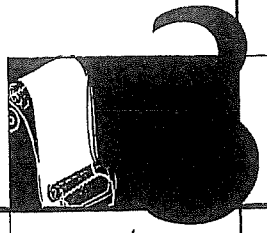


unit three

Love Sonnets

VERSE

SHAKESPEARE THE POET

The sonnet was introduced to England from Italy in the late 1580s. The Italian, Petrarch, had made the form famous in his sonnet cycle dedicated to Laura, and English poets such as Surrey and Wyatt spread its popularity. Twelve hundred sonnets survive from the 1590s.

The sonnet form was attractive because it challenged the poet's wit, having to match the sentiment and logic to the strict requirements of stanza and rhyme scheme. It was a highly conventional form in its subject matter as well. There was a set of accepted themes and the title was usually the name of the woman to whom the poem was dedicated. One of the standard themes was a 'catalogue', sometimes called a 'blazon' which was a kind of list of the woman's beauties. Another was the idea of verse (poetry) making its subject and their qualities immortal.

Most people know that Shakespeare wrote sonnets as well as plays and some longer poems. In fact he wrote 154 sonnets that were first published, apparently without his authority, in 1609. One unexpected aspect of Shakespeare's sonnets is that 126 of them are addressed to a man. However, although homoerotic elements are identified, they are not homosexual in content but rather express a platonic love, not unusual in the sixteenth century. Another unusual feature is the very personal and unconventional style found in the sonnets addressed to his mistress, the 'Dark Lady'.

The sonnet has fourteen lines and it sets out an argument, usually on the topic of love or one's lover. The rhythm is usually iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme has two or three main variants. Shakespeare used three quatrains (groups of four lines), followed by a couplet (two lines) with the rhyme scheme *a b a b c d c d e f e f g g*. Sometimes the rhyming couplet at the end serves to confirm the preceding argument; at other times it marks a complete departure from the earlier ideas, a rejection. The point at which the argument turns is called the 'volta'.

The following two sonnets are surprisingly fresh and accessible considering they were composed four hundred years ago!

Shakespeare was clearly not impressed with the idea of slavishly copying the clichéd praises of earlier poets or of his contemporaries. He opted for a much more honest and naturalistic appraisal of his mistress.

platonic: spiritual, without sexual desire; comes from the Greek philosopher Plato who conceived of a love that transcended self-interest and set its sights on an abstract ideal.

iamb: a metrical foot of two syllables: a short followed by a long or an unaccented followed by an accented

iambic: using iambs

foot, feet: metrical unit/s of verse

pentameter: verse using five metrical feet

The Sonnet

A sonnet is a one-stanza poem of fourteen lines, written in *iambic pentameter.* One way to describe a verse line is to talk about how many stressed and unstressed syllables are in the line. A simple grouping of syllables, some stressed, some unstressed, is called a *foot.* The iambic foot is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. *Pentameter* means there are five feet in the line. "Iambic Pentameter," then, means a line of ten syllables, which alternates unstressed and stressed syllables according to the iambic rhythm.

The *rhyme scheme* of a sonnet refers to the pattern formed by the rhyming words at the end of each line. Each end-rhyme is assigned a letter, and the fourteen letters assigned to the sonnet describe the rhyme scheme. Different kinds of sonnets have different rhyme schemes.

The **Petrarchan** or Italian sonnet, named after the fourteenth century Italian poet Petrarch, has the rhyme scheme ABBAABBA CDECDE. [You might imagine the end-rhymes represented by the letters to be something like cat log hog bat, rat bog tog fat, long neck noose, song heck loose]. The first eight lines, which all end in either rhyme A [at] or B [og], form the *octave.* The last six lines, which end in C [ong], D [eck], or E [oose], form the *sestet.* Variant rhyme schemes for the sestet also include CDCDCD and CDEDCE. There is usually a pause or break in thought between the octave and sestet called the *volta*, or turn. Traditionally, one main thought or problem is set out in the octave and brought to a resolution in the sestet.

The **Shakespearean** or English sonnet was actually developed in the sixteenth century by the Earl of Surrey, but is named after Shakespeare because of his great sonnet sequence (a series of sonnets all exploring the same theme) printed in 1609 . The Shakespearean sonnet has the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG, forming three *quatrains* (four lines in a group) and a closing *couplet* (two rhymed lines). The problem is usually developed in the first three quatrains, each quatrain with a new idea growing out of the previous one. Sometimes the first two quatrains are devoted to the same thought, resembling the octave of the Petrarchan sonnet, and followed by a similar volta. Most strikingly unlike the Petrarchan version, the Shakespearean sonnet is brought to a punchy resolution in the epigrammatic final couplet.

The Spenserian sonnet is a variation of the English sonnet with the rhyme scheme ABAB BCBC CDCD EE, in which the quatrains are linked by a continuation of one end-rhyme from the previous quatrain. The Miltonic sonnet is a Petrarchan sonnet which omits the volta. Wordsworth often used the Petrarchan form, but changed the octave to ABBA ACCA because it is harder to find rhyming words in English than in Italian.

The traditional subject of the sonnet has primarily been Love. Petrarch wrote his great sonnet sequence to his beloved, Laura. Many of Shakespeare's sonnets are also about Love, but Shakespeare mocked the standard worshipful attitude of the Petrarchan sonnet in his famous "My Mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun." Development of the English sonnet led to consideration of other topics, including mortality, mutability, politics, and writing itself. Donne turned from the secular subject of Love to consideration of sacred themes in a group of nineteen Holy Sonnets. Milton, instead of writing a sequence about Love, wrote individual sonnets about serious ideas, political themes, or public occasions. After Milton the sonnet declined in popularity--until it was taken up again with fervou\r during the Romantic period.

(Melissa J Sites)

Petrarchan Sonnets and Courtly Love

Il Canzoniere (Song Book).

Petrarch wrote a total of 366 sonnets in his work **Il Canzoniere (Song Book).** The sonnets were written between 1327-1374 and are divided into two sections: #1-262 and #263-366. Sonnets are more significant when they are read in the order that the poet places them in, rather than reading them at random. They become a "unity within a larger unity."

The total structure of **Il Canzoniere** is that section one makes a concrete relationship between the poet and the beloved and section two, which is shorter, brings about some sort of change in the relationship and the two members involved in it. In Petrarch's case, the change is the death of his beloved. Ending his sequence was difficult for Petrarch because the goal of winning his beloved is not achieved. From here, Petrarch's writings took on a religious theme.

