

# The Elements of Poetry

## A Poetry Review

### Types of Poems

- Lyric:** Subjective, reflective poetry with regular rhyme scheme and meter which reveals poet's thoughts and feelings to create a single, unique impression.  
Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"  
William Blake, "The Lamb," "The Tiger"  
Emily Dickinson, "Because I Could Not Stop for Death"  
Langston Hughes, "Dream Deferred"  
Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress"  
Walt Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"
- Narrative:** non-dramatic, objective verse with regular rhyme scheme and meter which relates a story or narrative.  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan"  
T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi"  
Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Wreck of the Deutschland"  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"
- Sonnet:** a rigid 14-line verse form, with variable structure and rhyme scheme according to type:  
a. **Shakespearian (English)** — three quatrains and concluding couplet in iambic pentameter, rhyming abab cdcd efef gg or abba cddc efef gg. The Spenserian sonnet is a specialized form with linking rhyme abab bcbc cdcd ee.  
Robert Lowell, "Salem"  
William Shakespeare, "Shall I compare Thee?"  
b. **Petrarchian (Italian)** — an octave and sestet, between which a break in thought occurs. The traditional rhyme scheme is abba abba cde cde (or -cdcdcd).  
John Milton, "On His Blindness"  
John Donne, "Death, Be Not Proud"
- Ode:** elaborate lyric verse which deals seriously with a dignified theme  
John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"  
Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind"  
William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"
- Blank Verse:** unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter  
Robert Frost, "Birches"  
John Milton, "Paradise Lost"  
Theodore Roethke, "I Knew a Woman"  
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*  
Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"
- Free Verse:** unrhymed lines without regular rhythm  
Walt Whitman, "The Last Invocation"  
William Carlos Williams, "Rain," "The Dance"  
Richard Wilbur, "Juggler"
- Epic:** a long, dignified narrative poem which gives the account of a hero important to his nation or race.  
Lord Byron, "Don Juan"  
John Milton, "Paradise Lost"  
Homer, "The Illiad," "The Odyssey"

**Dramatic Monologue:** a lyric poem in which the speaker addresses himself to persons around him; his speech deals with a dramatic moment in his life and manifests his character.

Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess"  
T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

**Elegy:** a poem of lament, meditating on the death of an individual.

W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats"  
John Milton, "Lycidas"  
Theodore Roethke, "Elegy for Jane"  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam A.H.H."

**Ballad:** simple, narrative verse which tells a story to be sung or recited: the folk ballad is anonymously handed down, while the literary ballad has a single author.

John Keats, "La Belle Dame sans Merci"  
Edward Arlington Robinson, "Richard Cory"  
William Butler Yeats, "The Fiddler of Dooney"

**Idyll:** lyric poetry describing the life of the shepherd in pastoral, bucolic, idealistic terms.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Idylls of the King"  
William Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper"

**Villanelle:** French verse form, strictly calculated to appear simple and spontaneous; five tercets and a final quatrain, rhyming aba aba aba aba abaa. Lines 1, 6, 12, 18 and 3, 9, 15, 19 are refrain.

Theodore Roethke, "The Walking"  
Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"

**Light Verse:** general category of poetry written to entertain, such as lyric poetry, epigrams, and limericks. It can also have a serious side as in parody or satire.

Vachel Lindsay, "The Congo"  
Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky"

**Haiku:** Japanese verse in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, often depicting a delicate image.

Matsuo Basko,           The lightening flashes!  
                                  And slashing through the darkness,  
                                  A night-heron's screech.

**Limerick:** humorous nonsense-verse in five anapestic lines rhyming aabba. a-lines being trimeter and b-lines dimeter.

Edward Lear            There was an old man at the Cape  
                                  Who made himself garments of crape  
                                  When asked "Will they tear?"  
                                  He replied "Here and there,  
                                  But they keep such a beautiful shape!"

**Meter** Meter is poetry's rhythm, or its pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Meter is measured in units of *feet*; the five basic kinds of metric feet are indicated below. Accent marks indicate stressed ( ) or unstressed ( ) syllables.

**Type of Metric Foot Accent/Stress Example**

Iambic	ba-loon
Trochaic	so-da
Anapestic	con-tra-dict
Dactylic	ma-ni-ac
Spondaic	man-made

Metrical units are the building blocks of lines of verse: lines are named according to the number of feet they contain:

Number of Metric Feet	Type of Line
one foot	monometer
two feet	dimeter
three feet	trimeter
four feet	tetrameter
five feet	pentameter
six feet	hexameter
seven feet	heptameter
eight feet	octometer (rare)

*Scansion* is the analysis of these mechanical elements within a poem to determine meter. Feet are marked off with slashes (/) and accented appropriately ( -stress, -unstressed). Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop For Death" is scanned here:

Because / I could / not stop / for Death  
 He kind- / ly stopped / for me  
 The car- / riage held / but just / our-selves  
 And Im- / mor-tal- / ity.

