sonnet. Why is *Even in May, the weather can be gray* less interesting than the original? In the lines on the sun (5-6 in both versions), what has Moss's modification deliberately left out? Why is Shakespeare's seeing death as a braggart memorable? Why aren't you greatly impressed by Moss's last two lines?
3. Can you explain Shakespeare's play on the word *untrimmed* (line 8)? Evidently the word can mean "divested of trimmings," but what other suggestions do you find in it?
4. How would you answer someone who argued, "Maybe Moss's language isn't as good as Shakespeare's, but the meaning is still there. What's wrong with putting Shakespeare into up-to-date words that can be understood by everybody?"

METAPHOR AND SIMILE

Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

The first of these lines (from Shelley's "Adonais") is a simile: a comparison of two things, indicated by some connective, usually *like*, *as*, *than*, or a verb such as *resembles*. A simile expresses a similarity. Still, for a simile to exist, the things compared have to be dissimilar in kind. It is no simile to say "Your fingers are like mine"; it is a literal observation. But to say "Your fingers are like sausages" is to use a simile. Omit the connective—say "Your fingers are sausages"—and the result is a metaphor, a statement that one thing is something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not. In the second of Shelley's lines, it is assumed that Eternity is light or radiance, and we have an implied

Oh, my love is like a red, red rose.

Simile

Oh, my love resembles a red, red rose.

Simile

Oh, my love is redder than a rose.

Simile

Oh, my love is a red, red rose.

Metaphor

Oh, my love has red petals and sharp thorns.

Implied metaphor

Oh, I placed my love into a long-stem vase
 and I bandaged my bleeding thumb.

Implied metaphor

Often you can tell a metaphor from a simile by much more than just the presence or absence of a connective. In general, a simile refers to only one characteristic that two things have in common, while a metaphor is not plainly limited in the number of resemblances it may indicate. To use the simile "He eats like a pig" is to compare man and animal in one respect: eating habits. But to say "He's a pig" is to use a metaphor that might involve comparisons of appearance and morality as well.

For scientists as well as poets, the making of metaphors is customary. In 1933 George Lemaitre, the Belgian priest and physicist credited with the big bang theory of the origin of the universe, conceived of a primal atom that existed before anything else, which expanded and produced everything. And so, he remarked, making a wonderful metaphor, the evolution of the cosmos as it is today "can be compared to a display of fireworks that has just ended." As astrophysicist and novelist Alan Lightman has noted, we can't help envisioning scientific discoveries in terms of things we know from daily life—spinning balls, waves in water, pendulums, weights on springs. "We have no other choice," Lightman reasons. "We cannot avoid forming mental pictures when we try to grasp the meaning of our equations, and how can we picture what we have not seen?"¹ In science as well as in poetry, it would seem, metaphors are necessary instruments of understanding.

Mixed Metaphors

In everyday speech, simile and metaphor occur frequently. We use metaphors ("She's a doll") and similes ("The tickets are selling like hotcakes") without being fully conscious of them. If, however, we are aware that words possess literal meanings as well as figurative ones, we do not write *died in the wool* for *dyed in the wool* or *tow the line* for *toe the line*; nor do we use mixed metaphors as did the writer who advised, "Water the spark of knowledge and it will bear fruit," or the speaker who urged, "To get ahead, keep your nose to the grindstone, your shoulder to the wheel, your ear to the ground, and your eye on the ball." Perhaps the unintended humor of these statements comes from our seeing that the writer, busy stringing together stale metaphors, was not aware that they had any physical reference.

Unlike a writer who thoughtlessly mixes metaphors, a good poet can join together incongruous things and still keep the reader's respect. In his ballad "Thirty Bob a Week," John Davidson has a British workingman tell how it feels to try to support a large family on small wages:

It's a naked child against a hungry wolf;
 It's playing bowls upon a splitting wreck;
 It's walking on a string across a gulf
 With millstones fore-and-aft about your neck;

¹"Physicists' Use of Metaphor." *The American Scholar* (Winter 1980): 90.

But the thing is daily done by many and many a one;
And we fall, face forward, fighting, on the deck.

Like the man with his nose to the grindstone, Davidson's wage earner is in an absurd fix; but his balancing act seems far from merely nonsensical. For every one of the poet's comparisons—of workingman to child, to bowler, to tightrope walker, and to seaman—offers suggestions of a similar kind. All help us see (and imagine) the workingman's hard life: a brave and unyielding struggle against impossible odds.

Poetry and Metaphor

A poem may make a series of comparisons, like Davidson's, or the whole poem may be one extended comparison:

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun

(about 1863)

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away –

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –
And now We hunt the Doe –
And every time I speak for Him –
The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow –
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –
I guard My Master's Head –
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –
None stir the second time –
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –
Or an emphatic Thumb –

Though I than He – may longer live
He longer must – than I –
For I have but the power to kill,
Without – the power to die –

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How much life metaphors bring to poetry may be seen by comparing two poems by Tennyson and Blake.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

Flower in the Crannied Wall

1869

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

How many metaphors does this poem contain? None. Compare it with a briefer poem on a similar theme: the quatrain that begins Blake's "Auguries of Innocence." (We follow here the opinion of W. B. Yeats, who, in editing Blake's poems, thought the lines ought to be printed separately.)

William Blake (1757–1827)

To see a world in a grain of sand

(about 1803)

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

Set beside Blake's poem, Tennyson's—short though it is—seems lengthy. What contributes to the richness of "To see a world in a grain of sand" is Blake's use of a metaphor in every line. And every metaphor is loaded with suggestion. Our world does indeed resemble a grain of sand: in being round, in being stony, in being one of a myriad (the suggestions go on and on). Like Blake's grain of sand, a metaphor holds much, within a small circumference.

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963)

Metaphors

1960

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendril.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Questions

1. To what central fact do all the metaphors in this poem refer?
2. In the first line, what has the speaker in common with a riddle? Why does she say she has

N. Scott Momaday (b. 1934)

Simile

What did we say to each other
 that now we are as the deer
 who walk in single file
 with heads high
 with ears forward
 with eyes watchful
 with hooves always placed on firm ground
 in whose limbs there is latent flight

1974

5

Questions

1. Momaday never tells us what was said. Does this omission keep us from understanding the comparison?
2. The comparison is extended with each detail adding some new twist. Explain the implications of the last line.

Experiment: Likening

Write a poem that follows the method of N. Scott Momaday's "Simile," consisting of one long comparison between two objects. Possible subjects might include talking to a loved one long-distance; what you feel like going to a weekend job; being on a diet; not being noticed by someone you love; winning a lottery.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

It dropped so low – in my Regard

(about 1868)

It dropped so low – in my Regard –
 I heard it hit the Ground –
 And go to pieces on the Stones
 At bottom of my Mind –

Yet blamed the Fate that flung it – less
 Than I denounced Myself,
 For entertaining Plated Wares
 Upon My Silver Shelf –

Questions

1. What is it? What two things are compared?
2. How much of the poem develops and amplifies this comparison?

Jill Alexander Essbaum (b. 1971)

The Heart

2007

Four simple chambers.
 A thousand complicated doors.

One of them is yours

Questions

1. Which line contains a figure of speech?
2. Is that figure a metaphor or a simile? Explain.

Craig Raine (b. 1944)

A Martian Sends a Postcard Home

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
 and some are treasured for their markings—

they cause the eyes to melt
 or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but
 sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
 and rests its soft machine on ground:

then the world is dim and bookish
 like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
 It has the property of making colors darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside—
 a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film
 to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
 or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
 that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
 to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
 deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer
 openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.
 They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt
 and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colors die,
 they hide in pairs

1979

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and read about themselves—
in color, with their eyelids shut.

A MARTIAN SENDS A POSTCARD HOME. The title of this poem literally describes its contents. A Martian briefly describes everyday objects and activities on earth, but the visitor sees them all from an alien perspective. The Martian/author lacks a complete vocabulary and sometimes describes general categories of things with a proper noun (as in Model T in line 13). 1 Caxtons: Books, since William Caxton (c. 1422–1491) was the first person to print books in England.

Question

Can you recognize everything the Martian describes and translate it back into Earth-based English?

Exercise: What Is Similar?

Each of these quotations contains a simile or a metaphor. In each of these figures of speech, what two things is the poet comparing? Try to state exactly what you understand the two things to have in common: the most striking similarity or similarities that the poet sees.

1. All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.
—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

2. When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces . . .
—Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Atalanta in Calydon"

3. Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though strong and brave,
Still, like muffled drums are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"

4. "Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –
—Emily Dickinson, an untitled poem

5. Why should I let the toad work
Squat on my life?
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?
—Philip Larkin, "Toads"

6. I wear my patience like a light-green dress
and wear it thin.
—Emily Grosholz, "Remembering the Ardèche"

7. a laugh maybe, like glasses on a shelf
suddenly found by the sun . . .

D. L. C. — "D. + A.D."

8. A new electric fence,
Its five barbed wires tight
As a steel-stringed banjo.
—Van K. Brock, "Driving at Dawn"

9. Spring stirs Gossamer Beynon Schoolmistress like a spoon.
—Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*

10. Our headlight caught, as in a flashbulb's flare,
A pair of hitchhikers.
—Paul Lake, "Two Hitchhikers"

OTHER FIGURES OF SPEECH

When Shakespeare asks, in a sonnet,

O! how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,

it might seem at first that he mixes metaphors. How can a *breath* confront the battering ram of an invading army? But it is summer's breath and, by giving it to summer, Shakespeare makes the season a man or woman. It is as if the fragrance of summer were the breath within a person's body, and winter were the onslaught of old age.

Personification

Such is Shakespeare's instance of personification: a figure of speech in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (*truth, nature*) is made human. A personification extends throughout this short poem.

James Stephens (1882–1950)

The Wind

1915

The wind stood up and gave a shout.
He whistled on his fingers and
Kicked the withered leaves about
And thumped the branches with his hand
And said he'd kill and kill and kill,
And so he will and so he will.

The wind is a wild man, and evidently it is not just any autumn breeze but a hurricane or at least a stiff gale. In poems that do not work as well as this one, personification may be employed mechanically. Hollow-eyed personifications walk the works of lesser English poets of the eighteenth century: Coleridge has quoted the beginning of one such neoclassical ode, "Inoculation! heavenly Maid, descend!" It is hard for the contemporary reader to be excited by William Collins's "The Passions, An Ode for Music" (1747), which personifies, stanza by stanza, Fear, Anger, Despair, Home, Revenge, Piety, Jealousy, Love, Hate, Melancholy, and

Cheerfulness, and has them listen to Music, until even "Brown Exercise rejoiced to hear, / And Sport leapt up, and seized his beechen spear." Still, in "Two Sonnets on Fame" John Keats makes an abstraction come alive in seeing Fame as "a wayward girl."

Apostrophe

Hand in hand with personification often goes apostrophe: a way of addressing someone or something invisible or not ordinarily spoken to. In an apostrophe, a poet (in these examples Wordsworth) may address an inanimate object ("Spade! with which Wilkinson hath tilled his lands"), some dead or absent person ("Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour"), an abstract thing ("Return, Delights!"), or a spirit ("Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought"). More often than not, the poet uses apostrophe to announce a lofty and serious tone. An "O" may even be put in front of it ("O moon!") since, according to W. D. Snodgrass, every poet has a right to do so at least once in a lifetime. But apostrophe doesn't have to be highfalutin. It is a means of giving life to the inanimate. It is a way of giving body to the intangible, a way of speaking to it person to person, as in the words of a moving American spiritual: "Death, ain't you got no shame?"

Overstatement and Understatement

Most of us, from time to time, emphasize a point with a statement containing exaggeration: "Faster than greased lightning," "I've told him a thousand times." We speak, then, not literal truth but use a figure of speech called overstatement (or hyperbole). Poets too, being fond of emphasis, often exaggerate for effect. Instances are Marvell's profession of a love that should grow "Vaster than empires, and more slow" and John Burdon's description of Petra: "A rose-red city, half as old as Time." Overstatement can be used also for humorous purposes, as in a fat woman's boast (from a blues song): "Every time I shake, some skinny gal loses her home."² The opposite is understatement, implying more than is said. Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi* recalls how, as an apprentice steamboat-pilot asleep when supposed to be on watch, he was roused by the pilot and sent clambering to the pilot house: "Mr. Bixby was close behind, commenting." Another example is Robert Frost's line "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches"—the conclusion of a poem that has suggested that to swing on a birch tree is one of the most deeply satisfying activities in the world.

Metonymy and Synecdoche

In metonymy, the name of a thing is substituted for that of another closely associated with it. For instance, we say "The White House decided," and mean that the president did. When John Dyer writes in "Grongar Hill,"

A little rule, a little sway,
A sun beam in a winter's day,
Is all the proud and mighty have
Between the cradle and the grave,

we recognize that *cradle* and *grave* signify birth and death. A kind of metonymy, synecdoche is the use of a part of a thing to stand for the whole of it or vice versa.

²Quoted by Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones] in *Blues People* (New York: Morrow, 1963).

We say "She lent a hand," and mean that she lent her entire presence. Similarly, Milton in "Lycidas" refers to greedy clergymen as "blind mouths."

Paradox

Paradox occurs in a statement that at first strikes us as self-contradictory but that on reflection makes some sense. "The peasant," said G. K. Chesterton, "lives in a larger world than the globe-trotter." Here, two different meanings of *larger* are contrasted: "greater in spiritual values" versus "greater in miles." Some paradoxical statements, however, are much more than plays on words. In a moving sonnet, the blind John Milton tells how one night he dreamed he could see his dead wife. The poem ends in a paradox:

But oh, as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

Pun

Asked to tell the difference between men and women, Samuel Johnson replied, "I can't conceive, madam, can you?" The great dictionary-maker was using a figure of speech known to classical rhetoricians as *paronomasia*, better known to us as a pun or play on words. How does a pun operate? It reminds us of another word (or other words) of similar or identical sound but of very different denotation. Although puns at their worst can be mere piddling quibbles, at best they can sharply point to surprising but genuine resemblances. The name of a dentist's country estate, Tooth Acres, is accurate: aching teeth paid for the property. In his novel *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville takes up questions about whales that had puzzled scientists: for instance, are the whale's spoutings water or gaseous vapor? And when Melville speaks pointedly of the great whale "sprinkling and mistifying the gardens of the deep," we catch his pun, and conclude that the creature both mystifies and mystifies at once.

In poetry, a pun may be facetious, as in Thomas Hood's ballad of "Faithless Nelly Gray":

Ben Battle was a soldier bold,
And used to war's alarms;
But a cannon-ball took off his legs,
So he laid down his arms!

Or it may be serious, as in these lines on war by E. E. Cummings:

the bigness of cannon
is skillful,

(*is skillful* becoming *is kill-ful* when read aloud); or perhaps, as in Shakespeare's song in *Cymbeline*, "Fear no more the heat o' th' sun," both facetious and serious at once:

Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Poets often make puns on images, thereby combining the sensory force of imagery with the verbal pleasure of wordplay. Find and explain the punning images in these two poems.

Margaret Atwood (b. 1939)

You fit into me 1971
 you fit into me
 like a hook into an eye
 a fish hook
 an open eye

George Herbert (1593–1633)

The Pulley 1633

When God at first made man,
 Having a glass of blessings standing by—
 Let us (said he) pour on him all we can;
 Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
 Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way,
 Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure:
 When almost all was out, God made a stay,
 Perceiving that, alone of all His treasure,
 Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said he)
 Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
 He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
 And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
 So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
 But keep them with repining restlessness;
 Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
 If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
 May toss him to My breast.

Questions

1. What different senses of the word *rest* does Herbert bring into this poem?
2. How do God's words in line 16, *Yet let him keep the rest*, seem paradoxical?
3. What do you feel to be the tone of Herbert's poem? Does the punning make the poem seem comic?
4. Why is the poem called "The Pulley"? What is its implied metaphor?

To sum up: even though figures of speech are not to be taken *only* literally, they refer us to a tangible world. By personifying an eagle, Tennyson reminds us that the bird and humankind have certain characteristics in common. Through *metonymy*, a poet can focus our attention on a particular detail in a larger object; through *hyperbole* and *understatement*, make us see the physical actuality in back of words. *Pun* and *paradox* cause us to realize this actuality, too, and probably surprise us ~~enjoyably at the same time~~. *Through abstruse the poet animates the inanimate*

and asks it to listen—speaks directly to an immediate god or to the revivified dead. Put to such uses, figures of speech have power. They are more than just ways of playing with words.

Dana Gioia (b. 1950)

Money 1991

Money is a kind of poetry.
—Wallace Stevens

Money, the long green,
 cash, stash, rhino, jack
 or just plain dough.

Chock it up, fork it over,
 shell it out. Watch it
 burn holes through pockets.

To be made of it! To have it
 to burn! Greenbacks, double eagles,
 megabucks and Ginnie Maes.

It greases the palm, feathers a nest,
 holds heads above water,
 makes both ends meet.

Money breeds money.
 Gathering interest, compounding daily.
 Always in circulation.

Money. You don't know where it's been,
 but you put it where your mouth is.
 And it talks.

Question

What figures of speech can you identify in this poem?

Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

Fog 1916

The fog comes
 on little cat feet.

It sits looking
 over harbor and city
 on silent haunches
 and then moves on.

Questions

1. What figure of speech does this poem use?
2. Which specific feline qualities does the speaker impute to the fog?

Charles Simic (b. 1938)*My Shoes*

Shoes, secret face of my inner life:
Two gaping toothless mouths,
Two partly decomposed animal skins
Smelling of mice nests.

My brother and sister who died at birth
Continuing their existence in you,
Guiding my life
Toward their incomprehensible innocence.

What use are books to me
When in you it is possible to read
The Gospel of my life on earth
And still beyond, of things to come?

I want to proclaim the religion
I have devised for your perfect humility
And the strange church I am building
With you as the altar.

Ascetic and maternal, you endure:
Kin to oxen, to Saints, to condemned men,
With your mute patience, forming
The only true likeness of myself.

Question

Which statements in this poem are literal, and which are not? For those that are figurative, identify the specific figure of speech that each employs.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER STUDY*Robert Frost* (1874–1963)*The Silken Tent*

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys^o it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul.
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To everything on earth the compass round,
And only by one's going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air

1967

5

10

15

20

attachments that steady it

5

10

Questions

1. Is Frost's comparison of a woman and tent a simile or a metaphor?
2. What are the ropes or cords?
3. Does the poet convey any sense of this woman's character? What sort of person do you believe her to be?
4. Paraphrase the poem, trying to state its implied meaning. (To be refreshed about paraphrase, turn back to page 6.) Be sure to include the implications of the last three lines.

Jane Kenyon (1947–1995)*The Suitor*

We lie back to back. Curtains
lift and fall,
like the chest of someone sleeping.
Wind moves the leaves of the box elder;
they show their light undersides,
turning all at once
like a school of fish.
Suddenly I understand that I am happy.
For months this feeling
has been coming closer, stopping
for short visits, like a timid suitor.

1978

10

Question

In each simile you find in "The Suitor," exactly what is the similarity?

Exercise: Figures of Speech

Identify the central figure of speech in the following four short poems.

Robert Frost (1874–1963)*The Secret Sits*

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

1942

A. R. Ammons (1926–2001)*Coward*

Bravery runs in my family.

1975

Kay Ryan (b. 1945)*Turtle*

Who would be a turtle who could help it?
A barely mobile hard roll, a four-oared helmet,
she can ill afford the chances she must take
in rowing toward the grasses that she eats.

1994

a packing-case places, and almost any slope
defeats her modest hopes. Even being practical,
she's often stuck up to the axle on her way
to something edible. With everything optimal,
she skirts the ditch which would convert
her shell into a serving dish. She lives
below luck-level, never imagining some lottery
will change her load of pottery to wings.
Her only levity is patience,
the sport of truly chastened things.

10

15

Anne Stevenson (b. 1933)**The Demolition**

1974

They have lived in each other so long
There is little to do there.
They have taken to patching the floor
While the roof tears.

The rot in her feeds on his woodwork.
He batters her cellar.
He camps in the ruin of her carpet.
She cries on his stairs.

Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962)**Hands**

1929

Inside a cave in a narrow canyon near Tassajara
The vault of rock is painted with hands,
A multitude of hands in the twilight, a cloud of men's palms,
 no more,
No other picture. There's no one to say
Whether the brown shy quiet people who are dead intended
Religion or magic, or made their tracings
In the idleness of art; but over the division of years these
 careful
Signs-manual are now like a sealed message
Saying: "Look: we also were human; we had hands, not paws.
 All hail
You people with the cleverer hands, our supplacers
In the beautiful country; enjoy her a season, her beauty, and
 come down
And be supplanted; for you also are human."

Question

Identify examples of personification and apostrophe in "Hands."

Robert Burns (1759–1796)

Oh, my love is like a red, red rose

(about 1788)

Oh, my love is like a red, red rose
 That's newly sprung in June;
My love is like the melody
 That's sweetly played-in tune.

So fair art thou, my bonny lass,
 So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
 Till a' the seas gang^o dry.

.5

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
 And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
 While the sands o' life shall run.

go

And fare thee weel, my only love!
 And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my love
 Though it were ten thousand mile.

10

15

*Robert Frost on Writing***The Importance of Poetic Metaphor**

1930

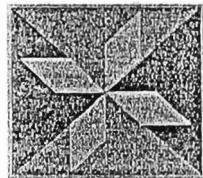
I do not think anybody ever knows the discreet
use of metaphors, his own and other people's,
the discreet handling of metaphor, unless he
has been properly educated in poetry.

Poetry begins in trivial metaphors, pretty
metaphors, "grace" metaphors, and goes on to
the profoundest thinking that we have. Poetry
provides the one permissible way of saying
one thing and meaning another. People
say, "Why don't you say what you mean?" We
never do that, do we, being all of us too much
poets. We like to talk in parables and in hints
and in indirections—whether from diffidence
or some other instinct.

I have wanted in late years to go further
and further in making metaphor the whole of
thinking. I find someone now and then to
agree with me that all thinking, except
mathematical thinking, is metaphorical, or all thinking except scientific thinking. The
mathematical might be difficult for me to bring in, but the scientific is easy enough.



Robert Frost



Figures of Speech

◦ ◦ ◦
The metaphor is probably the most fertile power possessed by man.

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

Poetry is made of comparisons, simple or complex, open or concealed. The richness of poetry is obtained by mixing or interweaving or juxtaposing these comparisons. The mixture is either a mechanical mixture or a chemical mixture: when the mechanical becomes chemical the explosion takes place. That is the difference between prose and poetry. In prose all comparisons are simple and uncompounded. In poetry all metaphors are mixed metaphors.

J. ISAACS, *The Background of Modern Poetry*

Suppose we shall never be able to distinguish absolutely and with a hard edge the image from the metaphor, any more than anyone has so distinguished prose from poetry. . . . We shall very often be able to tell, just as we can very often tell the difference between snow and rain; but there are some weathers which are either-neither, and so here there is an area where our differences mingle. If the poet says, simply, "The red bird," we shall probably take it as an image. But as soon as we read the rest of the line—"The red bird flies across the golden floor"—there arise obscure thoughts of relationships which lead in the direction of parable: the line alone is not, strictly, a metaphor, but its resonances take it prospectively beyond a pure perception. . . . The metaphor stands somewhat as a mediating term squarely between a thing and a thought, which may be why it is so likely to compose itself about a word of sense and a word of thought, as in this example of a common Shakespearean formula: "Even to the teeth and forehead of my fault."

HOWARD NEMEROV, "On Metaphor"

Metaphor is not to be considered, . . . as the alternative of the poet, which he elect to use or not, since he may state the matter directly and straightforwardly if he chooses. It is frequently the only means available if he writes at all. . . .

CLEANTH BROOKS, "Metaphor and the Tradition"
◦ ◦ ◦

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
(1564-1616)

Shall I Compare Thee
to a Summer's Day?
(1609)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;¹
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Although figurative language is used in all kinds of writing, poets in particular recognize the power of a figure of speech to take readers beyond the literal meaning of a word. For this reason, **figures of speech**—expressions that describe one thing in terms of something else—are more prominent in poetry than in other kinds of writing. For example, the preceding sonnet by Shakespeare compares a loved one to a summer's day in order to make the point that, unlike the fleeting summer, the loved one will—within the poem—remain forever young. But this sonnet goes beyond the obvious equation (loved one = summer's day); the speaker's assertion that his loved one will live forever in his poem actually says more about his confidence in his own talent and reputation (and about the power of figurative language) than about the loved one's beauty.

SIMILE, METAPHOR,
AND PERSONIFICATION

When William Wordsworth opens a poem with "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (p. 847), he conveys a good deal more than he would if he simply

¹ Beauty you possess.

said "I wandered, lonely." By comparing himself in his loneliness to a cloud, he suggests that like the cloud he is a part of nature and that he too is drifting, passive, blown by winds, and lacking will or substance. Thus, by using a figure of speech, the poet can suggest a wide variety of feelings and associations in very few words. The phrase "I wandered lonely as a cloud" is a **simile**, a comparison between two unlike items that includes *like* or *as*. When an imaginative comparison between two unlike items does not include *like* or *as*—that is, when it says "a is b" rather than "a is like b"—it is a **metaphor**.

Accordingly, when the speaker in Adrienne Rich's "Living in Sin" (p. 621) speaks of "daylight coming / like a relentless milkman up the stairs," she is using a strikingly original simile to suggest that daylight brings not the conventional associations of promise and awakening, but rather a stale, never-ending routine that is greeted without enthusiasm. This idea is consistent with the rest of the poem, an account of an unhappy relationship. However, when the speaker in Audre Lorde's poem says "Rooming houses are old women" (p. 666), she uses a metaphor, equating two elements to stress their common associations with emptiness, transience, and hopelessness. In addition, by identifying rooming houses as old women, Lorde is using **personification**, a special kind of comparison closely related to metaphor, that gives life or human characteristics to inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

Sometimes, as in Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud," a single brief simile or metaphor can be appreciated for what it communicates on its own. At other times, however, a simile or metaphor may be one of several related figures of speech that work together to communicate a poem's meaning. The following poem, for example, presents a series of related similes. Together, they suggest the depth of the problem the poem explores in a manner that each individual simile could not do alone.

• • •
LANGSTON HUGHES
(1902-1967)

Harlem
(1951)

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?
10 Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

The dream to which Hughes alludes in his 1951 poem is the dream of racial equality. It is also the American Dream—or, by extension, any important unrealized dream. His speaker offers six tentative answers to the question asked in the poem's first line, and five of the six are presented as similes. As the poem unfolds, the speaker considers different alternatives. The dream can shrivel up and die, fester, decay, crust over—or just sag under the weight of the burden those who hold the dream must carry. In each case, the speaker transforms an abstract entity—a dream—into a concrete item—a raisin in the sun, a sore, rotten meat, syrupy candy, a heavy load. The final line of the poem, italicized for emphasis, gains power less from what it says than from what it leaves unsaid. Unlike the other alternatives explored in the poem, "*Or does it explode?*" is not presented as a simile. Nevertheless, because of the pattern of figurative language the poem has established, readers supply the other, unspoken half of the comparison: ". . . like a bomb."

Sometimes a single *extended simile* or *extended metaphor* is developed throughout a poem. The poem that follows, for example, develops an extended simile; comparing a poet to an acrobat.

^ ^ ^
LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI
(1919—)

Constantly Risking Absurdity (1958)

Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
5 of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above a sea of faces
10 paces his way

to the other side of day
performing entrechats
and sleight-of-foot tricks
and other high theatrics
and all without mistaking
any thing
for what it may not be

For he's the super realist
who must perceive
taut truth
before the taking of each stance or step
in his supposed advance
toward that still higher perch
where Beauty stands and waits
with gravity
to start her death-defying leap

And he
a little charleychaplin man
who may or may not catch
her fair eternal form
spreadeagled in the empty air
of existence

In his extended comparison between a poet and an acrobat, Ferlinghetti characterizes the poet as a kind of all-purpose circus performer, at once swinging recklessly on a trapeze and balancing carefully on a tightrope.

What the poem suggests is that the poet, like an acrobat, works hard at his craft but manages to make it all look easy. Something of an exhibitionist, the poet is innovative and creative, taking impossible chances yet also building on traditional skills in his quest for truth and beauty. Moreover, like an acrobat, the poet is balanced "on eyebeams / above a sea of faces," for he too depends on audience reaction to help him keep his performance focused. The poet may be "the super realist," but he also has plenty of playful tricks up his sleeve: "entrechats / and sleight-of-foot tricks / and other high theatrics," including puns ("above the heads / of his audience"), unexpected rhyme ("climbs on rime"), alliteration ("taut truth"), coinages ("a little charleychaplin man"), and all the other linguistic acrobatics available to poets. (Even the arrangement of the poem's lines on the page suggests the acrobatics it describes.) Like these tricks, the poem's central simile is a whimsical one, perhaps suggesting that Ferlinghetti is poking fun at poets who take their craft too seriously. In any case, the simile helps him to illustrate the acrobatic possibilities of language in a fresh and original manner.

The following poem develops an extended metaphor, personifying looming houses as old women.

AUDRE LORDE
(1934–1992)

Rooming Houses Are Old Women (1968)

Rooming houses are old women
rocking dark windows into their whens
waiting incomplete circles
rocking
rent office to stoop to
community bathrooms to gas rings and
under-bed boxes of once useful garbage
city issued with a twice monthly check
and the young men next door
with their loud midnight parties
and fishy rings left in the bathtub
no longer arouse them
from midnight to mealtime no stops inbetween
light breaking to pass through jumbled up windows
and who was it who married the widow that Buzzie's son messed with
To Welfare and insult form the slow shuffle
from dayswork to shopping bags
heavy with leftovers
Rooming houses
are old women waiting
searching
through darkening windows
the end or beginning of agony
old women seen through half-ajar doors
hoping
they are not waiting
but being
the entrance to somewhere
unknown and desired
but not new.

So closely does Lorde equate rooming houses and women in this poem that at times it is difficult to tell which of the two is actually the poem's subject. Despite the poem's assertion, rooming houses are *not* old women; however, they are *comparable* to the old women who live there, because their walls enclose a lifetime of disappointments as well as the physical detritus of life. Like the old women, rooming houses are in decline, rocking away their remaining years. Like the houses they inhabit, these women's boundaries are fixed—"rent office to stoop to / community bathrooms to gas rings"—and their hopes and expectations are few. They are surrounded

other people's loud parties, but their own lives have been reduced to a "slow shuffle" to nowhere, a hopeless, frightened—and perhaps pointless—"waiting / searching." Over time, the women and the places in which they live have become one. By using an unexpected comparison between two seemingly unrelated entities, the poem illuminates both the essence of the rooming houses and the essence of their elderly occupants.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: SIMILE, METAPHOR, AND PERSONIFICATION

ROBERT BURNS
(1759–1796)

Oh, My Love Is like a Red, Red Rose (1796)

Oh, my love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
My love is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.

So fair art thou, my bonny lass,
So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang¹ dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only love!
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my love
Though it were ten thousand mile.

READING AND REACTING

1. Why does the speaker compare his love to a rose? What other simile is used in the poem? For what purpose is it used?
2. Why do you suppose Burns begins his poem with similes? Would moving them to the end change the poem's impact?

3. Where does the speaker seem to exaggerate the extent of his love? Why does he exaggerate? Do you think this exaggeration weakens the effectiveness of the poem? Explain.