Francesco Petrarca

Francesco Petrarca, better known in English as Petrarch, was born on the 20th of July, 1304 in Arezzo, where his father was in exile from Florence. His family soon moved to Avignon, in order for Petrarch's father to acquire a job with the Papal Court. On the 6th (or possibly 10th) of April, in 1327, Petrarch saw a woman known to us only as Laura and fell in love. He then proceeded to write love poetry to and about her for the rest of his life.

In Petrarch's love poems, there are obvious connections to the tradition of Courtly Love. The main way this is seen is through his portrayal of his beloved Laura. She is shown as a golden-haired beauty:
"She was beautiful, of course...Laura's hair was gold, her complexion snowy, though flushing on occasion. Her eyelashes were ebony, her eyes black. Her mouth was angelic, full of pearls and roses. She sang sweetly, in a thrilling voice. She was fond of finery, twined pearls and gems in her hair, and wore silk gloves, then rare and costly...She was prudent, modest, indomitably chaste."

This description closely matches the way women were portrayed in Courtly Love. To be able to see this, one must take a closer look at the tradition of Courtly Love.

Courtly love

Courtly love was a highly conventionalized medieval tradition of love between a knight and a married noblewoman, first developed by the troubadours of southern France and extensively employed in European literature of the time. The love of the knight for his lady was regarded as an ennobling passion and the relationship was typically unconsummated.In essence courtly love is a literary conception of love that emphasized nobility and chivalry. Medieval literature is filled with examples of knights setting out on adventures and performing various services for ladies because of their "courtly love".

Sonnet LXIX.
Erano i capei d' oro all' aura sparsi.
He Paints the Beauties of Laura, Protesting his Unalterable Love.

Loose to the breeze her golden tresses flow'd
Wildly in thousand mazy ringlets blown,
And from her eyes unconquer'd glances shone,
Those glances now so sparingly bestow'd.
And true or false, meseem'd some signs she show'd
As o'er her cheek soft pity's hue was thrown;
I, whose whole breast with love's soft food was sown,
What wonder if at once my bosom glow'd?
Graceful she moved, with more than mortal mien,
In form an angel: and her accents won
Upon the ear with more than human sound.
A spirit heavenly pure, a living sun,
Was what I saw; and if no more 'twere seen,
T' unbend the bow will never heal the wound.

Anon., Ox., 1795.

Looking at form: the sonnet

The sonnet has been an important form in the history of English poetry. It originated in Italy and spread to England in the sixteenth century. It was taken up by many poets, including John Milton, William Shakespeare, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and William Wordsworth. There are a number of variations on the form, but certain features remain fairly constant.

Activities

1. Working with a partner, make a list of the formal features of a sonnet. Poems 1 and 8 on page 76 are sonnets, as is the poem by Shakespeare below. Use the following headings to guide your note-making.

    1. Length.
    2. Rhyming pattern.
    3. Rhythm.
    4. Typical ideas or content.
    5. Language.
    6. Development and arrangement of ideas.

2. Share your findings with others, and add new features to your list. As you work through this section, you will find out more about the features of the sonnet form.

A Shakespearian sonnet

The following well-known sonnet is by William Shakespeare. It was written around 1609. It is sometimes referred to as 'Shall I Compare Thee?'

Read the poem, then do the activities that follow.

SONNET 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare 1564–1616

The speaker in this poem is addressing the lines to a particular person – perhaps a lover. The language of the poem can seem old fashioned to modern readers, and this can make it hard to follow.

5

Activity

1. Printed below is a paraphrase of Sonnet 18 in modern English – but the lines have been jumbled. Reconstruct the paraphrase by numbering the lines in the correct order, from 1 to 14. You will need to refer back to the original poem on the previous page to do this, and this will help you to make sense of the text.

   The first line has been numbered for you.

   - ☐ In summer, there are strong winds that shake the flowers
   - ☐ Summer is only with us for a short time
   - ☐ You are more beautiful and less harsh
   - ☐ By accident, or through the passing of time, beauty is lost
   - ☐ You won't lose the loveliness that you have
   - [1] Shall I compare you to a day in summer
   - ☐ All beautiful things eventually lose their attractiveness
   - ☐ Your beauty is recorded in print forever
   - ☐ For as long as civilisation survives
   - ☐ This poem will keep your memory alive
   - ☐ Even death can't cast a shadow over your beauty
   - ☐ Sometimes the sun is too hot for comfort
   - ☐ Other times it is cloudy and dull
   - ☐ Your attractiveness will not be lost, however

2. Check your numbering with a partner.

The sonnet's structure

The ideas in a sonnet are often developed in stages, with each stage introducing a different aspect of the overall argument. We can summarise the 'idea-structure' of Shakespeare's sonnet like this:

Idea 1 (lines 1–4)	Shall I compare you to a day in summer? But you are more beautiful, and summer is not always pleasant, so that comparison won't work.
Idea 2 (lines 5–8)	Nothing on earth is permanent, so why should I compare your beauty to things that won't last?
Idea 3 (lines 9–12)	I won't compare you to things that will fade. I will preserve your memory in writing.
Idea 4 (lines 13–14)	You will live on forever, in my poem – because it will be read forever.

The sonnet develops its ideas in three *quatrains* (groups of four lines), followed by a *couplet* (two lines) that concludes the argument.

Go back and read the sonnet again, with this structure in mind.

Conventions

In the sixteenth century, the sonnet form was highly conventionalised. Sonnets not only had a strict form; they had a common function, or use. Sonnets were often written for the purpose of praising or complimenting someone – just as nowadays people might give a Valentine's Day gift or card. Poets sometimes wrote sonnets to flatter someone who might be able to offer them employment or patronage (for example, a member of royalty).

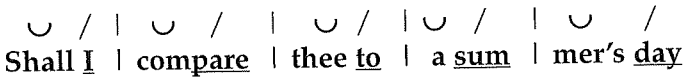
The content and methods of the sonnet were also conventional. Typically, the poems made flattering comparisons between the beauties of nature and the qualities of the favoured person. When we read Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 in this light, we can see that it *twists* some of these conventions.

