

Glossary for Poets and Critics of Poems from Cleis Abeni

OVERALL DEFINITION OF “POEMS”

Poems are a kind of language arts generally structured in lines and stanzas. Of course, hybrid structures like *prose poetry* abound; but, lines and stanzas most distinguish poetry’s design from prose. (Prose refers to fiction or nonfiction composed generally in full sentences divided into paragraphs.) In English-speaking worlds (nations in which English is a primary language), there are three major genres of poetry: *lyric*, *dramatic*, and *narrative*. Some “experimental” poems do not conform to these three genres. Yet, even when they are unclassifiable or hybrid, “experimental” poems always refer implicitly to older traditions.

DEFINITIONS FOR LYRIC, DRAMATIC, AND NARRATIVE POEMS

Lyric Lyric poems are highly musical short forms situated within the first person in which the speaker of the poem is often assumed to be the same as, or very similar to, the poet. For many centuries, poets, theorists and critics have debated the character of lyric poems. Building on the ideas of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), some critics said reading lyric poems is like overhearing someone speaking in a moment of intense, brief, solitary reflection. In this characterization, the speaker of the poem may address herself or the speaker may address a mysterious, beloved presence. If you are interested in books and articles that debate the meaning and character of lyric poems please ask for citations.

Dramatic In dramatic poetry, the speaker is a persona who is *not* the poet and the poem is a theatrical enactment.

Narrative Narrative poetry tells a story; and a story refers to a series of developing events with specific (though sometimes unreported) time frames, settings, and characters.

BASE-LINE COMPETENCIES FOR POETS AND CRITICS

Regardless of what kind of poetry that they write, read, or critique, poets and critics should know and do the following:

- 1) You should understand the rhetorical development of thought and feeling in a given poem (or matters of structure).
- 2) You should understand poetic forms (from their development in the Homeric age in 8th century BCE through 21st century forms). Form refers to named organizations of lines, stanzas, and rhythm (like sonnets) as well as to unique, unnamed, one-of-a-kind organizations (or nonce forms).

- 3) You should understand Standard English language grammar and syntax.
- 4) You should be endlessly attuned to and fascinated by language on the level of the sentence and the phrase. How sentences are styled and the drama of cadence (syntax and phrasing) should be very, very important to you.
- 5) You should understand rhetoric. Rhetoric means (1) the persuasive value of the language (how it makes and proves its case); (2) the expressive occasion of the language—or how the language is called to convey urgent things; and (3) the quality of address—to whom and how the language is pitched.
- 6) You should favor clarity, however complex your ideas or your approach. Consequently, you should avoid vagueness. Remember: selectivity, difficulty, and complexity are NOT the same as vagueness and confusion. A lack of clear reference and referents frequently produces vagueness. Some of my students still say amateurish statements like “but I *want* it to be vague” and “I think it *should* be confusing.” Multiple or conflicting meanings are not the same effects as vagueness and confusion. Irresolution is not the same as vagueness and confusion.
- 7) You should understand the role of typography (the textual appearance of the language on the page) and orthography (matters of capitalization and spelling).
- 8) Even if such an emphasis is not your chief domain, you should demonstrate excellence in understanding and writing verse in meter and rhyme. You should understand musicality, rhythm, rhyme, and meter—or a range of different prosodies from different eras and cultures of English language usage.
- 9) You should write with a *deficit* of sentimentality, contrivance, predictability, pretentiousness, and cliché, and a *surfeit* of exactitude and precision in the design of the language, and development of thought or feeling.
- 10) You should read very, very deeply and very, very widely across many different traditions of poetry—a book of poems a week is what I suggest (and no: that’s not too much). You must understand the conventions and trends that predate and influence your writing or criticism.
- 11) You should understand and be able to execute figuration in poems—metaphor, and all of the associative properties.
- 12) You should know music like a musician and oratory like a statesperson. Study the great musical compositions—especially the songs. Study the speech of the great orators and rhetoricians.
- 13) You should be gracious, discerning, and generous to other writers and the public, avoiding competitiveness, narcissism, gossip, and factionalism. Leave these rank human traits out of the art-making world. You should NOT be concerned with

hierarchies. It does not matter who is the best or who gets prizes or who gets “in” and who is “out” and other such claptrap. Be happy for everyone.

