POETRY

SPARK CHARTS™

INTRODUCTION: WESTERN POETIC SCHOOLS

Poetry is a mode of writing that is as focused on **rhythm, meter,** and **sound** as on meaning and communication. It especially emphasizes the interaction of sound and sense. The definition of poetry varies according to culture and historical period: it may verge on **song and chant, prayer and meditation, prose description and narrative;** or even **visual art.** Its purposes range from religious ritual to popular entertainment. Whatever its function, poetry has closer **ties to performance** than prose does: even when not read aloud (as poetry originally was in all cultures), poetry is concerned with the **auditory and visual** way in which it strikes its audience.

OLD ENGLISH/LATER OLD ENGLISH (ENGLAND ONLY)

(c. 650–c. 1066) The Old English poetry that survives represents works in the oral tradition of the bard that were committed to manuscript and preserved in monasteries. Verses were probably memorized and may have been performed with musical accompaniment. Many poems of this time are anonymous. Poetry displayed a varying mixture of pagan and Christian elements. The prevailing **Old English versification** consisted of varying numbers of unaccented syllables, but a constant number of accented syllables, per line. **Alliteration** and **caesuras** were used to stress various syllables.

ANGLO-NORMAN AND MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD (ENGLAND ONLY)

(c. 1066–1500) After the Norman Conquest (1066), English poetry was influenced by the dominance of French culture, especially in the imitation of new French **lyric** forms and **syllabic meters** based on classical Latin models. **Rhyme** appeared in English poetry, and the still-widespread form of the **ballad** emerged at this time.

RENAISSANCE

(c. 1500–1660) This rebirth of humanistic culture—focused on mankind rather than on God—followed the West's reacquaintance with Greek and Roman classics, and marked a new interest in science and the arts. European poetry was greatly influenced by the fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch, who pioneered the modern lyric based on a speaker meditating on his own feelings. Poets attempted to bring classical **meters** into English verse, or to find English substitutes for them. The fourteen-line **sonnet** became popular during this period. The later Renaissance saw the rise of the "Baroque" style, which showcased elements of exaggeration, excess, and extravagant imagery.

NEOCLASSICISM

(c. 1660–1798) This period is characterized by a precise and controlled imitation of classical forms, with an emphasis on restraint, correctness, order, and good taste. Serving the aims of the period known as the Enlightenment, with its appreciation of reason and belief in universal truths, the Neoclassical poetic style stressed clarity of meaning over extravagance of form or metaphor. Poetry was typically didactic, and the rise of satire helped further the intellectual's goal of improving human society. Regular, predictable forms like the **heroic couplet** were commonly used.

ROMANTICISM

(c. 1798–1832) Poets rebelled against Neoclassical restrictions and the dominance of reason as a poetic aim. Romantic poetry celebrated the imagination over rationality, passion and dreams over reason and external reality, and isolated individuality over collective humankind. Romantic poetry admitted great sentiment, and looked both to celebrate the supernatural and elevate the commonplace. **Blank verse, ballads, lyrics,** and **odes** eclipsed satires and didactic poems in **heroic couplets.**

VICTORIAN (ENGLAND, WITH EQUIVALENTS ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE)

(c. 1832–1910) This era is characterized by a tension between poetry's Romantic legacy of fantasy and freedom, and the industrialized world's growing emphasis on money, propriety, security, religious faith, and patriotism. Much Victorian poetry is romantic and escapist, employing traditional forms. However, some Victorian poets tackled contemporary concerns with hints of irony. The formal experimentation of a poet like Gerard Manley Hopkins anticipates and influences many modernists.

SYMBOLISM

(c. 1890–1914) Rebelling against the stodgy realism of much Victorian literature, the Symbolist poets returned to the imaginative freedom of Romanticism, but focused less on the individual's experience and more on enigmatic, mystical, or mythical connections between the visible world and what lies beyond it. Their poetry often rejects the reigning social values of piety and optimism, celebrating instead a "Decadent" vision of unrestrained desires, dreams, and decay.

MODERNISM

(c. 1914–1965) This period is characterized by a conscious re-examination of what poetry is, and a breakdown of traditional forms and styles. Attention was increasingly paid to a density of language or intensity of imagery as a way of rendering the complexities and stresses of external reality. Modernist poetry frequently displays motifs of alienation from society and grapples with the effects of urbanization and technological advancement. As Modernism rejected poetic traditions, it embraced the unregulated rhythms of **free verse**.

POSTMODERNISM

(c. 1965–present) Postmodernism follows Modernism in re-examining the nature and function of poetry, and goes even further in blurring traditional distinctions between high and low culture and in undermining the most basic assumptions about language—that it can have fixed meaning or refer unequivocally to things in the physical world. There are many threads of Postmodernism, among them poetry that carries personal confession to new levels of intimacy; poetry that seems to be entirely about language itself and is devoid of voice, theme, or recognizable form; and a flowering of poetry in minority voices that historically have been missing from the English poetic tradition. **Free verse** is the dominant form of Postmodernism.

ELEMENTS OF POETRY

VERSE

A line of poetry (and by extension, another word for poetry itself).

METER

The pattern created in a line by its structure of sounds and stressed syllables.

1. **Accentual meter (strong-stress meter):** refers to verse in which the number of stressed syllables in a line remains constant, regardless of the total number of syllables. This is the common meter in Old English verse and in popular ballads. In the following, W. H. Auden renders a wartime radio broadcast in Anglo-Saxon meter. The number of syllables varies greatly from line to line, but each line has four stresses.

> **Five cit**ies. **Fires start**ed.
> **Pres**sure ap**plied** by **pin**cer **move**ment
> In **threat**ening **thrust. Third Di**vision
> En**larg**es **beach**head. **Luck**y **charm**
> **Saves sni**per. **Sa**botage **hint**ed. . .

(*The Age of Anxiety*, W. H. Auden)

2. **Syllabic meter:** refers to lines of verse that maintain a certain number of stressed syllables per line, regardless of the number of stressed syllables. This is a relatively uncommon meter. In the following two **stanzas,** the first lines have the same number of syllables, as do the second lines, and so on, while the number of stresses in a given line varies from stanza to stanza.

> I too, dislike it: there are things that are important
>   beyond all this fiddle.   [19 syl.]
>   Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it,
>   one discovers that there is in   [22 syl.]
> it after all, a place for the genuine.   [11 syl.]
>   Hands that can grap, eyes   [5 syl.]
>   that can dilate, hair that can rise   [8 syl.]
>   if it must, these things are important not because a   [13 syl.]
>
> high sounding interpretation can be put upon them
>   but because they are   [19 syl.]
> useful; when they become so derivative as to
>   become unintelligible, the   [22 syl.]
> same thing may be said for all of us—that we   [11 syl.]
>   do not admire what   [5 syl.]
>   we cannot understand. The bat,   [8 syl.]
>   holding on upside down or in quest of something to...   [13 syl.]