Discussion

How does the argument of Sonnet 18 twist the conventions of praise and flattery? Find ways in which the poem seems to break with convention. Discuss these points in your group.

Rhythm in a sonnet

Sonnets are typically written in *iambic pentameter* – a rhythm in which there are five strong beats per line, in this pattern:



'Penta - meter' means 'five - beats', and an iambus is a rhythmical unit – called a *foot* – in which there is one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. Readers need to be aware of this rhythmical structure, especially if the poem is to be read aloud. The quality of the rhythm is one of the measures often used to judge the success of a sonnet.

Activities

1. Some of the following lines are in iambic pentameter; others are not. Working with a partner, read the lines aloud to each other and make a note of those that you think *are* in iambic pentameter.

    a. There was a man who lived in London town.
    b. A froggie went a-courting on a summer's day.
    c. The sea is calm tonight, the tide is high.
    d. Do not go gentle into that good night.
    e. Black was the night and the stars were afire.
    f. There was a young man from Peru.

2. Choose one of the lines you have decided is in iambic pentameter and try to mark in the stress pattern, as in the example above. You can underline the stressed syllables, or mark them with a slash above the stress. (Both have been done in the example above.)

3. Re-write the following lines so that they fit the iambic pentameter pattern. You may need to add or delete words or syllables.

    a. I met a trav'ller from a far land.
    b. The miller was a very large and brawny man.

4. Write endings for the following lines, so that the line is in iambic pentameter.

    a. My lover's eyes _____
    b. He thought he saw _____
    c. The autumn leaves _____

SONNET 18 – William Shakespeare

1.	Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	
2.	Thou art more lovely and more temperate:	
3.	Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,	
4.	And summer's lease hath all too short a date:	
5.	Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,	
6.	And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;	
7.	And every fair from fair sometime declines,	
8.	By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;	
9.	But thy eternal summer shall not fade	
10.	Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;	
11.	Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,	
12.	When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;	
13.	So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,	
14.	So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.	

Missing lines

You can test your understanding of the sonnet form by filling in the missing sections of an existing poem.

In this activity you will work with another sonnet by Shakespeare: Sonnet 130 which is sometimes referred to as 'My Mistress's Eyes'.

Like Sonnet 18 on page 80, Sonnet 130 also twists some of the conventions of the typical sonnet. It begins by pointing out that many of the flattering comparisons made in sonnets are not really believable.

Before you read the sonnet, study its idea-structure, as set out below.

Idea 1 My mistress doesn't have eyes like sunshine, or lips like red coral. Her hair is not soft and her skin is not white as snow.

Idea 2 I know what flowers look like, and how they smell – and my mistress doesn't look or smell like that.

Idea 3 Her voice doesn't sound like music, and she doesn't walk like a goddess. She is much more real.

Idea 4 But I think she is as beautiful as any woman who has been flattered with these false comparisons.

The Sonnet itself is printed below. Two lines have been deleted. Read the poem carefully, and refer back to the summary above to check your understanding of the argument.

SONNET 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; (dun = dull brown)
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked red and white, (damasked = dappled)
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than (1. _____)
I love to hear her speak, but well I know
That (2. _____)
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare. (belied = misrepresented)

William Shakespeare

MY MISTRESS' EYES ARE NOTHING LIKE THE SUN
William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

Looking into my Mistress' Eyes

1. Why is the opening line a startling one?
2. What is there in common about most of the items the poet contrasts with his mistress?
3. Comment on the impact of the words 'reeks', 'dun', and 'treads'. Why do they appear harsh?
4. What does the poem imply about the way a goddess walks?
5. What meaning does 'rare' have in this poem?
6. What quality, then, does the poet seem to prize in his mistress?
7. Would this poet approve of flattery? Support your answer from the poem.
8. How would you state the poet's theme or message?
9. Is the poem intended to be humorous or serious? Explain.
10. How would you describe the technique being used throughout this poem?
11. What is the effect of this technique on the poem's achievement?
12. Summarize the achievement of the poem.

romjul

SONNET 130

1.	My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;	
2.	Coral is far more red than her lips' red;	
3.	If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;	
4.	If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.	
5.	I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,	
6.	But no such roses see I in her cheeks;	
7.	And in some perfumes is there more delight	
8.	Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.	
9.	I love to hear her speak, yet well I know	
10.	That music hath a far more pleasing sound;	
11.	I grant I never saw a goddess go;	
12.	My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:	
13.	And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare	
14.	As any she belied with false compare.	

Holy Sonnet 17 (XVII) Analysis

(1617)
John Donne

Since she whom I lov'd hath paid her last debt
To nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soul early into heaven ravished,
Wholly in heavenly things my mind is set.
Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head;
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.
But why should I beg more love, whenas thou
Dost woo my soul, for hers off'ring all thine,
And dost not only fear lest I allow
My love to saints and angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Lest the world, flesh, yea devil put thee out.

TO HIS COY MISTRESS

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime. (coyness = coldness)
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Should'st rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than Empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state, (state = stateliness, dignity)
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires (transpires = exhales)
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may
And now, like amorous birds of prey
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power. (chapped = jawed)
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Andrew Marvell

1621–1678

Activity

To help you with your reading of 'To His Coy Mistress', the first twenty lines have been paraphrased for you below.

1. Working with a partner, place these paraphrased lines of the poem in order by numbering them from 1 to 7. The first has been numbered for you.

☐ I would tell you I had loved you since time began;
and you could refuse me until all Jews became Christians.

[1] If we had all the time in the world, your
playing 'hard to get' wouldn't be a problem.

☐ I would devote a whole century to looking at your
beautiful eyes, two hundred years to each breast,
and thousands of centuries for the rest of you, until
finally I had captured your heart.

☐ We could sit around, go for walks, decide how we
wanted to pass the time.

☐ My love for you would flower and grow with time like
a vast empire.

☐ You could collect precious stones in far-off places,
and I could mope by the river.

☐ You deserve such a dignified courtship, and I wouldn't
want to rush things.

2. Read the poem again, from start to finish. Discuss the second half in your groups, and briefly summarise the speaker's argument.

Exploring uses

There are many ways of *using* a text like 'To His Coy Mistress'. Consider these uses of the poem.

1. A reader uses the text to study the conventions of love-poetry in the seventeenth century, comparing it with other similar poems.
2. A reader writes out the poem by hand, on expensive paper, and mails it to a boyfriend or girlfriend on Valentine's day.