Related Works: "Araby" (p. 226), "My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun" (p. 538), "To His Coy Mistress" (p. 679)

^ ^
JOHN UPDIKE
(1932—)

Ex-Basketball Player (1958)

- Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,
Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off
Before it has a chance to go two blocks,
At Colonel McComsky Plaza. Berth's Garage
5 Is on the corner facing west, and there,
Most days, you'll find Flick Webb, who helps Berth out.

Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—
Five on a side, the old bubble-head style,
Their rubber elbows hanging loose and low.
10 One's nostrils are two S's, and his eyes
An E and O. And one is squat, without
A head at all—more of a football type.

Once Flick played for the high-school team, the Wizards.
He was good: in fact, the best. In '46
15 He bucketed three hundred ninety points,
A county record still. The ball loved Flick.
I saw him rack up thirty-eight or forty
In one home game. His hands were like wild birds.

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,
20 Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,
As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,
But most of us remember anyway.
His hands are fine and nervous on the lug wrench.
It makes no difference to the lug wrench, though.

25 Off work, he hangs around Mae's luncheonette.
Grease-gray and kind of coiled, he plays pinball,
Smokes those thin cigars, nurses lemon phosphates.
Flick seldom says a word to Mae, just nods
Beyond her face toward bright applauding tiers
30 Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads.

READING AND REACTING

Explain the use of personification in the second stanza and in the poem's last two lines. What two elements make up each figure of speech? How are the two elements in each pair alike?

What kind of figure of speech is each of the following: "His hands were like wild birds" (18); "Grease-gray and kind of coiled" (26)? What other figures of speech can you identify in the poem?

JOURNAL ENTRY Who do you think this poem's speaker might be? What is his attitude toward Flick Webb? Do you think Flick himself shares this assessment? Explain.

Related Works: "Miss Brill" (p. 103), "Sadie and Maud" (p. 689), *Death of a Salesman* (p. 1156)

^ ^
RANDALL JARRELL
(1914–1965)

The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner (1945)

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
5 When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

READING AND REACTING

- Who is the speaker? To what does he compare himself in the poem's first two lines? What words establish this comparison?
- Contrast the speaker's actual identity with the one he creates for himself in lines 1–2. What elements of his actual situation do you think lead him to characterize himself as he does in these lines?

- JOURNAL ENTRY** Both this poem and "Dulce et Decorum Est" (p. 658) use figurative language to describe the horrors of war. Which poem has a greater impact on you? How does the poem's figurative language contribute to this impact?

- Critical Perspective** In a 1974 article, Frances Ferguson criticizes "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," arguing that the poem "thoroughly manifests the lack of a middle between the gunner's birth and his death. . . . Because the poem presents a man who seems to have lived in order to die, we forget the fiction that he must have lived." However, in a 1978 explication, Patrick

J. Horner writes that the "manipulation of time reveals the stunning brevity of the gunner's waking life and the State's total disregard for that phenomenon. . . . Because of the telescoping of time, . . . [the poem] resonates with powerful feeling."

With which critic do you agree? That is, do you see the "lack of a middle" as a positive or negative quality of this poem?

Related Works: "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" (p. 545), "Goodnight Saigon" (p. 552), "Dulce et Decorum Est" (p. 658)

MARGE PIERCY
(1934-)

The Secretary Chant (1973)

My hips are a desk.
From my ears hang
chains of paper clips.
Rubber bands form my hair.
My breasts are wells of mimeograph ink.
My feet bear casters.
Buzz. Click.
My head is a badly organized file.
My head is a switchboard
where crossed lines crackle.
Press my fingers
and in my eyes appear
credit and debit.
Zing. Tinkle.
My navel is a reject button.
From my mouth issue canceled reams.
Swollen, heavy, rectangular
I am about to be delivered
of a baby.
Xerox machine.
File me under W
because I wonce
was
a woman.

visualize? Explain the relationship between the secretary and each item with which she is compared.

2. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Using as many metaphors and similes as you can, write a "chant" about a job you have held.
3. **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** In a review of a recent collection of Piercy's poetry, feminist critic Sandra Gilbert notes instances of "a kind of bombast" (pompous language) and remarks, "As most poets realize, political verse is almost the hardest kind to write."

In what sense can "The Secretary Chant" be seen as "political verse"? Do you think Piercy successfully achieves her political purpose, or does she undercut it with "bombast"?

Related Works: "Like a Winding Sheet" (p. 109), "Barbie-Q" (p. 354), "Women" (p. 744), "Metaphors" (p. 822)

JOHN DONNE
(1572-1631)

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning (1611)

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
The breath goes now, and some say no:

- 5 So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity¹ our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears;
10 Men reckon what it did and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

- 15 Dull sublunary lovers' love
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

READING AND REACTING

1. Examine each of the poem's figures of speech. Do they all make reasonable comparisons, or are some far-fetched or hard to

Here, "common people."

But we, by a love so much refined
 That ourselves know not what it is,
 Inter-assurèd of the mind,
 20 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.
 Our two souls, therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.
 25 If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin compasses² are two:
 Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.
 And though it in the center sit,
 30 Yet when the other far doth roam,
 It leans and harkens after it,
 And grows erect as that comes home.
 Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
 Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
 35 Thy firmness makes my circle just,³
 And makes me end where I begun.

READING AND REACTING

- Beginning with line 25, the poem develops an extended metaphor called a **conceit**, which compares the speaker and his loved one to "twin compasses" (26), attached and yet separate. Why is the compass an especially apt metaphor? What qualities of the compass does the poet emphasize?
- The poem uses other figures of speech to characterize both the lovers' union and their separation. To what other events does the speaker compare his separation from his loved one? To what other elements does he compare their attachment? Do you think these comparisons are effective?
- JOURNAL ENTRY** To what other object could Donne have compared his loved one and himself? Explain the logic of the extended metaphor you suggest.
- CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** In *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets* (1970), Judah Stampfer writes of this poem's "thin, dry texture, its stanzas of pinched music," noting that its form "has too clipped a brevity to qualify as a song" and that its "music

² The reference here is to the V-shaped instrument used to draw circles, not to the device used to determine direction.

³ Perfect.

wobbles on a dry, measured beat." Yet, he argues, "the poem comes choked with emotional power" because "the speaker reads as a naturally reticent man, leaving his beloved in uncertainty and deep trouble." Stampfer concludes, "Easy self-expression here would be self-indulgent, if not reprehensible. . . . For all his careful dignity, we feel a heart is breaking here."

Do you find such emotional power in this highly intellectual poem?

Related Works: "How Do I Love Thee?" (p. 540), "To My Dear and Loving Husband" (p. 678), "The Silken Tent" (p. 803), *A Doll House* (p. 970)

HYPERBOLE AND UNDERSTATEMENT

Two additional kinds of figurative language, *hyperbole* and *understatement*, also give poets opportunities to suggest meaning beyond the literal level of language.

Hyperbole is intentional exaggeration—saying more than is actually meant. In the poem "Oh, My Love Is like a Red, Red Rose" (p. 667), when the speaker says that he will love his lady until all the seas go dry, he is using hyperbole. **Understatement** is just the opposite—saying less than is meant. When the speaker in the poem "Fire and Ice" (p. 589), weighing two equally grim alternatives for the end of the world, says that "for destruction ice / Is also great / And would suffice," he is using understatement. In both cases, poets rely on their readers to understand that their words are not to be taken literally.

By using hyperbole and understatement, poets attract readers' attention. For example, poets can use hyperbole to convey exaggerated anger or graphic images of horror—and to ridicule and satirize as well as to inflame and shock. With understatement, poets can convey the same kind of powerful emotions subtly, without artifice or embellishment, thereby leading readers to look more closely than they would otherwise do.

The emotionally charged poem that follows uses hyperbole to attract attention, conveying anger and bitterness that seem almost beyond the power of words.

S Y L V I A P L A T H
 (1932–1963)

Daddy
 (1965)

You do not do, you do not do
 Any more, black shoe
 In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,
s Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time—
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one grey toe
10 Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
Where it pours bean green over blue
In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
I used to pray to recover you.
15 Ach, du.¹

In the German tongue, in the Polish town²
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
20 My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you.
25 The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,³
I could hardly speak.
I thought every German was you.
30 And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.⁴
I began to talk like a Jew.
35 I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.
With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
40 I may be a bit of a Jew.

¹ Ah, you. (German)

² Grabów, where Plath's father was born.

³ I. (German)

⁴ Nazi concentration camps.

I have always been scared of you,
With your Luftwaffe,⁵ your gobbedygoo.
And your neat moustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
45 Panzer⁶-man, panzer-man, O You—

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
50 Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
55 Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
60 I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
65 A man in black with a Meinkampf⁷ look

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
70 The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two—
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
75 Daddy, you can lie back now.

⁵ The German air force.

⁶ Protected by armor. The Panzer division was the German armored division.

⁷ *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) is Adolf Hitler's autobiography.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
 And the villagers never liked you.
 They are dancing and stamping on you.
 They always knew it was you.
 80 Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

In her anger and frustration, the speaker sees herself as a helpless victim—a foot entrapped in a shoe, a Jew in a concentration camp—of her father’s later, her husband’s) absolute tyranny. Thus, her hated father is characterized as a “black shoe,” “a bag full of God,” a “ghastly statue,” and, eventually, a Nazi, a torturer, the devil, a vampire. The poem “Daddy” is by scholars as autobiographical, and the fact that Plath’s own father was actually neither a Nazi nor a sadist (nor, obviously, the devil or a vampire) makes it clear that the figurative comparisons in the poem are wildly exaggerated. Even so, they may convey the poet’s true her father—and, perhaps, toward the patriarchal society in which she lived.

Plath uses hyperbole as the medium through which to communicate these emotions to readers who she knows cannot possibly feel the way she

Her purpose, therefore, is not just to shock but also to enlighten, to persuade, and perhaps even to empower her readers. Throughout the poem, the inflammatory language is set in ironic opposition to the childish, affectionate term “Daddy”—most strikingly in the last line’s choked out “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.” The result of the exaggerated rhetoric is a poem that is vivid and shocking. And, although some might believe that Plath’s almost wild exaggeration undermines the poem’s impact, others would argue that the powerful figurative language is necessary to convey the extent of the speaker’s rage.

Like “Daddy,” the next poem presents a situation whose emotional is devastating. In this case, however, the poet does not use emotional language; instead, he uses understatement, presenting the events without embellishment.

• • •
DAVID HUDDLE
(1942—)

Holes Commence Falling (1979)

The lead & zinc company
 owned the mineral rights
 to the whole town anyway,
 and after drilling holes

for 3 or 4 years,
 they finally found the right
 place and sunk a mine shaft.
 We were proud
 of all that digging,
 10 even though nobody from
 town got hired. They
 were going to dig right
 under New River and hook up
 with the mine at Austinville.
 15 Then people’s wells
 started drying up just like
 somebody’d shut off a faucet,
 and holes commenced falling,
 big chunks of people’s yards
 20 would drop 5 or 6 feet,
 houses would shift and crack.
 Now and then the company’d
 pay out a little money
 in damages; they got a truck
 25 to haul water and sell it
 to the people whose wells
 had dried up, but most
 everybody agreed the
 situation wasn’t
 30 serious.

Although “Holes Commence Falling” relates a tragic sequence of events, the tone of the poem is matter-of-fact and the language is understated. Certainly the speaker could have overdramatized the events, using inflated rhetoric to denounce big business and to predict disastrous events for the future. At the very least, he could have colored the events with realistic emotions, assigning blame to the lead and zinc company with justifiable anger. Instead, the speaker is so restrained, so nonchalant, so passive that readers must supply the missing emotions themselves—realizing, for example, that when the speaker concludes “everybody agreed the / situation wasn’t / serious,” he means just the opposite.

Throughout the poem, unpleasant events are presented without comment or emotion. As it proceeds, the poem traces the high and low points in the town’s fortunes, but for every hope (“We were proud / of all that digging”) there is a disappointment (“even though nobody from / town got hired”). The lead and zinc company offers some compensation for the damage it does, but never enough. The present tense verb of the poem’s title indicates that the problems the town faces—wells drying up, houses shifting and cracking—are regular occurrences.

Eventually, readers come to see that what is not expressed, what lurks just below the surface—anger, powerlessness, resentment, hopelessness—is the poem's real subject. The speaker's laconic speech and flat tone seem to suggest an attitude of resignation, but the obvious contrast between the understated tone and the seriousness of the problem creates a sense of irony that makes the speaker's real attitude toward the lead and zinc company clear.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: HYPERBOLE AND UNDERSTATEMENT

ANNE BRADSTREET
(1612?-1672)

To My Dear and Loving Husband (1678)

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me ye women if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persever,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

READING AND REACTING

- Review the claims the poem's speaker makes about her husband in lines 5-8. Are such exaggerated declarations of love necessary, or would the rest of the poem be sufficient to convey the extent of her devotion to her husband?
- JOURNAL ENTRY** Compare this poem's declarations of love to those of John Donne's speaker in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (p. 671). Which speaker do you believe is more convincing? Why?

Related Works: "A Rose for Emily" (p. 81), "Bright Star! Would I Were Steadfast as Thou Art" (p. 813)

ANDREW MARVELL
(1621-1678)

To His Coy Mistress (1681)

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Should'st rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber¹ would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze,
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near,
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor in thy marble vault shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning glew²
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,

¹ An estuary in the east coast of England.

² Dew.

Now let us sport us while we may;
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 40 Than languish in his slow-chapped³ power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Thorough the iron gates of life.
 45 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

READING AND REACTING

- In this poem, Marvell's speaker sets out to convince a reluctant woman to become his lover. In order to make his case more convincing, he uses hyperbole, exaggerating time periods, sizes, spaces, and the possible fate of the woman, should she refuse him. Identify as many examples of hyperbole as you can.
- The tone of "To His Coy Mistress" is more whimsical than serious. Given this tone, what do you see as the purpose of Marvell's use of hyperbole?
- JOURNAL ENTRY** Using contemporary prose, paraphrase the first four lines of the poem. Then, beginning with the word *But*, write a few additional sentences, continuing the argument Marvell's speaker makes.
- Critical Perspective** In his poem "The Definition of Love" Marvell laments love that is kept apart by fate. He writes:

For Fate with jealous eye does see
 Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;
 Their union would her ruin be,
 And her tyrannic pow'r depose.

How does Marvell propose to compensate for Fate's determination to keep true love apart in "To His Coy Mistress"?

Related Works: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (p. 469), "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (p. 536), "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (p. 597), *The Brute* (p. 1040)

Slowly crushing.

ROBERT FROST
 (1874-1963)

"Out, Out—"
 (1916)

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
 And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
 Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
 And from there those that lifted eyes could count
 Five mountain ranges one behind the other
 Under the sunset far into Vermont.

And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
 As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
 And nothing happened: day was all but done.
 Call it a day, I wish they might have said
 To please the boy by giving him the half hour
 That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
 His sister stood beside them in her apron
 To tell them "Supper." At the word, the saw,
 As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
 Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
 He must have given the hand. However it was,
 Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
 The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
 20 As he swung toward them holding up the hand
 Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
 The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
 Since he was old enough to know, big boy
 Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
 25 He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off—
 The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!"
 So. But the hand was gone already.
 The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
 He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
 30 And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.
 No one believed. They listened at his heart.
 Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
 No more to build on there. And they, since they
 Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

READING AND REACTING

- The poem's title is an **allusion** to a passage in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (5.5.23-28) that attacks the brevity and meaninglessness of life in very emotional terms:

"Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

What idea do you think Frost wants to convey through the title "Out, Out—"?

2. Explain why each of the following qualifies as understatement.

"Neither refused the meeting." (18)
"He saw all spoiled." (25)
"... that ended it." (32)
"No more to build on there." (33)

Can you identify any other examples of understatement in the poem?

3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Do you think the poem's impact is strengthened or weakened by its understated tone? Why?
4. **Critical Perspective** In an essay on Frost in his 1985 book *Affirming Limits*, Robert Pack focuses on the single word "So" in line 27 of "Out, Out—":

For a moment, his narration is reduced to the impotent word "So," and in that minimal word all his restrained grief is held. . . . That "So" is the narrator's cry of bearing witness to a that must be what it is in a scene he cannot enter. He cannot rescue or protect the boy. . . . In the poem's sense of human helplessness in an indifferent universe, we are all "watchers," and what we see is death without redemption, "signifying nothing." So. So? So! How shall we read that enigmatic word?

How do you read this "enigmatic word" in the poem?

Related Works: "The Lottery" (p. 271), "What Were They Like?" (p. 549), "Hope" (p. 602), "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (p. 669)

DONALD HALL
(1928-)

My Son, My Executioner (1955)

My son, my executioner,
I take you in my arms,
Quiet and small and just astir,
And whom my body warms.

Sweet death, small son, our instrument
Of immortality,
Your cries and hungers document
Our bodily decay.
We twenty-five and twenty-two,
Who seemed to live forever,
Observe enduring life in you
And start to die together.

READING AND REACTING

Because the speaker is a young man holding his newborn son in his arms, the equation in line 1 comes as a shock. What is Hall's purpose in opening with such a startling statement?

2. In what sense is the comparison between baby and executioner a valid one? Could you argue that, given the underlying difference between the two, Hall is *not* using hyperbole? Explain.

Related Works: "Doe Season" (p. 305), "That Time of Year Thou Mayst in Me Behold" (p. 523), "Morning Song" (p. 596), "Sailing to (p. 851)

MARGARET ATWOOD
(1939-)

You Fit into Me (1971)

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye
a fish hook
an open eye

READING AND REACTING

1. What connotations does Atwood expect readers to associate with the phrase "you fit into me"? What does the speaker seem at first to mean by "like a hook into an eye" in line 2?
2. The speaker's shift to the brutal suggestions of lines 3 and 4 is calculated to shock readers. Does the use of hyperbole here have another purpose in the context of the poem? Explain.

Related Works: "Popular Mechanics" (p. 353), "Daddy" (p. 673), *A Doll House* (p. 970)

METONYMY AND SYNECDOCHE

Metonymy and synecdoche are two related figures of speech. **Metonymy** is the substitution of the name of one thing for the name of another thing that most readers associate with the first—for example, using *hired gun* to mean “paid assassin” or *suits* to mean “business executives.” A specific kind of metonymy, called **synecdoche**, is the substitution of a part of the whole (for example, using *bread*—as in “Give us this day our daily bread”—to mean “food”) or the whole for a part (for example, saying “you can take the boy out of Brooklyn, but you can’t take Brooklyn [meaning its distinctive traits] out of the boy”). With metonymy and synecdoche instead of describing something by saying it is like something else (as in simile) or by equating it with something else (as in metaphor), writers can characterize an object or concept by using a term that evokes it. The following poem illustrates the use of synecdoche.

RICHARD LOVELACE
(1618–1658)

To Lucasta Going to the Wars (1649)

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind,
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honor more.

Here, Lovelace’s use of synecdoche allows him to condense a number of complex ideas into a very few words. In line 3, when the speaker says that he is flying from his loved one’s “chaste breast and quiet mind,” he is using “breast” and “mind” to stand for all his loved one’s physical and intellectual attributes. In line 8, when he says that he is embracing “a sword, a horse, a shield,” he is using these three items to represent all the trappings of war—and, thus, to represent war itself.

APOSTROPHE

In the figure of speech called **apostrophe**, a poem’s speaker addresses an absent person or thing—for example, a historical or literary figure or even an inanimate object or an abstract concept.

In the following poem, the speaker addresses Vincent Van Gogh.

SONIA SANCHEZ
(1934–)

On Passing thru Morgantown, Pa. (1984)

i saw you
vincent van
gogh perched
on those pennsylvania
cornfields communing
amid secret black
bird societies. yes.
i'm sure that was
you exploding your
fantastic delirium
while in the
distance
red indian
hills beckoned.

Expecting her readers to be aware that Van Gogh is a Dutch postimpressionist painter known for his mental instability as well as for his art, Sanchez is able to give added meaning to a phrase such as “fantastic delirium” as well as to the poem’s visual images. The speaker sees Van Gogh perched like a black bird on a fence, and at the same time she also sees what he sees. Like Van Gogh, then, the speaker sees the Pennsylvania cornfields as both a natural landscape and an “exploding” work of art.

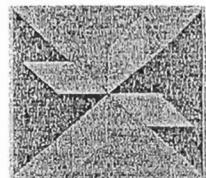
CHECKLIST: WRITING ABOUT FIGURES OF SPEECH

- ✓ Are any figures of speech present in the poem? Identify each example of simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, understatement, metonymy, synecdoche, and apostrophe.

- ✓ What two elements are being compared in each use of simile, metaphor, and personification? Is the comparison logical? What characteristics are shared by the two items being compared?
- ✓ How do figures of speech contribute to the impact of the poem as a whole?
- ✓ Does the poet use hyperbole? Why? For example, is it used to move or to shock readers, or is its use intended to produce a humorous or satirical effect?
- ✓ Does the poet use understatement? For what purpose? Would more straightforward language be more effective?
- ✓ In metonymy and synecdoche, what item is being substituted for another? What purpose does the substitution serve?
- ✓ If the poem includes apostrophe, whom or what does the speaker address? What is accomplished through the use of apostrophe?

♦ WRITING SUGGESTIONS: FIGURES OF SPEECH

1. Various figures of speech are often used to portray characters in a poem. Choose two or three poems that focus on a single character—for example, “Ex-Basketball Player” (p. 668), “Richard Cory” (p. 827), or “Gracie” (p. 634)—and explain how figures of speech are used to characterize each poem’s central figure. If you like, you may write about poems that focus on real (rather than fictional) people—for example, “Emmett Till” (p. 798) or “Medgar Evers” (p. 864).
2. Write an essay in which you discuss the different ways poets use figures of speech to examine the nature of poetry itself. What kinds of figures of speech do poets use to describe their craft? (You might begin by reading the three poems about poetry that open Chapter 11.)
3. Write a letter replying to the speaker in a poem by Marvell, Bradstreet, Donne, or Burns that appears in this chapter. Use figurative language to express the depth of your love and the extent of your devotion.
4. Choose two or three poems that have a common subject—for example, love, nature, war, art, or mortality—and write a paper in which you draw some general conclusions about the relative effectiveness of the poems’ use of figurative language to examine that subject.
5. Select a poem and a short story that treat the same subject matter and write a paper in which you compare their use of figures of speech.



Imagery

◆ ◆ ◆

Images are probably the most important part of the poem. First of all, you want to tell a story, but images are what are going to shore it up and get to the heart of the matter. . . . If they're not coming, I'm not even writing a poem; it's pointless.

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The difference between a literature that includes the image, and a literature that excludes the image (such as the newspaper or the scientific Newtonian essay) is that the first helps us to bridge the gap between ourselves and nature, and the second encourages us to remain isolated, living despairingly in the gap. Many philosophers and critics urge us to remain in the gap, and let the world of nature and the world of men fall further and further apart. We can do that, for a human being can reach out with his right hand to the natural world, and with his left hand to the world of human intelligence, and touch both at the same moment. Apparently no one but human beings can do this.

ROBERT BLY, "What the Image Can Do"

The poet sits before a blank piece of paper with a need to say many things in the small space of the poem. The world is huge, the poet is alone, and the poem is just a bit of language, a few scratchings of a pen surrounded by the silence of the night.

It could be that the poet wishes to tell you about his or her life. A few images of some fleeting moment when one was happy or exceptionally lucid. The secret wish of poetry is to stop time. The poet wants to retrieve a face, a mood, a cloud in the sky, a tree in the wind, and take a kind of mental photograph of that moment in which you as a reader recognize yourself. Poems are other people's snapshots in which we recognize ourselves.

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It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

EZRA POUND, "A Retrospect"

JANE FLANDERS
(1940—)

Cloud Painter

(1984)

Suggested by the life and art of John Constable¹

At first, as you know, the sky is incidental—a drape, a backdrop for trees and steeples.
Here an oak clutches a rock (already he works outdoors),
a wall buckles but does not break,
water pearls through a lock, a haywain² trembles.

The pleasures of landscape are endless. What we see around us should be enough.
Horizons are typically high and far away.

Still, clouds let us drift and remember. He is, after all,
a miller's son, used to trying
to read the future in the sky, seeing instead
ships, horses, instruments of flight.
Is that his mother's wash flapping on the line?
His schoolbook, smudged, illegible?

In this period the sky becomes significant.
Cloud forms are technically correct—mares' tails,
sheep-in-the-meadow, thunderheads.
You can almost tell which scenes have been interrupted
by summer showers.

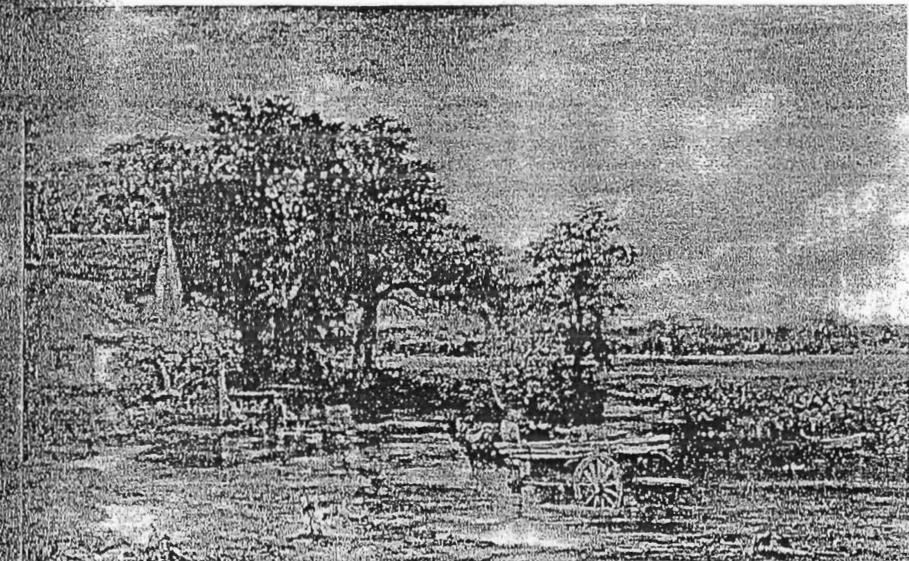
Now his young wife dies.
His landscapes achieve belated success.
He is invited to join the Academy. I forget
whether he accepts or not.

In any case, the literal forms give way
to something spectral, nameless. His palette shrinks
to gray, blue, white—the colors of charity.
Horizons sink and fade,
trees draw back till they are little more than frames,
then they too disappear.

Finally the canvas itself begins to vibrate
with waning light,
as if the wind could paint.
And we too, at last, stare into a space
which tell us nothing,
except that the world can vanish along with our need for it.

Because the purpose of poetry—and, for that matter, of all literature—is to expand the perception of readers, poets try to appeal to the senses. In "Cloud Painter," for example, Jane Flanders uses details, such as the mother's wash on the line and the smudged schoolbook, to enable readers to visualize particular scenes in John Constable's early work. Clouds are described so readers can easily picture them—"mares' tails, / sheep-in-the-meadow, thunderheads." Thus, "Cloud Painter" is not just about the work of John Constable; it is also about the ability of an artist—poet or painter—to call up images in the minds of an audience. To achieve this end, a poet uses **imagery**, language that evokes a physical sensation produced by one of the five senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, or smell.

Although the effect can be quite complex, the way images work is simple: when you read the word *red*, your memory of the various red things that you have seen determines how you picture the image. In addition, the



John Constable. *Landscape, Noon, The Haywain*. 1821. Oil on canvas, 130½ × 185½ cm. London, National Gallery.

¹ John Constable (1776–1837)—British painter noted for his landscapes.

² An open horse-drawn wagon for carrying hay.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
 And the villagers never liked you.
 They are dancing and stamping on you.
 They always knew it was you.
 80 Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

In her anger and frustration, the speaker sees herself as a helpless victim—a foot entrapped in a shoe, a Jew in a concentration camp—of her father’s (and, later, her husband’s) absolute tyranny. Thus, her hated father is characterized as a “black shoe,” “a bag full of God,” a “ghastly statue,” and, eventually, a Nazi, a torturer, the devil, a vampire. The poem “Daddy” is by scholars as autobiographical, and the fact that Plath’s own father was actually neither a Nazi nor a sadist (nor, obviously, the devil or a vampire) makes it clear that the figurative comparisons in the poem are wildly exaggerated. Even so, they may convey the poet’s true feelings toward her father—and, perhaps, toward the patriarchal society in which she lived.

Plath uses hyperbole as the medium through which to communicate these emotions to readers who she knows cannot possibly feel the way she

Her purpose, therefore, is not just to shock but also to enlighten, to persuade, and perhaps even to empower her readers. Throughout the poem, the inflammatory language is set in ironic opposition to the childish, affectionate term “Daddy”—most strikingly in the last line’s choked out “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.” The result of the exaggerated rhetoric is a poem that is vivid and shocking. And, although some might believe that Plath’s almost wild exaggeration undermines the poem’s impact, others would argue that the powerful figurative language is necessary to convey the extent of the speaker’s rage.

Like “Daddy,” the next poem presents a situation whose emotional intensity is devastating. In this case, however, the poet does not use emotional language; instead, he uses understatement, presenting the events without embellishment.

DAVID HUDDLE
 (1942–)

Holes Commence Falling (1979)

The lead & zinc company
 owned the mineral rights
 to the whole town anyway,
 and after drilling holes

for 3 or 4 years,
 they finally found the right
 place and sunk a mine shaft.
 We were proud
 of all that digging,
 10 even though nobody from
 town got hired. They
 were going to dig right
 under New River and hook up
 with the mine at Austinville.
 15 Then people’s wells
 started drying up just like
 somebody’d shut off a faucet,
 and holes commenced falling,
 big chunks of people’s yards
 20 would drop 5 or 6 feet,
 houses would shift and crack.
 Now and then the company’d
 pay out a little money
 in damages; they got a truck
 25 to haul water and sell it
 to the people whose wells
 had dried up, but most
 everybody agreed the
 situation wasn’t
 30 serious.

Although “Holes Commence Falling” relates a tragic sequence of events, the tone of the poem is matter-of-fact and the language is understated. Certainly the speaker could have overdramatized the events, using inflated rhetoric to denounce big business and to predict disastrous events for the future. At the very least, he could have colored the events with realistic emotions, assigning blame to the lead and zinc company with justifiable anger. Instead, the speaker is so restrained, so nonchalant, so passive that readers must supply the missing emotions themselves—realizing, for example, that when the speaker concludes “everybody agreed the / situation wasn’t / serious,” he means just the opposite.

Throughout the poem, unpleasant events are presented without comment or emotion. As it proceeds, the poem traces the high and low points in the town’s fortunes, but for every hope (“We were proud / of all that digging”), there is a disappointment (“even though nobody from town got hired”). The lead and zinc company offers some compensation for the damage it does, but never enough. The present tense verb of the poem’s title indicates that the problems the town faces—wells drying up, yards dropping, houses shifting and cracking—are regular occurrences.

Eventually, readers come to see that what is not expressed, what lurks just below the surface—anger, powerlessness, resentment, hopelessness—is the poem's real subject. The speaker's laconic speech and flat tone seem to suggest an attitude of resignation, but the obvious contrast between the understated tone and the seriousness of the problem creates a sense of irony that makes the speaker's real attitude toward the lead and zinc company clear.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: HYPERBOLE AND UNDERSTATEMENT

ANNE BRADSTREET
(1612?–1672)

To My Dear and Loving Husband (1678)

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me ye women if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persever,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

READING AND REACTING

- Review the claims the poem's speaker makes about her husband in lines 5–8. Are such exaggerated declarations of love necessary, or would the rest of the poem be sufficient to convey the extent of her devotion to her husband?
- JOURNAL ENTRY** Compare this poem's declarations of love to those of John Donne's speaker in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (p. 671). Which speaker do you believe is more convincing? Why?