(*Poetry*, Marianne Moore)

3. **Accentual-Syllabic meter:** the most prevalent meter in English poetry, it refers to lines of verse that maintain a specific number of stressed syllables per line, as well as a more or less fixed number of total syllables. Often, not only is the number of stressed syllables fixed, but the pattern in which they appear is also consistent. The rules governing accentual-syllabic meter constitute the field of prosody. In the example, the poet intersperses stressed and unstressed syllables in a regular pattern that creates a musical rhythm, and subtly forces our attention to certain words.

> I **can**not **say** what **loves** have **come** and **gone**,
> I **on**ly **know** that **sum**mer **sang** in **me**
> A **lit**tle **while**, that **in** me **sings** no **more**.

(*Sonnet XLIII*, Edna St. Vincent Millay)

2. **Quantitative meter:** refers to lines of verse based on a syllable's length or duration in time. It is the basis of most Greek, Sanskrit, and Latin poetry, but it is rare in English. In the following example by Thomas Campion, the reader is forced almost to sing certain syllables, holding the note of "come" for a long stretch, and extending "Sweetly gracing":

> Rose-cheeked Laura, **come**,
> Sing thou smoothly with thy beauty's
> Silent music, either other
>   **Sweet**ly **gra**cing.

(*Rose-cheeked Laura*, Thomas Campion)

FOOT

The basic unit of the accentual-syllabic line.

This unit is composed of a certain number of stressed and unstressed syllables. The process of figuring out the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line is called **scansion**. Poems can be classified by the number of feet per line in the following way:

Dimeter: two feet
Trimeter: three feet
Tetrameter: four feet
Pentameter: five feet
Hexameter: six feet
Heptameter: seven feet
Octameter: eight feet

"POETRY IS THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF A DOOR, LEAVING THOSE WHO LOOK THROUGH TO GUESS WHAT IS SEEN DURING A MOMENT."

CARL SANDBURG

ELEMENTS OF POETRY (CONTINUED)

There is always a slight hint of a pause between feet. But poets sometimes make extra pauses between feet in a line. This type of extra pause is called a **caesura**, and is marked by a double line (||) in scansion.

How can | I **live** | a**mong** | this **gen**tle
obso | **les**cent | **breed** of | he**ro**es, || and **not** weep?
(Aristrocrats, Keith Douglas)

Since a foot can contain various arrangements of stressed and unstressed syllables, we can specify not just the number of feet per line, but also the type of foot. The following **types of feet** are the most common:

1. **Iamb:** two syllables; unstressed, stressed

   I **bal** | anced **all**, || brought **all** | to **mind**,
   The **years** | to **come** | seemed **waste** | of **breath**,
   (An Irish Airman Foresees His Death,
   William Butler Yeats)

2. **Trochee:** two syllables; stressed, unstressed

   Come, my | **Cel**ia, | **Let** us | **prove.**
   (Come, My Celia, Ben Jonson)

3. **Dactyl:** three syllables; stressed, unstressed, unstressed

   This is the | **For**est pri | **me**val. The | **mur**muring |
   pines and the | **hem**locks.
   (Evangeline, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)
   (Note: the last foot is a trochee.)

4. **Anapest:** three syllables; unstressed, unstressed, stressed

   The **last** | of the **light** | of the **sun**
   That had **died** | in the **west**
   (Come In, Robert Frost) (Note: the first unstressed
   syllable is omitted in the first line.)

5. **Amphibrach:** three syllables; unstressed, stressed, unstressed

   Red **Rov**er, | Red **Rov**er
   I **call** you, | come **ov**er.

6. **Spondee:** two syllables; both stressed

   As yet | but knock, || breathe, shine, ||
   (Fourteenth Holy Sonnet, John Donne)

COMMON TYPES OF METER

By specifying both the type of line (trimeter, etc.) and the type of foot (dactyl, etc.), we can classify the meter fairly accurately. The following are several meters that have enjoyed enduring popularity in English:

1. **Iambic Pentameter:** five iambs per line. This meter is often used in epics, and other works on serious or majestic themes.

   Night's **lead** | en **scep** | ter **seals** | my **drow** | sy
   eyes,
   Then **cease**, || my **song**, || till **fair** | *Auro* | *ra* **rise.**
   (An Hymn to the Evening, Phillis Wheatley)

2. **Blank verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter.

   Therefore | all **sea** | sons **shall** | be **sweet** | to
   thee,
   Whether | the **sum** | mer **clothe** | the **gen** | eral
   earth
   With **green** | ness, or | the red | breast **sit** | and
   sing
   (Frost at Midnight, Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
   (Note: the first two initial feet are irregular.)

3. **Ballad:** alternating tetrameter and trimeter, usually iambic and rhyming. Much traditional folk poetry and song is in ballad form, which was revived in the Romantic period.

   The **king** | **sits** in | Dun**ferm** | line **town**
   Drinking | the **blude**-red | **wine**;
   'O **whare** | will I **get** | a **skeely** | **skip**per
   To **sail** | this new **ship** | of **mine**?'
   (Sir Patrick Spens, Anonymous)

4. **Free verse:** verse without fixed meter or rhyme, but using formal elements of patterned verse (e.g., assonance, alliteration). Free verse became very popular in the twentieth century.

   so much depends
   upon

   a red wheel
   barrow

   glazed with rain
   water

   beside the white
   chickens.
   (The Red Wheelbarrow, William Carlos Williams)

THE LINE

Poets can manipulate the shape and pattern of the line to create various effects.

1. For example, the line can be **end-stopped,** with a break at the end of it often marked with punctuation. The clause or sentence is concluded as the line ends.

   Twenty-eight young men bathe by the **shore**,
   Twenty-eight young men and all so **friendly;**
   Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so **lone-
   some.**
   (Song of Myself, Walt Whitman)

2. Alternatively, the clause or sentence can run over into the following line. Such lines are **enjambed.** They create a hint of suspense or mystery in the thought expressed, and usually emphasize the word(s) enjambed, lending them extra importance.

   I have had to learn the simplest things
   last. Which made for difficulties.
   (Maximus, to himself, Charles Olson)

3. A line may also be repeated one or more times in a poem, often to create a haunting or obsessive effect. This repeated line is called a **refrain.**

   I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
   I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
   I learn by going where I have to go.

   We think by feeling. What is there to know?
   I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
   I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
   (The Waking, Theodore Roethke)

4. Lines may be gathered into spatial segments on the page. The most familiar segment is the **stanza,** a line or distinct group of lines separated from other segments (usually by a white space), roughly like a paragraph in prose. Very long or book-length poems are sometimes divided into larger segments called **cantos** (like chapters in a novel).

RHYME

Poets can arrange rhyming lines in different configurations, to different effect.