These different *uses* of the text also imply different ways of reading it. One reader treats the poem as a historical document; the other as a persuasive argument. Thus, reading it, the readers above might do any of the following. (Which might each reader do when reading the poem?)

- compare the lover's feelings to their own;
- look for examples of romantic imagery;
- identify common seventeenth century word usages;
- focus on the romantic 'message' of the poem;
- search for similarities to poems by Marvell's contemporaries.

Activity

The activity that follows asks you to think about other ways of using this poem, and how these uses might influence how the poem is read.

1. Choose *four* of the following uses, and say what aspects of the text you would focus on, and how you would read it.

   a. If you were studying how the English language has changed through history, and how word meanings have shifted:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   b. If you were in a romantic relationship, and wanted to reflect on your feelings:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   c. If you were studying the way people lived in 17th century Britain, especially their ideas about love and relationships:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   d. If you wanted to explore issues of sexism in the teaching of literature:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   e. If you wanted to explore Marvell's skill as a poet:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   f. If you were doing a psychological study of Marvell:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   g. If you were reading to enjoy the cleverness of the language and ideas:

      - what would you focus on?
      - how might you read?

   Discuss your answers with others in your class.

2. These different ways of reading the poem would be associated with different reading contexts. The reader who sends this poem to a girlfriend or boyfriend is acting within a context that we might call 'romantic courtship'. Try to describe the context of the four uses you have examined above. Some possible contexts are historical research; language study; cultural studies; biographical research; personal pleasure.

Summing up

It seems that in different reading contexts, the poem can become a different kind of 'object,' depending on how it is *used*. In the case of the Valentines, the poem seems to serve as a personal message or gift. In other contexts a poem could become a time machine, a personal journal, a historical document, or a cultural artefact. It could be used, for example, to recapture past feelings about a relationship, or as a trigger for a reader's thoughts and emotions, or as a source of information about the English language, or as a 'window' on life in the 17th century.

It seems that how we read poems (and other texts) is shaped by the contexts we are acting within, and by other social practices that we engage in – such as historical research, personal reflection, romance, and so on. Reading practices are ways of producing certain things – knowledge, states of mind and feeling, and arguments.

From this we can see that poetry is not simply a category of texts, but a complex set of activities that people engage in.

"To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell

1.	Had we but world enough and time,	
2.	This coyness, lady, were no crime.	
3.	We would sit down, and think which way	
4.	To walk, and pass our long love's day.	
5.	Thou by the Indian Ganges' side	
6.	Shouldst' rubies find; I by the tide	
7.	Of Humber would complain. I would	
8.	Love you ten years before the flood,	
9.	And you should, if you please, refuse	
10.	Till the conversion of the Jews.	
11.	My vegetable love should grow	
12.	Vaster than empires and more slow;	
13.	An hundred years should go to praise	
14.	Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;	
15.	Two hundred to adore each breast,	
16.	But thirty thousand to the rest;	
17.	An age at least to every part,	
18.	And the last age should show your heart.	
19.	For, lady, you deserve this state,	
20.	Nor would I love at lower rate.	
21.	But at my back I always hear	
22.	Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;	
23.	And yonder all before us lie	

24.	Deserts of vast eternity.	
25.	Thy beauty shall no more be found;	
26.	Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound	
27.	My echoing song; then worms shall try	
28.	That long-preserved virginity,	
29.	And your quaint honour turn to dust,	
30.	And into ashes all my lust;	
31.	The grave's a fine and private place,	
32.	But none, I think, do there embrace.	
33.	Now therefore, while the youthful hue	
34.	Sits on thy skin like morning dew,	
35.	And while thy willing soul transpires	
36.	At every pore with instant fires,	
37.	Now let us sport us while we may,	
38.	And now, like amorous birds of prey,	
39.	Rather at once our time devour	
40.	Than languish in his slow-chapped power.	
41.	Let us roll all our strength and all	
42.	Our sweetness up into one ball,	
43.	And tear our pleasures with rough strife	
44.	Through the iron gates of life:	
45.	Thus, though we cannot make our sun	
46.	Stand still, yet we will make him run.	

FAMOUS 'FIRST DRAFTS'

Poets very rarely succeed in writing a poem in one go. Most have to re-draft their poems many times before they achieve the combination of words, sounds, images and ideas that will produce the results they want. Often the poems undergo significant changes in this process. A lot can be learned about the conventions of poetry by studying these drafts.

This section brings together the work you have done on words, form and meaning, through the study of two famous poems. In the work that follows you will see how the poems were shaped and drafted by their writers, and you will discuss the way conventions of description, comparison and form have contributed to this shaping.

The Tyger

'The Tyger' is by William Blake, an English poet and artist. It was written around 1793 as part of a collection of poems exploring ideas of innocence and corruption in the world. The poem presents the tiger as an awe-inspiring animal, both beautiful and disturbing.

The poem is structured as a series of questions, which can be summarised like this:

What kind of creator could produce such a fearful creature?
How could an animal like this have come about?
What does the existence of such an animal say about the world we live in?

Read through the poem at least twice before reading on.

THE TYGER

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame they fearful symmetry?

1757–1827

William Blake

Exploring the poem

The poem suggests that the tiger's fearsome qualities have been gathered from all over the world, and assembled by a mysterious and awesome creator. This idea can be seen in stanza two, as the following paraphrase shows.

Stanza two	Paraphrase
In what distant deeps or skies Burnt the fire of thine eyes? On what wings dare he aspire? What the hand dare seize the fire?	Where did the fire in your eyes come from? From what oceans or skies was it taken? Who was it that flew to these places to collect the fire? What hand seized it and brought it back?

The paraphrase shows that the language of the poem is often very compressed. For example, in this stanza the line, 'What the hand dare seize the fire?' could be read as 'What/whose was the hand that dared to seize this fire?'

Because of this compression, the poem requires careful reading.

Activities

1. Work in a pair or a small group, to create your own paraphrase of *one* other stanza in the poem. By allocating a different stanza to each group, the class can work on the whole poem. (You will need to consider the surrounding stanzas also, when writing your paraphrase.)

2. When the paraphrases have been written, invite each pair or group to present its paraphrase to the class and explain the meaning of their stanza.

