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# Poetry Appreciation and Analysis

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First of all,  
What makes a poem, a poem?

## Is it rhyme and meter?

- Rhyme and meter are extremely important in the history of poetry, given its shared history with songs
- But conventionally, they do not yet make a work a poem...

# Is it emotions and feeling?

- Yes, many poems express heightened emotions
- But you can go around the room yelling and screaming and that may not be considered poetry just yet

# Is it diction?

- Poetic diction, which includes rhyme and meter, is the structure and means of a poem.
- But what makes a poem, a poem conventionally is...

# Image

- Conventionally, image or imagery is what makes the poem.
- Image refers to a mental picture crafted through words.
- A poem is not something abstract.

# Image and imagery

- From the *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*: “most commonly, a visual, **physical representation** of something (such as a photograph) or a **mental picture** of some visible thing or things.”

## Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.



# On Imagery

- Imagery does not just refer to visual images.
- An adept poet may also use words to encapsulate auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile experiences.

## Visual Imagery:

From “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot

When the **evening is spread out against the sky**

Like a patient etherized upon a table;

Let us go, through **certain half-deserted streets,**

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

And **sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells**

## **Auditory Imagery:**

From “The Bells” by  
Edgar Allan Poe

While the stars that oversprinkle  
All the heavens, seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight;  
Keeping **time, time, time,**  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the **bells, bells, bells, bells,**  
**Bells, bells, bells—**  
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

## Olfactory Imagery:

From “Preludes” by T.S. Eliot

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.

Six o'clock.

The burnt-out ends of smoky days

## **Gustatory Imagery:**

"This Is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

## **Tactile Imagery:**

From “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
We could nor laugh nor wail;  
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!  
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,  
And cried, A sail! a sail!

# Denotation and Connotation

- In poetry, images are often “upgraded” to “figurative expressions”
- “Upgraded” images have a denotative and a connotative meaning.

# Denotation and Connotation

- **Denotation:** The dictionary definition of a word
- **Connotation:** The figurative meaning the word takes on
- **Example: Rose**
  - Denotation: A flower with red and white petals
  - Connotation: Love or the beauty of a person's face



# Imagery and Dramatic Situation

- In many cases, poems also have a “story element” known as the dramatic situation
- What is literally happening in the poem

## **Determining the Dramatic Situation**

### **What is the subject matter of the poem?**

- What is “happening” in the poem?
- Who are introduced in the poem?
- What images are presented?
- What do these images suggest?

### **Who is the speaker/persona of the poem?**

- Can we generate an acceptable profile for the speaker?
- Where is the speaker in relation to the subject matter?
- Is the speaker addressing someone? What is the speaker's relationship with the addressee (if any)?
- What is the speaker's attitude towards the subject matter or the addressee?

# **The Song of Wandering Aengus**

*William Butler Yeats*

I went out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread;  
And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And someone called me by my name:  
It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name and ran  
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

## Determining the Dramatic Situation

**Speaker:** Aengus, an Irish god associated with love and dreams.

**Dramatic Situation:** In the poem, he is depicted as an aging wanderer who, despite the passage of time, still continues to search for his lost love.

# Determining the Dramatic Situation

- **Speaker's Profile**

- A dreamer, a romantic, or even an idealist
  - A seeker of beauty and love.
  - Aging yet persistent
- Addressee: A sort of confessional to the reader

# **Determining the Dramatic Situation**

- **Relationship to the Subject:**
  - A sense of devotion, longing, and persistence with a hint of nostalgia in his search for the girl in the vision.

# Images and Ambiguity

- That the images in the poem can have a connotative and denotative meaning establishes a poem's *ambiguity*.
- “The machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry.” – William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*



- **“Fire in My Head”**
  - Headache?
  - Boredom?
  - Passion or energy?
  - Restlessness of youth?
- **“Apple blossom in her hair”**
  - A real flower
  - A recognizable physical feature (scent)
- **Apple = In Celtic mythology, a fruit associated with eternity**
- Wandering Aengus = to search for a love that has the timelessness of apples and knows me by my name.

