

The world is charged with the **Grandeur**
of **God.** (*Gerard Manley Hopkins*)

PREFACE

This book introduces poetry, maybe the oldest, certainly the most intense of literature's genres. When we learn to read poems, we acquire a pleasure and resource we never lose. In reading great poetry something changes in us that stays unchanged.

In making selections for this collection, I have tried to serve one purpose: to help students to read poems with understanding and pleasure; to provide them with a basic vocabulary for analyzing and talking about poems.

I have arranged the selections in **Four Units**. The units may be used as they stand but they are not intended to be "teacher-proof". Many ways will suggest themselves to you in which units may be adapted, modified and extended, and many of the strategies we suggest for particular unit will be equally successful with others.

The book begins with a **Section** which provides an introduction to the elements of poetry. **Unit One** contains ten short and easy poems for warm up. In **Unit Two** the students will encounter ten poems on a variety of subjects and in variety of forms. The poems in this unit are accompanied by study questions to encourage careful and thoughtful reading of the poems. In **Unit Three** you will develop strategies for gaining the fullest appreciation of each poem. I have also provided short biographical sketches on each poet, and many questions are designed to generate class discussions. The selections in this unit are arranged in chronological order. In **Unit Four** the poets are arranged in alphabetical order, then the summaries of the poems are given to take the students through the poems at the first level of meaning. Each summary includes a statement of theme at the simplest level and sometimes a brief reference to some important elements is made in order to help the reader to understand the poem.

I have also explained some terms in the units and have provided a glossary which discusses the meanings of those terms. The glossary, therefore, is a guide as well as a source of explanation. The list of books, which has been consulted and drawn upon, is appended at the end, and I acknowledge my indebtedness to their respective authors and publishers.

It is hoped that the book will prove useful to university students of various fields, especially those majoring in English.

A.A. Rezai (PH.D.)
abriz University

INTRODUCTION

Reading Poetry

All study of poetry starts with reading. The first thing you should remember is

that reading poetry is an art of discovery and revelation. The simplest way to respond to a poem is through the emotions. One first *feels* a poem, comprehending what it is about without necessarily understanding it. During the first reading, the reader should be open and loose, allowing the rhythms, the images and flow of the poem to impress themselves. Since most of the poems in this book are short, they can be read several times in a short period of time. Additional readings after the first will bring increased comprehension, then understanding.

Active readers become involved and ask questions about the use of words and clarify the intended use of language. They listen for the music of the poem; for the sound of the poem reinforces its meaning. They stop to summarize and to paraphrase the poems meaning. Finally, they pull together all the elements of the poems and add to them their own evaluations.

What Is Poetry?

The word "*poetry*", in fact comes from a Greek verb which means "*to make*". Poetry is a language that says more than ordinary language and says it with fewer words and in less space. Poets use language in a special way. Like other writers, poets choose words for their sense, but they also choose words for what they hint at or suggest, for the way they sound, and for the word pictures they create. Ordinary language makes sense. Poetry makes sense and sound, rhythm, music and vision.

Short stories, essays, newspaper articles, your college books, and so on, are written in prose. Poetry is usually in verse. Verse is a language with a definite rhythm, or beat. It is usually arranged in columns down the page. Sometimes these columns of lines are divided into units called stanzas. Lines of verse often (but not always) rhyme. Although you could say that poetry is what is written in verse, it is always more than rhythm and rhyme. Poetry, as a great poet said, is the more memorable kind of language.

Kinds of Poetry

Though poetry ranges from limerick to epic, there is general agreement about three major categories of poetry, *lyric*, *dramatic*, and *narrative*.

A *lyric* poem is fairly short and subjective, usually expressing the emotions and thoughts of one person, the speaker of the poem. Originally written to be sung to accompaniment of a lyre. Lyrics are often strongly melodic. Hymn, song, sonnet, ode, elegy, pastoral and perhaps haiku are all types of lyrics. Though entirely different in mood, what these lyrics have in common is that

they express through image, event, and scenes an individual state of mind.

Dramatic poetry employs dramatic form or technique. It is a poetry in which the speaker is clearly someone other than the poet. The essential feature in all dramatic poems is the persona, a character created by the poet and placed in a situation that involves some conflict or action. A dramatic poem may involve a single character or more than one, but the characters speak always in their own voices, which are not to be confused with the voice of the poet. Some of the best dramatic poetry consists of a dialogue in which more than one character speaks. As you read this poem in the book, look for the way in which death becomes a character.

Narrative poetry is poetry that tells a story, recounts a series of events. Like a short story, a narrative poem has a plot, characters, a setting and a theme. Unlike a short story, it is written in verse, language with a definite rhythm, or beat. In many, but not all narrative poems, the verses rhyme. Narrative poems, like other kinds of poetry, are often divided into stanzas, or groups of lines that form a unity. The stanzas of a poem usually have the same number of lines and the same rhyme pattern. The narrative poems may be very long, running to many thousands of lines in epics such as Homer's *Odyssey* or John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But a narrative may be compressed to the brevity of a single quatrain.

Figurative Language

It is the language that uses figures of speech. A figure of speech is a way of saying one thing and meaning another. For example, when Tennyson says that *the eagle* "clasps the crag with crooked hands" (p.19), he means that the eagle's claw are angular, bent, and bony looking reminding him of mangled human hands.