1. **Couplet:** The pairing of two rhymed lines (AA BB, etc.). The rhymed couplet has a lightness that makes it popular in children's verse, and a lucid simplicity that makes it useful in philosophical poetry, as in much eighteenth century verse. If the couplet is in iambic pentameter, it is called a **heroic couplet**, as in the following example.

   What would this Man? Now upward will he **soar**,
   And little less than Angel, would be **more**...
   (An Essay on Man (Epistle I), Alexander Pope)

2. **Tercet:** less common; a grouping of three lines that usually has one rhyme.

   Whenas in silks my Julia **goes,**
   Then, then, methinks, how sweetly **flows**
   That liquefaction of her **clothes.**
   (Upon Julia's Clothes, Robert Herrick)

3. **Terza rima:** a triple group of lines, but more complex than a simple tercet, consisting of interlocking triplets (ABA BCB CDC, etc.), often with a final couplet rhymed with the second line of the last triplet. Dante used it famously in his *Divine Comedy,* and other poets have experimented with it, though it is hard to maintain in English.

   O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's **being**,
   Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves **dead**
   Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter **fleeing,**
   Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic **red**,
   Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O **thou**,
   Who chariotest to their dark wintry **bed**...
   (Ode to the West Wind, Percy Bysshe Shelley)

4. **Quatrain:** a group of four lines, rhymed in various ways. The ballad's ABCB is a common quatrain pattern.

   I felt a Funeral, in my Brain**,**
   And Mourners to and **fro**
   Kept treading—treading—till it seemed
   That Sense was breaking **through**—

   And when they all were seated,
   A Service, like a **Drum**—
   Kept beating—beating—till I thought
   My Mind was going **numb**—
   (280, Emily Dickinson)

TYPES OF RHYME

1. **Feminine rhyme:** occurs if the rhymed syllables are stressed before the final syllable in the line.

   But I, who daily **crav**ing,
   Cannot have to con**tent** me,
   Have more cause to la**ment** me
   Since wanting is more woe than too much **hav**ing.
   (The Nightingale, Sir Philip Sidney)

2. **Masculine rhyme:** occurs if the rhymed syllables are the last in the line.

   Ring out your bells, let mourning shows be **spread**,
   For Love is **dead**.
   (Ring Out Your Bells, Sir Philip Sidney)

3. **End rhyme:** rhymes appearing at the end of lines of poetry. Most rhymes we know are of this type. But rhymes elsewhere in the line are possible too.

4. **Internal rhyme:** rhymes before the end of a line of poetry. In the example, "I" and "lie" rhyme within a single line.

   How stayest thou there, whilst **I** at Ipswich **lie**?
   (A Letter to Her Husband, Anne Bradstreet)

5. **Assonance:** the repetition of vowel sounds, not necessarily exactly rhyming. There can be a great deal of sonic pleasure in assonance.

   As I str**o**lled al**o**ne, years ag**o**, d**o**wn al**o**ng
   The **O**hio sh**o**re.
   *(In Response To a Rumor That the Oldest
   Whorehouse in Wheeling, West Virginia, Has
   Been Condemned,* James Wright)

ELEMENTS OF POETRY (CONTINUED)

6. **Perfect rhyme:** occurs when the rhyming vowel and con-sonants are exactly the same.

Fond are life's lustful **joys**,
Death proves them all but **toys**;
<div align="right">(A Litany in Time of Plague, Thomas Nashe)</div>

7. **Slant rhyme (or off-rhyme):** imperfect rhyme in which either the consonants or the vowels rhyme, but not both. "Death" and "Earth" are slant rhymes, and "House" and the 'ies' of "industries" are even more slant.

The Bustle in a **House**
The Morning after **Death**
Is solemnest of indust**ries**
Enacted upon **Earth**—
<div align="right">(1078, Emily Dickinson)</div>

POETIC FORM

Certain traditional forms of poetry have a distinctive stanza length combined with a distinctive meter or rhyme pattern. Some popular forms are:

1. **Ottava rima:** in English, an eight-line stanza with iambic pentameter and the rhyme scheme ABABABCC. It is difficult to use in English, where it is hard to find two rhyming triplets that do not sound childish. Its effect is majestic yet simple, with the concluding rhymed couplet packing a final punch.

I walk through the long schoolroom questio**ning**;
A kind old nun in a white hood re**plies**;
The children learn to cipher and to **sing**,
To study reading-books and histo**ries**,
To cut and sew, be neat in everyt**hing**
In the best modern way—the children's **eyes**
In momentary wonder stare up**on**
A sixty-year-old smiling public **man**.
<div align="right">(Among School Children, William Butler Yeats)</div>

2. **Haiku:** a Japanese form that contains seventeen syllables arranged in groups of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively (in English translation these syllable counts may be abandoned).

The crane's legs
have gotten shorter
 in the spring rain.
<div align="right">(Basho)</div>

3. **Limerick:** a five-line stanza with the rhyme scheme AABBA. The first and fifth lines may end with the same word. The limerick has a lighthearted and comic effect.

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared!—
Two Owls and a
Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!"
<div align="right">(There Was an Old Man with a Beard, Edward Lear)</div>

4. **Villanelle:** a complex French form consisting of 19 lines divided into six stanzas. The first five stanzas are tercets; the last is a quatrain. The poem has two rhymes and two refrains. Line 1 is repeated as lines 6, 12, and 18. Line 3 is repeated as lines 9, 15, and 19. The effect of the villanelle can often be nostalgic or dreamy, as the two rhymes keep recurring in a compulsive way.

5. **Sestina:** a form consisting of six six-line (123456) stanzas, followed by a three-line stanza. The same six words are repeated at the end of lines throughout the poem in a prede-termined pattern. In the first six stanzas, the end-word of the last line of one stanza rhymes with the first line of the follow-ing stanza (i.e., 123456 615243 364125…). The final three-line stanza follows the end-word pattern of 531 or 135, and often the 2, 4, and 6 end-words are incorporated into the body of the stanza. The sestina, when successful, creates a lulling, rolling, musical effect. As thoughts and observations recur in new contexts, they appear in a new light.

6. **Sonnet:** a fourteen-line lyric poem, traditionally in iambic pen-tameter. In some formulations, the first eight lines (**octave**) pose a question or dilemma that is resolved in the final six lines (**sestet**). There are three major types of sonnets:

   a. **Shakespearean sonnet:** divided into four parts: three quatrains with the rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF and a couplet rhymed GG.

   Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part;
   Nay, I have done, you get no more of me,
   And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart
   That thus so cleanly I myself can free;
   Shake hands forever, cancel all our vows,
   And when we meet at any time,
   Be it not seen in either of our brows
   That we one jot of former love retain.
   Now at the last gasp of love's latest breath,
   When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
   When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
   And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
   Now if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
   From death to life thou mightst him yet recover.
   <div align="right">(Idea, Michael Drayton)</div>

   b. **Spenserian sonnet:** a variant on the Shakespearean form, which links the three quatrains with an interlocked rhyme scheme, ABAB BCBC CDCD EE.

