

Introduction to Poetry

Poetic Terms/Devices

Poetry, language sung, chanted, spoken, or written according to some pattern of recurrence that emphasizes the relationships between words on the basis of sound as well as sense: this pattern is almost always a rhythm or “meter” which may be supplemented by rhyme or alliteration or both. The demands of verbal patterning usually make poetry a more condensed medium than prose or everyday speech, often involving variations in syntax, the use of special words and phrases (poetic diction) peculiar to poets, and a more frequent and more elaborate use of figures of speech. All cultures have their poetry, using it for various purposes from sacred ritual to obscene insult, but it is generally employed in those utterances and writings that call for heightened intensity of emotion, dignity of expression, or subtlety of meditation. Poetry is valued for combining pleasures of sound with freshness of ideas, whether these be solemn or comical. Some critics make an evaluative distinction between poetry, which is elevated or inspired, and verse which is merely clever or mechanical. The three major categories of poetry are narrative, dramatic, and lyric, the last being the most extensive.

The history of poetry begins where the history of all literature begins—with the **oral tradition**, information passed down from one generation to another by word of mouth.

The extended narratives were eventually transcribed as epics—long poems depicting the actions of heroic figures who determine the fate of a nation or of an entire race. Early epics include Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and Virgil’s *Aeneid*

Verse: This term has two major meanings. It refers to any single line of poetry or to any composition written in separate lines of more or less regular rhythm, in contrast to prose.

Types of Poetry:

Lyric poem: A short poem expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker. Often written in the first person, it traditionally has a songlike immediacy and emotional force.

Narrative poem: A poem that tells a story. **Ballads** and **epics** are two common forms of narrative poetry.

Dramatic monologue: A poem written as a speech made by a character at some decisive moment. The speaker usually addressing a silent listener.

Didactic poem: A poem intended to teach a moral lesson or impart a body of knowledge.

Listening to a Voice:

Tone: The mood or manner of expression of a literary work, which conveys an attitude toward the work’s subject, which may be playful, sarcastic, ironic, sad, solemn, or any other possible attitude. Tone helps to establish the reader’s relationship to the characters or ideas presented in the work.

Satiric poetry: Poetry that blends criticism with humor to convey a message, usually through the use of irony and a tone of detached amusement, withering contempt, and implied superiority.

Persona: Latin for “mask.” A fictitious character created by an author to be the speaker of a literary work.

Types of Irony

Irony: In language, discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. In life, a discrepancy between what is expected and what occurs.

Verbal irony: A mode of expression in which the speaker or writer says the opposite of what is really meant, such as saying “Great Story!” in response to a boring, pointless anecdote.

Dramatic irony: A situation in which the larger implications of a character’s words, actions, or situation are unrealized by that character but seen by the author and the reader or audience.

Cosmic irony: The contrast between a character’s position or aspiration and the treatment he or she receives at the hands of a seemingly hostile fate; also called **irony of fate**.

Sarcasm: A style of bitter irony intended to hurt or mock its target.

Tone

Theodore Roethke, "My Papa's Waltz"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43330/my-papas-waltz>

Thomas Hardy, “The Man He Killed”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44329/the-man-he-killed>

Irony

W.H. Auden "The Unknown Citizen"

<https://poets.org/poem/unknown-citizen>

Langston Hughes "Negro" (PDF/Schoolology)

The Speaker/ Voice

William Carlos’ "The Red Wheelbarrow"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45502/the-red-wheelbarrow>

Robert Browning "My Last Duchess" (Dramatic Poetry and Dramatic Monologue)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43768/my-last-duchess>

Words identify and name, characterize and distinguish, compare and contrast. Words describe, limit, and embellish; words locate and measure. Even though words may be elusive and uncertain and changeable, a single word—such as “beautiful” in the poem—can also be meaningful. In poetry, as in love and in politics, words matter.

Beyond the *quantitative*—how many words, how many letters and syllables—is a much more important consideration: the *quality* of words. Which words are chosen and why? Why 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: because poems are brief, they must compress many ideas into just a few lines; poets know how much weight each individual word carries, so they choose with great care, trying to select words that imply more than they state.

Poets may choose their words for their sound. For instance, a word may echo another word’s sound, and such repetition may place emphasis on both words; a word may rhyme with another word and therefore be needed to preserve the poem’s rhyme scheme; or a word 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.

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 or patriotism, for instance. **Specific words** refer to particular items; **general words** refer to entire classes or groups of items. (poem—closed form poem—sonnet—sixteenth-century sonnet—Elizabethan sonnet—sonnet by Shakespeare—My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun) – this is an example of the movement from general to specific.

Finally a word might be chosen for its **connotation**—what it suggests. Every word has one or more **denotations**—what it signifies without emotional association, judgments, or opinions. The word *family*, for example, denotes “a group of related things or people.” **Connotation** is a more complex matter, after all, 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 context.

