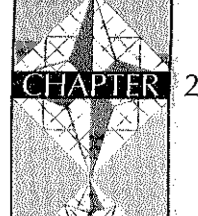

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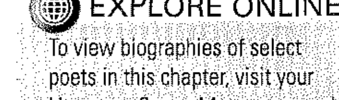
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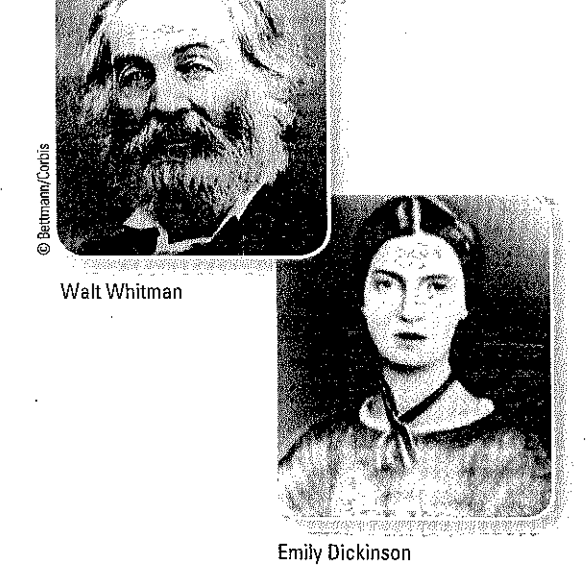
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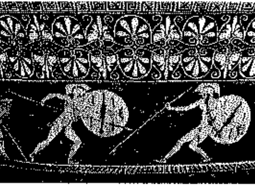
Walt Whitman

Emily Dickinson


Detail of vase showing Achilles killing Hector
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WALT WHITMAN (1819–1892)

Had I the Choice*

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,
To limn[1] their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,
Homer with all his wars and warriors—Hector, Achilles, Ajax,
Or Shakespeare's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear,
  Othello—Tennyson's fair ladies,

*Publication date is not available.

[1] *limn:* To describe, depict.

Meter or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect
  rhyme, delight of singers; 5
These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer,
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
And leave its odor there.

Rhythm

Rhythm—the regular recurrence of sounds—is at the center of all natural phenomena: the beating of a heart, the lapping of waves against the shore, the croaking of frogs on a summer's night, the whispering of wheat swaying in the wind. Even mechanical phenomena, such as the movement of rush-hour traffic through a city's streets, have a kind of rhythm. Poetry, which explores these phenomena, often tries to reflect the same rhythms. Walt Whitman expresses this idea in "Had I the Choice" when he says that he would gladly trade the "perfect rhyme" of Shakespeare for the ability to reproduce "the undulation of one wave" in his verse.

Public speakers frequently repeat key words and phrases to create rhythm. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. repeats the phrase "I have a dream" to create a rhythm that ties the central section of the speech together:

> I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

Poets too create rhythm by using repeated words and phrases, as Gwendolyn Brooks does in the poem that follows.

GWENDOLYN BROOKS (1917–2000)

Sadie and Maud (1945)

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in. 5
Her comb found every strand.

Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name. 10
Maud and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long
Her girls struck out from home.
(Sadie had left as heritage 15
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,
Is a thin brown mouse.
She is living all alone
In this old house. 20

Much of the force of this poem comes from the repeated words "Sadie" and "Maud," which shift the focus from one subject to the other and back again ("Maud went to college / Sadie stayed home"). The poem's singsong rhythm recalls the rhymes children recite when jumping rope. This evocation of carefree childhood is ironically contrasted with the adult realities that both Sadie and Maud face as they grow up: Sadie stays at home and has two children out of wedlock; Maud goes to college and ends up "a thin brown mouse." The speaker implies that the alternatives Sadie and Maud represent are both undesirable. Although Sadie "scraped life / with a fine-tooth comb," she dies young and leaves nothing to her girls but her desire to experience life. Maud, who graduated from college, shuts out life and cuts herself off from her roots.

Just as the repetition of words and phrases can create rhythm, so can the appearance of words on the printed page. How a poem looks is especially important in **open form poetry** (see p. 583), which dispenses with traditional patterns of versification. In the following excerpt from a poem by e. e. cummings, for example, an unusual arrangement of words forces readers to slow down and then to speed up, creating a rhythm that emphasizes a key phrase—"The / lily":

the moon is hiding
in her hair.
The
lily
of heaven
full of all dreams,
draws down.

Meter

Although rhythm can be affected by the regular repetition of words and phrases or by the arrangement of words into lines, poetic rhythm is largely created by **meter**, the recurrence of regular units of stressed and unstressed syllables. A **stress** (or accent) occurs when one syllable is emphasized more than another, unstressed, syllable: *fór • ceps, bá • sic, il • lú • sion, ma • lár • i • a.* In a poem, even one-syllable words can be stressed to create a particular effect. For example, in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's line "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," the metrical pattern that places stress on "love" creates one meaning; stressing "I" would create another.

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www.cengagebrain.com.

Scansion is the analysis of patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables within a line. The most common method of poetic notation indicates stressed syllables with a ´ and unstressed syllables with a ◡. Although scanning lines gives readers the "beat" of the poem, scansion only generally suggests the sound of spoken language, which contains an infinite variety of stresses. By providing a graphic representation of the stressed and unstressed syllables of a poem, scansion aids understanding, but it is no substitute for reading the poem aloud and experimenting with various patterns of emphasis.

The basic unit of meter is a **foot**—a group of syllables with a fixed pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. The chart that follows illustrates the most common types of metrical feet in English and American verse.

Foot	Stress Pattern	Example
Iamb	◡/	They pace | in sleek | chi val | ric cer | tain ty (Adrienne Rich)
Trochee	/◡	Thou, when | thou re | turn'st, wilt | tell me. (John Donne)
Anapest	◡◡/	With a hey, | and a ho, | and a hey | no ni no (William Shakespeare)
Dactyl	/◡◡	Constantly | risking ab | surdity (Lawrence Ferlinghetti)

Iambic and *anapestic* meters are called **rising meters** because they progress from unstressed to stressed syllables. *Trochaic* and *dactylic* meters are called **falling meters** because they progress from stressed to unstressed syllables.

The following types of metrical feet, less common than those listed above, are used to add emphasis or to provide variety rather than to create the dominant meter of a poem.

Foot	Stress Pattern	Example
Spondee	´ ´	Pomp, pride | and circumstance of glorious war! (William Shakespeare)
Pyrrhic	˘ ˘	A horse! a horse! My king | dom for | a horse! (William Shakespeare)

A metric line of poetry is measured by the number of feet it contains.

Monometer	one foot	**Pentameter**	five feet
Dimeter	two feet	**Hexameter**	six feet
Trimeter	three feet	**Heptameter**	seven feet
Tetrameter	four feet	**Octameter**	eight feet

The name for a metrical pattern of a line of verse identifies the name of the foot used and the number of feet the line contains. For example, the most common foot in English poetry is the **iamb,** most often occurring in lines of three or five feet.

Metrical Pattern	Example
Iambic trimeter	Eight hun | dred of | the brave (William Cowper)
Iambic pentameter	O, how | much more | doth beau | ty beau | teous seem (William Shakespeare)

Because **iambic pentameter** is so well suited to the rhythms of English speech, writers frequently use it in plays and poems. Shakespeare's plays, for example, are written in unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter called **blank verse** (see p. 562).

Many other metrical combinations are also possible; a few are illustrated below.

Metrical Pattern	Example
Trochaic trimeter	Like a | high-born | maiden (Percy Bysshe Shelley)
Anapestic tetrameter	The As sy | rian came down | like the wolf | on the fold (Lord Byron)
Dactylic hexameter	Maid en most | beau ti ful | moth er most | boun ti ful, | la dy of | lands, (A. C. Swinburne)
Iambic heptameter	The yel | low fog | that rubs | its back | up on | the win | dow-panes (T. S. Eliot)

Scansion can be an extremely technical process, and when readers become bogged down with anapests and dactyls, they can easily forget that poetic scansion is not an end in itself. Meter should be appropriate for the ideas expressed by the poem, and it should help to create a suitable tone. A light, skipping rhythm, for example, would be inappropriate for an **elegy,** and a slow, heavy rhythm would surely be out of place in an **epigram** or a limerick. The following lines of a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge illustrate the uses of different types of metrical feet:

Trochee trips from long to short;
From long to long in solemn sort
Slow Spondee stalks; strong foot! yet ill able
Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable.
Iambics march from short to long— 5
With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng;

One syllable long, with one short at each side,
Amphibrachys hastes with a stately stride—
First and last being long, middle short, Amphimacer
Strikes his thundering hoofs like a proud high-bred Racer. 10

A poet may use one kind of meter—iambic meter, for example—throughout a poem, but may occasionally vary line length to relieve monotony or to accommodate the poem's meaning or emphasis. In the following poem, the poet uses iambic lines of different lengths.

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EMILY DICKINSON (1830–1886)

I like to see it lap the Miles— (1891)

I like to see it lap the Miles—
And lick the Valleys up—
And stop to feed itself at Tanks—
And then—prodigious step

Around a Pile of Mountains— 5
And supercilious peer
In Shanties—by the sides of Roads—
And then a Quarry pare

To fit its Ribs
And crawl between 10
Complaining all the while
In horrid—hooting stanza—
Then chase itself down Hill—

And neigh like Boanerges[1]—
Then—punctual as a Star 15
Stop—docile and omnipotent
At its own stable door—

Dickinson's poem is a single sentence that, except for some pauses, stretches unbroken from beginning to end. Iambic lines of varying lengths actually suggest the movements of the train that the poet describes. Lines of iambic tetrameter, such as the first, give readers a sense of the train's steady, rhythmic movement across a flat landscape, and shorter lines ("To fit its Ribs / And crawl between") suggest the train's slowing motion. Beginning with two iambic dimeter lines and progressing to iambic trimeter lines, the third stanza increases in speed just like the train that is racing downhill "In horrid—hooting stanza—."

[1] *Boanerges:* A vociferous preacher and orator. Also, the name, meaning "son of thunder," Jesus gave to apostles John and James because of their fiery zeal.

When a poet uses more than one type of metrical foot, any variation in a metrical pattern—the substitution of a trochee for an iamb, for instance—immediately calls attention to itself. For example, in line 16 of "I like to see it lap the Miles," the poet departs from iambic meter by placing unexpected stress on the first word, *stop*. By emphasizing this word, the poet brings the flow of the poem to an abrupt halt, suggesting the jolt riders experience when a train comes to a stop.

Another way of varying the meter of a poem is to introduce a pause known as a **caesura**—a Latin word meaning "a cutting"—within a line. When scanning a poem, you indicate a caesura with two parallel lines: ||. Unless a line of poetry is extremely short, it probably will contain a caesura.