   (Note: These are archaic spellings, but the words are easy to sound out; where we would write 'v,' 'u' is written, and vice versa.)

   One day I wrote her name vpon the strand,
    but came the waues and washed it away:
    agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
    but came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray.
   Vayne man, sayd she, that doest in vaine assay,
    a mortall thing so to immortalize,
    for I my selue shall lyke to this decay,
    and eek my name bee wyped out lykewize.
   Not so (quod I) let baser things deuize,
    to dy in dust, but you shall liue by fame:
    my verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
    and in the heuens wryte your glorious name.
   Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
    our loue shall liue, and later life renew.
   <div align="right">(Sonnet 75 from Amoretti, Edmund Spenser)</div>

   c. **Petrarchan (Italian) sonnet:** divided into two main parts, an octave (eight lines) with a rhyme scheme of ABBAABBA or ABBACDDC, and a sestet (six lines) with a rhyme scheme of CDECDE or CDCDCD.

   Methought I saw my late espoused saint
    Brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave,
    Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
    Rescu'd from death by force, though pale and
     faint.
   Mine, as whom wash'd from spot of child-bed taint
    Purification in the old Law did save,
    And such as yet once more I trust to have
    Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
    Came vested all in white, pure as her mind;
    Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight
    Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd
   So clear as in no face with more delight.
    But Oh! as to embrace me she inclin'd,
    I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.
   <div align="right">(Sonnet 23, John Milton)</div>

LANGUAGE

DICTION

The choice of words in a poem. Some words are more sensually vivid (referring to sounds and colors), emotionally direct (referring to moods and attitudes), or intellectually complex (referring to abstract ideas) than others.

1. **High diction:** suggests a sophisticated or educated speaker, often using abstract nouns or complex figures of speech, and demanding greater intellectual effort from the audience.

Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust
<div align="right">(Sonnet 129, William Shakespeare)</div>

2. **Low diction:** suggests a simpler, less cultivated speaker, usually tending towards literal nouns, and with less grammatical complexity than high diction.

here they come
these guys
gray truck
radio playing
<div align="right">(the trash men, Charles Bukowski)</div>

IMAGE

A word or set of words that paints a verbal "picture" of an object, idea, mood, or situation. Most poems contain some sort of imagery.

1. **Literal image:** a physically visible object in the poem.

There is a parrot imitating spring
in the palace, its feathers parsley green.
<div align="right">(Parsley, Rita Dove)</div>

2. **Figurative image:** an object not really present, but con-jured up by the imagination.

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright
In the forests of the night…
<div align="right">(The Tyger, William Blake)</div>

THEME

A major idea that the poem illustrates or circles around consistently, and the most basic element of the poem's overarching meaning. Some poetic themes are more subtle than others, and some poems address several themes.

TONE

The aspect of the speaker's voice that reveals his or her attitude toward the theme or subject of the poem.

This attitude may not necessarily be pinpointed in any particular words, but may rather be an overall feeling created by the language and rhythm of the poem. A poetic tone may be joy-ous, nostalgic, meditative, critical, romantic, reverent, and so on. In the example, we can detect an ironic or sarcastic tone that leads us to believe that the speaker means the opposite of what he is saying, and that while his words are full of praise, his attitude is critical.

The English are so nice
So awfully nice
They are the nicest people in the world.
<div align="right">(The English Are So Nice!, D. H. Lawrence)</div>

ALLUSION

A reference in a poem to a literary work, historical event, phil-osophical idea, mythological story, religious credo, cultural product, etc. In the following example, the poet expects the reader to know that Socrates was forced to commit suicide by drinking hemlock (a poison) and to associate it here with wisdom and noble sacrifice.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk…
<div align="right">(Ode to a Nightingale, John Keats)</div>

ALLITERATION

The repetition of sounds in initial or stressed syllables, often used to reinforce meaning. In the following example, the repeated "s" reinforces the sweetness of the soul, and the repeated "m" drives home the "mystery to me."

Your sweetness of soul was a mystery to me.
<div align="right">(Grandmothers, Adrienne Rich)</div>

REPETITION

The repeating of words, sounds, phrases, lines, or elements of syntax. Sometimes repetition can enhance an element of meaning, but at other times it can dilute or dissipate mean-ing. In the following example, "bells" is repeated so often that the poem becomes dizzying and hypnotic rather than lucid and meaningful.

To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
 From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
  Bells, bells,
bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.
<div align="right">(The Bells, Edgar Allan Poe)</div>

MEANING

Virtually every line of any poem contains all these levels of meaning, and—if it seems important to the overall understanding of the poem—each level should be analyzed.

1. **Denotation:** the dictionary meaning of a word; its straightforward significance.
2. **Connotation:** all the other associations, sometimes even unconscious ones, that are conveyed by a word.
3. **Figurative meaning:** a type of connotative meaning, figurative meaning (conveyed by figures of speech like metaphors, similes, personifications, and so on) is a significance produced by a leap of the imagination. For example, the denotative meaning of "the red rose" is a flower, the connotative meaning might include the growth, beauty, and vitality of nature, and the figurative meaning—produced by our imaginations—might include its suggestions of romantic passion or love. To say a rose means love is not literally true, but it may feel figuratively true because of the way our imaginations work.

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits...
<div align="right">(Dover Beach, Matthew Arnold)</div>

In this example, the **denotative** meaning refers us to an actual landscape with sea and moon. The **connotative** meaning is a more subtle reference to the near-infinite vastness of the sea and sky, and the changeability of the tides and the moon. The **figurative** meaning would include the satisfaction associated with the moon's "fullness," the relaxation of the moon's "lying," and so on.

COMMON TYPES OF FIGURATIVE MEANING

1. **Metaphor:** a figure of speech in which an object, idea, or phrase is substituted for another in order to suggest the similarities between the two. In the example, the poet substitutes the image of an animal for the image of the fog. The animal thus becomes a metaphor for the fog.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes...
<div align="right">(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, T.S. Eliot)</div>

2. **Simile:** a figure of speech like a metaphor, but using the words "like" or "as" to compare two objects. In the following simile, the poet compares himself to a cloud.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills...
<div align="right">(I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud, William Wordsworth)</div>

3. **Personification:** a figure of speech that gives human qualities to inanimate objects or ideas. Hope in the example is not a person, but the poet endows it with a human friendliness.

Hope was but a timid friend—
She sat without my grated den,
Watching how my fate would tend...
<div align="right">(Hope, Emily Brontë)</div>

4. **Synecdoche:** a figure of speech that refers to a whole entity by identifying only a part of it. In the following example, "arms" are a synecdoche for all the beautiful women the speaker has known.