# Ambiguity and Figurative Expression

- In some cases ambiguity opens the poem to different kinds of figurative expression.
- Some of the more common ones are:
  - Simile and Metaphor
  - Metonymy and Synecdoche
  - Personification

# Simile and Metaphor

- Metaphors or similes are figures of speech that compare with similarities.
- Similes use “like” or “as” while metaphors do not.
- Examples of Metaphor:
  - **Causeway Bay** is a **playground** for shoppers.
  - **Joe’s Coffee** is an **oasis** in the busy shopping center
- Examples of Similes:
  - **Commuting during rush hour** *is like being in a stampede.*
  - **Her face** is as beautiful *as a rose*

# **In a Station of the Metro**

*Ezra Pound*

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

# In a Station of the Metro

*Ezra Pound*

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

**Tenor:** What is being described

**Vehicle:** What is used to  
describe it

**Effect:** The wet, black bough suggests a rainy, perhaps gloomy environment—urban and cold—while the petals suggest fleeting beauty, vulnerability, and transience → how does this illustrate a packed commute in an urban environment?

# Metonymy & Synecdoche

- If similes and metaphors are about comparison and similarities, metonymy and synecdoche are figures of speech on substitution and association.
- **Metonymy:** The substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant.
- **Synecdoche:** A kind of metonym where the part is made to represent the whole or vice versa.

# Examples from the Bards!

## **William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar":**

**Example:** "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

**Explanation:** Here, "ears" is used to represent the act of listening.

## **William Shakespeare's "Hamlet":**

**Example:** "The pen is mightier than the sword."

**Explanation:** "Pen" represents the written word, and "sword" represents military force.

## **Homer's "The Iliad":**

**Example:** "The crown" for the king.

**Explanation:** "The crown" is used to represent the authority and power of the king.

# Ozymandias

## Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, **whose frown,**  
**And wrinkled lip,** and **sneer of cold command,**  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The **hand** that mocked them, and **the heart** that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

The different parts of the sculpture remind the reader of the king's tyranny but it also is a reminder of the fleetingness of power. He is no more.



# Personification

- Assigning human attributes to non-humans, objects, or even concepts.

# Allusions

- A figure of speech that makes a reference to someone or something by name (a person, object, location, etc.).
- In most cases, the work does not explain explicitly state its relationship to the context of the work, so the reader is often invited to make the connections on their own.

# From “Ulysses by the Merlion” by Edwin Thumboo

Perhaps having dealt in things,  
Surfeited on them,  
Their spirits yearn again for images,  
Adding to the Dragon, Phoenix,  
Garuda, Naga those Horses of the Sun,  
This lion of the sea,  
This image of themselves.

Concept of nation-  
building through myth-  
making.

An allusion to the  
creation story

# Defamiliarization in Poetry

- Figures of speech generate an experience of defamiliarization.
- Defamiliarization is an artistic technique that unsettles readers' habitual ways of seeing the world.
- Poetry allows us to see our world from new perspectives.

# **A Martian Sends a Postcard Home**

## *Craig Raine*

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings  
and some are treasured for their markings –

they cause the eyes to melt  
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but  
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight  
and rests its soft machine on ground:

then the world is dim and bookish  
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.  
It has the property of making colours darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside –  
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film  
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist  
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,  
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it  
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up  
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer  
openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.  
They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt  
and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,  
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves –  
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

# **Sound, Sense, and Forms of Poetry**

## Preliminary Activity

Below is a poem without line cuts. Try to do your own line cutting or try to imagine what the poem looks like with line cuts. As you do your own line cuts, think about the underlying logic behind your line cutting – what makes you think the poem looks like that?

“Roof leaks still falls rain my pots and pans fill half-full with monsoon music.”



## **Sound and Form in poetry**

- Goes back to the oral origins of poetry as performance texts.
- Even poems that seem to be “free verse” have an internal auditory and formal logic.
- For now, let us look at some of the formal elements of poetry, beginning with sound.

# Patterns as poetic devices

- **Repetition**

- Repeating words, phrases, or lines throughout the poem

- **Rhyme**

- Patterns of end-sounds

- **Consonance**

- Repetition of consonant sounds

- **Alliteration**

- A special kind of consonance where the repetition of consonant letters happens in the stressed syllables.