A caesura occurs after a punctuation mark or at a natural break in phrasing:

> How do I love thee? || Let me count the ways.
>
> **Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

> Two loves I have || of comfort and despair.
>
> **William Shakespeare**

> High on a throne of royal state, || which far
> Outshone the wealth of Ormus || and of Ind
>
> **John Milton**

Sometimes more than one caesura occurs in a single line:

> 'Tis good. || Go to the gate. || Somebody knocks.
>
> **William Shakespeare**

Although the end of a line may mark the end of a metrical unit, it does not always coincide with the end of a sentence. Lines that have distinct pauses at the end—usually signaled by punctuation—are called **end-stopped lines.** Lines that do not end with strong pauses are called **run-on lines.** (Sometimes the term **enjambment** is used to describe run-on lines.) End-stopped lines can sometimes seem formal, or even forced, because their length is rigidly dictated by the poem's meter, rhythm, and rhyme scheme. In the following excerpt from John Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (p. 687), for example, rhythm, meter, and rhyme dictate the pauses that occur at the ends of the lines:

> O, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
> Alone and palely loitering?
> The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
> And no birds sing.

In contrast to end-stopped lines, run-on lines often seem more natural. Because their ending points are determined by the rhythms of speech and by the meaning and emphasis the poet wishes to convey rather than by meter and rhyme, run-on lines are suited to the open form of much modern poetry. In the following lines from the poem "We Have Come Home," by Lenrie Peters, run-on lines give readers the sense of spoken language:

We have come home
From the bloodless war
With sunken hearts
Our boots full of pride—
From the true massacre of the soul
When we have asked
"What does it cost
To be loved and left alone?"

Rather than relying exclusively on end-stopped or run-on lines, poets often use a combination of the two to produce the effects they want. For example, the following lines from "Pot Roast," by Mark Strand, juxtapose end-stopped and run-on lines:

I gaze upon the roast,
that is sliced and laid out
on my plate
and over it
I spoon the juices
of carrot and onion.
And for once I do not regret
the passage of time.

FURTHER READING: Rhythm and Meter

ADRIENNE RICH (1929–)

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers (1951)

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

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool 5
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by. 10
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

ing and Reacting

hat is the dominant metrical pattern of the poem? How does the meter enhance the ntrast the poem develops?

2. The lines in the first stanza are end-stopped, and those in the second and third stanza combine end-stopped and run-on lines. What does the poet achieve by varying the rhythm
3. What ideas do the caesuras in the first and fourth lines of the last stanza emphasize?
4. **Journal Entry** What is the speaker's opinion of Aunt Jennifer's marriage? Do you think she is commenting on this particular marriage or on marriage in general?
5. **Critical Perspective** In *The Aesthetics of Power*, Claire Keyes writes of this poem that although it is formally beautiful, almost perfect, its voice creates problems:

> [T]he tone seldom approaches intimacy, the speaker seeming fairly detached from the fate of Aunt Jennifer. . . . The dominant voice of the poem asserts the traditional theme that art outlives the person who produces it. . . . The speaker is almost callous in her disregard for Aunt's death. . . Who cares that Aunt Jennifer dies? The speaker does not seem to; she gets caught up in those gorgeous tigers. . . . Here lies the dominant voice: Aunt is not compelling; her creation is.

Do you agree with Keyes's interpretation of the poem?

Related Works: "Miss Brill" (p. 147), "Everyday Use" (p. 297), "Rooming houses are old women" (p. 508), "Ethics" (p. 697)

THOMAS LUX (1946–)

A Little Tooth (1989)

Your baby grows a tooth, then two,
and four, and five, then she wants some meat
directly from bone. It's all

over: she'll learn some words she'll fall
in love with cretins, dolts, a sweets 5
talker on his way to jail. And you,

your wife, get old, flyblown, and rue
nothing. You did, you loved, your feet
are sore. It's dusk. Your daughter's tall.

Reading and Reacting

1. This poem was selected to be featured in the New York City's "Poetry in Motion" program, which posts poems in public busses and trains. What qualities make "A Little Tooth" suitable for this program?
2. What is the dominant metrical pattern of this poem? Do you think this meter is an appropriate choice here? Explain.

3. Where in the poem does Lux use caesuras? What effect do these pauses have?
4. **Journal Entry** "A Little Tooth" is characterized by its extreme compression. What ideas does the poem express? Does the poem effectively communicate these ideas, or does it try to do too much in too few lines?
5. **Critical Perspective** Writing about Thomas Lux's work in the journal *Poetry*, Peter Campion makes the following observation:

> The problem is not simply that Lux knows the course his poems will take before he begins, though this probably contributes. It's that he writes from above his material. Reading Lux you rarely sense a consciousness moving down in the lines themselves. The poems are set speeches: their odd images or turns of phrase glimmer for moments then disappear as Lux glides on toward his desired effect.

Do you feel that Campion's criticisms apply to "A Little Tooth"? Why or why not?

Related Works: "Everyday Use" (p. 297), "Doe Season" (p. 340), "Where are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (p. 388), "Sadie and Maud" (p. 537), "Aristotle" (p. 606), "Family Ties" (p. 658), *Asteroid Belt* (p. 745)

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850–1894)

I Will Make You Brooches (1885)

I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea.

I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your room, 5
Where white flows the river and bright blows the broom,
And you shall wash your linen and keep your body white
In rainfall at morning and dewfall at night.

And this shall be for music when no one else is near,
The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear! 10
That only I remember, that only you admire,
Of the broad road that stretches and the roadside fire.

Reading and Reacting

1. What sounds and words are repeated in this poem? How does this repetition help to create the poem's rhythm?
2. Where in the poem are caesuras used? What effect does each of these pauses have?
3. What kind of meter does this poem use? Is the meter consistent with the poem's subject matter?
4. **Journal Entry** Stevenson wrote this poem for his wife. What do you think he is trying to tell her?

Related Works: "Araby" (p. 251), "If I should learn, in some quite casual way" (p. 5… My Dear and Loving Husband" (p. 521), "Meeting at Night" (p. 637), "How Do… Thee?" (p. 638)

Alliteration and Assonance

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Just as poetry depends on rhythm, it also depends on the sounds of individual words. An effect pleasing to the ear, such as "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" from William Blake's "The Tyger" (p. 660), is called **euphony.** A jarring or discordant effect, such as "The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!" from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" (p. 555), is called **cacophony.**

One of the earliest, and perhaps the most primitive, methods of enhancing sound is **onomatopoeia,** which occurs when the sound of a word echoes its meaning, as it does in common words such as *bang*, *crash*, and *hiss*. Poets make broad application of this technique by using combinations of words that suggest a correspondence between sound and meaning, as Edgar Allan Poe does in these lines from his poem "The Bells":

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Yet the ear, it fully knows,
By the twanging
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling
And the wrangling
How the danger sinks and swells
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
Of the bells,—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells. . . .

Poe's primary objective in this poem is to re-create the sound of ringing bells… Although he succeeds, the poem (113 lines long in its entirety) is extremely tedious… A more subtle use of onomatopoetic words appears in the following passage from A… *Essay on Criticism* by Alexander Pope:

Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when the loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too Labors, and the words move slow.

After earlier admonishing readers that sound must echo sense, Pope uses onomatopoetic words such as *lash* and *roar* to convey the fury of the sea, and he uses repeated consonants to echo the sounds these words suggest. Notice, for example, how the *s* and *m* sounds suggest the gently blowing Zephyr and the flowing of the smooth stream and how the series of *r* sounds echoes the torrent's roar.

Alliteration—the repetition of consonant sounds in consecutive or neighboring words, usually at the beginning of words—is another device used to enhance sound in a poem. Both Poe ("sinks and swells") and Pope ("smooth stream") make use of alliteration in the preceding excerpts.

Assonance—the repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds, especially in stressed syllables—can also enrich a poem. When used effectively, assonance can create both mood and tone in a subtle, musical way. Consider, for example, the use of assonance in the following lines from Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night": "Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage, against the dying of the light."

Sometimes assonance unifies an entire poem. In the following poem, assonance emphasizes the thematic connections among words and thus links the poem's ideas.

ROBERT HERRICK (1591–1674)

Delight in Disorder (1648)

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness.
A lawn[1] about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distractión;
An erring lace, which here and there 5
Enthralls the crimson stomacher;[2]
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribbons to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat; 10
A careless shoestring, in whose tie
I see a wild civility;
Do more bewitch me than when art
Is too precise in every part.

Repeated vowel sounds extend throughout this poem—for instance, "shoulders" and "thrown" in line 3; and "tie," "wild," and "precise" in lines 11, 12, and 14. Using alliteration as well as assonance, Herrick subtly links certain words—"tempestuous petticoat," for example. By connecting these words, he calls attention to the pattern of imagery that helps to convey the poem's theme.

[1] *lawn:* A shawl made of fine fabric.
[2] *stomacher:* A heavily embroidered garment worn by females over the chest and stomach.

Rhyme

In addition to alliteration and assonance, poets create sound patterns with **rhyme**—the use of matching sounds in two or more words: "tight" and "might"; "born" and "horn"; "sleep" and "deep." For a rhyme to be **perfect,** final vowel and consonant sounds must be the same, as they are in each of the preceding examples. **Imperfect rhyme** (also called *near rhyme, slant rhyme, approximate rhyme,* or **consonance**) occurs when the final consonant sounds in two words are the same but the preceding vowel sounds are different—"learn" / "barn" or "pads" / "lids," for example. William Stafford uses imperfect rhyme in "Traveling through the Dark" (p. 635) when he rhymes "road" with "dead." Finally, **eye rhyme** occurs when two words look as if they should rhyme but do not—for example, "watch" and "catch."

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Rhyme can also be classified according to the position of the rhyming syllables in a line of verse. The most common type of rhyme is **end rhyme,** which occurs at the end of a line:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night

William Blake, "The Tyger"

Internal rhyme occurs within a line:

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

Beginning rhyme occurs at the beginning of a line:

Red river, red river,
Slow flow heat is silence
No will is still as a river

T. S. Eliot, "Virginia"

Rhyme can also be classified according to the number of syllables that correspond. **Masculine rhyme** (also called **rising rhyme**) occurs when single syllables correspond ("can" / "ran"; "descend" / "contend"). **Feminine rhyme** (also called **double rhyme** or **falling rhyme**) occurs when two syllables, a stressed one followed by an unstressed one, correspond ("ocean" / "motion"; "leaping" / "sleeping"). **Triple rhyme** occurs when three syllables correspond. Less common than the other two, triple rhyme is often used for humorous or satiric purposes, as in the following lines from the long poem *Don Juan* by Lord Byron:

Sagest of women, even of widows, she
Resolved that Juan should be quite a paragon,
And worthy of the noblest pedigree:
(His sire of Castile, his dam from Aragon).

In some cases—for example, when it is overused or when it is used in unexpected places—rhyme can create unusual and even comic effects. In the following poem, humor is created by the incongruous connections established by rhymes such as "priest" / "beast" and "pajama" / "lllama."

