Poetry Kaleidoscope

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1 Poetry

Poetry (ancient Greek: ποιεω (poieo) = I create) is traditionally a written art form (although there is also an ancient and modern poetry which relies mainly upon oral or pictorial representations) in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content. The increased emphasis on the aesthetics of language and the deliberate use of features such as repetition, meter and rhyme, are what are commonly used to distinguish poetry from prose, but debates over such distinctions still persist, while the issue is confounded by such forms as prose poetry and poetic prose. Some modernists (such as the Surrealists) approach this problem of definition by defining poetry not as a literary genre within a set of genres, but as the very manifestation of human imagination, the substance which all creative acts derive from.

Poetry often uses condensed form to convey an emotion or idea to the reader or listener, as well as using devices such as assonance, alliteration and repetition to achieve musical or incantatory effects. Furthermore, poems often make heavy use of imagery, word association, and musical qualities. Because of its reliance on “accidental” features of language and connotational meaning, poetry is notoriously difficult to translate. Similarly, poetry’s use of nuance and symbolism can make it difficult to interpret a poem or can leave a poem open to multiple interpretations.

It is difficult to define poetry definitively, especially when one considers that poetry encompasses forms as different as epic narratives and haiku. Needless to say, many poets have given their own definitions. Carl Sandburg said that, "poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits." Robert Frost once said "Poetry is the first thing lost in translation."

Nature of poetry

Poetry can be differentiated from prose, which is language meant to convey meaning in a less condensed way, using more logical or narrative structures. This does not imply poetry is illogical. Poetry is often created from the desire to escape the logical, as well as expressing feelings and other expressions in a tight, condensed manner. English Romantic poet John Keats termed this escape from logic Negative Capability.
Prose poetry combines the characteristics of poetry with the superficial appearance of prose. Other forms include narrative poetry and dramatic poetry, used to tell stories and so resemble novels and plays.

The Greek verb ποιέω [poiéō (= I make or create)], gave rise to three words: ποιητής [poiētēs (= the one who creates)], ποίησις [poiēsis (= the act of creation)] and ποίημα [poiēma (= the thing created)]. From these we get three English words: poet (the creator), poesy (the creation) and poem (the created). A poet is therefore one who creates and poetry is what the poet creates. The underlying concept of the poet as creator is not uncommon. For example, in Anglo-Saxon a poet is a scop (shaper or maker) and in Scots makar.

**Tools**

**Sound**

Perhaps the most vital element of sound in poetry is rhythm. Often the rhythm of each line is arranged in a particular meter. Different types of meter played key roles in Classical, Early European, Eastern and Modern poetry. In the case of free verse, the rhythm of lines is often organized into looser units of cadence. Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams were three notable poets who rejected the idea that meter was a critical element of poetry, claiming it was an unnatural imposition into poetry.

Poetry in English and other modern European languages often uses rhyme. Rhyme at the end of lines is the basis of a number of common poetic forms, such as ballads, sonnets and rhyming couplets. However, the use of rhyme is not universal. Much modern poetry avoids traditional rhyme schemes. Classical Greek and Latin poetry did not use rhyme. Rhyme did not enter European poetry until the High Middle Ages, when adopted from the Arabic language. Arabs have always used rhymes extensively, most notably in their long, rhyming qasidas. Some classical poetry forms, such as Venpa of the Tamil language, had rigid grammars (to the point that they could be expressed as a context-free grammar), which ensured a rhythm. Alliteration played a key role in structuring early Germanic and English forms of poetry, alliterative verse. The alliterative patterns of early Germanic poetry and the rhyme schemes of Modern European poetry include meter as a key part of their structure, which determines when the listener expects instances of rhyme or alliteration to occur. Alliteration and rhyme, when used in poetic structures, help emphasise and define a rhythmic pattern. By contrast, the chief device of Biblical poetry in ancient Hebrew was parallelism, a rhetorical structure in which successive lines reflected each other in grammatical structure, sound structure, notional content, or all three; which lent itself to antiphonal or call-and-response performance.

Sound plays a more subtle role in free verse poetry by creating pleasing, varied patterns and emphasizing or illustrating semantic elements of the poem. Alliteration, assonance, consonance, dissonance and internal rhyme are among the ways poets use sound.
Euphony refers to the musical, flowing quality of words arranged in an aesthetically pleasing way.

**Form**

Poetry depends less on linguistic units of sentences and paragraphs. The structural elements are the line, couplet, strophe, stanza, and verse paragraph.

Lines may be self-contained units of sense, as in the well-known lines from William Shakespeare's Hamlet:

> To be, or not to be: that is the question.

Alternatively a line may end in mid-phrase or sentence:

> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

this linguistic unit is completed in the next line,

> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

This technique is called enjambment, and is used to create expectation, adding dynamic tension to the verse.

In many instances, the effectiveness of a poem derives from the tension between the use of linguistic and formal units. With the advent of printing, poets gained greater control over the visual presentation of their work. As a result, the use of these formal elements, and of the white space they help create, became an important part of the poet's toolbox. Modernist poetry tends to take this to an extreme, with the placement of individual lines or groups of lines on the page forming an integral part of the poem's composition. In its most extreme form, this leads to concrete poetry.

**Rhetoric**

Rhetorical devices such as simile and metaphor are frequently used in poetry. Aristotle wrote in his Poetics that "the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor". Since the rise of Modernism, some poets have opted for reduced use of these devices, attempting the direct presentation of things and experiences. Surrealists have pushed rhetorical devices to their limits, making frequent use of catachresis.

**History**

Poetry as an art form predates literacy. Poetry was employed as a means of recording oral history, storytelling (epic poetry), genealogy, and law. Poetry is often closely identified with liturgy in pre-literate societies. Many of the scriptures currently held to be sacred by contemporary religious traditions with their roots in antiquity were composed as poetry
rather than prose to aid memorization and help guarantee the accuracy of oral transmission in pre-literate societies. As a result many of the poems surviving from the ancient world are a form of recorded cultural information about the people of the past, and their poems are prayers or stories about religious subject matter, histories about their politics and wars, and the important organizing myths of their societies.

The use of verse to transmit cultural information continues today. Many English-speaking Americans know that "in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue". An alphabet song teaches the names and order of the letters of the alphabet; another jingle states the lengths and names of the months in the Gregorian calendar. Some writers believe poetry has its origins in song. Most of the characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of utterance—rhythm, rhyme, compression, intensity of feeling, the use of refrains—appear to have come about from efforts to fit words to musical forms. In the European tradition the earliest surviving poems, the Homeric and Hesiodic epics, identify themselves as poems to be recited or chanted to a musical accompaniment rather than as pure song. Another interpretation is that rhythm, refrains, and kennings are essentially paratactic devices that enable the reciter to reconstruct the poem from memory.

In preliterate societies, these forms of poetry were composed for, and sometimes during, performance. There was a certain degree of fluidity to the exact wording of poems. The introduction of writing fixed the content of a poem to the version that happened to be written down and survive. Written composition meant poets began to compose for an absent reader. The invention of printing accelerated these trends. Poets were now writing more for the eye than for the ear.

The development of literacy gave rise to more personal, shorter poems intended to be sung. These are called lyrics, which derives from the Greek lura or lyre, the instrument that was used to accompany the performance of Greek lyrics from about the seventh century BC onward. The Greek's practice of singing hymns in large choruses gave rise in the sixth century BC to dramatic verse, and to the practice of writing poetic plays for performance in their theatres. In more recent times, the introduction of electronic media and the rise of the poetry reading have led to a resurgence of performance poetry. The late 20th-century rise of the singer-songwriter, Rap culture, and the increase in popularity of Slam poetry have led to a split between the academic and popular views.