Three of the most important figures of speech are *simile*, *metaphor*, and personification. A *simile* compares one thing to another using the word *like* or *as*; for example, "This bread is like rubber." A *metaphor* compares one thing to another without using *like* or *as* "*Genius* is a fountain." *Personification* gives human characteristics to an animal, object, or idea "The sun is a wizard."

As you read the poems in this book, look for the figures of speech. Notice how they enrich meaning and add vividness and force to expression.

Imagery

Imagery means a poet's use of words to create mental pictures, or images, that communicate experience. Images are impressive because they make ideas concrete. It is presented in language in such a way that we can see, hear, smell, taste and touch it. So an image may appeal to one of the five senses, though in literature visual images are the most common. As you read "*The Pasture*" (p.20), look for specific words Robert Frost uses to create vivid word pictures. You must be able to picture in your mind what the poet means by his use of

imagery in order for his poem to be effective. Imagery is one of the most important resources poets make use of to capture and express experience.

Sound System

The best way to read a poem is to read it aloud, for although poems usually come to us as a visual experience, as words locked into the printed page, they are intended to be heard as well as seen. An attentiveness to the sounds and patterns of sounds is essential to the full appreciation of most poems. The basic elements of the sound system in poetry are *rhythm*, *meter*, and *rhyme*.

In poetry, *rhythm* is the arrangement, or pattern of accented and unaccented syllables in a word "*the beat*". For example, if you read the following lines from Tennyson's poem aloud, you will hear the forceful rhythm of the lines:

Theirs is not to make reply,
Theirs is not to reason why.
Theirs but to do and die.

Like songs, different poems have different rhythms. Usually a poet will use a rhythm that is appropriate to the subject and the poet's feeling about it. When you read a poem, your first concern should be with understanding what the lines mean. Your next concern should be with "*catching the beat*" and responding to it.

Meter is the pattern of accented and unaccented syllables that form the basis of a poem's rhythm. So the meter of a poem can be called its rhythmical pattern. This pattern is determined by the number and types of stresses, or beats, in each line. To describe the meter of a poem, you must *scan* its lines. *Scanning* involves marking the stressed and unstressed syllables, as follows:

The life | I lead | I want | to be

As you can see, each strong stress is marked with a slanted line (/) and each weak stress with a horseshoe symbol (^).

The weak and strong stresses are then divided by vertical lines (|) into groups called *feet*.

Rhyme is the repetition of a sound in two or more words or phrases. It is *sound*, not spelling, that determines rhyme. The common type of the rhyme that occurs at ends of the lines is called *end rhyme*:

Here she lies, a pretty *bud*,
Lately made of flesh and *blood*,
Who as soon fell fast *asleep*,
And her little eyes did *peep*.

When the rhyme occurs elsewhere than at the ends of lines, it is called *Internal Rhyme*. In the following example from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, note the internal rhymes in the first and third lines:

The fair breeze *blew*, the white foam *flew*,

The furrow followed *free*:
 We were the *first*, that even *burst*
 Into that silent *sea*.

A *rhyme scheme* is a regular pattern of rhyming words in a poem. The rhyme scheme of a poem is indicated by using different letters of the alphabet for each new rhyme. In an *abab* stanza, for example, line one rhymes with line three and line two

rhymes with line four.

I wandered lonely as a cloud, a
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills, b
 When all at once I saw a crowd a
 A host, of golden daffodils; b
 Beside....

Repetition in poetry is the use, again and again, of a word nor phrase. When the word or phrase appears in the same position in all or many of the stanzas of the poem, it is termed a *refrain*. In the following lines from a traditional Eskimo poem, the refrain has been italicized:

I wonder what the dear south wind
 has on its mind
as it blows past?
 Does it think about the small people
 Who live north of us?
Does it think of them
as it blows past?

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds. Poets use alliteration to create musical effects and draw attention to certain words or ideas, and to imitate sounds. In the following lines Christina Rossetti uses alliteration to imitate the sound of the wind:

Who has seen the wind
 Neither you nor I:
 But when the trees bow down their heads
 The wind is passing by.

Consonance and alliteration, as we have seen, involve the repetition of consonant sounds. *Assonance* refers to the repetition of vowel sounds in words next to or near to one another: "*take fate*".

Ways into Poetry

Poems give a lot of people a lot of pleasure. Sometimes a poem appeals to you straight away. At other times a new poem will have to be read several times and thought about or talked about before you start to enjoy it. However, a poem can give you pleasure each time you come to it just like a piece of music that you have begun to enjoy. Each reading can bring more understanding and more

satisfaction. Again, as with pieces of music, not everybody will appreciate the same poem in the same way. Sometimes you need to find your way into the meaning and pleasure of a poem.

Here are a number of approaches you can use to help you find that way in. Of course not *all* of them may be suitable for you or for all the poems in this book. Some of these activities you will find best to do on your own. Some will be most effective with another person or a small group in your class.

1. *Be prepared to read a poem a great many times, if necessary*, both for
2. pleasure and to add to your understanding.
2. Read a poem silently then read it aloud to one person or to a small group.
3. Prepare a dramatic reading with another person or a small group so as to convey the meaning of a poem as best you can. You could record your version for playing back to the class and for further discussion.
4. Prepare a group choral reading of a suitable poem.
5. Choose a poem you wish to learn by heart and when you have mastered it, present it to your group or the class.
6. Choose music or sound effects or pictures to accompany the reading of a poem.