OGDEN NASH (1902–1971)

The Lama (1931)

The one-l lama
He's a priest.
The two-l llama,
He's a beast.
And I will bet 5
A silk pajama
There isn't any
Three-l lllama.

The conventional way to describe a poem's rhyme scheme is to chart rhyming sounds that appear at the ends of lines. The sound that ends the first line is designated *a*, and all subsequent lines that end in that sound are also labeled *a*. The next sound to appear at the end of a line is designated *b*, and all other lines whose last sounds rhyme with it are also designated *b*—and so on through the alphabet. The lines of the poem that follows are labeled in this manner.

ROBERT FROST (1874–1963)

The Road Not Taken (1915)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, a
And sorry I could not travel both b
And be one traveler, long I stood a
And looked down one as far as I could a
To where it bent in the undergrowth; b 5

Then took the other, as just as fair c
And having perhaps the better claim, d
Because it was grassy and wanted wear; c
Though as for that, the passing there c
Had worn them really about the same, d 10

And both that morning equally lay e
In leaves no step had trodden black f
Oh, I kept the first for another day! e
Yet knowing how way leads on to way, e
I doubted if I should ever come back. f 15

I shall be telling this with a sigh g
Somewhere ages and ages hence: h
two roads diverged in a wood, and I — g
I took the one less traveled by, g
And that has made all the difference. h 20

The rhyme scheme of the four five-line stanzas in "The Road Not Taken" is the same in each stanza: *abaab*, *cdccd*, and so on. Except for the last line of the poem, all the rhymes are masculine. Despite its regular rhyme scheme, the poem sounds conversational, as if someone is speaking it without any effort or planning. The beauty of this poem comes from Frost's subtle use of rhyme, which makes the lines flow together, and from the alternating rhymes, which suggest the divergent roads that confront the speaker.

FURTHER READING: Alliteration, Assonance, and Rhyme

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844–1889)

Pied Beauty (1918)

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-color as a brinded[1] cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plow; 5
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.[2]

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: 10
Praise him.

EXPLORE ONLINE >
To listen to an audio reading of "Pied Beauty," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

[1] *brinded:* Brindled (streaked).
[2] *trim:* Equipment.

John Constable, *Summer Evening Near East Bergholt*, Suffolk (1806–09)
V&A Images, London / Art Resource, NY

Reading and Reacting

1. Identify examples of onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, imperfect rhyme, and perfect rhyme. Do you think all these techniques are essential to the poem? Are any of them annoying or distracting?
2. What is the central idea of this poem? How do the sounds of the poem help to communicate this idea?
3. Identify examples of masculine and feminine rhyme.
4. **Journal Entry** Hopkins uses both pleasing and discordant sounds in his poem. Identify uses of euphony and cacophony, and explain how these techniques affect your reactions to the poem.
5. **Critical Perspective** In her essay "The Allegory of From in Hopkins's Religious Sonnets," Jennifer A. Wagner discusses the ways in which Gerard Manley Hopkins saw relationships between what his poems were saying and how they expressed it:

   > Hopkins's most profound perception with regard to the form lies precisely in his demand for the conventional integrity of the sonnet, in his "dogmatic" (his word) insistence on the division of the octave and sestet—and in his recognition of the revisionary movement in the sonnet structure. . . . For Hopkins the play between octave and sestet is not incidental; it creates a "turn" that becomes a trope of limitation or reduction.

   Since "Pied Beauty" is what is known as a "curtal," or shortened, sonnet, it is not divided into sections of eight and six lines (the "octet" and "sestet" the Wagner mentions). Still, there is turn, or change of emphasis between the poem's two parts. How does the poem change after that turn occurs?

Related Works: "Cathedral" (p. 305), "I Wandered lonely as a cloud" (p. 630), "Loveliest of Trees" (p. 632), "Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God" (p. 671), *Beauty* (p. 750)

SHEL SILVERSTEIN (1930–1999)

Where the Sidewalk Ends (1974)

There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight, 5
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black
And the dark street winds and bends.
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow, 10
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know 15
The place where the sidewalk ends.

Reading and Reacting

1. Describe the rhyme scheme of this poem. How does the rhyme scheme contribute to the poem's overall effect?
2. What words does the poem repeat? What ideas does this repetition emphasize?
3. Where does the poem use alliteration and assonance? Do the alliteration and assonance contribute something vital to the poem, or are they just a distraction?
4. **Journal Entry** Silverstein is primarily known as a children's poet. What message does "Where the Sidewalk Ends" have for children? What message do you think it has for adults?

Related Works: "Gryphon" (p. 152), "The Lamb" (p. 659)

KAY RYAN (1945–)

Masterworks of Ming[1] (1994)

Ming, Ming,
such a lovely
thing blue
and white

[1] *Ming.* The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in China was known for its pottery and vases, among other things.

bowls and 5
basins glow
in museum
light

they would
be lovely 10
filled with
rice or
water

so nice
adjunct 15
to dinner

or washing
a daughter

a small
daughter 20
of course
since it's
a small basin

first you
would put 25
one then

the other
end in

Reading and Reacting

1. This poem has no punctuation. Why do you think Ryan chose not to include any?
2. Identify several different kinds of rhyme in this poem. Then, find example of alliteration and assonance.
3. What image does the poem create? How do rhyme, alliteration, and assonance help Ryan convey this image?
4. **JOURNAL ENTRY** If you were to add punctuation to this poem, where would you add it, and why?
5. **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** In an interview for the *Paris Review*, Kay Ryan asserts that her poems often have a dark and surprising side to them that readers initially miss:

   > People have trouble with my work because they want to say it's humorous . . . and that it's witty. But there's something else, this cartoony thing. When I read my poems to any audience there's a lot of laughing, but I always warn them that it's a fairy gift and will turn scary when they get it home.

   Is there a point at which "Masterworks of Ming" becomes "scary"? If so, where?

Further Reading: "What Shall I Give My Children?" (p. 480), "A Little Tooth" (p. 54
"Aristotle" (p. 606), "Barbie Doll" (p. 698)

Illustration of Jabberwock from *Alice in Wonderland*
© Mary Evans Picture Library / Alamy

LEWIS CARROLL (1832–1898)

Jabberwocky (1871)

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
   And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
   The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
   The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand;
   Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree
   And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
   The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
   And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
   The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
   He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
   Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh, Callay!"
   He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
   And the mome raths outgrabe.

EXPLORE ONLINE >
To listen to an audio reading of "Jabberwocky," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

Reading and Reacting

1. Many words in this poem may be unfamiliar to you. Are they actual words? Use a dictionary to check before you dismiss any. Do some words that do not appear in the dictionary nevertheless seem to have meaning in the context of the poem? Explain.
2. This poem contains many examples of onomatopoeia. What meanings does the sound of each of these words suggest?
3. **Journal Entry** Summarize the story the poem tells. In what sense is this poem a story of a young man's initiation into adulthood?
4. **Critical Perspective** According to Humpty Dumpty in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, the nonsense words in the poem are **portmanteau words** (that is, words whose form and meaning are derived from two other distinct words—as *smog* is a portmanteau of *smoke* and *fog*). Critic Elizabeth Sewell, however, rejects this explanation: "*[F]rumious*, for instance, is not a word, and does not have two meanings packed up in it; it is a group of letters without any meaning at all. . . . [I]t looks like other words, and almost certainly more than two."

   Which nonsense words in the poem seem to you to be portmanteau words, and which do not? Can you suggest possible sources for the words that are not portmanteau words?

Related Works: "A&P" (p. 142), "Gryphon" (p. 152), "The Secret Lion" (p. 401), "To Lucasta Going to the Wars" (p. 527), "*Words, Words, Words*" (p. 1040)

✔ CHECKLIST Writing about Sound

Rhythm and Meter

Does the poem contain repeated words and phrases? If so, how do they help to create rhythm?

Does the poem use one kind of meter throughout, or does the meter vary from line to line?

How does the meter contribute to the overall effect of the poem?

Where do caesuras appear? What effect do they have?

Are the lines of the poem end-stopped, run-on, or a combination of the two? What effects are created by the presence or absence of pauses at the ends of lines?

Alliteration, Assonance, and Rhyme

Does the poem include alliteration or assonance?

Does the poem have a regular rhyme scheme?

Does the poem use internal rhyme? beginning rhyme?

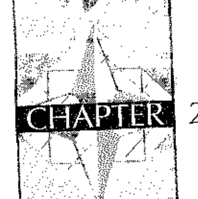
Does the poem include examples of masculine, feminine, or triple rhyme?

How does rhyme unify the poem?

How does rhyme reinforce the poem's ideas?

WRITING SUGGESTIONS: Sound

1. William Blake's "The Tyger" appeared in a collection entitled *Songs of Experience*. Compare this poem (p. 660) to "The Lamb" (p. 659), which appeared in a collection called *Songs of Innocence*. In what sense are the speakers in these two poems either "innocent" or "experienced"? How does sound help to convey the voice of the speakers in these two poems?
2. "Sadie and Maud" (p. 537), like "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 623), and "Daddy" (p. 517), communicates the speaker's attitude toward home and family. How does the presence or absence of rhyme in these poems help to convey the speakers' attitudes?
3. Robert Frost once said that writing **free verse** poems, which have no fixed metrical pattern, is like playing tennis without a net. What do you think he meant? Do you agree? After reading "Out, Out—" (p. 524), "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (p. 680), and "The Road Not Taken" (p. 550), write an essay in which you discuss Frost's use of meter.
4. Select two or three contemporary poems that have no end rhyme. Write an essay in which you discuss what these poets gain and lose by not using end rhyme.
5. Prose writers as well as poets use assonance and alliteration. Choose two or three a passages of prose—from "Araby" (p. 251), "Barn Burning" (p. 224), or "The Things They Carried" (p. 269), for example—and discuss their use of assonance and alliteration. Where are these techniques used? How do they help the writer create a mood?



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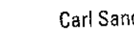
FORM



EXPLORE ONLINE >

To view biographies of select poets in this chapter, visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

Billy Collins

Carl Sandburg

Elizabeth Bishop

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JOHN KEATS (1795–1821)

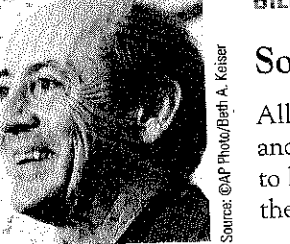
On the Sonnet (1819)

If by dull rhymes our English must be chained,
And like Andromeda,[1] the sonnet sweet
Fettered, in spite of painéd loveliness,
Let us find, if we must be constrained,
Sandals more interwoven and complete 5

[1] *Andromeda:* In Greek mythology, an Ethiopian princess chained to a rock to appease a sea monster.

To fit the naked foot of Poesy:
Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gained
By ear industrious, and attention meet;
Misers of sound and syllable, no less 10
Than Midas[2] of his coinage, let us be
Jealous of dead leaves in the bay-wreath crown;
So, if we may not let the Muse be free,
She will be bound with garlands of her own.