3. After hearing the paraphrases, read the poem again.

Discussion

In Blake's society, it was thought by many that all things were created for a purpose, and that the world reflected the qualities of its creator. 'The Tyger' can be read with this belief in mind.

1. What does the poem seem to imply about the world and its creator? The following statements might give you some starting points for discussion. Make a note of those you think are supported by the poem.

   a. The world is beautiful.
   b. The world is dangerous.
   c. The creator is powerful.
   d. The creator is threatening.
   e. The world exists for the benefit of humans.
   f. Humans are merely part of creation.
   g. Humans are irrelevant in the world.
   h. Appearances reveal the truth of things.

   Are there statements you could add to the list? If so, write them down.

2. Use these statements to discuss your reading of the poem with others in your group or class.

3. What image of the creator is developed in the poem?

Writing

Before going on, write a brief (one paragraph) report on the poem. In your report say what the poem is about, what ideas or themes you think it develops, and how the content and themes are conveyed. This should be a summing up of your ideas about the poem.

Shaping the poem

Like all poems, 'The Tyger' has been shaped by the associations and expectations that are shared by some readers and writers.

In writing his poem, Blake had to take account of the conventions of language and form that applied to poetry in eighteenth century England. Some of this shaping can be seen in the early drafts of the poem. What follows is an earlier version of 'The Tyger', showing the first draft and a number of additions that Blake made before the final version.

Read through the draft, and compare it to the final version on page 89.

Draft of 'The Tyger'

Tyger Tyger burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immortal hand or eye
~~Could~~ frame thy fearful symmetry
~~Dare~~

Burnt in
~~In what~~ distant deeps or skies
~~The cruel~~
~~Burnt the~~ fire of thine eyes
On what wings dare he aspire
What the hand dare seize the fire

Burnt in distant deeps or skies
The cruel fire of thine eyes
Could heart descend or wings aspire

What the hand dare seize the fire
dare he ~~smile~~ laugh
And ~~did he laugh~~ his work to see

~~ankle~~
~~What the shoulder what the knee~~
Dare
~~Did~~ he who made the lamb make thee
When the stars threw down their spears

And what shoulder & what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart
And when thy heart began to beat
What dread hand & what dread feet

~~Could fetch it from the furnace deep~~
~~And in they horrid ribs dare steep~~
~~In the well of sanguine woe~~
~~In what clay & in what mould~~
~~Were thy eyes of fury roll'd~~

Where where
~~What~~ the hammer ~~what~~ the chain
In what furnace was thy brain

dread grasp
What the anvil what ~~arm arm grasp clasp~~
~~Could~~ its deadly terrors ~~clasp grasp~~ clasp
Dare

And water'd heaven with their tears
Tyger tyger burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immortal hand & eye
Dare ~~form~~ they fearful symmetry
frame

Language

The wording of 'The Tyger' has gone through a number of changes from draft to final copy. The changes seem to have been guided by a number of factors:

- the effect of sound;
- the effect of likely associations;
- the development of an idea;
- the development of a pattern to the poem.

These are conventions of form and language that guide the reading and writing of poetry.

Activities

1. Listed below are two changes of wording that the poet has experimented with. For each example, select the reason in the right hand column that you think best explains the change, or write your own reason.

Draft	Final	Possible reasons for change
Did he laugh his work to see?	Did he smile his work to see?	'smile' is more ambiguous about the creator's purpose 'smile' implies satisfaction, not amusement 'laugh' breaks the sombre mood of the poem 'smile' makes the creator seem friendly
What the ankle what the knee	And what shoulder, & what art?	'shoulder' creates an image of powerful activity 'ankle and knee' are unintentionally funny 'art' presents the creator as more than just a 'builder' the first version is too repetitive

2. Find *three* other changes of wording, and give your own explanations for the changes that were made. Share your findings.

3. The following lines and image were rejected for the final version of the poem:

   'In what clay and in what mould
   Were thy eyes of fury roll'd'

   Can you suggest why this image was not used?

4. Find another image that was rejected, and discuss the possible reasons for it being left out.

Form

A number of patterns, such as rhyme and rhythm, contribute to the *form* of Blake's poem.

Activities

1. Work with a partner to list all of the formal features such as rhyme and rhythm that you can find in the poem.

2. Look for places where Blake's choice of form has helped shape the words and images of the poem (for example, places where words have been left out to make the rhythm work).

The Tyger 1757–1827 William Blake

1.	Tyger Tyger, burning bright,	
2.	In the forests of the night;	
3.	What immortal hand or eye,	
4.	Could frame thy fearful symmetry?	
5.	In what distant deeps or skies.	
6.	Burnt the fire of thine eyes?	
7.	On what wings dare he aspire?	
8.	What the hand, dare seize the fire?	
9.	And what shoulder, & what art,	
10.	Could twist the sinews of thy heart?	
11.	And when thy heart began to beat,	
12.	What dread hand? & what dread feet?	
13.	What the hammer? what the chain,	
14.	In what furnace was thy brain?	
15.	What the anvil? what dread grasp,	
16.	Dare its deadly terrors clasp!	
17.	When the stars threw down their spears	
18.	And water'd heaven with their tears:	
19.	Did he smile his work to see?	
20.	Did he who made the Lamb make thee?	
21.	Tyger Tyger burning bright,	
22.	In the forests of the night:	
23.	What immortal hand or eye,	
24.	Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?	

SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE — William Blake

"London"

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 black'ning 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

Poetry appreciation
'London' by William Blake

Context

Look up the meaning of "Romanticism (literature)". Make sure you are clear about the following contextual issues:

- The influence of Rousseau's philosophical ideas.
- The importance of libertarianism as a Romantic theme.
- The importance of Nature as a Romantic theme.

You could also read about William Blake's life and opinions at
http://www.eliterature.com.ar/blake_william/

Summary

The poem's persona wanders through the streets of London, observing the downtrodden faces of its inhabitants. S/he hears in their voices the damaging consequences of restrictive ideologies and beliefs. The church, the law, the political establishment and industrial capitalism destroy individuals and all notions of civil society.

Explanations

Make notes from a substantial dictionary of the appropriate meanings of the following words.

Line	Word/phrase	Explanation
1	charter	
4	woe	
7	ban	
8	forg'd	
8	manacles	
10	appals	
11	hapless	
14	harlot	
16	blights	
16	hearse	

Poetry appreciation
'London' by William Blake

Themes and issues, attitudes and values

1. How does William Blake present London? What themes and issues does he explore in relation to the city? What do his attitudes to these seem to be? What philosophical values underpin his thinking?