Related Works: "A Rose for Emily" (p. 81), "Bright Star! Would I Were Were Steadfast as Thou Art" (p. 813)

ANDREW MARVELL
(1621–1678)

To His Coy Mistress (1681)

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Should'st rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber¹ would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze,
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near,
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor in thy marble vault shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning glew²
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,

¹ An estuary in the east coast of England.
² Dew.

Now let us sport us while we may;
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 Than languish in his slow-chapped³ power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Thorough the iron gates of life.
 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

READING AND REACTING

- In this poem, Marvell's speaker sets out to convince a reluctant woman to become his lover. In order to make his case more convincing, he uses hyperbole, exaggerating time periods, sizes, spaces, and the possible fate of the woman, should she refuse him. Identify as many examples of hyperbole as you can.
- The tone of "To His Coy Mistress" is more whimsical than serious. Given this tone, what do you see as the purpose of Marvell's use of hyperbole?
- JOURNAL ENTRY** Using contemporary prose, paraphrase the first four lines of the poem. Then, beginning with the word *But*, write a few additional sentences, continuing the argument Marvell's speaker makes.
- CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** In his poem "The Definition of Love," Marvell laments love that is kept apart by fate. He writes:

For Fate with jealous eye does see
 Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;
 Their union would her ruin be,
 And her tyrannic pow'r depose.

How does Marvell propose to compensate for Fate's determination to keep true love apart in "To His Coy Mistress"?

Related Works: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (p. 469); "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (p. 536); "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (p. 597), *The Brute* (p. 1040)

ROBERT FROST
 (1874-1963)

"Out, Out—"
 (1916)

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
 And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
 Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
 And from there those that lifted eyes could count
 Five mountain ranges one behind the other
 Under the sunset far into Vermont.

And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
 As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
 And nothing happened: day was all but done.
 Call it a day, I wish they might have said
 To please the boy by giving him the half hour
 That a boy counts so much when saved from work.

His sister stood beside them in her apron
 To tell them "Supper." At the word, the saw,
 As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
 Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
 He must have given the hand. However it was,
 Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!

The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
 As he swung toward them holding up the hand
 Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
 The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
 Since he was old enough to know, big boy

Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
 He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off—
 The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!"
 So. But the hand was gone already.

The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
 He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.

And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.
 No one believed. They listened at his heart.
 Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
 No more to build on there. And they, since they
 Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

READING AND REACTING

- The poem's title is an **allusion** to a passage in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (5.5.23-28) that attacks the brevity and meaninglessness of life in very emotional terms:

³ Slowly crushing.

"Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

What idea do you think Frost wants to convey through the title "Out, Out—"?

2. Explain why each of the following qualifies as understatement.

"Neither refused the meeting." (18)
"He saw all spoiled." (25)
"... that ended it." (32)
"No more to build on there." (33)

Can you identify any other examples of understatement in the poem?

3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Do you think the poem's impact is strengthened or weakened by its understated tone? Why?
4. **Critical Perspective** In an essay on Frost in his 1985 book *Affirming Limits*, Robert Pack focuses on the single word "So" in line 27 of "Out, Out—":

For a moment, his narration is reduced to the impotent word "So," and in that minimal word all his restrained grief is held. . . . That "So" is the narrator's cry of bearing witness to a story that must be what it is in a scene he cannot enter. He cannot rescue or protect the boy. . . . In the poem's sense of human helplessness in an indifferent universe, we are all "watchers," and what we see is death without redemption, "signifying nothing." So. So? So! How shall we read that enigmatic word?

How do you read this "enigmatic word" in the poem?

Works: "The Lottery" (p. 271), "What Were They Like?" (p. 549), "Hope" (p. 602), "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (p. 669)

DONALD HALL
(1928-)

My Son, My Executioner (1955)

My son, my executioner,
I take you in my arms,
Quiet and small and just astir,
And whom my body warms.

Sweet death, small son, our instrument
Of immortality,
Your cries and hungers document
Our bodily decay.
We twenty-five and twenty-two,
19 Who seemed to live forever,
Observe enduring life in you
And start to die together.

READING AND REACTING

Because the speaker is a young man holding his newborn son in his arms, the equation in line 1 comes as a shock. What is Hall's purpose in opening with such a startling statement?

2. In what sense is the comparison between baby and executioner a valid one? Could you argue that, given the underlying similarities between the two, Hall is *not* using hyperbole? Explain.

Related Works: "Doe Season" (p. 305), "That Time of Year Thou Mayst in Me Behold" (p. 523), "Morning Song" (p. 596), "Sailing to Byzantium" (p. 851)

• • •
MARGARET ATWOOD
(1939-)

You Fit into Me (1971)

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye

READING AND REACTING

1. What connotations does Atwood expect readers to associate with the phrase "you fit into me"? What does the speaker seem at first to mean by "like a hook into an eye" in line 2?
2. The speaker shifts to the brutal suggestions of lines 3 and 4 is calculated to shock readers. Does the use of hyperbole here have another purpose in the context of the poem? Explain.

Related Works: "Popular Mechanics" (p. 353), "Daddy" (p. 673), A House (p. 970)

METONYMY AND SYNECDOCHE

♦ ♦ ♦

Metonymy and synecdoche are two related figures of speech. **Metonymy** is the substitution of the name of one thing for the name of another thing that most readers associate with the first—for example, using *hired gun* to mean “paid assassin” or *suits* to mean “business executives.” A specific kind of metonymy, called **synecdoche**, is the substitution of a part for the whole (for example, using *bread*—as in “Give us this day our daily bread”—to mean “food”) or the whole for a part (for example, saying “you can take the boy out of Brooklyn, but you can’t take Brooklyn [meaning its distinctive traits] out of the boy”). With metonymy and synecdoche instead of describing something by saying it is like something else (as in simile) or by equating it with something else (as in metaphor), writers can characterize an object or concept by using a term that evokes it. The following poem illustrates the use of synecdoche.

♦ ♦ ♦
RICHARD LOVELACE
(1618–1658)

To Lucasta Going to the Wars (1649)

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind,
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honor more.

Here, Lovelace’s use of synecdoche allows him to condense a number of complex ideas into a very few words. In line 3, when the speaker says that he is flying from his loved one’s “chaste breast and quiet mind,” he is using “breast” and “mind” to stand for all his loved one’s physical and intellectual attributes. In line 8, when he says that he is embracing “A sword, a horse, a shield,” he is using these three items to represent all the trappings of war—and, thus, to represent war itself.

APOSTROPHE

♦ ♦ ♦

Apostrophe, a poem’s speaker addresses an absent person or thing—for example, a historical or literary figure or even an inanimate object or an abstract concept.

In the following poem, the speaker addresses Vincent Van Gogh.

♦ ♦ ♦
SONIA SANCHEZ
(1934–)

On Passing thru Morgantown, Pa. (1984)

i saw you
vincent van
gogh perched
on those pennsylvania
cornfields communing
amid secret black
bird societies. yes.
i'm sure that was
you exploding your
fantastic delirium
while in the
distance
red indian
hills beckoned.

Expecting her readers to be aware that Van Gogh is a Dutch postimpressionist painter known for his mental instability as well as for his art, Sanchez is able to give added meaning to a phrase such as “fantastic delirium” as well as to the poem’s visual images. The speaker sees Van Gogh perched like a black bird on a fence, and at the same time she also sees what he sees. Like Van Gogh, then, the speaker sees the Pennsylvania cornfields as both a natural landscape and an “exploding” work of art.



CHECKLIST: WRITING ABOUT FIGURES OF SPEECH

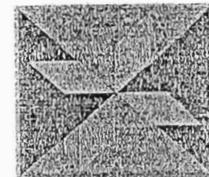
- ✓ Are any figures of speech present in the poem? Identify each example of simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, understatement, metonymy, synecdoche, and apostrophe.

- ✓ What two elements are being compared in each use of simile, metaphor, and personification? Is the comparison logical? What characteristics are shared by the two items being compared?
- ✓ How do figures of speech contribute to the impact of the poem as a whole?
- ✓ Does the poet use hyperbole? Why? For example, is it used to move or to shock readers, or is its use intended to produce a humorous or satirical effect?
- ✓ Does the poet use understatement? For what purpose? Would more straightforward language be more effective?
- ✓ In metonymy and synecdoche, what item is being substituted for another? What purpose does the substitution serve?
- ✓ If the poem includes apostrophe, whom or what does the speaker address? What is accomplished through the use of apostrophe?

◆ WRITING SUGGESTIONS: FIGURES OF SPEECH

1. Various figures of speech are often used to portray characters in a poem. Choose two or three poems that focus on a single character—for example, “Ex-Basketball Player” (p. 658), “Richard Cory” (p. 827), or “Gracie” (p. 634)—and explain how figures of speech are used to characterize each poem’s central figure. If you like, you may write about poems that focus on real (rather than fictional) people—for example, “Emmett Till” (p. 798) or “Medgar Evers” (p. 864).
2. Write an essay in which you discuss the different ways poets use figures of speech to examine the nature of poetry itself. What kinds of figures of speech do poets use to describe their craft? (You might begin by reading the three poems about poetry that open Chapter 11.)
3. Write a letter replying to the speaker in a poem by Marvell, Bradstreet, Donne, or Burns that appears in this chapter. Use figurative language to express the depth of your love and the extent of your devotion.
4. Choose two or three poems that have a common subject—for example, love, nature, war, art, or mortality—and write a paper in which you draw some general conclusions about the relative effectiveness of the poems’ use of figurative language to examine that subject.
5. Select a poem and a short story that treat the same subject matter and write a paper in which you compare their use of figures of speech.

CHAPTER 15



Imagery

Images are probably the most important part of the poem. First of all, you want to tell a story, but images are what are going to shore it up and get to the heart of the matter. . . . If they're not coming, I'm not even writing a poem; it's pointless.

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The poet sits before a blank piece of paper with a need to say many things in the small space of the poem. The world is huge, the poet is alone, and the poem is just a bit of language, a few scratchings of a pen surrounded by the silence of the night.

It could be that the poet wishes to tell you about his or her life. A few images of some fleeting moment when one was happy or exceptionally lucid. The secret wish of poetry is to stop time. The poet wants to retrieve a face, a mood, a cloud in the sky, a tree in the wind, and take a kind of mental photograph of that moment in which you as a reader recognize yourself. Poems are other people's snapshots in which we recognize ourselves.

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It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

EZRA POUND, "A Retrospect"

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(1940—)

Cloud Painter (1984)

Suggested by the life and art of John Constable¹

At first, as you know, the sky is incidental—a drape, a backdrop for trees and steeples.
Here an oak clutches a rock (already he works outdoors), a wall buckles but does not break,
water pearls through a lock, a haywain² trembles.

The pleasures of landscape are endless. What we see around us should be enough.
Horizons are typically high and far away.

Still, clouds let us drift and remember. He is, after all, a miller's son, used to trying to read the future in the sky, seeing instead ships, horses, instruments of flight.
Is that his mother's wash flapping on the line?
His schoolbook, smudged, illegible?

In this period the sky becomes significant. Cloud forms are technically correct—mares' tails, sheep-in-the-meadow, thunderheads.
You can almost tell which scenes have been interrupted by summer showers.

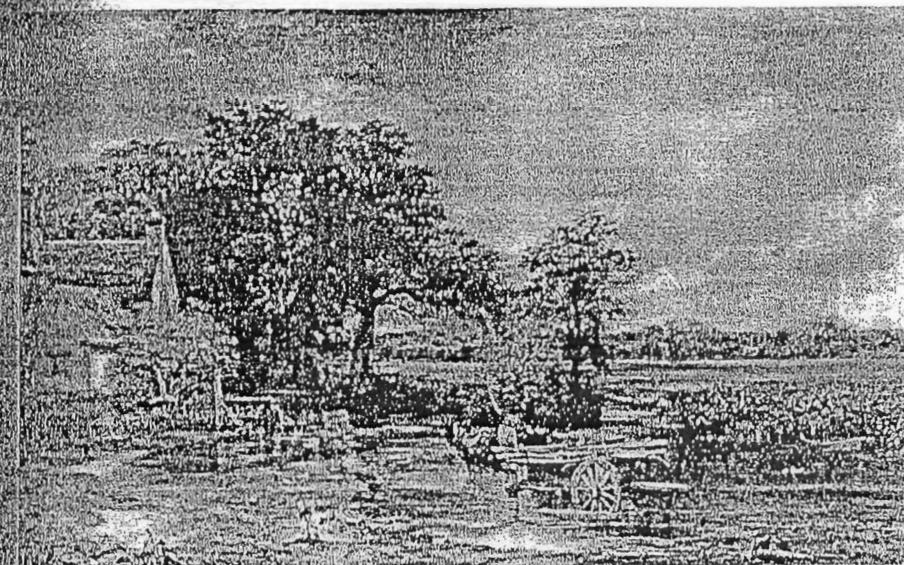
Now his young wife dies.
His landscapes achieve belated success.
He is invited to join the Academy. I forget whether he accepts or not.

In any case, the literal forms give way to something spectral, nameless. His palette shrinks to gray, blue, white—the colors of charity.
Horizons sink and fade, trees draw back till they are little more than frames, then they too disappear.

Finally the canvas itself begins to vibrate with waning light, as if the wind could paint.
And we, too, at last, stare into a space which tell us nothing, except that the world can vanish along with our need for it.

Because the purpose of poetry—and, for that matter, of all literature—to expand the perception of readers, poets try to appeal to the senses. In "Cloud Painter," for example, Jane Flanders uses details, such as the mother's wash on the line and the smudged schoolbook, to enable readers to visualize particular scenes in John Constable's early work. Clouds are described so readers can easily picture them—"mares' tails, / sheep-in-the-meadow thunderheads." Thus, "Cloud Painter" is not just about the work of John Constable; it is also about the ability of an artist—poet or painter—to call up images in the minds of an audience. To achieve this end, a poet uses **imagery**, language that evokes a physical sensation produced by one of the five senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, or smell.

Although the effect can be quite complex, the way images work is simple: when you read the word *red*, your memory of the various red things that you have seen determines how you picture the image. In addition, the



John Constable. *Landscape, Noon, The Haywain*. 1821. Oil on canvas, 130½ × 185½ cm. London, National Gallery.

¹ John Constable (1776–1837)—British painter noted for his landscapes.

² An open horse-drawn wagon for carrying hay.

word *red* may have emotional associations, or **connotations**, that define your response. A red sunset, for example, can have a positive connotation or a negative one depending on whether it is associated with the end of a perfect day or with air pollution. By choosing an image carefully, then, poets not only create pictures in a reader's mind, but also suggest a great number of imaginative associations. These associations help poets to establish the **atmosphere** or **mood** of the poem. The softly falling snow in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (p. 803), for example, creates a quiet, almost mystical mood.

Readers come to a poem with their own unique experiences, so an image in a poem does not always suggest the same thing to all readers. In "Cloud Painter," for example, the poet presents the image of an oak tree clutching a rock. Although most readers will probably see a picture that is consistent with the one the poet sees, no two images will be identical. Every reader will have his or her own distinct mental image of a tree clinging to a rock; some images will be remembered experiences, whereas others will be imaginative creations. Some readers may even be familiar enough with the work of the painter John Constable to visualize a particular tree clinging to a particular rock in one of his paintings.

By conveying what the poet sees and experiences, images open readers' minds and enrich their reading with perceptions and associations different from—and possibly more original and complex than—their own.

One advantage of imagery is its extreme economy. Just a few words enable poets to evoke a range of emotions and reactions. In the following poem, just a few visual images are enough to create a picture.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
(1883–1963)

Red Wheelbarrow (1923)

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens

"Red Wheelbarrow" asks readers to pause for a moment to consider the uniqueness and mystery of everyday objects. What is immediately apparent is the poem's verbal economy. The poet does not tell readers what the barnyard smells like or what sounds the animals make. In fact, he does not even paint a detailed picture of the scene. How large is the wheelbarrow? In what condition is it? How many chickens are in the barnyard? In this poem the answers to these questions are not important. Even without answering these questions, the poet is able to use simple imagery to create a scene upon which, he says, "so much depends."

The wheelbarrow establishes a momentary connection between the poet and his world. Like a still-life painting, the red wheelbarrow beside the white chickens gives order to a world that is full of seemingly unrelated objects. By asserting the importance of the objects in the poem, the poet suggests that our ability to perceive the objects of this world gives our lives meaning and that our ability to convey our perceptions to others is central to our lives as well as to art.

Images enable poets to present ideas that would be difficult to convey in any other way. Just one look at a dictionary will illustrate that concepts such as *beauty* and *mystery* are so abstract that they are difficult to define, let alone to discuss in specific terms. By choosing an image or series of images to embody these ideas, however, poets can effectively and persuasively make their feelings known, as Ezra Pound does in the brief poem that follows.

EZRA POUND
(1885–1972)

In a Station of the Metro (1916)

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

This poem is almost impossible to paraphrase because the information it communicates is less important than the feelings associated with this information. The poem's title indicates that the first line is meant to suggest a group of people gathered in a station of the Paris subway. The scene, however, is presented not as a clear picture but as an "apparition," suggesting that it is unexpected or even dreamlike. In contrast with the image of the subway platform is the image of the people's faces as flower petals on the dark branch of a tree. Thus, the subway platform—dark, cold, wet,

subterranean (associated with baseness, death, and hell)—is juxtaposed with white flowers—delicate, pale, radiant, lovely (associated with the ideal, life, and heaven). These contrasting images, presented without comment, bear the entire weight of the poem.

Although images can be strikingly visual, they can also appeal to the senses of hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The following poem uses images of sound and taste as well as visual images.

GARY SNYDER
(1930-)

Some Good Things to Be Said for the Iron Age (1970)

A ringing tire iron
dropped on the pavement
Whang of a saw
brushed on limbs
the taste
of rust

Here Snyder presents two commonplace aural images: the ringing of a tire iron and the sound of a saw. These somewhat ordinary images gain power, however, through their visual isolation in the poem. Together they produce a harsh and jarring chord that in turn creates a sense of uneasiness in the reader. This poem does more than present sensory images, though; it also conveys the speaker's interpretations of these images. The last two lines of the poem imply not only that the time in which we live (the Iron Age) is base and mundane, but also that it is declining, decaying into an age of rust. This idea is reinforced by the repeated consonant sounds in *taste* and *rust*, which encourage readers to hold the final image of the poem on their tongues. The title of the poem makes an ironic comment suggesting that compared to the time that is approaching, the age of iron may be "good." Thus, in the mind of the poet, ordinary events gain added significance, and images that spring from everyday experience become sources of enlightenment and insight.

In shorter poems, such as most of those discussed earlier, one or two images may serve as focal points. A longer poem may introduce a cluster of related images, creating a more complex tapestry of sensory impressions—as in the following poem, where several related images are woven together.

SUZANNE E. BERGER
(1944-)

The Meal (1984)

They have washed their faces until they are pale,
their homework is beautifully complete.
They wait for the adults to lean towards each other.
The hands of the children are oval
and smooth as pine-nuts.

The girls have braided and rebraided their hair,
and tied ribbons without a single mistake.
The boy has put away his coin collection.
They are waiting for the mother to straighten her lipstick,
and for the father to speak.

They gather around the table, carefully
as constellations waiting to be named.
Their minds shift and ready, like dunes.
It is so quiet, all waiting stars and dunes.

Their forks move across their plates without scraping,
they wait for the milk and the gravy
at the table with its forgotten spices.
They are waiting for a happiness to lift their eyes,
like sudden light flaring in the trees outside.

20 The white miles of the meal continue,
the figures still travel across a screen:
the father carving the Sunday roast,
her mouth uneven as a torn hibiscus,
their braids still gleaming in the silence.

"The Meal" presents related images that together evoke silence, order, and emptiness. It begins with the image of faces washed "until they are pale" and goes on to describe the children's oval hands as "smooth as pine-nuts." Forks move across plates "without scraping," and the table hints at the memory of "forgotten spices." Despite the poem's title, these children are emotionally starved. The attentive, well-scrubbed children sit at a table where, neither eating nor speaking, they wait for "the milk and the gravy" and for happiness that never comes. The "white miles of the meal" seem to go on forever, reinforcing the sterility and emptiness of the Sunday ritual. Suggesting an absence of sensation or feeling, a kind of paralysis, the poem's images challenge conventional assumptions about the family and its rituals.

Much visual imagery is **static**, freezing the moment and thereby giving it the timeless quality of painting or sculpture. ("The Meal" presents just such a tableau, and so do "Red Wheelbarrow" and "In a Station of the Metro.") Some imagery, however, is **kinetic**, conveying a sense of motion or change.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
(1883–1963)

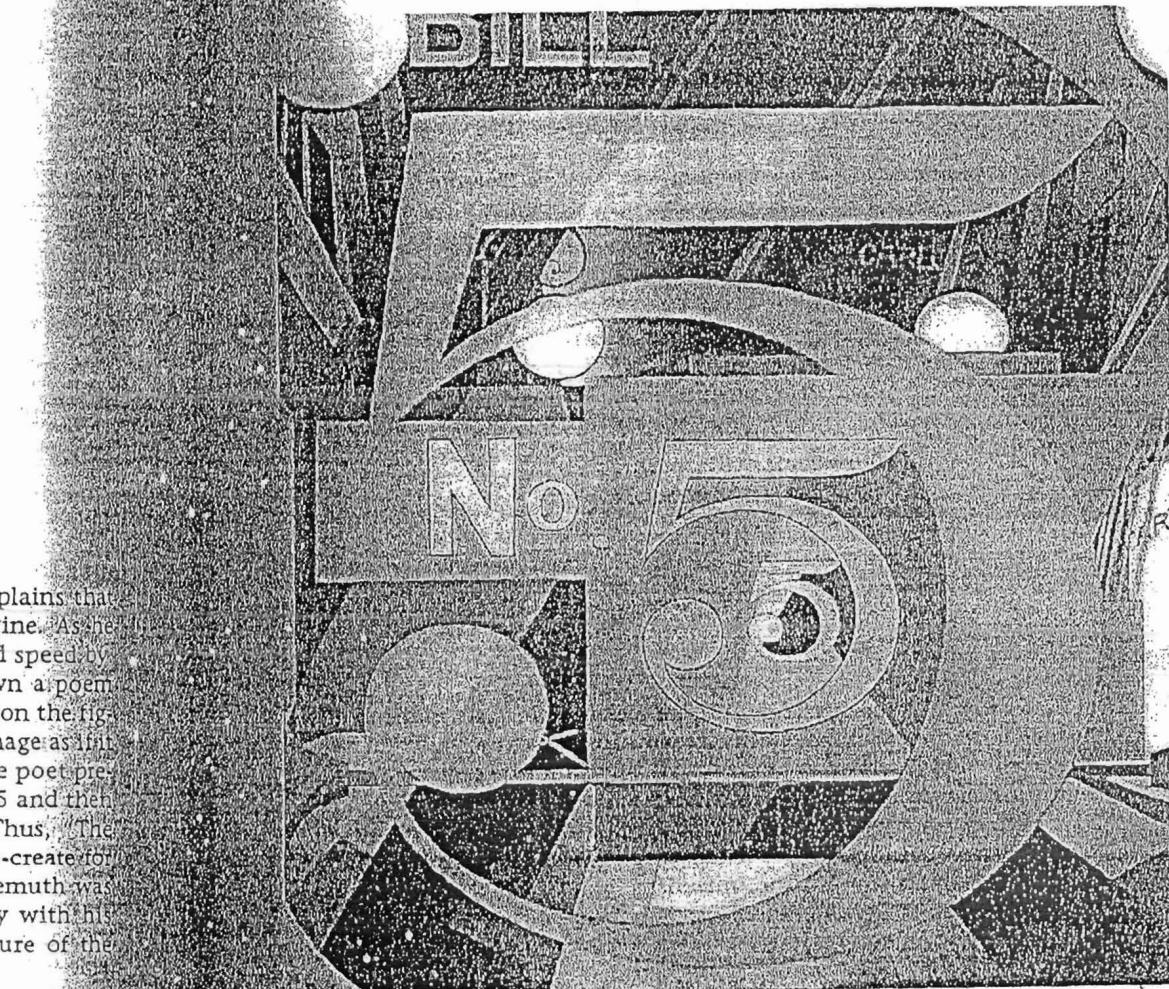
The Great Figure (1938)

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
 on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
10 to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

Commenting on this poem in his autobiography, Williams explains that while walking in New York, he heard the sound of a fire engine. As he turned the corner, he saw a golden figure 5 on a red background speed by. The impression was so forceful that he immediately jotted down a poem about it. In the poem, Williams attempts to re-create the sensation the figure 5 made as it moved into his consciousness, presenting the image as if it were a picture taken by a camera with a high-speed shutter. The poet presents images in the order in which he perceived them: first the 5 and then the red fire truck howling and clanging into the darkness. Thus, "The Great Figure" uses images of sight, sound, and movement to re-create for readers the poet's experience. The American painter Charles Demuth was fascinated by the kinetic quality of the poem. Working closely with his friend Williams, he attempted to capture the stop-action feature of the poem in the painting reproduced on page 653.

A special use of imagery, called **synesthesia**, occurs when one sense is described in a way that is more appropriate for another—for instance, when a sound is described with color. When people say they are feeling *blue* or describe music as *hot*, they are using synesthesia. The poet John Keats uses this technique in the following lines from "Ode to a Nightingale":

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvéd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!



Charles Demuth (1883–1935). *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*. Oil on composition board, 36 x 29½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Alfred Steiglitz Collection, 1949. (49.59.1) All rights reserved, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In these lines, the speaker describes the taste of wine in terms of images that appeal to a variety of senses: flowers, a grassy field, and sun.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: IMAGERY

MATSUO BASHO
(1644?–1694)

Four Haiku¹

Translated by Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite

Spring:

A hill without a name
Veiled in morning mist.

The beginning of autumn:

5 Sea and emerald paddy
Both the same green.

The winds of autumn
Blow: yet still green
The chestnut husks.

10 A flash of lightning:
Into the gloom
Goes the heron's cry.

READING AND REACTING

1. A haiku is a three-line poem, a Japanese form that traditionally has seventeen syllables. Haiku are admired for their extreme economy and their striking images. What are the central images in each of Basho's haiku? To what senses do these images appeal?
2. In another poem, Basho says that art begins with "The depths of the country / and a rice-planting song." What do you think he means? In what way do the preceding poems exemplify this idea?
3. Do you think the conciseness of these poems increases or decreases the impact of their images?

¹ Publication date is not available.

4. JOURNAL ENTRY "In a Station of the Metro" (p. 649) is Ezra Pound's version of a haiku. How successful do you think Pound was? Do you think a longer poem could have conveyed the images more effectively?

Related Works: "Seventeen Syllables" (p. 332), "Hokku Poems" (p. 731), "the sky was can dy" (p. 736), "Birches" (p. 799)

CAROLYN KIZER
(1925–)

After Basho (1984)

Tentatively, you
slip onstage this evening,
pallid, famous moon.

READING AND REACTING

1. What possible meanings might the word "After" have in the title? What does the title tell readers about the writer's purpose?
2. What visual picture does the poem suggest? What mood does poem's central image create?
3. What is the impact of "tentatively" in the first line and "famous" in the last line? How do the connotations of these words affect the image of the moon?

Related Works: "Photograph of My Father in His Twenty-Second Year" (p. 329), "Widow's Lament" (p. 730), "Homage to the Empress of the Blues" (p. 807)

RICHARD WILBUR
(1921–)

Sleepless at Crown Point (1973)

All night, this headland
Lunges into the rumpling
Capework of the wind.

READING AND REACTING

1. What scene is the speaker describing?
2. What is the significance of the title?
3. What are the poem's central images? How do the words "lunge" and "capework" help to establish these images?

Related Works: "The Story of an Hour" (p. 71), "Fog" (p. 827), "Dance" (p. 846)

ROBERT FROST
(1874-1963)

Nothing Gold Can Stay

(1923)

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief.
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

READING AND REACTING

1. What central idea does this poem express?
2. What do you think the first line of the poem means? In what sense is this line ironic?
3. What is the significance of the colors green and gold in this poem? What do these colors have to do with "Eden" and "dawn"?
4. **JOURNAL ENTRY** How do the various images in the poem prepare readers for the last line?
5. **Critical Perspective** In "The Figure a Poem Means," the introduction to the first edition of his *Collected Poems* (1930), Frost laid out a theory of poetry:

It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification . . . but a momentary stay against confusion. . . . Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting. . . . Read it a hundred times: it will forever

keep its freshness as a metal keeps its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went.

Can you apply Frost's remarks to "Nothing Gold Can Stay"?

Related Works: "The Secret Lion" (p. 43), "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" (p. 662), "God's Grandeur" (p. 808)

JEAN TOOMER
(1894-1967)

Reapers

(1923)

Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones
Are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones¹
In their hip-pockets as a thing that's done,
And start their silent swinging, one by one.
Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds,
His belly close to ground. I see the blade,
Blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade.

READING AND REACTING

1. What determines the order in which the speaker arranges the images in this poem? At what point does he comment on these images?
 2. The first four lines of the poem seem to suggest that the workers are content. What image contradicts this impression? How does it do so?
 3. What ideas are traditionally associated with the image of the reaper? The scythe? The harvest? (You may want to consult a reference work, such as *A Dictionary of Symbols* by J. E. Cirlot.) In what way does the speaker rely on these conventional associations to help him convey his ideas? Can you appreciate the poem without understanding these associations?
- Critical Perspective** As Brian Joseph Benson and Mabel Mayle Dillard point out in their 1980 study *Jean Toomer*, the poet disagreed with some other artists of the Harlem Renaissance, choosing not to focus on "Negro" themes for a primarily

¹ Stones used to sharpen cutting instruments.

black audience, but rather to try to make his work universal in scope.

Do you think he has achieved this goal in "Reapers"?

¹ Works: "A Worn Path" (p. 344), "Lineage" (p. 842), "The Solitary Reaper" (p. 848)

WILFRED OWEN
(1893–1918)

Dulce et Decorum Est¹ (1920)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines² that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
10 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
15 In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
20 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
25 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

¹ The title and last lines are from Horace, *Odes* 3.2: "Sweet and one's country."

² Shells that explode on impact and release poison gas.

READING AND REACTING

1 Who is the speaker in this poem? What is his attitude toward his subject?

2 What images are traditionally associated with soldiers? How do the images in this poem depart from convention? Why do you think Owen selected such images?

3 To what senses (other than sight) does the poem appeal to? Is any of the imagery kinetic?

JOURNAL ENTRY Does the knowledge that Owen died in War I change your reaction to the poem, or are the poem's compelling enough to eliminate the need for biographical background?

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE Like many other British poets who experienced fighting in the European trenches during World War I, Owen struggled to find a new poetic idiom to describe the horrors of this new kind of war. In his 1986 biography *Owen the Poet*, Dominic Hibberd praises the "controlled and powerful anger" in 'Dulce et Decorum Est' which for some readers will be the poem's most valuable quality" and goes on to note that the "organization and clarity of the first half is replaced [beginning at line 15] by confused, choking syntax and a vocabulary of sickness and disgust, matching the nightmare which is in progress."

