12

WRITING ABOUT POETRY

The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. . . . It inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.

—Robert Frost

We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.

—W. B. Yeats

THE SPEAKER AND THE POET

The **speaker** or **voice** or **mask** or **persona** (Latin for "mask") that speaks a poem is not usually identical with the poet who writes it. The author assumes a role, or counterfeits the speech of a person in a particular situation. Robert Browning (1812–89), for instance, in "My Last Duchess" (1842) invented a Renaissance duke who, in his palace, talks about his first wife and his art collection with an emissary from a count who is negotiating to offer his daughter in marriage to the duke.

In reading a poem, then, the first and most important question to ask yourself is this: Who is speaking? If an audience and a setting are suggested, keep them in mind, too, although these are not always indicated in a poem. Emily Dickinson's "Wild Nights—Wild Nights" (1861) is the utterance of an impassioned lover, but we need not assume that the beloved is actually in the presence of the lover. In fact, since the second line says, "Were I with Thee," the reader must assume that the person addressed is *not* present. The poem apparently represents a state of mind—a sort of talking to oneself—rather than an address to another person.

Emily Dickinson (1830–86)

WILD NIGHTS—WILD NIGHTS

Wild Nights—Wild Nights,
Were I with Thee
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!   4

Futile—the Winds
To a Heart in port—
Done with the Compass—
Done with the Chart!   8

Rowing in Eden
—Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor—Tonight—
In Thee.   12

Questions to Stimulate Ideas about "Wild Nights—Wild Nights"

This chapter will end with a checklist of many questions that you may ask yourself to get ideas for writing about any poem. Here, however, are a few questions about this particular poem, to help you to think about it:

1. How does his poem communicate the speaker's state of mind? For example, in the first stanza (lines 1–4), what—beyond the meaning of the words—is communicated by the repetition of "Wild Nights"? In the last stanza (lines 9–12), what is the tone of "Ah, the Sea"? (*Tone* means something like "emotional" coloring," as when one speaks of a "businesslike tone," a "bitter tone," or an "eager tone.")

2. Paraphrase (put into your own words) the second stanza. What does this stanza communicate about the speaker's love for the beloved? Compare your paraphrase and the original. What does the form of the original sentences, the *omission*, for instance, of the verbs of lines 5 and 6 and of the subject in lines 7 and 8) communicate?

3. Paraphrase the last stanza. How does "Ah, the Sea" fit into your paraphrase? If you had trouble fitting it in, do you think the poem would be better off without it? If not, why not?

Although the voice speaking a poem often clearly is *not* the author's, in many other poems the voice does have the ring of the author's own voice,

and to make a distinction between speaker and author may at times seem perverse. In fact, some poetry (especially contemporary American poetry) is highly autobiographical. Still, even in autobiographical poems it may be convenient to distinguish between author and speaker. The speaker of a given poem is, let's say, Sylvia Plath (1932–63) in her role as parent, or Sylvia Plath in her role as daughter, not simply Sylvia Plath the poet

The Language of Poetry: Diction and Tone

How is a voice or mask or persona created? From the whole of language, the author selects certain words and grammatical constructions; this selection constitutes the persona's **diction**. It is, then, partly by the diction that we come to know the speaker of a poem. Just as in life there's a difference between people who speak of a *belly button*, a *navel*, and an *umbilicus*, so in poetry there is a difference between speakers who use one word rather than another. Of course, it is also possible that all three of these words are part of a given speaker's vocabulary, but the speaker's choice among the three would depend on the situation; that is, in addressing a child, the speaker would probably use the word *belly button*; in addressing an adult other than a family member or close friend, the speaker might be more likely to use *navel*; and if the speaker is a physician addressing an audience of physicians, he or she might be most likely to use *umbilicus*. This is only to say that the dramatic situation in which one finds oneself helps to define oneself and establish the particular role that one is playing.

Some words are used in virtually all poems: *I*, *see*, *and*, and the like. Often the grammatical constructions in which they appear helps define the speaker. In Dickinson's "Wild Nights—Wild Nights," such expressions as "Were I with Thee" and "Might I" indicate an educated speaker. Speakers have attitudes toward

- themselves,
- their subjects,
- and their audiences,

and, consciously or unconsciously, they choose their words, pitch, and modulation accordingly; all these add up to their tone. In written literature, tone must be detected without the aid of the ear, although it's a good idea to read poetry aloud, trying to find the appropriate tone of voice; that is, the reader must understand by the selection and sequence of words the way the words are meant to be heard—playfully, angrily,

confidentially, ironically. The reader must catch what Frost calls "the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination."

A good way to begin your exploration of a speaker's tone of voice is to read the poem aloud. This oral performance of the poem helps to give us a feeling for the rhythm of the lines, the placement and effect of pauses, the impact of words and images and their relationship to one another. As you read a poem aloud, ask yourself: How does this speaker sound? Another form for the question might be: How would I respond if someone spoke to me in this tone of voice?

Let's examine the tone of voice in a sonnet (see page 249) by the American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950), a contemporary of Robert Frost's and T. S. Eliot's. Do your best not only to *see* the words on the page, but to *hear* them.

I, BEING BORN A WOMAN AND DISTRESSED

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest   4
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.   8
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity,—let me make it plain: 12
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

[1923]

Remember an obvious point that all of us sometimes overlook: You have the words of the poem in front of you. It's the words of the poem that you respond to, and that you *work with* when you prepare an analytical paper. In a sense *you are never at a loss* about what to say: There's always something to say, because you always have the poet's words to study and reflect upon—their sounds, their meanings and implications.

At the end of the first line, for instance, consider the word "distressed," which is perhaps a surprise in relation to the "I" that opens Millay's poem. The first-person speaker initially seems decisive; "I" it the

start of a line or sentence nearly always has an assertive effect, of someone taking a stand or speaking his or her mind. But the end of the first line, the "I" of this speaker is "distressed." Though we may wonder: Is she *really*, or is she, instead, ironically aware of the expectation that since she is a "woman," she is biologically destined to be "distressed" in a typical female way?

As we move more deeply into the poem, we'll find that it engages this conflict or tension: The tone shifts, as the speaker is sometimes inside, sometimes outside, the role that society (in the 1920s) expects a woman to occupy. Is the speaker strong and assertive, or not?

"Distress" is an intriguing word, which reveals even more about the speaker's tone. It derives from a Latin word for "hinder," and when used as a transitive verb, it means: "to cause strain, anxiety, or suffering to; to hold the property of (a person) against the payment of debts; to mar or otherwise treat (an object of fabric, for example) to give the appearance of an antique or of heavy prior use." It also has an older sense: "To constrain or overcome by harassment." Used as a noun, "distress" suggests "anxiety or mental suffering; severe strain resulting from exhaustion or an accident; acute physical discomfort; physical deterioration, as of a highway, caused by hard use over time; pavement distress; the condition of being in need of immediate assistance: a motorist in distress." The rich oil of the speaker—how she feels, and how she sounds as she describes how she feels.

"Propinquity" (line 3) is another word that plays a key role in evoking the speaker's tone. Here, we might expect a simpler word (e.g., "nearness"), but Millay is seeking the distance detachment, and irony that the more unusual, Latinate "Propinquity," which derives from the Latin word for "near") offers. Propinquity implies "proximity; nearness; kinship; similarity in nature." It's the kind of word that many of us may need to look up in a dictionary, and the strangeness of the word-choice tells us something about the distinctive tone of voice that Millay is seeking to create, a tone that is ironic and formal about highly charged issues of female identity, erotic feeling, and sexual desire.

One more example—"fume," as in line 6. Fume as a noun, means: "Vapor, gas, or smoke, especially if irritating, harmful, or strong; a strong or acrid odor; a state of resentment or vexation." As a verb, it means "to emit fumes; to rise in fumes; to feel or show resentment or vexation." One might have expected to find here the phrase "scheme of life" or

"span of life." And it's this expectation that Millay is working with—or, rather, against. "Fume" may imply "perfume"; both words derive from the Latin word for "smoke." "Fume" is also in an odd relationship to the passive voice "designed": We do not know who or what did the designing, and it sounds a little awkward or (deliberately) obscure to say that a "fume" (vaporous, gassy) is "designed."

A RULE FOR WRITERS:
Explore both the meanings and the sounds of the words that poets use. Seek to become—as Robert Frost recommended—not only an "eye reader" but also an "ear reader."

Let's now turn to a poem by Robert Frost and make use of our approach to tone and diction in the planning and development of an analytical paper.

Writing about the Speaker: Robert Frost's "The Telephone"

Robert Frost once said that

everything written is as good as it is dramatic. . . . [A poem is] heard as sung or spoken by a person in a scene—in character, in a setting. By whom, where and when is the question. By the dreamer of a better world out in a storm in autumn; by a lover under a window at night.

