

TROCHEE IAMB DACTYL ANAPEST AMPHIBRACH

the essential pocket guide to

POETIC METRE AND FORM



Octavia Wynne

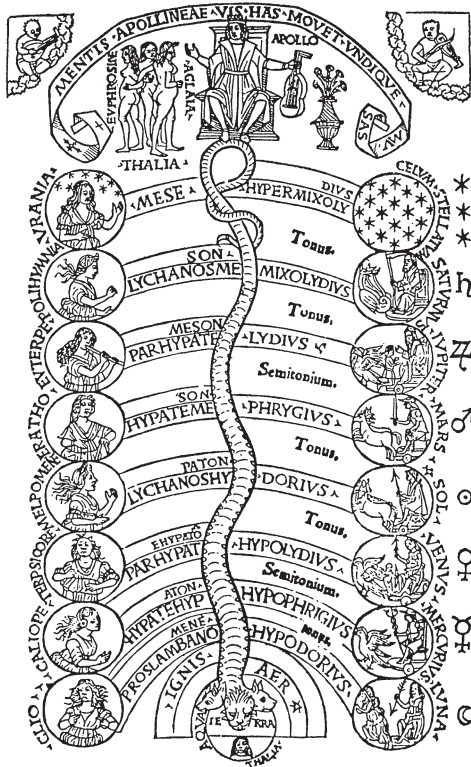


rhyme line

COUPLET TRIPLET QUATRAIN CINQUAIN SESTET

LIMERICK BALLAD SONNET RONDEAU GHAZAL HAIKU ODE

DIMETER TRIMETER TETRAMETER PENTAMETER HEXAMETER



Musica Universalis from Gafurius's *Practica Musica*, 1496. Apollo is shown presiding over the Muses and planetary spheres (left), and tunings and ratios (right). On the left the Three Graces, Euphrosine (mirth), Aglaia (splendour) and Thalia (comedy, also a muse) stand over the other eight muses: Urania (astronomy); Polyhymnia (hymns); Euterpe (music, song & elegiac poetry); Erato (lyric poetry); Melpomene (tragedy); Terpsichore (dance); Calliope (epic poetry); Clio (history).

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BOOKS

POETIC METRE AND FORM



by

Octavia Wynne

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Thanks to Mum, Dad, Trent Halliday, John Martineau, Stephen Parsons, Woody River, Liz Tetlow, Adam Tetlow, & Richard Henry.

Other good books on this subject are: The Ode Less Travelled, by Stephen Fry, 2007, The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary, by Frances Stillman, 1972, Poetic Metre and Poetic Form, by Paul Fussell, 1979, Poetry, The Basics, by Jeffrey Wainwright, 2004 and Rules for the Dance, by Mary Oliver, 1998.

*Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
 Though foolishly he lost the same,
 Decaying more and more,
 Till he became
 Most poor:
 With thee
 O let me rise
 As larks, harmoniously,
 And sing this day thy victories:
 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.*

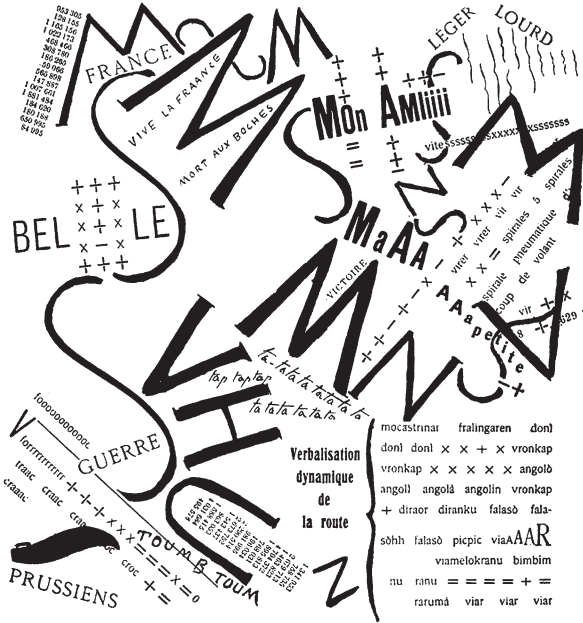
*My tender age in sorrow did beginne
 And still with sicknesses and shame.
 Thou didst so punish sinne,
 That I became
 Most thine.
 With thee
 Let me combine,
 And feel thy victorie:
 For, if I mp my wing on thine,
 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.*

Above: Easter Wings by George Herbert [1593-1633]; an example of a "shaped poem" (technopaegnon or calligramme), very popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. The earliest known examples of shaped poems are from Crete, 1700 BC, and Egypt, 700 BC. The forms can vary: six surviving ancient Greek examples are shaped as an egg, an axe, wings, an altar (twice) and a syrinx or nymph. Very often the shape of the poem is its subject.

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PAROLE CONSONANTI VOCALI NUMERI IN LIBERTÀ

Dal volume, di prossima pubblicazione: "I PAROLIBERI FUTURISTI",
 (AURO D'ALBA, BALLA, BETUDA, BOCCIONI, BUZZI, CAMPIGLIO, CANGIULLO, CARRÀ, CAVALLI, BRUNO CORRA,
 D. CORRENTI, M. DEL GUERRA, DELLA FLORESTA, L. FOLGORIE, A. FRANCHI, C. GOVONI, GUIZZIDORO, IFTAR,
 JANNELLI, MARINETTI, ARMANDO MAZZA, PREZENZINI-MATTOLI, RADIANTE, SETTIMELLI, TODINI, ecc.)



MARINETTI, *parolibero*. – Montagne + Vallate + Strade × Joffre

Above: Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto, Tommaso Marinetti,
 1915. A visual and sound poem presented like a military map to show the journey
 of General Joffre. Visual poems objectify their text and use line length, grouping,
 indentation, punctuation, capitalisation, typefaces and size changes to effect shifts

INTRODUCTION

People have been writing poems for a very long time. The Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* dates to around 300 BC and is still popular throughout India, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand. The Chinese *Shih-ching*, or *Book of Songs*, contains 305 poems dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BC. Poems meaningfully pattern the musical features of language, using rhythm, pitch and timbre (texture) and often grasp at truths that resist the logical pen of prose. This book looks at the patterns of poetry, its shapes and rhythms, through foot, metre and form.

The word 'poetry' derives via Latin from the Greek term *poiein* ('to make'). In the Archaic Period [800-480 BC], poetry was largely improvised orally, often accompanied by *music* (derived from the Greek word *mousiké*, 'having to do with the Muses'). In the Classical Period [480-323 BC], poetry began to be performed with the other verbal arts, *rhetoric* (public speaking) and *drama*, and some poems were memorised and written down.

Ancient European poetry was often sung: land songs, Anglo Saxon oar songs, Celtic smith songs, Greek altar songs, medieval court songs, and children's songs. The vast majority of pre-12th century English poetry is lost, but the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings brought with them a canon of verse full of epic myth which rolled and rowed to a four-beat turn with a stress on the first syllables of words, forming an earthy rhythm. Other settlers who followed them sometimes emphasised the ends of words, encouraging rhymes and a lilting upward beat. These two opposing styles combined in the daily rhythms of speech, poetry and song. Only later did the Crusades and the Renaissance bring with them the Greek and Roman classics, encouraging poets of the time to imitate these ancient forms.

PATTERNS IN LANGUAGE

rhythm, metre, rhyme and form

Listen to people speaking in any language and one can immediately detect patterns of various kinds. Though mostly spoken, language is innately suited for song or chant and its ancient shapes echo in music and poetry.

The most basic pattern of language is its *rhythm*, heard as a beat:

BEAT 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &
Pít-ter Pát-ter Pít-ter Pát-ter

In poetry, rhythm is most clear when spoken aloud, mainly as the effect of *syllables* and *stresses*. The majority of European Romance languages, derived from Latin, are syllable-timed, their natural rhythm resting on the number of syllables in words, phrases and sentences.

e.g. French: **Cá-ná-dá** (all syllables stressed equally).

English, on the other hand, is derived from West Germanic languages, and relies heavily on the *stresses* placed on syllables, it is *stress-timed*. It is as though, when walking, the basic rhythmical *left/right* pattern develops a bias towards one or other foot, a little like the way the British often accent the first syllable of a word, while Americans emphasise the second/last:

UK: **Débris** US: **Debrís**

In *prosody*, these different kinds of rhythmically stressed units are known as *feet*. Add some sway into your walk and a longer foot emerges:

LÉFT, two, three | **RÍGHT**, two, three

Accented syllables (marked *áéíóúý*) and the feet they define (divided by |) became the foundation of post-13th century English poetry. We will meet

the various feet in the pages which follow (*pages 6-13*), and learn how they may be formally combined into a line of two, three, four, five, six, seven or eight feet, which is then said to have a *poetic metre* (*pages 14-19*).

Poetic lines combine into larger units, *stanzas* (*pages 30-39*), which can be two lines (*couplets*), three (*triplets*), four (*quatrains*) or more, sometimes with occasional lines repeated as *refrains*. A finished poem may contain anywhere between one and over 2,000 stanzas, with some poetic forms dictating exactly how many stanzas are required (*closed* or *fixed forms*), and others allowing the poet more flexibility (*open forms*). The final part of this book examines some of the more popular poetic forms (*pages 40-53*).

There is a second obvious pattern of language: *rhyme*. This might be thought of as a natural phenomenon, since language uses a limited number of sounds to create words, yet two-thirds of the world's languages do not use poetic rhyme. Its earliest known use dates back to the *Book of Songs* (*see page 1*), and it arrived in Europe from China via Middle Eastern trade routes, through ancient Rome and Persian mystery cults and from Celtic Ireland around the 3rd-4th centuries BC. During the Middle Ages, English poetic rhyme was based on *alliteration*, where words start with the same stressed consonant (*five/feet*); and *assonance*, where words share the same vowel sounds (*black/hat*), but by the 14th century *perfect rhyme* (*bright/night/light*) was found in all European poetry, becoming ubiquitous in English verse around the 16th-17th centuries (*see pages 26-27*).

There are other interesting patterns that words can make, and which poets use, and some of these are explored later in the book (*pages 54-55*).

The building blocks and tools of poetry are thus reflections and refinements of natural patterns already present in language. Poetry may require effort and a degree of mastery to write, but we all experience the simple delight of words which beat and rhyme, and which, at the right time, can find easy passage into hearts and minds.

ACCENTUAL OR SYLLABIC

all about the rhythm

Metre is counted in different ways. *Accentual* metre is a natural mode of English verse and appears in Irish/Celtic, Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry such as *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as nursery rhymes, football chants, traditional ballads and literary imitations (by Coleridge, Hopkins, Yeats and others). For example:

ACCENTUAL VERSE - EXAMPLE WITH 2 BEATS PER LINE

<i>Báa, baa, bláck sheep,</i>	(4)	<i>Óne for the máster,</i>	(5)
<i>Háve you any wóol?</i>	(5)	<i>And óne for the dáme,</i>	(5)
<i>Yés sir, yés sir,</i>	(4)	<i>And óne for the líttle boy</i>	(7)
<i>Thréé bags fúll;</i>	(3)	<i>Who líves down the láne.</i>	(5)

Note how the number of stresses remains constant despite the changing syllable-count—since accentual verse counts only the stresses in a poetic line there may be any number of weak syllables in any part (*see too page 24*).

Syllabic verse, by contrast, purely counts the number of syllables in a line and is common in syllable-timed languages such as Spanish, French, Italian, the Baltic and Slavic languages, Turkish, Cantonese and Japanese. For example, Dylan Thomas' 1946 poem *In My Craft or Sullen Art* uses seven syllables in each line but has no regular stress pattern.

SYLLABIC VERSE - EXAMPLE WITH 7 SYLLABLES PER LINE

<i>In my cráft or súllen árt</i>	(7)	<i>I lábour by sínging líght</i>	(7)
<i>Éxercised in the stíll níght</i>	(7)	<i>Nót for ámbition or bréad</i>	(7)
<i>When ónly the móon ráges</i>	(7)	<i>Or the strút and tráde of chárms</i>	(7)
<i>And the lóvers líe abéd</i>	(7)	<i>On the ívory stáges</i>	(7)
<i>With áll their gríefs in their árms,</i>	(7)	<i>Bút for the cómmon wáges</i>	(7)
		<i>Of théir most sécret héart.</i>	(6)

The strictest form of poetic metre is accentual-syllabic. Here, both the number of stresses and the number of syllables are fixed. If most lines in a poem have the same number of syllables *and* stresses, or a poem has repeating patterns of them, then it is accentual-syllabic verse, as in this 1963 example from *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, by Edward Gorey.

ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSE - DACTYLIC TETRAMETER dium diddy ◯●×4

<i>Á is for| Ámy who| féll down the| stáirs</i>	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●
<i>B ís for Básił assáulted by béars</i>	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●
<i>C ís for Clára who wásted áway</i>	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●
<i>D ís for Désmond thrown óut of a sléigh</i>	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●

In *quantitative metre*, used in ancient Greek, Roman and Sanskrit poetry, it is the length of syllables in time that counts. Feet are durational rather than accentual, and each syllable is either long (*longis*) ■ or short (*brevis*) □. Syllables in English are likewise of different lengths, and these lengths do affect the rhythm of speech, but they disappear alongside the strong rhythms created by the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. Some Renaissance poets attempted to write English verse in quantitative metre, but with limited success. In the example below, from Edmund Spenser's 1579 poem *Iambicum Trimeterum*, notice the rhythms of duration over stresses.

QUANTITATIVE VERSE - QUANTITATIVE IAMBIC TRIMETER di dummm ■□×3

<i>Unhappý verse, the wítness of my unhappý státe,</i>	□■ □■ □■
<i>Make thy self flutt'ring wíngs of thy fást fýing</i>	□■ □■ □■
<i>Thought, and fý forth unto my love, wheresoever she be ...</i>	□■ □■ □■
<i>...Tell her, that her pleasures were wont to lull me asleep:</i>	
<i>Tell her, that her beauty was wont to feed mine eyes:</i>	
<i>Tell her, that her sweet tongue was wont to make me mirth.</i>	

Not an easy read! Which is why in this book we will learn our feet and metres via more easily scannable everyday English accentual-syllabic verse.