- 14) You should understand epic poetry—long narrative poems or poetic sequences in verse—from the ancient Homeric inventions, to Virgil’s genius through to contemporary epic innovations of writers like Gwendolyn Brooks (who wrote such epics as *The Anniad*; *In The Mecca*; *After the Mecca*; and *Riot*).
- 15) Emerging poets and critics should understand the conceptualization and organization of a series of poems. Such conceptualization and organization is crucial for the formation of unique, standalone books of poems. Even more than the writing, publishing, and reading of individual poems, a book of poems (which contains interrelationships of thought, feeling, form, and structure amongst the poems) is deeply important to the understanding and the health of literature in our world today.

TERMS OF SOUND, RHETORIC, RHYTHM & ADDRESS

Note: Periods are elided because definitions are ongoing and in-progress.

Accent

An emphasis given to a syllable or word; the word “poetry” has an accent (or stress) on the first syllable

Alliteration

The repetition of the same or similar sounds at the beginning of words: “What would the world be, once bereft/Of wet and wildness?” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Inversnaid”)

Related terms dealing with repeated sound values:

- Consonance: a preponderance of repeated consonants or vowel sounds
- Assonance: a preponderance of repeated vowels or vowel sounds (like stony and holy)
- Sibilance: repetition of the “s” sound; like a hissing effect

Antithesis

A figure of speech (or rhetorical figure) in which words and phrases with opposite meanings are balanced against each other; an example of antithesis is “To err is human, to forgive, divine.” (Alexander Pope)

Allegory

A narrative or collection of ideas that stands in or represents ideas that stand apart from the events or ideas literal meaning

Apostrophe

Words that are spoken to a person who is absent or imaginary, or to an object or abstract idea; the poem God's World by Edna St. Vincent Millay begins with an apostrophe: “O World, I cannot hold thee close enough!/Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!/Thy mists that roll and rise!”

Caesura

A natural pause or break in a line of poetry, usually near the middle of the line. There is a caesura right after the question mark in the first line of this sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”

Conceit

A greatly extended and developed metaphor; an example of a conceit can be found in Shakespeare's sonnet “Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?” and in Emily Dickinson's poem “There is no frigate like a book”

Enjambment

The continuation of a complete idea (a sentence or clause) from one line to the next line without a pause (including such a continuation across stanzas); an example of enjambment can be found in the first line of Joyce Kilmer's poem Trees: “I think that I shall never see/A poem as lovely as a tree”; enjambment comes from the French word for “to straddle”

Envoy

The shorter final stanza of a poem, as in a ballade; generally, in an Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnet, the last two lines (usually rhymed) are called a **volte**

Epic

A long, serious poem that tells the story of a heroic figure; two of the most famous epic poems are the ILIAD and the ODYSSEY by Homer, which tell about the Trojan War and the adventures of Odysseus on his voyage home after the war

“Epi” terms (please know the difference between these terms)

- 1) Epigram: a very short, witty poem: “Sir, I admit your general rule,/That every poet is a fool,/But you yourself may serve to show it,/That every fool is not a poet.” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
- 2) Epigraph: a quotation or phrase set at the beginning of a document
- 3) Epitaph: a descriptive word or phrase that has become a fixed formula; sometimes

appearing on tombstones

4) Epithet: a term that replaces or is added to the name of a person, like “clear-eyed Athena,” in which “clear-eyed” is the epithet; or a term of insult or abuse: “the shoplifter hurled epithets at the guard who had arrested her”

Epithalamium (or epithalamion)

A poem in honor of a bride and bridegroom

Feminine rhyme

This term is admittedly a very problematic and sexist or potentially sexist construction; nevertheless, for reference, this term refers to a rhyme that occurs in a final unstressed syllable: pleasure/leisure, longing/yearning