Language

1. What patterns of imagery do you notice? What significance do these have?
2. One can't help but notice the repetition in this poem. What is it doing?
3. Which words do you find the most striking? Why? Explore their connotations and connections.
4. What is significant about the nature of the words? Are they complex or simple, abstract or concrete? What about their syllabic length? Their degree of formality?
5. What aspects of 18th century society might be symbolised by the chimney sweeper, the harlot, and the soldier? Think about the age, gender, class and role of these individuals.
6. What significance might there be in the choice of title and the repeated reference to the river Thames? Consider what role in the world the city had in the 18th century.
7. Consider the aural impact of the poem. How are alliteration, assonance, and the sounds of words utilised by Blake? What impact do they have on mood or meaning?

Structure

1. Line 8 is the centre of a 16 line poem. How significant is this to an appreciation of Blake's poem?
2. What relationship do the first seven lines have to the eighth? How do the following eight develop its ideas? How does this structure influence the impact or meaning of the poem?

Form

1. Consider the persona and the situation. Some critics have suggested that the detachment, objectivity and omniscience of the persona are so extreme that the poem's voice must be that of a ghost. To what extent do you agree? Does this perspective make any difference to your understanding of the poem's meaning?
2. Consider the poetic form. What patterns of rhyme and rhythm does Blake use? How do these relate to the poem's mood(s) and/or ideas?
3. Consider the genre: this is a lyric from "***Songs*** of Experience". How does the idea of a lyric compare or contrast with the nature of Blake's themes/mood in this poem? What effect is created?

The poet's experience

The following poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,' is often cited as an example of the Romantic style in poetry.

Read the poem with the following question in mind.

> How do the content and style of the poem match Wordsworth's beliefs about 'good' poetry?

I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle in the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not be but gay,
In such a jocund company;
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth

Activities

Listed on the next page are some features we can note about the poem. Many of these features are in accord with Wordsworth's 'Romantic' approach to poetry, as set out in his comments in the preface on page 137.

1. Fill in the table by explaining how each aspect of the poem fits into the Romantic model of poetry. The first example has been done for you. You will need to refer back to the poem, the 'Preface', and the introductory notes on page 137 to fill in the others.

Features	Romantic approach
The poem is written in the first person (using 'I').	Shows the valuing of personal experience, individualism.
The character in the poem is also a poet.	
The poem depicts the beauty of nature.	
There is an emphasis on an emotional response to nature.	
The language is simple and direct.	
The speaker reflects on the experience later.	

2. Wordsworth's ideas about poetry are still held by many people today; they are often taught as fact in poetry classes. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including the following.

   a. Romantic ideas were dominant when mass schooling was introduced, in the late 1800s, and became part of the way poetry was taught.

   b. Modern society (through consumerism, and through its faith in democracy) maintains a strong belief in the individual and individual experience.

   c. During the 1960s there was revival of belief in the value of personal experience, through the 'hippie' movement.

   d. In modern societies there is a growing distrust of science, leading to a new acceptance of religious and mystical views of the world.

   Which of these ideas do you find most convincing? Can you think of other reasons why Romanticism is still strong today?

3. Go back to the reviews you collected for the previous section. Do some of these reviews make use of Romantic values in their judgements? (These values and beliefs might be signalled by references to writers, directors and musicians as 'creators', and through references to 'sensitivity', 'expression', 'personal vision', and so on.)

   Are there examples where Romantic *and* Classical values (see page 132) are evident in the same review?

"I Wondered Lonely as a cloud" William Wordsworth

1.	I wandered lonely as a cloud	
2.	That floats on high o'er vales and hills,	
3.	When all at once I saw a crowd,	
4.	A host, of golden daffodils;	
5.	Beside the lake, beneath the trees,	
6.	Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.	
7.	Continuous as the stars that shine	
8.	And twinkle on the milky way,	
9.	They stretched in never-ending line	
10.	Along the margin of a bay:	
11.	Ten thousand saw I at a glance,	
12.	Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.	
13.	The waves beside them danced; but they	
14.	Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:	
15.	A poet could not but be gay,	
16.	In such a jocund company:	
17.	I gazed—and gazed—but little thought	
18.	What wealth the show to me had brought:	
19.	For oft, when on my couch I lie	
20.	In vacant or in pensive mood,	
21.	They flash upon that inward eye	
22.	Which is the bliss of solitude;	
23.	And then my heart with pleasure fills,	
24.	And dances with the daffodils.	

Romantic poets: Blake and Wordsworth

William Blake, 1757-1827, was an early Romantic poet who revolted against the order and discipline of the Age of Reason, with its negative view of emotion as a weakness and evidence of a lack of control. Blake was interested in the imagination and personal feeling, and in the concept of childhood (an idea borrowed from philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-78, who promoted the necessity of education for all children). Blake considered the innocent child with a capacity for imagination who is unaware of society's conventions as the ideal.

Other influences at the time were the French Revolution, 1789-1799, which emphasised the importance of freedom (Liberté, égalité, fraternité" - liberty, equality, fraternity). Blake's revolt was particularly focussed on the restrictions of authority, and in poetry extended to ignoring the strict rules of versification. He believed in the importance of the individual and that emotion was the key to life.

William Wordsworth, 1770-1850, developed Blake's ideals and like Blake created his own personal philosophy. In his early adulthood he rejected religion and adopted a belief in the omnipresent spirit of the natural world. His belief in nature as a transcendent force earned him after his death the not-always-kind nickname as a "nature poet". In 1798 with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1772 – 1834, Wordsworth produced *Lyrical Ballads,* which presented their view of truth and meaning in the natural world.

Romantic poets often called their poems "epiphanies" as they considered them writing and reading them an almost spiritual experience in which ordinary life is intensified and an underlying meaning revealed.

In summary, Wordsworth's beliefs include the notions that:

- Emotions reconnect man with his inner life
- Simple language is necessary to reach all men but it should remain fresh and direct
- Rhythm and metre are predictable to make it accessible
- The focus of poems must be on ordinary people
- The poet has obligation and duty to reveal what he sees and feels, and must keep in mind he is writing for others
- The poet has a greater awareness of life and a "lively sensibility, enthusiasm and tenderness"
- The poet has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul
- He rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him
- "The poet has the ability to transform the ordinary world with a certain colouring of the imagination that will give an unusual aspect to the things we take for granted around us."
- A poet is in touch with his passions and is able to express what he thinks and feels.
- We have the ability to transfer emotion from experience to memory.