Give some examples to support Hibberd's statements. How does the movement from control to confusion convey the poem's message to readers?

CHECKLIST: WRITING ABOUT IMAGERY

- ✓ Do the images in the poem appeal to the sense of sight, touch, hearing, smell, or taste?
- ✓ Does the poem depend on a single image or on a variety of different images?
- ✓ Does the poem depend on a cluster of related images?
- ✓ What details make the images memorable?
- ✓ What mood do the images create?
- ✓ Are the images static or kinetic? Are there any examples of synesthesia?
- ✓ How do the poem's images help to convey its theme?
- ✓ How effective are the images? In what way do the images enhance your enjoyment of the poem?

♦ WRITING SUGGESTIONS: IMAGERY

1. How are short poems such as "Some Good Things to Be Said for Iron Age" (p. 650) and "In a Station of the Metro" (p. 649) like and unlike haiku?
2. Reread "Cloud Painter" (p. 646) and "**The Great Figure**" (p. 652) and read "Musée des Beaux Arts" (p. 771). **Study** the paintings accompanying the poems in the text. Then, write a paper in which you draw some conclusions about the differences between artistic and poetic images.
3. Reread "The Meal" (p. 651) and the discussion that accompanies it. Then, analyze the role of imagery in the depiction of the parent/child relationships in "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 531) and "My Father's Wars" (p. 535). How does each poem's imagery convey the nature of the relationship it describes?
4. Write an essay in which you discuss the color imagery in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" (p. 656), "Reapers" (p. 657), and "The Yellow Paper" (p. 152). In what way does color reinforce the themes of these works?
5. Sometimes imagery can be used to make a comment about the society in which a scene takes place. Choose two poems in which imagery functions in this way—"For the Union Dead" (p. 547), "The Colonel" (p. 742), or "The *Chicago Defender* Sends a Man to Little Rock" (p. 859), for example—and discuss how the images chosen reinforce the social statement each poem makes.

5

IMAGERY.

*It is better to present one Image in a lifetime
than to produce voluminous works.*

—EZRA POUND

Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

In a Station of the Metro

1916

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Pound said he wrote this poem to convey an experience: emerging one day from a train in the Paris subway (*Métro*), he beheld "suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another." Originally he had described his impression in a poem thirty lines long. In this final version, each line contains an image, which, like a picture, may take the place of a thousand words.

Though the term image suggests a thing seen, when speaking of images in poetry, we generally mean a word or sequence of words that refers to any sensory experience. Often this experience is a sight (visual imagery, as in Pound's poem), but it may be a sound (auditory imagery) or a touch (tactile imagery, as a perception of roughness or smoothness). It may be an odor or a taste or perhaps a bodily sensation such as pain, the prickling of gooseflesh, the quenching of thirst, or—as in the following brief poem—the perception of something cold.

Taniguchi Buson (1716–1783)

The piercing chill I feel

(about 1760)

The piercing chill I feel:
my dead wife's comb, in our bedroom,
under my heel . . .

—Translated by Harold G. Henderson

As in this haiku (in Japanese, a poem of seventeen syllables) an image can convey a flash of understanding. Had he wished, the poet might have spoken of the dead

woman, of the contrast between her death and his memory of her, of his feelings toward death in general. But such a discussion would be quite different from the poem he actually wrote. Striking his bare foot against the comb, now cold and motionless but associated with the living wife (perhaps worn in her hair), the widower feels a shock as if he had touched the woman's corpse. A literal, physical sense of death is conveyed; the abstraction "death" is understood through the senses. To render the abstract in concrete terms is what poets often try to do; in this attempt, an image can be valuable.

IMAGERY

An image may occur in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or, as in this case, an entire short poem. To speak of the imagery of a poem—all its images taken together—is often more useful than to speak of separate images. To divide Buson's haiku into five images—chill, wife, comb, bedroom, heel—is possible, for any noun that refers to a visible object or a sensation is an image, but this is to draw distinctions that in themselves mean little and to disassemble a single experience.

Does an image cause a reader to experience a sense impression? Not quite. Reading the word *petals*, no one literally sees petals; but the occasion is given for imagining them. The image asks to be seen with the mind's eye. And although "In a Station of the Metro" records what Ezra Pound saw, it is of course not necessary for a poet actually to have lived through a sensory experience in order to write of it. Keats may never have seen a newly discovered planet through a telescope, despite the image in his sonnet on Chapman's Homer.

It is tempting to think of imagery as mere decoration, particularly when we read Keats, who fills his poems with an abundance of sights, sounds, odors, and tastes. But a successful image is not just a dab of paint or a flashy bauble. When Keats opens "The Eve of St. Agnes" with what have been called the coldest lines in literature, he evokes by a series of images a setting and a mood:

St. Agnes' eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seemed taking flight for heaven, without a death . . .

Indeed, some literary critics look for much of the meaning of a poem in its imagery, wherein they expect to see the mind of the poet more truly revealed than in whatever the poet explicitly claims to believe. Though Shakespeare's Theseus (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) accuses poets of being concerned with "airy nothings," poets are usually very much concerned with what is in front of them. This concern is of use to us. Involved in our personal hopes and apprehensions, anticipating the future so hard that much of the time we see the present through a film of thought across our eyes, perhaps we need a poet occasionally to remind us that even the coffee we absentmindedly sip comes in (as Yeats put it) a "heavy spillable cup."

*T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)**The winter evening settles down*

1917

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps.

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Questions

- What mood is evoked by the images in Eliot's poem?
- What kind of city neighborhood has the poet chosen to describe? How can you tell?

*Theodore Roethke (1908-1963)**Root Cellar*

1948

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stinks!—
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

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Questions

- As a boy growing up in Saginaw, Michigan, Theodore Roethke spent much of his time in a large commercial greenhouse run by his family. What details in his poem show more than a passing acquaintance with growing things?
- What varieties of image does "Root Cellar" contain? Point out examples.
- What do you understand to be Roethke's attitude toward the root cellar? Does he view it as a disgusting chamber of horrors? Pay special attention to the last two lines.

*Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)**The Fish*

1946

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched glass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,

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and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

Questions

- How many abstract words does this poem contain? What proportion of the poem is imagery?
- What is the speaker's attitude toward the fish? Comment in particular on lines 61–64.
- What attitude do the images of the rainbow of oil (line 69), the orange bailer (bailing bucket, line 71), the sun-cracked thwarts (line 72) convey? Does the poet expect us to feel mournful because the boat is in such sorry condition?
- What is meant by *rainbow, rainbow, rainbow*?
- How do these images prepare us for the conclusion? Why does the speaker let the fish go?

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1907

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)**The Panther***In the Jardin des Plantes, Paris*^o

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
has grown so weary that it cannot hold
anything else. It seems to him there are
2 thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides
is like a ritual dance around a center
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly—. An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone.

—Translated by Stephen Mitchell

THE PANTHER. *Jardin des Plantes, Paris*: "garden of plants," a large botanical garden on the bank of the river Seine, which also contains a small zoo.

Questions

- What are the "bars" of line 1, and why are they "constantly passing"?
- How do the contradictory descriptions in the second stanza—especially the simile in lines 7–8—characterize the panther's situation?
- What is meant by "the curtain of the pupils" (line 9)?
- What is communicated by the image of the "image" in the last three lines?

Charles Simic (b. 1938)**Fork**

1969

This strange thing must have crept
Right out of hell.
It resembles a bird's foot
Worn around the cannibal's neck.

As you hold it in your hand,
As you stab with it into a piece of meat,
It is possible to imagine the rest of the bird:
Its head which like your fist
Is large, bald, beakless, and blind.

Questions

- The title image of this poem is an ordinary and everyday object. What happens to it in the first two lines?
- How does the word *crept* in line 1 change our sense of the fork? How does the author develop this new sense later in the poem?

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)*A Route of Evanescence*

(about 1879)

A Route of Evanescence
 With a revolving Wheel –
 A Resonance of Emerald –
 A Rush of Cochineal° –
 And every Blossom on the Bush
 Adjusts its tumbled Head –
 The mail from Tunis, probably,
 An easy Morning's Ride –

red dye

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A ROUTE OF EVANESCENCE. Dickinson titled this poem "A Humming-bird" in an 1880 letter to a friend. 1 *Evanescence*: ornithologist's term for the luminous sheen of certain birds' feathers. 7 *Tunis*: capital city of Tunisia, North Africa.

Questions

What is the subject of this poem? How can you tell?

Jean Toomer (1894–1967)*Reapers*

1923

Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones
 Are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones
 In their hip-pockets as a thing that's done,
 And start their silent swinging, one by one.
 Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
 And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds,
 His belly close to ground. I see the blade,
 Blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade.

Questions

1. Imagine the scene Toomer describes. What details most vividly strike the mind's eye?
2. What kind of image is *silent swinging*?
3. Read the poem aloud. Notice especially the effect of the words *sound of steel on stones* and *field rat, startled, squealing bleeds*. What interesting sounds are present in the very words that contain these images?
4. What feelings do you get from this poem as a whole? Besides appealing to our auditory and visual imagination, what do the images contribute?

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)*Pied Beauty*

(1877)

Glory be to God for dappled things—
 For skies of couple-color as a brindled° cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plow;

streaked

5

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him.

10

Questions

1. What does the word *pied* mean? (Hint: what does a Pied Piper look like?)
2. According to Hopkins, what do *skies, cow, trout, ripe chestnuts, finches' wings*, and *landscapes* all have in common? What landscapes can the poet have in mind? (Have you ever seen any *dappled* landscape while looking down from an airplane, or from a mountain or high hill?)
3. What do you make of line 6: what can carpenters' saws and ditch-diggers' spades possibly have in common with the dappled things in lines 2–4?
4. Does Hopkins refer only to visual contrasts? What other kinds of variation interest him?
5. Try to state in your own words the theme of this poem. How essential to our understanding of this theme are Hopkins's images?

ABOUT HAIKU*Arakida Moritake* (1473–1549)

The falling flower

The falling flower
 I saw drift back to the branch
 Was a butterfly.

—Translated by Babette Deutsch

Haiku means "beginning-verse" in Japanese—perhaps because the form may have originated in a game. Players, given a haiku, were supposed to extend its three lines into a longer poem. Haiku (the word can also be plural) consist mainly of imagery, but as we saw in Buson's lines about the cold comb, their imagery is not always only pictorial; it can involve any of the five senses. Haiku are so short that they depend on imagery to trigger associations and responses in the reader. A haiku in Japanese is rimeless; its seventeen syllables are traditionally arranged in three lines, usually following a pattern of five, seven, and five syllables. English haiku frequently ignore such a pattern, being timed or unrimed as the poet prefers. What English haiku do try to preserve is the powerful way Japanese haiku capture the intensity of a particular moment, usually by linking two concrete images. There is little room for abstract thoughts or general observations. The following attempt, though containing seventeen syllables, is far from haiku in spirit:

Now that our love is gone
 I feel within my soul
 a nagging distress.

Unlike the author of those lines, haiku poets look out upon a literal world, seldom looking inward to discuss their feelings. Japanese haiku tend to be seasonal in subject,

indicates spring; a crow on a branch, autumn; snow, winter. Not just pretty little sketches of nature (as some Westerners think), haiku assume a view of the universe in which observer and nature are not separated.

Haiku emerged in sixteenth-century Japan and soon developed into a deeply esteemed form. Even today, Japanese soldiers, stockbrokers, scientists, schoolchildren, and the emperor himself still find occasion to pen haiku. Soon after the form first captured the attention of Western poets at the end of the nineteenth century, it became immensely influential for modern poets such as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and H. D., as a model for the kind of verse they wanted to write—concise, direct, and imagistic.

The Japanese consider the poems of the "Three Masters"—Basho, Buson, and Issa—to be the pinnacle of the classical haiku. Each poet had his own personality: Basho, the ascetic seeker of Zen enlightenment; Buson, the worldly artist; Issa, the sensitive master of wit and pathos. Here are free translations of poems from each of the "Three Masters."

Matsuo Basho (1644–1694)

Heat-lightning streak
Heat-lightning streak—
through darkness pierces
the heron's shriek.

—Translated by X. J. Kennedy

In the old stone pool
In the old stone pool
a frogjump:
splishhhhh.

—Translated by X. J. Kennedy

Taniguchi Buson (1716–1783)

On the one-ton temple bell
On the one-ton temple bell,
a moonmoth, folded into sleep,
sits still.

—Translated by X. J. Kennedy

Moonrise on mudflats
Moonrise on mudflats,
the line of water and sky
blurred by a bullfrog

—Translated by Michael Stillman

Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827)

only one guy
only one guy and
only one fly trying to
make the guest room do.

—Translated by Cid Corman

Cricket
Cricket, be
careful! I'm rolling
over!

—Translated by Robert Bly

HAIKU FROM JAPANESE INTERNMENT CAMPS

Japanese immigrants brought the tradition of haiku-writing to the United States, often forming local clubs to pursue their shared literary interests. During World War II, when Japanese Americans were unjustly considered "enemy aliens" and confined to federal internment camps, these poets continued to write in their bleak new surroundings. Today these haiku provide a vivid picture of the deprivations suffered by the poets, their families, and their fellow internees.

Suiko Matsushita

Cosmos in bloom

Cosmos in bloom
as if no war
were taking place

—Translated by Violet Kazue de Cristoro

Hakuro Wada

Even the croaking of frogs

Even the croaking of frogs
comes from outside the barbed wire fence
this is our life

—Translated by Violet Kazue de Cristoro

CONTEMPORARY HAIKU

If you care to try your hand at haiku-writing, here are a few suggestions: make every word matter. Include few adjectives, shun needless conjunctions. Set your poem in the present. ("Haiku," said Basho, "is simply what is happening in this place at this moment.") Like many writers of haiku, you may wish to confine your poem to what can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched. Mere sensory reports, however, will be meaningless unless they make the reader feel something.

Here are six more recent haiku written in English. (Don't expect them all to observe a strict arrangement of seventeen syllables, however.) Haiku, in any language, is an art of few words, many suggestions. A haiku starts us thinking and telling.

Etheridge Knight (1931–1991)

Making jazz swing in

Making jazz swing in
Seventeen syllables AIN'T
No square poet's job.

Lee Gurga (b. 1949)

Visitor's Room

Visitor's Room—
everything bolted down
except my brother.

Penny Harter (b. 1940)

broken bowl

broken bowl
the pieces
still rocking.

Jennifer Brutschy (b. 1960)

Born Again

Born Again
she speaks excitedly
of death.

John Ridland (b. 1933)

The Lazy Man's Haiku

out in the night
a wheelbarrowful
of moonlight.

Garry Gay (b. 1951)

Hole in the ozone

Hole in the ozone
My bald spot . . .
sunburned

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER STUDY

John Keats (1795–1821)

Bright Star! would I were steadfast as thou art (1819)

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
 Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,
 And watching, with eternal lids apart,
 Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,^o
 The moving waters at their priest-like task
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
 Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
 No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
 Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
 To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
 And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

hermit

5

10

Questions

1. Stars are conventional symbols for love and a loved one. (Love, Shakespeare tells us in a sonnet, "is the star to every wandering bark.") In this sonnet, why is it not possible for the star to have this meaning? How does Keats use it?
2. What seems concrete and particular in the speaker's observations?
3. Suppose Keats had said *slow and easy* instead of *tender-taken* in line 13. What would have been lost?

Experiment: Writing with Images

Taking the following poems as examples from which to start rather than as models to be slavishly copied, try to compose a brief poem that consists largely of imagery.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

The Runner 1867

On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner;
 He is lean and sinewy, with muscular legs;
 He is thinly clothed—he leans forward as he runs,
 With lightly closed fists, and arms partially rais'd.

T. E. Hulme (1883–1917)

Image

(about 1910)

Old houses were scaffolding once
 and workmen whistling.

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)*El Hombre*

1917

It's a strange courage
 You give me ancient star:
 Shine alone in the sunrise
 Toward which you lend no part!

Robert Bly (b. 1926)

Driving to Town Late to Mail a Letter

1962

It is a cold and snowy night. The main street is deserted.
 The only things moving are swirls of snow.
 As I lift the mailbox door, I feel its cold iron.
 There is a privacy I love in this snowy night.
 Driving around, I will waste more time.

Paul Goodman (1911–1972)

Birthday Cake

1962

Now isn't it time
 when the candles on the icing
 are one two too many
 too many to blow out
 too many to count too many
 isn't it time to give up this ritual?

although the fiery crown
 fluttering on the chocolate
 and through the darkened room advancing
 is still the most loveliest sight
 among our savage folk
 that have few festivals.

10

But the thicket is too hot and thick
 and isn't it time, isn't it time
 when the fires are too many
 to eat the fire and not the cake
 and drip the fires from my teeth
 as once I had my hot hot youth.

15

Louise Glück (b. 1943)**Mock Orange**

It is not the moon, I tell you.
It is these flowers
lighting the yard.

I hate them.

I hate them as I hate sex,
the man's mouth
sealing my mouth, the man's
paralyzing body—

and the cry that always escapes,
the low, humiliating
premise of union—

In my mind tonight
I hear the question and pursuing answer

fused in one sound
that mounts and mounts and then
is split into the old selves,
the tired antagonisms. Do you see?
We were made fools of.
And the scent of mock orange
drifts through the window. .

How can I rest?
How can I be content
when there is still
that odor in the world?

MOCK ORANGE. The mock orange is a flowering shrub with especially fragrant white blossoms and fruit
that resemble those of an orange tree.

Billy Collins (b. 1941)**Embrace**

You know the parlor trick.
Wrap your arms around your own body
and from the back it looks like
someone is embracing you,
her hands grasping your shirt,
her fingernails teasing your neck.

From the front it is another story.
You never looked so alone,
your crossed elbows and screwy grin.
You could be waiting for a tailor
to fit you for a straitjacket,
one that would hold you really tight.

1985

5

10

15

20

5

10

Kevin Prufer (b. 1969)**Pause, Pause**

Praise to the empty schoolroom, when the folders
are stowed and the sighing desktops close.

Praise to the sixteen-hour silence
after the last chairleg complains against the tiles.

There are tracks in the snow on the sidewalk,
ice salting into the bootprints. Snow-clots fall
like good advice from the branches.
See the plaid skirts ticking into the distance?

The bookbags swaying to the footfalls?
Praise to the sun. It sets like a clocktower face,

oranges over, grows. Praise,
praise to the classrooms, empty at last.

One by one, the door-bolts click
and the lightbulbs shudder to a close.

The chairs dream all askew. Praise to the empty
hallway, the pause before the long bells cry.

10

15

1957

Stevie Smith (1902-1971)**Not Waving but Drowning**

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

10

2

LISTENING TO A VOICE

Irony is that little pinch of salt
which alone makes the dish palatable.

—JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

TONE

In old Western movies, when one hombre taunts another, it is customary for the second to drawl, "Smile when you say that, pardner" or "Mister, I don't like your tone of voice." Sometimes in reading a poem, although we can neither see a face nor hear a voice, we can infer the poet's attitude from other evidence.

Like tone of voice, tone in literature often conveys an attitude toward the person addressed. Like the manner of a person, the manner of a poem may be friendly or belligerent toward its reader, condescending or respectful. Again like tone of voice, the tone of a poem may tell us how the speaker feels about himself or herself: cocksure or humble, sad or glad. But usually when we ask, "What is the tone of a poem?" we mean, "What attitude does the poet take toward a theme or a subject?" Is the poet being affectionate, hostile, earnest, playful, sarcastic, or what? We may never be able to know, of course, the poet's personal feelings. All we need know is how to feel when we read the poem.

Strictly speaking, tone isn't an attitude; it is whatever in the poem makes an attitude clear to us: the choice of certain words instead of others, the picking out of certain details. In A. E. Housman's "Loveliest of trees," for example, the poet communicates his admiration for a cherry tree's beauty by singling out its white blossoms for attention; had he wanted to show his dislike for the tree, he might have concentrated on its broken branches, birdlime, or snails. To perceive the tone of a poem rightly, we need to read the poem carefully, paying attention to whatever suggestions we find in it.

Theodore Roethke (1908–1963)

My Papa's Waltz

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

1948

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf:
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

10

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

15

What is the tone of this poem? Most readers find the speaker's attitude toward his father critical, but nonetheless affectionate. They take this recollection of childhood to be an odd but happy one. Other readers, however, concentrate on other details, such as the father's rough manners and drunkenness. One reader has written that "Roethke expresses his resentment for his father, a drunken brute with dirty hands and whiskey breath who carelessly hurt the child's ear and manhandled him." Although this reader accurately noticed some of the events in the poem and perceived that there was something desperate in the son's hanging onto the father "like death," he simplifies the tone of the poem and so misses its humorous side.

While "My Papa's Waltz" contains the dark elements of manhandling and drunkenness, the tone remains grotesquely comic. The rollicking rhythms of the poem underscore Roethke's complex humor—half loving and half censuring of the unwashed, intoxicated father. The humor is further reinforced by playful rhymes such as *dizzy* and *easy*, *knuckle* and *buckle*, as well as the joyful suggestions of the words *waltz*, *waltzing*, and *romped*. The scene itself is comic, with kitchen pans falling because of the father's roughhousing while the mother looks on unamused. However much the speaker satirizes the overly rambunctious father, he does not have the boy identify with the soberly disapproving mother. Not all comedy is comfortable and reassuring. Certainly, this small boy's family life has its frightening side, but the last line suggests the boy is still clinging to his father with persistent if also complicated love.

Satiric Poetry

"My Papa's Waltz," though it includes lifelike details that aren't pretty, has a tone relatively easy to recognize. So does satiric poetry, a kind of comic poetry that generally conveys a message. Usually its tone is one of detached amusement, withering contempt, and implied superiority. In a satiric poem, the poet ridicules some person or persons (or perhaps some kind of human behavior), examining the victim by the light of certain principles and implying that the reader, too, ought to feel contempt for the victim.

Countee Cullen (1903–1946)

For a Lady I Know

She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven.

1925

Questions

1. What is Cullen's message?
2. How would you characterize the tone of this poem? Wrathful? Amused?

A Spectrum of Tones

In some poems the poet's attitude may be plain enough; while in other poems attitudes may be so mingled that it is hard to describe them tersely without doing injustice to the poem. Does Andrew Marvell in "To His Coy Mistress" (page 440) take a serious or playful attitude toward the fact that he and his lady are destined to be food for worms? No one-word answer will suffice. And what of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (page 369)? In his attitude toward his redemption-seeking hero who wades with trousers rolled, Eliot is seriously funny. Such a mingled tone may be seen in the following poem by the wife of a governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the earliest American poet of note. Anne Bradstreet's first book, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650), had been published in England without her consent. She wrote these lines to preface a second edition:

Anne Bradstreet (1612?–1672)

The Author to Her Book

1678

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth didst by my side remain,
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,
Who thee abroad exposed to public view;
Made thee in rags, halting, to the press to trudge,
Where errors were not lessened, all may judge.
At thy return my blushing was not small,
My rambling brat (in print) should mother call;
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;
Yet being mine own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:
I washed thy face, but more defects I saw,
And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.
I stretched thy joints to make thee even feet,
Yet still thou run'st more hobbling than is meet;
In better dress to trim thee was my mind,
But nought save homespun cloth in the house I find.
In this array, 'mongst vulgars may'st thou roam;
In critics' hands beware thou dost not come;
And take thy way where yet thou are not known.
If for thy Father asked, say thou had'st none;
And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,
Which caused her thus to send thee out of door.

20

In the author's comparison of her book to an illegitimate ragamuffin, we may be

to a mother who had scrubbed and dressed many. As she might feel toward such a child, so she feels toward her book. She starts by deplored it but, as the poem goes on, cannot deny its brief affection. Humor enters (as in the pun in line 15). She must dress the creature in homespun cloth, something both crude and serviceable. By the end of her poem, Bradstreet seems to regard her book-child with tenderness, amusement, and a certain indulgent awareness of its faults. To read this poem is to sense its mingling of several attitudes. A poet can be merry and in earnest at the same time.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

To a Locomotive in Winter

1881

Thee for my recitative,
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the winter-day
 declining,
Thee in thy panoply,^o thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy beat
 convulsive,
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass and silvery steel,
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating,
 shuttling at thy sides,
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering
 in the distance,
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple,
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-stack,
Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous twinkle of thy
 wheels,
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following,
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering;
Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the
 continent,
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,
With storm and buffeting gusts of wind and falling snow,
By day thy warning ringing bell to sound its notes,
By night thy silent signal lamps to swing.
15

Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy swinging lamps at night,
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an earth-quake,
 rousing all,
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,)
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide, across the lakes,
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.
25



(about 1862)

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

I like to see it lap the Miles

I like to see it lap the Miles –
And lick the Valleys up –
And stop to feed itself at Tanks –
And then – prodigious step

Around a Pile of Mountains –
And supercilious peer
In Shanties – by the sides of Roads –
And then a Quarry pare

To fit its Ribs
And crawl between
Complaining all the while
In horrid – hooting stanza –
Then chase itself down Hill –

And neigh like Boanerges –
Then – punctual as a Star
Stop – docile and omnipotent
At its own stable door –

Questions

- What differences in tone do you find between Whitman's and Dickinson's poems? Point out whatever in each poem contributes to these differences.
- Boanerges in Dickinson's last stanza means "sons of thunder," a name given by Jesus to the disciples John and James (see Mark 3:17). How far should the reader work out the particulars of this comparison? Does it make the tone of the poem serious?
- In Whitman's opening line, what is a *recitative*? What other specialized terms from the vocabulary of music and poetry does each poem contain? How do they help underscore Whitman's theme?
- Poets and songwriters probably have regarded the locomotive with more affection than they have shown most other machines. Why do you suppose this is so? Can you think of any other poems or songs as examples?
- What do these two poems tell you about locomotives that you would not be likely to find in a technical book on railroading?
- Are the subjects of the two poems identical? Discuss.

Kevin Young (b. 1970)

Doo Wop

Honey baby
Lady lovely

Milk shake your
money maker

10

15

2008

Shoo wah
Shoo wah

MILK PERPUSTAKAAN
JURUSAN BAHASA DAN SASTRA INGGRIS
UNIVERSITAS MEGALI PADJADRI

Countryfied
Sudden fried

Alabama
mamma jamma

10

Low bass
Fast pace

Past face
Femme postale

Penned pal
My gal

Corner song
Done wronged

Questions

1. What is the tone of this poem—comic, serious? both at once?
2. How many instances of plays on words, and playing with the sounds of words, can you find in the poem?
3. Beyond the author's exuberant delight in language, what do you think "Doo Wop" is about?

Weldon Kees (1914-1955)

For My Daughter

1940

Looking into my daughter's eyes I read
Beneath the innocence of morning flesh
Concealed, hintings of death she does not heed.
Coldest of winds have blown this hair, and mesh
Of seaweed snarled these miniatures of hands;
The night's slow poison, tolerant and bland,
Has moved her blood. Parched years that I have seen
That may be hers appear: foul, lingering
Death in certain war, the slim legs green.
Or, fed on hate, she relishes the sting
Of others' agony; perhaps the cruel
Bride of a syphilitic or a fool.
These speculations sour in the sun.
I have no daughter. I desire none.

10

Questions

1. How does the last line of this sonnet affect the meaning of the poem?
2. "For My Daughter" was first published in 1940. What considerations might a potential American parent have felt at that time? Are these historical concerns mirrored in the poem?
3. Donald Justice has said that "Kees is one of the bitterest poets in history." Is bitterness the

IRONY

To see a distinction between the poet and the words of a fictitious character—between Robert Browning and "My Last Duchess"—is to be aware of irony: a manner of speaking that implies a discrepancy. If the mask says one thing and we sense that the writer is in fact saying something else, the writer has adopted an ironic point of view. No finer illustration exists in English than Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," an essay in which Swift speaks as an earnest, humorless citizen who sets forth his reasonable plan to aid the Irish poor. The plan is so monstrous no sane reader can assent to it: the poor are to sell their children as meat for the tables of their landlords. From behind his false face, Swift is actually recommending not cannibalism but love and Christian charity.

A poem is often made complicated and more interesting by another kind of irony. Verbal irony occurs whenever words say one thing but mean something else, usually the opposite. The word *love* means *hate* here: "I just *love* to stay home and do my hair on a Saturday night!"

Sarcasm

If verbal irony is conspicuously bitter, heavy-handed, and mocking, it is sarcasm: "Oh, he's the biggest spender in the world, all right!" (The sarcasm, if that statement were spoken, would be underscored by the speaker's tone of voice.) A famous instance of sarcasm occurs in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in Mark Antony's oration over the body of the slain Caesar: "Brutus is an honorable man." Antony repeats this line until the enraged populace begins shouting exactly what he means to call Brutus and the other conspirators: traitors, villains, murderers. We had best be alert for irony on the printed page, for if we miss it, our interpretations of a poem may go wild.

Robert Creeley (1926-2005)

Oh No

If you wander far enough
you will come to it
and when you get there
they will give you a place to sit
for yourself only, in a nice chair,
and all your friends will be there
with smiles on their faces
and they will likewise all have places.

1959

This poem is rich in verbal irony. The title helps point out that between the speaker's words and attitude lie deep differences. In line 2, what is it? Old age? The wandering suggests a conventional metaphor: the journey of life. Is it literally a rest home for "senior citizens," or perhaps some naïve popular concept of heaven (such as we meet in comic strips: harps, angels with hoops for halos) in which the saved all sit around in a ring, smugly congratulating one another? We can't be sure, but the speaker's attitude toward this final sitting-place is definite. It is a place for the selfish, as we infer from the phrase *for yourself only*. And *smiles on their faces* may hint that the smiles are unchanging and forced. There is a difference between saying "They

had smiles on their faces" and "They smiled": the latter suggests that the smiles came from within. The word nice is to be regarded with distrust. If we see through this speaker, as Creeley implies we can do, we realize that, while pretending to be sweet-talking us into a seat, actually he is revealing the horror of a little hell. And the title is the poet's reaction to it (or the speaker's unironic, straightforward one): "Oh no! Not that!"

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony, like verbal irony, contains an element of contrast, but it usually refers to a situation in a play wherein a character whose knowledge is limited says, does, or encounters something of greater significance than he or she knows. We, the spectators, realize the meaning of this speech or action, for the playwright has afforded us superior knowledge. In Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, when Oedipus vows to punish whoever has brought down a plague upon the city of Thebes, we know—as he does not—that the man he would punish is himself. The situation of Oedipus also contains cosmic irony, or irony of fate: some Fate with a grim sense of humor seems cruelly to trick a human being. Cosmic irony clearly exists in poems in which fate or the Fates are personified and seen as hostile, as in Thomas Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (page 421); and it may be said to occur also in Robinson's "Richard Cory" (page 128). Obviously it is a twist of fate for the most envied man in town to kill himself.

To sum up: the effect of irony depends on the reader's noticing some incongruity or discrepancy between two things. In *verbal irony*, there is a contrast between the speaker's words and meaning; in an *ironic point of view*, between the writer's attitude and what is spoken by a fictitious character; in *dramatic irony*, between the limited knowledge of a character and the fuller knowledge of the reader or spectator; in *cosmic irony*, between a character's position or aspiration and the treatment he or she receives at the hands of Fate. Although, in the work of an inept poet, irony can be crude and obvious sarcasm, it is invaluable to a poet of more complicated mind, who imagines more than one perspective.

