

Lesson 2: Poetry Out Loud

Is a poem something we hear out loud, or something we see and read? Maybe it is both. Poetry started as something shared orally: it was spoken out loud or sung. As the written word began to be used more and more, the shape and punctuation of a poem, how it was written, came to matter more.

A quick lesson in language:

In language vowel sounds are grouped with consonant sounds and each grouping is called a syllable. Vowel sounds are the keys for figuring out syllables: you can have a lot of consonants, but if you only have one vowel sound you only have one syllable.

English is a language where some syllables are long and others short. The short vowel sounds are what we call 'stressed' and the long vowel sounds are unstressed. In order to make pleasant sounds, we try to time our stressed vowels evenly. We speed up when there are lots of unstressed vowel sounds in between two stressed vowels, and slow down when there are fewer. For example: read aloud "COME for TEA," and "COME and have some TEA." You most likely sped up during the second phrase so the stressed sounds of COME and TEA were closer. At the very least, you probably did not say each word as slowly as you did "for" in the first phrase. So we see language naturally has a rhythm.

In French each syllable sound takes roughly the same time. So French gains an even rhythm not through timing stressed syllables, but through the repetition of even sounds. Why does this matter for poetry in English? Well the Norman French invaded England in 1066 and nothing, including the language, was ever the same.

English poetry combines the English and French tricks. It tries to space out stressed syllables, but most often it tries to imitate the evenness of the French by putting only one syllable in between.

Most poetry, then, is made up of patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in lines of a certain length. This is called the meter. When the same meter is found through the whole poem, that is the poem's rhythm.

When the same vowel sounds repeat it is called rhyme. When the repetition occurs at the end of the line it is called end rhyme. When the repetition occurs in the middle of the line it is called internal rhyme.

Beat Patterns in Poetry:

Iambic: unstressed, stressed (daDUM, daDUM, daDUM)

Example: Come LIVE / with ME / and BE / my LOVE (Christopher Marlowe)

Trochaic: stressed, unstressed (DUMda, DUMda, DUMda)

Examples: Peter Peter / Pumpkin Eater / Had a wife and / couldn't keep her

Anapestic: unstressed, unstressed, stressed (da da DUM, da da DUM, da da DUM)

Example: For the MOON / never BEAMS / without BRING / ing me DREAMS /
Of the BEAU / tiful ANN / a bel LEE (Edgar Allen Poe)

Dactylic: stressed, unstressed, unstressed (DUM da da, DUM da da, DUM da da)
Example: Hickory, Dickory Dock

Spondaic (or Spondees): consecutive strong beats (two consecutive beats make up one foot)

Example: Break, Break, Break

On the cold gray stones, O Sea! (Tennyson)

Pyrrhic: consecutive unstressed beats (two consecutive unstressed beats make up one foot)

- often called an "empty foot"

Example: Today we went to the mountains

(Note: Spondee and pyrrhic are often mixed in with another type of metre.)

Amphibrach: unstressed, stressed, unstressed (da DUM da, da DUM da, da DUM da)

Example: All ready to put up the tents for my circus.

I think I will call it Circus McGurkus.

And now comes an act of Enormous Enormance!

No former performer's performed this performance!

(Dr. Seuss *If I Ran the Circus*)

The number of beats (or feet) in a line of poetry, gives it a specific name:

One foot: Monometer

Two feet: Dimeter

Three feet: Trimeter

Four feet: Tetrameter
Five feet: Pentameter
Six feet: Hexameter
Seven feet: Heptameter
Eight feet: Octameter

The most common meter in English poetry is iambic pentameter. Five feet (10 syllables) of “unstressed, stressed.” All of Shakespeare’s plays are in iambic pentameter.

Read the following poems aloud and try to pronounce them with the proper rhythm.

Sonnet 18 - William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm’d;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander’st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: *thát* keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Chríst — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

The Brook - Tennyson

I COME from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally,
And sparkle out among the fern,
To bicker down a valley.

By thirty hills I hurry down,
Or slip between the ridges,
By twenty thorps, a little town,
And half a hundred bridges.

Till last by Philip's farm I flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

I chatter over stony ways,
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

With many a curve my banks I fret
by many a field and fallow,
And many a fairy foreland set
With willow-weed and mallow.

I chatter, chatter, as I flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

I wind about, and in and out,
with here a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling,

And here and there a foamy flake
Upon me, as I travel
With many a silver water-break
Above the golden gravel,

And draw them all along, and flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

I steal by lawns and grassy plots,
I slide by hazel covers;
I move the sweet forget-me-nots
That grow for happy lovers.

I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,
Among my skimming swallows;
I make the netted sunbeam dance
Against my sandy shallows.

I murmur under moon and stars
In brambly wildernesses;
I linger by my shingly bars;
I loiter round my cresses;

And out again I curve and flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

Lochinvar - By Sir Walter Scott

O young Lochinvar is come out of the west,
Through all the wide Border his steed was the best;
And save his good broadsword he weapons had none,
He rode all unarm'd, and he rode all alone.
So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,
There never was knight like the young Lochinvar.

He staid not for brake, and he stopp'd not for stone,
He swam the Eske river where ford there was none;
But ere he alighted at Netherby gate,
The bride had consented, the gallant came late:
For a laggard in love, and a dastard in war,
Was to wed the fair Ellen of brave Lochinvar.

So boldly he enter'd the Netherby Hall,
Among bride's-men, and kinsmen, and brothers and all:
Then spoke the bride's father, his hand on his sword,
(For the poor craven bridegroom said never a word,)
"O come ye in peace here, or come ye in war,
Or to dance at our bridal, young Lord Lochinvar?"

"I long woo'd your daughter, my suit you denied;—
Love swells like the Solway, but ebbs like its tide—
And now I am come, with this lost love of mine,
To lead but one measure, drink one cup of wine.

There are maidens in Scotland more lovely by far,
That would gladly be bride to the young Lochinvar."

The bride kiss'd the goblet: the knight took it up,
He quaff'd off the wine, and he threw down the cup.
She look'd down to blush, and she look'd up to sigh,
With a smile on her lips and a tear in her eye.
He took her soft hand, ere her mother could bar,—
"Now tread we a measure!" said young Lochinvar.

So stately his form, and so lovely her face,
That never a hall such a galliard did grace;
While her mother did fret, and her father did fume,
And the bridegroom stood dangling his bonnet and plume;
And the bride-maidens whisper'd, "'twere better by far
To have match'd our fair cousin with young Lochinvar."

One touch to her hand, and one word in her ear,
When they reach'd the hall-door, and the charger stood near;
So light to the croupe the fair lady he swung,
So light to the saddle before her he sprung!
"She is won! we are gone, over bank, bush, and scaur;
They'll have fleet steeds that follow," quoth young Lochinvar.

There was mounting 'mong Graemes of the Netherby clan;
Forsters, Fenwicks, and Musgraves, they rode and they ran:
There was racing and chasing on Cannobie Lee,
But the lost bride of Netherby ne'er did they see.
So daring in love, and so dauntless in war,
Have ye e'er heard of gallant like young Lochinvar?