THE SPONDEE

dum dum

The basic element of metre is a *foot*, which consists of stressed (classically long) and/or unstressed (classically short) beats or syllables. The punchiest of the feet, and the symbol of rhythm itself, is the *spondee*. With two stressed beats, ●●, it KICKS HARD. Rare in poems, you are more likely to hear it in political slogans or football chants, or read it on road signs:

THE SPONDAIC FOOT - *dum dum* (●●)

SLOW DOWN!	●●	GIVE WAY!	●●
TURN RIGHT!	●●	THINK BIKE!	●●

The repetitive stress of the spondee may be heard in stressful situations, e.g. JUMP! JUMP! or compounded as: MAYDAY! MAYDAY! Shakespeare uses it in *Troilus and Cressida*: *Crý, crý! Tróy búrn, or élse let Hélen gó.*

Spondees are often mixed with less forceful feet to make a point: COME COME you answer with an idle tongue, or to create a stop at the end of a line: True ease in writing comes from art NOT CHANCE.

Two spondees placed together make a *dispondee*. Examples are the giant's call *Fé Fýe Fóe Fúm* or the multiple-rhyming *Hów Nów Brówn Ców?*

A rare example of a dispondaic poem is E.J. Thribb's 1967 *Bonfire Song*:

DISPONDAIC VERSE - *dum dum* (●●) × 2

Sún shine| Móon cúrl	●● ●●
Ráin wásh| Eárth whírl	●● ●●
Fíre fórk| Aír fúrl	●● ●●
Sóng bóy| Síng gírl	●● ●●

The spondee is the most insistent syncopation of metre.

THE PYRRHIC

di di

The opposite of the spondee is the *Pyrrhic* foot. Like the hollow victory to which the word now alludes, the pyrrhic consists of two unstressed syllables. Edgar Allan Poe [1809–49] dismissed it entirely as a chimerical foot, an irrational nonentity, for it is almost impossible to construct an entirely pyrrhic line or poem out of things like:

THE PYRRIC FOOT - *diddy* (○○)

is a	○○	into	○○
and the	○○	any	○○

Instead these little feet work best combined and contrasted with more stressed feet to punctuate the line. Welsh blues poet Dylan Evans combines a Pyrrhic foot with a spondee to form a *minor ionic* in *Old Coals*, 1952.

PYRRIC + SPONDEE = MINOR IONIC - *diddy dum dum* (○○●●)

See a| déad mán	○○ ●●
In a| bláck hóle	○○ ●●
In the| héartbréak	○○ ●●
Of a| lóne sóul	○○ ●●

A spondee *in front* of a Pyrrhic foot creates the rare and exciting *major ionic*:

SPONDEE + PYRRIC = MAJOR IONIC - *dum dum diddy* (●●○○)

Squeéze tíght,| it's a	●● ○○
Hót níght,| and the	●● ○○

The Pyrrhic foot is suggestive of further hidden rhythms, as well as other syllables which may be so weak as to be silent or missing altogether.

THE TROCHEE

dum di

A poetic unit consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one, ●○, is called a *trochee*. In musical terms it is a strong beat followed by a weaker one, a long note preceding a shorter one. Imagine a sergeant major shouting “LÉFT right, LÉFT right, LÉFT right, ...”. The emphasis may be slight, but many of us put our best foot first and walk in trochees.

Linguists speculate that there may be a trochaic bias in early childhood, with baby words like *mummy, daddy, happy, cuddle, hungry, bedtime, iPad*, following this pattern. ‘Dr.’ Theodor Seuss Geisel [1904–91] used it widely:

SIMPLE TROCHAIC VERSE - dum di (●○)

ONE Fish ●○	BLACK fish ●○
TWO Fish ●○	BLUE fish ●○
RED Fish ●○	OLD fish ●○
BLUE Fish ●○	NEW fish ●○

When trochees are compounded they form trochaic verse. Many nursery rhymes use four trochees per line, e.g. *Simple Simon* or:

TROCHAIC TETRAMETER - dum di (●○) × 4

Péter, | Péter, | púmpkin | éater	●○ ●○ ●○ ●○
Hád a | wífe but | couldn't | kéep her	●○ ●○ ●○ ●○

Lines of trochaic metre can also alternate with lines of iambic metre (*see facing page*), losing their weaker stresses at line endings, as in *Jack and Jill*, or:

ALTERNATING LINES OF TROCHAIC AND IAMBIC METRE

Máry | hád a | líttle | lám b	●○ ●○ ●○ ●
Its fléece | was whíte | as snów	○● ○● ○●

THE IAMB

di dum

The inverse of the trochee is the *iamb*, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, ○●, the most common foot in English verse. Like the trochee, the iamb reflects the natural rise and fall of speech. Words like *behold, amuse, arise, elect, return*, and *insist* are all iambs. In his poem *Upon His Departure Hence*, Robert Herrick [1591–1679] uses a single iambic foot for each line.

SIMPLE IAMBIC VERSE - di dum (○●)

Thus Í ○●	As óne ○●	I'm máde ○●
Pass bý ○●	Unknówn ○●	A sháde, ○●
And díe ○●	And góne ○●	And láid ○●

When several iambs are placed one after the other they create an iambic rhythm, *di-dum di-dum di-dum di-dum*. In this satirical example, Samuel Johnson [1709–84] alternates four and three iambs (*a ballad stanza, page 32*):

IAMBIC TETRAMETER/TRIMETER - di dum (○●) × 3/4

I pút | my hát | upón | my héad,	○● ○● ○● ○●
And wálked | intó | the Stránd,	○● ○● ○●
And thére | I mét | anóther mán	○● ○● ○● ○●
Whose hát | was ín | his hánd.	○● ○● ○●

Five iambs form Shakespeare’s mighty *iambic pentameter*: If *músic bé the foód of lóve play ón*. Lines of six and seven are popular, but why stop there? Here are lines of eight iambs by W. S. Gilbert, from *The Pirates of Penzance*:

IAMBIC OCTAMETER - di dum (○●) × 8

I ám | the vé|ry mó|del óf | a mó|dern Má|jor-Gé|nerál,	
I've ín|formá|tion vég|etá|ble, án|ímá|l, | and mí|nerál	

THE DACTYL

dum diddy

The *dactyl* is the three-fold equivalent of the trochee, with a strong beat followed by two weak ones, ●○○. This makes for a waltzing rhythm “ONE two three, ONE two three, ...”. Words like *búffalo*, *stráwberrý*, *pát-a-cake*, *éverywhere*, *sýnthesis* and *mérrily* are dactylic. The word *dactyl* comes from the Greek for finger, *daktylos*, since a long bone is followed by two short ones.

Two dactyls form a *double dactyl*, and this forms the basis of a poetic form designed by Anthony Hecht and John Hollander in 1966:

DOUBLE DACTYL - *dúm diddy* (●○○) × 2

Higgeldy| Piggledy	●○○ ●○○	Féw realistically	●○○ ●○○
Sérgéi Rach|máminov	●○○ ●○○	Cán pianistically	●○○ ●○○
Wrote his con|cérto for	●○○ ●○○	Dígitally	●○○ ●○○
Hánds|pans like| wíngs.	●○○ ●○○	Pláy the damned things.	●○○ ●○○

The omission of an unstressed syllable at the end of a poetic line or stanza creates *catalectic* verse. Four dactyls make *dactylic tetrameter*. In *The Bride of Abydos* Lord Byron [1788–1824] uses this to great effect:

CATALECTIC DACTYLIC TETRAMETER - *dúm diddy* (●○○) × 4

Knów ye the| lánd where the| cýpress and| mýrtle	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○
Are émbles of| déeds that are| done in their| clíme -	○●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●
Where the ráge of the vúlture, the lóve of the túrtle	○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○
Now mélt into sóftness, now mádden to críme?	○●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○
Know ye the land of the cedar and vine,	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●
Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine	○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○

Six dactyls form *dactylic hexameter*, one of the primary metres of the Classical world, widely used by Homer and Virgil (see page 18).

THE ANAPEST

diddy dum

A grouping of three syllables which saves its kick until the end is called an *anapest*. This waltz goes ○○●, “one two THREE, one two THREE, one two THREE, ...”. Anapestic words like *violín*, *indiréct*, *misconcéive*, *realígn* and *untowárd* are examples of this foot. Two anapests make *anapestic dimeter* and here is Dr. Seuss again, from his 1954 book *Horton Hears a Who*:

ANAPESTIC DIMETER - *diddy dúm* (○○●) × 2

On the fífteenth of Máy	○○● ○○●	In the héat of the dáy	○○● ○○●
In the Jún|gle of Nóol	○○● ○○●	In the cóol of the póol	○○● ○○●

Four anapests form *anapestic tetrameter*, a fine example of which is Lord Byron’s *Destruction of Sennacherib*, first published in 1815.

ANAPESTIC TETRAMETER - *diddy dúm* (○○●) × 4

The Assý|rian came dówn| like the wólfs| on the fóld,	○○● ○○● ○○● ○○●
And his có|horts were gléam|ing in púr|ple and góld;	
And the shéen of their spéars was like stárs on the séa,	
When the blúe wave rolls níghtly on déep Galilée.	

A variation appears in the well-known *The Night Before Christmas*, by Clement Clarke Moore [1779–1863]. Note the omission of the first syllables of lines 3 and 4, which produces *acephalous*, or *headless*, lines.

ANAPESTIC TETRAMETER - *diddy dúm* (○○●) × 4

’Twas the níght| before Chríst|mas, when áll| through the hóuse	○○● ○○● ○○● ○○●
Not a créa|ture was stír|ring, not éven a móuse.	○○● ○○● ○○● ○○●
The stóckings were húng by the chímney with cáre,	○○● ○○● ○○● ○○●
In hópes that St Nícholas sóon would be thére.	○○● ○○● ○○● ○○●

AMPHIBRACH

di dum di

The third place where emphasis can fall in a three-syllable unit is in the centre, ○●○, to form an amphibrach, “one **Two** three, one **Two** three, one **Two** three, ...”, as in *imáigine, eléctron, impróper, forebéarance, petúnia*, and *corréctly*. Amphibrachs (along with anapests) also form the basis of limericks:

CATALECTIC AMPHIBRACHIC DI/TRIMETER - di dúm di (○●○) × 2/3

There was an| old mán from| Perú	○●○ ○●○ ○●
Who dréamed he was éating his shóe.	○●○ ○●○ ○●
He wóke in the níght	○●○ ○●
With a térrible fríght	○ ○●○ ○●
And fóund that his dréam had come trúe!	○●○ ○●○ ○●

Four amphibrachs gallop along, as here in Dr. Seuss’ *If I Ran The Circus*:

AMPHIBRACHIC TETRAMETER - di dúm di (○●○) × 4

And NÓW comes| an áct of| ENórmous| ENórmance! ○●○ ○●○ ○●○ ○●○
No fórmer pèrformer’s| pèrformed this pèrformance!

Amphibrachs are a common metre in Russian poetry, where the final syllable is often omitted, as here in Thomas Hardy’s *The Ruined Maid*:

CATALECTIC AMPHIBRACHIC TETRAMETER - di dúm di (○●○) × 4

“O ‘Mélia|, my déar, this| does évery|thing crówn! ○●○ ○●○ ○●○ ○●
Who cóuld have supposed| I should méet you in Tówn?”

The inversion of the amphibrach is the rare *amphimacer*, ●○●, *dúm-di-dúm*:

AMPHIMACER - dúm di dúm (●○●), from *The Oak*, by Lord Tennyson [1809-92]

Líve thy lífe / Yóung and óld / Líke yon oák / Bright in Spríng / Líving góld.

	FOOT	LENGTH	KEY	RHYTHM	EXAMPLE
MONO	brach	1	●	strong	big, stár, béat, hóle
	macer	1	○	weak	a, the, in, to, by
BINARY	iamb	2	○●	rising	alive, becóme, contról, a bírd, to séek
	trochee	2	●○	falling	místard, pívot, wéaving, fínd ít
	spondee	2	●●	emphatic	ráinbow, cúckoo, lóve song
	pyrrhic	2	○○	quiet	any, into, of a, in the
TERNARY	anapest	3	○○●	rising	disagrée, incorréct, víolin
	dactyl	3	●○○	falling	émphasis, fíckering, móckingbírd
	amphibrach	3	○●○	galloping	eléctron, enchántment, ínsistence
	amphimacer	3	●○●	galloping	místletoe, lá-dí-dáh, mén-at-árms
	bacchius	3	○●●	rising	abúndánce, my héart áches
	antibacchius	3	●●○	falling	óutsíder, flátfóoted
	molossus	3	●●●	emphatic	bómbárdment
tribrach	3	○○○	quiet	anyway, in and out, into it	
QUATERNARY	tetrabrach	4	○○○○	quiet	ínnít yeah síe, ínsy-wínsy
	primus paeon	4	●○○○	galloping	díffícultíes, génuínely, sécularíst
	secundus paeon	4	○●○○	galloping	abnórmmally, comédían, díscóvery
	tertius paeon	4	○○●○	emphatic	acqúísítíon, deconstrúctíon, íncohérent
	quartus paeon	4	○○○●	emphatic	mísunderstánd, undersubscríbed
	major ionic	4	●●○○	falling	péjórative, pré-émínent, prófessíonal
	minor ionic	4	○○●●	rising	wíth the lóve sòng, anacrúsís
	ditrochee	4	●○●○	falling	círculátíon, ídíótíc, váríatíon
	diiamb	4	○●○●	rising	levíathán, búffóonery, assíduóus
	choriamb	4	●○○●	galloping	mírmuring sílk, óde to the wést,
antispast	4	○●●○	galloping	besíde bóttom, abóve cóíton	
first epitrite	4	○●●●	emphatic	tomátó sóup! behóld Kíng BÍll!	
second epitrite	4	●○●●	rising	chóco yúm yúm, háppy bírthdáy!	
third epitrite	4	●●○●	galloping	fóótbáll ínspires, píck úp that gún	
fourth epitrite	4	●●○●	falling	chíldhóod swéetheart, báíthróbe fállíng	
dispondee	4	●●●●	emphatic	wígwám súnshíne, básebáll tóothbrúsh	

METRE

dimeter and trimeter

Poetic feet combine to produce poetic *metre*, and each metre has its own distinctive quality, melody and musical meaning. Likewise, a subject, mood or feeling may suggest an appropriate metre. In general, metres are formed from a single repeated foot, although some metres are combinations of different feet (e.g. *The Sapphic*, see page 48).

Metres are named after the (Greek) number and type of foot of which they are comprised; thus with one foot per line a poem is described as being in *monometer* (see examples on pages 8–9) and with two feet per line it is an example of *dimeter*, and so on. Such simple metres are rare outside children’s verse. However, lines of three feet, *trimeter*, are more common.

Here is some iambic trimeter from William Blake’s 1777 *I Love the Jocund Dance* (note the extra *hypercatalectic* syllable at the start of the fourth line).