Imagery: because the purpose of poetry is to expand the perception of readers, poets appeal to the senses. A poet uses imagery, language that evokes a physical sensation produced by one or more of the five senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell.

By choosing images carefully, poets not only create pictures in a reader’s mind but also create a great number of imaginative associations. These associations help poets to establish the

atmosphere or mood of the poem. The image of softly falling snow in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” 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 suggest exactly the same thing to all readers. Some images will be remembered experiences, whereas others will be imaginative creations. One advantage of imagery is its extreme economy. A few carefully chosen words enable poets to evoke a range of emotions and reactions.

Image: A word or series of words that refers to any sensory experience (include sight, although also sound, smell, touch, or taste). An image is a direct or literal recreation of physical experience and adds immediacy to literary language.

Imagery: the collective set of images in a poem or other literary work.

Visual Imagery: imagery that refers to the sense of sight or presents something one may see.

Auditory imagery: imagery refers to the sense of hearing.

Tactile imagery: imagery refers to the sense of touch.

Haiku: a haiku compresses words into a very small package. A haiku focuses on an image, not an idea. A traditional Japanese form, the haiku is a brief unrhymed poem that presents the essence of some aspect of nature, concentrating a vivid image in three lines. Although in the strictest sense a haiku consists of seventeen syllables divided into three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively, not all poets conform to this rigid structure.

Word Choice, Word Order

Walt Whitman, “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45479/when-i-heard-the-learn-d-astronomer>

Margaret Atwood’s “The City Planners”

https://www.best-poems.net/margaret_atwood/the_city_planners.html

Imagery

Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/12675/in-a-station-of-the-metro>

Robert Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay”

<https://poets.org/poem/nothing-gold-can-stay>

Jean Toomer's "Reapers"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46405/reapers>

About Haiku

Arakida Moritake's "The Falling Flower"

<https://orderredefined.wordpress.com/2014/01/06/deluded-from-arakida-moritakes-haiku-the-falling-flower/>

Matsuo Basho's "Heat-Lightning Streak"

<https://orderredefined.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/lightning-night-with-matsuo-bashos-heat-lightning-streak/>

Figures of Speech

Simile: A comparison of two things, indicated by some connective, usually *like*, *as*, or *than*, or verb such as *resembles*. A simile usually compares two things that initially seem unlike but are shown to have a significant resemblance. "Gool as a cucumber" and "My love is like a red, red rose" are examples of similes.

Metaphor: A statement that one thing *is* something else, which, in a literal sense, it is not. A metaphor creates a close association between the two entities and underscores some important similarity between them. An example of metaphor is "Richard is a pig."

Implied Metaphor: A metaphor that uses neither connective nor the verb *to be*. If we say "John crowed over his victory," we imply metaphorically that John is a rooster but do not say so specifically.

Mixed Metaphor: The (usually unintentional) combining of two or more incompatible metaphors, resulting in ridiculousness or nonsense. For example, "Mary was such a tower of strength that she breezed her way through all the work" ("towers" do not "breeze").

Personification: The endowing of thing, an animal, or an abstract term with human characteristics. Personification dramatizes the nonhuman world in tangibly human terms.

Apostrophe: A direct address to someone or something. In apostrophe, a speaker may address an inanimate object, a dead or absent person, an abstract thing, or a spirit.

Overstatement: Also called **hyperbole**. Exaggeration used to emphasize a point.

Understatement: An ironic figure of speech that deliberately describes something in a way that is less than the case.

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.”

Synecdoche: is the substitution of a part for the whole (for example, using *wheels* to refer to an automobile or *bread*—as in “Give us this day our daily bread”—to mean “Food”) or the whole for a part (for example, using the *law* to refer to a police officer).

Metaphor and Simile P 449

Terms for Review P 463 (the definition of the poetic devices).

William Shakespeare "Shall I compare thee to a Summer Day? **Simile, metaphor and personification**

<https://poets.org/poem/shall-i-compare-thee-summers-day-sonnet-18>

Sylvia Plath's "Metaphors"

<http://shslboyd.pbworks.com/f/Metaphors.pdf>

N. Scott Momaday "Simile"

<https://www.elacommoncorelessonplans.com/the-simile-poem-simile-by-n-scott-momaday.html>

Sylvia Plath "Daddy" **hyperbole and understatement**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48999/daddy-56d22aafa45b2>

Anne Bradstreet, “To My Dear and Loving Husband”. **Hyperbole & understatement**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43706/to-my-dear-and-loving-husband>

Richard Lovelace's “To Lucasta, Going to the Wars” **Metonymy and Synecdoche**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44658/to-lucasta-going-to-the-wars>

Nancy Mercado's “Going to Work” **Apostrophe**

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/poet-nancy-mercado-reflects-on-what-she-lost-in-going-to-work-after-9-11>

Sound

Rhythm: The recurring pattern of stresses and pauses in a poem. Rhythm can be created by the repetition of words and phrases or by the arrangement of words into line.