Suppose, in reading a poem Frost published in 1916, we try to establish by whom, where, and when it is spoken. We may not be able to answer all three question: in great detail, but let's see what the poem suggests. As you read it, you'll notice—alerted by the quotation marks—that the poem has *two* speakers; the poem is a tiny drama. The closing quotation marks at the end of line 9 signal to us that the first speech is finished.

Robert Frost (1874–1963)
THE TELEPHONE

"When I was just as far as I could walk
From here today
There was an hour

All still
When leaning with my head against a flower
I heard you talk.
Don't say I didn't, for I heard you say—
You spoke from that flower on the window sill—
Do you remember what it was you said?"

"First tell me what it was you thought you said."

"Having found the flower and driven a bee away,
I leaned my head,
And holding by the stalk,
I listened and I thought I caught the word—
What was it? Did you call me by my name?
Or did you say—
Someone said 'Come'—I heard it as I bowed."

"I may have thought as much, but not aloud."

"Well, so I came."

15

10

Suppose we ask:

- Who are these two speakers?
- What is their relationship?
- What's going on between them?
- Where are they?

These questions cannot be answered with absolute certainty, but some answers are more probable than others. For instance, line 8 ("You spoke from that flower on the window sill") suggests that the speakers are in a room, probably of their home—rather than, say, in a railroad station—though we can't say whether they live in a farmhouse or in a village, town, or city, or an apartment.

Let's put the questions (even if they may turn out to be unanswerable) into a more specific form.

Questions

1. One speaker speaks lines 1–9, 11–17, and 19. The other speaks lines 10 and 18. Can you tell the gender of each speaker? Certainly, probably, or not at all? On what do you base your answer?

2. Try to visualize this miniature drama. In line 7 the first speaker says, "Don't say I didn't . . . ." What happens—what do you see in your mind's eye—after line 6 that causes the speaker to say this?
3. Why do you suppose the speaker of lines 10 and 18 says so little? How would you characterize the tone of these two lines? What sort of relationship do you think exists between the two speakers?
4. How would you characterize the tone of lines 11-17? Of the last line of the poem?

If you haven't jotted down your responses, consider doing so before reading what follows.

Journal Entries

Given questions somewhat like these, students were asked whether they could identify the speakers by sex, to speculate on their relationship, and then to add whatever they wished to say. One student recorded the following thoughts:

These two people care about each other—maybe husband and wife, or lovers—and a man is doing most of the talking, though I can't prove it. He has walked as far as possible—that is, as far as possible and still get back on the same day—and he seemed to hear the other person call him. He claims that she spoke to him "from that flower on the window sill," and that's why I think the second person is a woman. She's at home, near the window. Somehow I even imagine she was at the window near the kitchen sink, maybe working while he was out on this long walk.

Then she speaks one line; she won't say if she did or didn't speak. She is very cautious or suspicious: "First tell me what it was you thought you heard." Maybe she doesn't want to say something and then have her husband embarrass her by saying, "No, that's not what I thought." Or maybe she just doesn't feel like talking.

Then he claims that he heard her speaking through a flower, as though the flower was a telephone, just as though it was hooked up to the flower on the window sill. But at first he won't say what he supposedly heard, or "thought" he heard. Instead, he says that maybe it was someone else: "Someone said 'Come.'" Is he teasing her? Pretending that she may have a rival?

Then she speaks—again just one line, saying, "I may have thought as much, but no aloud." She won't admit that she did think this thought. And then the man says, "Well, so I came." Just like that, short and sweet. No more fancy talk about flowers as telephones. He somehow (through telepathy?) got the message, and so here he is. He seems like a sensitive guy, playful (the stuff about the flowers as telephones) but also he knows when to stop kidding around.

Another student also identified the couple as a man and a woman and thought that this dialogue occurs after a quarrel:

As the poem goes on, we learn that the man wants to be with the woman, but it starts by telling us that he walked as far away from her as he could. He doesn't say why, but I think from the way the woman speaks later in the poem, they had a fight and he walked out. "Then, when he stopped to rest, he thought he heard her voice. He really means that he was thinking of her and he was hoping she was thinking of him. So he returns, and he tells her he heard her calling him, but he pretends he heard her call him through a flower on their window sill. He can't admit that he was thinking about her. This seems very realistic to me; when someone feels a bit

ashamed, it's sometimes hard to admit that you were wrong, and you want the other person to tell you that things are OK anyhow. And judging from line 7, when he says "Don't say I didn't," it seems that she is going to interrupt him by denying it. She is still angry, or maybe she doesn't want to make up too quickly. But he wants to pretend that she called him back. So when he says, "Do you remember what it was you said?" she won't admit that she was thinking of him, and she says "First tell me what it was you thought you heard." She's testing him a little. So he goes on, with the business about flowers as telephones, and he says "someone" called him. He understands that she doesn't want to be pushed into forgiving him, so he backs off. Then she is willing to admit that she did think about him, but still she doesn't quite admit it. She is too proud to say openly that she wants him back but she does say, "I may have thought as much...." And then, since they both have preserved their dignity and also have admitted that they care about the other, he can say, "Well, so I came."

Further Thoughts about "The Telephone"

1. In a paragraph or two, *evaluate* one of these two entries recorded by students. Do you think the comments are weak, plausible, or convincing, and *why* do you think so? Can you offer additional supporting evidence, or counterevidence?

2. Two small questions: In a sentence or two, offer a suggestion why in line 11 Frost wrote, "and driven a bee away." After all, the bee plays no role in the poem. Second, in line 17 Frost has the speaker say, "I heard it as I bowed." Of course, "bowed" rhymes with "aloud," but let's assume that the need for a rhyme did not dictate the choice of this word. Do you think "I heard it as I bowed" is better than "I heard it as I waited" or "I heard it as I listened"? Why?

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Robert Frost said, "Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another." This is an exaggeration, but it shrewdly suggests the importance of figurative language—saying one thing in terms of something else. Words have their literal meaning, but they can also be used so that something other than the literal meaning is implied. "My love is a rose" is, literally, nonsense, for a person is not a five-petaled, many-stamened plant with a spiny stem. But the suggestions of rose (at least for Robert Burns [1759–96], the Scottish poet who compared his beloved to a rose in the line, "My Love is like a red 'red rose'") include "delicate beauty," "soft," and "perfumed," and, thus, the word rose can be meaningfully applied—figuratively rather than literally—to "my love." The girl is fragrant; her skin is perhaps like a rose in texture, and (in some measure) color; she will not keep her beauty long. The poet has communicated his perception very precisely.

People who write about poetry have found it convenient to name the various kinds of figurative language. Just as the student of geology employs special terms as kames and eskers, the student of literature employs special terms to name things as accurately as possible. The following paragraphs discuss the most common terms.

In a **simile**, items from different classes are explicitly compared by a connective such as like, as, or than, or by a verb such as appears or seems. If the objects compared are from the same class, for example, "Tokyo is like Los Angeles," no simile is present.)

Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.

—MUHAMMAD ALI

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free.
The holy time is quiet as a Nun,
Breathless with adoration.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

All of our thoughts will be fairer than doves.

—ELIZABETH BISHOP

Seems she a dove? His feathers are but borrowed.

—SHAKESPEARE

A **metaphor** asserts the identity, without a connective such as like or a verb such as appears, of terms that are literally incompatible.

Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.

—ELIZABETH BISHOP

The whirlwind fife-and-drum of the storm bends the salt marsh grass.

—MARIANNE MOORE

In the following poem, Keats's excitement on reading George Chapman's sixteenth-century translation of the Greek poet Homer is communicated first through a metaphor and then through a simile:

John Keats (1795–1821)
ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

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 hold.   loyalty   4
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;°   property
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene°   vast expanse   8
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;
Or like stout Cortez 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.°   in Central America   12

We might pause for a moment to take a closer look at Keats's poem. If you write an essay on the figurative language in this sonnet, you will probably discuss the figure involved in asserting that reading is a sort of traveling (it brings us to unfamiliar worlds) and especially that reading brings us to realms of gold. Presumably, the experience of reading is valuable. "Realms of gold" not only continues and modifies the idea of reading as travel, but in its evocation of El Dorado (an imaginary country in South America, thought to be rich in gold and, therefore, the object of search by Spanish explorers of the Renaissance) it introduces a suggestion of the Renaissance appropriate to a poem about a Renaissance translation of

Homer. The figure of traveling is amplified in the next few lines, which assert that the "goodly states and kingdoms" and "western islands" are ruled by poets who owe allegiance to a higher authority, Apollo.

The beginning of the second sentence (line 5) enlarges this area—this spacious area with its reference to "one wide expanse," and the ruler of this area (unlike the other rulers) is given the dignity of being named; the ruler is Homer, "deep-browed," "deep" suggesting not only his high or perhaps furrowed forehead but the profundity of the thoughts behind the face. The speaker continues the idea of books as remote places, but now he also seems to think of this place as more than a rich area; instead of merely saying that until he read Chapman's translation he had not seen it (as in line 2) or "been" there (line 3), he says he never breathed its air—that is, the preciousness is not material but ethereal, not gold but something far more exhilarating and essential.