IAMBIC TRIMETER - di dúm (○●) × 3

I love| the jóc|und d|ánc|e,	○● ○● ○●
The sóftly bréa|thing sóng,	○● ○● ○●
Where innoc|ent éy|es do gl|ánc|e,	○● ○● ○●
And wh|ere líps the máid|en’s t|óngue.	○● ○● ○●

The waltzing quality of trimeter is doubly apparent in this poem by William Cowper, published in 1782:

ANAPAEISTIC TRIMETER - di di dúm (○○●) × 3

I am óut| of húm|án|ity’s ré|á|ch,	○○● ○● ○●
I must fín|ish my jóur|ney ál|one,	○○● ○● ○●
Never héar the swé|et music of sp|é|é|ch;	○○● ○● ○●
I stá|rt at the sóund of my ówn.	○○● ○● ○●

METRE	No.	FOOT		SYLL.	EXAMPLE
Dimeter	2	Trochaic	●○ × 2	4	Úp the válléys / Dówn the c|ányons
	2	Iambic	○● × 2	4	And só to dréam / How still the d|áy
	2	Anapaestic	○○● × 2	6	From the c|én|tre all sóund / and all síl|ence is f|ound
	2	Dactylic	●○○ × 2	6	Cánnon to ríght of th|em / Cánnon to líft of th|em
Trimeter	3	Trochaic	●○ × 3	6	Glíding c|l|óse to héav|en / sóáring óv|er Dév|on
	3	Iambic	○● × 3	6	The ónly n|éws I kn|ów / is búl|letíns all d|áy
	3	Anapaestic	○○● × 3	9	And I láugh to see th|ém whí|rl and fl|ée
	3	Dactylic	●○○ × 3	9	Túrning and galloping w|éar|ily
Tetrameter	4	Trochaic	●○ × 4	8	B|y the sh|óres of G|ítchee G|úme|e
	4	Iambic	○● × 4	8	And báts w|ent róund in fr|ágr|ant sk|ies
	4	Anapaestic	○○● × 4	12	The Ass|yrian c|ame dówn |Like the w|olf on the f|óld
	4	Dactylic	●○○ × 4	12	Grínd aw|ay, mó|isten and másh up th|y páste ○○
Pentameter	5	Trochaic	●○ × 5	10	Néver, néver, néver, néver, néver!
	5	Iambic	○● × 5	10	I á|n you|re ów|ene l|óve and you|re w|yf
	5	Anapaestic	○○● × 5	15	Like the ówl in the n|íght who was th|inking s|ome míce m|ight be n|ice
	5	Dactylic	●○○ × 5	15	Chórus oh s|ing w|ith the s|ún as sh|e r|ises and sh|ines on us
Hexameter	6	Trochaic	●○ × 6	12	Hóly, hóly, hóly, ál|l the s|áins ad|óre th|ee
	6	Iambic	○● × 6	12	Did nów but fr|éshly sp|ring, and sílken bl|óssoms bé|are
	6	Anapaestic	○○● × 6	18	As a sl|óop w|ith a sw|éep of ím|maculate w|ings on h|er délicate sp|ine
	6	Dactylic	●○○ × 6	18	Fáint was the áir w|ith the ód|orous bré|ath of mágn|olia bl|óssoms ○
Heptameter	7	Trochaic	●○ × 7	14	Cúrsed be the síckly fórms that érr fr|om hónest ná|úres’s (r|íle)
	7	Iambic	○● × 7	14	Oh sóme are f|ond of Sp|ánish w|ine and sóme are f|ond of Fr|énc|h
	7	Anapaestic	○○● × 7	21	For the móon néver béams w|ithout br|ing me dréams of the bé|autiful Ánn|abel L|ée
	7	Dactylic	●○○ × 7	21	Dówn in the váll|ey of Áv|on so pé|ácful, so pé|rílous, w|áited you|ng W|illóugh|by
Octameter	8	Trochaic	●○ × 8	16	Thén, meth|ought, the áir gr|ew déns|er, p|érfum|ed fr|om an ún|seen c|énser
	8	Iambic	○● × 8	16	My s|élf|ish hé|art is véil nów r|ípp|ed, yet r|hythm héals wh|at br|óken str|íps
	8	Anapaestic	○○● × 8	24	And nów th|at the rage of th|y rap|ture is sat|iate w|ith rével and ná|vín and sp|óil of the sn|ów
	8	Dactylic	●○○ × 8	24	Wóuld be a l|óng and a vé|rily c|úmbers|ome síght in a lítle w|ee bóok wh|ere the sp|áce is so

TETRAMETER

four feet

Lines of four feet are known as *tetrameter* (Greek *tetra* is ‘four’). These often alternate with lines of trimeter, the paired lines adding to form ballad *heptameter*, as in this example from Macaulay’s *Lays of Ancient Rome*:

IAMBIC TETRAMETER / TRIMETER - di dóm (○●)×4/3

Then óut| spake bráve| Horá|tiús,	○ ● ○ ● ○ ● ○ ●
The Cáp|tain óf| the Gáte:	○ ● ○ ● ○ ●
“To évery mán upón this éarth	○ ● ○ ● ○ ● ○ ●
Death cómeth sóon or láte.”	○ ● ○ ● ○ ●

We have already seen examples of trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, anapestic, and amphibrachic species of tetrameter (*pages 8–12*), but here is another interesting variety from *Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds*, by Lennon & McCartney, whose elongated ‘trees’ and ‘skies’ almost put it in the category of accentual verse (*see page 4*).

DACTYLIC TETRAMETER - dóm diddy (●○○)×4

Pícture your|sél|f in a| bóat on a| ríver	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○
With tángerine| trée-ees and| mármalade| skí-ies	○●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○
Sómebody cálls you, you ánsver quite slówly	●○○ ●○○ ●○○ ●○○
A gírl with kaléidoscope| éyes	○●○○ ●○○ ●

Longer feet (*see page 13*) can create great rhythms. Here is contemporary poet Julia Donaldson, with the first two lines from *Tyrannosaurus Drip*:

TERTIUS PAEONIC TETRAMETER - diddy dóm di (○○●○)×4

In a swámp be|side a ríver| where the lánd was| thícK with vég
Líved a héd of| dúck-bílléd díno|saurS who róamed the| wátérS ége

PENTAMETER

five feet

Five feet make a line of *pentameter*, and five iambs form *iambic pentameter*, the beating heart of most traditional English metrical poetry since the 14th century. This is a *measured metre*, the ‘heroic’ line of English verse from Chaucer and Shakespeare to the present, used to translate the epic dactylic hexameter of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Virgil’s *Aeniad* into English. Take these two lines from Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 18*:

IAMBIC PENTAMETER - di dóm (○●×5)

Rough wínds| do sháke| the dárl|ing bíds| of Máy,
And súnner’s léase hath áll too shórt a dáte.

Examples of *trochaic pentameter* are very rare, so instead let’s turn to another popular metre from classical Greek and Latin poetry, the *dactylic pentameter*. This line was made of two equal parts, each consisting of two dactyls and a stressed half-foot, the number of feet summing to five in total, and with the first half-foot always ending a word, to produce a *caesura* (*see page 20*). Classical quantitative metres do not translate well into English (*see page 5*), but here is an attempt at the form in English accentual-syllabic style:

DACTYLIC PENTAMETER - dóm diddy (●○○×5)

“Whát is the| póint of you| Sír?” ¶ said the| Kíng, álmóst| víóllently.
“Whý are there stárs in the ský?” ¶ then he láughed and stóod síllently.

In the *elegiac couplet* (*see page 49*) a line of dactylic pentameter follows a line of dactylic hexameter. Ovid’s *Amores*, a collection of erotic poems about love, begin with Cupid stealing a metrical foot from Ovid’s epic hexameter, turning it into pentameter to create the form.

HEXAMETER

the six footer

Six iambic feet combine to produce the rare and hypnotic line of *iambic hexameter*, which tends to divide in half. Here is a sample from Michael Drayton's 15,000-line epic *Poly-Olbion*, published in 1612.

LAMBIC HEXAMETER - di dúm (○●) × 6

Cons|der, quóth| this Nýmph,| the times| be cúr|ious nów,
And nó|thing óf| that kínd| will án|y wáy| allów.
The móre they hér persúade, the móre she dóth persíst ;
Let thém say whát they will, she will do whát she líst.

The classical quantitative metre (see page 5) is the six-foot *dactylic hexameter*. In Homer's epic poems, any of the first four dactyls can be substituted (see page 22) with spondees (see page 6) and the sixth foot is a spondee or trochee. The Greek form was approximated in English by Henry W. Longfellow in his 1847 poem *Evangeline*. Notice his substitutions and final spondees.

DACTYLIC HEXAMETER - dúm diddy (●○○) × 6

This is the| fórest pri|méal. The| múrmuring| pínes and the| hémlocks,
Béarded with| móss, and in| gárments| gréen, indis|tínt in the| twílight,
Stánd like| Drúids of| óld, with| vóices| sád and pro|phétic,
Stánd like| hárpers| hóar, with| béards that| rést on their| bósoms.

Anapestic hexameter has a lovely galloping quality. W. B. Yeats' used it for Book III of his epic *Wanderings of Oisín*, first published in 1889:

ANAPESTIC HEXAMETER - diddy dúm (○○●) × 6

And thére| at the fóot| of the móun|tain, two cár|ried a sáck| full of sánd ...
Leaning down| from the gém-studded sáddle, I flúng it five yáreds with my hánd.

HEPTAMETER & OCTAMETER

seven and eight feet

Seven feet form lines of exciting *heptameter*. These can often be divided into one part trimeter and one part tetrameter. Emily Dickinson [1830–86] often used iambic heptameter within ballad stanzas:

LAMBIC HEPTAMETER - di dúm (○●) × 7

Bécause| I cóuld| not stóp| for Déath,| He kínd|ly stópped| for mé;
The carr|iage héld| but júst| óursélves| and ímm|ortá|lity.

Sevens and threes often go well together and here are two anapestic lines from Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*, published in 1876.

ANAPESTIC HEPTAMETER - diddy dúm (○○●) × 7

"He remáarked| to me thén,"| said that míld|est of mén,| "If your Snárk| be a Snárk,| that is right:
Fetch it hóme| by all méans|— you may sérve| it with gréens,| and it's hán|dy for stríking a líght.

Eight feet form an *octameter*. In Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 poem *The Raven*, the first line can be cut in half to form a double tetrameter whilst the second line is true octameter:

TROCHAIC OCTAMETER - dúm di (●○) × 8

Ónce, up|ón a| mídnight| dréary,| wíle I| pón|dered| wéak and| wéary
Óver| mány a| quáint and| cúrious| vólume| óf for|góttén| lore

Combining eight anapests produces a very long line, as in this example from Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1887 poem *March, an Ode*:

ANAPESTIC OCTAMETER - diddy dúm (○○●) × 8

Ere fróst-flówer and snów-blossóm| fáded and féll and the spléndour of wínter had pássed out of síght,
The wáys of the wóodlands were fáirer and stránger than dréams that fulfil us in sléep with delíght;

CAESURA

take a breath

A break or audible pause in the flow of a line is called a ‘caesura’, ¶, from the Latin *caedere*, ‘to cut’. Caesurae can vary or support poetic rhythm, and create expressive contrasts, both metrical and rhetorical. Often marked with punctuation, they are like breath pauses between musical phrases. A caesura near the beginning of a line is termed *initial*, near the middle is *medial* and near the end is *terminal*. In the extracts below from *Paradise Lost*, John Milton [1608–74] makes flexible use of initial and terminal caesurae:

INITIAL AND TERMINAL CAESURA - in iambic pentameter (○●) di dūm × 5

Séasons| return,| but nó| to mé| retúrns
Dáy, ¶ or| the swéet| appróach| of Év'n| or Mórn.
Gó in| thy ná|tive ínn|océnce, ¶ relíe
On whát| thou hást| of vér|tue, ¶ súmm|on áll,

Medial caesurae are usually less idiosyncratic. They neatly aid stylistic/contextual counterpoint and, in the absence of strict metre, can help define rhythm (they are an ever-present feature in *Anglo-Saxon* verse, see p.51). Here is Thomas Nashe’s c. 1587 poem *Spring, the Sweet Spring*:

MEDIAL CAESURA (RHYTHMICAL) - in catalectic dactylic tetrameter (●○○) dūm diddy × 4

Spriḡ, the sweet| spriḡ, ¶ is the| yéar’s pleásant| kíng,
Then blóoms each thínḡ, ¶ then maids dánce in a ríng,

In Alexander Pope’s 1731 *Moral essay*, caesura augments antithesis:

MEDIAL CAESURA (RHETORICAL) - in accentual

Cháste to her Húsband, ¶ fránk to all beside,
A téeming místress, ¶ but a bárren Bríde.

STOP OR ENJAMB

the end of the line

In a single line of verse, *end-stopping*, ⊙, marks the end of a complete phrase and usually coincides with suitable punctuation, though sometimes it is the sense of the words alone which dictates the pause. End stopping is a principle element of rhythm, sense and form in most English poetry. Here are four end-stopped lines from Elizabeth Browning’s *A Musical Instrument*, 1854:

END STOPPING - in dactylic trimeter (●○○) dūm diddy × 4

Whát was he| dóing, the| gréat god Pán, ⊙
Dówn in the| réeds by the| river? ⊙
Spréading ruín and scáattering bán, ⊙
Spláshing and páddling with hóofs of a góat, ⊙

When a line runs onto the next and the reader feels little compulsion to pause, it is said to be *enjambé*, √, (from the French *enjamber* ‘to stride’). Here are two enjambed lines from Maya Angelou’s [1928–2014] poem *Rise*:

ENJAMBMENT - in anapestic/quartus-paonic dimeter (○●●) diddy dūm × 2

Does it cóme| as a surpríse √
That I dánce like I’ve got díamonds √
At the méeting of my thíghs?