The feet in these lines are iambic ( ). The first and third lines have four feet and can be identified as iambic tetrameter. The second and fourth lines, with three feet each, are iambic trimeter. Therefore, the basic meter is iambic tetrameter.

Metric feet make up lines, which make up stanzas. A stanza is to a poet what a paragraph is to a narrative. Stanzas are identified by the number of lines they contain:

Number of Lines	Type of Stanza
2	couplet
3	tercet
4	quatrain
5	cinquain
6	sestet
7	septet
8	octet (octave)
9 (or more)	x-lined stanza

**Other Metric Terms:**

- amphibrach:** a foot with unstressed, stressed, unstressed syllables ( ) as Chicago.
- anacrusis:** an extra unaccented syllable at the beginning of a line before the regular meter begins  
 "Mine / by the right / of the white / election"  
 (Emily Dickinson)
- amphimacer:** a foot with stressed, unstressed, stressed syllables ( ) as attitude.
- catalexis:** an extra unaccented syllable at the ending of a line after the regular meter ends (opposite of anacrusis)  
 "I'll tell / you how / the sun / rose" (Emily Dickinson)
- caesura:** a pause in the meter or rhythm of a line.  
 Flood-tide below me! || I see you face to face!  
 (Walt Whitman: "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry")
- enjambement:** a run-on line, one continuing into the text without a grammatical break.  
 Green rustlings, more-than-regal charities  
 Drift coolly from that tower of whispered light.  
 (Hart Crane: "Royal Palm")

**Rhyme:**

**Rime** old spelling of rhyme, which is the repetition of like sounds at regular intervals, employed in *Versification*, the writing of verse.

**End Rhyme:** rhyme occurring at end of verse line; most common rhyme form.

I was angry with my *friend*,  
 I told my wrath, my wrath *did end*.  
 (William Blake, "A Poison Tree")

**Internal Rhyme:** rhyme contained within a line of verse.  
 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.  
 (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Blow, Bugle, Blow")

**Rhyme Scheme:** pattern of rhymes within a unit of verse; in analysis, each end rhyme-sound is represented by a letter.

Take, O take those lips away,	a
That so sweetly were forsworn;	b
And those eyes, the break of day,	a
Lights that do mislead the morn:	b
But my kisses bring again, bring again;	c
Seals of love, but seal'd in vain, seal'd in vain.	c

(William Shakespeare, "Take, O Take Those Lips Away")

**Masculine Rhyme:** rhyme in which only the last, accented syllable of the rhyming words correspond exactly in sound; most common kind of end rhyme.

She walks in beauty like the *night*  
 Of cloudless climes and starry *skies*;  
 And all that's best of dark and *bright*  
 Meet in her aspect and her *eyes*:  
 Thus mellowed to that tender *light*  
 Which heaven to gaudy day *denies*.  
 (Lord Byron, "She Walks in Beauty")

**Feminine Rhyme:** rhyme in which two consecutive syllables of the rhyme-words correspond, the first syllable carrying the accent; double rhyme.

Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying,  
 O the pain, the bliss of dying!  
 (Alexander Pope, "Vital Spark of Heavenly Flame")

**Half Rhyme (Slant Rhyme):** imperfect, approximate rhyme.

In the mustardseed sun.  
 By full tilt river and switchback sea  
 Where the cormorants scud,  
 In his hoouse on stilts high among beaks  
 (Dylan Thomas, "Poem on His Birthday")

**Assonance:** repetition of two or more vowel sounds within a line.

Burnt the fire of thine eyes  
 (William Blake, "The Tiger")

And do I smile, such cordial light  
 (Emily Dickinson, "My Life Had Stood, A Loaded Gun")

**Consonance:** repetition of two or more consonant sounds within a line.

And all is seared with trade; bleared smeared with toil;  
 And wears man's smudge and shares men's smell: the soil  
 (Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur")

Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,  
 Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.  
 (John Donne, "The Sun Rising")

**Alliteration:** repetition of two or more initial sounds in words within a line.

Bright black-eyed creature, brushed with brown.  
 (Robert Frost, "To a Moth Seen in Winter")

He clasps the crag with crooked hands  
 (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Eagle")

**Onomatopoeia:** the technique of using a word whose sound suggests its meaning.

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
 (Robert Frost, "Out, Out")

Veering and wheeling free in the open  
 (Carl Sandberg, "The Harbor")

**Euphony:** the use of compatible, harmonious sounds to produce pleasing, melodious effect.  
 I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,  
 When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them.  
 (Theodore Roethke, "I Knew a Woman")

And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows  
 (Alexander Pope, "Sound and Sense")

**Cacophony:** the use of inharmonious sounds in close conjunction for effect; opposite of euphony.  
 Or, my scrofulous French novel  
 On grey paper with blunt type!  
 Simply glance at it, you grovel  
 Hand and foot in Belial's gripe:  
 (Robert Browning, "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister")