1.1 Nature of Poetry

1.1.1 Prose Poetry

Prose poetry is prose that breaks some of the normal rules of prose discourse for heightened imagery or emotional effect.

As a specific poetic form, prose poetry originated in the 19th century in France. French prose was governed by laws so strict that by breaking them, it was possible to create prose that was seen to be intended as poetry. Poets such as Aloysius Bertrand, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stephane Mallarmé were among the founders of the
form. The form continued to be practiced in France and found profound expression in the prose poems of Francis Ponge in the mid twentieth century.

It used to be said that prose poetry was impossible in English, because the English language was not so strictly governed by rules as the French was. In the twentieth century, when English prose has become more and more governed by the iron laws of Strunk and White, this may no longer be the case. Rapturous, rhythmical, and image-laden prose from previous centuries, such as is found in Jeremy Taylor or Thomas de Quincey, strikes 21st century readers as having something of a poetic quality.

1.1.2 Poem and Song

Where verse is set to music, the distinction between poem and song may become artificial — to the point of being untenable. This is perhaps recognised in the way popular songs have lyrics. The verse, however, may precede in time the tune (in the way that "Rule Britannia" was set to music, and "And did those feet in ancient time" has become the hymn "Jerusalem"); the tune may be lost over time but the words survive; a number of alternate tunes may fit (this is particularly common with hymns and ballads).

Possible classifications proliferate (under anthem, ballad, blues, carol, folk song, hymn, libretto, lied, lullaby, march, praise song, round, spiritual). Nursery rhymes may be songs, or doggerel: the term doesn't imply a distinction. The ghazal is a sung form that is considered primarily poetic. See rapping, roots of hip hop music also, on the boundaries: verse+music against verse against verse set to music.

Analogously, verse drama might normally be judged (at its best) as poetry, but not consisting of poems (see dramatic verse). Again there are genres as far apart as masque and pantomime.

1.1.2.1 Poesybeat

Poesybeat is an online collaborative artform whereby participants combine music and poetry together into a new musical style. The authors of the music and the poetry often have never met one another. The premiere site for this style is poesybeat.org, a not-for-profit site that promotes the poesybeat artform.

1.2 End-stopping

End-stopping is a feature in poetry where the syntactic unit (phrase, clause, or sentence) corresponds in length to the line. Its opposite is enjambment (also spelled enjambment), where the sense runs on into the next line. According to A. C. Bradley, "a line may be called 'end-stopped' when the sense, as well as the metre, would naturally make one pause at its close; 'run-on' when the mere sense would lead one to pass to the next line without any pause."
An example of end-stopping can be found in the following extract from *The Burning Babe* by Robert Southwell; the end of each line corresponds to the end of a clause.

As I in hoary winter's night stood shivering in the snow,  
Surprised I was with sudden heat, which made my heart to glow;  
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,  
A pretty babe all burning bright did in the air appear.

The following extract from *The Winter's Tale* by Shakespeare is heavily enjambed.

I am not prone to weeping, as our sex  
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew  
Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have  
That honourable grief lodged here which burns  
Worse than tears drown.

In this extract from *The Gap* by Sheldon Vanauken, the first and third lines are enjambed, while the second and fourth are end-stopped:

All else is off the point: the Flood, the Day  
Of Eden, or the Virgin Birth—Have done!  
The Question is, did God send us the Son  
Incarnate crying Love! Love is the Way!

Scholars such as A. C. Bradley and Goswin König have estimated approximate dates of undated works of Shakespeare by studying the proportion of end-stopping to enjambment, the former being more typical of Shakespeare's early plays, and the latter a feature of his later works.

### 1.3 Groups and Movements

#### 1.3.1 Confessionalism

Confessionalism is a label formally applied to a style of American poetry that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. The label continues to be applied, though usually in a derogatory sense, to poetry about personal experience, particularly when that poetry is written carelessly or thoughtlessly.

Confessionalist poets draw on personal history for their inspiration. Often well schooled in verse traditions, they choose to mine their own lives for subject matter, often using personal trauma as fuel for literary or dramatic effect. Of the poets emerging in the late 1950s, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton are most commonly identified as Confessionalists. Much of John Berryman's work is considered Confessionalist, and Robert Lowell is widely regarded as the most accomplished in the Confessionalist movement. There are strong Confessionalist elements in the work of the Beat poets in the 1950s and 1960s, notably in Allen Ginsberg.
Many Confessionalist writers explore themes of madness in their poetry. Although most Confessionalist poets of the 1950s and 1960s met and knew each other, they did not seek to identify themselves as part of a distinct literary movement. The label was developed and applied to the movement in the 1970s.

1.3.2 Black Mountain Poets

The Black Mountain poets, sometimes called the Projectivist poets, were a group of mid 20th century American avant-garde or postmodern poets centered around Black Mountain College.

Background

Black Mountain College, which operated from 1933 to 1956, was one of the leading experimental schools of art in the United States. The college attracted leading figures from across the arts as teachers. These included Josef Albers, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Buckminster Fuller, Walter Gropius and Charles Olson. Guest lecturers included Albert Einstein, Clement Greenberg, and William Carlos Williams.

Projective Verse

In 1950, Olson published his seminal essay, *Projective Verse*. In this, he called for a poetry of "open field" composition to replace traditional closed poetic forms with an improvised form that should reflect exactly the content of the poem. This form was to be based on the line, and each line was to be a unit of breath and of utterance. The content was to consist of "one perception immediately and directly (leading) to a further perception". This essay was to become a kind of de facto manifesto for the Black Mountain poets. One of the effects of narrowing the unit of structure in the poem down to what could fit within an utterance was that the Black Mountain poets developed a distinctive style of poetic diction (e.g. "yr" for "your").

The Main Black Mountain Poets

In addition to Olson, the poets most closely associated with Black Mountain include Larry Eigner, Robert Duncan, Ed Dorn, Paul Blackburn, Hilda Morley, John Wieners, Denise Levertov, Jonathan Williams and Robert Creeley. Creeley worked as a teacher and editor of the Black Mountain Review for two years, moving to San Francisco in 1957. Here, he acted as a link between the Black Mountain poets and the Beats, many of whom he had published in the review.

Legacy of the Black Mountain Poets

Apart from their strong interconnections with the Beats, the Black Mountain poets influenced the course of later American poetry via their importance for the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. They were also important for the development of
innovative British poetry since the 1960s, as evidenced by such poets as Tom Raworth and J. H. Prynne.

1.3.3 Deep Image

Deep image is a term coined by Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Kelly in the second issue of Trobar, and was used to describe poetry written by him and by Robert Kelly, Diane Wakoski and Clayton Eshleman.

In creating the term, Rothenberg was inspired by the Spanish *canto jondo* (deep song), especially the work of Federico Garcia Lorca and by the symbolist theory of correspondences.

In general, deep image poems are resonant, stylised and heroic in tone. Longer poems tend to be catalogues of free-standing images.

The deep image group was short-lived in the manner that Kelly and Rothenberg used.

It was later redeveloped by Robert Bly and used by many, such as Galway Kinnel and James Wright. The redevelopment relied on being concrete, not abstract, and to let the images make the experience and to let the images and experience generate the meanings. This new style of Deep Image tended to be narrative, but was often lyrical.

1.4 Poetic closure

Poetic closure is a term referring to the sense of conclusion that the ending of poems gives. Barbara Herrnstein Smith's detailed study—Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End—explores various techniques for achieving a sense of 'closure'. One of the most common techniques is setting up a regular pattern and then breaking it to mark the end of a poem. Another technique is to refer to subject matter that in itself provides a sense of closure: death is the clearest example of this.