Here are both devices, in a verse from Andrew Marvell’s *The Mower to the Glo-Worms*, published in 1781:

END STOPPING & ENJAMBMENT - in iambic tetrameter (○●) di dūm × 4

Ye cóun|try cóm|ets, thát| porténd √
No wár| nor prín|ce’s fún|erál, ⊙
Shíning untó no hígher énd √
Than tó preságe the gráss’s fáll; ⊙

SUBSTITUTION

changing feet

A poetic line which ends with an unstressed syllable is said to have a *feminine ending*, whereas a final stressed syllable is *masculine*. To aid *lineation* (the flow of lines) an iambic or anapestic line will occasionally end with an *extra* unstressed syllable. For example, this extract from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, published in 1603, although written in iambic pentameter (5 iambic feet, 10 syllables per line), contains *hypermetrical* lines of 11 syllables:

ADDING FEMININE ENDINGS - to iambic pentameter (◉●) di dúm × 5

Thus cón|science dóes| make ców|ards óf| us áll; ◉	(10) m
And thús| the ná|tive húe| of rés|olútion ✓	(11) +f
Is síck| lied ó'er| with the| pále cást| of thóught, ◉	(10) m
And én|terpri|ses of| gréat pith| and móment ◉	(11) +f

Note that the longer lines still consist of five feet, and that the addition of the unstressed syllable to the final foot changes it from an iamb into an amphibrach (see page 12). Deeper scansion of the above also reveals that this is not the only change in foot type. For example, a pyrrhic foot (see page 7) 'with the' appears in the third line, and a spondaic 'great pith' in the fourth.

This *substitution* of one foot for another is a commonly-used technique in metrical verse. A poet exchanges the expected foot for a different one, even of a different length. The swap is often found at the beginning of lines but can occur anywhere, any number of times. *Hamlet* again:

SUBSTITUTION - in iambic pentameter (◉●) di dúm × 5

To bé,| or nó|t to bé;| thát is| the quéstion: — ◉	(11) 4th foot trochee +f
Whéther| 'tis nó|bler ín| the mind| to súffer ✓	(11) 1st foot trochee, +f
The slíngs| and á|rròws óf| outrá|geous fórtune; ◉	(11) no subs, +f

Ór to| take árms| agáinst| a séa| of tróubles, ◉	(11) 1st foot trochee, +f
And bý| oppósing,| énd them?| — To díe|, to sléep, ◉	(11) 2nd amphibra., 3rd troch., m
Nó móre;| and, bý| a sléep,| to sáy| we énd ✓	(10) 1st foot spondee, m
The héart|—áche, and| the thóu|sand ná|tural shócks ✓	(10) 2nd foot trochee, m
That flésh| is héir| to, — 'Tis| a cón|summátion	(10) no subs, +f

Sometimes it can make sense metrically and dialectically to substitute the first foot of a line. For example, in the extract above the opening trochaic 'Whether' (*facing page*) naturally follows a feminine ending. Substitution is also often used expressively, to signal a rhetorical shift, as in Hamlet's forceful opening spondee 'No more' (*above*).

Below, Emily Dickinson emphasises the opening word of her 1891 poem *Hope is the thing with feathers* with a trochee:

INITIAL SUBSTITUTION - in iambic trimeter (◉●) di dúm × 3

Hópe is| the thín|g| with féathers ✓	(7) 1st foot trochee, +f
that pérch|es ín| the sóul ◉	(6) no subs, m

And here, Robert Frost [1874–1963] uses some neat *trisyllabic substitution* (the substitution of a binary foot for a ternary foot, e.g. an anapest for an iamb) in his 1916 poem *The Road Not Taken*:

TRISYLLABIC SUBSTITUTION - in iambic tetrameter (◉●) di dúm × 4

Two róads| díverged| in a yé|llow wóod, ◉	(9) 3rd foot anapest, m
And sór|ry I cóuld| not trá|vel bóth ✓	(9) 2nd foot anapest, m
And bé| one trá|vellér lón|g,| I stóod ✓	(9) 2nd foot amphibrach, m
And lóoked| down óne| as fár| as I cóuld ◉	(9) 4th foot anapest, m

Thus, with an ear for how language is spoken, metrical variation is *part of* poetic metre. It is used expressively, expanding and reinforcing meaning, and helping to naturalize a poem's rhythm. Ballads and nursery rhymes tend to vary less, as their metres are reinforced by musical rhythm (*overleaf*).

HIDDEN RHYTHMS

and mixed metres

We have already seen how stresses and syllables create poetic rhythm. Yet something else underpins this art; something deeply connected to the musical origins of poetry. It is background beat, and we all meet it as children in the song and chant of nursery rhymes.

To take an example, *Hickory Dickory Dock* is a five-line accentual poem (see page 4), with varying syllable counts, and three stresses for lines 1, 2 and 5 and two for lines 3 and 4. However, when presented in semi-musical notation (below) we quickly discover the hidden 3:4 rhythm which is heard when the rhyme is actually spoken by children:

RHYTHMIC ACCENTUAL											
I	2	3	I	2	3	I	2	3	I	2	3
Híck--or---y	Díck--or---y	Dóck				The	(7)				
móuse	ran	úp	the	clóck		The	(6)				
clóck	struck	óne;	The	móuse	ran	dówn	(8)				
Híck--or---y	Díck--or---y	Dóck					(7)				

Notice how the stressed syllables fall on primary beats while the off-beats host unstressed syllables. In many places neither is marked. *Humpty Dumpty* has a similar rhythm, with lines 3 and 4 marking every beat:

I	2	3	I	2	3	I	2	3	I	2	3
Húmp- ---ty	Dúmp- ---ty	sát	on	a	wáll		(8)				
Húmp- ---ty	Dúmp- ---ty	hád	a	great	fáll		(8)				
Áll	the	king's	hórs---es	and	áll	the	king's	mén			(10)
Cóuld'n't	put	Húmp-ty	to--gé---ther	a---gáin			(10)				

Many accentual poems can be analysed in this way. In *The Owl and the Pussycat*, by Edward Lear [1812–88], the waltzing rhythm is established from

the start. It's almost impossible to read the first line without introducing pauses between 'went' and 'to sea', or between 'pea' and 'green boat':

RHYTHMIC ACCENTUAL											
I	2	3	I	2	3	I	2	3	I	2	3
The	Ówl	and	the	Pús---sy---cat	wént	to	séa	in	a		(10)
Béau--ti---ful	peá	green	bóat			They					(8)
tóok	some	hó---ney	and	plén---ty	of	món---ey	wrapped				(11)
úp	in	a	five	póund	nóte						(7)

Another way that poets vary the contours of metrical schemes is to mix their metres. William Wordsworth, in his 1804 ode on *Intimations of Immortality* changes his metre on almost every line, whilst always retaining the lilting iambic foot as his base unit (this poem also appears on page 49):

MIXED METRE	IAMBIC	
There wás| a tíme| when méa|dow, gróve,| and stréam,	pentameter	(10)
The éarþ,| and év|ery cóm|mon síght,	tetrameter	(8)
To mé| did séem	dimeter	(4)
Appá|relled ín| celés|tial líght,	tetrameter	(8)
The gló|ry ánd| the frésh|ness óf| a dréam.	pentameter	(10)
It ís| not nów| as ít| hath béen| of yóre;—	pentameter	(10)
Turn whére|soé'er| I máy,	trimeter	(6)
By níght| or dáy,	dimeter	(4)
The thín|gs| whích| I| have séen| I nów| can sée| no móre.	hexameter	(12)

In the poem below, e e cummings [1894–1962] takes the opposite approach, varying his feet, whilst always ensuring there are four per line:

whát	if	a|	múch	of	a|	whích	of	a|	wínd,	Dactylic tetrameter	(10)
gíves	the|	trúth	to|	súmmer's|	líe;					Trochic tetrameter	(7)
blóodíes	wíth|	dízzyíng|	léaves	the|	sún					Dactylic tetrameter	(10)
and	yánks|	ímmór|tal	stárs|	awrý?						Iambic tetrameter	(8)

RHYME

and its schemes

Rhymes bind elements together, implying and intensifying connections. The terms ‘rhyme’ and ‘rhythm’ both come from the Greek word *rhythmos* meaning ‘flow’, ‘regular motion’ or ‘symmetry’. Here’s a rhythmic tail rhyme from the very end of *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss:

END OR TAIL RHYME - anapestic tetrameter (○○●) diddy dúm × 4

Then our mó|ther came ín| and she sáid| to us twó ○● ○● ○● ○● [a]
 ‘Did you háve| any fún|? Tell me, whát| did you dó?’ ○● ○● ○● ○● [A]
 And Sáily and Í did not knów what to sáy. ○● ○● ○● ○● [b]
 Should we téll her the thínks that went ón there that dáy? ○● ○● ○● ○● [b]
 Should we téll her abóut it? Now whát should we dó? ○● ○● ○● ○● [A]
 Well, whát would you dó if your móther asked yóu? ○● ○● ○● ○● [a]

To notate rhymes and rhyming schemes, each new rhyme is given a new letter when it first appears in a poem, e.g. *aabb cddc efef ggaa*, where *a* rhymes with *a*, and *b* with *b*, etc. In the example above, repeated end words are also notated, with capitalised letters, *aAbbAa*. Gerald Manly Hopkins’ *The Windhover*, 1877, uses end rhymes, internal rhymes, and many other devices:

INTERNAL RHYMES - sprung rhythm, loose pentameter

I caught| this mórn|ing mórn|ing’s mín|ion, king-
dom of dáylight’s dáuphin, dápple-dawn-drawn Fálcon, in his ríding
 Of the rólling lével undernéath him stéady áir, and stríding
Hígh there, how he ríng upón the réin of a wímpling wíng
 In his écstasy! then óff, óff fórh on swíng,
 As a skáte’s héal sweéps smóoth on a bów-bénd: the húrl and glíding
Rebúffed the big wínd. My heárt in híding
Stírred for a bírd, — the áchíeve of; the mástery of the thíng!

RHYME	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
END OR TAIL RHYME, RIME COUÉE	A rhyme in the final syllable(s) of two or more lines.	The cow is of the bovine ilk; One end is moo, the other milk. O.Nash
INTERNAL RHYME	Two or more rhyming words occur within the same line or across the centre and/or end words of adjacent lines.	Whát would the wórd be ónce bereft/ Of wét and of wildness? Lét them be léft, G.M. Hopkins
CROSS RHYME	The end-word of one line matches a word in the middle of the following line or vice versa.	And he shall go where time lies still and frozen beneath eternal snow.
PERFECT, FULL OR TRUE RHYME	The sound of two words are identical except at the beginning.	light / night; fire / briar; names / flames; fish / dish; kind / mind; hole / mole
MASCULINE	Stress is on the final syllable of each word.	sublime / design; reveal / conceal
FEMININE	Stress is on the second from last syllable of each word.	thúnder / ásúnder; súltry / póultry; tówers / flówers
DACTYLIC	Stress is on the third from last syllable of each word.	cacóphony / heteróphony
PARTIAL OR HALF RHYME	Words which almost rhyme. Any species other than perfect rhyme: barn / large, craft / laugh, love / blush, etc	Courage was mine, and I had mystery; Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery: W. Owen
IMPERFECT RHYME	The otherwise perfect rhyming of stressed-unstressed syllables.	Lasting / sting; imagine / grin; summer / her; mountain / win; crystal / fall; narrative / live
ASSONANT RHYME OR ASSONANCE	Vowel sounds are identical but consonants differ.	love / move / prove; oar / oak; blows / notes; round / drown
CONSONANT RHYME	Outer consonants are the same but vowels differ.	night / nought; fell / fall / fool / foul / fail / feel; years / yours
ALLITERATION	Words in close succession have the same first letter or sound.	concordant / consonants / consistently / convolve and aurally / accord
EYE RHYME	A typographic rhyme between words with similar spellings but different sounds.	look / moon / o; thought / though; love / prove; brow / crow; hubris / debris; live / live
RICH RHYME	Rhyme between identical sounding words with different meanings.	their / there; bear / bare; foul / fowl; where / wear; eye / I; see / sea
DIMINISHING RHYME	A perfect chiming of two successive words where the second is nested in the first.	report / port; emotion / motion; avail / veil; impale / pale; start / art; cracking / king

THE STANZA

unit of poetic form

Syllables combine to form words, words form lines and lines form *stanzas* (*It.* for ‘room’). Stanzas are the building blocks of poetic form, building space, shape, sense and story in a poem and aiding the reader’s eye. Here are the first two stanzas of Emily Dickinson’s 1891 poem *In the Garden*:

STANZA I

A *bírd*| came *dówn*| the *wálk*:
He *díd*| not *knów*| I *sáw*;
He *bít*| an *án*|*gle-wórm*| in *hálv*s
And *áte*| the *féll*|*ow, ráw*.

STANZA II

And *thén*| he *dránk*| a *déw*
From *á*| *convé*|*nient gráss*,
And *thén*| *hopp**ed síde*|*wise tó*| the *wáll*
To *lét*| a *bée*|*tle páss*.

The Greek word for stanza is *strophe*, which means ‘turn’; literally, a complete turn in a dance. A poem formed from several stanzas is said to be *strophic*, which in music means several repeated verses (AAA) of the same melody, but with changing lyrics. Successive stanzas can function as introduction, development and conclusion; like a story’s beginning, middle and end, or a logical argument (*sylogism*: if A and B then C).

When starting a poem, a poet faces a choice whether to use a *fixed form*, a traditional pattern, or a *nonce form*, a unique pattern devised by the poet.

FIXED FORM - c.g. a Villanelle, see p.42, first two stanzas, by Dylan Thomas, 1952

Do <i>nót</i>| go <i>gén</i>|<i>tle ín</i>|to <i>thát</i>| good <i>níght</i> ,	[A ²]
Old <i>áge</i>| should <i>búrn</i>| and <i>ráve</i>| at <i>clóse</i>| of <i>dáy</i> ;	[b]
Rage, <i>rage</i> against the <i>dýing</i> of the <i>light</i> .	[A ²]
Though <i>wise</i> men at their <i>end</i> know <i>dark</i> is <i>right</i> ,	[a]
Because their words had <i>forked</i> no <i>lightning</i> they	[b]
Do not go <i>gentle</i> into that good <i>night</i> .	[A ²]

BLANK VERSE

fewer rules

Poetry which is not *stanzaic*, or broken into stanzas, is *stichic* (pr. *stik-ik*), and poems of unrhymed stichic lines written in regular metre are known as *blank verse*. It has been estimated that three quarters of all English poetry is in blank verse, mostly iambic pentameter. The lack of rhyme is well-suited to argument, emotion and rhythmic speech. It was first adapted to English from the 11-syllable Italian form *verse sciolti da rima* (‘verse free from rhyme’) by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in the 1540s for his translations of *The Aeneid*. Christopher Marlowe [1564–93] used it in *Tamburlaine the Great* and, coupled with rhyme and song, it then became the great workhorse of Shakespeare’s [1564–1616] plays and Milton’s [1608–74] *Paradise Lost*.

Here is an example from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1768 *Frost at Midnight*.