This reference to air leads easily to the next dominant image, that of the explorer of the illimitable skies (so vast is Homer's world) rather than of the land and sea. But the explorer of the skies is imagined as watching an *oceanic* sky. In hindsight we can see that the link was perhaps forged earlier in line 7, with "serene" (a vast expanse of air or water); in any case, there is an unforgettable rightness in the description of the suddenly discovered planet as something that seems to "swim" into one's ken.

After this climactic discovery we return to the Renaissance Spanish explorers (though Balboa, not Cortez, was the first white man to see the Pacific) by means of a simile that compares the speaker's rapture with Cortez's as he gazed at the expanse before him. The writer of an essay on the figurative language, in a poem should, in short, call attention to the aptness (or ineptness) of the figures and to the connecting threads that make a meaningful pattern.

Two types of metaphor deserve special mention. In **synecdoche** the whole is replaced by the part, or the part by the whole. For example, "bread," in "Give us this day our daily bread," stands for all sorts of food. In **metonymy** something is named that replaces something closely related to it. For example, James Shirley (1596–1666) names certain objects ("scepter and crown," and "scythe and spade") using them to replace social classes (powerful people and poor people) to which the objects are related:

Scepter and crown must tumble down
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

The attribution of human feelings or characteristics to abstractions or to inanimate objects is called **personification**.

Memory,
that exquisite blunderer.

—AMY CLAMPITT

There's Wrath who has learnt every trick of guerilla warfare,
The shamming dead, the night-raid, the feinted retreat.

—W. H. AUDEN

Hope, thou bold taster of delight.

—RICHARD CRASHAW

Crashaw's personification, "Hope, thou bold taster of delight," is also an example of the figure called **apostrophe**, an address to a person or thing not literally listening. Wordsworth begins a sonnet by apostrophizing John Milton:

Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.

and Allen Ginsberg (1926–97) apostrophizes "gusts of wet air":

Fall on the ground, O great Wetness.

What conclusions can we draw about figurative language?

First, figurative language, with its literally incompatible terms, forces the reader to attend to the connotations (suggestions, associations) rather than to the denotations (dictionary definitions) of one of the terms.

Second, although figurative language is said to differ from ordinary discourse, it is found in ordinary discourse, as well as in literature. "It rained cats and dogs," "War is hell," "Don't be a pig," "Mr. Know-all," and other tired figures are part of our daily utterances. But through repeated use, these, and most of the figures we use, have lost whatever impact they once had and are only a shade removed from expressions that, though once figurative, have become literal: the *eye* of a needle, a *branch* office, the *face* of a clock.

Third, good figurative language is usually concrete, condensed, and interesting. The concreteness lends precision and vividness; when Keats writes that he felt "like some watcher of the skies / When a new planet swims into his ken," he more sharply characterizes his feelings than if he had said, "I felt excited!" His simile isolates for us a precise kind of

excitement, and the metaphoric "swims" vividly brings up the oceanic association, can be seen by attempting to paraphrase some of these three qualities, condensation. A paraphrase will commonly use more words than the original, and it will have less impact—as the gradual coming of night usually has less impact on us than a sudden darkening of the sky, or as a prolonged push has less impact than a sudden blow. The third quality, interest, is largely dependent on the previous two; the successful figure often makes us open our eyes wider and take notice. Keats's "deep-browed Homer" arouses our interest in Homer as "longdrawn Homer" or "meditative Homer" does. Similarly, when William Butler Yeats says:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,

the metaphoric identification of an old man with a scarecrow jolts us out of all our usual unthinking attitudes about old men as kind, happy folk who are content to have passed from youth into age.

Preparing to Write about Figurative Language

As you prepare to write about figurative language, consider

1. the areas from which the images are drawn (for instance, religion, exploration, science, commerce, nature);
2. the kinds of images (for instance, simile, metaphor);
3. any shifts from one type of imagery to another (for instance, from literal speech), or from abundant figures of speech to similes to metaphors, or from metaphors, overstatements, understatements);
4. the location of the images (perhaps they are concentrated at the beginning of the poem or in the middle or at the end) and if parts of the poem are richer in images than other parts, consider their effect on you.

If you underline or highlight images in your text or in a copy of the poem that you have written or typed, you'll be able to see patterns, and you can indicate the connections by drawing arrows or perhaps by making lists of related images. Thinking about these patterns, you will find ideas arising about the ways in which the poem makes its effect.

Imagery and Symbolism

When we read rose, we may call to mind a picture of a rose, or perhaps we are reminded of the odor or texture of a rose. Whatever in a poem appeals to any of our senses (including sensations of heat as well as of sight, smell, taste, touch, sound) is an image. In short, images are the sensory content of a work, whether literal or figurative. When a poet says, "My rose" and is speaking about a rose, we have no figure of speech—although we still have an image. If, however, "My rose" is a shortened form of "My love is a rose," some would say that the poet is using a metaphor, though others would say that because the first term is omitted ("My love is"), the rose is a symbol. A poem about the transience of a rose might compel the reader to feel that the transience of female beauty is the larger theme even though it is never explicitly stated.

Some symbols are conventional symbols—people have agreed to accept them as standing for something other than their literal meaning: A poem about the cross is probably about Christianity; similarly, the rose has long been a symbol of love. In Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway (1925), the husband communicates his love by proffering this conventional symbol: "He was holding out flowers—roses, red and white roses. (But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words.)" Objects that are not conventional symbols, however, may also give rise to rich, multiple, indefinable associations. The following poem uses the traditional symbol of the rose, but in a nontraditional way:

William Blake (1757–1827)
THE SICK ROSE

O rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

A reader might argue that the worm is invisible (line 2) merely because it is hidden within the rose, but an "invisible worm / That flies in the night" is more than a long, slender, soft-bodied creeping animal, and a rose that has, or is, a "bed / Of crimson joy" is more than a gardener's rose.

Blake's worm and rose suggest things beyond themselves—a stranger, more vibrant world than the world we are usually aware of. They are symbolic, although readers will doubtless differ in their interpretations. Perhaps we find ourselves half thinking, for example, that the worm is male, the rose female, and that the poem is about the violation of virginity. Or that the poem is about the destruction of beauty: Woman's beauty, rooted in joy, is destroyed by a power that feeds on her. But these interpretations are not fully satisfying: The poem presents a worm and a rose, and yet it is not merely about a worm and a rose. These objects resonate, stimulating our thoughts toward something else, but the something else is elusive. This is not to say, however, that symbols mean whatever any reader says they mean. A reader could scarcely support an interpretation arguing that the poem is about the need to love all aspects of nature. Not all interpretations are equally valid; it's the writer's job to offer a reasonably persuasive interpretation.

A **symbol**, then, is an image so loaded with significance that it is not simply literal, and it does not simply stand for something else; it is both itself *and* something else that it richly suggests, a kind of manifestation of something too complex or too elusive to be otherwise revealed. Blake's poem is about a blighted rose and at the same time about much more.

STRUCTURE

The arrangement of the parts, the organization of the entire poem, is its **structure.** Sometimes a poem is divided into blocks of, say, four lines each, but even if the poem is printed as a solid block, it probably has some principle of organization—for example, from sorrow in the first two lines to joy in the next two, or from a question in the first three lines to an answer in the last line.

Consider this short poem by an English poet of the seventeenth century.

Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

Upon Julia's Clothes

Whenas in silk my Julia goes,
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

Next, when I cast mine eyes, and see
That brave° vibration, each way free,
O, how that glittering taketh me.

Annotating and Thinking about a Poem

David Thurston, a student, began thinking about this poem by copying it, double-spaced, and by making the following notes on his copy.

Upon Julia's Clothes

Whenas in silk my Julia goes,   — cool tone?

Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows   "Then, then"—
That liquefaction of her clothes.   more excited
                                            almost at a
                                            loss for words?

Next, when I cast mine eyes, and see
That brave vibration, each way free,   free to do what?
O, how that glittering taketh me.   free from what?

emotional?

Thurston got further ideas by thinking about several of the questions that, at the end of this chapter (page 258), we suggest you ask yourself while rereading a poem. Among the questions are these:

Does the poem proceed in a straightforward way, or at some point or points does the speaker reverse course, altering his or her tone or perception?

What is the effect on you of the form?

With such questions in mind, Thurston was stimulated to see if Herrick's poem has a reversal or change and, if so, how it is related to the structure. After rereading the poem several times, thinking about it in the light of these questions and perhaps others, he produced the following note:

Two stanzas, each of three lines, with the same structure
Basic structure of 1st stanza: When X (one line), then Y (two lines)
Basic structure of second stanza: Next (one line), then Z (two lines)

When he marked the text after reading the poem a few times, he noticed that the last line—an exclamation of delight ("O, how that glittering taketh me")—is much more personal than the rest of the poem. A little further thought enabled him to refine this last perception:

Although the pattern of stanzas is repeated, the somewhat analytic, detached tone of the beginning ("Whereas," "Then," "Next") changes to an open, enthusiastic confession of delight in what the poet sees.