1.5 Poetic diction

Poetic diction is the term used to refer to the linguistic style, the vocabulary, and the metaphors used in the writing of poetry. In the Western tradition, all these elements were thought of as properly different in poetry and prose up to the time of the Romantic revolution, when William Wordsworth challenged the distinction in his Romantic manifesto, the Preface to the third (1802) edition of Lyrical Ballads (1798). Wordsworth proposed that a "language near to the language of men" was as appropriate for poetry as it was for prose. This idea was very influential, though more in theory than practice: a special "poetic" vocabulary and mode of metaphor persisted in 19th century poetry. It was deplored by the Modernist poets of the 20th century, who again proposed that there is no such thing as a "prosaic" word unsuitable for poetry.
Greece and Rome

In some languages, "poetic diction" is quite literally a dialect usage. In Classical Greek literature, for example, certain linguistic dialects were seen as appropriate for certain types of poetry. Thus, tragedy and history would employ different Greek dialects. In Latin, poetic diction involved not only a vocabulary somewhat uncommon in everyday speech, but syntax and inflections rarely seen elsewhere. Thus, the diction employed by Horace and Ovid will differ from that used by Julius Caesar, both in terms of word choice and in terms of word form.

The first writer to discuss poetic diction in the Western tradition was Aristotle (384 BC—322 BC). In his Poetics, he stated that the perfect style for writing poetry was one that was clear without meanness. He went on to define meanness of style as the deliberate avoidance of unusual words. He also warned against over-reliance on strange words:

"The perfection of Diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean. The clearest indeed is that made up of the ordinary words for things, but it is mean… A certain admixture, accordingly, of unfamiliar terms is necessary. These, the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental equivalent, etc., will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness. What helps most, however, to render the Diction at once clear and non-prosaic is the use of the lengthened, curtailed, and altered forms of words." ¹

Germanic languages

Germanic languages developed their own form of poetic diction. In Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse, poetry often involved exceptionally compressed metaphors called "kennings", such as whale-road for "the sea", or sword-weather for "battle". Also, poetry often contained riddles (e.g. the Gnomic Verses in Anglo-Saxon). Therefore, the order of words for poetry as well as the choice of words reflected a greater tendency to combine words to form metaphor.

In Iceland, Snorri Sturlusson wrote the Prose Edda, a.k.a. the Younger Edda around 1200 A.D., partially to explain the older Edda and poetic diction. Half of the Prose Edda, the Skáldskaparmál ("language of poetry creation" or "creative language of poets"), is a manual of traditional Icelandic poetic diction, containing a list of kennings. The list is systematized so as to function as a practical thesaurus for the use of poets wishing to write in the genuine old manner, and structured as an FAQ. Snorri gives traditional examples and also opens the way for creating correct new kennings:

"How should man be periphrased? By his works, by that which he gives or receives or does; he may also be periphrased in terms of his property, those things which he possesses, and, if he be liberal, of his liberality; likewise in terms of the families from which he descended, as well as of those which have sprung from him. How is one to periphrase him in terms of these things? Thus, by calling him accomplisher or performer of his goings or his conduct, of his battles or sea-
voyages or huntings or weapons or ships.… Woman should be periphrased with reference to all female garments, gold and jewels, ale or wine or any other drink, or to that which she dispenses or gives; likewise with reference to ale-vessels, and to all those things which it becomes her to perform or to give. It is correct to periphrase her thus: by calling her giver or user of that of which she partakes. But the words for 'giver' and 'user' are also names of trees; therefore woman is called in metaphorical speech by all feminine tree-names.²

Asia

In Japanese poetry, the formal rules for writing haiku and renga require that each poem include a reference to a specific season of the year. This linking is achieved by using season-words called kigo, and Japanese poets regularly use a Saijiki, or kigo dictionary that contains lists of words and examples of their use.

Poetic diction in English

In English, poetic diction has taken multiple forms, but it generally mirrors the habits of Classical literature. Highly metaphoric adjective use, for example, can, through catachresis, become a common "poetic" word (e.g. the "rosey-fingered dawn" found in Homer, when translated into English, allows the "rose fingered" to be taken from its Homeric context and used generally to refer not to fingers, but to a person as being dawn-like). In the 17th century, Edmund Spenser (and, later, others) sought to find an appropriate language for the Epic in English, a language that would be as separate from commonplace English as Homeric Greek was from koine. Spenser found it in the intentional use of archaisms. (This approach was rejected by John Milton, who sought to make his epic out of blank verse, feeling that common language in blank verse was more majestic than difficult words in complex rhymes.)

In the 18th century, pastoral and lyric poetry both developed a somewhat specialized vocabulary and poetic diction. The common elision within words ("howe'er" and "howsome," e.g.) were not merely graphical. As Paul Fussell and others have pointed out, these elisions were intended to be read aloud exactly as printed. Therefore, these elisions effectively created words that existed only in poetry. Further, the 18th century saw a renewed interest in Classical poetry, and thus poets began to test language for decorum. A word in a poem needed to be not merely accurate, but also fitting for the given poetic form. Pastoral, lyric, and philosophical poetry was scrutinized for the right type of vocabulary as well as the most meaningful. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele discussed poetic diction in The Spectator, and Alexander Pope satirized inappropriate poetic diction in his 1727 Peri Bathos.

The Romantics explicitly rejected the use of poetic diction, a term which William Wordsworth uses pejoratively in the 1802 "Preface to Lyrical Ballads":

"There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction; I have taken as much pains to avoid it as others ordinarily take to produce
it; this I have done for the reason already alleged, to bring my language near to
the language of men, and further, because the pleasure which I have proposed to
myself to impart is of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many
persons to be the proper object of poetry."

In an appendix, "By what is usually called poetic diction", Wordsworth goes on to define
the poetic diction he rejects as above all characterized by heightened and unusual words
and especially by "a mechanical adoption of… figures of speech, … sometimes with
propriety, but much more frequently applied… to feelings and ideas with which they had
no natural connection whatsoever". The reason that a special poetic diction remote from
prose usage gives pleasure to readers, suggests Wordsworth, is "its influence in
impressing a notion of the peculiarity and exaltation of the Poet's character, and in
flattering the Reader's self-love by bringing him nearer to a sympathy with that
character." As an extreme example of the mechanical use of conventionally "poetic"
metaphors, Wordsworth quotes an 18th-century metrical paraphrase of a passage from the
Old Testament:

   How long, shall sloth usurp thy useless hours,
   Unnerve thy vigour, and enchain thy powers?
   While artful shades thy downy couch enclose,
   And soft solicitation courts repose,
   Amidst the drowsy charms of dull delight,
   Year chases year with unremitted flight,
   Till want now following, fraudulent and slow,
   Shall spring to seize thee, like an ambushed foe.3

"From this hubbub of words", comments Wordsworth, "pass to the original… 'How long
wilt thou sleep, 0 Sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a
little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that
travailleth, and thy want as an armed man.'" (Proverbs, vii, 6)

At the same time, Wordsworth himself, and Coleridge had an interest in the archaisms
found in the border regions of England and introduced dialect into their poetry. While
such language was "unnatural" to the London readership, Wordsworth was careful to
point out that he was using it not for an exotic or elevated effect, but as a sample of the
contemporary "language of men", specifically the language of poor, uneducated country
folk. On the other hand, the later Romantic poet John Keats had a new interest in the
poetry of Spenser and in the "ancient English" bards, and so his language was often quite
elevated and archaic.

Modernism, on the other hand, rejected specialized poetic diction altogether and without
reservation. Ezra Pound, in his Imagist essay/manifesto A Few Don'ts (1913) warned
against using superfluous words, especially adjectives (compare the use of adjectives in
the 18th-century poem quoted above) and also advised the avoidance of abstractions,
stating his belief that 'the natural object is always the adequate symbol'. Since the
Modernists, poetry has approached all words as inherently interesting, and some schools
of poetry after the Modernists (Minimalism and Plain language, in particular) have insisted on making diction itself the subject of poetry.