BLANK VERSE - using iambic pentameter (◌●) di dím × 5

My *bábe*| so *béau*|*tífú!*| it *thrills*| my *héart*
With *tén*|*der glád*|*ness, thús*| to *lók*| at *thée*,
And *thínk* that *thóu* shalt *léarn* far *óther* *lóre*,
And *ín* far *óther* *scénes*! For *í* was *réared*
In the *great* city, *pent* ‘mid *cloisters* *dim*,
And *saw* nought *lovely* but the *sky* and *stars*.
But *thou*, my *babe*! Shalt *wander* like a *breeze*
By *lakes* and *sandy* shores, *beneath* the *crag*s
Of *ancient* mountain, and *beneath* the *clouds*,

Since the late 19th century, some poets have discarded metre as well as rhyme, resulting in *free verse*. This builds form and narrative using rhetoric, repetition, assonance, strophic and stichic line grouping, visual shape, trope, metaphor and simile, but is not the subject of this book.

COUPLETS AND TRIPLETS

and the terza rima

The *couplet* is the simplest stanza. Formed from any two lines rhyming *aa*, couplets take many forms. In an *equal couplet*, both lines have the same number of syllables and beats. Seventeenth-century poets, Shakespeare among them, often used sequences of *heroic couplets* in iambic pentameter to give the feel of the classical heroic epics:

HEROIC COUPLET - iambic pentameter (○●) di dím × 5

COUPLET
.....
.....

The Tíme is óut of jóint, O cúrsed spíte [a]
That éver Í was bórn to sét it right. [a]

This is also an example of a *closed couplet*, one that forms a complete, balanced statement or sentence. The first line rises/calls; the second answers/falls. Closed couplets can become *epigrams*. Like Coleridge's eponymous example:

CLOSED COUPLET - example in iambic pentameter (○●) di dím × 5

What ís| an épi|grám?| A dwárf|ish w hóle, [a]
Its bó|dy bré|vity| and wít| its sóul. [a]

Unequal couplets have unequal line lengths, like the *poulter's measure*:

UNEQUAL COUPLET - e.g. the poulter's measure, iamb. hex./hept. (○●) di dím × 5/6

A twé|v|ish twist|ing líne,| a póul|ter's méa|sure kéeps, [a]
With fóur|teen móre| right ún|derneath| on whí|ch the óth|er sléeps. [a]

Two couplets enjambed together are *open couplets*, as in this by Keats [1818]:

OPEN COUPLETS - example in iambic pentameter (○●) di dím × 5

A thín|g of béau|ty ís| a jóy| for éver: +f [a]
Its lóve|línéss| incréa|ses; ít| will néver ✓ +f [a]

Pass ín|to nóth|ingnéss;| but stíll| will kéep [b]
A bów|er quíet| for ús,| ¶ ánd| a sléep [b]

A *triplet* is a three-line stanza of any length, rhyming *aaa*. It is often used for dramatic emphasis and variation in couplet-heavy verse. In *The Eagle*, Tennyson's powerful triplets draw out the bird:

TRIPLETS - example in iambic tetrameter (○●) di dím × 4

TRIPLET
.....
.....
.....

He clásp|s the crá|g| with cróok|ed hánds: [a]
Clóse to| the sún| in lóne|ly lánds, [a]
Rínged with| the áz|ure wórd,| it stánds. [a]

The wríckled séa| benéath him cráwls; [b]
He wáches fróm| his móuntain wálls, [b]
And líke a thúnderbólt| he fálls. [b]

A *tercet* is any three-line unit of poetry, but when rhymed *aba* it is known as a *terza rima* (Italian for 'third rhyme'). Strung together in *chain rhymes*, *aba bab cdc ded efe* etc, stanzas of *terza rima* form the backbone of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer's *Complaint to His Lady*. Four chained tercets with a concluding couplet, *aba bab cdc ded ee*, form a *terza rima sonnet*.

TERZA RIMA - in iamb. pent. from Second Satire by Thomas Wyatt [1503-42]

TRIPLET
.....
.....
.....

Ye dó| misséek| with móre| traváil| and cáre. [a]
Make pláin| thy héart,| that ít| bé not| knótted [b]
With hópe| or dréad;| and sée| thy wíll| bé báre [a]

From áll| affécts whom více| hath éver spótted. +f [b]
Thysélf| contént with thát| is thée| assignéd, [c]
And úse it wéll| that is to thée| allótted. +f [b]

Then seek no more out of thyself to find [c]
The thing that thou hast sought so long before, [d]
For thou shalt feel it sitting in thy mind; [c]

THE BALLAD

the great quatrain

Any four-line stanza is called a *quatrain*. Hugely popular, many English poems are in quatrains: nursery rhymes, songs, and hymns. For example, Robert Burns's 18th century version of *John Barleycorn* begins like this:

THE BALLAD STANZA - iambic tetrameter/trimeter

QUATRAIN	There wás| three kíngs| into| the eást,	○ ● ○ ● ○ ● ○ ●	[a]
	Three kíngs| both gréat| and hígh,	○ ● ○ ● ○ ●	[b]
	And théy have swórn a sólemn óath	○ ● ○ ● ○ ● ○ ●	[c]
	John Bárleycórn should díe.	○ ● ○ ● ○ ●	[b]

This quatrain is a *ballad stanza* (from the French *ballare*, 'to dance'), which alternates between lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter. Lines can rhyme *abcb defe* (as above), use a tighter cross-rhyme *abab cdcd*, or even fall into couplets *aabb cddd*. There are also versions which vary in line-length and metre (a 6-line version, rhyming *abcdbd*, is common). The earliest written English example of the form, *Judas*, dates to at least the 13th century:

Júdas,| thou móst| to júr|selém,	Thritti pláten of sélver thóu
oure méte|e fóri| to búgge;	bére up óthi rúgge.

Traditional ballads use everyday speech and song to tell stories of love, rural life, work, local events, and the supernatural. The ancient Scottish Border ballad of *Tam Lin* shows the form:

O Í| forbíd| you, mái|dens á',	There's náne that gáes by Cárterháugh
That wéar| gowd ón| your háir,	But théy leave him a wáid,
To cóme| or gáel| by Cár|terháugh,	Eithér their rings, or gréen mantlés,
For yóung| Tam Lín| is thére.	Or élse their máidenhéad.

The ballad form was used for catchy hymns in the 15th and 16th centuries, when it became known as *common* or *short measure*. Then, between the 17th and 19th centuries, *Broadside ballads* flourished throughout Europe. Printed cheaply and posted on pub walls or sold by peddlars, they often later became popular songs, passed on orally. Broadside ballads are journalistic, full of sensational news, disaster, love scandals, murder and suicide. An example is the *Ballad of George Barnwell*, published in the 1650s. Here is an extract:

Most súdd|enly| within| a wóod	And fúrscore póund in réady cóyn,
he strúck| his Ún|cle dówn	out óf his Púirse he tóok,
And béat| his bráins| out óf| his héad,	And cómning únto Lóndón stráit,
so sóre| he cráckt| his crówn:	the Cóuntry quíte forsóok.

Literary ballads developed throughout the 18th century. Oscar Wilde [1854–1900] adapted the form for *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* with two extra lines broadly rhyming *ababcb*, but perhaps the most famous example comes from Coleridge [1722–1834], in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

All ín| a hóti| and cóp|per ský,	Dáy after dáy, dáy after dáy,
The blóodi|y Sún,| at nóon,	We stúck, nor bréath nor mótion;
Right úp| abóve| the mást| did stánd,	As ídle ás a páinted shíp
No bígg|er thán| the Móon.	Upón a páinted ócean.

Rap, performance poetry, and pop songs are modern ballads. Here is a ballad variation from Benjamin Zephaniah's *Talking Turkeys*, 1994. Instead of 4-3-4-3 iambic feet, it uses 3-3-4-3 anapestic, much like a limerick:

BALLAD VARIATION - anapestic trimeter/tetrameter (○○●) diddy düm × 3/4

So, be nice| to yu túr|key dis chrístmas	Be nice to yu túrkey dis chrístmas
Invíte| dem indóors| fe sum gréens	An spáre dem de cúit of de knífe,
Lét| dem eat cáke| an lét| dem partáke	Join Túrkeys United an déy'll be delighted
In a pláte| of orgán|ic grown béans,	An yú will mek nów friends 'FOR LÍFE'.

FOUR QUATRAINS

four-line stanzas

Long measure is a common quatrain which has four lines of four iambs with the same *abcb* rhyme scheme as the ballad. T.S. Elliot [1888–1965] used it for *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*, where the form’s sincerity and natural openness help reinforce the poems irony:

LONG MEASURE - 4 lines of iambic tetrameter (◡◡) di dúm × 4

QUATRAIN	Ápe|neck Swée|ney spréads| his knées	[a]
	Létting| his árms |hang dówn| to láugh,	[b]
	Déath and| the Rá|ven dríft| abóve	[c]
	Swélling| to mác|uláte| giráffe.	[b]
	The circles óf the stórmý móon	[d]
	Slide wéstward towárd the Ríver Pláte,	[e]
	The zébra stripes alóng his jáw	[f]
	And Swééney gúards the hórned gáte.	[e]

When long measure has the rhyme scheme *abba*, it is called the *In Memoriam stanza*, after Tennyson’s famous lengthy elegy *In Memoriam* [1850], forever associating it with the lyric of loss and lament, as in this extracted quatrain from Section LXXXV:

THE IN MEMORIAM STANZA - 4 lines of iambic tetrameter

This trúth| came bórne| with bíer| and páll,	[a]
I félt| it, whén| I sórr|ow’d móst,	[b]
’Tis better to have loved and lost,	[b]
Than never to have loved at all	[a]

This is also an example of an *envelope stanza*, because the enclosed couplet *bb* is enveloped between another enclosing couplet, *aa*.

The *heroic* or *elegiac quatrain* uses iambic pentameter and has an alternating rhyme scheme *abab*. An example is *Elegy Written in Country Churchyard*, by Thomas Grey [1716–71] (an elegy in name but not in form, *see page 49*):

HEROIC QUATRAIN - 4 lines of iambic pentameter

The cúr|few tólls| the knéll| of párt|ing dáy,	[a]
The lów|ing hérd| wind slów|ly óe’r| the léa,	[b]
The plóughman hómeward plóds his wéary wáy,	[a]
And léaves the wórd to dárkness ánd to mé;	[b]
Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,	[c]
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,	[d]
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,	[c]
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;	[d]

Notice how the longer lines of the pentameter allow adjectives, fanfare and modifiers of all kinds to come rushing in to fill out the rhythm.

Ruba’i (plural *ruba’iat*) is a traditional Persian quatrain form, which was introduced to England in Edward FitzGerald’s 1859 translation of the *Ruba’iat of Omar Khayyam*. Here are the first two quatrains of over 1,000, which demonstrate the *Ruba’i*’s rhyme scheme *aaba bbcb ccdc dded* etc:

RUBA’I - 4 lines of iambic pentameter, cross-rhyming with the next 4

Awáke! | for Mórning ín| the Bówl| of Night	[a]
Has flúng| the Stóne| that púts| the Stárs| to Flíght:	[a]
And Ló! | the Hún|ter óf| the Eást| has cáught	[b]
The Súl|tan’s Tú|rrret ín| a Nóose| of Light.	[a]
Dreaming when Dawn’s Left Hand was in the Sky	[b]
I heard a Voice within the Tavern cry,	[b]
“Awake, my Little ones, and fill the Cup	[c]
Before Life’s Liquor in its Cup be dry.”	[b]

QUINTAINS

limericks and madness

Any poetic form built on five-line stanzas is called a *quintain*. The most widely recognised example in English verse is the *limerick*. It is constructed from three lines of anapestic/amphibrachic trimeter (lines 1, 2 & 5) and two lines of dimeter (lines 3 & 4). The rhyme scheme is strictly *aabba*, and the form seems to lend itself particularly well to wit or humour, with extra points awarded for uncanny or ridiculous rhymes, and nonsense or smut.

LIMERICK - Anon, catalectic amphibrachic trimeter / dimeter (○●○) di dúm di × 3/2

There wás a| young lády| named White	[a]
Who trávelled| much fástér| than líght,	[a]
She sét out| one dáy	[b]
In a réla|tive wáy	[b]
And cáme back| the prévi|ous níght	[a]

Five-line stanzas also appear in other *nonsense verse* like 16th- and 17th-century *mad-songs* or *Bedlamite verse*. This form has five lines of variable metre (trochees and anapests) rhyming *abccb*, leaving an unrhymed *a*:

MAD-SONG STANZA - Anon. 16th C.

.....	Fróm the hág and húngry góblin	[a]	.....
.....	That into rágs would rénd ye,	[b]	.....
.....	All the spírits that stánd	[c]	.....
.....	By the náked mán,	[c]	.....
.....	In the bóok of móons defénd ye!	[b]	.....

A five-line stanza can be rhymed using only the enclosing and enclosed couplets (*as above*), or *ababa*, or *aaaba*, or the trickier *abbba*, or split into a triplet and a couplet, *aaabb*.

SESTETS

six lines

Stanzas of six lines, *sestets*, can be formed in many ways. Three couplets, rhyming *aabcc*, are common, as is the Middle-English *romance stanza*, which rhymes *aabccb*. Scottish poet Robert Burns [1759–96] wrote over fifty poems in sestets—here is the first stanza of his *To a Mountain Daisy*:

THE BURNS STANZA (STANDARD HABBIE) - iamb. tetr./dimeter (○●) di dúm × 4/2

Wee, mó|dest crím|son-típp|èd flów'r,	[a]
Thou's mé|t me ín| an é|vil hóur;	[a]
For Í| maun crúsh| amáng| the stóure	[a]
Thy slén|der stém:	[b]
To spá|re thee nów| is pást| my pów'r,	[a]
Thou bón|ie gém.	[b]

Couplets added to a longer stanza can form an epigram or conclusion, and six lines of iambic pentameter rhyming *ababcc* form the sestet at the end of a *Petrarchan sonnet* (page 40), a six-line stanza which is also used by Shakespeare for his 1593 poem *Venus and Adonis*. Sir Walter Raleigh [1552–1618] opts for the same scheme in *The Lie*, but shortens the line to iambic trimeter, while William Wordsworth [1770–1850] uses it in tetrameter to describe his famous daffodils in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*:

QUATRAIN WITH END COUPLET - c.g. in iambic tetrameter (○●) di dúm × 4

.....	Contín|uous ás| the stárs| that shíne,	[a]	.....
.....	And twin|kle ón| the míl|ky wáy,	[b]	.....
.....	They strétched| in né|ver-én|ding líne	[a]	.....
.....	Alóng| the má|gin óf| a báy:	[b]	.....
.....	Ten thóu|sand sáw| I át| a glánce,	[c]	.....
.....	Tóssing| their héads| in spríght|ly dánce.	[c]	.....