Figure of speech (or rhetorical figures)

A verbal expression in which words or sounds are arranged in a particular way to achieve a particular effect; figures of speech are organized into different categories, such as alliteration, assonance, metaphor, metonymy, onomatopoeia, simile, and synecdoche (see this alphabetical list for definitions of these terms)

Foot

Two or more syllables that together make up the smallest unit of rhythm in a poem; for example, an iamb is a foot that has two syllables, one unstressed followed by one stressed; an anapest has three syllables, two unstressed followed by one stressed

Free verse (also “vers libre”)

Poetry composed of either rhymed or unrhymed lines that have no set meter

Hyperbole

A figure of speech in which deliberate exaggeration is used for emphasis; many everyday expressions are examples of hyperbole: tons of money, waiting for ages, a flood of tears, etc. Hyperbole is the opposite of *litotes*

Hypotaxis

The syntactic subordination of one clause to another, generally using many conjunctions: “As we ran and we sang and we told jokes and we laughed, we became as one”; or “we loved and we gave and we died and we lived again”

Irony

Verbal: Saying the opposite of what is meant

Situational: The meaning of the context (or situation) runs counter to the action

Dramatic: Doing the opposite of what is meant

Line

The major rhythmic, typographic unit of expression within a poem; a sentence is *NOT* the same as a line of poetry because a sentence can span across many lines of poetry; students, please remember the following definition of a sentence: a sentence is a group of clauses or phrases forming a complete syntactic unit, usually with a subject and a predicate, which expresses an assertion, a question, a command, a wish, an exclamation, or the performance of an action; and in writing, a sentence usually begins with a capital letter and concludes with appropriate ending punctuation—like a period, exclamation mark, or question mark; and when speaking, pauses and end-points in a sentence are often distinguished by characteristic patterns of stress, pitch, and pause

Litotes

A figure of speech in which a positive is stated by negating its opposite; some examples of litotes: no small victory, not a bad idea, not unhappy; litotes is the opposite of hyperbole

Masculine rhyme

This term is admittedly a very problematic and sexist or potentially sexist construction; nevertheless, for reference, this term refers a rhyme that occurs in a final stressed syllable: cat/hat, desire/fire, observe/deserve

Metaphor

A figure of speech in which two things are compared, usually by saying one thing is another, or by substituting a more descriptive word for the more common or usual word that would be expected; some examples of metaphors: all the world's a stage; he was a lion in battle

Meter

The arrangement of a line of poetry by the number of syllables and the rhythm of accented (or stressed) syllables

Metonymy

A figure of speech in which one word is substituted for another with which it is closely associated; for example, in the expression “The pen is mightier than the sword,” the word

pen is used for “the written word,” and sword is used for “military power”

Narrative

Telling a story with some semblance of characters, plots, locales, time frames, dialogue or scenes; ballads, epics, and lays are different kinds of narrative poems

Ode

A lyric poem that is serious and thoughtful in tone and has a very precise, formal structure; John Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is a famous example of this type of poem

Onomatopoeia

A figure of speech in which words are used to imitate sounds; examples of onomatopoeic words are buzz, hiss, zing, clippety-clop, and tick-tock; Keats's “Ode to a Nightingale” not only uses onomatopoeia, but calls our attention to it: “Forlorn! The very word is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self!”; another example of onomatopoeia is found in this line from Tennyson's Come Down, O Maid: “The moan of doves in immemorial elms,/And murmuring of innumerable bees.” The repeated “m/n” sounds reinforce the idea of “murmuring” by imitating the hum of insects on a warm summer day

Parataxis

A rhetorical and syntactic arrangement in which clauses are strung together in series, without subordination: “We ran, we sang, and we told jokes”

Personification

A figure of speech in which things or abstract ideas are given human attributes: dead leaves dance in the wind, blind justice.