Further thinking led to this:

Although the title is "Upon Julia's Clothes," and the first five lines describe Julia's silken dress, the poem finally is not only about Julia's clothing but about the effect of Julia (moving in silk that liquefies or seems to become a liquid) on the poet.

This is a nice observation, but when Thurston looked again at the poem the next day and started to write about it, he found that he was able to refine his observation.

Even at the beginning, the speaker is not entirely detached, for he speaks of "my Julia."

In writing about Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes," Thurston reported, the thoughts did not come quickly or neatly. After two or three thoughts, he started to write. Only after drafting a paragraph and rereading the poem did he notice that the personal element appears not only in the last line ("taketh me") but even in the first line ("my Julia"). In short, for almost all of us, the only way to get to a good final essay is to read, to think, to jot down ideas, to write a draft, and to revise and revise again. Having gone through such processes, the student came up with the following excellent essay.

The Student's Finished Essay: "Herrick's Julia, Julia's Herrick"

By the way, Thurston did not hit on the final version of his title ("Herrick's Julia, Julia's Herrick") until shortly before he typed his final version. His preliminary title was

Structure and Personality in Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes"

That's a bit heavy-handed, but at least it is focused, as opposed to such an uninformative title as "On a Poem." He soon revised his tentative title to

Julia, Julia's Clothing, and Julia's Poet

That's a good title: It is neat, and it is appropriate; it moves (as the poem and the essay do) from Julia and her clothing to the poet. It doesn't tell the reader exactly what the essay will be about; and three uses of Julia may be one too many, but it does stimulate the reader's interest. The essayist's final title, however, is even better:

Herrick's Julia, Julia's Herrick

Again, it is neat (the balanced structure, and structure is part of the student's topic), less repetitive, and it moves (a: the poem itself moves) from Julia to the poet.

Herrick's Julia, Julia's Herrick

Robert Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes" begins as a description of Julia's clothing and ends as an expression of the poet's response not just to Julia's clothing but to Julia herself. Despite the apparently objective or detached tone of the first stanza and the first two lines of the second stanza, the poem finally conveys a strong sense of the speaker's excitement.

The first stanza seems to say, "When as" X (one line), "Then" Y (two lines). The second stanza repeats this basic structure of one line of assertion and two lines describing the consequence: "Next" (one line), "then" (two lines). But the logic or coolness of "Whenas," "Then," and "Next," and of such rather scientific language as liquefaction (a more technical-sounding word than "melting") and vibration is undercut by the breathlessness or

er excitement of "Then, then" (that is very different from a simple "Then"). It is also worth mentioning that although there is a per-sonal rather than a fully detached note even in the first line, in "my Julia," this expression scarcely reveals much feeling. In fact, it re-veals a touch of male chauvinism, a suggestion that the woman is a possession of the speaker's. Not until the last line does the speaker reveal that, far from Julia being his possession, he is pos-sessed by Julia: "O, how that glittering taketh me," he begins coolly, objectively, and somewhat complacently and uses a struc-ture that suggests a somewhat detached mind, in the exclamatory "O" he nevertheless at last confesses (to our delight) that he is en-raptured by Julia.

Other things might be said about this poem. For instance, the writer says nothing about the change: in the meter and the possible value in the poem. Nor does he say anything about the sounds of any of the words e might have commented on the long vowels in "sweetly flows" and own low the effect would have been different if instead of "sweetly ws" Herrick had written "swiftly flits"). But such topics might be mate-l for another essay. Furthermore, another reader might have found the em less charming—even offensive in its exclusive concern with Julia's pearance and its utter neglect of her mind. Still, this essay is, in itself, interesting and perceptive discussion of the way the poet used a re-ated structure to set forth a miniature drama in which observation is, at end, replaced by emotion.

me kinds of Structure

etitive Structure

hough every poem has its own structure, if we stand back from a given m we may see that the structure is one of three common sorts: repet-e, narrative, or logical. **Repetitive structure** is especially common in es that are sung, where a simple state of mind is repeated from stanza

to stanza so that the stanzas are pretty much interchangeable. Here is a passage from Walt Whitman's "By Blue Ontario's Shore" (1881) that has a repetitive structure:

I will confront these shows of the day and night,
I will know if I am to be less than they,
I will see if I am not as majestic as they,
I will see if I am not as subtle and real as they,
I will see if I am to be less generous than they.

Narrative Structure

In a poem with a **narrative structure** (we are not talking about "narra-tive poems," poems that tell a story, such as Homer's *Odyssey* or Co-leridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, but about a kind of lyric poem) there is a sense of advance. Blake's "The Sick Rose" (page 229) is an ex-ample. What comes later in the poem could not come earlier. The poem seems to get somewhere, to settle down to an end. A lyric in which the speaker at first grieves and then derives comfort from the thought that at least he was once in love similarly has a narrative structure. Here is a short poem with a narrative structure.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

A SLUMBER DID MY SPIRIT SEAL

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal° course,   *daily*
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

In the first stanza *did* and *seemed* establish the time as the past; in the second stanza *now* establishes the time as the present In the blank space between the stanzas the woman has died. If we were required to summa-rize the stanzas very briefly, we might for the first stanza come up with "I thought she could not die," and for the second, "She is dead." But the poem is not so much about the woman's life and death as about the speaker's response to her life and death.

Logical Structure

The third kind of structure commonly found is **logical structure**. The speaker argues a case and comes to some sort of conclusion. Probably the most famous example of a poem that moves to a resolution through an argument is Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" (1681). The speaker begins, "Had we but world enough, and time" (that is, "if"), and for twenty—At the twenty-first line he says, "But," and he indicates that the preceding twenty lines, in the subjunctive, are not a description of a real condition. The real condition (as he sees it) is that Time oppresses us, and he sets this idea forth in lines 21–32. In line 33 he begins his conclusion, "Now therefore," clinching it in line 45 with "Thus." Here is another example of a poem with a logical structure.

John Donne (1572–1631)

THE FLEA

Mark but this flea, and mark in this
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;   5
   Yet this enjoys before it woo,
   And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
   And this, alas, is more than we would do.

O stay! three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea more than married are.   10
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
   Though use° make you apt to kill me,   15   *custom*
   Let not to that, self-murder added be,
   And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden! Hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,   20
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st and say'st that thou

Find'st not thyself, nor me, the weaker now;
'Tis true. Then learn how false fears be;
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,   25
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The speaker is a lover who begins by assuring his mistress that sexual intercourse is of no more serious consequence than a flea bite. Between the first and second stanzas the woman has apparently threatened to kill the flea, moving the lover to exclaim in line 10, "O stay! Three lives in one flea spare." In this second stanza he reverses his argument, now insisting on the importance of the flea, arguing that since it has bitten both man and woman it holds some of their lives, as well as its own. Unpersuaded of its importance, the woman kills the flea between the second and third stanzas; and the speaker uses her action to reinforce his initial position when he says, beginning in line 25, that the death of the flea has no serious consequences and her yielding to him will have no worse consequences.

Verbal Irony

Among the most common devices in poems with logical structure (although this device is employed elsewhere, too) is **verbal irony**. The speaker's words mean more or less the opposite of what they seem to say. Sometimes it takes the form of **understatement**, as when Andrew Marvell's speaker in "To His Coy Mistress" remarks with cautious wryness, "The grave's a fine and private place, / But none, I think, do there embrace," or when Sylvia Plath sees an intended suicide as "the big strip tease." One special form of understatement, *litotes*, uses a negative to imply the opposite. Thus, "He's not very smart" does not mean exactly what it says—that he is not very smart, is merely of average intelligence. It means that he is the opposite of 'very smart' (it means "he is stupid"). Sometimes verbal irony takes the form of **overstatement**, or **hyperbole**, as when Donne's speaker says that in the flea he and the lady are "more than married." Intensely emotional contemporary poems, such as those of Plath, often use irony to undercut—and thus make acceptable—the emotion.

Paradox

Another common device in poems with a logical structure is **paradox**, the assertion of an apparent contradiction, as in "This flea is you and ..." But again it must be emphasized that irony and paradox are not limited to

poems with a logical structure. In "Auld Lang Syne," there is the paradox that the remembrance of joy evokes sadness, and there is understatement in "we've wandered many a weary fitt," which stands (roughly) for something much bigger, such as "we have had many painful experiences."

EXPLICATION

In Chapter 4, which included a discussion of Langston Hughes's "Harlem" and also an Explication Checklist (page 56), we saw that an explication is a line-by-line commentary on what is going on in a text. (*Explication* literally means "unfolding," or "spreading out.") Although your explication will for the most part move steadily from the beginning to the end of the selection, try to avoid writing along these lines (or, one might say, along this one line): "In line one . . . , In the second line . . . . In the third line . . . ; that is, don't hesitate to write such things as

The poem begins . . . . In the next line . . . The speaker immediately adds . . . She then introduces . . . The next stanza begins by saying . . .