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
<div align="right">(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, T.S. Eliot)</div>

5. **Metonymy:** a figure of speech that refers to something by identifying an object or term closely associated with it. In this example, "milk" is a metonym for the comforting nourishments of childhood that must be dispensed with when one grows up, and the book of proverbs is a metonym for the education of adulthood:

I have thrown out yesterday's milk
And opened a book of maxims.
<div align="right">(The Broken Home, James Merrill)</div>

6. **Symbol:** an image that means something more than what is shown (and that often evokes ideas or tenets that otherwise are difficult to represent literally). Unlike the metaphor, which is substituted for something present, the symbol itself usually is present, but its literal meaning is linked to a deeper or perhaps more universal meaning. In the example, there is a daffodil, yet the daffodil becomes a symbol of the poet and the ephemeral nature of life.

When a daffodil I see
Hanging down his head towards me,
Guess I may what I must be:
First, I shall decline my head;
Secondly, I shall be dead;
Lastly, safely buried.
<div align="right">(Divination by a Daffodil, Robert Herrick)</div>

7. **Onomatopoeia:** occurs when a word seems to sound like what the word denotes. In this example, the word "ooze" mimics the sound of oil in motion.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
    It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
    It gathers to a greatness, like the **ooze of oil**
Crushed.
<div align="right">(God's Grandeur, Gerard Manley Hopkins)</div>

GENRES OF POEMS

Just as prose fiction can be divided up into historical novels, short stories, and adventure tales, so too can poems be divided into different types or genres. These genres differ from the metrical forms listed above. A poetic genre is not necessarily associated with a certain type of meter or rhyme form, though some (like the epic) tend to be. A genre is defined according to theme, style, or attitude. Some of the most common poetic genres are these:

1. **Epic:** A long, serious narrative poem concerning a heroic figure or group of heroic figures engaged in historical or mythical events that are usually of great significance to a culture. Examples include *Paradise Lost,* John Milton's epic on Christianity; *The Iliad,* Homer's epic on the Trojan War; and *The Prelude,* William Wordsworth's epic on childhood.

2. **Dramatic:** Poetry written in dialogue or monologue, using the voice of a character created by the poet and not identifiable with that poet. Examples include *Ulysses,* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, in which the speaker speaks in the first person, but is a Greek warrior rather than an English poet; *My Last Duchess,* by Robert Browning, in which the speaker is a murderous Italian Renaissance duke; and

"Papa Don't Preach," by Madonna, in which the speaker is an unwed mother-to-be.

3. **Lyric:** poems that are written in a subjectively rich voice, often with a strong emotional element. A lyric is often in the first person, but need not always be. The lyric focuses on inner experience rather than on outward story, and ever since Wordsworth, who pioneered its use in English, it has become the most common modern mode of poetry.

4. **Ode:** a lyric poem of exalted emotion celebrating someone or something, often addressed to its subject. The following example passionately exalts the west wind as the principle of creative and destructive power in the universe.

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing...
<div align="right">(Ode to the West Wind, Percy Bysshe Shelley)</div>

5. **Elegy:** a poetic lament for the dead or absent, often addressed to the missing person.

My sparrow, you are not here,
Waiting like a fern, making a spiny shadow.
The sides of wet stones cannot console me,
Nor the moss, wound with the last light.
<div align="right">(Elegy for Jane, Theodore Roethke)</div>

6. **Prose poem:** a form of free verse that lacks the formal shape of poetry (regular line lengths, etc.) as well as lacking regular meter or rhyme. It is distinct from prose in some key way: it may have some quirky shape on the page, or extreme brevity (some prose poems are like anecdotes), or it may display an intensely figurative language that distinguishes it from more literal prose.

    My friend, this body offers to carry us for nothing—as the ocean carries logs. So on some days the body wails with its great energy; it smashes up the boulders, lifting small crabs, that flow around the sides.
<div align="right">(Mercian Hymns, Geoffrey Hill)</div>

HOW TO WRITE ABOUT A POEM

WRITING A POETRY ESSAY

A paper about a poem is similar to an essay on other subjects. (See the *Essays and Term Papers* SparkChart for more information.) Simply making loosely connected lists of comments about various images or metaphors does not produce a fully developed paper. Rather, as with any other subject, you need an argument about the overall effect and function of the object of your investigation. This requires a careful reading (and re-reading) of the poem; reading it aloud a few times can show you things you did not notice before, particularly about the poem's use of sound. Sometimes background research is useful in understanding the historical circumstances of the poem (if it was written in wartime, for example), or its biographical framework (whether the poet had just been married, or was ill, etc.). But for many poetry essays, such research is not expected. In such cases, what is required is called an **explication**, or a **close reading**. In close readings, the essay pays close attention to the nitty-gritty details of the poem—details involving the speaker, the style, the figurative language, the meter, and so on—and to how they all work together to produce their overall effects.

You will need to:

1. **Read the poem attentively, slowly, and with an open mind.** Read through the poem several times. Do not skim, but immerse yourself. Do not assume you know what the poem is about right away, or that its meaning can be reduced to a simple message—most great poems are complex and ambiguous (like life itself). Do not convince yourself in advance that a love poem, say, will be simply about the poet's straightforward love for his beloved. It may be about love, but may also touch on jealousy, resentment, despair, hope, fear, or disbelief, and a thorough reading of the poem must attend to all those other emotions as well. Similarly, put biographical information at the back of your mind for the time being. Knowing that a certain poet had marriage problems, or was a Catholic in a Protestant society, may be useful later, but for the first few readings such knowledge may interfere with your pure experience of the poem. Let go of all your preconceptions as you read.

2. **Gather interesting data.** Run through the poem again, marking with a pencil every word, image, or line you find interesting or suggestive for whatever reason. Great art

teaches us to see life differently, so any odd or unusual details in a poem are bound to be important (though it may take some time to figure out why). Is there a vocabulary item that seems surprising or out of place? Does the rhyme scheme force you to associate certain words that do not belong together? Does the poet suddenly switch styles, or move from the past to the present tense? Is there a sudden appearance of an image that does not fit in with the rest? Does the poem leave out an important detail that you would expect to be included? Does the poet make something mysterious that in real life should be straightforward? Note all of these details. Don't worry that you can't get the "big picture" yet—that will come eventually.

3. **Evaluate the big picture.** It is now time to home in on the basic outlines of the poem's meaning or purpose. What sort of statement does the poem make? What is the relationship between poet and reader? What does the poet want us to get out of the poem? These big questions can be answered by methodically thinking through some smaller questions first. Answer the following questions, focusing whenever possible on the interesting details you have marked:

Who is the speaker?
- What is the speaker's gender? age? class?
- What is the speaker's diction?
- Is the speech fragmented, or grammatically complete?
- Where is the speaker? Is the place specified?
- Does the speaker observe, persuade, meditate, or fantasize?
- What are the speaker's main concerns?
- What is the speaker's emotional state, and how does it change throughout the poem?