Rhyme

The occurrence of the same or similar sounds at the end of two or more words; the pattern of rhyme in a stanza or poem is shown usually by using a different letter for each final sound; in a poem with an *aabba* rhyme scheme, the first, second, and fifth lines end in one sound, and the third and fourth lines end in another

A Compendium of Terms and Concepts Related to Rhyme

A note on arrangement: This compendium starts with an extended definition of one of the perennial problems with rhyme: forced rhyme. Then it moves on to the most used, in my estimation, to the least used rhymes. Examples are sometimes (though not always) deliberately uncredited so that I can challenge my students to discover the source, and in the 21st century, typing the lines into an Internet search engine can lead to the name of most of these example's authors. I do not ascribe to the gendering of rhyme as masculine or feminine. But, I record these terms here so readers may know that these definitions and usages still persist.

Forced rhyme: Forced rhyme occurs when the writer seems to be desperate to rhyme in a manner that leads to the following problematic structures:

- 1) The length of a line is extended erring towards verbosity so that a rhyming word at the end of the line is achieved.
- 2) The length of a line is shortened erring towards impoverishment so that a rhyming word at the end of the line is achieved.
- 3) Archaic syntax or diction is used to twist around word order so that a rhyme appears at the end of a line ("archaic" pertains to usages from another, repudiated era of language within a culture).
- 4) Unintelligible language is inserted merely to achieve the rhyme.
- 5) Language that is erratic, inconsistent, unrelated, or unconnected to prior language in the poem is inserted merely to achieve the rhyme.
- 6) The phrasing is rearranged with convoluted or archaic syntax in order to put the rhyme at the end of a line.
- 7) Wrenched rhyming (one of the banes of rhyming and a chief insult commensurate with forced, indelicate rhyme): Wrenched rhyme occurs when the end sounds of the words in two or more lines are the same, but the accents are not on the same syllables. This leads to a gross inattention to the rhythm of the words that purport to achieve the rhyme. Rhyme is only achieved by a shallow recognition of surface sound value. Example: "This definition is like a sting--/you'll wince but come up laughing."

Perfect rhyme, full rhyme, true rhyme: These terms refer to the immediately recognizable norm: true/blue, mountain/fountain.

Imperfect rhyme, slant rhyme, half rhyme, approximate rhyme, near rhyme, off rhyme, oblique rhyme: These are all general terms referring to rhymes that are close but not exact: lap/shape, glorious/nefarious.

Eye rhyme: This refers to rhymes based on similarity of spelling rather than sound. Often these are highly conventional, and reflect historical changes in pronunciation: love/move/prove, why/envy.

Identical rhyme: A word rhymes with itself.

Example:

We paused before a house that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground--
The Roof was scarcely visible--
The Cornice--in the Ground.

End rhyme, terminal rhyme: All rhymes occur at line ends--the standard procedure.

Initial rhyme, head rhyme: Alliteration or other rhymes at the beginning of a line.

Internal rhyme: Rhyme that occurs within a line or passage, whether randomly (as below, on "flow" and "grow") or in some kind of pattern:

Example:

A heavenly paradise is that place,
Wherein all pleasant fruits do flow.
These cherries grow, which none may buy
Till "Cherry Ripe!" themselves do cry.

Chain rhyme: rhymes that pick up the prior rhyme from the previous line (like terza rima).

Rich rhyme (from the French, rime riche): A word rhymes with its homonym: blue/blew, guessed/guest.

Assonant rhyme: Rhyming with similar vowels, different consonants: dip/limp, man/prank.

Consonant rhyme: Rhyming with similar consonants, different vowels: limp/lump, bit/bet.

Scarce rhyme: Rhyming on words with limited rhyming alternatives: whisp/lisp, motionless/oceanless.

Macaronic rhyme: Macaronic verse uses more than one language, as in medieval lyrics with Latin refrains. Macaronic rhyme is also bilingual: glory/pro patria mori, sure/kreatur, queasy/civilisé.

One-syllable rhyme, or "masculine" rhyme: The norm, in which rhyme occurs on the final stressed syllables:

Example:

One, two,
Buckle my shoe

Extra-syllable rhyme, triple rhyme, multiple rhyme, extended rhyme, feminine rhyme: These all refer to rhyming double or triple or multiple extra-syllable endings: dying/flying, generate/venerate, salubrious/lugubrious.