Andromeda in Chains
Alinari Archives/Corbis



Source: ©AP Photo/Beth A. Keiser

BILLY COLLINS (1941–)

Sonnet (1999)

All we need is fourteen lines, well, thirteen now,
and after this one just a dozen
to launch a little ship on love's storm chased seas,
then only ten more left like rows of beans.

[2] *Midas:* A legendary king of Phrygia whose wish that everything he touched would turn to gold was granted by the god Dionysus.

Young man in Elizabethan dress
© Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library / Alamy

How easily it goes unless you get Elizabethan
and insist the iambic bongos must be played 5
and rhymes positioned at the ends of lines,
one for every station of the cross.
But hang on here while we make the turn
into the final six where all will be resolved, 10
where longing and heartache will find an end,
where Laura will tell Petrarch[1] to put down his pen,
take off those crazy medieval tights,
blow out the lights, and come at last to bed.

The **form** of a literary work is its structure or shape, the way its elements fit together to form a whole; **poetic form** is the design of a poem described in terms of rhyme, meter, and stanzaic pattern.

Until the twentieth century, most poetry was written in **closed form** (sometimes called **fixed form**), characterized by regular patterns of meter, rhyme, line length, and stanzaic divisions. Early poems that were passed down orally—epics and ballads, for example—relied on regular form to facilitate memorization. Even after poems began to be written down, poets tended to favor regular patterns. In fact, until relatively recently, regular form was what distinguished poetry from prose. Of course, strict adherence to regular patterns sometimes produced poems that were, in John Keats's words, "chained" by "dull rhymes" and "fettered" by the rules governing a particular form. But rather than feeling "constrained" by form, many poets—like Billy Collins in the playful sonnet above—have experimented with imagery, figures of speech, allusion, and other techniques, moving away from rigid patterns of rhyme and meter and thus stretching closed form to its limits.

As they sought new ways in which to express themselves, poets also borrowed forms from other cultures, adapting them to the demands of their own languages. English and American poets, for example, adopted (and still use) early French forms, such as the **villanelle** and the **sestina,** and early Italian forms, such as the **Petrarchan sonnet** and **terza rima.** The nineteenth-century American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow studied Icelandic epics; the twentieth-century poet Ezra Pound studied the works of French troubadours; and Pound and other twentieth-century American poets, such as Richard Wright and Carolyn Kizer, were inspired by Japanese haiku. Other American poets, such as Vachel Lindsay, Langston Hughes, and Maya Angelou, looked closer to home—to the rhythms of blues, jazz, and spirituals—for inspiration.

As time went on, more and more poets moved away from closed form to experiment with **open form** poetry (sometimes called **free verse** or *vers libre*), varying line length within a poem, dispensing with meter and stanzaic divisions, breaking lines in unexpected places, and even abandoning any semblance of formal structure. In English, nineteenth-century poets—such as William Blake and Matthew Arnold—experimented with lines of irregular meter and length, and Walt Whitman wrote **prose poems,** open form poems whose long lines made them look like prose. (Well before this time, Asian poetry and some biblical passages had used a type of free verse.) In nineteenth-century France, symbolist poets, such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, also used free verse. In the early twentieth century, a group of American poets—including Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Amy Lowell—who were associated with a movement known as **imagism** wrote poetry that dispensed with traditional principles of English versification, creating new rhythms and meters.

Although much contemporary English and American poetry is composed in open form, many poets also continue to write in closed form—even in very traditional, highly structured patterns. Still, new forms, and new variations of old forms, are being created all the time. And, because contemporary poets do not necessarily feel bound by rules or restrictions about what constitutes "acceptable" poetic form, they experiment freely, trying to discover the form that best suits the poem's purpose, subject, language, and theme.

Closed Form

A **closed form** poem has an identifiable, repeated pattern, with lines of similar length arranged in groups of two, three, four, or more. A closed form poem also tends to rely on regular metrical patterns and rhyme schemes.

Despite what its name suggests, closed form poetry does not have to be confining or conservative. In fact, contemporary poets often experiment with closed form—for example, by using characteristics of open form poetry (such as lines of varying length) within a closed form. Sometimes poets move back and forth within a single poem from open to closed to open form; sometimes (like their eighteenth-century counterparts) they combine different stanzaic forms (stanzas of two and three lines, for example) within a single poem.

Even when poets work within a traditional closed form, such as a sonnet, sestina, or villanelle, they can break new ground. For example, they can write a sonnet with an unexpected meter or rhyme scheme (or with no consistent pattern of rhyme or meter at all), add an extra line or even extra stanzas to a traditional sonnet form, combine two different traditional sonnet forms in a single poem, or write an abbreviated version of a sestina or villanelle. In other words, poets can use traditional forms as building blocks, combining them in innovative ways to create new patterns and new forms.

Sometimes a pattern (such as **blank verse**) simply determines the meter of a poem's individual lines. At other times, the pattern extends to the level of the **stanza,** with lines arranged into groups (**couplets, quatrains,** and so on). At still other times, as in the case of traditional closed forms like sonnets, a poetic pattern gives shape to an entire poem.

[1] *Petrach:* Italian poet (1304–74); Laura was the inspiration for his sonnets.

Blank Verse

Blank verse is unrhymed poetry with each line written in a pattern of five stressed and five unstressed syllables called **iambic pentameter** (see p. 540). Many passages from Shakespeare's plays, such as the following lines from *Hamlet*, are written in blank verse:

> To sleep! perchance to dream:—ay, there's the rub;
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause: there's the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life

Stanza

A **stanza** is a group of two or more lines with the same metrical pattern—and often with a regular rhyme scheme as well—separated by blank space from other such groups of lines. Stanzas in poetry are like paragraphs in prose: they group related ideas into units.

A two-line stanza with rhyming lines of similar length and meter is called a **couplet.** The **heroic couplet,** first used by Chaucer and later very popular throughout the eighteenth century, consists of two rhymed lines of iambic pentameter, with a weak pause after the first line and a strong pause after the second. The following example, from Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*, is a heroic couplet:

EXPLORE ONLINE >

To complete a tutorial on "Stanza," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

> True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
> As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

A three-line stanza with lines of similar length and a set rhyme scheme is called a **tercet.** Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (p. 703) is built largely of tercets:

> 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

Although in many tercets all three lines rhyme, "Ode to the West Wind" uses a special rhyme scheme, also used by Dante, called **terza rima.** This rhyme scheme (*aba, bcb, cdc, ded*, and so on) creates an interlocking series of stanzas: line 2's *dead* looks ahead to the rhyming words *red* and *bed*, which close lines 4 and 6, and the pattern continues throughout the poem. Robert Frost's 1928 poem "Acquainted with the Night" is a contemporary example of terza rima.

A four-line stanza with lines of similar length and a set rhyme scheme is called a **quatrain.** The quatrain, the most widely used and versatile unit in English and American poetry, is used by William Wordsworth in the following excerpt from "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" (1800):

> A violet by a mossy stone
> Half hidden from the eye!
> —Fair as a star, when only one
> Is shining in the sky.

Quatrains are frequently used by contemporary poets as well—for instance, in Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 623), Adrienne Rich's "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" (p. 544), and William Stafford's "Traveling through the Dark" (p. 635).

One special kind of quatrain, called the **ballad stanza,** alternates lines of eight and six syllables; typically, only the second and fourth lines rhyme. The following lines from the traditional Scottish ballad "Sir Patrick Spence" illustrate the ballad stanza:

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

Common measure, a four-line stanzaic pattern closely related to the ballad stanza, is used in hymns as well as in poetry. It differs from the ballad stanza in that its rhyme scheme is *abab* rather than *abcb*.

Other stanzaic forms include **rhyme royal,** a seven-line stanza (*ababbcc*) set in iambic pentameter, used in Sir Thomas Wyatt's sixteenth-century poem "They Flee from Me That Sometimes Did Me Seke" as well as in Theodore Roethke's twentieth-century "I Knew a Woman" **ottava rima,** an eight-line stanza (*abababcc*) set in iambic pentameter; and the **Spenserian stanza,** a nine-line form (*ababbcbcc*) whose first eight lines are set in iambic pentameter and whose last line is in iambic hexameter. The Romantic poets John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley were among those who used the Spenserian stanza. (See Chapter 20 for definitions and examples of various metrical patterns.)

The Sonnet

Perhaps the most familiar kind of traditional closed form poem written in English is the **sonnet,** a fourteen-line poem with a distinctive rhyme scheme and metrical pattern. The English or **Shakespearean sonnet,** which consists of fourteen lines divided into three quatrains and a concluding couplet, is written in iambic pentameter and follows the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg*. The **Petrarchan sonnet,** popularized in the fourteenth century by the Italian poet Francesco Petrarch, also consists of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, but these lines are divided into an eight-line unit called an **octave** and a six-line unit (composed of two tercets) called a **sestet.** The rhyme scheme of the octave is *abba abba*; the rhyme scheme of the sestet is *cde cde*.

EXPLORE ONLINE >

To complete a tutorial on "Sonnet," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

The conventional structures of these sonnet forms reflect the arrangement of ideas within the poem. In the Shakespearean sonnet, the poet typically presents three "paragraphs" of related thoughts, introducing an idea in the first quatrain, developing it in the two remaining quatrains, and summing up in a succinct closing couplet. In the Petrarchan sonnet, the octave introduces a problem that is resolved in the sestet. (Many Shakespearean sonnets also have a problem-solution

structure.) Some poets vary the traditional patterns somewhat to suit the poem's language or ideas. For example, they may depart from the pattern to sidestep a forced rhyme or unnatural stress on a syllable, or they may shift from problem to solution in a place other than between octave and sestet.

The following poem has the form of a traditional English sonnet.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes (1609)

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless[1] cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, 5
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least,
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply[2] I think on thee, and then my state, 10
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love rememb'red such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Goddess of Fortune turning wheel
©Charles Walker / Topfoto / The Image Works

[1] *bootless:* Futile.
[2] *Haply:* Luckily.

Shakespeare's sonnet is written in iambic pentameter and has a conventional rhyme scheme: *abab* (eyes-state-cries-fate), *cdcd* (hope-possessed-scope-least), *efef* (despising-state-arising-gate), *gg* (brings-kings). In this poem, in which the speaker explains how thoughts of his loved one can rescue him from despair, each quatrain is unified by subject matter as well as by rhyme.

In the first quatrain, the speaker presents his problem: he is down on his luck and out of favor with his peers, isolated in self-pity and cursing his fate. In the second quatrain, he develops this idea further: he is envious of others and dissatisfied with things that usually please him. In the third quatrain, the focus shifts. The first two quatrains have developed a dependent clause ("When . . .") that introduces a problem, and now line 9 begins to present the resolution. In the third quatrain, the speaker explains how, in the midst of his despair and self-hatred, he thinks of his loved one, and his spirits soar. The closing couplet sums up the mood transformation the poem describes and explains its significance: when the speaker realizes the emotional riches his loved one gives him, he is no longer envious of others.