- **Assonance**

- Repetition of vowel sounds

## **maggie and milly and molly and may**

e.e. cummings

maggie and milly and molly and may  
went down to the beach(to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang  
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

milly befriended a stranded star  
whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing  
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

may came home with a smooth round stone  
as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose(like a you or a me)  
it's always ourselves we find in the sea

# **maggie and milly and molly and may**

e.e. cummings

- The nursery rhyme-like tone adds a layer to the philosophical meditation
  - We experience life differently
  - The sea as a mirror of life
  - The innocence of youth can lead to profound meditations on life.

## More on Forms and patterns

- These sounds do not just appear randomly but they are positioned and arranged in a particular structure.
  - Lines – the basic unit of versification
  - Stanza - group of lines
  - Rhyme schemes – patterns of rhymes at the end of each lines.
- These structures in turn help us explore the poem's complexity.

# London

## William Blake

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.

And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

# London

## William Blake

I wander thro' each **charter'd** street, (a)

Near where the **charter'd** Thames does flow. (b)

And mark in every face I meet (a)

**Marks of** weakness, **marks of** woe. (b)

**In every** cry **of every** Man, (c )

**In every** Infants cry of fear, (d )

**In every** voice: **in every** ban, (c )

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear (d )

How the Chimney-sweepers cry (e)

Every blackning Church appalls, (f)

And the hapless Soldiers sigh (e )

Runs in blood down Palace walls (f)

But most thro' midnight streets I hear (g)

How the youthful Harlots curse (h)

Blasts the new-born Infants tear ( g)

And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse (h)

The poem mostly follows a fixed rhyme scheme and structure (iambic octameter or 8 metrical feet). Except one line. Can we play the popular game *Among Us* for a bit and see which line does not follow?

# London

## William Blake

I wander thro' each **charter'd** street, (a)  
Near where the **charter'd** Thames does flow. (b)

And mark in every face I meet (a)  
**Marks of** weakness, **marks of** woe. (b)

**In every** cry **of every** Man, (c )

**In every** Infants cry of fear, (d )

**In every** voice: **in every** ban, (c )

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear (d )

The highlighted line marks a trochaic turn in the poem (from iambic to trochaic). What is the effect? Marks the break in the rhythm and the speaker's encounter with people



The Form and Structure, in other words, help build the poem's meaning!

- 1.Sonnet** – A 14-line poem with a specific rhyme scheme and meter, often exploring themes of love, nature, or philosophy. The two most common types are the Shakespearean (English) sonnet and the Petrarchan (Italian) sonnet.
- 2.Haiku** – A three-line Japanese poem with a 5-7-5 syllable structure, typically focusing on nature, seasons, or fleeting moments of beauty.
- 3.Limerick** – A humorous five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme and a bouncy rhythm, often ending with a witty or absurd punchline.
- 4.Villanelle** – A 19-line poem with a complex structure of repeating lines and a strict rhyme scheme (ABA ABA ABA ABA ABA ABAA), often used to express obsession or deep emotions.
- 5.Ballad** – A narrative poem that tells a story, usually in quatrains with an ABCB or ABAB rhyme scheme, often focusing on love, adventure, or tragedy.
- 6.Ode** – A lyrical poem that praises or celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea, often written in an elevated, formal tone.

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# Case Study: The Sonnet

- 14 lines, usually iambic.
- Two popular versions: Petrarchan (ABBAABBA CDECDE) and Shakespearean (ABABCDCDEFEFGG).
- Typically structured like an argument:
  - First introduces a topic,
  - Initiates a creative explication on the topic,
  - Proceeds to a shift in perspective (called a volta)
  - Wraps up the whole thing in the final two lines.

# Sonnet 29 by William Shakespeare

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweep my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least;  
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
(Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

- Here we encounter a speaker lamenting his failures and of being an outcast (black color).
- He then proceeds to meditate on his cruel fate, cursing heavens, comparing himself to a peer who seems more blessed
- We then reach the volta (violet color) where he thinks of a “you.” His mood then changes; he is grateful and happy because of his relationship with that you, presumably the beloved.
- The last two lines (the green) then summarizes the whole sonnet.