Light rhyme: Rhyming of a stressed syllable with a secondary stress: frog/dialog, live/prohibitive.

Wrenched rhyme: Rhyming of a stressed syllable with an unstressed syllable. This often occurs in ballads and folk poetry, often on conventional words like lady/a bee.

Leonine rhyme, medial rhyme: Rhyme that occurs at the caesura and line end within a single line--like a rhymed couplet printed as a single line:

Example:

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers

Caesural rhyme, interlaced rhyme: Rhymes that occur at the caesura and line end within a pair of lines--like an abab quatrain printed as two lines:

Example 1:

Sweet is the treading of wine, and sweet the feet of the dove;
But a goodlier gift is thine than foam of the grapes or love.
Yea, is not even Apollo, with hair and harp-string of gold,
A bitter God to follow, a beautiful God to behold?

Example 2:

Upon the mat she lies and leers and on the tawny throat of her
Flutters the soft and silky fur or ripples to her pointed ears.

Come forth, my lovely seneschal! so somnolent, so statuesque!
Come forth you exquisite grotesque! half woman and half animal!

Crossed rhyme, alternating rhyme, interlocking rhyme: Rhyming in an abab pattern.

Intermittent rhyme: Rhyming every other line, as in the standard ballad quatrain: xaxa.

Envelope rhyme, inserted rhyme: Rhyming abba (as in the In Memoriam stanza).

Irregular rhyme: Rhyming that follows no fixed pattern (as in the pseudopindaric or irregular ode).

Sporadic rhyme, occasional rhyme: Rhyming that occurs unpredictably in a poem with mostly unrhymed lines.

Thorn line: A line left without rhyme in a generally rhymed passage. (There are ten

thorn lines among the 193 lines in Milton's irregularly rhymed Lycidas.)

Broken rhyme: Rhyme using more than one word:

Example 1:

But-oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,
Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all?

Example 2:

Or rhyme in which one word is broken over the line end:
I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
Dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing...

Linked rhyme: Rhyme that depends on completing the rhyme sound by enjambment over the line end:

Example:

But what black Boreas wrecked her? He
Came equipped, deadly-electric,

Apocopated rhyme: Rhyming a line end with a penultimate syllable:

Example:

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds.

Rhythm

The organization of pulses, beats, stresses, or accents in a line of poetry, a musical phrase, or a sentence

Sentence

See <https://cleisabeni.com/sentences.html> (instead of clicking on to the link, you may have to copy/paste this link into a web browser)

Simile

A figure of speech in which two things are compared using the word “like” or “as.” An example of a simile using like occurs in Langston Hughes's poem “Harlem”: “What happens to a dream deferred?/ Does it dry up/ like a raisin in the sun?”

Stanza

Two or more lines of poetry that together form one of the divisions of a poem. The stanzas of a poem are usually of the same length and follow the same pattern

Stress

The prominence or emphasis given to particular syllables; stressed syllables usually stand out because they have long, rather than short, vowels, or because they have a different pitch or are louder than other syllables

Symbol

Objects, characters, or ideas that stand for specific meanings, themes, concepts, or other abstractions; the whale in the novel *Moby Dick* symbolized humans battle with the forces of nature

Synecdoche

A figure of speech in which a part is used to designate the whole or the whole is used to designate a part; for example, the phrase “all hands on deck” means “all men on deck,” not just their hands; the reverse situation, in which the whole is used for a part, occurs in the sentence “The U.S. beat Russia in the final game,” where the U.S. and Russia stand for “the U.S. team” and “the Russian team,” respectively

Trope

A figure of speech, such as metaphor or metonymy, in which words are not used in their literal (or actual) sense but in a figurative (or imaginative) sense