But when loud surges lash the sounding shore  
 (Alexander Pope, "Sound and Sense")

### Poetic Devices and Figurative Language

**Metaphor:** figure of speech which makes a direct comparison of two unlike objects by identification or substitution.

All the world's a stage  
 (William Shakespeare, "As You Like It")

Death is the broom  
 I take in my hands  
 To sweep the world clean.  
 (Langston Hughes, "War")

**Simile:** a direct comparison of two unlike objects, using like or as.  
 The holy time is quiet as a nun  
 (William Wordsworth, "On the Beach at Calais")

And like a thunderbolt he falls  
 (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Eagle")

**Conceit:** an extended metaphor comparing two unlike objects with powerful effect. (It owes its roots to elaborate analogies in Petrarch and to the Metaphysical poets, particularly Donne.)

If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses are two;  
 Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.  
 (John Donne, "Valediction Forbidding Mourning")

**Personification:** figure of speech in which objects and animals have human qualities.

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

Into the jaws of Death,  
 Into the mouth of Hell.  
 (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade")

**Apostrophe:** addressing a person or personified object not present.

Little Lamb, who made thee?  
(William Blake, "The Lamb")

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!  
(John Milton, "Samson Agonistes")

**Metonymy:** the substitution of a word which relates to the object or person to be named, in place of the name itself

The serpent that did sting thy father's life  
Now wears his crown.  
(William Shakespeare, "Hamlet")

A spotted shaft is seen [snake]  
(Emily Dickinson, "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass")

**Synecdoche:** figure of speech in which a part represents the whole object or idea.

Not a *hair* perished. [person]  
(William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*)

And all mankind that haunted nigh  
Had sought their *household fire* [homes]  
(Thomas Hardy, "The Darkling Thrush")

**Hyperbole:** gross exaggeration for effect; overstatement.

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

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

**Litotes:** understatement for effect.

I am the American heartbreak—  
The rock on which Freedom  
Stumped its toe.  
(Langston Hughes, "American Heartbreak")  
[In this personification, Freedom did not just stump its toe, but was injured permanently.]

But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me!  
(William Wordsworth, "She Dwelt Among Untrodden Ways")  
[Wordsworth deeply loved the woman, and therefore felt deep sorrow not hinted at in these casual lines.]

**Irony:** the contrast between actual meaning and the suggestion of another meaning.

- a. **verbal irony**—meaning one thing and saying another.  
next to of course god america i love you\  
(e.e. cummings)

- b. **dramatic irony**—two levels of meaning—what the speaker says and what he means, and what the speaker says and the author means.  
 I stood upon a high place,  
 And saw, below, many devils  
 Running, leaping,  
 And carousing in sin.  
 One looked up grinning,  
 And said, "Comrade! Brother!"  
 (Stephan Crane, "I Stood Upon a High Place")
- c. **situational irony**—when the reality of a situation differs from the anticipated or intended effect; when something unexpected occurs.  
 What rough beast, its hour come round at last  
 Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?  
 (William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming")  
 [*The second coming of Christ is intended, but a rough beast will come instead.*]

**Symbolism:** the use of one object to suggest another, hidden object or idea.  
 In Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," the fork in the road represents a major decision in life, each road a separate way of life.

In Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," "Cupid's flames" symbolizes love.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Caged Skylark": "As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage" symbolizes man's spirit contained within the domains of society.

**Imagery:** the use of words to represent things, actions, or ideas by sensory description.

Night after Night  
 Her purple traffic  
 Strews the and with Opa Bales—  
 Merchantmen—poise upon Horizons—  
 Dip—and vanish like Orioles!  
 (Emily Dickinson, "This is the land Where Sunset Washes")

And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings  
 (Thomas Hardy, "Afterwards")

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;  
 He watches from his mountain walls,  
 And like a thunderbolt he falls.  
 (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Eagle")

**Paradox:** a statement which appears self-contradictory, but underlines a basis of truth.

Elected silence, sing to me.  
 (Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Habit of Perfection")

Were her first years the Golden Age; that's true,  
 But now she's gold oft-tried and ever-new.  
 (John Donne, "The Autumnal")

**Oxymoron:** contradictory terms brought together to express a paradox for strong effect.  
Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!  
Dove-feathered raven! wolvish-ravening lamb!  
(William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*)

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.  
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty")

**Allusion:** a reference to an outside fact, event, or other source.  
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras  
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings  
What a star sang and careless Muses heard  
(William Butler Yeats, "Among School Children"  
[*Pythagoras--Greek mathematician; Muses---mythological goddesses of beauty and music*])

In Breughel's great painting, *The Kermess*,  
the dancers go round, they go round and around  
(William Carlos Williams, "The Dance")