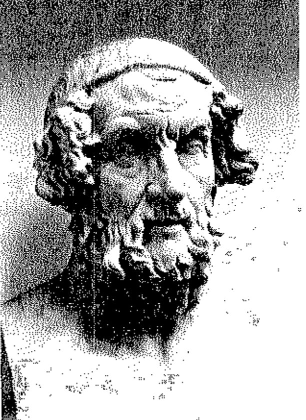
FURTHER READING: The Sonnet

JOHN KEATS (1795–1821)

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer[1] (1816)

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold,
  And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
  Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo[2] hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told 5
  That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne,[3]
  Yet did I never breathe its pure serene[4]
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
  When a new planet swims into his ken; 10
Or like stout Cortez[5] when with eagle eyes
  He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
  Silent, upon a peak in Darien.[6]

[1] *Chapman's Homer:* The translation of Homer's works by Elizabethan poet George Chapman.
[2] *Apollo:* Greek god of light, truth, reason, male beauty; associated with music and poetry.
[3] *demesne:* Realm, domain.
[4] *serene:* Air, atmosphere.
[5] *Cortez:* It was Vasco de Balboa (not Hernando Cortez as Keats suggests) who first saw the Pacific Ocean, from "a peak in Darien."
[6] *Darien:* Former name of the Isthmus of Panama.



Bust of Homer
Photo © Boltin Picture Library / The Bridgeman Art Library International

Reading and Reacting

1. Is this a Petrarchan or a Shakespearean sonnet? Explain.

2. **Journal Entry** The sestet's change of focus is introduced with the word *Then* in line 9. How does the mood of the sestet differ from the mood of the octave? How does the language differ?

3. **Critical Perspective** As Keats's biographer Aileen Ward observes, Homer's epic tales of gods and heroes were known to most readers of Keats's day only in a very formal eighteenth-century translation by Alexander Pope. Here is Pope's description of Ulysses escaping from a shipwreck:

    his knees no more
   Perform'd their office, or his weight upheld:
   His swoln heart heav'd, his bloated body swell'd:
   From mouth to nose the briny torrent ran,
   And lost in lassitude lay all the man,
   Deprived of voice, of motion, and of breath,
   The soul scarce waking in the arms of death . . .

   In a rare 1616 edition of Chapman's translation, Keats discovered a very different poem:

    both knees falt'ring, both
   His strong hands hanging down, and all with froth
   His cheeks and nostrils flowing, voice and breath
   Spent to all use, and down he sank to death.
   The sea had soak'd his heart through. . . .

   This, as Ward notes, was "poetry of a kind that had not been written in England for two hundred years."

   Can you understand why Keats was so moved by Chapman's translation? Do you think Keats's own poem seems closer in its form and language to Pope or to Chapman?

Related Works: "Snow" (p. 75), "Gryphon" (p. 152), "Araby" (p. 251), "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (p. 461), *Trifles* (p. 773)

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY (1892–1950)

Love is not all (1931)

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath, 5
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.
It well may be that in a difficult hour,
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release, 10
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
Or trade the memory of this night for food.
It well may be. I do not think I would.

Reading and Reacting

1. Describe the poem's rhyme scheme. Is it a Petrarchan or a Shakespearean sonnet?
2. Does this poem have a problem-solution structure, or is there some other thematic distinction between its octave and its sestet?
3. Why are the words "It well may be" repeated in lines 9 and 14?
4. **Journal Entry** The poem's first six lines list all the things that love is not and what it cannot do. Why do you think the poet chose not to enumerate what love *is* and what it *can* do?
5. **Critical Perspective** In an essay on Edna St. Vincent Millay's love sonnets, poet and critic Anna Evans notes the ways in which Millay's unconventional lifestyle provided material for her poetry:

   > Some of Millay's finest sonnets written during her marriage are presumed to be addressed to her younger poet lover George Dillon, who became part of a ménage a trois in the Millay household. . . The narrator of "Love is not all: it is not meat or drink" demonstrates Millay's newest philosophy of romantic love. There is no doubt that the speaker is expressing love for the object of the poem, yet there is no commitment, the love is spoken of already almost as of something in the past, and the poem lacks an absolute conviction of permanence.

   What evidence can you find in the poem to support Evans's claims that there is no romantic "commitment," and that the speaker "lacks an absolute conviction of permanence"?

Related Works: "Love and Other Catastrophes: A Mix Tape" (p. 78), "If I should learn, in some quite casual way" (p. 521), "When, in disgrace with Fortune and men'

eyes" (p. 564), "How Do I Love Thee?" (p. 638), "What lips my lips have kissed" (p. 638), "General Review of the Sex Situation" (p. 640)

LYNN AARTI CHANDHOK (1963–)

The Carpet Factory (2001)

A wood shack on the riverbank. Inside,
through dust-filled shafts of light, bright colors rise
and drown the warps, transforming their brown threads
to poppy fields, the Tree of Life, a wide
sun hemmed by cartwheeled tulips, fountainheads 5
that spew blue waterfalls of peacock eyes.

With furious fingers mothlike at the weft,
the children tie and cut and tie and cut
and tamp the knots down, turning blade to gavel.
Each pull's a dust-cloud *plink*—bereft 10
of music. Toothless men spit betelnut
in blood-red stains. Everywhere, reds unravel.

The bended limbs of saplings twist and part
and weave into the prayer rug's pale silk heart.

Reading and Reacting

1. Look carefully at this poem's rhyme scheme and at the way its lines are divided into stanzas. Is it more like a Shakespearean or a Petrarchan sonnet? Explain.
2. This poem uses color imagery to describe a prayer rug. Identify the references to color. Do they all describe the rug?
3. What point does this poem make about the carpet factory? How does the closing couplet sum up this point?
4. **Journal Entry** How are the descriptions of the factory—and of its child labourers—different from the descriptions of the carpets produced there?
5. **Critical Perspective** Reviewing Lynn Aarti Chandhok's book *The View from Zero Bridge*, Patty Paine focuses on the poem "The Carpet Factory":

   > This poem itself is meticulously crafted and beautifully realized. The form and the content merge seamless. . . One can see the slants of light, the children's fingers darting at the weft, hear the plink and watch the blood-red spittle seep into the ground. By taking such care with her images, the poet has created an intimacy and familiarity that transports the reader into a world that is fully formed. . . The specter of child labor hovers over "The Carpet Factory," and Chandhok confronts the issue through imagery rather than polemics.

   Given its focus on the issue of child labor, do you see this poem as social protest? Or, do you see the poem's content as less important than its form and imagery? How does Paine's reading of the poem affect your own interpretation of it? Do the poem's "form and content merge seamlessly"?

Related Works: "Girl" (p. 79), "Gretel in Darkness" (p. 428), "The Secretary Chant" (p. 513), "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" (p. 544), "Indian Boarding School: The Runaways" (p. 678), *Trifles* (p. 773)

GWENDOLYN BROOKS (1917–2000)

First Fight. Then Fiddle (1949)

First fight. Then fiddle. Ply the slipping string
With feathery sorcery; muzzle the note
With hurting love; the music that they wrote
Bewitch, bewilder. Qualify to sing
Threadwise. Devise no salt, no hempen thing 5
For the dear instrument to bear. Devote
The bow to silks and honey. Be remote
A while from malice and from murdering.
But first to arms, to armor. Carry hate
In front of you and harmony behind. 10
Be deaf to music and to beauty blind.
Win war. Rise bloody, maybe not too late
For having first to civilize a space
Wherein to play your violin with grace.

Reading and Reacting

1. What is the subject of Brooks's poem?
2. Explain the poem's rhyme scheme. Is this rhyme scheme an essential element of the poem? Would the poem be equally effective if it did not include end rhyme? Why, or why not?
3. Study the poem's use of capitalization and punctuation carefully. Why do you think Brooks chooses to end many of her sentences in midline? How do her decisions determine how you read the poem?
4. **Journal Entry** What do you think Brooks means by "fight" and "fiddle"?

Related Works: "The Soldier" (p. 643)

The Sestina

The **sestina,** introduced in thirteenth-century France, is composed of six 6-line stanzas and a three-line conclusion called an **envoi.** The sestina does not require end rhyme; however, it requires that each line end with one of six key words, which are repeated throughout the poem in a fixed order. The alternation of

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To complete a tutorial on "Sestina," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

these six words in different positions—but always at the ends of lines—in each of the poem's six stanzas creates a rhythmic verbal pattern that unifies the poem, as the key words do in the poem that follows.

ALBERTO ALVARO RÍOS (1952–)

Nani (1982)

Sitting at her table, she serves
the sopa de arroz[1] to me
instinctively, and I watch her,
the absolute mamá, and eat words
I might have had to say more 5
out of embarrassment. To speak,
now-foreign words I used to speak,
too, dribble down her mouth as she serves
me albóndigas.[2] No more
than a third are easy to me. 10
By the stove she does something with words
and looks at me only with her
back. I am full. I tell her
I taste the mint, and watch her speak
smiles at the stove. All my words 15
make her smile. Nani never serves
herself, she only watches me
with her skin, her hair. I ask for more.

I watch the mamá warming more
tortillas for me. I watch her 20
fingers in the flame for me.
Near her mouth, I see a wrinkle speak
of a man whose body serves
the ants like she serves me, then more words
from more wrinkles about children, words 25
about this and that, flowing more
easily from these other mouths. Each serves
as a tremendous string around her,
holding her together. They speak
nani was this and that to me 30
and I wonder just how much of me
will die with her, what were the words
I could have been, was. Her insides speak
through a hundred wrinkles, now, more
than she can bear, steel around her, 35
shouting, then, What is this thing she serves?

She asks me if I want more.
I own no words to stop her.
Even before I speak, she serves.

[1] *sopa de arroz:* Rice soup.
[2] *albóndigas:* Meatballs.

In many respects, Ríos's poem closely follows the form of the traditional sestina. For instance, it interweaves six key words—"serves," "me," "her," "words," "more," and "speak"—through six groups of six lines each, rearranging the order in which the words appear so that the first line of each group of six lines ends with the same key word that also ended the preceding group of lines. The poem repeats the key words in exactly the order prescribed: *abcdef, faebdc, cfdabe,* and so on. In addition, the sestina closes with a three-line envoi that includes all six of the poem's key words, three at the ends of lines and three within the lines. Despite this generally strict adherence to the sestina form, Ríos departs from the form by grouping his six sets of six lines not into six separate stanzas but rather into two eighteen-line stanzas.

The sestina form suits Ríos's subject matter. The focus of the poem, on the verbal and nonverbal interaction between the poem's "me" and "her," is reinforced by each of the related words. "Nani" is a poem about communication, and the key words return to probe this theme again and again. Throughout the poem, these repeated words help to create a fluid, melodic, and tightly woven work.