W. H. Auden (1907–1973)

The Unknown Citizen

1940

(To JS/07/M/378

This Marble Monument Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found

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That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his
generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

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Questions

1. Read the two-line epitaph at the beginning of the poem as carefully as you read what follows. How does the epitaph help establish the voice by which the rest of the poem is spoken?
2. Who is speaking?
3. What ironic discrepancies do you find between the speaker's attitude toward the subject and that of the poet himself? By what is the poet's attitude made clear?
4. In the phrase "The Unknown Soldier" (of which "The Unknown Citizen" reminds us), what does the word *unknown* mean? What does it mean in the title of Auden's poem?
5. What tendencies in our civilization does Auden satirize?
6. How would you expect the speaker to define a Modern Man, if a CD player, a radio, a car, and a refrigerator are "everything" a Modern Man needs?

Sharon Olds (b. 1942)

Rite of Passage

1983

As the guests arrive at my son's party
they gather in the living room—
short men, men in first grade
with smooth jaws and chins.
Hands in pockets, they stand around
jostling, jockeying for place, small fights
breaking out and calming. One says to another
How old are you? Six. I'm seven. So?
They eye each other, seeing themselves
tiny in the other's pupils. They clear their
throats a lot, a room of small bankers,
they fold their arms and frown. I could beat you
up, a seven says to a six,

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the dark cake, round and heavy as a
turret, behind them on the table. My son,
freckles like specks of nutmeg on his cheeks,
chest narrow as the balsa keel of a
model boat, long hands
cool and thin as the day they guided him
out of me, speaks up as a host
for the sake of the group.

We could easily kill a two-year-old,
he says in his clear voice. The other
men agree, they clear their throats
like Generals, they relax and get down to
playing war, celebrating my son's life.

Questions

1. What is ironic about the way the speaker describes the first-grade boys at her son's birthday party?
2. What other irony does the author underscore in the last two lines?
3. Does this mother sentimentalize her own son by seeing him as better than the other little boys?

Rod Taylor (b. 1947)

Dakota: October, 1822: Hunkpapa Warrior

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1972

New air has come around us.
It is cold enough to make us know we are different
from the things we touch. Before dark, we ride
along the high places or go deep in the long
grass at the edge of our people
and watch for enemies.

We are the strongest tribe of the Sioux. Buffalo
are plentiful, our women beautiful. Life
is good.

What bad thing can be done against us?

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DAKOTA: OCTOBER, 1822: HUNKPAPA WARRIOR. The Hunkpapa are one of seven branches of the Lakota Sioux tribe.

Questions

1. How would you describe the speaker's tone—confident, boastful, serene?
2. What is ironic about this poem?
3. What kind of irony does the poem display?

Sarah N. Cleghorn (1876–1959)

The Golf Links

1917

The golf links lie so near the mill
That almost every day
The laboring children can look out

Questions

1. Is this brief poem satiric? Does it contain any verbal irony or is the poet making a matter-of-fact statement in words that mean just what they say?
2. What other kind of irony is present in the poem?
3. Sarah N. Cleghorn's poem dates from before the enactment of legislation against child labor. Is it still a good poem, or is it hopelessly dated?
4. Would you call this poem lyric, narrative, or didactic?

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950)

Second Fig

1920

Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:
Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!

Question

Do you think the author is making fun of the speaker's attitude or agreeing with it?

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967)

Comment

1926

Oh, life is a glorious cycle of song,
A medley of extemporeana;
And love is a thing that can never go wrong;
And I am Marie of Roumania.

COMMENT. 4 Marie of Roumania: Princess Marie of Edinburgh (1875–1938), a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, was married in 1893 to Prince Ferdinand of Romania, who ascended the throne in 1914.

Questions

1. Is Marie of Roumania the speaker of the poem?
2. How serious is the poem's tone? Consider the rhythm and the rhymes in lines 2 and 4.
3. In actuality, Queen Marie of Roumania had an unhappy life. Does this fact add another level of irony to the poem?

Bob Hicok (b. 1960)

Making it in poetry

2004

The young teller
at the credit union
asked why so many
small checks
from universities?
Because I write
poems I said. Why
haven't I heard
of you? Because
I write poems

10

Questions

1. Is the title of this poem ironic or not? Explain your answer.
2. Both of the teller's questions are answered the same way. Is there irony in that fact?
3. Do you find any significance in the description of the teller as "young"?

Exercise: Detecting Irony

Point out the kinds of irony that occur in the following poem

Thomas Hardy* (1840–1928)*The Workbox**

1914

"See, here's the workbox, little wife,
That I made of polished oak."
He was a joiner,^o of village life;
She came of borough folk.

carpenter

He holds the present up to her
As with a smile she nears
And answers to the profferer,
"Twill last all my sewing years!"

5

"I warrant it will. And longer too.
'Tis a scantling that I got
Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who
Died of they knew not what.

10

"The shingled pattern that seems to cease
Against your box's rim
Continues right on in the piece
That's underground with him.

15

"And while I worked it made me think
Of timber's varied doom:
One inch where people eat and drink,
The next inch in a tomb.

20

"But why do you look so white, my dear,
And turn aside your face?
You knew not that good lad, I fear,
Though he came from your native place?"

25

"How could I know that good young man,
Though he came from my native town,
When he must have left far earlier than
I was a woman grown?"

"Ah, no. I should have understood!
It shocked you that I gave
To you one end of a piece of wood
Whose other is in a grave?"

30

"Don't, dear, despise my intellect,
Mere accidental things
Of that sort never have effect
On my imaginings."

Yet still her lips were limp and wan,
Her face still held aside,
As if she had known not only John,
But known of what he died.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER STUDY***William Blake* (1757–1827)****The Chimney Sweeper**

1789

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry "weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

10

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

15

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father, and never want^o joy.

lack 20

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

Questions

1. What does Blake's poem reveal about conditions of life in the London of his day?
2. What does this poem have in common with "The Golf Links" (page 36)?
3. Sum up your impressions of the speaker's character. What does he say and do that displays it to us?

4. What pun do you find in line 3? Is its effect comic or serious?
5. In Tom Dacre's dream (lines 11–20), what wishes come true? Do you understand them to be the wishes of the chimney sweepers, of the poet, or of both?
6. In the last line, what is ironic in the speaker's assurance that the dutiful *need not fear harm*? What irony is there in his urging all to do their duty? (Who have failed in their duty to him?)
7. What is the tone of Blake's poem? Angry? Hopeful? Sorrowful? Compassionate? (Don't feel obliged to sum it up in a single word.)

Erich Fried (1921–1988)

The Measures Taken

The lazy are slaughtered
the world grows industrious

The ugly are slaughtered
the world grows beautiful

The foolish are slaughtered
the world grows wise

5

The sick are slaughtered
the world grows healthy

The sad are slaughtered
the world grows merry

10

The old are slaughtered
the world grows young

The enemies are slaughtered
the world grows friendly

15

The wicked are slaughtered
the world grows good

—Translated from the German by Michael Hamburger

Questions

1. Can you relate this poem to a particular historical context? Explain.
2. Does it also have a more general application?
3. Do you think that the author shares the speaker's views? Why or why not?
4. What is especially ironic about the concluding couplet?

William Stafford (1914–1993)

At the Un-National Monument Along the Canadian Border

This is the field where the battle did not happen,
where the unknown soldier did not die.
This is the field where grass joined hands,
where no monument stands,

1977

Birds fly here without any sound,
unfolding their wings across the open.
No people killed—or were killed—on this ground
hallowed by neglect and an air so tame
that people celebrate it by forgetting its name.

Questions

1. What nonevent does this poem celebrate? What is the speaker's attitude toward it?
2. The speaker describes an empty field. What is odd about the way in which he describes it?
3. What words does the speaker appear to use ironically?

Exercise: Telling Tone

Here are two radically different poems on a similar subject. Try stating the theme of each poem in your own words. How is tone (the speaker's attitude) different in the two poems?

Richard Lovelace (1618–1658)

To Lucasta

1649

On Going to the Wars

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind,
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honor more.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)

Dulce et Decorum Est

1920

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of friend overstrung Five Ninees that dropped behind.

THE TONE OF THE POEM

• • •

The tone of a poem conveys the speaker's attitude toward his or her subject or audience. In speech, this attitude can be conveyed easily: stressing a word in a sentence can modify or color a statement, drastically affecting the meaning of a sentence. For example, the statement "Of course, you would want to go to that restaurant" is quite straightforward, but changing the emphasis to "Of course *you* would want to go to *that* restaurant" transforms a neutral statement into a sarcastic one. For poets, however, conveying a particular tone to readers represents a challenge because readers rarely hear their spoken voices. Instead, poets indicate tone by using techniques such as rhyme, meter, word choice, sentence structure, figures of speech, and imagery.

The range of possible tones is wide. For example, a poem's speaker may be joyful, sad, playful, serious, comic, intimate, formal, relaxed, condescending, or ironic. The detached tone of the following poem conveys the speaker's attitude toward his subject.

• • •
ROBERT FROST
(1874-1963)

Fire and Ice

(1923)

Some say the world will end in fire,
 Some say in ice.
 From what I've tasted of desire
 I hold with those who favor fire.
 But if it had to perish twice,
 I think I know enough of hate
 To say that for destruction ice
 Is also great
 And would suffice.

Here the speaker uses word choice, rhyme, and understatement to comment on the human condition. The conciseness and the simple, regular meter and rhyme suggest an epigram—a short poem that makes a pointed comment in an unusually clear, and often witty, manner. This pointedness is consistent with the speaker's glib, unemotional tone, as is the last line's understatement that ice "would suffice." The contrast between the poem's serious message—that active hatred and indifference are equally

destructive—and its informal style and offhand tone is consistent with the speaker's detached, almost smug, posture.

Sometimes shifts in tone reveal changes in the speaker's attitude. In the following poem, changes in tone reveal a shift in the speaker's attitude toward war.

THOMAS HARDY
(1840-1928)

The Man He Killed (1902)

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!"
5 "But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.
"I shot him dead because—
10 Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although
"He thought he'd 'list,² perhaps,
Off-hand-like—just as I—
15 Was out of work—had sold his traps—
No other reason why.
"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
20 Or help to half-a crown."

The speaker in this poem is a soldier relating his wartime experiences. Quotation marks indicate that he is engaged in conversation—perhaps in a pub—and his dialect indicates that he is probably of the English working class. For him, at least at first, the object of war is simple: kill or be killed. To Hardy, this speaker represents all men who are thrust into a war

¹ A small container of liquor.

² Enlist.

without understanding its underlying economic or ideological causes. In this sense, the speaker and his enemy are both victims of forces beyond their comprehension or control.

The tone of "The Man He Killed" changes as the speaker tells his story. As the poem unfolds, its sentence structure deteriorates, and this in turn helps to convey the speaker's changing attitude toward the war in which he has fought. In the first two stanzas of the poem, sentences are smooth and unbroken, establishing the speaker's matter-of-fact tone and reflecting his confidence that he has done what he had to do. In the third and fourth stanzas, however, broken syntax reflects the narrator's increasingly disturbed state of mind as he tells about the man he killed. The poem's singsong meter and regular rhyme scheme (*met/wet, inn/nipperkin*) suggest that the speaker is trying hard to maintain his composure; the smooth sentence structure of the last stanza and the use of a cliché in an attempt to trivialize the incident ("Yes; quaint and curious war is!") show the speaker's efforts to regain his control.

Sometimes a poem's tone can establish an ironic contrast between the speaker and his or her subject. In the next poem, the speaker's abrupt change of tone at the end of the poem establishes just such a contrast.

AMY LOWELL
(1874-1925)

Patterns (1915)

I walk down the garden-paths,
And all the daffodils
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.
I walk down the patterned garden-paths
5 In my stiff, brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jewelled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden-paths.
10 My dress is richly figured,
And the train
Makes a pink and silver stain
On the gravel, and the thrift
Of the borders.
15 Just a plate of current fashion
Tripping by in high-heeled, ribboned shoes.

Not a softness anywhere about me,
Only whalebone¹ and brocade.
And I sink on a seat in the shade
20 Of a lime tree. For my passion
Wars against the stiff brocade.
The daffodils and squills
Flutter in the breeze
As they please.
25 And I weep;
For the lime-tree is in blossom
And one small flower has dropped upon my bosom.
And the plashing of waterdrops
In the marble fountain
30 Comes down the garden-paths.
The dripping never stops.
Underneath my stiffened gown
Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin,
A basin in the midst of hedges grown
35 So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,
But she guesses he is near,
And the sliding of the water
Seems the stroking of a dear
Hand upon her.
40 What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!
I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground.
All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground.
I would be the pink and silver as I ran along the paths,
And he would stumble after,
45 Bewildered by my laughter.
I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt and buckles
on his shoes.
I would choose
To lead him in a maze along the patterned paths,
A bright and laughing maze for my heavy-booted lover.
50 Till he caught me in the shade,
And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my body as he clasped me.
Aching, melting, unafraid.
With the shadows of the leaves and the sundrops,
And the plopping of the waterdrops,
55 All about us in the open afternoon—
I am very like to swoon
With the weight of this brocade,
For the sun sifts through the shade.

¹ Used in making corsets.

Underneath the fallen blossom
In my bosom,
Is a letter I have hid.
It was brought to me this morning by a rider from the Duke.
Madam, we regret to inform you that Lord Hartwell
Died in action Thursday se'nnight.²
As I read it in the white, morning sunlight,
The letters squirmed like snakes.
"Any answer, Madam," said my footman.
No, I told him.
See that the messenger takes some refreshment.
No, no answer."
And I walked into the garden,
Up and down the patterned paths,
In my stiff, correct brocade.
The blue and yellow flowers stood up proudly in the sun,
Each one.
I stood upright too,
Held rigid to the pattern
By the stiffness of my gown.
Up and down I walked.
Up and down.
In a month he would have been my husband.
In a month, here, underneath this lime,
We would have broken the pattern;
He for me, and I for him,
He as Colonel, I as Lady,
On this shady seat.
He had a whim
That sunlight carried blessing.
And I answered, "It shall be as you have said."
Now he is dead.
In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden-paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.
I shall go
Up and down,
In my gown.

² "Seven night," or a week ago Thursday.

100 Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guardea from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
105 Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,³
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?

The speaker begins by describing herself walking down garden paths. She wears a stiff brocaded gown, has powdered hair, and carries a jewelled fan. By her own admission she is "a plate of current fashion." Although her tone is controlled, she is preoccupied by sensual thoughts. Beneath her "stiffened gown" is the "softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin," and the "sliding of the water" in a fountain reminds the speaker of the stroking of her lover's hand. She imagines herself shedding her brocaded gown and running with her lover along the maze of "patterned paths." The sensuality of the speaker's thoughts stands in ironic contrast to the images of stiffness and control that dominate the poem; her passion "wars against the stiff brocade." She is also full of repressed rage. After all, she knows that her lover has been killed, and she realizes the meaninglessness of the patterns of her life, patterns to which she has conformed, just as her lover has conformed by going to war and doing what he was supposed to do. Throughout the poem, the speaker's tone reflects her barely contained anger and frustration. In the last line of the poem, when she finally lets out her rage, the poem's point about the senselessness of war becomes apparent.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: THE TONE OF THE POEM

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
(1770-1850)

The World Is Too Much with Us (1807)

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

5 This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
10 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus¹ rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton² blow his wreathèd horn.

READING AND REACTING

1. What is the speaker's attitude toward the contemporary world? How is this attitude revealed through the poem's tone?
2. This poem is a *sonnet*, a highly structured traditional form. How do the rhyme scheme and the regular meter establish the poem's tone?
3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Imagine you are a modern-day environmentalist, labor organizer, or corporate executive. Write a response to the sentiments expressed in this poem.
4. **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** According to M. H. Abrams in his 1972 essay "Two Roads to Wordsworth," critics have tended to follow one of two different paths to the poet, and these approaches have yielded two different versions of the poet:

One Wordsworth is simple, elemental, forthright, the other is complex, paradoxical, problematic; one is an affirmative poet of life, love, and joy, the other is an equivocal or self-divided poet whose affirmations are implicitly qualified . . . by a pervasive sense of morality and an ever-incipient despair of life; . . . one is the Wordsworth of light, the other the Wordsworth of [shadow], or even darkness.

Does your reading of "The World Is Too Much with Us" support one of these versions of Wordsworth over the other? Which one? Why?

Related Works: "The Rocking-Horse Winner" (p. 318), "Dover Beach" (p. 778), "She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways" (p. 848), "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (p. 850)

¹Region in northwestern Europe, including part of northern France and western Belgium. Flanders was the site of a historic World War I battle.

²sometimes said to be Poseidon's son, this Greek sea god had the ability to change shapes at will and to tell the future.

The trumpeter of the sea, this sea god is usually pictured blowing on a conch shell. Triton was the son of Poseidon, ruler of the sea.

SYLVIA PLATH
(1932-1963)

Morning Song (1962)

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
In a drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.

Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square
Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

READING AND REACTING

- Who is the speaker? To whom is she speaking? What does the poem reveal about her?
- What is the poem's subject? What attitudes about her subject do you suppose the poet expects her readers to have?
- How is the tone of the first stanza different from that of the third? How does the tone reflect the content of each stanza?
- JOURNAL ENTRY** In what sense does this poem reinforce traditional ideas about motherhood? How does it undercut them?
- CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** Sylvia Plath's life, which ended in suicide, was marked by emotional turbulence and instability. According to Anne Stevenson in *Bitter Fame*, her 1988 biography of Plath, in the weeks immediately preceding the composition of "Morning Song" a fit of rage over her husband's supposed infidelity caused Plath to destroy many of his books and poetic

works in progress. Then, only a few days later, she suffered a miscarriage. According to Stevenson, "Morning Song" is about sleepless nights and surely reflects Plath's depression. However, in a 1991 biography, *Rough Magic*, Paul Alexander says, "Beautiful, simple, touching, 'Morning Song' was Plath's—then—definitive statement of motherhood."

Which biographer's assessment of the poem do you think makes more sense? Why?

Related Works: "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (p. 152), "My Son, My Executioner" (p. 682), "What Shall I Give My Children?" (p. 858)

ROBERT HERRICK
(1591-1674)

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time (1646)

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

- In
The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

READING AND REACTING

How would you characterize the speaker? Do you think he expects his listeners to share his views? How might his expectations affect his tone?

2. This poem is developed almost like an argument. What is the speaker's main point? How does he support it?
3. What effect does the poem's use of rhyme have on its tone?
4. JOURNAL ENTRY Whose side are you on—the speaker's or those he addresses?

Related Works: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (p. 469); "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (p. 536), "Cinderella" (p. 605); *The Brute* (p. 1040)

IRONY

• • •

Just as in fiction and drama, **irony** in poetry occurs when a discrepancy exists between two levels of meaning or experience. Consider the tone of the following lines by Stephen Crane:

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the a frightened steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

How can war be "kind"? Isn't war exactly the opposite of "kind"? Surely the speaker does not intend his words to be taken literally. By making this ironic statement, the speaker actually conveys the opposite idea: war is a cruel, mindless exercise of violence.

Skillfully used, irony is a powerful way of making a pointed comment about a situation or of manipulating a reader's emotions. Implicit in irony is the writer's assumption that readers will not be misled by the literal meaning of a statement. In order for irony to work, readers must recognize the disparity between what is said and what is meant, or between what a character or speaker thinks is occurring and what readers know to be occurring.

One kind of irony that appears in poetry is **dramatic irony**, which occurs when a speaker believes one thing and readers realize something else. In the following poem, the poet uses a deranged speaker to tell a story that is filled with irony.

ROBERT BROWNING
(1812-1889)

Porphyria's Lover (1836)

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
5 I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
10 Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
15 And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
20 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me—she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
25 And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
30 So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
35 While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound

40 Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
45 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
50 Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
55 And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
60 And yet God has not said a word!

Like Browning's "My Last Duchess" (p. 583) this poem is a **dramatic monologue**. The speaker recounts his story in a straightforward manner seemingly unaware of the horror of his tale. In fact, much of the effect of this poem comes from the speaker's telling his tale of murder in a flat, unemotional tone—and from readers' gradual realization that the speaker is mad.

The irony of the poem, and of its title, becomes apparent as the monologue progresses. At first the speaker fears that Porphyria is too weak to free herself from pride and vanity to love him. As he looks in her eyes, however, he comes to believe that she worships him. To preserve the perfection of Porphyria's love, the speaker strangles her with her own hair. He assures his silent listener, "I am quite sure she felt no pain." Like many of Browning's narrators, the speaker in this poem exhibits a selfish and perverse need to possess another person totally. The moment the speaker realizes that Porphyria loves him, he feels compelled to kill her and keep her forever. According to him, she is at this point "mine, mine, fair," "Perfectly pure and good," and he believes that by murdering her he actually fulfills "Her darling one wish"—to stay with him forever. As he attempts to justify his actions, the speaker reveals himself to be a deluded psychopathic killer.

Another kind of irony is **situational irony**, which occurs when the situation itself contradicts readers' expectations. For example, in "Porphyria's Lover" the meeting of two lovers results not in joy and passion but in murder. In the next poem too the situation creates irony.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
(1792–1822)

Ozymandias

(1818)

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
10 "My name is Ozymandias,¹ king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The speaker tells a tale about a colossal statue that lies shattered in the desert. Its head lies separated from the trunk, and the face has a wrinkled lip and a "sneer of cold command." On the pedestal of the monument are words exhorting all those who pass: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" The situational irony of the poem has its source in the contrast between the "colossal wreck" and the boastful inscription on its base. To the speaker, Ozymandias stands for the vanity of those who mistakenly think they can withstand the ravages of time.

Perhaps the most common kind of irony found in poetry is **verbal irony**, which is created when words say one thing but mean another, often exactly the opposite. When verbal irony is particularly biting, it is called **sarcasm**—for example, Stephen Crane's use of the word *kind* in his antiwar poem "War Is Kind." In speech, verbal irony is easy to detect through the speaker's change in tone or emphasis. In writing, when these signals are absent, verbal irony becomes more difficult to convey. Poets must depend on the context of a remark or on the contrast between a word and other images in the poem to create irony.

Consider how verbal irony is established in the following poem.

¹The Greek name for Ramses II, ruler of Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C.

ARIEL DORFMAN
(1942-)

Hope (1988)

Translated by Edith Grossman with the author

My son has been
missing
since May 8'
of last year.

They took him
just for a few hours
they said
just for some routine
questioning.

10 After the car left,
the car with no license plate,
we couldn't

find out

anything else
15 about him.

But now things have changed.
We heard from a compañero
who just got out

that five months later
20 they were torturing him
in Villa Grimaldi,

at the end of September
they were questioning him
in the red house

25 that belonged to the Grimaldis.

They say they recognized
his voice his screams
they say.

Somebody tell me frankly
30 what times are these
what kind of world

what country?

What I'm asking is
how can it be

35 that a father's
joy
a mother's
joy
is knowing
40 that they
that they are still
torturing
their son?
Which means
45 that he was alive
five months later
and our greatest
hope
will be to find out
50 next year
that they're still torturing him
eight months later

and he may might could
still be alive.

Although it is not necessary to know the background of the poet to appreciate this poem, it does help to know that Ariel Dorfman is a native of Chile. After the assassination of Salvador Allende, Chile's elected socialist president, in September 1973, the civilian government was replaced by a military dictatorship. Civil rights were suspended, and activists, students, and members of opposition parties were arrested and often detained indefinitely; sometimes they simply disappeared. The irony of this poem originates in the discrepancy between the way the word *hope* is used in the poem and the way it is usually used. For most people, hope has positive connotations, but in this poem it takes on a different meaning. This irony is not lost on the speaker.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: IRONY

W. H. AUDEN
(1907-1973)

The Unknown Citizen (1939)

(To JS/07/M/378
This Marble Monument Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint.
5 For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
10 For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
15 And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan.
20 And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a fridgidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went
25 He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist¹ says was the right number for a parent of his
generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

READING AND REACTING

The "unknown citizen" represents modern citizens, who, according to the poem, are programmed like machines. How does the title help to establish the tone of the poem? How does the inscription on the monument help to establish the tone?

2 Who is the speaker? What is his attitude toward the unknown citizen? How can you tell?

3 What kinds of irony are present in the poem? Identify several examples.

4 JOURNAL ENTRY This poem was written in 1939. Does its criticism apply to contemporary society, or does the poem seem dated?

5 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE In 1939, the same year this poem was published, Auden argued in his essay "The Public vs. The Late Mr. William Butler Yeats" that poetry can never really change anything. He reiterated this point as late as 1971 in his biographical *A Certain World*:

By all means let a poet, if he wants to, write poems . . . [that protest] against this or that political evil or social injustice. But let him remember this. The only person who will benefit from them is himself; they will enhance his literary reputation among those who feel as he does. The evil or injustice, however, will remain exactly what it would have been if he had kept his mouth shut.

Do you believe that poetry—or any kind of literature—has the power to combat "evil or injustice" in the world? Do you consider "The Unknown Citizen" a political poem? How might this poem effect positive social or political change?

Related Works: "A&P" (p. 97), "The Metamorphosis" (p. 388), "The Man He Killed" (p. 590), "next to of course god america i" (p. 785), *A Doll House* (p. 970)

ANNE SEXTON
(1928-1974)

Cinderella (1970)

You always read about it:
the plumber with twelve children
who wins the Irish Sweepstakes.
From toilets to riches.
s That story.

¹ One who studies the science of human improvement, especially through genetic control.

Or the nursemaid,
some luscious sweet from Denmark
who captures the oldest son's heart.
From diapers to Dior.¹
10 That story.

Or a milkman who serves the wealthy,
eggs, cream, butter, yogurt, milk,
the white truck like an ambulance
who goes into real estate
15 and makes a pile.
From homogenized to martinis at lunch.

Or the charwoman
who is on the bus when it cracks up
and collects enough from the insurance.
20 From mops to Bonwit Teller.²
That story.

Once
the wife of a rich man was on her deathbed
and she said to her daughter Cinderella:
25 Be devout. Be good. Then I will smile
down from heaven in the seam of a cloud.
The man took another wife who had
two daughters, pretty enough
but with hearts like blackjacks.
30 Cinderella was their maid.
She slept on the sooty hearth each night
and walked around looking like Al Jolson.³
Her father brought presents home from town,
jewels and gowns for the other women
35 but the twig of a tree for Cinderella.
She planted that twig on her mother's grave
and it grew to a tree where a white dove sat.
Whenever she wished for anything the dove
would drop it like an egg upon the ground.
40 The bird is important, my dears, so heed him.

Next came the ball, as you all know.
It was a marriage market.
The prince was looking for a wife.

¹ Fashion designer Christian Dior.

² Exclusive department store.

³ Al Jolson (Asa Yoelson; 1886–1950)—American singer and songwriter, famous for his “black-face” minstrel performances.

All but Cinderella were preparing
45 and gussying up for the big event.
Cinderella begged to go too.
Her stepmother threw a dish of lentils
into the cinders and said: Pick them
up in an hour and you shall go.
50 The white dove brought all his friends;
all the warm wings of the fatherland came,
and picked up the lentils in a jiffy.
No, Cinderella, said the stepmother,
you have no clothes and cannot dance.
55 That's the way with stepmothers.

Cinderella went to the tree at the grave
and cried forth like a gospel singer:
Mama! Mama! My turtledove,
send me to the prince's ball!
60 The bird dropped down a golden dress
and delicate little gold slippers.
Rather a large package for a simple bird.
So she went. Which is no surprise.
Her stepmother and sisters didn't
65 recognize her without her cinder face
and the prince took her hand on the spot
and danced with no other the whole day.
As nightfall came she thought she'd better
get home. The prince walked her home
70 and she disappeared into the pigeon house
and although the prince took an axe and broke
it open she was gone. Back to her cinders.
These events repeated themselves for three days.
However on the third day the prince
75 covered the palace steps with cobbler's wax
and Cinderella's gold shoe stuck upon it.
Now he would find whom the shoe fit
and find his strange dancing girl for keeps.
He went to their house and the two sisters
80 were delighted because they had lovely feet.
The eldest went into a room to try the slipper on
but her big toe got in the way so she simply
sliced it off and put on the slipper.
The prince rode away with her until the white dove
85 told him to look at the blood pouring forth.
That is the way with amputations.
They don't just heal up like a wish.
The other sister cut off her heel.

but the blood told as blood will.
 90 The prince was getting tired.
 He began to feel like a shoe salesman.
 But he gave it one last try.
 This time Cinderella fit into the shoe
 like a love letter into its envelope.

95 At the wedding ceremony
 the two sisters came to curry favor
 and the white dove pecked their eyes out.
 Two hollow spots were left
 like soup spoons.

100 Cinderella and the prince
 lived, they say, happily ever after,
 like two dolls in a museum case
 never bothered by diapers or dust,
 never arguing over the timing of an egg,

105 never telling the same story twice,
 never getting a middle-aged spread,
 their darling smiles pasted on for eternity
 Regular Bobbsey Twins.⁴
 That story.

READING AND REACTING

1. The first twenty-one lines of the poem act as a prelude. How does this prelude help to establish the speaker's ironic tone?
2. At times the speaker talks directly to readers. What effect do these statements have on you? Would the poem be stronger without them?
3. Throughout the poem, the speaker mixes contemporary colloquial expressions with the conventional diction of a fairy tale. Find examples of these two kinds of language. How does the juxtaposition of these different kinds of diction create irony?
4. JOURNAL ENTRY What details of the fairy tale does Sexton change in her poem? Why do you think she makes these changes?
5. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE In his 1973 book *Confessional Poets*, Robert Phillips comments on Anne Sexton's use of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales in her book *Transformations*. According to Phillips, by transforming the Grimms' stories into symbols of our own time, Sexton "has managed to offer us understandable images of the world around us":

⁴ The two sets of twins—Nan and Bert, Flossie and Freddie—in a popular series of early twentieth-century children's books. They led an idealized, problem-free life.

8

SOUND

The sound must seem an echo to the sense.

—ALEXANDER POPE

SOUND AS MEANING

Isak Dinesen, in a memoir of her life on a plantation in East Africa, tells how some Kikuyu tribesmen reacted to their first hearing of rimed verse:

The Natives, who have a strong sense of rhythm, know nothing of verse, or at least did not know anything before the times of the schools, where they were taught hymns. One evening out in the maize-field, where we had been harvesting maize, breaking off the cobs and throwing them on to the ox-carts, to amuse myself, I spoke to the field laborers, who were mostly quite young, in Swahili verse. There was no sense in the verses, they were made for the sake of rime—"Ngumbe na-penda chumbe, 'Malaya mbaya. Wakamba na-kula mamba.' The oxen like salt—whores are bad—The Wakamba eat snakes. It caught the interest of the boys, they formed a ring round me. They were quick to understand that meaning in poetry is of no consequence, and they did not question the thesis of the verse, but waited eagerly for the rime, and laughed at it when it came. I tried to make them themselves find the rime and finish the poem when I had begun it, but they could not, or would not, do that, and turned away their heads. As they had become used to the idea of poetry, they begged: "Speak again. Speak like rain." Why they should feel verse to be like rain I do not know. It must have been, however, an expression of applause, since in Africa rain is always longed for and welcomed.¹

What the tribesmen had discovered is that poetry, like music, appeals to the ear. However limited it may be in comparison with the sound of an orchestra—or a tribal drummer—the sound of words in itself gives pleasure. However, we might doubt Isak Dinesen's assumption that "meaning in poetry is of no consequence." "Hey nonny-nonny" and such nonsense has a place in song lyrics and other poems, and we might

take pleasure in hearing rimes in Swahili; but most good poetry has meaningful sound as well as musical sound. Certainly the words of a song have an effect different from that of wordless music: they go along with their music and, by making statements, add more meaning. The French poet Isidore Isou, founder of a literary movement called *lettresme*, maintained that poems can be written not only in words but also in letters (sample lines: *xyl, xyl, / prprali dryl / znglo trpylo pwi*). But the sound of letters alone, without denotation and connotation, has not been enough to make Letterist poems memorable. In the response of the Kikuyu tribesmen, there may have been not only the pleasure of hearing sounds but also the agreeable surprise of finding that things not usually associated had been brought together.

