



Reading Poetry

- Read straight through to get a general sense of the poem.
- Try to understand the poem's meaning and organization, studying these elements:
 - Title
 - Speaker
 - Meanings of all words
 - Poem's setting and situation
 - Poem's basic form and development
 - Poem's subject and theme
- Read the poem aloud, sounding each word clearly.
- Prepare a paraphrase of the poem, and make an explication of the ideas and themes.



Writing an Explication of a Poem

- Questions to ask in preparation:
 - What does the title contribute to the reader's understanding?
 - Who is speaking? What is the situation?
 - What difficult, special, unusual words does the poem contain? What references need explaining?
 - How does the poem develop? Personal statement or a story?
 - What is the main idea of the poem?
- Write a paraphrase of a poem = rewrite in prose in your own words
- Explain poem's major organizing elements
- Explain poem in relation to your central idea
- Explain structure of the poem (prosody, closed, open, etc.)



Imagery in Poetry

- Sight = visual images
- Sound = auditory images (sounds)
- Touch = tactile images (textures)
- Taste = gustatory images
- Smell = gustatory, odors
- Movement = kinetic and kinesthetic images



Figures of Speech

- Terms describing patterns of comparison that deepen, broaden, extend, illuminate meaning
 - Metaphor = Equates known objects or actions with something unknown; e.g., It is music to my ears.
 - Simile = similarity or comparability of the known to something unknown; e.g., Your words are like music to my ears.
 - Paradox = Something apparently wrong or contradictory is shown to be truthful or noncontradictory; e.g., "I burn and freeze like ice."
 - Anaphora = Repetition of the same word or phrase



Figures of Speech (cont'd)

- Apostrophe = Speaker addresses a real or imagined listener
- Personification = Relationships to environment, ideals, and inner lives; e.g., "Poor Soul, the Center of My Sinful Earth"
- Synecdoche = A part stands for the whole; e.g., all hands aboard.
- Metonymy = Substitutes one thing for another, one thing represents another; e.g., White House, Hollywood
- Pun (paronomasia) = Wordplay stemming from the fact that words with different meanings sound alike or similar
- Synesthesia = Description of feeling or perception with words that are not usually used with that feeling; e.g., wine tastes of "Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth"
- Overstatement or Understatement = Exaggeration or its opposite



Tone in Poetry

- Shaping of attitudes in poetry through choice of words
 - Poet establishes a common ground of assent
- Verbal irony = Emphasis on ambiguities and discrepancies through word selection
- Situational irony = Discrepancies between life's anomalies and uncertainties
- Dramatic irony = Readers understand the irony better than the characters in the poem
- Satire = Words exposing human follies and vices – often bitter and vituperative = insulting



Form: The Shape of a Poem

- Closed-form = lines of poetry contain specific number of syllables measured by heavy stress (prime) or light stress (breve)
 - Units of light and heavy stresses = feet
- Types of poetic feet
 - Iamb = light, heavy
 - Trochee = heavy, light
 - Spondee = heavy, heavy
 - Pyrrhic = light, light
 - Anapest = light, light, heavy
 - Dactyl = heavy, light, light
 - Imperfect = single light, single heavy



Form (cont'd)

- Analysis of poetic rhythm = prosody or metrics or versification or scansion
- Repetition of feet in a line of poetry
 - Monometer = one foot
 - Dimeter = two feet
 - Trimeter = three feet
 - Tetrameter = four feet
 - Pentameter = five feet
- Poetic equivalent of a paragraph = stanza
- Rhyme = major characteristic of closed-form poetry
- Assonance = repetition of vowel sounds in a line of poetry
- Alliteration = repetition of consonant sounds in a line of poetry



Types of Closed-form Poetry

- Blank verse = five unrhymed iambic lines (iambic pentameter)
- Couplet = two rhyming lines identical in length and meter
- Tercet = three-line stanza, often all rhyming
- Quatrain = four-line stanza, most common
- Sonnet = fourteen-line poem
 - Italian (Petrarchan) = one octave, one sestet, usually abba,abba,cde,cde
 - English (Shakespearean) = three quatrains, one couplet, sometimes abab,cdec,efef,gg
- Villanelle = nineteen-line poem containing six tercets, rhymed aba, concluded by four lines – most difficult to write



Closed-form Poetry (cont'd)

- Song or lyric = stanzaic poem of variable length
- Ode = complex, extensive stanzaic poem
- Ballad = old songs, usually quatrains of xaxa, xbxb, xcxc, etc.
- Hymn = religious songs, usually quatrains
- Haiku = Oriental poem consisting of seventeen syllables, three lines (five, seven, five) and dealing with nature
- Epigram = short, witty poem, often satirical
- Epitaph = short poem marking someone's death – sometimes humorous
- Limerick = five-line humorous, often bawdy poem
- Clerihew = two-couplet humorous poem, double dactyl (heavy, light, light) related to the epigram



Open-form Poetry

- Does not rhyme, and does not have consistent meter
- Also called free verse
- Relies on content, assonance, alliteration, visual images
- Generally open form developed in late 19th century and continues to be used (E.g., Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson were early open-form poets)



Symbolism and Allusion

- Symbols extend meaning beyond normal connotation
 - Cultural (universal) symbols = widely recognized
 - Contextual (authorial) symbols = developed by author for that work
 - May be actions, scenes, settings, characters, situations
- Allusions refer to another poem, Bible, other art works
 - Can be a word, a phrase, description of a setting, situation, etc.
- Symbols and allusions in poetry require close reading



Myths: Systems of Symbolic Allusion

- Mythology = stories and beliefs of a society
 - Greek, Roman, Norse, Native American, others
- Mythos = system of beliefs and religious or historical doctrine
- Mythological motifs and themes are common to many cultures
 - Carl Jung identified recurring images, characters, events in his patients as archetypes (i.e., all humans share a universal or collective unconscious)
 - Joseph Campbell, academic expert on myths (*The Power of Myth, The Hero with a Thousand Faces*)