TERMS RELATED TO METER

Analytical Terms Related to Meter

Caesura

Literally meaning a cut or cutting; refers to a particular kind of break within a poetic line. In Latin and Greek meter, caesura refers to a break within a foot caused by the end of a word. In English poetry, a caesura refers to a sense of a break within a line. Caesurae play a particularly important role in Old English poetry

Envoy

The shorter final stanza of a poem, as in a ballade; generally, in an Elizabethan or Shakespearean sonnet, the last two lines (usually rhymed) are called a *volte*

Foot

Two or more syllables that together make up the smallest unit of rhythm in a poem; for example, an iamb is a foot that has two syllables, one unstressed followed by one stressed; an anapest has three syllables, two unstressed followed by one stressed

Heptameter

A line of poetry that has seven metrical feet

Heroic couplet

A stanza composed of two rhymed lines in iambic pentameter

Hexameter

A line of poetry that has six metrical feet

Iamb

A metrical foot of two syllables, one short (or unstressed) and one long (or stressed); there are four iambs in the line “Come live/ with me/ and be/ my love,” from a poem by Christopher Marlowe; the iamb is the reverse of the trochee

Iambic pentameter

A type of meter in poetry, in which there are five iambs to a line; the prefix penta- means “five,” as in pentagon, a geometrical figure with five sides; meter refers to rhythmic units; in a line of iambic pentameter, there are five rhythmic units that are iambs; Shakespeare's plays were written mostly in iambic pentameter, which is the most common type of meter in English poetry; an example of an iambic pentameter line from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is “But soft!/What light/ through yon/der win/dow breaks?” Another, from Richard III, is “A horse!/ A horse!/My king/dom for/ a horse!”

Inversion

When a foot of poetry is reversed with respect to the general meter of a poem

Headless

A meter where the first foot is missing its first syllable

Pentameter:

A line of poetry that has five metrical feet

Prosody

The study of verse, or metrical structures, from a certain historical period or culture

Quatrain

A stanza or poem of four lines

Refrain

A line or group of lines that is repeated throughout a poem, usually after every stanza

Rhyme

The occurrence of the same or similar sounds at the end of two or more words; the pattern of rhyme in a stanza or poem is shown usually by using a different letter for each final sound; in a poem with an *aabba* rhyme scheme, the first, second, and fifth lines end in one sound, and the third and fourth lines end in another

Rhythm

The organization of beats, stresses, or accents in a line of poetry, a musical phrase, or a sentence

Scansion

The analysis of the meter or rhythmic design of a particular line of poetry

Tetrameter

A line of poetry that has four metrical feet

Verse

A single metrical line of poetry, or poetry in general (as opposed to prose)

THE SEVEN MAJOR METERS

Anapest A metrical foot of three syllables, two short (or unstressed) followed by one long (or stressed), as in *seventeen* and *to the moon*; the anapest is the reverse of the dactyl

Dactyl A metrical foot of three syllables, one long (or stressed) followed by two short (or unstressed), as in *happily*. The dactyl is the reverse of the anapest

Iamb A metrical foot of two syllables, one short (or unstressed) and one long (or stressed); there are four iambs in the line “Come **live/** with **me/** and **be/** my **love,**” from a poem by Christopher Marlowe; the stressed syllables are in bold; the iamb is the reverse of the trochee

Spondee A metrical foot of two syllables, both of which are long (or stressed)

Trochee A metrical foot of two syllables, one long (or stressed) and one short (or unstressed); an easy way to remember the trochee is to memorize the first line of a lighthearted poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which demonstrates the use of various kinds of metrical feet: “Trochee/ trips from/ long to/ short”; he trochee is the reverse of the iamb

Pyrrhic A metrical foot of two syllables, both of which are unstressed

Amphibrach A metrical foot of three syllables: unstressed, stressed, unstressed

SOME MAJOR POETIC FORMS & METRICAL ARRANGEMENTS

Alexandrine

This is a line of poetry that has 12 syllables. The name probably comes from a medieval romance about Alexander the Great that was written in 12-syllable lines

Blank Verse

Poetry that is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter; Shakespeare wrote most of his plays in blank verse; Milton’s 1667/1674 epic poem Paradise lost is in blank verse