Who is the audience?
- Is the speaker aware that he or she is speaking to anyone? If so, who?
- If the speaker is aware of the audience, what is his/her attitude regarding that audience?
- What is the reason for the speaker addressing his or her audience at all?
- Is the speaker persuading the audience of anything?
- Is the speaker confiding in the audience?

What is the main subject of the poem?
- What is the speaker mainly talking or thinking about?
- Is it a thing, feeling, situation, or problem?
- Is it the speaker or another person?
- Is the subject introduced appropriately, or thrust upon us haphazardly?
- How does the speaker's treatment of the subject change by the end of the poem?
- Does the poem focus on emotional states or events?
- Is the subject covered in detail, or sketched in broad strokes?
- What does the poem leave out?

Does the poem belong to a genre?
- How does the poem's genre affect the poem's subject?

What are the form and meter of the poem?
- Does the poem have a consistent meter, or does the meter change?
- Does the meter make the poem flow quickly or slowly, bouncily or solemnly?
- Are there any natural divisions in the poem?
- How do the parts of the poem relate to each other?
- Does the poem rhyme? What effects do the rhymes produce?
- Are there refrains, or any form of repetition in the poem?
- What organizational patterns does the poet use?
- How does the structure express the subject of the poem?
- Where does the poem's climax occur?
- How does the form relate to the poem's subject?

What figures of speech are used in the poem?
- Are there similes or metaphors?
- Are the figures wild and outlandish, or modest and familiar?
- Do the figures illustrate ideas, or alienate us?
- What particular moments in the poem are figurative? Why?
- Is there a connection between the figures used and the poem's subject?

What were the poet's life and times like? (Optional: ask your instructor whether a research essay is expected.)
- What is the poet's national and social background? (Remember that the speaker of the poem is not always the same as the poet, since poets can create fictional speakers.)
- Did the poet belong to a movement or school of poetry?
- Did the poet have a strong religious faith?
- Was the poet committed to any ideas or doctrines?
- Did the poet lead an active, adventurous life, or a quiet, sedentary one?
- Did the poet have any social ambitions?
- Did the poet have a family life? What kind?
- What was the poet's nation going through at the time of the poem's composition?
- How did the poet relate to the social elite of his day?
- Was the poet writing for a specific audience?

FORMULATE AN ARGUMENT

If you have answered all the above questions and paid attention to the unusual details you noticed in your first read-through, then you are ready to arrive at some interesting insight about the poem and to present that insight in the form of an argument. A good essay needs a powerful argument. Avoid the trivial and the self-evident. Your poetry essay must not be a simple paraphrase of the poem, or a commentary on how some words or images are repeated. Rather, it must make some claim about the poem that is not immediately obvious, and that a critic could dispute, requiring your defense of it with evidence and logical reasoning. A good argument reveals something about the deep, underlying purpose or significance of the poem: how it shows us a little glimpse of experience, and embodies this uniquely in form and language. Some common arguments are:

Is there a change in the poem by the end?
- Does the speaker change his mind about some topic by the end of the poem?
- Does the speaker change his or her mood by the end?
- Does the style of the poem change as it unfolds?
- Does the reader's position or attitude change by the end?

Sample argument: "While the poem is about loss throughout, by the end, the speaker's position changes from grief to acceptance."

Does the poem contain any contradictions or ambiguities?
- Is the style or genre of the poem at odds with its themes or images (e.g., an upbeat meter in a poem about death)?
- Does the speaker reveal any mixed feelings about his theme (e.g., negative imagery attached to the beloved in a love poem)?
- Is there any inconsistent imagery in the poem (e.g., images of heat accompanied by images of cold in a poem about romantic passion)?

Sample argument: "While the poem appears to be a patriotic hymn to a nation at war, the imagery suggests that the poet is actually deeply critical of the war."

Is there an interesting relationship between the form of the poem and its meaning?
- Does the meter of the poem reinforce its "message"? How?
- Does its shape visually relate in any way to the poem's meaning (e.g., short choppy stanzas may suggest a lively, distracted mood that affirms a poem's theme of the dizzying effects of love)?
- Does the rhyme scheme affect the experience of the poem?

Sample argument: "The poet's use of the epic iambic pentameter gives a solemn, philosophical seriousness to a poem that otherwise might seem lighthearted."

When you have framed your argument in your head, you are ready to write. Present your thesis statement as succinctly as possible, toward the beginning of the essay. Clearly define your terms and the scope of your argument. Present disclaimers if necessary. Avoid sweeping generalizations. Proceed methodically through the different steps necessary to prove your point. Remember to connect these various observations or interpretations you make about the *subject* or *theme* of the poem to your observations about the *form* and *language* of the poem—these last elements, after all, are what distinguish poetry from prose. At the end, briefly summarize what you have claimed, without simply repeating what you said before. Give it a slightly different spin, and a somewhat more general relevance.

EXAMPLE ONE

Two roads diverged[1] in a yellow wood[2]	1
And sorry I could not travel both	2
And be one traveler, long I stood	3
And looked down one as far as I could	4
To where it bent in the undergrowth;	5
Then took the other, just as fair,	6
And having perhaps the better claim,	7
Because it was grassy and wanted[3] wear;	8
Though as for that the passing there	9
Had worn them really about the same,	10
And both that morning equally lay	11
In leaves no step had trodden[4] black.	12
Oh, I kept the first for another day!	13
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,	14
I doubted if I should ever come back.	15
I shall be telling this with a sigh	16
Somewhere ages and ages hence:	17
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—	18
I took the one less traveled by,	19
And that has made all the difference.	20

(*The Road Not Taken*, Robert Frost)

Notes:
1. diverged: separated, split
2. wood: forest
3. wanted: lacked
4. trodden: worn by walking

"The Road Not Taken," despite its apparent simplicity, contains ambiguities and contradictions that suggest a greater complexity. On the surface, the poem recounts a stroll in the woods and then delivers the moral of that story. The poem, however, is actually philosophical and mysterious in a way that makes any simple moral unlikely. Although the poem appears to be about choosing one path in life over another, its deeper point is that when we contemplate all our possibilities through the power of our imagination, we are actually traveling all roads at once.

Initially the poem seems straightforward and the subject seems mundane. Frost's style suggests that the speaker thinks in literal terms—there are no obvious metaphors in the poem, nor any exuberant similes or flourishes. The diction is modest and plain, without colorful or sophisticated vocabulary. His experience also appears simple. For most of the poem, the speaker straightforwardly recollects a routine moment during a walk in the woods. The path is just a path; the trees are just trees. It is not until the last couple lines that the nature imagery becomes heavily symbolic, inviting us to delve deeper into the meaning of these words. Reading the poem in this straightforward way, we take the poem's ending to be an affirmation of a simple philosophy of life: You cannot take two different paths; you must choose between different walks of life. The speaker, who observed the first path but then "took the other"(6), appears to advocate a freethinking and unconventional approach to life.