# Case Study: Haiku

## **Third World Music on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of Rain**

*Marjorie Evasco*

Roof leaks still falls rain  
my pots and pans fill half-full  
with monsoon music.

- A haiku originally in English by a Filipino writer
- There are exactly 23 words in the poem
- The tension between the ability of art to control the uncontrollable: nature.

# Doing a Comparative Study in Poetry



- Comparative studies in general are able to highlight similarities and differences in terms of:
  - authorship (works by the same author)
  - time period
  - subject matter
  - form
  - combination of above
- When choosing works for comparison, there should be some noticeable similarities and differences.

# The Chimney Sweeper (Innocence)

When my mother died, I was very *young*,  
And my father sold me while yet my *tongue*  
Could scarcely cry " '*weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!*"  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I *sleep*.

## Dramatic situation:

- Highlights the poverty situation of the child and his family
- Child labor and the terrible situation the child is in
- Weep, weep, weep → Reference to crying but also the child's inability to fully say the word "sweep"

There's little **Tom Dacre**, who cried when his head  
That curled like a **lamb's** back, was shaved, so I said,  
"Hush, **Tom**! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As **Tom** was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, **Dick, Joe, Ned**, & **Jack**,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

### **Discussion Points:**

- 1.The lamb as a Biblical reference
- 2.What is the significance of the names? Why did the speaker name the children?

# The Lamb as a Biblical Reference

- The lamb as a symbol of purity but also sacrifice
  - Lambs as sacrificial animals
  - Jesus as the “Lamb of God”
- Reference to the youth and innocence of the chimney sweeper but also to how they are being “sacrificed.”

And by came an Angel who had a **bright** key,  
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a **green plain**, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then **naked & white**, all their bags left behind,  
They **rise upon clouds**, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

### **Discussion Points:**

1. Death is portrayed as something beautiful. Contrast this with the dark and grotesque imagery in the previous stanzas.
2. Green as a reference to the pastoral
3. Cruel irony: Death is the only escape from the poverty.
4. Justification of the suffering draws from Christian Theology.

# The Chimney Sweeper (Experience)

A *little black thing* among the snow,  
Crying "*weep! 'weep!*" in notes of woe!  
"Where are thy father and mother? say?"  
"*They are both gone up to the church* to pray.

## Discussion Points

1. A little black thing = small and dehumanized. A reflection on the child's state. Note the tension also between black and white colors.
2. "Weep, weep" = a mirroring of what the Chimney Sweeper poem from the Songs of Innocence with a more somber tone.
3. "They are both gone up to the church" = Blake's critique of parental (and government) neglect.

Because I was *happy upon the heath*,  
And *smil'd* among the winter's snow,  
They clothed me in the *clothes of death*,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

Discussion Points:

- 1. Happy upon the heath:** Parental jealousy or a child's interpretation of the events?
- 2. They:** Who? The parents? The government.
- 3. Clothes of death:** Note the contradiction: clothes as a source of comfort and protection but here they are seen as a condemnation. Death = literally, the boy is covered in soot, and metaphorically it means he is miserable.
- 4. Notes of Woe:** Highlights the lost innocence of a child. Observe also the use of "notes" rather than "song."

And because *I am happy and dance and sing*,  
They think they have done me no injury,  
And are gone to *praise God and his Priest and King*,  
Who make up a *heaven of our misery*.”

- 1. I am happy and dance and sing:** The child presents himself a happy person, concealing and repressing his true feelings and sentiment.
- 2. Praise God and his Priest and the King:** The parents are accused of collaborating with the elite of English society such as the church and the monarchy.
- 3. Heaven of our misery:** Several meanings
  1. Oxymoron of the child's state (heaven vs misery)
  2. Heaven = “good life.” The elite benefit from our labor.
  3. Make up a heaven = they present heaven as a place where they will be happy later if they just do their duty.



Rubric	From the Songs of Innocence	From the Songs of Experience
Perspective	Told from the POV of a young, innocent child	Told from the POV of an older, more experienced child
Tone	Hopeful	Cynical and bitter
Theme	Faith in God brings eventual freedom	Religion is used to justify suffering
Symbolic Use of Colors	White hair = purity, angelic visions = hope	Black soot = corruption,
Similarities: Depiction of child labor, critique of society, and institutions		