1.6 Action Poetry

**Action Poetry** is the active use of poetry, often spreading in a community. It might include painting poetry on murals, or distributing poetry. It can also involve the encouragement of live poetry recitings and distribution of free poetry.

1.7 Ethnopoetics

**Ethnopoetics** refers to poetic traditions which are typically seen as tribal or otherwise ethnic by the Western world (or indeed between any ethnoculturally different peoples). Within the field of linguistics, it refers to the study of linguistic use and structure in oral narration, including poetry, prose narratives, such as folk tales, ceremonial speech and other forms of extended utterances. It may also refer to the act of hearing poetries of perceived distant people, often this distance is in terms of time. Examples are the poetry of Native Americans, the Native Hawaiian Pidgin, and tribal Africans.

1.8 Poets

**Poet** is a term applied to a person who composes poetry, including extended forms such as dramatic verse. Poets, like any artist, exist within a cultural and intellectual tradition and generally write in a specific language, but the qualities which comprise good poetry are to some extent timeless and address issues common to all humanity.

In the English language, poets often considered to be some of the very best include Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, and T.S. Eliot. In the Western tradition, Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Goethe round out a basic list. In world poetry, Li Bai, Du Fu, Basho, and Omar Khayyám complete one defensible canon. Unfortunately, the very definition of a canon is political and personal, and so no objectivity can be pretended to. For a young poor African-American New Yorker, Patricia Smith may very well be the foremost poet who ever lived. An Australian might see the work of Banjo Paterson as epitomizing universal human values. The French may demand the inclusion of Baudelaire; a homosexual, Allen Ginsberg. No matter how large or small of a group is defined, the list of definitive poets would change, just as the notion of poetry itself cannot be strictly defined. Perhaps the best approach is simply to rely on numerous inclusionist lists:

Bad poets are sometimes called poetasters and what they write is sometimes termed doggerel.

**Life of a poet**
Any five-year-old making up a nonsense rhyme is to some degree a poet in the oral tradition. To be generally recognized as a poet, however, one needs to create work that receives widespread distribution and study. Certain correlations and characteristics stand out in the biographies of the major poets. First, most poets come from an haute bourgeois (upper-middle) class or lower-upper class background. Academics speculate that this may be so because ordinary middle-class people aspire to increase or maintain their social standing, whereas the aristocracy become involved in politics and power. This particular social standing (high-middle/low-high) allows for an elevated education, access to social knowledge of the very powerful, yet also sufficient connexion to ordinary life so as to understand the basic feelings of the poor and alienated as well as the experiences of the common man. Perhaps no combination is more fruitful to developing a broad, critical understanding of the human condition.

The biographies of poets typically include as well some sort of personal or identity alienation. Homer, of course, was reportedly blind and his appellation suggests that he was the son of captured prisoners-of-war, and thus ineligible for full participation in the political life of his state. Virgil was of non-Roman descent, and actively promoted (and perhaps subverted) the concept of a universal, mixed-blood Rome in his work. Currents of homosexuality, pedarasty, or other deviant sexualities are clearly evident in both the works and days of Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Ginsberg, and many other poets. Conversely, deviant political ideologies mar history's reception of such greats as Ezra Pound (who made propaganda broadcasts on behalf of fascist Italy) and T.S. Eliot (whose anti-Semitic inclinations are well-documented). See creativity theory for more research into how creativity proceeds out of the "gaps" and through the conflation of different intellectual currents.

Once they have established their name, poets, through their connexion to the eternal, often fully ascend into the ranks of the aristocracy, although continued identification and membership in bohemia is also not unknown. Today, there are a grand total of zero poets who are self-maintaining themselves entirely in the marketplace, just as history itself includes only a very limited number of examples, even for short periods of poet lives. Patrons and the state have long been the solution to this particular problem, including through such institutions as the poet laureate.

Poets and society

Perhaps no other occupation demands so much thought for so little output, epitomized in the Japanese haiku tradition, which involves production of seventeen syllable poems. Even in other traditions including thousand-line poems, a poet's total lifetime output might fill only two or three volumes. For this reason, poets occupy a peculiar position in society, even when compared to other artists. A painter might easily find work producing architectural drawings or caricatures. Other creative writers can work on industry trade journals or grant proposals. Musicians can busk, score sound for movies or videogames, perform at weddings, or otherwise earn a living in addition to their creative side projects. Poets, however, tend to be either on the fringes of or at the very center of their culture. Until they achieve prominence, they are stereotypically poor or low in prestige. Such a
distinction even holds within the context of a specific institution: the "poet" of a given high school or college class is often a moody, introverted individual, disconnected from mainstream social life. However, poets who receive recognition from authority suddenly find themselves the very spokesperson of their generation or group.

Because of this "most very low; a few very high" dynamic, the practice of poetry itself is oftentimes a hobby or side activity rather than the central focus on an individual's life. In the tradition of courtly love, a knight would become a poet only when inspired by his lady love. After having his initial advances rejected, he would then become very moody and exclaim how close he felt to death. He might then produce a number of usually very poorly-written verses (or find a skilled friend to write them for him), before eventually recovering his will to live and returning to his knightly duties (only in which he could ever hope to win honours and the heart of his love). Full-time poets of remarkable skill might be maintained by a lord or by royalty, but the average knight was only a poet for brief period of his life, if ever so.

In the east, poets were similarly maintained by royal patronage, and those of high birth were expected to develop this skill alongside many others. Within the tradition of Japanese chivalry, bushido, Japanese knights, known as samurai, were expected to become poets only once: right before death. Thus, the tradition of love poems does not exist in Japan, but the quantity and quality of death poems is renowned.

1.8.1 Poetaster

Poetaster, rhymester or versifier are contemptuous names often applied to bad or inferior poets.

The original poetasters were John Marston and Thomas Dekker as this was the name given to a 1601 play by Ben Jonson—the first to use the word in print—lampooning these two writers.

While poetaster has always been a negative appraisal of a poet's skills, rhymester (or rhymer) and versifier have held an ambiguous meanings depending on the commentator’s opinion of a writer's verse. Versifier is often used to refer to someone who produces work in verse with the implication that while technically able to make lines rhyme they have no real talent for poetry. Rhymer on the other hand is usually always impolite despite attempts to salvage the reputation of rhymers such as the Rhymers' Club and Rhymer being a common last name.

The faults of a poetaster frequently include errors or lapses in their work's meter, badly rhyming words which jar rather than flow, over sentimentality, too much use of the pathetic fallacy and unintentionally bathetic choice of subject matter. Although a mundane subject in the hands of some great poets can be raised to the level of art such as On First Looking into Chapman's Homer by John Keats or Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes by Thomas Gray others merely produce
bizarre poems on bizarre subjects. A good/bad example being James McIntyre who wrote mainly of cheese.

Two other poets often regarded as poetasters are William Topaz McGonagall and Alfred Austin. The latter was actually the British poet laureate but is nevertheless regarded as greatly inferior to his predecessor Alfred Lord Tennyson, was regularly mocked during his career and is little read today.

1.8.2 Poetess

A poetess, in the simplest sense, is a woman poet.

Use of this word is criticised by feminist writers on usage, because it is a word marked for gender in a context where gender is theoretically irrelevant: see non-sexist language. Like many such words, its use might well be unexceptionable when it is used simply to convey two items of data about an author in a single word. The true measure of the distrust for this word stems from the situation that the use of the word is somewhat more complicated than that. The word "poetess" means more than a conjunction of the concepts of "poet" and "woman".