Euphony and Cacophony

More powerful when in the company of meaning, not apart from it, the sounds of consonants and vowels can contribute greatly to a poem's effect. The sound of *s*, which can suggest the swishing of water, has rarely been used more accurately than in Surrey's line "Calm is the sea, the waves work less and less." When, in a poem, the sound of words working together with meaning pleases mind and ear, the effect is euphony, as in the following lines from Tennyson's "Come down, O maid":

Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Its opposite is cacophony: a harsh, discordant effect. It too is chosen for the sake of meaning. We hear it in Milton's scornful reference in "Lycidas" to corrupt clergymen whose songs "Grate on their scranne pipes of wretched straw." (Read that line and one of Tennyson's aloud and see which requires lips, teeth, and tongue to do more work.) But note that although Milton's line is harsh in sound, the line (when we meet it in his poem) is pleasing because it is artful. In a famous passage from his *Essay on Criticism*, Pope has illustrated both euphony and cacophony. (Given here as Pope printed it, the passage relies heavily on italics and capital letters, for particular emphasis. If you will read these lines aloud, dwelling a little longer or harder on the words italicized, you will find that Pope has given you very good directions for a meaningful reading.)

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

True Ease in Writing comes from Art,
not Chance

1711

True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.
'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,
The Sound must seem an Echo to the Sense.
Soft is the Strain when Zephyr^o gently blows,
And the smooth Stream in smoother Numbers^o flows;
But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore,
The hoarse, rough Verse should like the Torrent roar.
When Ajax strives, some Rock's vast Weight to throw,

the west wind 5
metrical rhythm

Not so, when swift Camilla scours the Plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending Corn, and skims along the Main.⁹

Hear how Timotheus' varied Lays surprise,
And bid Alternate Passions fall and rise!

While, at each Change, the Son of Lybian Jove
Now burns with Glory, and then melts with Love;

Now his fierce Eyes with sparkling Fury glow;
Now Sighs steal out, and Tears begin to flow:

Persians and Greeks like Turns of Nature found,
And the World's Victor stood subdued by Sound!

The Pow'rs of Music all our Hearts allow;
And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.

expanses (of sea)

15

20

TRUE EASE IN WRITING COMES FROM ART, NOT CHANCE (An Essay on Criticism, lines 362–383). 9 Ajax: Greek hero, almost a superman, who in Homer's account of the siege of Troy hurls an enormous rock that momentarily flattens Hector, the Trojan prince (*Iliad* VII, 268–272). 11 Camilla: a kind of Amazon or warrior woman of the Volcians, whose speed and lightness of step are praised by the Roman poet Virgil: "She could have skimmed across an unmown grainfield / Without so much as bruising one tender blade; / She could have sped across an ocean's surge / Without so much as wetting her quicksilver soles" (*Aeneid* VII, 808–811). 13 Timotheus: favorite musician of Alexander the Great. In "Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Music," John Dryden imagines him: "Timotheus, placed on high / Amid the tuneful choir, / With flying fingers touched the lyre: / The trembling notes ascend the sky, / And heavenly joys inspire." 15 Lybian Jove: name for Alexander. A Libyan oracle had declared the king to be the son of the god Zeus Ammon.

Notice the pleasing effect of all the s sounds in the lines about the west wind and the stream, and in another meaningful place, the effect of the consonants in *Ajax strives*, a phrase that makes our lips work almost as hard as Ajax throwing the rock.

Is sound identical with meaning in lines such as these? Not quite. In the passage from Tennyson, for instance, the cooing of doves is not exactly a moan. As John Crowe Ransom pointed out, the sound would be almost the same but the meaning entirely different in "The murdering of innumerable beeves." While it is true that the consonant sound *sl-* will often begin a word that conveys ideas of wetness and smoothness—*slick, slimy, slippery, slush*—we are so used to hearing it in words that convey nothing of the kind—*slave, slow, sledgehammer*—that it is doubtful whether, all by itself, the sound communicates anything definite. The most beautiful phrase in the English language, according to Dorothy Parker, is *cellar door*. Another wit once nominated, as our most euphonious word, not *sunrise* or *silvery* but *syphilis*.

Onomatopoeia

Relating sound more closely to meaning, the device called onomatopoeia is an attempt to represent a thing or action by a word that imitates the sound associated with it: *zoom, whiz, crash, bang, ding-dong, pitter-patter, yakety-yak*. Onomatopoeia is often effective in poetry, as in Emily Dickinson's line about the fly with its "uncertain stumbling Buzz," in which the nasal sounds *n, m, ng* and the sibilants *c, s* help make a droning buzz.

Like the Kikuyu tribesmen, others who care for poetry have discovered in the

the notes of bells, the sounds of musical instruments, the noises of wind, sea, and rain, the rattle of milkcarts, the clopping of hooves on cobbles, the fingering of branches on the window pane, might be to someone, deaf from birth, who has miraculously found his hearing.¹² For readers, too, the sound of words can have a magical spell, most powerful when it points to meaning. James Weldon Johnson in *God's Trombones* has told of an old-time preacher who began his sermon, "Brothers and sisters, this morning I intend to explain the unexplainable—find out the indefinable—ponder over the imponderable—and unscrew the inscrutable!" The repetition of sound in *unscrew* and *inscrutable* has appeal, but the magic of the words is all the greater if they lead us to imagine the mystery of all Creation as an enormous screw that the preacher's mind, like a screwdriver, will loosen. Though the sound of a word or the meaning of a word may have value all by itself, both become more memorable when taken together.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)

Who Goes with Fergus?

1892

Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,¹³
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

WHO GOES WITH FERGUS? Fergus: Irish king who gave up his throne to be a wandering poet.

chariots

10

Questions

1. In what lines do you find euphony?
2. In what line do you find cacophony?
3. How do the sounds of these lines stress what is said in them?

Exercise: Listening to Meaning

Read aloud the following brief poems. In the sounds of which particular words are meanings well captured? In which of the following four poems do you find onomatopoeia?

John Updike (1932–2009)

Recital

ROGER BOBO GIVES
RECITAL ON TUBA

—Headline in the *Times*

Eskimos in Manitoba,
Barracuda off Aruba,
Cock an ear when Roger Bobo
Starts to solo on the tuba.

Men of every station—Pooh-Bah,
Nabob, bozo, toff, and hobo—

Cry in unison, "Indubi-
Tably, there is simply nobo-

Dy who oompahs on the tubo,
Solo, quite like Roger Bubo!"

1963

5

10

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal

1800

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears—
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

5

Emanuel di Pasquale (b. 1943)

Rain

1971

Like a drummer's brush,
the rain hushes the surface of tin porches.

Aphra Behn (1640?–1689)

When maidens are young

1687

When maidens are young, and in their spring,
Of pleasure, of pleasure let 'em take their full swing,
Full swing, full swing,
And love, and dance, and play, and sing,
For Silvia, believe it, when youth is done,

5

ALLITERATION AND ASSONANCE

Listening to a symphony in which themes are repeated throughout each movement, we enjoy both their recurrence and their variation. We take similar pleasure in the repetition of a phrase or a single chord. Something like this pleasure is afforded us frequently in poetry.

Analogies between poetry and wordless music, it is true, tend to break down when carried far, since poetry—to mention a single difference—has denotation. But like musical compositions, poems have patterns of sounds. Among such patterns long popular in English poetry is alliteration, which has been defined as a succession of similar sounds. Alliteration occurs in the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of successive words—"round and round the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran," or in this delightful stanza by Witter Bynner, written nearly a century ago as part of an elaborate literary hoax:

If I were only dexterous
I might be making hymns
To the liquor of your laughter
And the lacquer of your limbs.

Or it may occur inside the words, as in Milton's description of the gates of Hell:

On a sudden open fly
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound
The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook
Of Erebus.

The former kind is called initial alliteration, the latter internal alliteration or hidden alliteration. We recognize alliteration by sound, not by spelling: *know* and *nail* alliterate, *know* and *key* do not. In a line by E. E. Cummings, "colossal hoax of clocks and calendars," the sound of *x* within *hoax* alliterates with the *cks* in *clocks*. Incidentally, the letter *r* does not always lend itself to cacophony: elsewhere in *Paradise Lost* Milton said that

Heaven opened wide
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
On golden hinges moving . . .

By itself, a letter-sound has no particular meaning. This is a truth forgotten by people who would attribute the effectiveness of Milton's lines on the Heavenly Gates to, say, "the mellow *o*'s and liquid *l* of *harmonious* and *golden*." Mellow *o*'s and liquid *l*'s occur also in the phrase *moldy cold oatmeal*, which may have a quite different effect. Meaning depends on larger units of language than letters of the alphabet.

Poetry formerly contained more alliteration than it usually contains today. In Old English verse, each line was held together by alliteration, a basic pattern still evident in the fourteenth century, as in the following description of the world as a "fair field" in *Piers Plowman*:

A feir feld ful of folk fond I ther bi-twene,

Most poets nowadays save alliteration for special occasions. They may use it to give emphasis, as Edward Lear does: "Far and few, far and few, / Are the lands where the Jumblies live." With its aid they can point out the relationship between two things placed side by side, as in Pope's line on things of little worth: "The courtier's promises, and sick man's prayers." Alliteration, too, can be a powerful aid to memory. It is hard to forget such tongue twisters as "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers," or common expressions such as "green as grass," "tried and true," and "from stem to stern." In fact, because alliteration directs our attention to something, it had best be used neither thoughtlessly nor merely for decoration, lest it call attention to emptiness. A case in point may be a line by Philip James Bailey, a reaction to a lady's weeping: "I saw, but spared to speak." If the poet chose the word *spared* for any meaningful reason other than that it alliterates with *speak*, the reason is not clear.

As we have seen, to repeat the sound of a consonant is to produce alliteration, but to repeat the sound of a vowel is to produce assonance. Like alliteration, assonance may occur either initially—"all the awful auguries"—or internally—Edmund Spenser's "Her goodly eyes like sapphires shining bright, / Her forehead ivory white . . ." and it can help make common phrases unforgettable: "eager beaver," "holy smoke." Like alliteration, it slows the reader down and focuses attention.

A. E. Housman (1859–1936)

Eight O'Clock

1922

He stood, and heard the steeple
Sprinkle the quarters on the morning town.
One, two, three, four, to market-place and people
It tossed them down.

Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour,
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck;
And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength, and struck.

Questions

1. Why does the protagonist in this brief drama curse his luck? What is his situation?
2. For so short a poem, "Eight O'Clock" carries a great weight of alliteration. What patterns of initial alliteration do you find? What patterns of internal alliteration? What effect is created by all this heavy emphasis?

James Joyce (1882–1941)

All day I hear

1907

All day I hear the noise of waters
Making moan,
Sad as the sea-bird is, when going
Forth alone,

The grey winds, the cold winds are blowing

Where I go.

I hear the noise of many waters

Far below.

All day, all night, I hear them flowing

To and fro.

10

Questions

1. Find three instances of alliteration in the first stanza. Do any of them serve to reinforce meaning?
2. There is a great deal of assonance throughout the poem on a single vowel sound. What sound is it, and what effect is achieved by its repetition?

Experiment: Reading for Assonance

Try reading aloud as rapidly as possible the following poem by Tennyson. From the difficulties you encounter, you may be able to sense the slowing effect of assonance. Then read the poem aloud a second time, with consideration.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

The splendor falls on castle walls

1850

The splendor falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story;
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

5

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar^o
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

jutting rock

10

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river;
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

RIME

Isak Dinesen's tribesmen, to whom rime was a new phenomenon, recognized at once that rimed language is special language. So do we, for, although much English poetry is unrimed, rime is one means to set poetry apart from ordinary conversation and bring it closer to music. A rime (or rhyme), defined most narrowly, occurs when two

and the consonant-sounds (if any) that follow the vowel-sound are identical: *hay* and *sleigh*, *prairie schooner* and *piano tuner*. From these examples it will be seen that rime depends not on spelling but on sound.

Excellent rimes surprise. It is all very well that a reader may anticipate which vowel-sound is coming next, for patterns of rime give pleasure by satisfying expectations; but riming becomes dull clunking if, at the end of each line, the reader can predict the word that will end the next. Hearing many a jukebox song for the first time, a listener can do so: *charms lead to arms, skies above to love*. As Alexander Pope observes of the habits of dull rimesters,

Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"
In the next line it "whispers through the trees";
If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with "sleep" . . .

But who—given the opening line of this comic poem—could predict the lines that follow?

William Cole (1919–2000)

On my boat on Lake Cayuga

1985

On my boat on Lake Cayuga
I have a horn that goes "Ay-oogah!"
I'm not the modern kind of creep
Who has a horn that goes "beep beep."

Robert Herrick, in a more subtle poem, made good use of rime to indicate a startling contrast:

Then while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.

Though good rimes seem fresh, not all will startle, and probably few will call to mind things so unlike as *May* and *decay*, *Cayuga* and *Ay-oogah*. Some masters of rime often link words that, taken out of text, might seem common and unevocative. Here are the opening lines of Rachel Hadas's poem, "Three Silences," which describe an infant feeding at a mother's breast:

Of all the times when not to speak is best,
mother's and infant's is the easiest,
the milky mouth still warm against her breast.

Hadas's rime words are not especially memorable in themselves, and yet these lines are—at least in part because they rime so well. The quiet echo of sound at the end of each line reinforces the intimate tone of the mother's moment with her child. Poetic invention may be driven home without rime, but it is rime sometimes that rings the doorbell. Admittedly, some rimes wear thin from too much use. More difficult to use freshly than before the establishment of Tin Pan Alley, rimes such as *moon*, *June*, *croon* seem leaden and would need an extremely powerful context to ring true. *Death* and

mirth. And yet we cannot exclude these from the diction of poetry, for they might be the very words a poet would need in order to say something new and original.

Types of Rime

To have an exact rime, sounds following the vowel sound have to be the same: *red* and *bread*, *wealthily* and *stealthily*, *walk to her* and *talk to her*. If final consonant sounds are the same but the vowel sounds are different, the result is slant rime, also called near rime, off rime, or imperfect rime: *sun* riming with *bone*, *moon*, *rain*, *green*, *gone*, *thin*. By not satisfying the reader's expectation of an exact chime, but instead giving a clunk, a slant rime can help a poet say some things in a particular way. It works especially well for disappointed letdowns, negations, and denials, as in Blake's couplet:

He who the ox to wrath has moved
Shall never be by woman loved.

Many poets have admired the unexpected and arresting effects of slant rime. One of the first poets to explore the possibilities of rhyming consonants in a consistent way was Wilfred Owen, an English soldier in World War I, who wrote his best poems in the thirteen months before he was killed in action. Seeking a poetic language strong enough to describe the harsh reality of modern war, Owen experimented with matching consonant sounds in striking ways:

Now men will go content with what we spoiled
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled,
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.

Consonance, a kind of slant rime, occurs when the rimed words or phrases have the same beginning and ending consonant sounds but a different vowel, as in *chitter* and *chatter*. Owen rimes *spoiled* and *spilled* in this way. Consonance is used in a traditional nonsense poem, "The Cutty Wren": "O where are you going?" says Milder to Malder." (W. H. Auden wrote a variation on it that begins, "O where are you going?" said reader to rider," thus keeping the consonance.)

End rime, as its name indicates, comes at the ends of lines, internal rime within them. Most rime tends to be end rime. Few recent poets have used internal rime so heavily as Wallace Stevens in the beginning of "Bantams in Pine-Woods": "Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan / Of tan with henna hackles, halt!" (lines also heavy on alliteration). A poet may employ both end rime and internal rime in the same poem, as in Robert Burns's satiric ballad "The Kirk's Alarm":

Orthodox, Orthodox, wha believe in John Knox,
Let me sound an alarm to your conscience:
There's a heretic blast has been blawn' i' the wast,^{west}
"That what is not sense must be nonsense."

Masculine rime is a rime of one-syllable words (*sail*, *bail*) or (in words of more than

Feminine rime is a rime of two or more syllables, with stress on a syllable other than the last: TUR-tle, FER-tile, or (to take an example from Byron) in-tel-LECT-u-al, hen-PECKED you all. Often it lends itself to comic verse, but can occasionally be valuable to serious poems, as in Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence":

We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness,

or as in Anne Sexton's seriously witty "Eighteen Days Without You":

and of course we're not married, we are a pair of scissors
who come together to cut, without towels saying His. Hers.

Artfully used, feminine rime can give a poem a heightened musical effect for the simple reason that it offers the listener twice as many timing syllables in each line. In the wrong hands, however, that sonic abundance has the unfortunate ability of making a bad poem twice as painful to endure. Serious poems containing feminine rimes of three syllables have been attempted, notably by Thomas Hood in "The Bridge of Sighs":

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!

But the pattern is hard to sustain without lapsing into unintended comedy, as in the same poem:

Still, for all slips of hers,
One of Eve's family—
Wipe those poor lips of hers,
Oozing so clammily.

It works better when comedy is wanted.

Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953)

The Hippopotamus

1896

I shoot the Hippopotamus
with bullets made of platinum,
Because if I use leaden ones
his hide is sure to flatten 'em.

Ogden Nash (1902–1971)

The Panther

1940

The panther is like a leopard,
Except it hasn't been peppered.
Should you behold a panther crouch,
Prepare to say Ouch.
Better yet, if called by a panther,

In eye rime, spellings look alike but pronunciations differ—rough and dough, idea and flea, Venus and menus. Strictly speaking, eye rime is not rime at all.

Rime in American poetry suffered a significant fall from favor in the early 1960s. A new generation of poets took for models the open forms of Whitman, Pound, and William Carlos Williams. In the last few decades, however, some poets have been skillfully using rime again in their work. Often called the New Formalists, these poets include Julia Alvarez, R. S. Gwynn, Mark Jarman, Paul Lake, Charles Martin, Marilyn Nelson, A. E. Stallings, and Timothy Steele. Their poems often use rime and meter to present unusual contemporary subjects, but they also sometimes write poems that recollect, converse with, and argue with the poetry of the past.

Still, most American poets don't write in rime; some even consider its possibilities exhausted. Such a view may be a reaction against the wearing thin of rimes by overuse or the mechanical and meaningless application of a rime scheme. Yet anyone who listens to children skipping rope in the street, making up rimes to delight themselves as they go along, may doubt that the pleasures of rime are ended; and certainly the practice of Yeats and Emily Dickinson, to name only two, suggests that the possibilities of slant rime may be nearly infinite. If successfully employed, as it has been at times by a majority of English-speaking poets whose work we care to save, rime runs through its poem like a spine: the creature moves by means of it.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)

Leda and the Swan

1928

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Questions

- According to Greek mythology, the god Zeus in the form of a swan descended on Leda, a Spartan queen. Among Leda's children were Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's unfaithful wife, who conspired in his murder, and Helen, on whose account the Trojan war was fought. What does a knowledge of these allusions contribute to our understanding of the poem's last two lines?
- The slant rime up / drop (lines 11, 14) may seem accidental or inept. Is it? Would this poem have ended nearly so well if Yeats had made an exact rime like up / cup or stop /

*Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)***God's Grandeur**

(1877)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things; 10
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

GOD'S GRANDEUR. 1 charged: as though with electricity. 3-4 It gathers . . . Crushed: The grandeur of God will rise and be manifest, as oil rises and collects from crushed olives or grain. 4 reck his rod: heed His law. 10 deep down things: Tightly packing the poem, Hopkins omits the preposition in or within before things. 11 last lights . . . went: When in 1534 Henry VIII broke ties with the Roman Catholic Church and created the Church of England.

Questions

1. In a letter Hopkins explained *shook foil* (line 2): "I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel. . . . Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and creasings and network of small many cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too." What do you think he meant by the phrase *ooze of oil* (line 3)? Would you call this phrase an example of alliteration?
2. What instances of internal rhyme does the poem contain? How would you describe their effects?
3. Point out some of the poet's uses of alliteration and assonance. Do you believe that Hopkins perhaps goes too far in his heavy use of devices of sound, or would you defend his practice?
4. Why do you suppose Hopkins, in the last two lines, says *over the bent / World* instead of (as we might expect) *bent over the world*? How can the world be bent? Can you make any sense out of this wording, or is Hopkins just trying to get his rhyme scheme to work out?

*William Jay Smith (b. 1918)***A Note on the Vanity Dresser**

1947

The yes-man in the mirror now says no,
 No longer will I answer you with lies.
 The light descends like snow, so when the snow-

9

RHYTHM

*I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as
the Rhythmical Creation of Beauty.*

—EDGAR ALLAN POE

STRESSES AND PAUSES

Rhythms affect us powerfully. We are lulled by a hammock's sway, awakened by an alarm clock's repeated yammer. Long after we come home from a beach, the rising and falling of waves and tides continue in memory. How powerfully the rhythms of poetry also move us may be felt in folk songs of railroad workers and chain gangs whose words were chanted in time to the lifting and dropping of a sledgehammer, and in verse that marching soldiers shout, putting a stress on every word that coincides with a footfall:

Your LEFT! TWO! THREE! FOUR!
Your LEFT! TWO! THREE! FOUR!
You LEFT your WIFE and TWEN-ty-one KIDS
And you LEFT! TWO! THREE! FOUR!
You'll NEV-er get HOME to-NIGHT!

A rhythm is produced by a series of recurrences: the returns and departures of the seasons, the repetitions of an engine's stroke, the beats of the heart. A rhythm may be produced by the recurrence of a sound (the throb of a drum, a telephone's busy signal), but rhythm and sound are not identical. A totally deaf person at a parade can sense rhythm from the motions of the marchers' arms and feet, from the shaking of the pavement as they tramp. Rhythms inhere in the motions of the moon and stars, even though when they move, we hear no sound.

In poetry, several kinds of recurrent sound are possible, including (as we saw in the last chapter) rhyme, alliteration, and assonance. But most often when we speak of the rhythm of a poem, we mean the recurrence of stresses and pauses in it. When we hear a poem read aloud, stresses and pauses are, of course, part of its sound. It is possible to be aware of rhythms in poems read silently, too.

Stresses

A stress (or accent) is a greater amount of force given to one syllable in speaking than is given to another. We favor a stressed syllable with a little more breath and

in duration than other syllables. In this manner we place a stress on the first syllable of words such as *eagle*, *impact*, *open*, and *statue*, and on the second syllable in *cigar*, *mystique*, *precise*, and *until*. Each word in English carries at least one stress, except (usually) for the articles *a*, *an*, and *the*, the conjunction *and*, and one-syllable prepositions: *at*, *by*, *for*, *from*, *of*, *to*, *with*. Even these, however, take a stress once in a while: "Get *WITH* it!" "You're not *THE* Dolly Parton?" One word by itself is seldom long enough for us to notice a rhythm in it. Usually a sequence of at least a few words is needed for stresses to establish their pattern: a line, a passage, a whole poem. Strong rhythms may be seen in most Mother Goose rimes, to which children have been responding for hundreds of years. This rime is for an adult to chant while jogging a child up and down on a knee:

Here goes my lord
A trot, a trot, a trot, a trot!
Here goes my lady
A canter, a canter, a canter, a canter!
Here goes my young master
Jockey-hitch, jockey-hitch, jockey-hitch, jockey-hitch!
Here goes my young miss
An amble, an amble, an amble, an amble!
The footman lags behind to tipple ale and wine
And goes gallop, a gallop, a gallop, to make up his time.

More than one rhythm occurs in these lines, as the make-believe horse changes pace. How do these rhythms differ? From one line to the next, the interval between stresses lengthens or grows shorter. In "a TROT a TROT a TROT a TROT," the stress falls on every other syllable. But in the middle of the line "A CAN-ter a CAN-ter a CAN-ter a CAN-ter," the stress falls on every third syllable. When stresses recur at fixed intervals as in these lines, the result is called a meter.

Stresses embody meanings. Whenever two or more fall side by side, words gain in emphasis. Consider these hard-hitting lines from John Donne, in which accent marks have been placed, dictionary-fashion, to indicate the stressed syllables:

Bat-ter my heart, three-per-soned God, for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend.
That I may rise and stand, o'er throw me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

Unstressed (or slack) syllables also can direct our attention to what the poet means. In a line containing few stresses and a great many unstressed syllables, there can be an effect not of power and force but of hesitation and uncertainty. Yeats asks in "Among School Children" what young mother, if she could see her baby grown to be an old man, would think him:

A com-pen-sa-tion for the pang of his birth
Or the un-cer-tain-ty of his set-ting forth?

¹With each unstressed syllable occurs in pairs, the result is a rhythm that trips and

A bunch of the boys were whoop-ing it up in the Ma-la-mute sa-loon . . .
or in Edgar Allan Poe's lines—also light but meant to be serious:

For the moon nev-er beams, with-out bring-ing me dreams
Of the beau-ti-ful An-na-bell Lee.

Apart from the words that convey it, the rhythm of a poem has no meaning. There are no essentially sad rhythms, nor any essentially happy ones. But some rhythms enforce certain meanings better than others do. The bouncing rhythm of Service's line seems fitting for an account of a merry night in a Klondike saloon; but it may be distracting when encountered in Poe's wistful elegy.

The special power of poetry comes from allowing us to hear simultaneously every level of meaning in language—denotation and connotation, image and idea, abstract content and physical sound. Since sound stress is one of the ways that the English language most clearly communicates meaning, any regular rhythmic pattern will affect the poem's effect. Poets learn to use rhythms that reinforce the meaning and the tone of a poem. As film directors know, any movie scene's effect can change dramatically if different background music accompanies the images. Master of the suspense film Alfred Hitchcock, for instance, could fill an ordinary scene with tension or terror just by playing nervous, grating music underneath it.

Exercise: Get with the Beat

In each of the following passages the author has established a strong rhythm. Describe how the rhythm helps establish the tone and meaning of the poem. How does each poem's beat seem appropriate to the tone and subject?

1. I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed," cried the watch as the gatebolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through.
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

—Robert Browning, from "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix"

2. I couldn't be cooler, I come from Missoula,
And I rope and I chew and I ride.
But I'm a heroin dealer, and I drive a four-wheeler
With stereo speakers inside.
My ol' lady Phoebe's out rippin' off C.B.'s
From the rigs at the Wagon Wheel Bar,
Near a Montana truck stop and a shit-outta-luck stop
For a trucker who's driven too far.

—Greg Keeler, from "There Ain't No Such Thing as a Montana Cowboy" (a song lyric)

3. Oh newsprint moonprint Marilyn!
Rub ink from a finger
to make your beauty mark.

—Rachel Eisler, from "Marilyn's Nocturne" (a poem about a newspaper photograph of Marilyn Monroe)

4. Of all the lives I cannot live,
I have elected one

to haunt me till the margins give
and I am left alone

One life has sounded in my voice
and made me like a stone—

one that the falling leaves can sink
not over, but upon.

—Annie Finch, "Dickinson"

5. The master, the swabber, the boatswain, and I,
The gunner and his mate
Loved Mall, Meg, and Marian, and Margery,
But none of us cared for Kate;
For she had a tongue with a tang
Would cry to a sailor "Go hang!"—
She loved not the savor of tar nor of pitch
Yet a tailor might scratch her where'er she did itch;
Then to sea, boys, and let her go hang!
- William Shakespeare, a song from *The Tempest*

Pauses

Rhythms in poetry are due not only to stresses but also to pauses. "Every nice ear," observed Alexander Pope (nice meaning "finely tuned"), "must, I believe, have observed that in any smooth English verse of ten syllables, there is naturally a pause either at the fourth, fifth, or sixth syllable." Such a light but definite pause within a line is called a cesura (or caesura), "a cutting." More liberally than Pope, we apply the name to any pause in a line of any length, after any word in the line. In studying a poem, we often indicate a cesura by double vertical lines (||). Usually, a cesura will occur at a mark of punctuation, but there can be a cesura even if no punctuation is present. Sometimes you will find it at the end of a phrase or clause or, as in these lines by William Blake, after an internal time:

And priests in black gowns || were walking their rounds
And binding with briars || my joys and desires.

Lines of ten or twelve syllables (as Pope knew) tend to have just one cesura, though sometimes there are more as in John Webster's line from *The Duchess of Malfi*:

Cover her face: || mine eyes dazzle: || she died young.

Pauses also tend to recur at more prominent places—namely, after each line. At the end of a verse (from *versus*, "a turning"), the reader's eye, before turning to go on to the next line, makes a pause, however brief. If a line ends in a full pause—usually indicated by some mark of punctuation—we call it end-stopped. All the lines in this passage from Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (in which Faustus addresses the apparition of Helen of Troy) are end-stopped:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burin the ruless towers of Ilion?

Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.

A line that does not end in punctuation and that therefore is read with only a slight pause after it is called a run-on line. Because a run-on line gives us only part of a phrase, clause, or sentence, we have to read on to the line or lines following, in order to complete a thought. All these lines from Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" are run-on lines:

Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought . . .

A passage in run-on lines has a rhythm different from that of a passage like Marlowe's in end-stopped lines. When emphatic pauses occur in the quotation from Browning, they fall within a line rather than at the end of one. The passage by Marlowe and that by Browning are in lines of the same meter (iambic) and the same length (ten syllables). What makes the big difference in their rhythms is the running on, or lack of it.

To sum up: rhythm is recurrence. In poems, it is made of stresses and pauses. The poet can produce it by doing any of several things: making the intervals between stresses fixed or varied, long or short; indicating pauses (cesuras) within lines; end-stopping lines or running them over; writing in short or long lines. Rhythm in itself cannot convey meaning. And yet if a poet's words have meaning, their rhythm must be one with it.

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000)

1960

We Real Cool

The Pool Players.
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

5

Question

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

Break, Break, Break

(1834)

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

10

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

15

Questions

1. Read the first line aloud. What effect does it create at the beginning of the poem?
2. Is there a regular rhythmic pattern in this poem? If so, how would you describe it?
3. The speaker claims that his or her thoughts are impossible to utter. Using evidence from the poem, can you describe the speaker's thoughts and feelings?

Ben Jonson (1573–1637)Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time
with my salt tears

1600

Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;

Yet slower yet, oh faintly, gentle springs;

List to the heavy part the music bears,

Woe weeps out her division° when she sings.

a part in a song

Droop herbs and flowers,

Fall grief in showers;

Our beauties are not ours;

Oh, I could still,

Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,

Drop, drop, drop, drop,

Since nature's pride is now a withered daffodil.

10

SLOW, SLOW, FRESH FOUNT. The nymph Echo sings this lament over the youth Narcissus in Jonson's play *Cynthia's Revels*. In mythology, Nemesis, goddess of vengeance, to punish Narcissus for loving his own beauty, caused him to pine away and then transformed him into a narcissus (another name for a daffodil, line 11).