An explication is not concerned with the writer's life or times, and it is not a paraphrase (a rewording)—although it may include paraphrase if a passage in the original seems unclear because of an unusual word or an unfamiliar expression. On the whole, however, an explication goes beyond paraphrase, seeking to make explicit what the reader perceives as implicit in the work. To this end it calls attention, as it proceeds, to the implications of

- words, especially of their tone (repetition, shifts in levels of diction, for instance, from colloquial to formal language, or from ordinary language to technical language);
- figures of speech;
- length of sentence (since an exceptionally short or exceptionally long sentence conveys a particular effect);
- sound effects, such as alliteration and rhyme; and
- structure (for instance, a question in one stanza, and the answer in the next, or a generalization and then a particularization, or a contrast of some sort).

An explication makes *explicit* what is implicit, especially in the words. It sets forth the reader's sense of the precise meaning of the work, word by word, or phrase by phrase or line by line.

A Simple Explication of Yeats's "The Balloon of the Mind"

Take this short poem (published in 1917) by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939). The "balloon" in the poem is a dirigible, a blimp.

William Butler Yeats

THE BALLOON OF THE MIND

Hands, do what you're bid:
Bring the balloon of the mind
That bellies and drags in the wind
Into its narrow shed.

Annotations and Journal Entries

A student began thinking about the poem by copying it, double-spaced. Then she jotted down her first thoughts.

Hands, do what you're bid: —— *sounds abrupt*

Bring the balloon of the mind / *balloon imagined by the mind? Or a mind like a balloon?*

That bellies and drags in the wind / *no real rhymes? line seems to drag— it's so long!*

Into its narrow shed.

Later she wrote some notes in a journal.

I'm still puzzled about the meaning of the words. "The balloon of the mind." Does "balloon of the mind" mean a balloon that belongs to the mind, sort of like "a disease of the heart"? If so, it means a balloon that the mind has, a balloon that the mind possesses, I guess by imagining it. Or does it mean that the mind is like a balloon, as when you say, "He's a pig of a man," meaning he is like a pig, he is a pig? Can it mean both? What's a balloon that the mind imagines? Something like dreams of fame? wealth? Castles in Spain?

Is Yeats saying that the "hands" have to work hard to make dreams a reality? Maybe. But maybe the idea really is that the mind is like a balloon—hard to keep under control, floating around. Very hard to keep the mind on the job. If the mind is like a balloon, it's hard to get it into the hangar (shed).

"Bellies." Is there such a verb? In this poem it seems to mean something like "puffs out" or "flops around in the wind." Just checked The American Heritage Dictionary, and it says "belly" can be a verb, "to swell out," "to bulge." Well, you learn something every day.

A later entry:

OK, I think the poem is about a writer trying to keep his balloon-like mind under control, trying to keep it working at the job of writing something, maybe writing something with the "clarity, unity, and coherence" I keep hearing about in this course.

Here is the student's final version of the explication:

Yeats's "Balloon of the Mind" is about writing poetry, specifically about the difficulty of getting one's floating thoughts down in lines on the page. The first line, a short, stern, heavily stressed command to the speaker's hands, perhaps implies by its severe or impatient tone that these hands will be disobedient or inept or careless if not watched closely. The poor bumbling body so often fails to achieve the goals of the mind. The bluntness of the command in the first line is emphasized by the fact that all the subsequent lines have more syllables. Furthermore, the first line is a grammatically complete sentence, whereas the thought of line 2 spills over into

the next lines, implying the difficulty of fitting ideas into confining spaces, that is, of getting one's thoughts into order, especially into a coherent poem.

Lines 2 and 3 amplify the metaphor already stated in the title (the product of the mind is an airy but unwieldy balloon), and they also contain a second command, "Bring." Alliteration ties this command "Bring" to the earlier "bid"; it also ties both of these verbs to their object, "balloon," and to the verb that most effectively describes the balloon, "bellies." In comparison with the abrupt first line of the poem, lines 2 and 3 themselves seem almost swollen, bellying and dragging, an effect aided by using adjacent unstressed syllables ("of the," "[bell]ies and," "in the") and by using an eye rhyme ("mind" and "wind") rather than an exact rhyme. And then comes the short last line: Almost before we could expect it, the cumbersome balloon—here the idea that is to be packed into the stanza—is successfully lodged in its "narrow shed." Aside from the relatively colorless "into," the only words of more than one syllable in the poem are "balloon," "bellies," and "narrow," and all three emphasize the difficulty of the task. But after "narrow"—the word itself almost looks long and narrow, in this context like a hangar—we get the simplicity of the monosyllable "shed." The difficult job is done; the thought is safely packed away, the poem is completed—but again with an off rhyme ("bid" and "shed"), for neatness can go only so far when minds and mind and a balloon are involved.

Note: The reader of an explication needs to see the text, and if the explicated text is short, it is advisable to quote it all. Remember, your imagine-d

audience probably consists of your classmates; even if they have already read the work you are explicating, they have not memorized it, and so you helpfully remind them of the work by quoting it.

- You may quote the entire text at the outset, or you may quote the first unit (for example, a stanza), then explicate that unit, and then quote the next unit, and so on.
- And if the poem or passage of prose is longer than, say, six lines, it is advisable to number each line at the right for easy reference.

Reminder: For an Explication Checklist, see page 56.

RHYTHM AND VERSIFICATION: A GLOSSARY FOR REFERENCE

Rhythm

Rhythm (most simply), in English poetry, stresses at regular intervals) has a power of its own. A highly pronounced rhythm is common in such forms of poetry as charms, college yells, and lullabies; all are aimed at inducing a special effect magically. It is not surprising that *carmen*, the Latin word for poem or song, is also the Latin word for charm and the word from which our word *charm* is derived.

In much poetry, rhythm is only half heard, but its presence is suggested by the way poetry is printed. Prose (from Latin *prorsus*, for-"ward," "straight on") keeps running across the paper until the right-hand margin is reached; then, merely because the paper has given out, the writer or printer starts again at the left, with a small letter. But verse (Latin *versus*, "a turning") often ends well short of the right-hand margin. The next line begins at the left—usually with a capital—not because paper has run out but because the rhythmic pattern begins again. Lines of poetry are continually reminding us that they have a pattern.

Note that a mechanical, unvarying rhythm may be good to put the baby to sleep, but it can be deadly to readers who want to stay awake. Po-ets vary their rhythm according to their purposes; they ought not to be so regular that they are (in W. H. Auden's words) "accentual pests." In com-petent hands, rhythm contributes to meaning; it says something. Ezra Pound has a relevant comment: "Rhythm *must* have meaning. It can't be merely a careless dash off, with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense, a tumty tum tumty tum tum ta."

Consider this description of Hell from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) (stressed syllables are marked by ´; unstressed syllables by ˘):

> Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death

The normal line in *Paradise Lost* is written in iambic feet—alternate unstressed and stressed syllables—but in this line Milton immediately follows one heavy stress with another, helping to communicate the "mean-ing"—the oppressive monotony of Hell. As a second example, consider the function of the rhythm in two lines by Alexander Pope (1688–1744):

> When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
> The line too labors, and the words move slow.

The stressed syllables: do not merely alternate with the unstressed ones; rather, the great weight of the rock is suggested by three consecutive stressed words, "rock's vast weight," and the great effort involved in mov-ing it is suggested by another three consecutive stresses, "line too labors," and by yet another three, "words move slow." Note, also, the abundant pauses within the lines. In the first line, unless one's speech is slovenly, one must pause at least slightly after *Ajax, strives, rock's, vast, weight,* and *throw.* The grating sounds in *Ajax* and *rock's* do their work, too, and so do the explosives. When Pope wishes to suggest lightness, he re-verses his procedure, and the groups unstressed syllables:

> Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
> Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.

This last line has twelve syllables and is, thus, longer than the line about Ajax, but the addition of *along* helps communicate lightness and swift-ness because in this line neither syllable of *along* is strongly stressed. If *along* is omitted, the line still makes grammatical sense and becomes more regular, but it also becomes less imitative of lightness. The very regularity of a line may be meaningful, too. Shakespeare begins a sonnet thus:

> When I do count the clock that tells the time.

This line about a mechanism runs with appropriate regularity. (It is worth noting that "count the clock" and "tells the time" emphasize the regularity by the repetition of sounds and syntax.) But notice what Shake-speare does in the middle of the next line:

> And see the brave day sunk in hideous night.

The three heavy stresses, on "brave day sunk," are oppressive; one might almost say they they hang weights on the day, sinking it in the night.

The technical vocabulary of **prosody** (the study of the principles of verse structure, including meter, rhyme and other sound effects, and stanzaic patterns) is large. An understanding of these terms will not turn anyone into a poet, but it will enable you to write about some aspects of poetry more efficiently. The following are the chief terms of prosody.