SEPTETS, OCTAVES & NINES

for royals and faeries

The seven-line *Rhyme Royal* stanza emerged from late Medieval French court poetry. It uses iambic pentameter rhyming *ababbcc*. Geoffrey Chaucer [1343–1400] used it for high-minded and comic narratives like the *Parliament of Foules* and *The Canterbury Tales*, and Shakespeare for *The Rape of Lucrece*. Here is verse 132 from Book V of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*:

RHYME ROYAL - 7 lines of iambic pentameter (◌●) di dām × 5

SEPTET	And with| that wórd| he gán| to wáx|en réed,	[a]	QUATRAIN COUPLETS
	And ín| his spéche| a lítel wíght| he quóok,	[b]	
	And caste a-syde| a lítel wíght| his heed,	[a]	
	And stinte a whyle; and afterward awook,	[b]	
	And soberly on hir he threw his look,	[b]	
	And seyde, ‘I am, al be it yow no Ioye,	[c]	
	As gentil man as any wíght in Troye.’	[c]	

The scheme hinges on its centre (like a musical scale’s 4th and 5th), as the *bb* couplet expands the opening quatrain and suggests the *cc* couplet. The fifth line is the pivot—it can expand, amplify or slow down the broader rhythm of the stanza. This openness makes it well-suited to shifting temporal experiences like dreams, visions, reverie, and trance. Milton added a foot at the end, to give a 12-syllable line known as an *alexandrine*.

With eight lines, *Ottava Rima* first appeared in Italy in the poetry of Giovanni Boccaccio [1313–75], most notably in *The Decameron*. It uses feminine-ended (see page 22) lines of iambic pentameter (so *hendecasyllabic*, 11 syllables) and an *abababcc* rhyme scheme (rhyme royal with an extra fifth line). Simultaneously narrative and meandering, sincere and comic, Lord Byron [1788–1824] called it ‘half-serious rhyme’ and used it for his

long satirical poem *Don Juan*. In the dedication, Byron writes to his fellow Romantic poets—Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge—suggesting that they should travel to expand their minds and their poetry:

OTTAVA RIMA - 8 lines of feminine-ended iambic pentameter

OCTAVE	· · · You gén|tlemén,| by dínt| of lóng| seclúsiön	+f [a]	SESTET
	· · · From bét|ter cóm|pany,| have képt| your ówn	[b]	
	· · · At Kés|wick, and| through still| contin|ued fúsiön	+f [a]	
	· · · Of óne| anó|ther’s mínds| at lást| have grówn	[b]	
	· · · To déem,| as á| most lóg|icál| conclúsiön,	+f [a]	
	· · · That pó|esý| has wréaths| for yóu| alóne.	[b]	
	· · · There ís| a ná|rrownéss| in sích| a nótiön,	+f [c]	
	· · · Which mákes| me wish| you’d chángé| your lákes| for ócean	+f [c]	

The nine-line *Spenserian stanza* was invented by Edmund Spenser [1553–1599] for the *The Faerie Queen*, and was revived in the 19th century by Byron, Keats, Shelley and others. The rhyming scheme is *ababbcbcc*, essentially two chain-rhymed ballad stanzas *abab bcbc* with a concluding *c* to form a couplet. The stanza is fomed of eight lines of iambic pentameter and a concluding line of iambic hexameter, a 12-syllable alexandrine. *The Faerie Queen* contains over 2,000 of such stanzas; here is one of them:

SPENSERIAN STANZA - 8 lines of iambic pentameter + 1 line of iambic hexameter

SPENSERIAN	· · · For wéll| I wóte| thou spríngst| from án|cient ráce	[a]	COUPLET QUATRAIN COUPLET QUATRAIN COUPLET
	· · · Of Sáx|on kíngs,| that háve| with mígh|tie hánd	[b]	
	· · · And many bloody battailes fought in place	[a]	
	· · · High reard their royall throne in Britane land,	[b]	
	· · · And vanquisht them, unable to withstand:	[b]	
	· · · From thence a Faerie thee unweeting reft,	[c]	
	· · · There as thou slepst in tender swadling band,	[b]	
	· · · And hér| base Él|fin bróod| there fór| thee léft.	[c]	
	· · · Such mén| do Cháunge|lings cáll,| so cháng’d| by Fáe|ries théft.	[c]	

THE SONNET

fourteen lines of love

The *sonnet* is a 14-line closed poem in iambic pentameter, traditionally on a *lyrical*, or personal, theme, often love. Initially developed in Sicily (*sonetto*, ‘a little sound/song’), it was popularised by Francesco Petrarca [1304–74], who divided the stanza 4:3 into an octave (split into two quatrains) followed by a sestet, rhyming *abba abba cdcddc*, with the sestet occasionally varying as *cdcdcd* or *cdcedc*. Here is Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s [1823–1911] translation of Petrarca’s *Gli Occhi Di Ch’ Io Parlai*:

PETRARCHAN SONNET - 14 lines of iambic pentameter (◡●) di dūm × 5

OCTAVE	Those eyes, | ‘neath which | my pássionate ráp|ture róse,	[a]	⋮
	The árms, | hánds, fées, | the béau|ty thát | erewhíle	[b]	⋮
	Could my own soul from its own self beguile,	[b]	⋮
	And in a separate world of dreams enclose,	[a]	⋮
	The hair’s bright tresses, full of golden glows,	[a]	⋮
	And the soft lightning of the angelic smile	[b]	⋮
	That changed this earth to some celestial isle,	[b]	⋮
	Are now but dust, poor dust, that nothing knows.	[a]	⋮
SESTET	And yet I live! Myself I grieve and scorn,	[c]	⋮
	Left dark without the light I loved in vain,	[d]	⋮
	Adrift in tempest on a bark forlorn;	[c]	⋮
	Dead is the source of all my amorous strain,	[d]	⋮
	Dry is the channel of my thoughts outworn,	[c]	⋮
	And my sad harp can sound but notes of pain.	[d]	⋮

Typically, the first and second quatrains outline and expand upon the subject of the poem (*exposition* and *development*). Then comes the *volta* or ‘turn’, C, often signalled with a preposition ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘while’, ‘yet’, ‘though’,

or ‘until’, after which the sestet opposes and resolves the subject (*conclusion*).

The *Spenserian sonnet* was developed by Edmund Spenser from the 9-line stanza he used for *The Faerie Queen* (page 39). The 14 lines are divided into three chained quatrains and a final couplet, rhyming *abab bcbc cdcd ee* with the *volta* either after the first octave or before the final couplet.

The *Shakespearean sonnet* became popular around 1600. It is similar to the Spenserian, but easier to rhyme as it separates the three quatrains: *abab cdcd efef gg*. The *volta* is again at the start of the 9th or 13th line, with the final rhyming couplet often acting as an epigrammatic solution to the problem developed over the three quatrains. Here is Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 18*:

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET - 14 lines of iambic pentameter

Shall Í | compáre| thee tó| a súm|mer’s dáy?	[a]	⋮
Thou árt| more lóve|ly ánd| more tém|peráte.	[b]	⋮
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	[a]	⋮
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.	[b]	⋮
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,	[c]	⋮
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;	[d]	⋮
And every fair from fair sometime declines,	[c]	⋮
By chance, or nature’s changing course, untrimmed;	[d]	⋮
C But thy eternal summer shall not fade,	[e]	⋮
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,	[f]	⋮
Nor shall death brag thou wand’rest in his shade,	[e]	⋮
C When in eternal lines to Time thou grow’st.	[f]	⋮
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,	[g]	⋮
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.	[g]	⋮

Some *sonnet variations* do not follow the rhyming schemes listed above. A famous example is *Ozymandias*, by Percy Shelley [1792–1822], which rhymes *abab acdc edefef*, an interesting fusion of the two classical forms. John Milton’s *When I Consider How My Light Is Spent* is another example.

VILLANELLE

nineteen lines

The dreamy rustic *villanelle* (It. *villano* ‘peasant’ or ‘villa’) is a closed form of 19 lines of iambic pentameter, with five 3-line stanzas and a final quatrain:

VILLANELLE - 19 lines of iamb. pent: e.g. The Waking, by T. Roethke [1908-65]

- | | | | |
|----|--|--|----------|
| 1. | I wáke to sléep, and táke my wá king slów.
I féel my fáte in whát I cán not féar.
I léarn by gó ing whére I háve to gó. | A ¹
[b]
A ² | TERCET |
| 2. | We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow. | [a]
[b]
A ¹ | TERCET |
| 3. | Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go. | [a]
[b]
A ² | TERCET |
| 4. | Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow. | [a]
[b]
A ¹ | TERCET |
| 5. | Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go. | [a]
[b]
A ² | TERCET |
| 6. | This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go. | [a]
[b]
A ¹
A ² | QUATRAIN |

A little like a musical round, the 1st and 3rd lines of the first stanza, A¹ and A², are *refrains*, and repeat throughout the poem (see too page 28).

PANTOUM

strange refrains

The *pantoum* is another circular creature, this time from Malaysia via France. The English adaption has an *open form* composed with a variety of metres in interlocking cross-rhymed quatrains: *abab bcbc cdcd ... nana*.

The second and fourth lines of each stanza repeat as the first and the third of the next, and the first and third lines of the first stanza become the fourth and second lines of the final stanza. The second half of each quatrain also has a more personal voice than the first half. Here’s an extract from *The Blue Fly Sung in The Pane* by Austin Dobson [1840–1921]:

PANTOUM - example in dactylic trimeter (●○○) dúm diddy × 3

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 1. | Toiling in Tówn now is “hórrid,”
(Thére is that wóman a gdáin!)—
Júne in the zénith is tórrid,
Thóught gets dry in the bráin. | A ¹
B ¹
A ²
B ² |
| 2. | There is that woman again:
“Strawberries! fourpence a pottle!”
Thought gets dry in the brain;
Ink gets dry in the bottle. | B ¹
C ¹
B ²
C ² |
| 3. | “Strawberries! fourpence a pottle!”
Oh for the green of a lane!—
Ink gets dry in the bottle;
“Buzz” goes a fly in the pane! ... | C ¹
D ¹
C ²
D ² |
| 10. | To dash one with eau de Cologne,
(June in the zenith is torrid;—)
And why should I stay here alone!
Toiling in Town now is “horrid.” | I ¹
A ²
I ²
A ¹ |

BALLADE, TRIOLET & RONDEAU

French song and dance

The solemn *ballade* is one of the three musical *formes fixes* of medieval French poetry (the other two were the *virelai* and the *rondeau*). The ballade uses 28 lines of consistent metre in three 8-line stanzas rhyming *ababbcbC* with a closing four line *envoi* rhyming *bcbC*. The last line of the first stanza becomes a refrain, repeated as the last line of all other stanzas, including the *envoi*. Here is the end of Algernon Charles Swinburne's *A Ballad of Dreamland*:

BALLADE - 3 × 8 lines, with a 4-line envoi, example in iambic/anapestic tetrameter

3. The gréen| land's náme| that a chárm| enclóses, [a]
It né|ver was wrít| in the trá|veller's chárt, [b]
And swéet| on its trées| as the frúit| that gróws is, [a]
It né|ver was sóld| in the mér|chant's márt. [b]
The swá|llows of dréams| through its dí| fields dárt, [b]
And sléep's| are the túnes| in its trée|tops héard; [c]
No hóund's| note wák|ens the wíld|wood hárt, [b]
Ónly| the sóng| of a séc|ret bírd. c
- ENVOI 4. In the wó|rd| of dréams| I have chó|sen my párt, [b]
To sléep| for a séa|son and héar| no wórd [c]
Of trú|e| love's trúth| or of líght| love's árt, [b]
Ónly| the sóng| of a séc|ret bírd. c

The jaunty *virelai* is constructed from a 4-line refrain, rhyming AAAB, ABAB, or ABBA, followed by three tercets, rhyming *aab* or *abb*. The refrain repeats and another three tercets and refrain may or may not follow.

The *triolet* is an epigrammatic lyric form, originally sung as two melodies, matching its refrains. With no fixed metre or length, it is usually written in octaves with line 1 repeated as the 4th and 7th, and line 2 as the 8th:

TRIOLET - example in iambic tetrameter by Robert Bridges [1844-1930]

When fírst| we mét,| we díd| not gúess A
That Lóve| would próve| so hárd| a máster; +f B
Of more than common friendliness [a]
When fírst we met we did not guess A
Who could foretell the sore distress, [a]
This ir retrievable disaster, +f [b]
When fírst we met? We did not guess A
That Love would prove so hard a master. +f B

The triolet is the basis for the *rondeau*, which originated from sung dance-rounds (*rondels*). The 12- and 15-line variations are the most common. Cut the second line of each stanza of Don Marquis' [1878-1937] 15-line example below to convert it to the 12-line form:

RONDEAU - example in iambic tetrameter (o●) di dím × 4

Your rón|deau's tále| must stíll| be líght — R [a]
[No bú|gle-cáll| to lífe's| stern fíght!] [a]
Rathér| a smí|ling ínt|erlúde [b]
Memór|ial tó| some trán|sient móod [b]
Of íd|le lóve| and gá|la-night. [a]
Its manner is the merest sleight [a]
[O' hand; yet therein dwells its might,] [a]
For if the heavier touch intrude [b]
Your rondeau's stale. R
Fragrant and fragile, fleet and bright, [a]
[And wing'd with whim, it gleams in flight] [a]
Like April blossoms wind-pursued [b]
Down aisles of tangled underwood;-- [b]
Nor be too serious when you write [a]
Your rondeau's tail! R

SESTINA

lyrical symmetry

The *sestina* is a closed form built on repetition. Mostly unrhymed, it uses any metre for its six 6-line stanzas and final 3-line closing *envoi*. Each stanza juggles the end-words in the next by a pattern: 1→2, 2→4, 3→6, 4→5, 5→3, 6→1. Here is an extract from *Sestina* by Elisabeth Bishop [1911–1979]:

SESTINA - 6 × 6 lines, with a 3-line envoi, example in loose iambic tetrameter

- | | | |
|----------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Septém ber ráin fálls on the <u>hóuse</u> .
In the fáil ing light , the óld <u>grándmother</u>
síts in the kí chen with the <u>chíld</u>
besíde the Lí tle Már vel Stóve,
réadíng the jókes from the ál manác,
láughíng and tálkíng to híde her <u>téars</u> . | 1
2
3
4
5
6 |
| 2. | She thínks that her equínocíal <u>tears</u>
and the ráin that béats on the roof of the <u>house</u>
were both foretold by the <u>almanac</u> ,
but only known to a <u>grándmother</u> .
The íron kettle síngs on the <u>Stove</u> .
She cuts some bréad and sáys to the <u>chíld</u> , ... | 6
5
4
3 |
| ENVOI 7. | Time to plánt <u>tears</u> , sáys the <u>almanac</u> .
The <u>grándmother</u> síngs to the marvellous <u>Stove</u>
and the <u>chíld</u> dráws another inscrutable <u>house</u> . | 6,5
2,4
3,1 |

After six stanzas all end-words have rotated through all positions, and then the final *envoi* reuses them in three lines, in the order: 6, 5; 2, 4; 3, 1. The *sestina* was developed by Arnaut Daniel [fl. 1180–1200], one of the *Troubadours*, a southern European group of lyrical poets who sung their poetry over simple monophonic music, shaping the poetic experience.