Questions

1. Read the first line aloud rapidly. Why is it difficult to do so?
2. Which lines rely most heavily on stressed syllables?
3. How would you describe the rhythm of this poem? How is it appropriate to what is said?

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967)

1926

Résumé

Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful;
You might as well live.

5

Questions

1. Which of the following words might be used to describe the rhythm of this poem, and which might not—flowing, jaunty, mournful, tender, abrupt?
2. Is this light verse or a serious poem? Can it be both?

METER

Meter is the rhythmic pattern of stresses in verse. To enjoy the rhythms of a poem, no special knowledge of meter is necessary. All you need do is pay attention to stresses and where they fall, and you will perceive the basic pattern, if there is any. There is nothing occult about the study of meter. Most people find they can master its essentials in no more time than it takes to learn a complicated game such as chess. If you take the time, you will then have the pleasure of knowing what is happening in the rhythms of many a fine poem, and pleasurable knowledge may even deepen your insight into poetry. The following discussion, then, will be of interest only to those who care to go deeper into prosody, the study of metrical structures in poetry.

To make ourselves aware of a meter, we need only listen to a poem, or sound its words to ourselves. If we care to work out exactly what a poet is doing, we scan a line or a poem by indicating the stresses in it. Scansion, the art of so doing, is not just a matter of pointing to syllables; it is also a matter of listening to a poem and making sense of it. To scan a poem is one way to indicate how to read it aloud; in order to see where stresses fall, you have to see the places where the poet wishes to put emphasis. That is why, when scanning a poem, you may find yourself suddenly understanding it.

An objection might be raised against scanning: isn't it too simple to pretend that all language (and poetry) can be divided neatly into stressed syllables and unstressed syllables? Indeed it is. Language isn't binary; there are many levels of stress from a scream to a whisper. However, the idea in scanning a poem is not to reproduce the sound of a human voice. For that we would do better to buy a tape recorder. To scan a poem, rather, is to make a diagram of the stresses (and absences of stress) we find in it. Various marks are used in scansion; in this book we use ' for a stressed syllable and

Types of Meter

There are four common accentual-syllabic meters in English—iambic, anapestic, trochaic, and dactylic. Each is named for its basic foot (usually a unit of two or three syllables that contains one strong stress) or building block. Here are some examples of each meter.

1. Iambic—a line made up primarily of iambs, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, $\text{˘} \text{˘}$. The iambic measure is the most common meter in English poetry. Many writers, such as Robert Frost, feel iambs most easily capture the natural rhythms of our speech.

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
But soft, | what light | through yon | der win | dow breaks?
—William Shakespeare

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
When I | have fears | that I | may cease | to be
—John Keats

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
Had we | but world | e-nough | and time,
This coy | ness, la | dy, were | no crime
—Andrew Marvell

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
My life | had stood — | a load | ed Gun
—Emily Dickinson

2. Anapestic—a line made up primarily of anapests, two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable, $\text{˘˘} \text{˘}$. Anapestic meter resembles iambic but contains an extra unstressed syllable. Totally anapestic lines often start to gallop, so poets sometimes slow them down by substituting an iambic foot (as Poe does in “Annabel Lee”).

$\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
The As-syr | ian came down | like a wolf | on the fold
And his co | horts were gleam | ing in pur | ple and gold.
And the sheen | of their spears | was like stars | on the sea
When the blue | wave rolls night | ly on deep | Gal-i-lee.
—Lord Byron

$\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
Now this | is the Law | of the Jun | gle—as old | and as true
| as the sky;
And the Wolf | that shall keep | it may pros | per, | but the Wolf
| that shall break | it must die.

$\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
It was ma | ny and ma | ny a year | a go,
 $\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
In a king | dom by | the sea,
 $\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
That a maid | en there lived | whom you | may know
By the name | of An | na-bel Lee.
—Edgar Allan Poe

3. Trochaic—a line made up primarily of trochees, a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, $\text{˘} \text{˘}$. The trochaic meter is often associated with songs, chants, and magic spells in English. Trochees make a strong, emphatic meter that is often very mnemonic—that is, “helping, or meant to help, the memory.” Shakespeare and Blake used trochaic meter to exploit its magical associations. Notice how Blake drops the unstressed syllable at the end of his lines from “The Tyger.” (The location of a missing syllable in a metrical foot is usually marked with a caret sign, ˘ .)

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
Dou·ble, | dou·ble, | toil and | trou·ble,
 $\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
Fi·re | burn and | caul·dron | bub·ble.
—Shakespeare

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
Ty·ger! | Ty·ger! | burn·ing | bright
 $\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
In the | for·ests | of the | night
—William Blake

$\text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘}$
Go and | catch a | fall·ing | star
—John Donne

4. Dactylic—a line made up primarily of dactyls, one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, $\text{˘˘} \text{˘}$. The dactylic meter is less common in English than in classical languages like Greek or Latin. Used carefully, dactylic meter can sound stately, as in Longfellow’s *Evangeline*.

$\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
This is the | for·est pri | me-val. The | mur·mur-ing | pines and the
| hem-lock
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

But it also easily becomes a prancing, propulsive measure and is often used in comic verse.

$\text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘} \text{˘˘}$
Puss·y-cat, | puss·y-cat, | where have you | been?
—Mother Goose

Poets often drop the unstressed syllables at the end of a dactylic line, the omission usually being noted with a caret sign, ^.

Take her up | ten·der·ly,
Lift her with | care;
Fash·ioned so | slen·der·ly,
Young, and so | fair!

—Thomas Hood

Iambic and anapestic meters are called rising meters because their movement rises from an unstressed syllable (or syllables) to stress; trochaic and dactylic meters are called falling. In the twentieth century, the bouncing meters—anapestic and dactylic—were used more often for comic verse than for serious poetry. Called feet, though they contain no unaccented syllables, are the monosyllabic foot (') and the spondee ("). Meters are not ordinarily made up of them; if one were, it would be like the steady impact of nails being hammered into a board—no pleasure to hear or to dance to. But inserted now and then, they can lend emphasis and variety to a meter, as Yeats well knew when he broke up the predominantly iambic rhythm of "Who Goes with Fergus?" (page 147) with the line in which two spondees occur.

And the white breast of the dim sea,

Line Lengths

Meters are classified also by line lengths: trochaic monometer, for instance, is a line one trochee long, as in this anonymous brief comment on microbes:

Adam
Had 'em.

A frequently heard metrical description is iambic pentameter: a line of five iambs, a meter especially familiar because it occurs in all blank verse (such as Shakespeare's plays and Milton's *Paradise Lost*), heroic couplets, and sonnets. The commonly used names for line lengths follow:

monometer	one foot
dimeter	two feet
trimeter	three feet
tetrameter	four feet
pentameter	five feet
hexameter	six feet
heptameter	seven feet
octameter	eight feet

Lines of more than eight feet are possible but are rare. They tend to break up into shorter lengths in the listening ear.

When Yeats chose the spondees white breast and dim sea, he was doing what

expected one. Often such a substitution will be made at the very beginning of a line, as in the third line of this passage from Christopher Marlowe's *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*:

Was this | the face | that launched | a thou | sand ships
And burnt | the top | less tow'rs | of Il | i-um?
Sweet Hel | en, make | me im·mor | tal with | a kiss.

How, we might wonder, can that last line be called iambic at all? But it is, just as a waltz that includes an extra step or two, or leaves a few steps out, remains a waltz. In the preceding lines the basic iambic pentameter is established, and though in the third line the regularity is varied from, it does not altogether disappear. It continues for a while to run on in the reader's mind, where (if the poet does not stay away from it for too long) the meter will be when the poem comes back to it.

Like a basic dance step, a meter is not to be slavishly adhered to. The fun in reading a metrical poem often comes from watching the poet continually departing from perfect regularity, giving a few heel-kicks to display a bit of joy or ingenuity, then easing back into the basic step again. Because meter is orderly and the rhythms of living speech are unruly, poets can play one against the other, in a sort of counterpoint. Robert Frost, a master at pitting a line of iambs against a very natural-sounding and irregular sentence, declared, "I am never more pleased than when I can get these into strained relation. I like to drag and break the intonation across the meter as waves first comb and then break stumbling on the shingle."¹

Evidently Frost's skilled effects would be lost to a reader who, scanning a Frost poem or reading it aloud, distorted its rhythms to fit the words exactly to the meter. With rare exceptions, a good poem can be read and scanned the way we would speak its sentences if they were ours. This, for example, is an unreal scansion:

That's my last Dutch·ess paint·ed on the wall.

—because no speaker of English would say that sentence in that way. We are likely to stress *That's* and *last*.

Although in good poetry we seldom meet a very long passage of absolute metrical regularity, we sometimes find (in a line or so) a monotonous rhythm that is effective. Words fall meaningfully in Macbeth's famous statement of world-weariness: "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow . . ." and in the opening lines of Thomas Gray's "Elegy":

The cur·few tolls the knell of part·ing day,
The low·ing herd wind slow·ly o'er the lea,
The plow·man home·ward plods his wear·y way,
And leaves the world to dark·ness and to me.

Although certain unstressed syllables in these lines seem to call for more emphasis than others—you might, for instance, care to throw a little more weight on the

¹Letter to John Cournos in 1914, in *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. Lawrence Thompson (New York:

second syllable of *curfew* in the opening line—we can still say that the lines are notably iambic. Their almost unvarying rhythm seems just right to convey the tolling of a bell and the weary setting down of one foot after the other.

Accentual Meter

Besides the two rising meters (iambic, anapestic) and the two falling meters (trochaic, dactylic), English poets have another valuable meter. It is accentual meter, in which the poet does not write in feet (as in the other meters) but instead counts accents (stresses). The idea is to have the same number of stresses in every line. The poet may place them anywhere in the line and may include practically any number of unstressed syllables, which do not count. In "Christabel," for instance, Coleridge keeps four stresses to a line, though the first line has only eight syllables and the last line has eleven:

There is not wind e·nough to twirl
 The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
 That dan·ces as of·ten as dance it can,
 Hang·ing so light, and hang·ing so high,
 On the top-most twig that looks up at the sky.

The history of accentual meter is long and honorable. Old English poetry was written in a kind of accentual meter, but its line was more rule-bound than Coleridge's: four stresses arranged two on either side of a cesura, plus alliteration of three of the stressed syllables. In "Junk," Richard Wilbur revives the pattern:

An axe an·gles || from my neigh·bor's ash·can . . .

Many poets, from the authors of Mother Goose rimes to Gerard Manley Hopkins, have sometimes found accentual meters congenial. Recently, accentual meter has enjoyed huge popularity through rap poetry, which usually employs a four-stress line (see page 136 for further discussion of rap).

Although less popular among poets today than formerly, meter endures. Major poets from Shakespeare through Yeats have fashioned their work by it, and if we are to read their poems with full enjoyment, we need to be aware of it. To enjoy metrical poetry—even to write it—you do not have to slice lines into feet; you do need to recognize when a meter is present in a line, and when the line departs from it. An argument in favor of meter is that it reminds us of body rhythms such as breathing, walking, the beating of the heart. In an effective metrical poem, these rhythms cannot be separated from what the poet is saying—or, in the words of an old jazz song of Duke Ellington's, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." As critic Paul Fussell has put it: "No element of a poem is more basic—and I mean physical—in its effect upon the reader than the metrical element, and perhaps no technical triumphs reveal more readily than the metrical the poet's sympathy with that universal human nature . . . which exists outside his own."²

Exercise: Meaningful Variation

At what place or places in each of these passages does the poet depart from basic iambic meter? How does each departure help underscore the meaning?

- Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he
 Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
 The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,
 But Shadwell never deviates into sense.
 —John Dryden, "Mac Flecknoe" (speech of Flecknoe, prince of Nonsense, referring to Thomas Shadwell, poet and playwright)
- A needless Alexandrine ends the song
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.
 —Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*
- Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
 Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
 When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
 Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.
 —George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
- Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
 Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
 Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
 And, in the isolation of the sky,
 At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
 Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
 Downward to darkness, on extended wings.
 —Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning"

Exercise: Recognizing Rhythms

Which of the following poems contain predominant meters? Which poems are not wholly metrical, but are metrical in certain lines? Point out any such lines. What reasons do you see, in such places, for the poet's seeking a metrical effect?

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950)

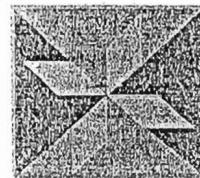
Counting-out Rhyme

Silver bark of beech, and sallow
 Bark of yellow birch and yellow
 Twig of willow.
 Stripe of green in moosewood maple,
 Color seen in leaf of apple,
 Bark of popple.

Wood of popple pale as moonbeam,

1928

CHAPTER 17



Sound

• • •

The primary pleasure in poetry is . . . the pleasure of saying something over for its own sweet sake and because it sounds just right. For myself, . . . the thing said over will not necessarily be A Great Thought, though great thoughts are not necessarily excluded either; it may be as near as not to meaningless, especially if one says it without much attention to its context. For instance, a riddling song has the refrain: Sing ninety-nine and ninety. I can remember being charmed enough with that to say it over and over to myself for days, without ever having a single thought about its meaning except for a certain bemused wonder about how different it was from singing a hundred and eighty-nine.

HOWARD NEMEROV, "Poetry and Meaning"

I've never taught a poetry writing class that has not suffered my reiteration of Duke Ellington's line: "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." How can you describe the feeling of reading a Roethke poem, . . . when the rhythm is so palpable it is as if the poem could be cupped in your hands? Those poems move great distances in meaning between sentences and yet they hold together, largely because of the sound. The same thing is operating in a song that makes you want to get up and dance.

MICHAEL RYAN, "On the Nature of Poetry"

The most obvious function of the line-break is rhythmic: it can record the slight (but meaningful) hesitations between word and word that are characteristic of the mind's dance among perceptions but which are not noted by grammatical punctuation. Regular punctuation is a part of regular sentence structure, that is, of the expression of completed thoughts; and this expression is typical of prose, even though prose is not at all times bound by its logic. But in poems one has the opportunity not only, as in expressive prose, to depart from the syntactic norm, but . . . to present the dynamics of perception *along with* its arrival at full expression. The line-break is a form of punctuation *additional to* the punctuation that forms part of the logic of completed thoughts.

DENISE LEVERTOV, "On the Function of Line"

• • •

WALT WHITMAN
(1819-1892)

Had I the Choice¹

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,
To limn² their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,
Homer with all his wars and warriors—Hector, Achilles, Ajax,
Or Shakespeare's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello—Tennyson's
fair ladies,

s Meter or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect rhyme
delight of singers;

These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer,
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
And leave its odor there.

A

RHYTHM

• • •

Rhythm—the regular recurrence of sounds—is at the heart of all natural phenomena: the beating of a heart, the lapping of waves against the shore, the croaking of frogs on a summer's night, the whispering of wheat swaying in the wind. In fact, even mechanical phenomena, such as the movement of rush-hour traffic through a city's streets, have a kind of rhythm. Poetry, which explores these phenomena, often tries to reflect the same rhythms. Walt Whitman makes this point in "Had I the Choice" when he says that he would gladly trade the "perfect rhyme" of Shakespeare for the ability to reproduce "the undulation of one wave" in his verse.

Effective public speakers frequently repeat key words and phrases to create rhythm. In his speech "I Have a Dream," for example, Martin Luther King, Jr., repeats the phrase "I have a dream" to create a cadence that ties the central section of the speech together:

I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, *I still have a dream*. It is a dream deeply rooted

¹ Publication date is not available.

² To describe, depict.

in the American dream. *I have a dream* that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." *I have a dream* that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. *I have a dream* that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. *I have a dream* that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

Doets too create rhythm by using repeated words and phrases, as Gwendolyn Brooks does in the poem that follows.

• • •
G WENDOLYN BROOKS
(1917-)

Sadie and Maud

(1945)

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

s She didn't leave a tangle in.
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
10 Under her maiden name.
Maud and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long
Her girls struck out from home.
15 (Sadie had left as heritage
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,
Is a thin brown mouse.
She is living all alone
20 In this old house.

Much of the force of this poem comes from its balanced structure and regular rhyme and meter, underscored by the repeated words "Sadie" and "Maud," which shift the focus from one subject to the other and back again ("Maud went to college / Sadie stayed home"). The poem's singsong rhythm recalls the rhymes children recite when jumping rope. This evocation of carefree childhood ironically contrasts with the adult realities that both Sadie and Maud face as they grow up: Sadie stays at home and has two children out of wedlock; Maud goes to college and ends up "a thin brown mouse." The speaker implies that the alternatives Sadie and Maud represent are both undesirable. Although Sadie "scraped life / with a fine tooth comb," she dies young and leaves nothing to her girls but her desire to experience life. Maud, who graduated from college, shuts out life and cuts herself off from her roots.

Just as the repetition of words and phrases can create rhythm, so can the distribution of words among the lines of a poem—and even the appearance of words on a printed page. How a poem looks is especially important in **open form** poetry (see p. 732), which dispenses with traditional patterns of versification. In the following excerpt from a poem by E. E. Cummings, for example, an unusual arrangement of words forces readers to slow down and then to speed up, creating a rhythm that emphasizes a key phrase—"The / lily":

the moon is hiding
in her hair.
The
lily
of heaven
full of all dreams,
draws down.

Poetic rhythm—the repetition of stresses and pauses—is an essential element in poetry. Rhythm helps to establish a poem's mood, and in combination with other poetic elements, it conveys the poet's emphasis and helps communicate the poem's meaning. Although rhythm can be affected by the regular repetition of words and phrases or by the arrangement of words into lines, poetic rhythm is largely created by **meter**, the recurrence of regular units of stressed and unstressed syllables.

METER

A **stress** (or accent) occurs when one syllable is emphasized more than another, unstressed, syllable: *fór • ceps, bá • sic, il • lá • sion, ma • lár • i•* and so on. In a poem, even one-syllable words can be stressed to create a particular effect.

For example, in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's line "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," the metrical pattern that places stress on "love" creates one meaning; stressing "I" would create another.

Scansion is the process of analyzing patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables within a line. The most common method of poetic notation involves indicating stressed syllables with a ' and unstressed syllables with a . Although scanning its lines gives readers the "beat" of the poem, scansion only approximates the sound of spoken language, which contains an infinite variety of stresses. By providing a graphic representation of the stressed and unstressed syllables of a poem, scansion aids understanding, but it is no substitute for reading the poem aloud and experimenting with various patterns of emphasis.

The basic unit of meter is a **foot**—a group of syllables with a fixed pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. The following chart illustrates the most common types of metrical feet in English and American verse.

FOOT	STRESS PATTERN	EXAMPLE
Iamb	◦	They pace in sleek chi val ric cer tain ty (Adrienne Rich)
Trochee	◦	Thou, when thou re turn'st, wilt tell me. (John Donne)
Anapest	◦ ◦	With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino (William Shakespeare)
Dactyl	◦ ◦	Constantly risking ab surdity (Lawrence Ferlinghetti)

Iambic and *anapestic* meters are called *rising meters* because they progress from unstressed to stressed syllables. *Trochaic* and *dactylic* meters are called *falling meters* because they progress from stressed to unstressed syllables.

The following types of metrical feet, less common than those listed above, are used to emphasize or to provide variety rather than to create the dominant meter of a poem.

Spondee

||

Pomp, pride | and
circumstance of
glorious war
(William
Shakespeare)

Like a | high-born | maiden
Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Trochaic trimeter

Pyrrhic

VV

A horse! a horse!
My king|dom for
a horse! (William
Shakespeare)

The As sy|rian came down |
like the wolf | on the fold
Lord Byron)

Anapestic tetrameter

A metric line of poetry is measured by the number of feet it contains.

monometer one foot
diameter two feet
trimeter three feet
tetrameter four feet

pentameter five feet
hexameter six feet
heptameter seven feet
octameter eight feet

The name for a metrical pattern of a line of verse identifies the name of the foot used and the number of feet the line contains. For example, the most common foot in English poetry is the **iamb**, most often occurring in lines of three or five feet.

Maid en most | beau ti ful |
mother most | boun ti ful, | la
dy of | lands, (A. C. Swinburne)

Dactylic hexameter

The yellow fog | that rubs | its
back | upon | the win |
dow-panes (T. S. Eliot)

Iambic heptameter

Scansion can be an extremely technical process, and when readers become bogged down with anapests and dactyls, they can easily forget that poetic meter is not an end in itself. Meter should be appropriate for the ideas expressed by the poem, and it should help to create a suitable tone. A light, skipping rhythm, for example, would be inappropriate for an **elegy**, and a slow, heavy rhythm would surely be out of place in an **epigram** or a limerick. The following lines of a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge illustrate the different types of metrical feet:

Eight hun|dred of | the brave

Iambic trimeter

(William Cowper)

O, how | much more | doth

Iambic pentameter

beau|ty beau|teous seem

(William Shakespeare)

Trochee trips from long to short;

from long to long in solemn sort

Slow Spondee stalks; strong foot! yet ill able

Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable.

Iambics march from short to long—

With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng;

One syllable long, with one short at each side,

Amphibrachys hastens with a stately stride—

First and last being long, middle short, Amphimacer

Strikes his thundering hoofs like a proud high-bred Racer.

Because **iambic pentameter** is so well suited to the rhythms of English speech, writers frequently use it in plays and poems. Shakespeare's plays, for example, are written in unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter called **blank verse** (see p. 716).

Many other material combinations are also possible; a few are illustrated here:

A poet may use one kind of meter—iambic meter, for example—throughout a poem. Even so, the poet may vary line length to relieve monotony or to accommodate the demands of meaning or emphasis. In the following poem, the poet uses iambic lines of different lengths.

EMILY DICKINSON
(1830–1886)

I Like to See It Lap the Miles (1891)

I like to see it lap the Miles—
And lick the Valleys up—
And stop to feed itself at Tanks—
And then—prodigious step

s Around a Pile of Mountains—
And supercilious peer
In Shanties—by the sides of Roads—
And then a Quarry pare

To fit its Ribs
10 And crawl between
Complaining all the while
In horrid—hootng stanza—
Then chase itself down Hill—

And neigh like Boanerges¹—
15 Then—punctual as a Star
Stop—docile and omnipotent
At its own stable door—

This poem is a single sentence that, except for some short pauses, stretches unbroken from beginning to end. Iambic lines of varying lengths actually suggest the movements of the train that the poet describes. Lines of iambic tetrameter, such as the first, give readers a sense of the train's steady rhythmic movement across a flat landscape, and shorter lines ("To fit its Ribs / And crawl between") suggest the train's slowing motion. Beginning with two iambic dimeter lines and progressing to iambic trimeter lines, the third stanza increases in speed just like the train that is racing down hill "In horrid—hootng stanza—."

A poet can also use more than one type of metrical foot. Any variation in a metrical pattern—the substitution of a trochee for an iamb, for instance—immediately calls attention to itself. Poets are aware of this fact and use it to their advantage. For example, in line 16 of "I Like to See It Lap the Miles," the poet departs from iambic meter by placing unexpected stress on the first word, *stop*. By emphasizing this word, the poet brings the flow of the poem to an abrupt halt, suggesting the jolt riders experience when a train comes to a stop. In the following segment from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Samuel Taylor Coleridge also departs from his poem's dominant meter:

The ship | was cheered, | the har|bor cleared,
Merrily did | we drop
Below | the kirk, | below | the hill,
Below | the light|house top.

Although these lines are arranged in iambic tetrameter, the poet uses a trochee in the second line, breaking the meter in order to accommodate the natural pronunciation of "merrily" as well as to place stress on the word.

Another way of varying the meter is to introduce a pause in the rhythm known as a **caesura**—a Latin word meaning "a cutting"—within a line. When scanning a poem, you indicate a caesura with two parallel lines ||. Unless a line of poetry is extremely short, it probably will contain a caesura.

A caesura occurs after a punctuation mark or at a natural break in phrasing:

How do I love thee? || Let me count the ways.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Two loves I have || of comfort and despair.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

High on a throne of royal state, || which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus || and of Ind

JOHN MILTON

Sometimes, more than one caesura occurs in a single line:

It's good. || Go to the gate. || Somebody knocks.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Although the end of a line may mark the end of a metrical unit, it does not always coincide with the end of a sentence. Poets may choose to indicate a

¹ A vociferous preacher and orator. Also, the name, meaning "son of thunder," given to apostles John and James because of their fiery zeal.

Pause at this point, or they may continue, without a break, to the next line. Lines that have distinct pauses at the end—usually signaled by punctuation—are called **end-stopped lines**. Lines that do not end with strong pauses are called **run-on lines**. (Sometimes the term **jambment** is used to describe this type of line.) End-stopped lines can seem formal, or even forced, because their length is rigidly dictated by the poem's meter, rhythm, and rhyme scheme. In the following excerpt from John Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (p. 811), for example, rhythm, meter, and rhyme dictate the pauses that occur at the ends of the lines:

O, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

In contrast to end-stopped lines, run-on lines seem more natural. Because their ending points are determined by the rhythms of speech and by the meaning and emphasis the poet wishes to convey rather than by meter and rhyme, run-on lines are suited to the open form of much modern poetry. In the following lines from the 1967 poem "We Have Come Home" by Poet Lenrie Peters, run-on lines give readers the sense of spoken language:

We have come home
From the bloodless war
With sunken hearts
Our boots full of pride—
From the true massacre of the soul
When we have asked
'What does it cost
To be loved and left alone?'

Rather than relying exclusively on end-stopped or run-on lines, poets often use a combination of the two to produce the effects they want. In the following lines from "Pot Roast" by Mark Strand, for example, the juxtaposition of end-stopped and run-on lines controls the rhythm:

I gaze upon the roast,
that is sliced and laid out
on my plate
and over it
I spoon the juices
of carrot and onion.
And for once I do not regret
the passage of time.

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: RHYTHM AND METER

ADRIENNE RICH
(1929-)

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers (1951)

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

READING AND REACTING

1. What is the dominant metrical pattern of the poem? In what way does the meter enhance the contrast the poem develops? The lines in the first stanza are end-stopped, and those in the second and third stanzas combine end-stopped and run-on lines. What does the poet achieve by varying the rhythm?

2. What ideas do the caesuras in the first and fourth lines of the last stanza emphasize?

3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** What is the speaker's opinion of Aunt Jennifer's marriage? Do you think she is commenting on this particular marriage or on marriage in general?

4. **Critical Perspective** In her 1986 study of Rich's work, *The Aesthetics of Power*, Claire Keyes writes of this poem that although it is formally beautiful, almost perfect, its voice creates problems:

[T]he tone seldom approaches intimacy, the speaker seeming fairly detached from the fate of Aunt Jennifer.... The dominant voice of the poem asserts the traditional theme that art outlives the person who produces it.... The speaker is almost callous in her disregard for Aunt's death.... Who cares that Aunt Jennifer dies? The speaker does not seem to; she gets

caught up in those gorgeous tigers. . . . Here lies the dominant voice: Aunt is not compelling; her creation is.

Do you agree with Keyes's reading of the poem?

Related Works: "Miss Brill" (p. 103), "Rooming Houses Are Old Women" (p. 666), "Ethics" (p. 821)

• • •
ETHERIDGE KNIGHT
(1931–1991)

For Malcolm,¹ a Year After (1986)

Compose for Red² a proper verse;
Adhere to foot and strict iamb;
Control the burst of angry words
Or they might boil and break the dam.
Or they might boil and overflow
And drench me, drown me, drive me mad.
So swear no oath, so shed no tear,
And sing no song blue Baptist sad.
Evoke no image, stir no flame,
And spin no yarn across the air.
Make empty anglo tea lace words—
Make them dead white and dry bone bare.

Compose a verse for Malcolm man,
And make it rime and make it prim.
The verse will die—as all men do—
But not the memory of him!
Death might come singing sweet like C,
Or knocking like the old folk say,
The moon and stars may pass away.
But not the anger of that day.

READING AND REACTING

1. Why do you think Knight chooses to write a "proper verse" in "strict iamb"? Do you think this meter is an appropriate choice for his subject?

¹ Malcolm X.

² Malcolm X's nickname when he was a young man.

2. What sounds and words are repeated in this poem? How does this repetition enhance the poem's rhythm?

3. Where in the poem does Knight use caesuras? Why does he use this device in each instance?

JOURNAL ENTRY How would you describe the mood of the speaker? Is the poem's meter consistent with his mood or in conflict with it? Explain.

Related Works: "In Memory of Donald A. Stauffer" (p. 728), "If We Must Die" (p. 817), "Medgar Evers" (p. 864)

ALLITERATION AND ASSONANCE

• • •

Just as poetry depends on rhythm, it also depends on the sounds of individual words. An effect pleasing to the ear, such as "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" from William Blake's "The Tyger" (p. 781), is called **euphony**. A jarring or discordant effect, such as "The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!" from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" (p. 710), is called **cacophony**.

One of the earliest, and perhaps the most primitive, methods of enhancing sound is **onomatopoeia**, which occurs when the sound of a word echoes its meaning, as it does in common words such as *bang*, *crash*, and *hiss*. Poets make broad application of this technique by using combinations of words that suggest a correspondence between sound and meaning, as Edgar Allan Poe does in the following lines from his poem "The Bells":

Yet the ear, it fully knows,
By the twanging
And the clangling,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling
And the wrangling
How the danger sinks and swells
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
Of the bells,—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells. . . .

The primary objective in this poem is to re-create the sound of ringing bells. Although he succeeds, the poem (113 lines long in its entirety) is extremely tedious. A more subtle use of onomatopoetic words appears in the following passage from *An Essay on Criticism* by Alexander Pope:

Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when the loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labors, and the words move slow.

After earlier admonishing readers that sound must echo sense, Pope uses onomatopoeic words such as *lash* and *roar* to convey the fury of the sea, and he uses repeated consonants to echo the sounds these words suggest. Notice, for example, how the *s* and *m* sounds suggest the gently blowing Zephyr and the flowing of the smooth stream and how the series of *r* sounds echoes the torrent's roar.

Alliteration—the repetition of consonant sounds in consecutive or neighboring words, usually at the beginning of words—is another device used to enhance sound in a poem. Both Poe ("sinks and swells") and Pope ("smooth stream") make use of alliteration in the preceding excerpts, and so does Alfred, Lord Tennyson in the following poem.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON
(1809-1892)

The Eagle (1851)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls:
5 He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

Throughout the poem, *c*, *l*, and *w* sounds occur repeatedly. The poem is drawn together by the recurrence of these sounds and, as a result, it flows smoothly from beginning to end.

The following poem also uses alliteration to create special aural effects.

N. SCOTT MOMADAY
(1934-)

Comparatives (1976)

Sunlit sea,
the drift of fronds,
and banners
of bobbing boats—
5 the seaside
upon the planks,
the coil and
crescent of flesh
extending
10 just into death.

Even so,
in the distant,
inland sea,
a shadow runs,
15 radiant,
rude in the rock:
fossil fish,
fissure of bone
forever.
20 It is perhaps
the same thing,
an agony
twice perceived.

It is most like
25 wind on waves—
mere commotion,
mute and mean,
perceptible—
that is all.

Throughout the poem, Momaday uses alliteration to create a pleasing effect and to link certain words and ideas. Each stanza of the poem has its own alliterative pattern: the first stanza contains repeated *s* and *b* sounds, the second stanza contains repeated *r* and *f* sounds, and the third stanza contains repeated *w* and *m* sounds. Not only does this use of alliteration create a pleasing effect, but also it reinforces the development of the poem's theme from stanza to stanza.