Dover Beach (1867) BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.
Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

2. The Romantic view

William Wordsworth: the poem as 'Expressed Emotion'

At the start of the nineteenth century in England, the classical view of poetry was being challenged. The effects of industrialisation and the growth of cities led some writers to fear that human sensitivity and a love of nature was being lost through mechanisation and commercialism. This led them to focus on human emotions and individual experiences of nature, rather than epic stories of historical events and people.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) was influential in establishing this 'Romantic' view of poetry. Wordsworth believed the best poetry recorded a poet's feelings about some experience. In the Preface to a collection of his poems, titled *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explained at length his ideas about what poetry was, and what a good poem should be like.

This extract from the preface contains Wordsworth's definition of poetry and his account of how poets compose their works.

from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800) *William Wordsworth*

What is a poet? ... He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with a more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him ... To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present ...

... poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually reproduced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment.

Activity

Check your understanding of Wordsworth's argument by ticking those statements below that are most in agreement with his position.

- ☐ Every person has the capacity to write good poetry.
- ☐ A poet is more sensitive than the ordinary person.
- ☐ Poetry offers readers a direct description of the world.
- ☐ Poetry offers readers the poet's impression of the world.
- ☐ Quiet reflection is essential for the creation of poetry.
- ☐ Poets write according to strict rules of style and content.
- ☐ Poets write from 'within', following their own feelings.

Compare your decisions with the choices made by others in your class.

Lynn Peters: Why Dorothy Wordsworth is not as Famous

The poet William Wordsworth had a sister, Dorothy, who he lived with for some time in the English Lake District. Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855) was a skilled writer and diarist, though none of her works was published in her own lifetime. Except for the journals she kept about her brother William's life and writings, Dorothy's own work has gone largely unrecognised.

The following poem builds on these facts to make a point about history's neglect of women writers. It is by English poet Lynn Peters.

Read the poem, then do the activities that follow.

WHY DOROTHY WORDSWORTH IS NOT AS FAMOUS AS HER BROTHER

'I wandered lonely as a ...
They're in the top drawer, William,
Under your socks –
I wandered lonely as a –
No not that drawer, the top one.
I wandered by myself –
Well wear the ones you can find,
No don't get overwrought my dear,
I'm coming.'

'I was out one day wandering
Lonely as a cloud when –
Softboiled egg, yes my dear
As usual, three minutes –
As a cloud when all of a sudden –
Look, I said I'll cook it,
Just hold on will you –
All right, I'm coming.'

'One day I was out for a walk
When I saw this flock –
It can't be too hard, it had three minutes.
Well put some butter on it.
– This host of golden daffodils
As I was out for a stroll one –'

'Oh you fancy a stroll, do you.
Yes, all right William. I'm coming.
It's on the peg. Under your hat.
I'll bring my pad, shall I, in case
You want to jot something down?'

Lynn Peters

Activities

1. Lynn Peters' poem is an effective piece to read aloud. Work with a partner to prepare a presentation of the poem. You could experiment with the following approaches.

   a. Changing your tone of voice to indicate the shifts between poetry and conversation.
   b. Trying different ways of presenting the speaker (patient, hassled, bitter, and so on).
   c. Making the poetry sound more and more muddled as the interruptions increase.

2. This poem is often read as a 'feminist' text. Which of the following readings do you think best fit the poem? (Make a note of your choices.)

   a. Dorothy Wordsworth's work was stolen by her brother.
   b. Dorothy Wordsworth voluntarily sacrificed her personal ambitions for her brother.
   c. Society expected Dorothy Wordsworth to sacrifice her personal ambitions for her brother.
   d. Society expects all women to sacrifice their interests for others.
   e. As a poet, Dorothy Wordsworth was the equal of her famous brother.
   f. Women are the equals of men in many fields, but their efforts are stifled.

   Explain your reasons for reading the poem in this way.

Your theory

In this chapter you have seen that ideas about poetry change from time to time and place to place. So, too, do the types of poetry that people write and read. These ideas and practices are shaped by complex forces, such as historical events, changing lifestyles and values, and so on.

Your own ideas about poetry will have been shaped by these forces, too. Some of the factors that have shaped your views might include:

- your social background (culture, parents' attitudes, etc);
- your gender (whether you are male or female);
- your educational background (what you have been taught in the past);
- your peer group (your friends and their attitudes).

This means that your attitudes to poetry may reflect attitudes and beliefs held by many people in your community. One way of exploring these attitudes and beliefs is to try setting out your own theory of poetry.

Activities

1. Try thinking through your own theory by writing your response to the following questions.

   a. What is the nature of poetry?

      (Is it an imitation of the world? An expression of personal feeling? An 'open text'? A category of writing? Something else?)

   b. What makes a 'good' poem?

      (Truth or accuracy? Verbal cleverness? Language that readers understand? A moral lesson? Different factors?)

   c. What is a poet?

      (Anyone who chooses to write poetry? A person with special insight? Someone who is 'inspired' by a Muse? A 'mixer of writings'?)

BLANK VERSE

History

The origins of blank verse can be traced back through Italian poetry to early Greek and Roman heroic verse.

During the Renaissance there was a new interest in the early Greek and Latin writings and many translations were made. One of these was the translation by Henry Howard, Early of Surrey, of two books of the *Aeneid* by the Roman poet, Virgil. In his translation he took over the pattern of the original which used lines of an equal number of syllables. In this way he was responsible for the introduction of blank verse into English literature.

The form was immediately popular and was used extensively by poets and by the Elizabethan playwrights Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare.

John Milton also used blank verse for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667). In this poem Milton achieves a classical dignity suitable to his subject. However, the Romantic poet William Wordsworth was able to use the form to elicit a more personal feeling in his long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*.

Compared with other poetic forms which have strick **stanza** patterns, blank verse is quite flexible. This is probably why it has remained popular right through to the present. This also explains why it was popular with poets writing longer poems.