Chanson de Geste

An epic poem of the 11th to the 14th century, written in Old French, which details the exploits of a historical or legendary figure, especially Charlemagne

Doggerel

Horribly clichéd verse sometimes written in rhymed couplets of loose iambs; the word is derogatory, from Middle English; doggerel might be trite, clichéd, or overly sentimental; brimming with forced or imprecise rhymes; chock full of mixed and ill-conceived metaphors; or characterized by faulty meter

Canzone

A medieval Italian lyric poem, with five or six stanzas and a shorter concluding stanza (or envoy); the poets Petrarch and Dante Alighieri were masters of the canzone

Elegy

A poem that laments the death of a person, or one that is simply sad and thoughtful. An example of this type of poem is Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"

Ghazal

A Persian (Iranian) poetic form consisting of couplets, which share a rhyme and a refrain; each line must share the same meter or number of syllables; the second line of each couplet in a ghazal ends with the repetition of a refrain of one or a few words, known as a *radif*, preceded by a rhyme (though in a less strict ghazal the rhyme does not need to precede the refrain immediately), known as a *Qaafiyaa*; in the first couplet, which introduces the theme, both lines end in the rhyme and refrain. I.e. AA BA CA etc; there can be no enjambment across the couplets in a strict ghazal; each couplet must be a complete sentence (or several sentences) in itself

Haiku

A Japanese poem composed of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables; Haiku often reflect on some aspect of nature

Idyll, or idyl

Either a short poem depicting a peaceful, idealized country scene, or a long poem that tells a story about heroic deeds or extraordinary events set in the distant past; *Idylls of the King*, by Alfred Lord Tennyson, is about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table

Lay

A long narrative poem, especially one that was sung by medieval minstrels called trouvères. The Lais of Marie de France are lay

Limerick

A light, humorous poem of five usually anapestic lines with the rhyme scheme of aabba

Ode

A lyric poem that is serious and thoughtful in tone and has a very precise, formal structure; John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a famous example of this type of poem

Ottava rima

A type of poetry consisting of 10- or 11-syllable lines arranged in 8-line "octaves" with

the rhyme scheme abababcc

Pastoral

A poem that depicts rural life in a peaceful, idealized way

Rhyme royal

A type of poetry consisting of stanzas of seven lines in iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme ababbcc; rhyme royal was an innovation introduced by Geoffrey Chaucer

Senryu

A short Japanese poem that is similar to a haiku in structure but treats human beings rather than nature, often in a humorous or satiric way

Sijo

More ancient than haiku, the Korean sijo shares a common ancestry with haiku, tanka and similar Japanese genres; all evolved from more ancient Chinese patterns; the word sijo refers to both singular and plural forms—five sijo is the plural form; sijo is traditionally composed in three lines of 14-16 syllables each, totaling between 44-46 syllables; a pause breaks each line approximately in the middle; the pause resembles a caesura but is not based on metrics; each half-line contains 6-9 syllables; the last half of the final line is often shorter than the rest

Sestina

A sestina is a highly structured poem consisting of six six-line stanzas followed by a tercet (called its envoy or tornada), for a total of thirty-nine lines; the same set of six words ends the lines of each of the six-line stanzas, but in a different order each time; if we number the first stanza's lines 123456, then the words ending the second stanza's lines appear in the order 615243, then 364125, then 532614, then 451362, and finally 246531; this organization is referred to as *retrogradatio cruciata* ("retrograde cross"); these six words then appear in the tercet as well, with the tercet's first line usually containing 1 and 2, its second 3 and 4, and its third 5 and 6 (but other versions exist, described below); English sestinas are usually written in iambic pentameter or another decasyllabic meter; the sestina was invented in the late 12th century by the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel; the oldest British example of the form is a double sestina, "You Goat-Herd Gods", written by Philip Sidney; writers such as Dante, A. C. Swinburne, Rudyard Kipling, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, John Ashbery and Elizabeth Bishop are all noted for having written excellently composed sestinas