Assonance—the repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds especially in stressed syllables—can also enrich a poem. When used solely to produce aural effects, assonance can be distracting. Consider, for example, the clumsiness of the repeated vowel sounds in Tennyson's "Many a morning on the moorland did we hear the copsis ring...." When used more subtly, however, assonance can enhance a poem's effectiveness.

Assonance can also unify an entire poem. In the following poem, assonance emphasizes the thematic connections among words and thus unifies the poem's ideas.

ROBERT HERRICK
(1591-1674)

Delight in Disorder (1648)

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.
A lawn¹ about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthralls the crimson stomacher;²
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
~~with~~ to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
10 In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoestring, in whose tie
I see a wild civility;
Do more bewitch me than when art
Is too precise in every part.

Repeated vowel sounds extend throughout this poem—for instance, "shoulders" and "thrown" in line 3; and "tie," "wild," and "precise" in lines 11, 12, and 14. Using alliteration as well as assonance, Herrick subtly links certain words—"tempestuous petticoat," for example. By connecting these words, he calls attention to the pattern of imagery that helps to convey the poem's theme.

¹A shawl made of fine fabric.
²A heavily embroidered garment worn by females over the chest and stomach.

RHYME

In addition to alliteration and assonance, poets create sound patterns with rhyme—the use of matching sounds in two or more words: "tight" and "night"; "born" and "horn"; "sleep" and "deep." For a rhyme to be perfect, final vowel and consonant sounds must be the same, as they are in each of the preceding examples. **Imperfect rhyme** (also called *near rhyme*, *slant rhyme*, *approximate rhyme*, or *coisonance*) occurs when the final consonant sounds in two words are the same but vowel sounds are different—"learn/barn" or "pads/lids," for example. William Stafford uses imperfect rhyme in "Traveling through the Dark" (p. 836) when he rhymes "road" with "dead." Finally, **eye rhyme** occurs when two words look as if they should rhyme but do not—for example, "watch" and "catch."

Rhyme can also be classified according to the position of the rhyming syllables in a line of verse. The most common type of rhyme is **end rhyme**, which occurs at the end of a line:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night

WILLIAM BLAKE, "The Tyger"

Internal rhyme occurs within a line:

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright and on the right
Went down into the sea.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

Beginning rhyme occurs at the beginning of a line:

Red River, red river,
Slow flow heat is silence
No will is still as a river
Still. Will heat move

T. S. ELIOT, "Virginia"

Rhyme can also be classified according to the number of corresponding syllables. **Masculine rhyme** (also called *rising rhyme*) occurs when single syllables correspond ("can"/"ran"; "descend"/"contend"). **Feminine rhyme** (also called *double rhyme* or *falling rhyme*) occurs when two syllables, a stressed one followed by an unstressed one, correspond ("ocean"/"motion"; "leaping"/"sleeping"). Finally, **triple rhyme** occurs when three syllables correspond. Less common than the other two, triple rhyme is often used for humorous or satiric purposes, as in the following lines from the long poem *Don Juan* by Lord Byron:

Sagest of women, even of widows, she
 Resolved that Juan should be quite a paragon,
 And worthy of the noblest pedigree:
 (His sire of Castile, his dam from Aragon).

In some cases—for example, when it is overused or used in unexpected places—rhyme can create unusual and even comic effects. In the following poem, humor is created by the incongruous connections established by rhymes such as “priest”//“beast” and “pajama”//“llama.”

O G D E N N A S H
 (1902–1971)

The Lama (1931)

The one-l lama
 He's a priest.
 The two-l llama,
 He's a beast.
 s And I will bet
 A silk pajama
 There isn't any
 Three-l llama.

The conventional way to describe a poem's rhyme scheme is to chart rhyming sounds that appear at the ends of lines. The sound that ends the first line is designated *a*, and all subsequent lines that end in that sound are also labeled *a*. The next sound to appear at the end of a line is designated *b*, and all other lines whose last sounds rhyme with it are also designated *b*—and so on through the alphabet. The lines of the poem that follows have been labeled in this manner.

R I C H A R D W I L B U R
 (1921–)

A Sketch (1975)

Into the lower right *a*
 Square of the window frame *b*
 There came *b*
 with scalloped flight *a*

s A goldfinch, lit upon *c*
 The dead branch of a pine, *d*
 Shining, *d*
 and then was gone, *c*
 Tossed in a double arc *e*
 10 Upward into the thatched *f*
 And cross-hatched *f*
 pine-needle dark. *e*
 Briefly, as fresh drafts stirred *g*
 The tree, he dulled and gleamed *h*
 15 And seemed *h*
 more coal than bird, *g*
 Then, dodging down, returned *i*
 In a new light, his perch *j*
 A birch— *j*
 20 twig, where he burned *i*
 In the sun's broadside ray, *k*
 Some seed pinched in his bill. *l*
 Yet still *l*
 he did not stay, *k*
 25 But into a leaf-choken pane, *m*
 Changeful as even in heaven, *n*
 Even *n*
 in Saturn's reign, *m*
 Tunneled away and hid. *o*
 30 And then? But I cannot well *p*
 Tell *p*
 you all that he did. *o*
 It was like glancing at rough *q*
 Sketches tacked on a wall, *r*
 35 And all *r*
 so less than enough *q*
 Of gold on beaten wing, *s*
 I could not choose that one *t*
 Be done *t*
 40 as the finished thing. *s*

Although the rhyme scheme of this poem (*abba*, *cddc*, and so on) is regular, it is hardly noticeable until it is charted. Despite its subtlety, however, the rhyme scheme is not unimportant. In fact, it reinforces the poem's meaning and binds lines into structural units, connecting the first and fourth as well as the second and third lines of each stanza. In stanza 1,

"right" and "flight" draw lines 1 and 4 of the stanza together, enclosing "fame" and "came" in lines 2 and 3. The pattern begins again with the next stanza and continues through the rest of the poem. Like the elusive goldfinch the poet describes, the rhymes are difficult to follow with the eye. In this sense, the rhyme reflects the central theme of the poem: the difficulty of capturing in words a reality which, like the goldfinch, is ever shifting.

Naturally, rhyme does not have to be subtle to enrich a poem. An obvious rhyme scheme can communicate meaning by connecting ideas that are not normally linked. Notice how Alexander Pope uses this technique in the following excerpt from *An Essay on Man*:

Honour and shame from no condition rise;
Act well your part, there all the honour lies.
Fortune in men has some small diff'rence made,
One flaunts in rags, one flutters in brocade;
The cobbler aproned, and the parson gowned,
The friar hooded, and the monarch crowned.
"What differ more (you cry) than crown and cowl?"
I'll tell you, friend; a wise man and a fool.

You'll find, if once the monarch acts the monk,
Or, cobbler-like, the parson will be drunk,
Worth makes the man, and want of it, the fellow;
The rest is all but leather or prunella.¹

Stuck o'er with titles and hung round with strings,
That thou mayest be by kings, or whores of kings.
Boast the pure blood of an illustrious race,
In quiet flow from Lucrece² to Lucrece;
But by your fathers' worth if yours you rate,
Count me those only who were good and great.

The lines of this poem are written in **heroic couplets**, with a rhyme scheme of *aa, bb, cc, dd*, and so on. In heroic couplets, greater stress falls on the second line of each pair, usually on the last word of the line. Coming at the end of the line, this word receives double emphasis, strengthened both because of its position in the line and because it is rhymed with the last word of the couplet's first line. In some cases, it joins opposing ideas, thereby reinforcing a theme that runs through the passage: the contrast between the high and the low, the virtuous and the immoral. For example, "gowned" and "crowned" in lines 5 and 6 con-

POEMS FOR FURTHER READING: ALLITERATION, ASSONANCE, AND RHYME

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS
(1844-1889)

Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-color as a brindled¹ cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plow;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.²

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

READING AND REACTING

Identify examples of onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, imperfect rhyme, and perfect rhyme. Do you think all these techniques are essential to the poem? Are any of them annoying or distracting?

What is the central idea of this poem? In what way do the sounds of the poem help to communicate this idea?

Identify examples of masculine and feminine rhyme.

JOURNAL ENTRY Hopkins uses both pleasing and discordant sounds in his poem. Identify uses of euphony and cacophony, and explain how these techniques affect your reactions to the poem.

Related Works: "Women" (p. 744), "I Never Saw a Moor" (p. 788), "Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God" (p. 790)

¹ Heavy cloth the color of prunes.

² In Roman legend, she stabbed herself after being defiled by Sextus Tarquinius.

Presentation Rubric

2. Yuni Armida
 3. Rezki Tivani
 4. Rahma Iis
 5. Aulia Fadhlia

4

Evaluating Student Presentations					
	Developed by Information Technology Evaluation Services, NC Department of Public Instruction				
	1	2	3	4	Total
Organization	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	
Subject Knowledge	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.	
Graphics	Student uses superfluous graphics or no graphics	Student occasionally uses graphics that rarely support text and presentation.	Student's graphics relate to text and presentation.	Student's graphics explain and reinforce screen text and presentation.	
Mechanics	Student's presentation has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	
Eye Contact	Student reads all of report with no eye contact.	Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.	Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.	Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.	
Elocution	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly for students in the back of class to hear.	Student's voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.	Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.	
				Total Points:	

Name: _____

Date: _____

Essay Rubric

Directions: Your essay will be graded based on this rubric. Consequently, use this rubric as a guide when writing your essay and check it again before you submit your essay.

Traits	4	3	2	1
Focus & Details	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main ideas are clear and are well supported by detailed and accurate information.	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main ideas are clear but are not well supported by detailed information.	There is one topic. Main ideas are somewhat clear.	The topic and main ideas are not clear.
Organization	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic, and provides an overview of the paper. Information is relevant and presented in a logical order. The conclusion is strong.	The introduction states the main topic and provides an overview of the paper. A conclusion is included.	The introduction states the main topic. A conclusion is included.	There is no clear introduction, structure, or conclusion.
Voice	The author's purpose of writing is very clear, and there is strong evidence of attention to audience. The author's extensive knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are evident.	The author's purpose of writing is somewhat clear, and there is some evidence of attention to audience. The author's knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are evident.	The author's purpose of writing is somewhat clear, and there is evidence of attention to audience. The author's knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are limited.	The author's purpose of writing is unclear.
Word Choice	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words seems accurate, natural, and not forced.	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words is inaccurate at times and/or seems overdone.	The author uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety.	The writer uses a limited vocabulary. Jargon or clichés may be present and detract from the meaning.
Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling	All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes no errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling.	Most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes a few errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling, but they do not interfere with understanding.	Most sentences are well constructed, but they have a similar structure and/or length. The author makes several errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.	Sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive, or are difficult to understand. The author makes numerous errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.
Reviewer's Comments				

Lesson Plan

(SAP)

Course : Poetry 1 Credit Hour : 2
Study Program: English Code : ING 208
Faculty : Arts and Languages
Docent : Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
: Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A.

Learning Outcomes

Main Competence:

Upon the completion of the course, students are expected to be able appreciate poetry, especially the ones written in English

Supporting Competence:

Students are able to analyze thoughts or ideas conveyed in poetry

Soft skills/Character: Students are endowed with the ability to collaborate with others; express their opinion; show high commitment and passion in what they are doing; read between the lines and think critically.

Topics:

1. ACCORDING TO MY MOOD (Benjamin Zephaniah)
2. Language Barrier (Valerie Bloom)
3. Background, Casually (Nissim Ezekiel)
4. Do Not Say (Mohamad Bin Haji Saleh)
5. Sun-a-shine, Rain-a-fall (Valerie Bloom)

Lesson Plan

stage	Lecturer's Activities	Students' activities	Assessment	Media
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the overview of lesson in meeting 14-16 2. Explain the benefit students can gain from their ability to analyze ideas and thoughts conveyed in poetry 3. Explain the competences they should achieve by the end of meeting 16 	Listen to the lecture		Syllabus
Presentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activate students' background knowledge on the nature of poetry and elements of poetry 2. Remind them of active reading strategy in helping them to understand the poems and get to ideas and thoughts it might convey 3. Lead a class discussion on the following poem: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. ACCORDING TO MY MOOD (Benjamin Zephaniah) b. Language Barrier (Valerie Bloom) c. Background, Casually (Nissim) 	<p>Respond to the questions</p> <p>Students work in group to dig out possible ideas and thoughts conveyed in poems assigned to them.</p>	<p>A 3-4 pages paper discussing ideas and thoughts conveyed in poems of their choice</p> <p>An anthology of several poems which bear similarities in ideas or thoughts</p>	Photocopied texts which have been forwarded to them in advance.

	Ezekiel) d. Do Not Say (Mohamad Bin Haji Saleh) e. Sun-a-shine, Rain-a-fall (Valerie Bloom)			
Closing	<p>4. Close the session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ask students questions on topics which have been covered b. Respond to students' answer c. Assign them to be prepared for the anthology project 	Respond to the questions		

Assessment Rubric:

1. Essay rubric adopted from <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/printouts/Essay%20Rubric.pdf>
2. Poetry anthology rubric adopted from <http://www.learner.org/workshops/middlewriting/images/pdf/W3VJ-MAnthRub.pdf>

References:

1. Philips, N (e.d.). 1996. *The new oxford book of children's verse*. Oxford University Press: Oxford
2. Thieme, J (e.d.). 1996. *The Arnold anthology of post-colonial literatures in english*. Arnold: London.

Appendices

1. Photocopied material forwarded to students in advance

Sap3poetry12012

2. Rubric for students' essay
3. Rubric for student's anthology

**APPENDICES AND PHOTOCOPIED MATERIAL WHICH SERVES AS BOTH
TEACHING MATERIAL AND STUDENTS' WORK SHEET**

Part III

A selection of poems from the Postcolonial world

- ❖ Benjamin Zephaniah
- ❖ Nissim Ezekiel
- ❖ Muhammad Haji Saleh

VALERIE BLOOM

1956–

Sun-a-shine, Rain-a-fall

Sun a-shine an' rain a-fall,
 The Devil an' him wife cyan 'gree at all,
 The two o' them want one fish-head,
 The Devil call him wife bonehead,
 She hiss her teeth, call him cock-eye,
 Greedy, worthless an' workshy,
 While them busy callin' name,
 The puss walk in, sey is a shame
 To see a nice fish go to was'e,
 Lef with a big grin pon him face.

BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH

1958–

ACCORDING TO MY MOOD

∞ I have *poetic* licence, i WriTe thE way i waNt.
 i drop my full stops where i like...
MY CAPITAL LeteRs go where i liKE,
 i order from **MY PeN**, i verse **the way** i like
 (i do my spelling write)

According to My *MOod*.

i HAve Poetic licence,
 i put my **commers** where i like. ((O)).
 (((my brackets are write))
 I REPEAT WHen i likE.
 i can't go rong.
 i look and i.c.
 It's rite.
 iI REPEAT WHen i likE. i have
poetic licence!
 don't question me???

when me and she eye
mek four
the world was neither
more or less
but a moment of rightness

we tongue locked
in a syntax of yes

§ Language usage Bennett, Reid, Sparrow, Brathwaite (3), Bloom, Breeze;
TransC: Johnson, D'Aguiar

580
582

VALERIE BLOOM (1956-)

Language Barrier

Jamaica language sweet *yuh* know *bwoy*,
An *yuh* know *mi* nebba notice *i'*,
Till tarra day one foreign frien'
Come spen some time wid *mi*.

- 5 An den im call mi attention to
Some tings im sey soun' queer,
Like de way wi always sey 'koo yah'
When we really mean 'look here'.

10 Den annoda ting whey puzzle im,
Is how wi lub 'repeat' wise'
For de ongle time im repeat a wud
Is when smaddy half deaf.

15 Todda day im a walk outa road
An when im a pass one gate,
Im see one bwoy a one winda,
An one noddla one outside a wait.

20 Im sey dem did look kine o' nice
Soh im ben a go sey howdy,
But im tap shart when de fus' bwoy sey
'A ready *yuh* ready ready?'

12 smaddy: somebody.

Den like sey dat ney quite enuff,
Fe po' likkle foreign Hugh,
Him hear de nedda bwoy halla out,
'A come mi come fe come wait se *yuh*'.
yuh : *you*
and : *with*
mi : *me*
sey :

25 An dat is nat all dat puzzle him,
Why wi run wi words togedda?
For when im expec' fe hear 'the other',
him hear dis one word, 'toddla'.

Instead o' wi sey 'all of you'
Wi ongle sey unoo,
Him can dis remember sey
De wud fe 'screech owl' is 'patoo'.

35 As fe some expression him hear,
Im wouldn badda try meck dem out,
Like 'boonoonoonoos,' 'chamba-chamba',
An 'kibba up *yuh* mout'.

40 Him can hardly see de connection,
Between 'only' an 'dengey',
An im woulda like fe meet de smaddy
Who invent de wud 'preckey'.

45 Mi advise im no fe fret imself,
For de Spaniards do it to,
For when dem mean fe sey 'jackass',
Dem always sey 'burro'.

50 De French, Italian, Greek an Dutch,
Dem all guilty o' de crime
None a dem no chat im language,
Soh Hugh betta larn fe mime.

55 But sayin' dis an dat *yuh* know,
Some o' wi cyan eben undastan one anodda,
Eben doah wi all lib yah
An chat de same patois.

For from las' week mi a puzzle out,
Whey Joey coulda mean,

35 boonoonoonoos: term of endearment: pretty, beautiful; also pleasant; nice.

36 kibba: cover.

51 lib yah: live here.

35 chamba-chamba: disfigured; tattered.

40 preckey: foolish or credulous person; clown; so used adjectively.

55 When im teck im facey self soh ax
Ef any o' im undapants clean.

§ *Language usage* Bennett, Reid, Sparrow, Brathwaite (3), Bloom, Agard, Breeze; NZSP: Tuwhare; SEA: Mohamad Bin Haji Salleh; TransC: D'Aguiar

GRACE NICHOLS (1950-)

One Continent/To Another

Child of the middle passage womb
push
daughter of a vengeful Chi
she came
5 into the new world
birth aching her pain
from one continent/to another

moaning

her belly cry sounding the wind

10 and after fifty years
she hasn't forgotten
hasn't forgotten
how she had lain there
in her own blood
15 lain there in her own shit

bleeding memories in the darkness

how she stumbled onto the shore
how the metals dragged her down
how she thirsted

20 But being born a woman
she moved again
knew it was the Black Beginning
though everything said it was
the end

55 facey: impudent, cheeky.

1 middle passage womb: Atlantic slave ship.

3 Chi: personal god.

NISSIM EZEKIEL (1924—)

I: Background, Casually

I

A poet-rascal-clown was born,
The frightened child who would not eat
Or sleep, a boy of meagre bone.
He never learnt to fly a kite,
5 His borrowed top refused to spin.

I went to Roman Catholic school,
A mugging Jew among the wolves.
They told me I had killed the Christ,
That year I won the scripture prize.
10 A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.

I grew in terror of the strong
But undernourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong,
Repelled me by passivity.
15 One noisy day I used a knife.

At home on Friday nights the prayers
Were said. My morals had declined.
I heard of Yoga and of Zen.
Could I, perhaps, be rabbi-saint?
20 The more I searched, the less I found.

Twenty-two: time to go abroad.
First, the decision, then a friend
To pay the fare: Philosophy,
Poverty and Poetry, three
25 Companions shared my basement room.

II

The London seasons passed me by.
I lay in bed two years alone.
And then a Woman came to tell
My willing ears I was the Son
30 Of Man. I knew that I had failed.

In everything, a bitter thought.
So, in an English cargo-ship
Taking French guns and mortar shells
To Indo-China, scrubbed the decks.
35 And learned to laugh again at home.

How to feel it home, was the point.
Some reading had been done, but what
Had I observed, except my own
Exasperation? All Hindus are
40 Like that, my father used to say,

When someone talked too loudly, or
Knocked at the door like the Devil.
They hawked and spat. They sprawled around.
I prepared for the worst. Married,
45 Changed jobs, and saw myself a fool.

The song of my experience sung,
I knew that all was yet to sing.
My ancestors, among the castes,
Were aliens crushing seed for bread
50 (The hooded bullock made his rounds).

III

One among them fought and taught,
A Major bearing British arms.
He told my father sad stories
Of the Boer War, I dreamed that
55 Fierce men had bound my feet and hands.

The later dreams were all of words.
I did not know that words betray
But let the poems come, and lost
That grip on things the worldly prize.
60 I would not suffer that again.

I look about me now, and try
To formulate a plainer view:

49 crushing seed: Bene Israel tradition has it that their ancestors took to oil pressing soon after arrival in India.
Hence Shanmar i.e. Saturday oil-pressers, i.e. those who did not work on Saturdays. [author's note]

... LEKIEI

The wise survive and serve - to play
The fool, to cash in on
65 The inner and the outer storms.

The Indian landscape sears my eyes.
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.
They say that I am singular,
70 Their letters overstate the case.

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
75 My backward place is where I am.

§ Diverse cultural inheritances/borderline protagonists Aus: Malouf; Carib:
Walcott (2); SEA: Somtow

2: The Patriot

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting,
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi
5 I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct.
I should say even 200% correct.
But Modern generation is neglecting
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.

10 Other day I'm reading in newspaper
(Every day I'm reading Times of India
To improve my English Language)
How one goonda fellow
Throw stone at Indirabehn.
15 Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying
(to myself)
Lend me the ears.
Everything is coming -
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.
20 Be patiently, brothers and sisters.

13 goonda: rogue.

14 Indirabehn: Indira Gandhi, literally 'Sister Indira'.

WONG PHUI NAM (1935–)

Prospect in Spring

At the death of great houses
the waste of cities
the land returns to desolation
of its rivers and its hills;
5 the high walls under a mild sun
lie fissured
opened in great wounds
to the ravening tide of spring.
These flowers that well up from the ground
10 are tears I will weep
against adversity.
I think of you my children. My fear
darkens around this chirruping
of sparrows
15 fighting beneath the walls.
The skies these nights are louring red
with beacon fires
built for the invasion.
I would there were news from home.
20 Daily the comb slips more easily through my hair.
Of little use my passions held
this hair-pin in my fingers
which will not catch then falls
from the hair against the palm.

§ Politics and private lives Ee Tiang Hong (2), Thumboo, Jeyaretnam; SA: Hosain, Sahgal, Arasanayagam, Selvadurai; Elegy for older ways Ee Tiang Hong (1)

MOHAMAD BIN HAJI SALLEH (1942–)

Do Not Say

do not say my people are lazy
because you do not know.
you are only a critic, an onlooker.
you cannot know or judge,
5 passing the kampong in your car,
staring at economic data.

5 kampong: Malay village.

do not think my people are weak
because they are gentle,
because they do not build skyscrapers.

10 have you ever worked in a ladang,
or danced the ronggeng?
can you sing the dondang sayang?
do not think that we have only music
because we love life.

15 do not write that we have no literature, culture.
have you ever listened to the sajak or pantun
stayed a night at the bangsawan?
have you read the epic shairs
or the theological theses?

20 how many times have you wondered about history in
the blade
and ancestry in the handle of the keris,
or felt the pattern of the songket?
have you lived in a kampong?

25 do not condemn us as poor
because we have very few banks.
see, here the richness of our people,
the brimful hearts that do not grab or grapple.
we collect humanity from sun and rain and man,
transcending the business and the money.

30 do not tell us how to live
or organise such nice associations and bodies.
our society was an entity
before the advent of political philosophy.

35 do not say –
because you do not know.

§ Language usage Carib: Brathwaite (3), Bloom; NZSP: Tuwhare

10 ladang: clearing for non-irrigated farming.
12 dondang sayang: a type of serenade in which both members of a couple sing verses alternately.
17 bangsawan: Malay opera.
21 keris: traditional Malay dagger.
22 songket: hand-woven cloth, shot with gold or silver thread.

11 ronggeng: dance for couples, sometimes accompanied by song.
16 sajak: form of modern Malay verse.
18 shairs: literary form in which the language is rhythmic.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT ON TONE

Choose a poem from this chapter, and analyze its speaker's attitude toward the poem's main subject. Examine the author's choice of specific words and images to create the particular tone used to convey the speaker's attitudes. (Possible subjects include Wilfred Owen's attitude toward war in "Dulce et Decorum Est," the tone and imagery of Weldon Kees's "For My Daughter," Ted Hughes's view of the workings of nature in "Hawk Roosting," and Anne Bradstreet's attitude toward her own poetry in "The Author to Her Book.")

Here is an example of an essay written for this assignment by Kim Larsen, a student of Karen Locke's at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon.

SAMPLE STUDENT PAPER

Larsen 1

Kim Larsen
Professor Locke
English 110
21 November 2009

Word Choice, Tone, and Point of View in Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz"

Some readers may find Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" a reminiscence of a happy childhood scene. I believe, however, that the poem depicts a more painful and complicated series of emotions. By examining the choice of words that Roethke uses to convey the tone of his scene, I will demonstrate that beneath the seemingly comic situation of the poem is a darker story. The true point of view of "My Papa's Waltz" is that of a resentful adult reliving his fear of a domineering parent.

The first clue that the dance may not have been a mutually enjoyable experience is in the title itself. The author did not title the poem "Our Waltz" or "Waltzing with My Papa," either of which would set an initial tone for readers to expect a shared, loving sentiment. It does not even have a neutral title, such as "The Waltz." The title specifically implies that the waltz was exclusively the father's. Since a waltz normally involves two people, it can be reasoned that the father dances his waltz without regard for his young partner.

Title gives sense of the paper's focus

Name of author and work

Thesis sentence

Topic sentence on title's significance

Larsen 2

Examining each stanza of the poem offers numerous examples where the choice of words sustains the tone implied in the title. The first line, "The whiskey on your breath," conjures up an olfactory image that most would find unpleasant. The small boy finds it so overpowering he is made "dizzy." This stanza contains the only simile in the poem, "I hung on like death" (3), which creates a ghastly and stark visual image. There are many choices of similes to portray hanging on: a vine, an infant, an animal cub, all of which would have illustrated a lighthearted romp. The choice of "death" was purposefully used to convey an intended image. The first stanza ends by stating the "waltzing was not easy." The definitions of *easy*, as found in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, include "free from pain, annoyance or anxiety," and "not difficult to endure or undergo" ("Easy"). Obviously the speaker did not find those qualities in the waltz.

Further evidence of this harsh and oppressive scene is brought to mind by reckless disregard for "the pans / Slid from the kitchen shelf" (5-6), which the reader can almost hear crashing on the floor in loud cacophony, and the "mother's countenance," which "[c]ould not unfrown itself" (7, 8). If this were only a silly, playful romp between father and son, even a stern, fastidious mother might be expected to at least make an unsuccessful attempt to suppress a grin. Instead, the reader gets a visual image of a silent, unhappy woman, afraid, probably because of past experience, to interfere in the domestic destruction around her. Once more, this detail suggests a domineering father who controls the family.

The third stanza relates the father's "battered" hand holding the boy's wrist. The tactile image of holding a wrist suggests dragging or forcing an unwilling person, not holding hands as would be expected with a mutual dance partner. Further disregard for the son's feelings is displayed by the lines "At every step you missed / My right ear scraped a buckle" (11-12). In each missed step, probably due to his drunkenness, the father causes the boy physical pain.

The tone continues in the final stanza as the speaker recalls "You beat time on my head / With a palm caked hard by dirt" (13-14). The visual and tactile image of a dirt-hardened hand beating on a child's head as if it were a drum is distinctly unpleasant. The last lines, "Then waltzed me off to bed / Still clinging to your shirt" (15-16), are the most ambiguous in the poem. It can be reasoned, as X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia do, that the lines suggest

Topic sentence on word choice

Paragraph focus on first stanza

Textual evidence

Key word defined

Paragraph focuses on word choice in second stanza

Textual evidence

Discusses third stanza

Discusses final stanza

Larsen 3

Quotation from secondary source

"the boy is still clinging to his father with persistent if also complicated love" (20). On the other hand, if one notices the earlier dark images, the conclusion could describe a boy clinging out of fear, the physical fear of being dropped by one who is drunk and the emotional fear of not being loved and nurtured as a child needs to be by his father.

Transitional phrase

It can also be argued that the poem's rollicking rhythm contributes to a sense of fun, and in truth, the poem can be read in that fashion. On the other hand, it can be read in such a way as to de-emphasize the rhythm, as the author himself does in his recording of "My Papa's Waltz" (Roethke, Reads). The joyful, rollicking rhythm can be seen as ironic. By reminding readers of a waltzing tempo, it is highlighting the discrepancy between what a waltz should be and the bleak, frightening picture painted in the words.

Conclusion

While "My Papa's Waltz" can be read as a roughhouse comedy, by examining Roethke's title and choice of words closely to interpret the meaning of their images and sounds, it is also plausible to hear an entirely different tone. I believe "My Papa's Waltz" employs the voice of an embittered adult remembering a harsh scene in which both he and his mother were powerless in the presence of a drunk and domineering father.

Larsen 4

Works Cited

- "Easy." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. 2003. Print.
- Kennedy, X. J., and Dana Gioia, eds. *An Introduction to Poetry*. 13th ed. New York: Longman, 2010. 20. Print.
- Roethke, Theodore. "My Papa's Waltz." *An Introduction to Poetry*. Ed. X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia. 13th ed. New York: Longman, 2010. 19. Print.
- . *Theodore Roethke Reads His Poetry*. Audio Forum, 2006. CD.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Essay Rubric

Directions: Your essay will be graded based on this rubric. Consequently, use this rubric as a guide when writing your essay and check it again before you submit your essay.

Traits	4	3	2	1
Focus & Details	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main ideas are clear and are well supported by detailed and accurate information.	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main ideas are clear but are not well supported by detailed information.	There is one topic. Main ideas are somewhat clear.	The topic and main ideas are not clear.
Organization	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic, and provides an overview of the paper. Information is relevant and presented in a logical order. The conclusion is strong.	The introduction states the main topic and provides an overview of the paper. A conclusion is included.	The introduction states the main topic. A conclusion is included.	There is no clear introduction, structure, or conclusion.
Voice	The author's purpose of writing is very clear, and there is strong evidence of attention to audience. The author's extensive knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are evident.	The author's purpose of writing is somewhat clear, and there is some evidence of attention to audience. The author's knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are evident.	The author's purpose of writing is somewhat clear, and there is evidence of attention to audience. The author's knowledge and/or experience with the topic is/are limited.	The author's purpose of writing is unclear.
Word Choice	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words seems accurate, natural, and not forced.	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words is inaccurate at times and/or seems overdone.	The author uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety.	The writer uses a limited vocabulary. Jargon or clichés may be present and detract from the meaning.
Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling	All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes no errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling.	Most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes a few errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling, but they do not interfere with understanding.	Most sentences are well constructed, but they have a similar structure and/or length. The author makes several errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.	Sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive, or are difficult to understand. The author makes numerous errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.
Reviewer's Comments				

Poetry Anthology Rubric

Name _____ Date _____

<u>Item</u>	<u>Points</u>
I. Poems you've written Your name, date Ten or more	10 _____
II. Poems you've collected Author, response to each Forty or more	40 _____
III. Organization Title page Table of contents/sections	15 _____
IV. Reflections on poetry	15 _____
V. Artistic effects/neatness	20 _____

Total points _____

Reviewed by _____