Rime or rhyme: two or more words that contain an identical or similar vowel sound, usually accented, with following consonant sounds (if any) identical as (*woo* and *stew*). An **exact rime** is a full rime in which the sounds following the initial letters of the words are identical in sound (*follow* and *hollow*).

Meter: is the recurrence of regular units of stressed and unstressed syllables. A **stress** (or accent) when one syllable is emphasized more than another, unstressed, syllable: *fo' r, ceps, ba', sic, il lu' sion, ma la' r I a.*

Foot: the basic unit of measurement in metrical poetry. Each separate meter is identified by the pattern and order of stressed and unstressed syllables in its foot.

Iamb: a metrical foot in verse in which an unaccented syllable is followed by an accented one (◡). The iambic measure is the most common one used in English poetry.

Iambic Pentameter: the most common meter in English verse, five iambic feet per line. Many fixed forms, such as the sonnet and heroic couplets, employ iambic pentameter.

Alliteration: the repetition of a consonant sound in a line of verse or prose. Alliteration can be used at the beginning of words (initial alliteration, as in “cool cats”) or internally on stressed syllables (internal alliteration as in “I met a traveler from an antique land.”)

Assonance: The repetition of two or more vowel sounds in successive words, which creates a kind of rime. Like alliteration, the assonance may occur initially (“all the awful auguries”) or internally (“white lilacs”).

Cacophony: a harsh, discordant sound often mirroring the meaning of the context in which it is used.

Euphony: the harmonious effect when the sound of the words connect with the meaning in a way pleasing to the ear and mind.

Onomatopoeia: an attempt to represent a thing or action by a word that imitates the sound associated with it. For example, tick-tock, twang, murmur, moo, vroom, gurgle, whizz.

Gwendolyn Brooks' “Sadie and Maud”- Rhythm

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43311/sadie-and-maud>

Emily Dickinson's "I like to see it Lap the Miles" - **Meter**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56019/i-like-to-see-it-lap-the-miles-383>

Frances Cornford, "The Watch" **Alliteration**

<https://www.poetry.com/poem/13693/the-watch>

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Splendor Falls on Castle walls" **Assonance**

<https://poets.org/poem/splendor-falls>

Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" - Rhyme/rime

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

William Butler Yeats' "Who Goes with Fergus". Cacophony and Euphony

<https://poets.org/poem/who-goes-fergus>

Emily Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz- when I died" **Onomatopoeia**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45703/i-heard-a-fly-buzz-when-i-died-591>

Closed Form: a generic term that describes poetry written in a pattern of meter, rime, lines, or stanzas. A closed form adheres to a set structure.

Open form/free verse: verse that has no set scheme—no regular meter, rime, or stanzaic pattern. Open form has also been called **free verse**.

Blank verse: verse that contains five iambic feet per line (iambic pentameter) and is not rimed ("Blank" means unrimed.)

Couplet: a two-line stanza in poetry, usually rimed and with lines of equal length.

Closed couplet/ heroic couplet: two rimes lines of iambic pentameter that usually contain an independent and complete thought or statement.

Quatrain: a stanza consisting of four lines, it is the most common stanza form used in English-language poetry.

Epic: a long narrative poem tracing the adventure of a popular hero. Epic poems are usually written in a consistent form and meter throughout.

Epigram: a very short comic poem, often turning at the end with some sharp with or unexpected stinger.

Ballad: traditionally, a song that tells a story. Ballads are characteristically compressed, dramatic, and objective in their narrative style.

Sonnet: a fixed form of fourteen lines poem, traditionally written in iambic pentameter and rimed throughout.

Italian/Petrarchan Sonnet: it rimes the **octave** (first eight lines) abba abba; the **sestet** (last six lines) rime pattern is cdc cdc or cde cde. The poem traditionally turns, or shifts in mood or tone, after the octave.

English/Shakespearean Sonnet: it has the following rime scheme organized into three quatrains and a concluding couplet: abab cdcd ef ef gg. The poem may turn—that is, shift in mood or tone—between any of the rime clusters. Usually it has an issue or a problem in the first three quatrains and the solution in the couplet

Sonnet: John Kate’s “On first Looking into Chapman’s Homer”—Italian/ Petrarchan Sonnet

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44481/on-first-looking-into-chapmans-homer>

William Shakespeare’s “When, in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes”- English/Elizabethan Sonnet

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45090/sonnet-29-when-in-disgrace-with-fortune-and-mens-eyes>

Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “What Is an Epigram

<https://poets.org/poem/what-epigram>

Carl Sandburg’s “Chicago” – Open Form

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/12840/chicago>

Anonymous, “Sir Patrick Spenser” **Ballad**

<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/sir-patrick-spens/>

E.E. Cummings, “Buffalo Bill's” **Free Verse**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47244/buffalo-bill-s>

Charles Simic, “The Magic Study of Happiness” **Prose Poetry**

<http://greatamericanprosepoems.blogspot.com/2012/03/magic-study-of-happiness-by-charles.html>