Sonnet

A lyric poem that is 14 lines long:

- 1) Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnets are divided into two quatrains and a six-line “sestet,” with the rhyme scheme abba abba cdecde (or cdcdcd)
- 2) English, Elizabethan, or Shakespearean sonnets are composed of three quatrains and a final couplet, with a rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg. English sonnets are written generally in iambic pentameter
- 3) Blues sonnets are an African American tradition composed of a triplet stanza derived from the Black jazz tradition of lamentation or complaint, rhyming Aaa; they are usually written in loose iambic pentameter measures, the second line is an incremental repetition of the first line, and the third line is a synthetic parallel giving a consequence of the first two lines; an example, in strict iambic pentameter: The train she rides is fifteen coaches long/ The train she rides is fifteen coaches long/ The girl I love is on that train and gone

Tanka

A Japanese poem of five lines, the first and third composed of five syllables and the rest of seven

Terza Rima

A type of poetry consisting of 10- or 11-syllable lines arranged in three-line “tercets” with the rhyme scheme aba bcb cdc, etc. The poet Dante is credited with inventing terza rima, which he used in his Divine Comedy; terza rima was borrowed into English by Chaucer, and it has been used by many English poets, including Milton, Shelley, and Auden

Villanelle

A form, which entered English-language poetry in the 1800s from the imitation of French models; a villanelle has only two rhyme sounds; the first and third lines of the first stanza are rhyming refrains that alternate as the third line in each successive stanza and form a couplet at the close; a villanelle is nineteen lines long, consisting of five tercets and one concluding quatrain

STANZAIC FORMS

1-line stanza

A one-line stanza is sometimes called a **MONO-LINE**

2-line stanzas

A 2-line stanza is called a couplet; aa is a rhymed **COUPLET**; xx an unrhymed couplet; the French call rhymed couplets *rimes plates* or *rimes suivies*

3-line stanzas

A 3-line stanza of any kind is called a **TERCET**; aaa is a triplet. axa is pretty common, occurring in forms such as the villanelle and terza rima (where in both cases there are also rhymes between stanzas); the haiku is a species of tercet

4-line stanzas

A 4-line stanza of any kind is called a **QUATRAIN**

5-line stanzas

A 5-line stanza of any kind can be called a **QUINTAIN**, a quintet, or a cinquain; however, the word cinquain is also used both for a particular verse form of French origin, and for a particular syllable-counting form (of no great merit or interest, as far as I can see); it is therefore best to stick with quintain as the general word for any 5-line stanza; the best-known form of quintain in the English-speaking world is a particular heterometric form (i.e. not all the lines are the same length) called the limerick; a sequence of limericks would constitute a perfectly well-formed ode, but might lack gravitas; the tanka is a species of quintain, and so is the bina, my own miniaturized sestina form

6-line stanzas

A 6-line stanza is **SEXAIN**; synonyms include sixain, sextet and hexastich, as well as sestet (which usually means the last 6 lines of a sonnet) and sextain (which is sometimes used to mean sestina, a form of no fewer than 39 lines)

7-line stanzas

A 7-line stanza of any kind is called a **SEPTET**; the most common such form, and apparently the only one to have a special name, is **rhyme royal**, which uses the scheme ababbcc, the lines having 10 syllables each i.e. (usually) iambic pentameter; rhyme royal is also sometimes known as the Troilus stanza

8-line stanzas

An 8-line stanza of any kind is called an **OCTAVE** (or occasionally an octet); the word octave is also used for the first 8 lines of a sonnet; **ottava rima** rhymes abababcc, the lines being of either 10 or 11 syllables (i.e. iambic pentameter, sometimes with an extra syllable); the most famous example of ottava rima in English is Byron's "Don Juan";

the ballade stanza rhymes ababbcbc

9-line stanzas

The best known is the **SPENSERIAN STANZA** (after Edmund Spenser of the Faerie Queene), which rhymes ababbcbcc, the first 8 lines being pentameters and the last a hexameter or alexandrine