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FURTHER READING: The Sestina

ELIZABETH BISHOP (1911–1979)

EXPLORE ONLINE: To listen to an audio reading of "Sestina," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

Sestina (1965)

September rain falls on the house.
In the failing light, the old grandmother
sits in the kitchen with the child
beside the Little Marvel Stove,
reading the jokes from the almanac, 5
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house
were both foretold by the almanac,
but only known to a grandmother. 10
The iron kettle sings on the stove.
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears
dance like mad on the hot black stove, 15

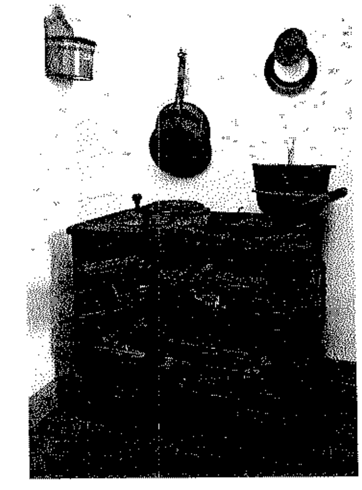
the way the rain must dance on the house.
Tidying up, the old grandmother
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac
hovers half open above the child, 20
hovers above the old grandmother
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.
She shivers and says she thinks the house
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove. 25
I know what I know, says the almanac.
With crayons the child draws a rigid house
and a winding pathway. Then the child
puts in a man with buttons like tears
and shows it proudly to the grandmother. 30

But secretly, while the grandmother
busies herself about the stove,
the little moons fall down like tears
from between the pages of the almanac
into the flower bed the child 35
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.
The grandmother sings to the marvellous stove
and the child draws another inscrutable house.



Stove similar to Marvel stove
© Niels Poulsen mus / Alamy

Reading and Reacting

1. Does the poet's adherence to the traditional sestina form create any problems? For example, do you think word order seems forced at any point?
2. Consider the adjectives used in this poem. Are any of them unexpected? What is the effect of these surprising choices? Do you find them distracting, or do you think they strengthen the poem?
3. **Journal Entry** What are the poem's six key words? How are these words related to the poem's theme?
4. **Critical Perspective** In his essay "Elizabeth Bishop's Surrealist Inheritance," Richard Mullen writes the following:

   > Some of the enchanted mystery which permeates Elizabeth Bishop's poetry arises from her preoccupation with dreams, sleep, and the borders between sleeping and waking. Her poems contain much of the magic, uncanniness and displacement associated with the works of the surrealists, for she too explores the workings of the unconscious and the interplay between conscious perception and dream.

   What examples can you find in "Sestina" of "the enchanted mystery" to which Mullen refers? In what ways is the poem dreamlike?

Related Works: "Nani" (p. 570), "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 623), "One Art" (p. 659)

PATRICIA SMITH (1955–)

Ethel's Sestina (2006)

Ethel Freeman's body sat for days in her wheelchair outside the New Orleans Convention Center. Her son Herbert, who has assured his mother that help was on the way, was forced to leave her there once she died.

Gon' be obedient in this there chair,
gon's bide my time, fanning against this sun.
I ask my boy, and all he says is *Wait*.
He wipes my brow with steam, says I should sleep.
I trust his every word. Herbert my son. 5
I believe him when he says help gon' come

Been so long since all these suffrin' folks come
to this place. Now on the ground 'round my chair,
they sweat in my shade, keep asking my son
could that be a bus they see. It's the sun 10
foolin' them, shining much too loud for sleep,
making us hear engines, wheels. Not yet. Wait.

Lawd, some folks prayin' for rain while they wait,
forgetting what rain can do. When it come,
it smashes living flat, wakes you from sleep, 15

eats streets, washes you clean out of the chair
you be sittin' in. Best to praise this sun,
shinin' its dry shine *Lawd have mercy, son.*

Is it coming? Such a strong man, my son.
Can't help but believe when he tells us, *Wait.* 20
Wait some more. Wish some trees would block this sun.
We wait. Ain't no white men or buses come,
but look—see that there? Get me out this chair,
help me stand on up. No time for sleepin',

cause look what's rumbling this way. It you sleep 25
you gon' miss it. *Look there,* I tell my son.
He don't hear. I'm 'bout to get out this chair,
but the ghost in my legs tells me to wait,
wait for the salvation that's she to come.
I see my savior's face 'longside that sun. 30

Nobody sees me running toward the sun.
Lawd, they think I done gone and fell asleep.
They don't hear *Come.*

Come.
Come. 35
Come.
Come.
Come.
Come.
Ain't but one power make me leave my son. 40
I can't wait, Herbert. Lawd knows I can't wait.
Don't cry, boy, I ain't in that chair no more.

Wish you coulda come on this journey, son,
seen that ol' sweet sun lift me out of sleep.
Didn't have to wait. And see my golden chair? 45

Reading and Reacting

1. What six key words are repeated in this poem? What other words are repeated? Why?
2. Where does this sestina depart from its required form? Is this departure justified by the poem's theme or subject matter? Does it strengthen or weaken the poem's impact?
3. **Journal Entry** Write a few sentences—or a few lines of poetry—from Herbert's point of view, expressing what you think he would like to tell his mother.
4. **Critical Perspective** In an interview with Cherryl Floyd-Miller for the Webzine *Torch,* Patricia Smith talked about the qualities of a good "persona poem":

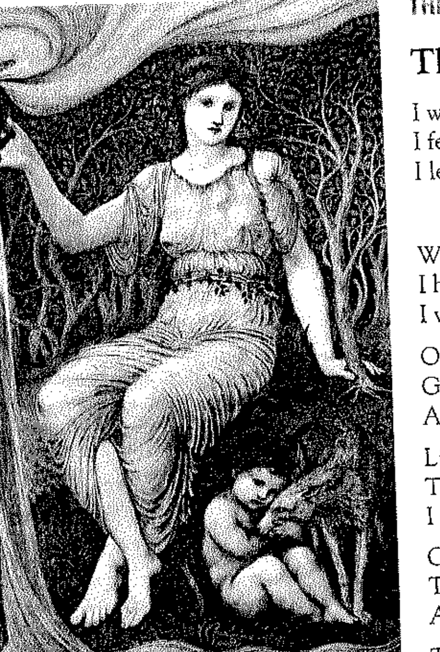
> I think the persona poem moves us out of our space, moves us out of our comfort zone where we're almost forced to take a really hard look at another life. Whether it be something you're just doing for the fun of it, like, you know, wow, what's it like to be Little Richard for a day, or you're sitting next to some woman who is clutching like twenty bags or something on the subway, you know that her whole life is in those bags, and you realize just how close everyone's life is to your own.

Does "Ethel's Sestina" take you "out of [your] comfort zone"? Does it make you "realize just how close everyone's life is to your own"?

Related Works: "Girl" (p. 79), "Everyday Use" (p. 297), "Incident" (p. 525), "Do not go gentle into that good night" (p. 628), *Fences* (p. 1111)

The Villanelle

The **villanelle,** first introduced in France during the Middle Ages, is a nineteen-line poem composed of five tercets and a concluding quatrain; its rhyme scheme is *aba aba aba aba aba abaa.* Two different lines are systematically repeated in the poem: line 1 appears again in lines 6, 12, and 18, and line 3 reappears as lines 9, 15, and 19. Thus, each tercet concludes with an exact (or close) duplication of either line 1 or line 3, and the final quatrain concludes by repeating both line 1 and line 3.



Earth Mother, painting of Mother Nature by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1882
Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts, USA / The Bridgeman Art Library International

THEODORE ROETHKE (1908–1963)

The Waking (1953)

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.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

"The Waking," like all villanelles, closely intertwines threads of sounds and words. The repeated lines and the very regular rhyme and meter give the poem a monotonous, almost hypnotic, rhythm. This poem uses end rhyme and repeats entire lines. It also makes extensive use of alliteration ("I feel my fate in what I cannot fear") and internal rhyme ("I hear my being dance from ear to ear"; "I wake to sleep and take my waking slow"). The result is a tightly constructed poem of overlapping sounds and images.

The Epigram

Originally, an epigram was an inscription carved in stone on a monument or statue. As a literary form, an **epigram** is a very brief poem that makes a pointed, often sarcastic, comment in a surprising twist at the end. In a sense, it is a poem with a punch line. Although some epigrams rhyme, others do not. Many are only two lines long, but others are somewhat longer. What they have in common is their economy of language and their tone. One of the briefest of epigrams, written by Ogden Nash, appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine in 1931:

The Bronx?
No thonx.

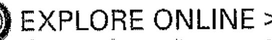
Here, in four words, Nash manages to convey the unexpected, using rhyme and creative spelling to convey his assessment of one of New York City's five boroughs. The poem's two lines are perfectly balanced, making the contrast between the noncommittal tone of the first and the negative tone of the second quite striking.

FURTHER READING: The Epigram

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772–1834)

What Is an Epigram? (1802)

What is an epigram? a dwarfish whole,
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.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To listen to an audio reading of "What Is an Epigram?," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

DOROTHY PARKER (1893–1967)

News Item (1937)

Men seldom make passes
At girls who wear glasses.

Reading and Reacting

1. Explain the point made in each of the epigrams above.
2. Evaluate each poem. What qualities do you conclude make an epigram effective?
3. **Journal Entry** In what respects are short-short stories (see Chapter 10) and ten-minute plays (see Chapter 36) like epigrams?
4. **Critical Perspective** In "Making Love Modern: Dorothy Parker and Her Public," Nina Miller explains why Dorothy Parker's poetry achieved its considerable popularity during the 1920s:

   Sophistication—that highly prized commodity which was to define the Jazz Age—meant cynicism and a barbed wit, and women like Parker were perfectly situated to dominate this discourse. In the twenties, as a wisecracking member of the celebrated Algonquin Round Table, Parker would be at the cutting edge of a mannered and satirical wittiness, one which determined the shape of her poetry in important ways.

   What is it that makes "News Item" witty? If it is satirical, what attitudes in society does it satirize?

Related Works: "Fire and Ice" (p. 436), "You fit into me" (p. 526), "General Review of the Sex Situation" (p. 640), *Nine Ten* (p. 767)

MARTÍN ESPADA (1957–)

Why I Went to College (2000)

If you don't,
my father said,
you better learn
to eat soup
through a straw, 5
'cause I'm gonna
break your jaw

Reading and Reacting

1. How is "Why I Went to College" different from Coleridge's and Parker's epigrams? How is it similar to them?
2. What function does the poem's title serve? Is it the epigram's "punch line," or does it serve another purpose?
3. What can you infer about the speaker's father from this poem? Why, for example, do you think he wants his son to go to college?

4. **Journal Entry** Exactly why did the speaker go to college? Expand this short poem into a paragraph written from the speaker's point of view.

Related Works: "Baca Grande" (p. 472), "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 623), "'Faith' is a fine invention" (p. 671)

A. R. AMMONS (1926–2001)

Both Ways (1990)

One can't
have it

both ways
and both

ways is 5
the only

way I
want it.