The word "poetess" is often used in a mildly pejorative and dismissive sense; like all the best pejoratives, it keeps open the option to deny that the person who used the word meant anything of the kind. In his Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, Alexander Pope wrote the lines:

\[ Is \text{ there a Parson, much bemus'd in beer,} \\
\text{A maudlin Poetess, a rhyming Peer. . .} \]

Marguerite Ogden put the issue in a nutshell, writing about "the word poetess, with all its suggestion of tepid and insipid achievement." By this repute, a poetess is a minor woman poet, an authoress of sentimental or conventional verse.

Formerly, in the public mind this stereotype was usually joined with chaste bookishness of the sort suggested by the old word "bluestocking." More recently, the "poetess" stereotype is drawn somewhat differently: she strikes an earth-mother pose; she writes verse that is vaguely sensual, and given to moony oracular announcements, and couples this with a habit of enthusing over her bodily humours. Referring to a woman who writes poetry as a poetess risks calling forth this stereotype.

1.8.3 National Poets

Many nations have adopted a poet who is perceived to represent the identity, beliefs and principles of their culture. This person, whether officially or by popular acclaim, is often referred to as the national poet or national bard. Many are historical figures, whereas others are still writing today. Some nations have more than one national poet.
There follows a list of nations. Note that this is not a list of sovereign states or countries, although many of the nations listed may also be states or countries. The words nation (cultural), country (geographical) and state (political) are not synonymous.

**List of national poets**

- Austria - Peter Rosegger
- Australia - Adam Lindsay Gordon
- Bangladesh - Kazi Nazrul Islam
- Canada - Parliamentary Poet Laureate
- England - Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate
- Finland - Johan Ludvig Runeberg
- Guernsey - George Métivier
- Hungary - Sándor Petőfi
- Italy - Giosuè Carducci
- India - Kuvempu
- Israel - Hayyim Nahman Bialik
- Jews - Yehuda Halevi
- Malta - Dun Karm Psaila
- Moldova - Mihai Eminescu
- Ossetia - Kosta Xetagurov
- Pakistan - Muhammad Iqbal
- Poland - the Three Bards: Zygmunt Krasiński, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki
- Portugal - Luís de Camões
- Romania - Mihai Eminescu
- Russia - Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Fyodor Tyutchev
- Scotland -
  - official appointment: Edwin Morgan, The Scots Makar
  - traditionally: Robert Burns
- South Africa -
- Tamil Nadu - Kannadasan
- Turkey - Mehmet Akif Ersoy
- United States - Ted Kooser, Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress
- Vietnam - Nguyen Du
- Wales - it was announced in February 2005 that Wales is to have its own official national poet.

**Sobriquets**

The French language has a number of sobriquets to denote the origin of various literary languages. Many of these writers may be considered as the bard of their nation, even if they were primarily dramatists or prose writers.

- Dutch language: *langue de Vondel*
1.8.4 War Poets

The term *war poet* came into currency during and after World War I. A number of poets writing in English had been soldiers, and had written about that experience. Quite a number had died, most famously Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, and Charles Sorley. Others such as Siegfried Sassoon had survived, but made a reputation based on scathing poetry written from the disabused point of view of the trench soldier who had lost faith in his military superiors. At the time the term *soldier poet* was also used, but then dropped out of favour.

**World War I**

There was probably at least as much poetry of quality written on the German side of the Western Front; but it was in English poetry that the war poem became an established genre marker, and attracted growing popular interest. Americans and Canadians contributed notable work (John McCrae wrote *In Flanders Fields* which is on the Canadian $5 bill), and the French had their own war poetry. According to Patrick Bridgwater in *The German Poets of the First World War*, the closest comparison to Owen would be Anton Schnack; and Schnack’s only peer would be August Stramm.

It is perhaps not a well-defined question, what makes a war poet (compare, say, Brooke and Georg Trakl). The public may have seen war poems as reportage and direct emotional links to the soldier. Robert Graves served in the trenches and survived, David Jones also; Graves did not use war experience as poetic material (making it autobiography in *Goodbye to All That*), or, more accurately, later suppressed what he had made of it; and Jones postponed its use, incorporating it into modernist forms. These and other WWI poets are listed here: World War I poets.

**Spanish Civil War**

The Spanish Civil War produced a substantial volume of poetry in English and, of course, Spanish too, and other languages — there were English-speaking poets serving on both sides.
World War II

By the time of World War II the role of 'war poet' was so well-established in the public mind that 'where are the war poets?' became a topic of discussion. The Times Literary Supplement ran an editorial 'To the Poets of 1940' right at the end of 1939 (still during the phoney war, therefore). Robert Graves gave a radio talk 'Why has this War produced no War Poets?' in October 1941. Stephen Spender also replied at about the same time, T. S. Eliot a year later.

Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas are the standard critical choices amongst British war poets of that time, and Karl Shapiro made a reputation based on poetry written during the Pacific war; there was probably more heavyweight poetry written in French from 1939-1945, than in English. The reason may be to do with the onward march of technology and the fact that soldiers spent less of their time sitting in trenches waiting for something to happen.

The expectation of war poetry can be noted in a character from the C. S. Forester novel The Ship who is a poet serving in a Royal Navy ship in the Mediterranean around 1942, and who is killed in action. Benjamin Britten's War Requiem made use of war poem texts, as does Robert Steadman's "In Memoriam".

Later wars

There has been little recognition of war poetry from any subsequent conflict, certainly when compared with novels. That is not to say, at all, that such conflicts have not affected poets and what they write.

1.8.5 Poète maudit

A poète maudit (French: accursed poet) is a poet living a life outside or against society. Abuse of drugs and alcohol, insanity, crime, violence, and in general any societal sin, often resulting in an early death are typical elements of the biography of a poète maudit.

The first poète maudit, and its prototype, was François Villon (1431-c. 1474) but the phrase wasn't coined until the end of the 19th century, with Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud considered typical examples.

1.9 Poetry Analysis

Poetry analysis is the process of investigating a poem's form, content, and history in an informed way, with the aim of heightening one's own and others' understanding and appreciation of the work.

The words poem and poetry derive from the Greek poiēma (to make) and poieo (to create). That is, a poem is a made thing: a creation; an artifact. One might think of a
poem as, in the words of William Carlos Williams, a "machine made of words". Machines produce some effect, or do some work. They do whatever they are designed to do. The work done by this "machine made of words" — a poem — is the effect it produces in the reader’s mind. A reader analyzing a poem is akin to a mechanic taking apart a machine in order to figure out how it works.

Like poetry itself, poetry analysis can take many forms, and be undertaken for many different reasons. A teacher might analyze a poem in order to gain a more conscious understanding of how the poem achieves its effects, in order to communicate this to his or her students. A writer learning the craft of poetry might use the tools of poetry analysis to expand and strengthen his or her own mastery. And (perhaps the best use of poetry analysis), a reader might use the tools and techniques of poetry analysis in order to discern all that the work has to offer, and thereby gain a fuller, more rewarding appreciation of the poem.

This article begins with an Overview that demonstrates the nature, method, and value of poetry analysis through close reading of three poems. Subsequent sections provide readers with terms and methods that will help them analyze poems on their own.

**Overview**

"Another", by Robert Herrick

Returning to the mechanical metaphor introduced earlier, some machines — ballpoint pens, flashlights — can be taken apart by hand or with only the simplest tools. Similarly, some poems reward careful reading, and respond to analysis, but do not require of the reader an extensive set of critical terms, such as this short poem written by Robert Herrick in the 17th century.

Here a pretty baby lies  
Sung asleep with lullabies:  
Pray be silent and not stir  
Th' easy earth that covers her.

In the first three lines, the reader understands the speaker to be describing a sleeping baby. At the fourth line, this understanding is shaken. The baby is covered, not by a blanket, but by earth. That is, the baby has been buried. The baby is dead.