Meter

Most poetry written in English has a pattern of stressed (**accented**) sounds, and this pattern is the **meter** (from the Greek word for "measure"). Strictly speaking we really should not talk of "unstressed" or "unaccented" syllables, since to utter a syllable—however lightly—is to give it some stress. It is really a matter of *relative* stress, but the fact is that *unstressed* and *unaccented* are parts of the established terminology of versification.

In a line of poetry, the **foot** is the basic unit of measurement. It is on rare occasions a single stressed syllable; generally a foot consists of two or three syllables, one of which is stressed. The repetition of feet, then, produces a pattern of stresses throughout the poem

Two cautions:

1. A poem will seldom contain only one kind of foot throughout; significant variations usually occur, but one kind of foot is dominant.
2. In reading a poem, one chiefly pays attention to the sense, not to a presupposed metrical pattern. By paying attention to the sense, one often finds (reading aloud is a great help) that the stress falls on a word that according to the metrical pattern would be unstressed. Or a word that according to the pattern would be stressed may be seen to be unstressed. Furthermore by reading for sense one finds that not all stresses are equally heavy; some are almost as light as unstressed syllables, and some have a **hovering stress**; that is, the stress is equally distributed over two adjacent syllables. To repeat: One reads for sense, allowing the syntax to help indicate the stresses.

Metrical Feet The most common feet in English poetry are the six listed here.

Iamb (adjective: **iambic**): one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. The iamb, said to be the most common pattern in English speech, is surely the most common in English poetry. The following example has four iambic feet:

My heart is like a singing bird.

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Trochee (trochaic): one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed.

We were very tired, we were very merry

—EDNA ST. VINCENT

Anapest (anapestic): two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed.

There are many who say that a dog has his day.

—DYLAN THOMAS

Dactyl (dactylic): one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed. This trisyllabic foot, like the anapest, is common in light verse or verse suggesting joy, but its use is not limited to such material, as Longfellow's long narrative poem *Evangeline* (1847) shows. Thomas Hood's sentimental "The Bridge of Sighs" begins:

Take her up tenderly;

Spondee (spondaic): two stressed syllables; most often used as substitute for an iamb or trochee.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away.

—A. E. HOUSMAN

Pyrrhic: two unstressed syllables; it is often not considered a legitimate foot in English.

Metrical Lines A metrical line consists of one or more feet and is named for the number of feet in it. The following names are used:

monometer: one foot
dimeter: two feet
trimeter: three feet
tetrameter: four feet

pentameter: five feet
hexameter: six feet
heptameter: seven feet

A line is scanned for the kind and number of feet in it, and the **scansion** tells you if it is, say, anapestic trimeter (three anapests):

As I came to the edge of the woods.

Or, in another example, iambic pentameter:

The summer thunder, like a wooden bell

—ROBERT FROST

A line ending with a stress has a **masculine ending**; a line ending with an extra unstressed syllable has a **feminine ending**. The **caesura** (usually indicated by the symbol //) is a slight pause within the line. It need not be indicated by punctuation (notice the fourth and fifth lines in the following quotation), and it does not affect the metrical count:

Awake, my St. John!//leave all meaner things
To low ambition,//and the pride of kings.
Let us//(since Life can little more supply
Than just to look about us//and to die)
Expatiate free/o'er all this scene of Man;
A mighty maze!//but not without a plan;
A wild//where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot;
Or garden,//tempting with forbidden fruit.

—ALEXANDER POPE

4

The varying position of the caesura helps give Pope's lines an informality that plays against the formality of the pairs of rhyming lines.

An **end-stopped line** concludes with a distinct syntactical pause, but a **run-on line** has its sense carried over into the next line without following pause. The running-on of a line is called **enjambment**. In the following passage, only the first is a run-on line:

Yet if we look more closely we shall find
Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind:
Nature affords at least a glimmering light;
The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn right.

—ALEXANDER POPE

Meter produces **rhythm**, recurrences at equal intervals, but rhythm (from a Greek word meaning "flow") is usually applied to larger units than feet. Often it depends most obviously on pauses. A poem with run-on lines will have a different rhythm from a poem with end-stopped lines

even though both are in the same meter. And prose, though it is unmetrical, may also have rhythm.

In addition to being affected by syntactical pause, rhythm is affected by pauses attributable to consonant clusters and to the length of words. Polysyllabic words establish a different rhythm from monosyllabic words, even in metrically identical lines. One may say, then, that rhythm is altered by shifts in meter, syntax, and the length and ease of pronunciation. Even with no such shift, ever if a line is repeated word for word, a reader may sense a change in rhythm. The rhythm of the final line of a poem, for example, may well differ from that of the line before even though in other respects the lines are identical, as in Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," which concludes by repeating "And miles to go before I sleep." One may simply sense that this final line ought to be spoken, more slowly and with more stress on "miles."

Patterns of Sound

Though rhythm is basic to poetry, **rhyme**—the repetition of the identical or similar stressed sound or sounds—is not. Rhyme is pleasant in itself; it suggests order; and it is also may be related to meaning, for it brings two words sharply together, often implying a relationship, as in the now trite dove and love or in the more imaginative throne and alone.

Perfect or **exact rhyme**: Differing consonant sounds are followed by identical stressed vowel sounds, and the following sounds, if any, are identical (foe–toe; meet–fleet; buffer–rougher). Notice that perfect rhyme involves identity of sound, not of spelling. Fix and sticks, like buffer and rougher, are perfect rhymes.

Half rhyme (or off-rhyme): Only the final consonant sounds of the words are identical; the stressed vowel sounds, as well as the initial consonant sounds, if any, differ (soul–oil; mirth–forth; trolley–bully).

Eye-rhyme: The sounds do not in fact rhyme, but the words look as though they would rhyme (cough–bough).

Masculine rhyme: The final syllables are stressed and, after their differing initial consonant sounds, are identical in sound (stark–mark; support–retort).

Feminine rhyme (or double rhyme): Stressed rhyming syllables are followed by identical unstressed syllables (revival–arrival; flatter–batter).

Triple rhyme is a kind of feminine rhyme in which identical stressed vowel sounds are followed by two identical unstressed syllables (machinery–scenery; tenderly–slenderly).

End rhyme (or terminal rhyme): The rhyming words occur at the ends of the lines.

Internal rhyme: At least one of the rhyming words occurs within the line (Oscar Wilde's "Each narrow cell in which we dwell").

Alliteration: Sometimes defined as the repetition of initial sounds ("All the awful auguries" or "Bring me my bow of burning gold"), and sometimes as the prominent repetition of a consonant ("after life's fitful fever").

Assonance: The repetition, in words of proximity, of identical vowel sounds preceded and followed by differing consonant sounds. Whereas tide and hide are rhymes, tide and mine are assonantal.

Consonance: The repetition of identical consonant sounds and differing vowel sounds in words in proximity (fail-feel; rough-roof; bitter-patter). Sometimes, consonance is more loosely defined merely as the repetition of a consonant (fail-peel).

Onomatopoeia: The use of words that imitate sounds, such as hiss and buzz. A common mistaken tendency is to see onomatopoeia everywhere—for example, in thunder and horror. Many words sometimes thought to be onomatopoeic are not clearly imitative of the thing they refer to; they merely contain some sounds that, when we know what the word means, seem to have some resemblance to the thing they denote. The Victorian poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson's lines from "Come Down O Maid" are an example of onomatopoeia:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Stanzaic Patterns

Lines of poetry are commonly arranged into a rhythmical unit called a **stanza** (from an Italian word meaning "room" or "stopping place"). Usually, all the stanzas in a poem have the same rhyme pattern. A stanza is sometimes called a **verse** though verse may also mean a single line of poetry. (In discussing stanzas, rhymes are indicated by identical letters. Thus, a b a b indicates that the first and third lines rhyme with each other, while the second and fourth lines are linked by a different rhyme. An unrhymed line is denoted by x.) Common stanzaic forms in English poetry are the following:

Couplet: a stanza of two lines, usually, but not necessarily, rhymes. Couplet is also used for a pair of rhyming lines. The **octosyllabic couplet** is iambic or trochaic tetrameter:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.

—ANDREW MARVELL

Heroic couplet: a rhyming couplet of iambic pentameter, often "closed," that is, containing a complete thought, with a fairly heavy pause at the end of the first line and a still heavier one at the end of the second. Commonly, a parallel or an antithesis (contrast) is found within a line or between the two lines. It is called heroic because in England, especially in the eighteenth century, it was much used for heroic (epic) poems.

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;
The ancients only, or the moderns, prize.

—ALEXANDER POPE

Triplet (or **tercet**): a three-line stanza, usually with one rhyme.