Features

Blank verse is simply unrhymed verse with a regular **meter**. The term especially applies to unrhymed **iambic** and pentameter i.e. a **verse** line of ten syllables with every second syllable being accented. This is shown in this way

×/×/×/×/×/

Blank verse should *not* be confused with **free verse** which has no definite meter. It can be compared with the **heroic couplet** which consists of two rhymed iambic pentameters.

Early English experimenters with the form, such as Christopher Marlowe, used **end-stopped** lines, i.e. each line is a unit of thought and ends with a punctuation mark. Shakespeare found this approach lacked variety and flexibility so he adapted it by letting the sense of one line 'overflow' into the next. Thus he made his lines fit the sentence rather than make the sentences fit the lines.

He added further variety by not strictly following the pattern of iambic feet and by altering the position in the line of the sentence or thought ending. Examples will aid in understanding these differences. Compare the extract from Marlowe's play *Dr Faustus* with that from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

History

Although this form is chiefly associated with the nineteenth century poet Robert Browning, a very similar technique had been used in the fourteenth century by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and by the Metaphysical poet John Donne in his poem *The Canonization*. It had also been used widely in drama as the **soliloquy**, a popular feature of Greek, Roman and Renaissance drama.

Poets such as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot have found this approach suitable to the modern fascination with psychology and the workings of the human mind.

Features

The dramatic monologue is an extended **soliloquy** which reveals an incident in the life of a character. A listener is present but is not 'heard' to respond. This is where it differs from the stage soliloquy where the convention is that the audience is allowed to overhear the character talking to himself.

It aids understanding of the form to think of it as being one end of a telephone conversation — you know someone is listening to the conversation and responding but you cannot hear the response. However, you can conclude what is said from what the speaker you can hear has to say. Through this 'conversation' some element of the speaker's temperament or character is revealed and it is this psychological insight into the character which gives the form its dramatic intensity.

Thus it can be seen that the essential feature of the dramatic monologue is the 'approach' rather than any formal structure.

FREE VERSE

History

The term 'free verse' is a translation of the French phrase *'vers libre'*. This name was first used to describe a movement in French poetry in the late nineteenth century. The aim of this movement was to free poetry from the strict conventions of **rhythm** and **rhyme** to which it had always been bound.

Individual poets had much earlier released themselves from these ties. Old English and Medieval poetry had some freedom. The poetry in the Psalms of the King James version of the Bible is an outstanding example of early free verse.

The Romantic poets, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Wordsworth had also experimented with free verse as did the American poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman.

Free verse became popular in English poetry early this century partly through the influence of students of French poetry such as T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

It has now become the form used by most poets writing in English, its rejection of conventional forms suiting the spirit of the modern age.

Features

The main feature of free verse is that traditional **rhythm** is abandoned. The regular line rhythm based on meter is replaced by the natural rhythms and cadences of ordinary speech, so that the flow of the verse rises and falls at random as do the poet's thoughts and emotions. This means the rhythm is based on phrases, sentences and paragraphs rather than on feet, lines and stanzas. The result is an elimination of artificiality. In its place is a more flexible, modern and casual form. This does not imply that free verse is completely formless — each poet must structure the poem to work in conjunction with its meaning. This demands great creativity.

Rhyme is also frequently abandoned but other poetic devices, such as alliteration, assonance, etc., are generally retained.

PASTORAL AND NATURE POETRY

History

The Greek poet, Theocritus, in writing about shepherds in the third century BC, began a tradition which endured for centuries. It is the tradition of portraying an idealised and stylised form of country life in which the main characters are shepherds. The convention was well suited for elegies (see ELEGY AND PASTORAL ELEGY). It became popular for both serious and satirical poetry and was used by Spenser (*Shepherd's Calendar*, 1579), Shakespeare (*As You Like It*) and Wordsworth (*Michael*).

Although Wordsworth chose the traditional pastoral form for *Michael*, he also heralded the beginning of a new approach to nature poetry.

Wordsworth lived during the turmoil of the French Revolution and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, and so he sought refuge in nature and wrote poetry in which nature, as opposed to man, became the 'ideal'. The group of poets who shared this view of man as the symbol of destruction and of nature as the symbol of a new freedom were termed the Romantic poets.

For them, nature became the essential part of poetry. Some of the main features of their poetry are its abandonment of convention, its simplicity, and its creative spirit.

Features

There are no restrictions in form for pastoral poems. They can vary in length and in metrical and stanzaic form.

Their common features come from their subject matter and its treatment. They are lyric poems giving a picture of simple rural life and depicting simple people, often as shepherds.

The artificial atmosphere created has left the form open to satire. Modern poets have modified it and deal more realistically with rural life.

Form gave way to feeling with the Romantic poets. From their time on, we find more variety and flexibility of form as well as the introduction of new, freer forms.

Form and Feeling E. Hamilton and 36 T. Winnastas

SONNET

History

The sonnet originated in Italy where it was made popular by the poet Petrarch. The form was introduced into England in the sixteenth century by the poets Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey.

Although the sonnet form is very rigid, it has remained popular with poets throughout the centuries. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. Edmund Spenser and John Milton also used the form; while Romantics like William Wordsworth, John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley were able to capture the spontaneity of their feelings and thoughts in this poetic mode. Similarly, Hopkins, sometimes said to be the 'father of modern poetry' and well known as a 'poetic experimenter', disciplined himself to write within the confines of the form, as have more contemporary poets such as Robert Frost and Bruce Dawe.

Features

All sonnets have fourteen lines. They are written in the **rhythm** of **iambic** pentameter, while rhyming in a set pattern.

The original Petrarchan sonnet was composed of two main sections — an **octave** and a **sestet**. The octave had a rhyme pattern of a b b a a b b a and the sestet rhymed c d e c d e. The break at the end of the octave is called the **volta** and this usually indicates a turning point in the thought of the poem.

Shakespeare altered the pattern to three **quatrains** and a **couplet** rhyming a b a b c d c d e f e f g g as he found this allowed more freedom of rhyme. This was necessary as the English language is not as rich in rhyme as Italian.

Edmund Spenser used another variation with a rhyme scheme a b a b b c b c c d c d e e. Although the rhyme scheme does not indicate it, both he and Shakespeare often used the convention of the volta or shift in thought at the end of the eighth line in order to heighten dramatic emphasis. They were also fond of using the couplet, or last two lines, to clinch or sum up the argument or theme of their poems.