Reading and Reacting

1. Is this poem actually an epigram, or is it just a short poem? Explain your conclusion.
2. Why do you think the speaker uses "one" in line 1 and "I" in line 7? Try substituting other pronouns for these two. How do your substitutions change the poem's meaning?
3. **Journal Entry** Write three original epigrams: one about love, one about school or work, and one about a social or political issue.
4. **Critical Perspective** In reviewing *The Really Short Poems of A. R. Ammons*, poet and critic Fred Chappell criticizes some of the individual poems as trivial or even confusing but then goes on to add the following:

> [A]t his best [Ammons] is incomparable. No one else is so cheerfully quirky, so slyly sensible, so oxymoronically accurate. Most of us think in clichés, I'm afraid, but Ammons appears to think in reversed clichés; it's hard to believe he ever met a thought he didn't want to stand on its head. When he has done so, the effect may be merely clumsy. But it may also be utterly fresh and original, witty, unexpected, serious, and even profound.

Is "Both Ways" an example of one of the "reversed clichés" that Chappell discusses? Is the poem "witty"? Could it be considered "serious, and even profound"?

Related Works: "Two Questions" (p. 96), "Story of an Hour" (p. 115), "Two Kinds" (p. 405) "The Road Not Taken" (p. 550), "Ethics (p. 697), *Beauty* (p. 750)

WANG PING (1957–)

Syntax (1999)

She walks to a table
She walk to table

She is walking to a table
She walk to table now

What difference does it make 5
What difference it make

In Nature, no completeness
No sentence really complete thought

Language, like woman,
Look best when free, undressed. 10

Reading and Reacting

1. Does each couplet in this poem constitute a separate epigram? Could the entire poem be considered an epigram or does only the last couplet satisfy the criteria of an epigram?
2. What point does this poem make? How does the contrast between each set of paired lines in the first three couplets get this point across?
3. What does the word *syntax* mean? Is this word an appropriate title for the poem? Why, or why not?
4. **Journal Entry** What do you think the speaker means by language that is "free, undressed" (10)? Does this poem's language qualify as both "free" and "undressed"? Explain.
5. **Critical Perspective** In an interview with Daniel Kane, Wang Ping describes the genesis of her poem "Syntax":

> This poem came out of a conversation I had with a poet named Leonard Schwartz. I was talking to him and I made a grammatical mistake. He was correcting me and I said "What difference does it make?" I suddenly realized I could write a poem out of that. I wanted to explore the relationship between language and nature, language and the body, language and culture.

How does "Syntax" "explore the relationship between language and nature, language and the body, language and culture"? How would you interpret Ping's reaction—"What difference does it make?"—to being corrected? Is she saying that a grammatical mistake makes *no* difference, or is she wondering about the difference that it does in fact make?

Related Works: "Two Questions" (p. 96), "Beautiful" (p. 459)

Haiku

Like an epigram, a haiku compresses words into a very small package. Unlike an epigram, however, a haiku focuses on an image, not an idea. A traditional Japanese

form, the **haiku** is a brief unrhymed poem that presents the essence of some aspect of nature, concentrating a vivid image in three lines. Although in the strictest sense a haiku consists of seventeen syllables divided into lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively, not all poets conform to this rigid structure.

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To complete a tutorial on "Haiku," visit your Literature CourseMate, accessed through www.cengagebrain.com.

The following poem is a translation of a classic Japanese haiku by Matsuo Bashō:

Silent and still: then.
Even sinking into the rocks,
The cicada's screech.

Notice that this poem conforms to the haiku's three-line structure and traditional subject matter, vividly depicting a natural scene without comment or analysis.

FURTHER READING: Haiku

MATSUO BASHŌ (1644–1694)

Four Haiku*

Translated by Geoffrey Bownas and Anthony Thwaite

Spring:
A hill without a name
Veiled in morning mist.

The beginning of autumn:
Sea and emerald paddy 5
Both the same green.

The winds of autumn
Blow: yet still green
The chestnut husks.

A flash of lightning: 10
Into the gloom
Goes the heron's cry.

Reading and Reacting

1. Haiku are admired for their extreme economy and their striking images. What are the central images in each of Bashō's haiku? To what senses do these images appeal?
2. In another poem, Bashō says that art begins with "The depths of the country / and a rice-planting song." What do you think he means? How do these four haiku exemplify this idea?
3. Do you think the conciseness of these poems increases or decreases the impact of their images? Explain.
4. **Journal Entry** "In a Station of the Metro" (p. 491) is Ezra Pound's version of a haiku. How successful do you think his poem is as a haiku? Do you think a longer poem could have conveyed the images more effectively?

Related Works: "Where Mountain Lion Lay Down with Deer" (p. 432), "the sky was candy" (p. 586), "Birches" (p. 632), "Fog" (p. 632)

*Publication date is not available.

CAROLYN KIZER (1925–)

After Bashō (1984)

Tentatively, you
slip onstage this evening,
pallid, famous moon.

Reading and Reacting

1. What possible meanings might the word "After" have in the title? What does the title tell readers about the writer's purpose?
2. What is the impact of "tentatively" in the first line and "famous" in the last line? How do the connotations of these words convey the image of the moon?
3. **Journal Entry** What visual picture does the poem suggest? What mood does the poem's central image create?

Related Works: "Four Haiku" (p. 580), "Meeting at Night" (p. 637)

JACK KEROUAC (1922–1969)

American Haiku

Early morning yellow flowers,
thinking about
the drunkards of Mexico.

No telegram today
only more leaves 5
fell.

Nightfall,
boy smashing dandelions
with a stick.

Holding up my 10
purring cat to the moon
I sighed.

Drunk as a hoot owl,
writing letters
by thunderstorm. 15

Empty baseball field
a robin
hops along the bench.

All day long
wearing a hat 20
that wasn't on my head.

Crossing the football field
coming home from work—
the lonely businessman.

After the shower 25
among the drenched roses
the bird thrashing in the bath.

Snap your finger
stop the world—
rain falls harder. 30

Nightfall,
too dark to read the page
too cold.

Following each other
my cats stop 35
when it thunders.

Wash hung out
by moonlight
Friday night in May.

The bottoms of my shoes 40
are clean
from walking in the rain.

Glow worm
sleeping on this flower—
your light's on. 45

Reading and Reacting

1. How are these haiku different from those by Matsuo Bashō (p. 580)? Do they fit the definition of *haiku* on page 580?
2. What, if anything, makes these poems "American"? Is it their language? their subject matter? something else?
3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Try writing a few "American haiku" of your own. Then, evaluate the success of your efforts. What problems did you encounter?
4. **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** Writing about his experiments with haiku, Jack Kerouac said, "Above all, a Haiku must be very simple and free of all poetic trickery and make a little picture and yet be as airy and graceful as a Vivaldi Pastorella."

   Do you think Kerouac's haiku satisfy these conditions?

Related Works: "Love and Other Catastrophes: A Mix Tape" (p. 78); *from* "Song of Myself" (p. 712)

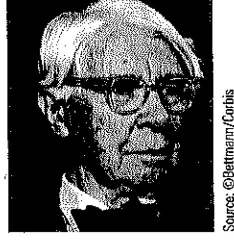
Open Form

Although an **open form** poem may make occasional use of rhyme and meter, it has no easily identifiable pattern or design: no conventional stanzaic divisions, no consistent metrical pattern or line length, no repeated rhyme scheme. Still, open form poetry is not necessarily shapeless, untidy, or randomly ordered. All poems have form, and the form of a poem may be determined by factors such as repeated sounds, the appearance of words on the printed page, or pauses in natural speech as well as by a conventional metrical pattern or rhyme scheme.

Open form poetry invites readers to participate in the creative process, to discover the relationship between form and meaning. In fact, some modern poets believe that only open form offers them freedom to express their ideas or that the subject matter or mood of their poetry demands a relaxed, experimental approach to form. For example, when Lawrence Ferlinghetti portrays the poet as an acrobat who "climbs on rime" (p. 507), he constructs his poem in a way that is consistent with the poet/acrobat's willingness to take risks. Thus, the poem's idiosyncratic form supports its ideas about the limitless possibilities of poetry and the poet as experimenter.

Without a predetermined pattern, however, poets must create forms that suit their needs, and they must continue to shape and reshape the look of the poem on the page as they revise its words. Thus, open form is a challenge, but it is also a way for poets to experiment with fresh arrangements of words and new juxtapositions of ideas.

For some poets, such as Carl Sandburg, open form provides an opportunity to create **prose poems**, poems that look more like prose than like poetry.

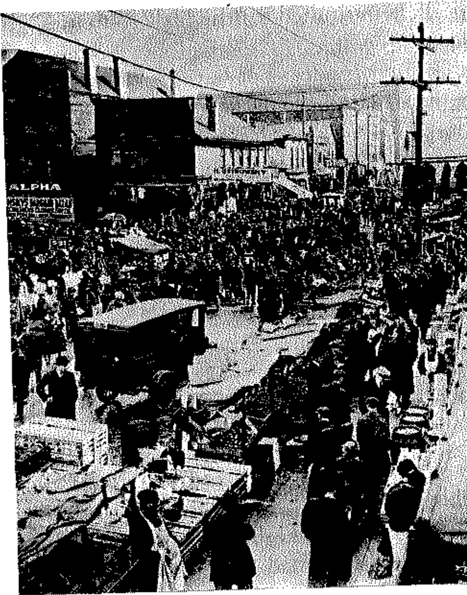


Source: ©Bettmann/Corbis

CARL SANDBURG (1878–1967)

Chicago (1914)

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders: 5
They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning. 10
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking, 15
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle, 20
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.



Chicago street scene, 1925
© Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

"Chicago" uses capitalization and punctuation conventionally, and it generally (though not always) arranges words in lines in a way that is consistent with the natural divisions of phrases and sentences. However, the poem is not divided into stanzas, and its lines vary widely in length—from a single word isolated on a line to a line crowded with words—and follow no particular metrical pattern. Instead, its form is created through its pattern of alternating sections of long and short lines; through its repeated words and phrases ("They tell me" in lines 6–8, "under" in lines 18–19, and "laughing" in lines 18–23, for example); through alliteration (for instance, "slugger set vivid against the little soft cities" in line 11); and, most of all, through the piling up of words and images into catalogs in lines 1–5, 13–17, and 22.

In order to understand Sandburg's reasons for choosing such a form, readers need to consider the poem's subject matter and theme. "Chicago" celebrates the scope and power of a "Stormy, husky, brawling" city, one that is exuberant and outgoing, not sedate and civilized. Chicago is a city that does not follow anyone else's rules; it is, after all, "Bareheaded, / Shoveling, / Wrecking, / Planning, / Building, breaking, rebuilding," constantly active, in flux, on the move, "proud to be alive." "Fierce as a dog . . . cunning as a savage," the city is characterized as, among other things, a worker, a fighter, and a harborer of "painted women" and killers and hungry women and children. Just as Chicago itself does not conform to the rules, the poem departs from the orderly confines of stanzaic form and measured rhyme and meter, a kind

of form that is, after all, better suited to "the little soft cities" than to the "tall bold slugger" that is Chicago.