When we look closely at the poem, we see that it is more sophisticated and playful than it seems. For example, the intricate complexity of the poem's ABAAB rhyme scheme goes against the simplicity of its diction and style. Also, there are hidden contradictions in the poem that thwart any simple message. For example, the speaker does not actually reject the travelled path and take the untraveled one. Rather he "kept the first for another day"(13). He is not opting for one path over the other, but keeping both possibilities alive. Moreover, the choices are not as distinct as they originally seemed. Yes, the speaker says that one is grassier and less worn than the other, but he adds, "the passing there / Had worn them really about the same"(9–10). First he asserts one is less worn, and then asserts that they are equally worn, suggesting that the poem is more like a philosopher's riddle than a simple observation. Moreover, the speaker considers both paths with equal care. Frost shows the importance of the popular path by naming the poem for the "road not taken," and by examining it closely: "long I stood / And looked down one as far as I could / To where it bent in the undergrowth" (3–5). The traveled path is not associated with tired conventionality, but is presented to us as an impenetrable mystery that holds the speaker's gaze.

Because we hear so much about both paths in the poem, we feel as though the poet actually travels both of them. In his body he chose only one path, but in his vision he followed both routes. The speaker says he was sorry he "could not travel both / And be one traveler"(2–3). The second clause ("and be one traveler") is crucial, since it raises the possibility of someone being *two* travelers at once: one a traveler of the body, the other of the mind. The speaker further suggests two travelers by using a double "I" at the end, "and I— / I took"(18–19). Furthermore, the speaker refers not to a single road diverging in a wood, but to *two* roads diverging. Frost also suddenly slips out of the past tense and imagines himself in the distant future, "ages and ages hence," creating both a future "I" and a past "I." He thereby suggests that every person is always two travelers on two roads. We are often in two places at once, in time as well as in space, living in the future as we live in the past.

"The road less traveled" symbolizes not just an unconventional lifestyle, but also the mysteries of the imagination and of life itself. This road referred to at the end is mysterious because we are unsure which of the two roads it is. Is it the less trodden path? Or is it the road that the poet does not travel, the first enticing road he saved for a later day? If the speaker prefers the road he took, the reason why he named the poem after the other road is unclear. We are left with a mystery. Similarly, the speaker's attitude toward his experience is also unclear. We do not know if he will "sigh"(16) later from regret or from satisfaction. Most perplexing of all is the final line, where the speaker says that his choice of paths has "made all the difference"(20). We do not know the reasons for the difference or whether the difference is positive or negative. For such a climactic moment in the poem, "all the difference" is a curiously open-ended or empty phrase. It can go in any direction, just like the two paths themselves. This open-endedness suggests that Frost does not recommend one road over another and instead acknowledges our mysterious ability to imagine life's infinite possibilities.

EXAMPLE TWO

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,	1
So do our minutes hasten to their end,	2
Each changing place with that which goes before,	3
In sequent toil all forwards do contend[1].	4
Nativity[2], once in the main of light[3],	5
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned	6
Crooked eclipses[4] 'gainst his glory fight,	7
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound[5].	8
Time doth transfix the flourish[6] set on youth,	9
And delves the parallels[7] in beauty's brow,	10
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth[8],	11
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.	12
And yet to times in hope[9] my verse shall stand,	13
Praising thy worth, despite his[10] cruel hand.	14

(*Sonnet 60*, Shakespeare)

Notes:
1. "In sequent toil...contend": one after another struggle forward
2. "nativity": birth
3. "in the main of light": exposed to the light of day (i.e., of life)
4. "crooked eclipses": bodily imperfections, or ill astrological omens
5. "confound": thwart, oppose
6. "transfix the flourish": destroy the loveliness
7. "delves the parallels": digs rows, i.e., wrinkles
8. "rarities of nature's truth": outstanding examples of natural beauty
9. "to times in hope": with hope of outlasting the ages
10. "his": Time's

On a first reading, Shakespeare's "Sonnet 60" appears to be a poem in praise of an addressee's physical beauty. However, a closer examination of the sonnet's form, meter, diction, and style reveals that the speaker is less concerned with celebrating his subject than he is with celebrating his poetry's independence from the constraints of the physical and natural world. Through its imagery and rhythm the poem claims an affinity with nature, only to distance itself from nature at the end and to assert art's independence from the natural and physical world. At the end of the sonnet, we discover that it is not so much about the addressee's beauty as about art's efforts to withstand the destructive forces of time and nature.

The poem's meter influences our understanding of its meaning. Shakespeare's choice of the iambic pentameter for this sonnet lends an intellectual gravity, since that is the grand meter of most English-language epic verse and philosophical poetry. The five beats of a pentameter line cannot be divided into symmetrical halves, which means the line's rhythm avoids the singsong bounciness of other meters (such as the tetrameter). The characteristic soft-hard stress pattern ("LIKE as the WAVES make TOWARDS the PEBbled SHORE") of the iambic foot reinforces the poem's theme, since it mimics the endless "waves"(1) of the sea mentioned. Similarly, the assonance of the "el" sounds in "delves the parallels" (10) and the alliteration of "beauty's brow" (10) enhance the wavelike repetition to which the poet refers in the opening line. The poem's beat subtly reminds us that—like the sea's waves, or time—nothing stands still: everything is moving inexorably ahead, "contending forwards" (4). Sound and sense affirm each other.

The imagery of the poem also echoes the poem's theme of forward movement. Shakespeare traces the course of a human life in referring first to "nativity" (5), then to "maturity" (6) in the following line, and then concluding with a long depiction of the ravages of old age (7–12). This mirroring of life's chronology considerably boosts the speaker's authority, since it makes him into a kind of spokesman for personified Time and a representative of the processes of nature. He is not uttering mere human thoughts; he is voicing the universal pattern of the cosmos. The similarity between the human speaker and the figure personified as "Time" is stressed by the image of the Time using a human tool (the scythe) to cut down all living things, and by the

description of Time's "flourishes" (9) and "parallels" (10) on the face. Just as a writer makes flourishes and inscribes in parallel lines when he writes on the blank page, Time decorates the faces of all humans with marks such as lines and wrinkles. The artist Time and the artist Poet are described in imagery that makes them resemble each other, and the resemblance gives the Poet some of the incontrovertible authority of Time in the first twelve lines of this poem.