CANZONE

heads and tails

Canzone, ‘song’, is the term for various Italian forms derived from medieval Provençal poetry. Stanzas contain between 8 and 20 lines, of feminine-ended iambic pentameter or trimeter, with all stanzas in any one *canzone* identical. Each stanza is divided into a *fronte* (head), made of two matching *pedi* (feet) and a *sirma* (tail), sometimes divided into two *volte*. *Canzone* generally contain between three and seven stanzas. The opening stanza introduces a lyrical theme, the following stanzas elaborate on it, and the final stanza (sometimes just a *sirma*) concludes. The last line of a stanza often rhymes with the first line of the next.

In his translation of *Of The Gentle Heart* by Guido Guinicelli [1225–76], Dante Gabriel Rossetti [1828–82] shortens the 7- and 11-syllable Italian lines to 6 and 10 syllables to better suit English:

CANZONE - iambic pentameter/trimeter (◌●) di dúm × 5/3

- | | | | | | |
|--------|---|-------|---|---|--|
| FRONTE | U | SIRMA | 2. The fíre of Lóve comes tó the gén tle héart
Like ás its vír tue tó a pré cious stóne;
To whích no stár its ín fluence cán impárt
Till ít is máde a púre thing bý the sún
For whén the sún hath smít
From óut its éss ence thát whích thére was víle,
The stár endów eth ít.
And só the héart créa ted bý God's bréath
Pure, trúe, and cléan from guíle,
A wó man, líke a stár, enám ouréth. | (10) [a]
(10) [b]
(10) [a]
(10) [b]
(6) [c]
(10) [d]
(6) [c]
(10) [e]
(6) [d]
(10) [e] | PIEDE
PIEDE
PIEDE
VOLTE
VOLTE
VOLTE |
|--------|---|-------|---|---|--|

The full poem has six stanzas, each the same length and structure. Many other *canzones* open with a pair of quatrains, much like sonnets.

THE SAPPHIC STANZA

love and devotion

The Greek poetess Sappho [c. 620–570BC] wrote and sang devotional and oracular *lyric poetry*, often in three-line stanzas of mixed metre (trochee-trochee/spondee-dactyl-trochee-spondee, with another dactyl and trochee ending the third line). The Roman poet Horace [65–8BC] modified the form so that the English Renaissance *Sapphic stanza* has three 11-syllable lines followed by a single 5-syllable line (an *adonic*):

Shimmer|ing-throned| immortal| Áphro|díte,
 Dáughter| of Zéus,| Enchántress,| Í im|plóre thee,
 Spáre me,| Ó quéen,| this ágo|n'ý and| ánguish,
 Crúsh not my| spírít.

Swinburne famously experimented with the form in his *Sapphics*. Note the *anceps*, ∅, where a foot can be either a trochee or a spondee.

THE ENGLISH SAPPHIC ODE - (trochee × 2, dactyl, trochee × 2) × 3, + (dactyl, spondee)

13. Sáw the| Lésbians| kissing a|cross their| smíttén
 Lútes with| líps móre| swéet than the| sóund of| lúte-stríngs,
 Móuth to| móuth and| hánd upon| hánd, her| chósen,
 Fáirer than| áll mén;

14. Ónly| sáw the| béautiful| líps and| fíngers, ● ○ ● ● ○ ○ ● ○ ● ○
 Fúll of| sóngs and| kísses and| líttle| whíspers, ● ○ ● ● ○ ○ ● ○ ● ○
 Fúll of| músic;| ónly be|héld a|móng them ● ○ ● ● ○ ○ ● ○ ● ○
 Sóar, as a| bírd sóars ● ○ ● ●

When reading a Sapphic in English, note how the emphasis falls most heavily on the cluster of three stresses in the final three feet of each line.

ODES AND ELEGIES

passion, loss, lament

The modern *ode* developed from two ancient forms. The heroic *Pindaric ode*, from Pindar [522–443 BC], consists of an open-ended stanza (a *strophe*), its reverse-danced *antistrophe*, and finally a closed *epode*. Wordsworth's 1804 poem *Intimations of Immortality* encapsulates the idea within a stanza:

ENGLISH PINDARIC ODE - iambic pent./tetr./di./tri./hex.

There wás| a tíme| when méa|ldow, gróve,| and stréam,	(10)	[a]	...
The éarh,| and év|ery cóm|mon síght	(8)	[b]	...
To mé| díd séem	(4)	[a]	...
Appárelled in célestíal líght,	(8)	[b]	...
The glóry and the fréshness of a dréam.	(10)	[a]	...
It is not now as it hath béen of yore;--	(10)	[c]	...
Turn wheresoe'er I may,	(6)	[d]	...
By níght or dáy,	(4)	[d]	...
The thíngs whích I háve séen I nów can sée no móre.	(12)	[c]	...

STROPHE ANTISTROPHE EPODE

The more intimate *Horatian ode* derives from Sappho via Horace and is a form of long/short line quatrain. Andrew Marvel [1621–78] shortened the first two lines to tetrameter for his *Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*:

ENGLISH HORATIAN ODE - iambic tetrameter/trimeter

He nó|thíng cóm|mon díd| or méan	(8)	[a]
Upón| that mé|mórá|ble scéne,	(8)	[a]
But wíth| híis kée|ner éye	(6)	[b]
The áx|e's édge| díd trý;	(6)	[b]

Classical *elegies* were written in *elegiac couplets*, alternate lines of dactylic hexameter (sometimes divided into halves or thirds) and pentameter.

CELTIC VERSE

the blacksmith's anvil

Irish verse is the oldest form of vernacular poetry in Europe, with the earliest written examples dating from the 6th and 7th centuries. Learned *Filidh*, seers, composed oral verse in Gaelic alongside ecclesiastical poets writing in Latin, sharing metres and forms. As with Anglo-Saxon verse (*opposite*), every line contains alliteration, with the alliterative syllables falling on stresses. Here is the 9th century poem *The Blackbird calling from the Willow*:

EARLY IRISH POEM - catalectic trochaic tetrameter (●○) dúm di × 4

ínt en| gáires| ásin| t-sáil	The bird doth from the willow speak
álainn| guílbnen| ás glan| gáir:	lovely clear-toned little beak:
rínn binn| blúide fir| dúib| drúin:	yellow bill of sleek black boy:
cás cor| cúirther,| gúth ind| lúin.	bright the song, the blackbird's voice.

From the 6th to the 12th centuries, compositions often alternated sections of verse with prose (*prosimetrum*) as in *Buile Shuibne*, ‘Sweeney’s Frenzy’, the story of a king who, cursed to madness by a saint, turns into a bird.

In the classical Bardic period [1200–1600] the traditional poetic forms were standardised, in particular the *Dan Direach*, which are composed in quatrains built from ‘leading’ and longer ‘closing’ trochaic couplets.

Later Irish poets captured some of these forms in English. Here are *hemi-stichs* from John Philpot Curran’s [1750–1817] *The Deserter’s Meditation*:

IRISH OCHTFOCLACH STANZA - catalectic dactylic dimeter (●○○) dúm diddy × 2

Bút as in| wáiling	then for that reason,
thére’s nought a|wáiling	and for a season
ánd death un|fáiling	let us be merry
will strike the| blów,	before we go.

ANGLO-SAXON VERSE

the push and pull of the oar

Anglo-Saxon verse was part of a rich, pre-Christian literary tradition of epic story, metaphysical fantasy, elegy and magic. It is accentual with four primary stresses per line, often end-stopped, with each line divided in half with the weight of meaning in the first half. Evidence about the lolling form survives in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late 14th C.) and *Beowulf* (8th–11th C.). Here is Beowulf’s funeral (trans. Murphy & Sullivan):

ANGLO SAXON STYLE - accentual amphibrachic tetrameter

The firewind fátered ¶ and flámes dwindled,	○●○ ○●○ ○●○ ○●○
hót at their héart ¶ the bróken bónehouse.	●○ ○●○ ○●○ ○●○
Her háir wáving, ¶ a Géatish wóman	○●○ ○●○ ○●○ ○●○
sáng for the Stálwart ¶ a sórrowful dírg	●○ ○●○ ●○ ○●○

Both consonants and vowels are alliterated, on at least two, though typically three, of the four stressed syllables (e.g. ‘fire’, ‘faltered’, ‘flames’).

A figurative device, or *trope*, widely used in Anglo-Saxon, Old-German and Norse verse is *kenning* (from *kenna*, ‘know, feel, show’). A kenning expresses one thing in terms of another: the sea becomes the *whale-road*; the ship a *sea-steed*; the body the *bonehouse*; in the Norse *Edda*, fire is the *sun of the houses*, and arms are *mountains of hawks*. And kennings can compound, so you can have a kenning of a kenning of a kenning:

COMPOUND KENNING - from *The Names of the Hare*, c. 1200, trans. S Heaney

The stárer,| the wóod-cat,	○●○ ○●○
the púrblind,| the fúr cat,	○●○ ○●○
the skúlder,| the bléary-eyed,	○●○ ○●○
the wáll-eyed,| the glánce aside ...	○●○ ○●○

GHAZAL

song to the beloved

The *ghazal* is a poetic form originating in North Africa and the Middle-East around the 6th century. In the 12th century it spread into South Asia and India via Sufism. Its theme is unrequited love, either because the love is forbidden or, especially within Sufism, the unobtainable beloved is God or a spiritual master. Ghazals frequently become intense, with the beloved referred to as a killer or assassin, and can include hyperbole or violence.

The form consists of five or more rhyming couplets and a refrain, with the last phrase of each line rhyming: *aa ba ca da* etc. Notoriously hard to translate, the form is nevertheless evident in this version by Walter Leaf [1852-1927] of a ghazal by the Persian poet Hafiz of Shiraz [1316-90]:

GHAZAL - rhyming couplets in hemistichs

Minstrel, awake the sound of glee, joyous and eager, fresh and free;

Fill me the bumper bounteously, joyous and eager, fresh and free.

O for a bower and one beside, delicate dainty, there to hide;

Kisses at will to seize and be: joyous and eager, fresh and free.

Sweet is my dear, a thief of hearts; bravery, beauty, saucy arts,

Odors and unguents, all for me, joyous and eager, fresh and free.

How shall the fruit of life be thine, if thou refuse the fruitful vine?

Drink of the wine and pledge with me, joyous and eager, fresh and free.

Call me my Saki silver-limbed, bring me my goblet silver-rimmed;

Fain would I fill and drink to thee, joyous and eager, fresh and free.

Wind of the West, if e'er thou roam, pass on the way my fairy's home;

Whisper of Hafiz amorously, joyous and eager, fresh and free.

The final verse of a ghazal often contains the poet's name (*as above*) or a hidden signature, a convention known as the *Maqta*.

TANKA & HAIKU

cutting through the moment

The classical *tanka* form, with its emphasis on nature, transience and beauty, dominated Japanese poetry, or *waka*, in the 9th and 10th centuries. It has five lines with a total of 31 *on* (syllables) in the pattern: 5-7-5-7-7. From the 10th to 17th centuries the form became collaborative, as *renga*. A *renga* stanza splits the *tanka* into three opening lines, a *hokku*, plus two contrasting lines written by someone else, as shown in the verse below (*right*), taken from a longer *Haikai no renga* by master Sogi and his disciples.

TANKA - Ono no Komachi [825-900]

Though I go to you [5]
ceaselessly along dream paths, [7]
the sum of those trysts [5]
is less than a single glimpse [7]
granted in the waking world. [7]

RENGA - Inō Sogi [1421-1502]

Some snow still remains [7]
as haze moves low on the slopes
toward evening. - Sogi [5]
Flowing water, far away [7]
and a plum-scented village - Shohaku [5]

By the 13th century, rules stated that a *hokku* must include a *kigo* (season word), appropriate to the season in which the *renga* was written, e.g. 'frog' for spring or 'rain' for summer, and also a *kireji* (cutting word) which, if placed at the end of a verse provides closure or return, but when used in the middle of a verse briefly cuts the stream of thought. By the time of Matsuo Basho [1644-1694], the *hokku* had begun to appear as an independent poem, the 5-7-5-*on haiku*, which keeps a sense of "opening without a closure".

HAIKU - Matsuo Bashō

By the ancient pond [5]
When a frog leaps into it [7]
The sound of water [5]

HAIKU - Yosa Buson [1716-84]

An evening cloudburst — [5]
sparrows cling desperately [7]
to trembling bushes [5]

POETIC DEVICES

rhetoric in verse

Rhetorical devices (or *figures*) are ways of patterning words, phrases, sentences and lines of verse to create deeper symmetry, meaning and beauty. Studied by orators as persuasive aids, they are also widely used by poets to enhance the vitality of their verse.

Repetition is the most common device, whether as *refrain*, *rhyme*, or *rhythm*, or as repeated consonants, in *alliteration* and *consonance* (e.g. *five/feet* and *blank/think*) or *assonance* in vowels, as in (*black/hat*) (see pages 26–7).

ALLITERATION ON ‘B’+‘TTER’

Betty Botter bought some butter, but she said, the butter’s bitter
If I put it in my batter it will make my batter bitter ...

Other common repetitions include *anaphora* (where several lines begin the same way), and *polyptoton* (when a word is used in more than one way, e.g. ‘*Please, please me*’). In *chiasmus*, from the Greek letter X (*chi*), sounds, words, phrases and grammar are repeated in reverse order:

CHIASMUS

The wave of the particle	I mean what I say	Swift as an arrow flying
is the particle of the wave	and I say what I mean	fleeing like a hare afraid

The first two examples reverse nouns and verbs, respectively, and exhibit *antimetabole*, total symmetry, while the third inverts adjective-simile-participle into participle-simile-adjective. Entire verses of the King James Bible, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* are structured in this way, giving them a feeling of necessary balance.