Of course, open form poetry does not have to look like Sandburg's prose poem. The following poem, an extreme example of open form, looks almost as if it has spilled out of a box of words.

E. E. CUMMINGS (1894–1962)

the sky was candy (1925)

the
        sky
            was
can   dy lu
minous 5
            edible
spry
        pinks shy
lemons
greens   coo l choc 10
olate
s.
    un der,
    a lo
co 15
mo
    tive   s pout
                        ing
                            vi
                            o 20
                            lets

Like many of Cummings's poems, this one seems ready to skip off the page. Its irregular line length and its unconventional capitalization, punctuation, and word divisions immediately draw readers' attention to its form. Despite these oddities, and despite the absence of orderly rhyme and meter, the poem does have its conventional elements.

A closer examination reveals that the poem's theme—the beauty of the sky—is quite conventional; that the poem is divided, though somewhat crudely, into two sections; and that the poet does use some rhyme—"spry" and "shy," for example. However, Cummings's sky is described not in traditional terms but rather as something "edible," not only in terms of color but of flavor as well. The breaks within words ("can dy lu / minous"; "coo l choc / olate / s") seem to expand the words' possibilities, visually stretching them to the limit, extending their taste and visual image over several lines and, in the case of the poem's last two words, visually reinforcing the picture the words describe. In addition, the isolation of syllables exposes hidden rhyme, as in "lo / co / mo" and "lu" / "coo." Thus, by using open form, Cummings illustrates the capacity of a poem to move beyond the traditional boundaries set by words and lines.

FURTHER READING: Open Form

WALT WHITMAN (1819–1892)

from "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (1881)

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month[1] midnight,
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child
    leaving his bed wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
Down from the shower'd halo, 5
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if
    they were alive,
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and
    fallings I heard,
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if
    with tears, 10
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the
    mist,
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,
From the myriad thence-arous'd words,
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
From such as now they start the scene revisiting, 15
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,
Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter, 20
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
A reminiscence sing.

[1] *Ninth-month:* The Quaker designation for September; in context, an allusion to the human birth cycle.

Reading and Reacting

1. This excerpt, the first twenty-two lines of a poem nearly two hundred lines long, has no regular metrical pattern or rhyme scheme. What gives it its form?
2. How might you explain why the poem's lines vary in length?
3. **JOURNAL ENTRY** Compare this excerpt with the excerpt from Whitman's "Song of Myself" (p. 712). In what respects are the forms of the two poems similar?

Related Works: "Chicago" (p. 584), "Defending Walt Whitman" (p. 652), from "Song of Myself" (p. 712)

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883–1963)

Spring and All (1923)

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast—a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields 5
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy 10
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches— 15

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind—

Now the grass, tomorrow 20
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined—
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance—Still, the profound change 25
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken

Contagious Hospital, Brookline, MA, 1909
© Brookline Historical Society, Brookline, Massachusetts

Reading and Reacting

1. Although this poem is written in free verse and lacks a definite pattern of meter or rhyme, it includes some characteristics of closed form poetry. Explain.
2. What does Williams accomplish by visually isolating lines 7–8 and lines 14–15?
3. "Spring and All" includes assonance, alliteration, and repetition. Give several examples of each technique, and explain what each adds to the poem.
4. **JOURNAL ENTRY** What do you think the word *All* means in the poem's title?
5. **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** According to critic Bonnie Costello, "Williams thought about the creative process in painters' terms, and he asks us to experience the work as we might experience a modern painting. His great achievement was to bring some of its qualities into poetry."
   Consider the images Williams uses in this poem. In what ways is this poem like a painting? Which images are conveyed in "painters' terms"? How does he use these images to create meaning in the poem?

Related Works: "l(a" (p. 423), "Pied Beauty" (p. 551), "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (p. 630), "Monet's '*Waterlilies*'" (p. PS4)

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA (1947–)

Nude Interrogation (1998)

Did you kill anyone over there? Angelica shifts her gaze from the Janis Joplin poster to the Jimi Hendrix, lifting the pale muslin blouse over her head. The blacklight deepens

the blues when the needle drops into the first groove of "All Along the Watchtower." I don't want to look at the floor. Did you kill anyone? Did you dig a hole, crawl inside, and wait for your target? Her miniskirt drops into a rainbow at her feet. Sandalwood incense hangs a slow comet of perfume over the room. I shake my head. She unhooks her bra and flings it against a bookcase made of plywood and cinderblocks. Did you use an M-16, a hand-grenade, a bayonet, or your own two strong hands, both thumbs pressed against that little bird in the throat? She stands with her left thumb hooked into the elastic of her sky-blue panties. When she flicks off the blacklight, snowy hills rush up to the windows. Did you kill anyone over there? Are you right-handed or left-handed? Did you drop your gun afterwards? Did you kneel beside the corpse and turn it over? She's nude against the falling snow. Yes. The record spins like a bull's-eye on the far wall of Xanadu.[1] Yes, I say. I was scared of the silence. The night was too big. And afterwards, I couldn't stop looking up at the sky.

Reading and Reacting

1. Who is the speaker? Why is Angelica interrogating him? How is the fact that she is undressing during this interrogation related to the questions she asks?
2. What do you think is going through the speaker's mind as he watches Angelica undress? Is he thinking about her, or is he thinking about Vietnam? How can you tell?
3. **Journal Entry** Retype this poem so it looks like a story, adding paragraph breaks and quotation marks as necessary. Do you think its impact is greater in this format? Why or why not?

Related Works: "The Things They Carried" (p. 269), "Facing It" (p. 646), "Terza Rima" (p. 648)

DIONISIO MARTÍNEZ (1956–)

The Prodigal Son catches up with the bounty hunters (1998)

There is only one answer and even the bread crumbs stand at attention when it comes. Someone starts to talk about alleged disappearances, but is soon interrupted and the subject is closed. They bring him up to date on all the deaths in the family, the marriages, the births. In the wake of the latest scandal, they tell him, the new government has maintained its innocence, blaming the Constitution, blaming the scholars and "their gross misinterpretation of our laws." Tap water is potable for the first time in years. The house fell and was rebuilt at least three times, always on a different site. There was a war, they admit, although that's not what they want to say. There was famine. Their lungs and then their chests and finally their mouths fill with all the things they'd like to tell him. He knows the answer, but likes to hear them say it. After hovering, after spying like an insect on the screen door, he asks if perhaps there's a place for him at the table.

[1] *Xanadu*: A mythical location and image of other worldly beauty in the poem "Kubla Khan" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

DIONISIO MARTÍNEZ (1956–)

The Prodigal Son jumps bail (1998)

After hovering, after spying like an insect on the screen door, he asks if perhaps there's a place for him at the table. He knows the answer, but likes to hear them say it. Their lungs and then their chests and finally their mouths fill with all the things they'd like to tell him. There was a war, they admit, although that's not what they want to say. There was famine. The house fell and was rebuilt at least three times, always on a different site. Tap water is potable for the first time in years. In the wake of the latest scandal, they tell him, the new government has maintained its innocence blaming the Constitution, blaming the scholars and "their gross misinterpretation of our laws." They bring him up to date on all the deaths in the family, the marriages, the births. Someone starts to talk about alleged disappearances, but is soon interrupted and the subject is closed. There is only one answer and even the bread crumbs stand at attention when it comes.

Reading and Reacting

1. Treating Martínez's two prose poems as prose rather than poetry, try dividing them int[o] paragraphs. What determines where you make your divisions?
2. If you were to reshape Martínez's poems into conventional-looking poetry, what option[s] might you have? Rearrange a few sentences of the poem so that they "look like poetry," an[d] compare your revision to the original. Which version do you find more effective? Why?
3. What is the main theme of these poems? How does their form help Martínez to communi-cate this theme?
4. **Journal Entry** Do you think these two works are poetry or prose? Consider their subjec[t] matter and language as well as their form.
5. **Critical Perspective** Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, critic Katha Pollitt f[o]cuses on "poetic clichés," which, she says, are "attempts to energize the poem by annexing [a] subject that is guaranteed to produce a knee-jerk response in the reader. This saves a lot [of] bother all around, and enables poet and reader to drowse together in a warm bath of mutu[al] admiration for each other's capacity for deep feeling and right thinking." Among the poet[ic] clichés Pollitt discusses is something she calls "the CNN poem, which retells in overheate[d] free verse a prominent news story involving war, famine, torture, child abuse or murder."

   Do you think Martínez's poems (and Komunyakaa's poem on page 956) are "CN[N] poems," or do you see them as something more than just "poetic cliché"?

Related Works: "Poetry Searches for Radiance" (p. 415), "Hope" (p. 449)

✔ **CHECKLIST Writing about Form**

- Is the poem written in open or closed form? On what characteristics do you base your conclusion?
- Why did the poet choose open or closed form? For example, is the poem's form consistent with its subject matter, tone, or theme? Is it determined by the conventions of the historical period in which it was written?
- If the poem is arranged in closed form, does the pattern apply to single lines, to groups of lines, or to the entire poem? What factors determine the breaks between groups of lines?
- Is the poem a sonnet? a sestina? a villanelle? an epigram? a haiku? How do the traditional form's conventions suit the poet's language and theme? Does the poem follow the rules of the form at all times, or does it break any new ground?
- If the poem is arranged in open form, what determines the breaks at the ends of lines?
- Are certain words or phrases isolated on lines? Why?
- How do elements such as assonance, alliteration, rhyme, and repetition of words give the poem form?
- What use does the poet make of punctuation and capitalization? Of white space on the page?
- Is the poem a prose poem? How does this form support the poem's subject matter?
- Is the poem a concrete poem? How does the poet use the visual shape of the poem to convey meaning?

WRITING SUGGESTIONS: Form

1. Reread the definitions of closed form and open form in this chapter. Based on these definitions, do you think concrete poems are "open" or "closed"? Explain your position in a short essay, supporting your thesis with specific references to the concrete poems in this chapter.
2. Some poets—for example, Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost—write both open and closed form poems. Choose one open and one closed form poem by a single poet, and analyze the two poems, explaining the poet's possible reasons for choosing each type of form.
3. Do you see complex forms, such as the villanelle and the sestina, as exercises or even merely as opportunities for poets to show off their skills—or do you believe the special demands of the forms add something valuable to a poem? To help you answer this question, read Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" (p. 628), and Elizabeth Bishop's "Sestina" (p. 571).
4. Look through Chapter 24, "Poetry for Further Reading," and identify one or two **prose poems.** Write an essay in which you consider why the form seems suitable for the poem or poems you have chosen. Is there a particular kind of subject matter that seems especially appropriate for a prose poem?