But a break occurs in the logic and rhyme scheme at the end of the sonnet, which makes us question the lines that came earlier. The interwoven rhyming couplets that make up the poem's three quatrains (ABAB CDCD EFEF) abruptly give way to a curt, simple couplet (GG) at the very end. After the interlaced pattern of the quatrains, the simplicity of the ending gives it the force of a punch line: it is the poet's last word, the thought that lingers on in our minds after we finish the poem. The word "stand" is rhymed in the last couplet, and is thus given an important emphasis. This final couplet makes a different point than the earlier quatrains did, focusing on stasis and immobility rather than movement and change. Whereas the speaker talked earlier as if he were Time's spokesman, at the end he becomes Time's opponent. He hopes to create a poem that will withstand the attacks of Time's "cruel hand"(14), as if Time is no longer the poet's ally, but his enemy.

With the appearance of the first-person pronoun, the themes of the poet's identity and the poet's authorship emerge in the poem's final moments. With the phrase "my verse" (13), the speaker refers to himself for the first and only time in the poem after he has positioned himself as the enemy rather than the ally of Time. It is as if the speaker can express a self-identity only when he breaks away from the iron laws of the physical universe and enters a freer realm of art. He earlier possessed authority as nature's spokesman, but by positioning himself as a poet, he asserts his immunity to time's destructions. His own achievement will be spiritual, perhaps, but not natural—it will transcend nature. Thus this poem, which appears to be about preserving the beauty of the addressee through poetry, is also art's declaration of independence from nature and the physical world.

SELECTED POETS

The best way to encounter most of these authors is in an anthology or in a volume of selected poems. A few notable longer works are also listed below (although these are not always the best introductions to a poet's work).

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE POETS

- Caedmon, *Hymns* (c. 1000)
- *Beowulf* (manuscript c. 1000; composed c. 700–750)
- William Langland (c. 1332–c.1400) *Piers Plowman*
- Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) *Canterbury Tales*
- Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599) *The Faerie Queene*
- Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586)
- Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)
- William Shakespeare (1564–1616) Sonnets
- Thomas Campion (1567–1620)
- John Donne (1572–1631)
- Ben Jonson (1572–1637)
- Robert Herrick (1591–1674)
- George Herbert (1593–1633)
- Thomas Carew (c. 1598–c. 1639)
- John Milton (1608–1674) *Paradise Lost*
- † Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612–1672)
- Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)
- Henry Vaughan (1622–1695)
- John Dryden (1631–1700)
- † Edward Taylor (c. 1642–1729)
- Alexander Pope (1688–1744) *The Rape of the Lock*
- Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)
- Thomas Gray (1716–1771)
- Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753–1784)
- William Blake (1757–1827) *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Jerusalem*
- Robert Burns (1759–1796)
- William Wordsworth (1770–1850) *The Prelude*
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)
- Lord Byron (1778–1824) *Don Juan*
- Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
- John Keats (1795–1821) *Endymion*
- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861)
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)
- Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)
- Edward Lear (1812–1888)
- Robert Browning (1812–1889)
- Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)
- Walt Whitman (1819–1892) *Leaves of Grass*
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882)
- Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)
- Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)
- Lewis Carroll (1832–1898)
- Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)
- Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)
- A.E. Housman (1859–1936)
- William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
- Robert Frost (1874–1963)
- Edward Thomas (1878–1917)
- Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)
- William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) *Paterson*
- D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930)
- Ezra Pound (1885–1972) *The Cantos*
- H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) (1886–1961)
- Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962)
- Marianne Moore (1887–1972)

- ‡ T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) *The Waste Land, Four Quartets*
- Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950)
- Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)
- e.e. cummings (1894–1962)
- Hart Crane (1899–1932) *The Bridge*
- Langston Hughes (1902–1967)
- § W.H. Auden (1907–1973)
- Theodore Roethke (1908–1963)
- Charles Olson (1910–1970) *The Maximus Poems*
- Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979)
- John Berryman (1914–1972) *The Dream Songs*
- Dylan Thomas (1914–1953)
- Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000)
- Robert Lowell (1917–1977) *Life Studies*
- Robert Duncan (1919–1988)
- Philip Larkin (1922–1985)
- § Denise Levertov (1923–1997)
- A.R. Ammons (1926–2001)
- Robert Bly (1926–)
- Robert Creeley (1926–)
- James Merrill (1926–1995) *The Changing Light at Sandover*
- Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)
- Frank O'Hara (1926–1966)
- John Ashbery (1927–) *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*
- W.S. Merwin (1927–)
- James Wright (1927–1980)
- Adrienne Rich (1929–)
- Ted Hughes (1930–1998)
- Derek Walcott (1930–)
- Geoffrey Hill (1932–)
- Sylvia Plath (1932–1963)
- Mark Strand (1934–)
- Les Murray (1938–)
- Charles Simic (1938–)
- Seamus Heaney (1939–)
- Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996)
- Robert Pinsky (1940-)
- Louise Glück (1943–)

Key
- British
- † born in Britain, moved to colonial America
- § born in Britain, became U.S. citizen
- American
- ‡ born in U.S., became British subject
- Australian
- Irish
- West Indian
- born in Yugoslavia, became U.S. citizen
- born in Russia, became U.S. citizen

A SELECTION OF POETS TO READ IN TRANSLATION (with the languages in which they principally wrote or write)

Anna Akhmatova *Russian*
Yehuda Amichai *Hebrew*
Guillaume Apollinaire *French*
Matsuo Basho *Japanese*
Charles Baudelaire *French*
Jorge Luis Borges *Spanish*
Yosa Buson *Japanese*
Catullus *Latin*
C.P. Cavafy *Greek*
Paul Celan *German*
Aimé Césaire *French*
Dante *Italian*
Gunnar Ekelof *Swedish*
Federico García Lorca *Spanish*
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe *German*
Jorge Guillén *Spanish*
Zbigniew Herbert *Polish*
Nazim Hikmet *Turkish*
Homer *Greek*
Horace *Latin*
Kobayashi Issa *Japanese*
Li Bo *Chinese*
Antonio Machado *Spanish*
Osip Mandelstam *Russian*
Czeslaw Milosz *Polish*
Eugenio Montale *Italian*
Pablo Neruda *Spanish*
Ovid *Latin*
Octavio Paz *Spanish*
Fernando Pessoa *Portuguese*
Petrarch *Italian*
Pindar *Greek*
Aleksandr Pushkin *Russian*
Rainer Maria Rilke *German*
Arthur Rimbaud *French*
Sappho *Greek*
Wislawa Szymborska *Polish*
Thomas Tranströmer *Swedish*
Paul Valéry *French*
César Vallejo *Spanish*
Paul Verlaine *French*
Virgil *Latin*
Gabriela Mistral *Spanish*
Su Tung-p'o *Chinese*
Friedrich Hölderlin *German*
Marina Tsvetaeva *Russian*

ONLINE POETRY RESOURCES

Public library of poetic works	http://www.poets-corner.org
Online glossary of poetic terms	http://www.poeticbyway.com
Biographies, selected poems, and some audio files for 450 poets	http://www.poets.org
Portal to literary criticism	http://vos.ucsb.edu
Archive of English sonnets and commentary	http://www.sonnets.org

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