This realization can produce a sharp emotional reaction, an almost physical pang. And this reaction, this effect on the reader, is the "work" that this "machine of words" is designed to do. Although this poem is not humorous, its "mechanism" is akin to that of most jokes: a sudden alteration of perspective produces an immediate and visceral response.

There are these two fish in a tank. The first fish looks over at the second fish and says, "Hey, do you know how to drive this thing?"
At the outset of the joke, the listener imagines the fish to be in a fish tank. For the listener who "gets it" (and who cares for this sort of joke), there is an immediate and visceral reaction (pleasure, perhaps laughter) when this perspective is suddenly altered. The fish are not in a fish tank: they are in a military tank, a tracked, armored, combat vehicle.

Just as one needs no critical terminology or tools to "get" the joke, one does not really need critical terminology or tools to appreciate Herrick's poem. One needs only to read attentively and thoughtfully (it is crucial to recognize the incongruence and significance of the phrase "Th'easy earth"). Critical terminology, though, becomes useful when one attempts to articulate one's reaction to the poem in order to share it with others. A simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, typically using the words like or as: "My love is like a red, red rose." A metaphor is a figure of speech in which the comparison is implicit, with one thing replacing another: "My love is a red, red rose" or "The red, red rose of my love." Constructions such as similes and metaphors are known as figurative speech.

This terminology becomes useful when one attempts to articulate how Herrick's poem works. Because the poem begins with natural language, and a common, easily imagined scene, and because it does not include "like" or "as", a reader first understands lines 1-3 to be literal (nonfigurative). The revelation that this "sleeping" baby is covered not by a blanket, but instead by earth, causes a sudden and dramatic shift in perspective, and in how the reader understands what he or she has just read. The effect of the poem traces to an almost instantaneous reversal of the reader's own understanding. The preceding lines are not literal, they are instead a sustained metaphor in which an unbearable reality (the baby is dead) is replaced by something else (the comforting but unsustainable fantasy that the baby is merely sleeping).

"The Destruction of Sennacherib", by Lord Byron

Similarly, one can derive pleasure from two of the most fundamental tools in the poet's toolbox — meter and rhyme — without necessarily knowing a lot of terminology, as in this, the first stanza of Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib":

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Byron's use of meter and rhyme is especially evident and rewarding when one reads the lines out loud. The lines have a powerful, rolling, and very evident rhythm, and they rhyme in a way that is impossible to ignore. In other words, the physicality of the language — how it sounds and feels — accounts for a large measure of the poem's effect. The poem does not have a deep, hidden, symbolic meaning. Rather, it is simply pleasurable to read, say, and hear.
Critical terminology becomes useful when one attempts to account for why the language is pleasurable, and how Byron achieved this effect. The lines are not simply rhythmic: the rhythm is regular, it is the same in each line. A poem having a regular rhythm (not all poems do) is said to follow a certain meter. In "The Destruction of Sennacherib", each line has the basic pattern of two unstressed syllables followed by a third stressed syllable, with each of these basic patterns being repeated four times in a line. Those basic patterns are called feet, and this particular pattern (weak weak STRONG) is called anapest. A line with four feet is said to be in tetrameter (tetra-, from the Greek for four). This poem has a pleasurable and appropriate rhythm, and that rhythm has a name: this poem is written in anapestic tetrameter. (This process of analyzing a poem's rhythms is called scansion.) The poem also rhymes (not all poems do), and the rhymes follow a pattern (they do not have to). In this case, the rhymes come right next to each other, which emphasizes them, and therefore emphasizes the sound, the physical nature, of the language. The effect of the poem's language derives in part from Byron's choice of an appropriate pattern of rhyme (or rhyme scheme): these adjacent, rhyming lines are called couplets. The sound, the physical nature, of the language is also emphasized by alliteration, as in the repetition of s sounds in the third line.

"The Silken Tent", by Robert Frost

In these two examples, analytic terms are not needed to appreciate the poem; they are only needed to explain or describe the poem's effect. Sometimes, though, the reader needs a certain skill in analyzing poetry in order to appreciate the poem. If a listener doesn't know what fish tanks and military tanks are, he or she will not "get the joke" about the two fish. Similarly, sometimes a poem cannot work, cannot produce its intended effect, and cannot do what it was designed to do, unless the reader brings a certain level of analytic skill to the experience of reading it. One such poem is Robert Frost's "The Silken Tent".

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when the sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys 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
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

Often, a good way to begin analyzing a poem is to reword it, putting it in one's own words, or into ordinary speech, in order to get a good grasp of the poem's content. (This
is called doing a *prose paraphrase*.) Like Shakespeare's "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day", this poem uses a sustained image to describe another person. Frost draws out an extended comparison between a woman and a silken tent in order to make some essential aspect of the woman's character real and available to the reader. The comparison is not to just any tent, but to a tent imagined in a very specific way. Ropes or cords draw up, become taut, when wet. In this case, the tent is imagined at midday. Any morning dew which would have soaked the tent's guy-lines has evaporated, and the ropes are now somewhat slack. The tent sways slightly in response to the wind. This imagery conveys — at a subconscious but very real and effective level — a sense that the woman being described is not tense or nervous, but is instead genial, relaxed, comfortable to be around. This does not mean, though, that she is wishy washy, someone who is blown about by every gust of fad and fashion. The tent's pole — its upright nature, its strength — conveys a sense of backbone, character, and firmness in the woman being described. In this woman's case, firmness of character does not lead to her becoming dogmatic or insistent. Rather, her character derives in part at least from her deep investment in friends, family, and community, from "countless silken ties of love and thought". Some people would experience numerous relationships — and the obligations they entail — as something entangling, binding, or limiting. This woman does not seem to. She seems to be very much at ease in this situation, so much so that she and those around her are only likely to be aware of their bounds and limits in unusual circumstances.

When one reads this poem aloud, rhythm and meter are much less evident, much less emphatically presented than in "The Destruction of Sennacherib". In fact, most people who hear the poem read aloud for the first time will say that it does not rhyme and it does not have any particular rhythm. Closer examination reveals that the poem does rhyme though. In fact, it rhymes in a specific pattern: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG (that is, the first line rhymes with the third line (the A's), the second line rhymes with the fourth line (the B's), and so forth). But, the rhymes are much less forceful, much less emphatic and noticeable, than in Byron's poem. This is in part because Byron arranged the words such that each line ending (and therefore each rhyme) corresponds a natural pause in speech. That is, the lines end at the same places where one would pause if the lines were set as prose and one were reading the words aloud. Such lines are said to be *end stopped*. End stopping makes rhyme more noticeable. Frost, though, arranged at least some of the lines in "The Silken Tent" such that the line endings do not coincide with natural pauses (such as the end of line 2: someone reading the words "a sunny, summer breeze has dried the dew" would not necessarily pause after "breeze"). This technique is called *enjambment*. Enjambment de-emphasizes rhyming lines.

And, there is a rhythm, albeit a rather subtle or muted one. Each line has ten syllables, and (with slight and pleasant variations) they follow a pattern of weak syllables followed by strong syllables:

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has DRIED the DEW and ALL its ROPES reLENT
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This pattern (weak STRONG) is called an *iamb*. There are five iambs to the line here: these are *pentameter lines* (*penta-* is from the Greek for "five"). The poem does have a
meter: it is called iambic pentameter. Frost employs the meter with a very light touch, though, and — rather like a good jazz musician — feels free to "play around with it", briefly departing from the regular pattern as appropriate.

Interestingly, the whole poem is a single sentence: a single, rather long, but nonetheless conversational sounding sentence that covers fourteen lines.