Whenas in silks my Julia goes
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

—ROBERT HERRICK

Quatrain: a four-line stanza, rhymed or unrhymed. The **heroic** (or **elegiac**) **quatrain** is iambic pentameter, rhyming a b a b; that is, the first and third lines rhyme (so they are designated a), and the second and fourth lines rhyme (so they are designated b).

Sonnet: a fourteen-line poem, predominantly in iambic pentameter. The rhyme is usually according to one of the two following schemes. The **Italian** (or **Petrarchan**) **sonnet** has two divisions: the first eight lines (rhyming a b b a a b b a) are the **octave**; the last six (rhyming c d e c d e, or a variant) are the **sestet**. Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (page 000) is an Italian sonnet. The second kind of sonnet, the **English** (or **Shakespearean**) **sonnet**, is arranged usually into three quatrains and a couplet, rhyming a b a b c d c d e f e f g g. Many sonnets have a marked correspondence between the rhyme scheme and the development of the thought. Thus, an Italian sonnet may state a generalization in the octave and a specific example in the sestet. Or an English sonnet may give three examples—one in each quatrain—and draw a conclusion in the couplet.

Blank Verse and Free Verse

A good deal of English poetry is unrhymed, much of it in **blank verse**; that is, unrhymed iambic pentameter. Introduced into English poetry by Henry Howard, the earl of Surrey, in the middle of the sixteenth century,

it became the standard medium (especially in the hands of Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare) of English drama late in the century. A passage of blank verse that has a rhetorical unity is sometimes called a **verse paragraph.**

The second kind of unrhymed poetry fairly common in English, especially in the twentieth century, is **free verse** (or **vers libre**), which has rhythmical lines varying in length, adhering to no fixed metrical pattern, and usually unrhymed. The pattern is often largely based on repetition and parallel grammatical structure. Here is a sample of free verse.

Walt Whitman (1819–92)
WHEN I HEARD THE LEARN'D ASTRONOMER

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,   5
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

What can be said about the rhythmic structure of this poem? Rhymes are absent, and the lines vary greatly in the number of syllables, ranging from 9 (the first line) to 23 (the fourth line), but when we read the poem we sense a rhythmic structure. The first four lines obviously hang together, each beginning with "When"; indeed, three of these four lines begin "When I." We may notice, too, that each of these four lines has more syllables than its predecessor (the numbers are 9, 14, 18, and 23); this increase in length, like the initial repetition is a kind of pattern.

In the fifth line, however, which speaks of fatigue and surfeit, there is a shrinkage to 14 syllables, offering an enormous relief from the previous swollen line with its 23 syllables. The second half of the poem—the pattern established by "When" in the first four lines is dropped, and in effect we get a new stanza, also of four lines—does not relentlessly diminish the number of syllables in each succeeding line, but it almost does so: 4, 14, 13, 10.

The second half of Whitman's poem, thus, has a pattern, and this pattern is more or less the reverse of the first half of the poem. We may

notice, too, that the last line (in which the poet, now released from the oppressive lecture hall, is in communion with nature) is very close to an iambic pentameter line; the poem concludes with a metrical form said to be the most natural in English.

The effect of naturalness or ease in this final line, moreover, is increased by the absence of repetitions (e.g., not only of "When I," but ever of such syntactic repetitions as "charts and diagrams," "tired and sick," "rising and gliding") that characterize most of the previous lines. This final effect of naturalness is part of a carefully constructed pattern in which rhythmic structure is part of meaning. Though at first glance free verse may appear unrestrained, as T. S. Eliot (a practitioner) said, "No vers is libre for the man who wants to do a good job"—or for the woman who wants to do a good job.

In recent years poets who write what earlier would have been called free verse have characterized their writing as **open form.** Such poets, as Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov reject the "closed form" of the traditional, highly patterned poem, preferring instead a form that seems spontaneous or exploratory. To some readers the unit seems to be the phrase or the line rather than the group of lines; but Denise Levertov insists that the true writer of open form poetry must have a "form sense"; she compares such a writer to "a sort of helicopter scout flying over the field of the poem, taking aerial photos and reporting on the state of the forest and its creatures—or over the sea to watch for the schools of herring and direct the fishing fleet toward them."[1] And, Levertov again, "Form is never more than a revelation of content."

PREPARING TO WRITE ABOUT PROSODY

• Once you have decided to write about some aspect of verse structure—whether meter, rhyme, or other sound effects—write your own copy of the poem (or passage from a long poem), triple-spaced so that you will have plenty of room for your annotations. Number the lines, and print or photocopy several copies because you may find it useful to put metrical annotations on one copy, annotations concerning effects such as alliteration and

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[1] "Some Notes on Organic Form." Reprinted in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, eds. Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman (New York, 1973, 316–317.

the rhyme scheme on yet another.

- Read the poem aloud several times, making sure that you are reading for sense and are not imposing too regular a metrical pattern.

- consonance within lines on another; and annotations concerning

- Mark the stresses, and in marginal notes call attention to all departures (or probable departures) from the overall metrical pattern.

- Circle letters of words that are connected, for instance by alliteration or by assonance, and see if the connections are meaningful. The identity of sound may, for instance, reinforce identity or similarity of meaning (as in "born and bred"), or the identity of sound may provide an ironic contrast ("born and blasted"). Again, jot down marginal notes expanding your observations.

- Mark the rhyme scheme, and in your marginal notes call attention to imperfect rhymes. *Caution*: The pronunciation of some words has changed over the centuries. In the eighteenth century, for instance, *line* and *join* (pronounced *jine*) were perfect rhymes.

- Prepare a tentative organization. If you are planning to write on all aspects, you probably will want to write first about one aspect—let's say the overall structure of sounds imposed by the rhyme—then about meter, and then about other sound effects such as assonance and consonance. When you have finished a draft you may well discover that for this particular poem, a different organization is preferable, but you ought to begin with a tentative plan, and—equally or more importantly—you ought to be prepared to modify your plan after you finish a first draft.

SAMPLE ESSAY ON METRICS: "SOUND AND SENSE IN A. E. HOUSMAN'S 'EIGHT O'CLOCK'"

Here is an excellent analysis by a student, Julia Tefords. Notice that she quotes the poem and indicates the metrical pattern and that she proceeds chiefly by explaining the effect of the variations or departures from the norm in the order in which they occur.

Notice, too, that although it is a good idea to announce your thesis early—that is, in the first paragraph—this writer does *not* say, "This

paper will show that Housman effectively uses rhythm to support his ideas" or some such thing. It's sufficient that the writer announces her topic in the title and again, in slightly different words, in the first sentence (the paper will "analyze the effects of sounds and rhythms in Housman's 'Eight O'Clock'"). We know where we will be going, and we head with even a bit of suspense, looking to see what the analysis will produce.

Sound and Sense in A. E. Housman's "Eight O'Clock"

Before trying to analyze the effects of sounds and rhythms in A. E. Housman's "Eight O'Clock" (1922) it will be useful to quote the poem and to indicate which syllables are stressed and which are unstressed. It must be understood, however, that the following scansion is relatively crude, because it falsely suggests that all stressed syllables (marked ´) are equally stressed, but of course they are not. In reading the poem aloud, one would stress some of them relatively heavily, others only a trifle more than the unstressed syllables. It should be understood, too, that in the discussion that follows the poem some other possible scansions will be proposed.

He stood, | and heard | the stee | ple
Sprinkle | the quar | ters on | the mor | ning town.
One, two, | three, four, | to mar | ket-place | and people
It tossed | them down.

Strapped, noosed, | nighing | his hour,
He stood, | and coun | ted them | and cursed | his luck;
And then | the clock | collec | ted in | the tower
Its strength, | and struck.

As the first line of the second stanza makes especially clear, the poem is about a hanging at eight o'clock, according to the title Housman could have written about the man's thoughts on the justice or injustice of his fate, or about the reasons for the execution, but he did not. Except for the second line of the second stanza—"He stood and counted them and cursed his luck"—he seems to tell us little about the man's thoughts. But the poem is not merely a narrative of an event: the sound effects in the poem help to convey an idea as well as a story.

The first line establishes an iambic pattern. The second line begins with a trochee ("Sprinkle"), not an iamb, and later in the line possibly "on" should not be stressed even though I marked it with a stress and made it part of an iambic foot, but still the line is mainly iambic. The poem so far is a fairly jingling description of someone hearing the church clock chiming a each quarter of the hour. Certainly, even though the second line begins with a stress, there is nothing threatening in "Sprinkle," a word in which we almost hear a tinkle.

But the second half of the first stanza surprises us, and maybe even jolts us. In "One, two, three, four" we get four consecutive heavy stresses. These stresses are especially emphatic because there is a pause, indicated by a comma, after each of them. Time is not just passing to the chimes of a clock: This is a countdown, and we sense that it may lead to something significant. Moreover, the third line, which is longer than the two previous lines, does not end with a pause. This long line (eleven syllables) runs on into the next

line, almost as though once the countdown has begun there is no stopping it. But then we do stop suddenly, because the last line of the stanza has only four syllables—far fewer than we would have expected. In other words, this line stops unexpectedly because it has only two feet. The first line had three feet, and the second and third lines had five feet. Furthermore, this short final line of the stanza ends with a heavy stress in contrast to the previous line, which ends with an unstressed syllable, "people." As we will see, the sudden stopping at the end is a sort of preview of a life cut short. Perhaps it is also a preview of a man dropping through a trapdoor and then suddenly stopping when the slack in the hangman's rope has been taken up.