Another family of figurative devices uses repetition to compare one

thing to another, using *colour*, *imagery*, and *sensory clues* to invoke memories, and *simile* (‘as’ or ‘like’) and *metaphor* to draw parallels, e.g.:

METAPHOR - from *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, pub. 1623

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;

Words sometimes sound like the things they describe, a device known as *onomatopoeia*. Similarly, *portmanteau* mixes two words into one new one:

ONOMATOPOEIA & PORTMANTEAU - from *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll, 1872

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / did gyre and gimble in the wabe
All mimsy were the borogoves, / and the mome raths outgrabe.

Poets often extend comparisons via the human *personification* of animals, objects or ideas, e.g. ‘the wind whispered’. Sometimes these personifications may even be addressed directly, as in *apostrophe* (e.g. ‘O Moon!’):

APOSTROPHE - from *Holy Sonnet 10* by John Donne, 1572–1631

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;

Occasionally, the best way to draw a comparison is by *contrast*, which in its most binary form takes the form “not X”. In *antithesis* (or juxtaposition) opposing situations are overlapped for effect, e.g.:

ANTITHESIS - *Eternity* by William Blake, 1757–1827

He who binds to himself a joy / Does the wingéd life destroy
He who kisses the joy as it flies / Lives in eternity’s sun rise.

Poetic devices are the secret tools which poets use to enchant their audiences, but every poem still needs *atmosphere* (or mood) and symbolic *narrative*, and at the core of every poem is the poet, with their unique creative and artistic *voice*. I hope this book helps you find yours!

GLOSSARY

ACATALECTIC: Where a line contains the correct number of syllables for its metre (c.f. catalectic and acephalous).

ACCENTUAL VERSE: Rhythmic construction where only the stresses in each line are counted: e.g. Anglo-Saxon and much contemporary verse.

ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC VERSE: Rhythmic construction where both the number of syllables and stresses are counted in each line of verse.

ACEPHALOUS (Lit. headless): Lacking a syllable or syllables in the first foot of a line (= headless line), (c.f. catalectic and acatalectic).

ACROSTIC: A form where the first letter of each line of a poem spells a word. Also mesotic, middle of the line, and telescopic, end of the line.

ALLITERATION: A form of consonance; the repetition of stressed consonant sounds at the beginning of words (e.g. 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame' - G.M.Hopkins).

AMPHIMACER (Lit. long at both ends): (=cretic). A metrical foot of one unstressed syllable between two stressed ones; dum di dum.

AMPHIBRACH (Lit. short on both sides): A metrical foot of one stressed syllable between two unstressed syllables; di dum di.

ANCEPS: A variable metrical unit, normally either a trochee or a spondee.

ANAPEST (Lit. struck back): A metrical foot of two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable; di di dum.

ANGLO-SAXON VERSE: Accentual verse with 4 stresses per line. Lines are hemistich - in two halves, separated by caesura. No rhyme, alliteration on 2-3 primary stresses.

APOSTROPHE (app-os-iro-FEE): An exclamatory passage in addressed to an imaginary person/abstract entity. Often begins with 'O' (e.g. 'O death, where is thy sting?').

ASSONANCE: Repeating vowel sounds in successive words (e.g. do you like blue?).

BALLAD: A narrative poem in short, usually four line, stanzas; was often song. In pop music the term now refers to an emotive or dramatic love song.

BALLADE: French verse form of three 8-line stanzas and a 4-line envoi, rhyming ababbcb, bcbC.

BEDLAMITE VERSE: Poems in the voice of 'Poor Tom' or his sweetheart 'Merry Mad Maid'.

BLANK VERSE: Open form of non-stanzaic verse, unrhymed and usually in iambic pentameter. Appears frequently in plays of Shakespeare and poems of Milton.

CAESURA: A significant pause (often for breath) in a line of verse, usually marked with a comma, colon or semi-colon.

CATALECTIC: Lacking one or more syllables in the first, or more often last, foot of a line (c.f. acephalous and acatalectic).

CHAIN RHYME: Interlinking stanzas by carrying rhymes over from one stanza to the next (e.g. aba bcb cdc ded...).

CHORIAMB: A metrical foot of two stressed syllables sandwiched by two unstressed syllables.

CLOSED FORM: Any poetic form where metre, stanza, rhyme, and other features are all fixed (= fixed form).

CONTRACTION: Reducing the number of syllables in a word (= elision), (q.v. syncope and synaeresis).

CONSONANCE: The repetition of consonant sounds in successive words (e.g. tomorrow matters for Timmy, the end well found), (c.f. alliteration).

COUPLET: A 2-line rhyming stanza in any metre.

DACTYL (DACK-till, Gr. finger): A metrical foot of one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables; dum di di.

DIPODIC VERSE: Strongly metrical verse with only two feet per line. Rap lyrics are often dipodic.

DISTICH: A unit of two verse lines, usually a couplet.

ELISION: The omission of one or more sounds (vowel, consonant, or syllable) from words or phrases, often used to aid adherence to a metrical scheme or rhythm (e.g. oft, o'er), (q.v. syncope and synaeresis).

ELLIPSIS: Dropping words without impeding the reader's ability to understand meaning (e.g. 'I will away').

ENDSTOPPING: When a line of verse ends without running on (grammatically) to the next.

ENJAMBMENT: When a line runs or 'strides' into the next (e.g. I sing it in / My heart this / Joyful song).

EPENTHESIS: The addition of a sound to a word.

EPIC VERSE: Long and often dramatic narrative poetry with grand, noble, mythological, or nationally important themes (c.f. lyric poetry).

FEMININE RHYME: Rhymes the second from last syllables of successive words.

FEMININE ENDING: A line of verse which ends on an unstressed syllable.

FREE VERSE: Poetry with no conventional metre or form.

FOOT: A metrical unit, comprised of stressed and unstressed syllables, in varying combinations, used to measure and represent poetic metre. The system is inherited from ancient Greek literature and the different metrical feet retain their Greek names (e.g. iamb, dactyl, anapest, etc.).

GNOMIC POETRY: Verse containing short statements (gnomes) pertaining to general truth or morality (e.g. "Thus did Egtheow's son, so famous for battles and valient deeds, act as a brave man ought" - Beowulf).

HAIKU: Japanese poetic form. Three lines of 5-7-5 'on' (approximate to syllables). Syllabic metre. No rhyme. Used for meditative/lyrical/transcendental themes.

HEADLESS: See ACEPHALOUS.

HETEROMETRIC STANZA: A stanza with lines containing different numbers of syllables (c.f. isometric stanza).

HEMISTICH: A half-line of verse followed and preceded by a caesura.

HEPTAMETER: A metrical line of seven feet.

HEXAMETER: A metrical line of six feet.

HOLORHYME: A line/stanza that rhymes in its entirety (e.g. Ms Stephen, without a first-rate stakeholder sum or deal, Must, even, with outer fur straight, stay colder, some ordeal).

HYPERCATALECTIC: A metrical line of verse which contains an additional syllable or syllables (c.f. acephalous and acatalectic).

IAMB: A metrical foot containing one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, e.g. beSIDE.

ISOMETRIC STANZA: A stanza with lines containing equal numbers of syllables.

LAISSE: A stanza of varying length; each line typically decasyllabic or alexandrine; found in medieval French epic poetry. Line-endings are assonant rather than rhyming (e.g. "The Song of Roland").

LIMERICK: A 5-line rhyming poem, usually with an anapestic or amphibrachic metre.

LINEATION: The manner in which line breaks are inserted in a poem for expressive/rhythmical purposes.

LINKED VERSE: Poems written collectively by more than one person (often in large groups, e.g. renga).

LYRIC POETRY (ENGLISH): Poetry expressing personal

thoughts or feelings, typically spoken in first person (c.f. epic verse).

LYRIC POETRY (GREEK): Ancient Greek verse sung to music played on the lyre ('lyrikos' = adj. form of 'lyra').

MAD SONG: A verse form of 5-line stanzas. Variable accentual metre. Rhymes abcb etc. Used for nonsense, oddities and madness.

MASCULINE RHYME: Rhymes the last syllable of each word.

MASCULINE ENDING: A line of verse which ends on a stressed syllable.

METRE: The measurement of regular rhythm in verse.

MIMESIS: 'To imitate'. In ancient Greek poetics, the process by which the arts come to truth through imitation and stylization of humanity and nature.

OCTAMETER: A metrical line of eight feet.

OCTAVE: Any eight-line stanza, although most often two quatrains, the first eight lines of a sonnet.

ODE: An elaborately structured poem praising or glorifying an event or individual.

ON: Japanese phonetic units similar to English syllables but different in that they can contain two distinct sounds.

OPEN FORM: Metrical poetry with no fixed rhyme or stanza scheme (c.f. closed form, blank verse, free verse).

OTTAVA RIMA: A rhyming stanza form, originally from Italy, of 8 lines, usually in iambic pentameter.

PALINDROME: A device used since antiquity where a word, phrase, number or sequence reads the same backwards as forwards. Earliest from 79 AD Herculaneum. E.g. 'moon', 'race car', 'able was I ere I saw Elba', 'madam, I'm Adam'.

PANTOUM: Malayan closed verse form adapted to English.

PAEAN (PEE-uhn): A song/chant of praise, triumph, or imploration.

PAEON (PEE-uhn): A type of quaternary foot.

PENTAMETER: A metrical line of five feet.

PETRARCHAN SONNET: Sonnet form named for Francesco Petrarca [1304-74]. Two quatrains (an octave) followed by a sestet.

PROSODY: The study of poetic metre and the art of versification.

PYRRHIC (P-rik): A metrical foot of two unstressed syllables.

QUALITATIVE VERSE: Poetry which counts stressed syllables at regular intervals as either the only (accentual) or combined (accentual-syllabic) component of its metre.

QUANTITATIVE VERSE: The type of metrical poetry

written in Ancient Greek (and other syllable-timed languages) which counts syllable length, not stress.

QUATRAIN: A stanza of four lines.

RENGA: Japanese collaborative poetry, opening stanza developed into Haiku form. **RHYME ROYAL:** A 7-line stanza of iambic pentameter, rhyming ababbcc. Originally a medieval French form introduced into English poetry by Chaucer.

RONDEAU: A French verse form with various English adaptations. Usually consists of 12 or 15 lines in 2 or 3 rhyming stanzas with a refrain.

RUBAI / RUBA'YYAT: Verse form originally from Persia in quatrains rhyming aaba ccdc dded etc.

SAPPHIC ODE: English ode form adapted from the Sapphic stanza via Roman poet Horace who added a 5-syllable fourth line.

SAPPHIC STANZA: Hendecasyllabic (11 syllables per line) metrical / stanzaic scheme originally used by celebrated Greek lyric poetess Sappho (c.630-570 BC); 3 lines, 5 feet per line, usually: trochee, trochee or spondee, dactyl, trochee, spondee. (= Sapphic metre).

SCANSON: The process of determining and representing (usually graphically) the metrical nature of verse.

SESTINA: A closed verse form of six 6-line stanzas with a 3-line envoi at the end. Accentual-syllabic metre of any length. Normally no rhyme.

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET: A sonnet in iambic pentameter, three quatrains and a couplet (= English sonnet).

SONNET: A 14-line poem following various schemes and conventions; usually expressing affairs of the heart. Originally from 13th C. Italy.

SPONDEE: A metrical foot of two stressed syllables.

STANZA: The dividing unit of a poem comprised of a fixed number of lines, often arranged in a metrical pattern.

STICH (STIK): A line of poetry.

STICHIC (STIK-ik): Of, or in, lines only, as opposed to stanzas. Also, 'lines' as opposed to sentences - the difference between poetry and prose. (cf. strophic)

STROPHE: Lit. a "turn, bend, twist". Originally the first part of an ode in Greek tragedy. Now the term is usually considered equivalent to "stanza". Can also refer to a shift from one kind of metrical foot to another.

STROPHIC: Poetry composed in stanzas as distinct from epic poems or blank verse which are composed in lines. (cf. stichic), (= stanzaic).

STRESS: The emphasis of syllables in spoken language by

variation of some or all of the following: pitch, loudness, length and timbre.

SUBSTITUTION: Swapping, or substituting, one kind of metrical foot for another in lines of verse.

SYLLABIC VERSE: Poetic construction where only the number of syllables are counted in each line. Line breaks are often arbitrary/imperceptible when read aloud.

SYNAERESIS (see-NEA-ro-sis): Joining two vowels to create a single syllable (e.g. 'of man's first disobedience', Di-so-be-di-ence becomes di-so-be-dyence to preserve Milton's pentameter).

SYNCOPE (SIN-kult-pee): A form of elision; the omission from a word of either a consonant (e.g. 'ne'er') or unstressed vowel (e.g. 'hastening' to 'hast'ning).

SYZYGY (SIZ-ee-jed): Can refer to the combination of two metrical feet into one (e.g. iamb + trochee = choriamb).

TANKA: Traditional Japanese 5-line poem.

TERZA RIMA: Open form of 3-line stanzas in pentameter, rhyming aba bab cdc ded efe... ee. Used in Dante's 'Divine Comedy'. Narrative and lyrical.

TETRAMETER: A metrical line of four feet.

THORN LINE: A line without rhyme in a generally rhymed passage. There are ten 'thorn lines' among the 193 lines in Milton's irregularly rhymed 'Lycidas'.

TRIMETER: A metrical line of three feet.

TRIOLET: Closed form of 8 lines of accentual-syllabic verse with any metre. Rhymes ABaAbBAb (A+B = refrains). Used for lyrical/light verse/imagistic themes.

TRIPLET/TERCET: 3-line stanzas of any metre, rhyming aaa/aba. Semantically linked, often a complete statement

TROCHEE (TRO-key): A metrical unit (or "foot") containing one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable, e.g. STATEment, RIVER, WONder.

TROPE: A device (or "figure") which uses words in a non-literal sense. Tropes commonly used in poetry include metaphor, metonymy and simile.

VERSE: Poetry as distinct from prose. The word 'verse' is used interchangeably with 'poetry'. Also a traditional word for stanza.

VERSIFICATION: The art or technique of writing verse.

VILLANELLE: A 19 line poem (6 stanzas of 3 lines each) with rhyming refrains and a concluding quatrain, all in iambic pentameter. Also a French dance with sung lyrics.

VIRELAI: A French verse form often used in song and dance.

WRENCHED ACCENT: The forcing of an accent onto a non-accented syllable (e.g. 'in my imagination' becomes 'in my imagina-shee-aan').