So, this poem, which at first seems rather formless, in fact has a very specific structure: fourteen lines of iambic pentameter rhyming ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. There is a term for this structure: it is called the Shakespearean sonnet, and it is regarded as one of the stricter, more difficult forms. Frost is not writing a shapeless poem; he is writing within very strict rules, and in fact has raised the bar by making himself do it all in one sentence. The poem is single, long, graceful sentence that unfolds — in very relaxed, natural sounding way — within the strict boundaries of the Shakespearean sonnet form.

And — going back to the prose paraphrase — it describes a woman whose life unfolds in a very relaxed, natural way, within numerous strict boundaries. In the woman's character, as in the poem's form, one is not really aware that the boundaries are even there. The woman, like the poem, exists comfortably, naturally, easily within numerous limits and boundaries.

And this is the poem's great accomplishment: the form enacts the content; the language of the poem does what the language itself says. Though this analysis proceeded by temporarily separating form and content, the result of the analysis is the realization that in "The Silken Tent", form and content are truly inseparable: they are exact complements to each other. The effect of this poem, the work it is designed to do, is to create a sharp sense of pleasure and appreciation when one recognizes how skillfully and appropriately the poet has used the words.

In this case, a certain amount of critical terminology and analytic skill is necessary in order to appreciate the poem. If the reader does not know what a sonnet is, much less more subtle aspects of form such as enjambment, he or she will have no way to see what the poem does. He or she will have no way to "get the joke". In this case, poetry enjoyment is enabled by poetry analysis.

**Tools for poetry analysis**

**Poetic forms**

Poems can have many forms. Some forms are strictly defined, with required line counts and rhyming patterns, such as the sonnet or limerick. Such poems exhibit closed form. Others (which exhibit open form) have less structure or, indeed, almost no apparent structure at all. This appearance, though, is deceptive: successful open form poems are informed throughout by organic structure which may resist formal description but is nonetheless a crucial element of the poem's effect on the reading mind.
Closed forms

A poet writing in closed form follows a specific pattern, a specific design. Some designs have proven so durable and so suited to the English language that they survive for centuries and are renewed with each generation of poets (sonnets, sestinas, limericks, and so forth), while others come into being for the expression of one poem and are then set aside (Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a good example).

Of all closed forms in English prosody, none has demonstrated greater durability and range of expression than blank verse, which is verse that follows a regular meter but does not rhyme. In English, iambic pentameter is by far the most frequently employed meter. Among the many exemplary works of blank verse in English are Milton's Paradise Lost and most of the verse passages from Shakespeare's plays, such as this portion of a famous soliloquy from Hamlet:

To be, or not to be — that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep —
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is bear to. 'Tis a sonsummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep,
To sleep — perchance to dream. Aye, there's the rub.

Note that Shakespeare does not rigidly follow a pattern of five iambs per line. Rather, most lines have five strong syllables, and most are preceded by a weak syllable. The meter provides a rhythm that informs the line: it is not an invariable formula.

Rhymed pairs of iambic pentameter lines form the heroic couplet. Two masters of the form are Alexander Pope and John Dryden. The form has proven especially suited to conveying wit and sardonic humor, as in the opening of Pope's An Essay on Criticism.

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' offence,
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;
A fool might once himself alone expose,
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.

Fourteen lines of iambic pentameter arranged in a more elaborate rhyme scheme form a sonnet. There are two major variants. The form originated in Italy, and the word derives from "sonetto", which is Italian for "little song". The Italian sonnet or Petrarchan sonnet follows a rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA CDE CDE, ABBA ABBA CD CD CD, ABBA
ABBA CCE DDE, or ABBA ABBA CDD CEE. In each of these, a group of eight lines (the octave) is followed by a group of six (the sestet). Typically, the octave introduces a situation, idea, or problem to which the sestet provides a response or resolution. For example, consider Longfellow's "The Sound of the Sea".

The sea awoke at midnight from its sleep,  
And round the pebbly beaches far and wide  
I heard the first wave of the rising tide  
Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep;  
A voice out of the silence of the deep,  
A sound mysteriously multiplied  
As of a cataract from the mountain's side,  
Or roar of winds upon a wooded steep.  
So comes to us at times, from the unknown  
And inaccessible solitudes of being,  
The rushing of the sea-tides of the soul;  
And inspirations, that we deem our own,  
Are some divine foreshadowing and foreseeing  
Of things beyond our reason or control.

The octave presents the speaker's experience of the sound of the sea, coming to him from some distance. In the sestet, this experience mutates into a meditation on the nature of inspiration and man's connection to creation and his experience of the numinous.

English has (proportionally) far fewer rhyming words than Italian. Recognizing this, Shakespeare adapted the sonnet form to English by creating an alternate rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The poet using this, the English sonnet or Shakespearean sonnet form, may use the fourteen lines as a single unit of thought (as in "The Silken Tent" above), or he may treat the groups of four rhyming lines (the quatrains) as organizational units, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold  
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth steal away,  
Death's second self, which seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
In lines 1-4, the speaker compares his time of life to autumn. In lines 5-8, the comparison is to twilight; in lines 9-12, the comparison is to the last moments of a dying fire. Each quatrain presents a shorter unit of time, creating a sense of time accelerating toward an inevitable end, the death implied in the final couplet.

At the "high end" of closed forms are the sestina and villanelle. At the "low end" are forms such as the limerick, which follows a metrical pattern of two lines of anapestic trimeter (three anapests per line), followed by two lines of anapestic dimeter (two anapests per line), followed by one line of anapestic trimeter. (The beginning of the metrical foot does not have to coincide with the beginning the line.) Any poem following this metrical pattern would generally be considered a limerick, however most also follow an AABBA rhyme scheme. Most limericks are humorous, and many are ribald, or outright obscene (possible rhymes that could follow an opening like "There once was a man from Nantucket" are left as an exercise for the reader). Nonetheless, the form is capable of sophisticated and playful expression:

Titian was mixing rose madder.
His model posed nude on a ladder.
Her position to Titian
Suggested coition
So he nipped up the ladder and had her.

Open forms

In contrast, a poet using open form (sometimes called "free verse") seeks to find fresh and uniquely appropriate form for each poem, letting the structure grow out of the poem's subject matter or inspiration. A common perception is that open form is easier and less rigorous than closed form (Frost likened it to "playing tennis without a net"), but such is not necessarily the case (skeptics should try playing tennis without a net): success with the open form requires great sensitivity to language and a particular type of adaptable understanding. In the best open form poems, the poet achieves something that is inaccessible through closed form. As X. J. Kennedy has said, "Should the poet succeed, then the discovered arrangement will seem exactly right for what the poem is saying" (582).

Walt Whitman was an important innovator of open form, and he demonstrates its merits in "A Noiseless Patient Spider".

A noiseless patient spider,
I marked where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Marked how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.
And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need to be formed, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

Long, rolling lines — unified, held together like strong cords, by alliteration and assonance — partake of the same nature as the spider's filaments and the soul's threads. Two balanced stanzas, one describing a spider, the other the speaker's soul, perfectly frame the implicit comparison, with neither being privileged over the other. Just as the spider and the soul quest outward for significance, the two stanzas throw links to each other with subtly paired words: isolated/detached, launched/fling, tirelessly/ceaselessly, surrounding/surrounded. As Alexander Pope said so well, in the best poetry, "The sound should be an echo to the sense".

**Imagery and symbolism**

Most poetry can be read on several levels. The surface is not necessarily the essence of the poem although in some cases (notably, the works of William McGonagall) there is little beyond the immediate. Allegory, connotation and metaphor are some of the subtler ways in which a poet communicates with the reader.