In the first line of the second stanza the situation is made clear, and it is also made emphatic by three consecutive stresses: "Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour." The pauses before the first three stresses make the words especially emphatic. And though I have marked the first two words of the next line "He stood," possibly "He" should be stressed too. In any case even if "He" is not heavily stressed, it is certainly stressed more than the other unstressed syllables, "and," "ed" (in "counted"), and "his." Similarly in the third line of the stanza an effective reading might even stress the first word as well as the second, thus: "And then." And although normal speech would stress only the second syllable in "collected," in this poem the word appears after "clock," and so one must pause after the k sound in "clock," and so one must pause after the k sound in "clock" (one simply can't say "clock collected" without pausing briefly between the two words),

and the effect is to put it more than usual stress on the first syllable, almost turning it into "collected." And so this line really can reasonably be scanned like this:

And then the clock collected in the tower

And again the third line of the stanza runs over into the fourth, propelling us onward. The final line surely begins with a stress, even though "Its" is not a word usually stressed, and so in the final line we begin with two strong stresses, "Its strength." This line, like the last line of the first stanza, is unusually short and it, too, ends with a heavy stress. The total effect, then, of the last two lines of this stanza is of a clock striking, not just sprinkling music but forcefully and emphatically and decisively striking. The pause after "strength" is almost like the suspenseful pause of a man collecting his strength before he strikes a blow, and that is what the clock does:

And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength and struck.

If "clock collected" has in its k sounds a sort of ticktock effect, the clock at the end shows its force, for when it strikes the hour, the man dies.

I said near the beginning of this essay that Housman did not write about the man's thoughts about the justice or injustice of the sentence, and I think this is more or less true, but if we take into account the sound effects in the poem we can see that in part the poem is about the man's thoughts: He sees himself as the victim not only of his "luck" but of this machine, this ticking, unstoppable contraption that strikes not only the hours but a man's life.

A Brief Overview of the Essay

• The **title** suggests the writer's topic, and the first sentence of the **opening paragraph** establishes it without doubt, "the effects of sounds and rhythms" in a particular poem. This paragraph also includes some sentences whereby the author quite reasonably indicates her awareness that not everyone will scan the poem exactly as she does. Willingness to concede differences of opinion is a good argumentative strategy; it establishes the reader as a person who is open-minded.

• Julia provides the reader with **the text of the poem**, marked with her sense of the stresses. Don't expect your reader to read your paper and also to be thumbing through a book to find the poem.

• The **organization** is simple but adequate. Julia begins at the beginning and move through the poem to its end.

• In her **final paragraph** Julia interestingly modifies an assertion she made earlier, that Housman "did not write about the man's thoughts about the justice or injustice of the sentence." She now shows that, in a way, the metrical effects—her chief topic—do tell us something about the victim's thoughts. This modification is not a contradiction. If indeed she now sees that Housman did write about these topics, she of course should have revised the earlier passage. But the earlier passage remains true, at least in a broad sense Housman did not write about the victim's thoughts about justice. What Julia is saying, at the end of her essay, is that the metrical effects do in some degree get us into the mind of the victim, helping us to see him as someone struck down by an implacable machine.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993), is an indispensable reference work, with entries ranging from a few sentences to half a dozen or so pages on prosody, genre; critical approaches, and so on. See also Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 2nd ed. (2003).

On prosody, see Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, rev. ed. (1979); and (especially engaging) John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason*, 3rd ed. (2001). A cogent recent look on the same topic is Robert Pinsky, *The Sound of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998). Barbara Herrnstein Smith,

Poetic Closure: A Study of the Way Poems End (1968), is an interesting study. For poets talking about their art, see *The Poet's Work: 29 Masters of 20th Century Poetry on the Origins and Practice of Their Art*, ed. Reginald Gibbons (1979). For good discussions (with interesting visual materials) of thirteen American poets from Whitman to Sylvia Plath, see *Voices and Visions: The Poet in America*, ed. Helen Vendler (1987).

Other insightful books are Christopher B. Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (1984); Frank Kermode, *An Appetite for Poetry* (1989); and John Hollander, *The Work of Poetry* (1997). For a collection of essays illustrating contemporary theory, see *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (1985), eds. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker. A huge book that doubles as a reference work and a history of poetry is Michael Schmidt, *Lives of the Poets* (1999). We also suggest you take a look at *Touchstones: American Poets on a Favorite Poem*, eds. Robert Pack and Jay Parini (1996).

✔ A Checklist: Getting Ideas for Writing about Poetry

If you are going to write about a fairly short poem (say, under thirty lines), it's a good idea to copy out the poem, writing it or typing it triple-spaced. By writing it out you will be forced to notice details, down to the punctuation. After you have copied the poem, proofread it carefully against the original. Catching an error—even the addition or omission of a comma—may prompt you to notice a detail in the original that you might otherwise have overlooked. And now that you have the poem with ample space between the lines, you have a worksheet with room for jottings.

A good essay is based on a genuine response to a poem; a response may be stimulated in part by first reading the poem aloud and then considering the following questions.

First Response

❏ What was your response to the poem on first reading? Did some parts especially please or displease you or puzzle you? After some study—perhaps checking the meanings of some of the words in a dictionary and reading the poem several times—did you modify your initial response to the parts and to the whole?

Speaker and Tone

❏ Who is the speaker? (Consider age, sex, personality, frame of mind, and tone of voice.) Is the speaker defined fairly precisely (for instance, an old woman speaking to a child), or is the speaker

simply a voice meditating? (Jot down your first impressions, then reread the poem and make further jottings, if necessary.)

❏ Do you think the speaker is fully aware of what he or she is saying, or does the speaker unconsciously reveal his or her personality and values? What is your attitude toward this speaker?

❏ Is the speaker narrating or reflecting on an earlier experience or attitude? If so, does he or she convey a sense of new awareness, such as of regret for innocence lost?

Audience

❏ To whom is the speaker speaking? What is the situation, including time and place? (In some poems, a listener is strongly implied, but in others, especially those in which the speaker is meditating, there may be no audience other than the reader, who "overhears" the speaker.)

Structure and Form

❏ Does the poem proceed in a straightforward way, or at some point or points does the speaker reverse course, altering his or her tone or perception? If there is a shift, what do you make of it?

❏ Is the poem organized into sections? If so, what are these sections—stanzas, for instance—and how does each section (characterized, perhaps, by a certain tone of voice, or a group of rhymes) grow out of what precedes it?

❏ What is the effect on you of the form—say, quatrains (stanzas of four lines) or blank verse (unrhymed lines of ten syllables)? If the sense overflows the form, running without pause from, for example, one quatrain into the next, what effect is created?

Center of Interest and Theme

❏ What is the poem about? Is the interest chiefly in a distinctive character, or in meditation? That is, is the poem chiefly psychological or chiefly philosophical?

❏ Is the theme stated explicitly (directly) or implicitly? How might you state the theme in a sentence? What is lost by reducing the poem to a statement of a theme?

Diction

❏ How would you characterize the language? Colloquial, or elevated, or what?

- Do certain words have rich and relevant associations that relate to other words and define the speaker or the theme or both?
- What is the role of figurative language, if any? Does it help to define the speaker or the theme?
- What do you think is to be taken figuratively or symbolically, and what literally?

Sound Effects

- What is the role of sound effects, including repetitions of sound (for instance, alliteration) and of entire words, and shifts in versification?
- If there are off-rhymes (such as, *dizzy* and *easy*, or *home* and *come*), what effect do they have on you? Do they, for instance, add a note of tentativeness or uncertainty?
- If there are unexpected stresses or pauses, what do they communicate about the speaker's experience? How do they affect you?

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WRITING AB
AUTHOR IN

A poem is best read in the light of ten. We read A the better read B (t may get very little out of A). We re better to read D, D the better to g out of A. Progress is not the aim, get among the poems where they places as the stars do.

If you have read several works by an aut speare or detective stories about Sherlo Doyle, you know that authors return a and themes (tragedy for Shakespeare, c treatment is different *Hamlet*, *Macbe*, tragedies and share certain qualities th yet each is highly distinctive.

When we read several works by an about resemblances and differences. W again a theme (nature, or love, or imm once more the possibilities of a literary short story). We may find that the auth and that we are getting a sense of the w

Sometimes we speak of the shape reer, meaning that the careful study o derstanding of the narrative—with its the writings tell across a period of tim by an author and find it intriguing o about reading more: Are there other p