Before getting seduced into explorations of subtle nuance, however, the reader should establish the theme of the poem. What is the 'story' that is being told? Not the literal story but the heart of the poem. For example: Another tells of a buried child; The Destruction of Sennacherib tells of the last days of the Assyrian king; The silken tent compares a woman to a tent. Part of this involves recognising the voice of the poem (who is speaking), and the rest of Kipling's "six honest serving men": the events in the poem; when these occur; where is the 'speaker' and where do the events occur; why does the speaker speak? William Harmon has suggested that starting an analysis with: "This poem dramatizes the conflict between …" is a key technique.

George Herbert in his poem Jordan (I) asks if poetry must be about the imaginary. The poem opens:

> Who sayes that fictions onely and false hair  
> Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?  
> Is all good structure in a winding stair?  
> May no lines passe, except they do their dutie  
> Not to a true, but painted chair?

He was railing against the prevalent enthusiasm for pastoral poetry above all other forms (as becomes apparent in subsequent verses). Curiously, this verse uses metaphors to challenge the use of indirect approaches to their subject. False hair and a painted chair are decorations of the mundane. The winding stair is obstructive concealment of meaning. Herbert is criticising the overuse of allegory, symbolism or elaborate language.

For most poets—even the plain-speaking Herbert—metaphor is the fundamental means of communicating complexity succinctly. Some metaphors become so widely used that
they are widely recognised symbols and these can be identified by using a specialist dictionary.

Allegorical verse uses an extended metaphor to provide the framework for the whole work. It was particularly prevalent in seventeenth century English but a more recent example is Charles Williams' *The Masque of the Manuscript*, in which the process of publishing is a metaphor for the search for truth. Allegories are usually readily apparent because of the heavy use of metaphor within them.

The symbolism used in a poem may not always be as overt as metaphor. Often the poet communicates emotionally by selecting words with particular connotations. For example, the word "sheen" in *The Destruction of Sennacherib* has stronger connotations of polishing, of human industry, than does the similar "shine". The Assyrians did not simply choose shiny metal; they worked to make it so. The word hints at a military machine.

Other tropes that may be used to increase the level of allusion include irony, litotes, simile, and metonymy (particularly synecdoche).

**Meter and rhyme**

English language poetic meter depends on stress, rather than the number of syllables. It thus stands in contrast to poetry in other languages, such as French, where syllabic stress is not present or recognized and syllable count is paramount. This often makes scansion (the analysis of metrical patterns) seem unduly arcane and arbitrary to students of the craft.

In the final analysis, the terms of scansion are blunt instruments, clumsy ways of describing the infinitely nuanced rhythms of language. Nonetheless, they provide a tool for discerning and describing the underlying structure of poems (especially those employing closed form).

The terms fall into two groups: the names of the different feet, and the names of the varying line lengths.

The most common feet in poetry written in English are the iamb (weak STRONG), the anapest (weak weak STRONG), the trochee (STRONG weak), and the dactyl (STRONG weak weak). The iamb and anapest are known as *rising meters* (they move "up" from weak to strong syllables); the trochee and dactyl are *falling meters* (they move "down" from strong to weak). Less common, but frequently important for the variety and energy they bring to a line, are the monosyllabic foot (weak) and the spondee (STRONG STRONG).

The terms for line length follow a regular pattern: a Greek prefix denoting the number of feet and the root "meter" (for "measure"): monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, heptameter, and octameter (lines having more than eight feet are possible but quite rare).
Another useful term is caesura, for a natural pause within a line.

Meter and line length are not formulas for successful lines of poetry. They are rough forms of notation for the many satisfying and variable rhythms of language. Slavish adherence to meter produces doggerel. Skillful poets structure their poems around a meter and line length, and then depart from it and play against it as needed in order to create effect, as Robert Browning does in the first line of "My Last Duchess":

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall.

The opening spondees, which throw the iambic line out of pattern, gives the Duke's words a certain virulent energy: he's spitting the words out.

Gerard Manley Hopkins took this idea of poetic energy through departure from meter to its extreme, with his theory and practice of sprung rhythm, an approach to poetry in which the language constantly frustrates the reading mind's expectation of a regular meter.

Sound, tone, diction, and connotation

Analyzing diction and connotation — the meanings of words as well as the feelings and associations they carry — is a good place to start for any poem. The use of specific words in the poem serve to create a tone — an attitude taken towards the subject. For example, consider the words "slither" and "sneak." When used in a poem, the words conjure up images of a snake. The sibilant s sound reinforces the image. The connotations of the words suggest something surreptitious and undercover. From the tone, one can infer that the author is suspicious or fearful of the subject.

A detached tone, or an opposite tone than the reader would expect, are sometimes purposely employed to elicit more of a response. In the opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", T. S. Eliot quickly sets a certain tone, and then creates effect by juxtaposing it with a very different tone:

Let us go then, you and I,
    When the evening is spread out against the sky
    Like a patient etherised upon a table

Visual and concrete poetry

Poets such as E. E. Cummings experiment with punctuation and the words' layout on a page. In doing so, they venture into a realm of poetry that really cannot be read aloud: it can only be experienced through the eye.

Approaches to poetry analysis

Schools of poetry
There are many different 'schools' of poetry: oral, classical, romantic, modernist, etc and they each vary in their use of the elements described above.

The **Imagists** were (predominantly young) poets working in England and America in the early 20th century, including F. S. Flint, T. E. Hulme, and Hilda Doolittle (known primarily by her initials, H.D.). They rejected Romantic and Victorian conventions, favoring precise imagery and clear, non-elevated language. Ezra Pound formulated and promoted many precepts and ideas of Imagism. His "In a Station of the Metro" (Roberts & Jacobs, 717), written in 1916, is often used as an example of Imagist poetry:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

**Schools of criticism**

Poetry analysis is almost as old as poetry itself, with distinguished practitioners going back to figures such as Plato. At various times and places, groups of like-minded readers and scholars have developed, shared, and promoted specific approaches to poetry analysis.

**The New Criticism** dominated English and American literary criticism from the 1920s to the early 1960s. The New Critical approach insists on the value of close reading and rejects extra-textual sources. The New Critics also rejected the idea that the work of a critic or analyst is to determine what author's intended meaning (a view formalized by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley as the intentional fallacy). The New Critics prized ambiguity, and tended to favor works that lend themselves to multiple interpretations.

**Reader Response** developed in Germany and the United States as a reaction to New Criticism. It emphasises the reader's role in the development of meaning.

**Reception aesthetics** is a development of Reader Response that considers the public response to a literary work and suggests that this can inform analysis of cultural ideology at the time of the response.

**Reading poetry aloud**

Poems may be read silently to oneself, or may be read aloud solo or to other people. Although reading aloud to oneself raises eyebrows in many circles, few people find it surprising in the case of poetry.

In fact, many poems reveal themselves fully only when they are read aloud. The characteristics of such poems include (but are not limited to) a strong narrative, regular poetic meter, simple content and simple form. At the same time, many poems that read well aloud have none of these characteristics (for example, T. S. Eliot’s "Journey of the Magi").
Poetry Kaleidoscope

Introduction in poetry: nature of poetry, tools, history, terms (periods, styles and movements, technical means, tropes, measures of verse, verse forms, national poetry...

Poetry is traditionally a written art form (although there is also an ancient and modern poetry which relies mainly upon oral or pictorial representations) in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content.

The increased emphasis on the aesthetics of language and the deliberate use of features such as repetition, meter and rhyme, are what are commonly used to distinguish poetry from prose, but debates over such distinctions still persist, while the issue is confounded by such forms as prose poetry and poetic prose.

Some modernists (such as the Surrealists) approach this problem of definition by defining poetry not as a literary genre within a set of genres, but as the very manifestation of human imagination, the substance which all creative acts derive from.

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