**What makes a poem?**

The importance of words in poetry is undeniable, though the way the author uses them is just as important. The disagreement between Mallarmé, Whitman, and Spicer is less of an argument then a difference in what holds what relevance in poetry. Inherently, as art, poems are meant to express complex emotional ideas. Poets use words in ways to express themselves no other way can. This makes both words and meaning equally important. Meaning is necessary, or else there is no purpose, though words are necessary for accessibility and expression. Without the right use of words, meaning will be lost; without meaning, the words have no purpose. The connection between words and meaning within poetry cannot be separated because they cannot exist without each other.

Poetry is an art form. As an art form, poetry has characteristics that make it different from other forms of writing. It is unique because it has it’s own special forms that are different from prose. This is a contrast against literary works, especially those that are considered short-fiction. Poetry is meant to evoke emotion and greater understanding with-in it’s reader. Although it may not be it’s only goal, there is certainly a focus on achieving an emotional effect on the reader. Poetry is also, inherently, a creation of man, and, as art, serves no other purpose then for people to read and experience it. As a whole, a poet’s messages lies within the reader’s feelings about the poem. One of the best ways to understand a poem is to reread it several times, even if there is no analysis of the text. The feel of a poem is each reader’s own. In Robert Frost’s *Mending Wall*, Frost uses the line, “Good walls make good neighbors,” twice. The second time I read the line on my first read through the poem, I felt that there was a profound message hidden within the poem and I had only scratched the surface of it. Although this feeling itself may not take particular effect on a reader, I noticed it did entice me to reflect upon the poem with a more open mind, an effect whose value could bring many more possibilities into light. The existence of poets having word choice makes everything an author includes into a poem deliberate. The author has purpose in all of his or her words, much like how a painter makes his strokes or composer choses his notes. Although many poems can be used as powerful tools to connect with a readers mind, poetry is also not meant to be persuasive or educational. Poetry serves it’s purpose just by existing and being observed, just like any other art form. The evolution of poetry has shown that there are many ways to write and approach the explanation of a subject through poetry. Poetry aims to create emotion and revelation, and there are multiple ways to communicate these ideas. There are also ways to explain many different ideas using the same style of poetry. Many poets can explain multiple ideas within one poem that holds the same kind of structure and form throughout it. Using these styles correctly is part or writing great poetry. A poet has artistic license to manipulate these styles as he or she pleases in order to convey his ideas as clearly as wanted.

The primary factor that makes poetry stand out from other art forms is that it is written. Words all have ideas attached to each of them that make them unique, each with different uses although some may be similar. Poets use words specifically in order to create new and interesting ideas, especially if that means using a word in a place that would, or should, not normally be used. One way to understand poetry that takes advantage of what is written is the analysis of specific passages in a poem. In Whitman’s *As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life*, the second section of the second stanza reads:

“O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,  
Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to open my mouth,  
Aware now that amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me I have  
not once had the least idea who or what I am,  
But that before all my arrogant poems the real Me stands yet  
untouch'd, untold, altogether unreach'd,  
Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock-congratulatory signs and bows,  
With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word I have written,  
Pointing in silence to these songs, and then to the sand beneath.” (Whitman, Leaves of Grass 213)

Whitman calls upon his own being in these lines, to emphasize a couple of characteristics of his poem. The first is the complex ideas that his poem holds. The poem takes place in a town he knows well, and even as a skilled poet, cannot seem to find himself, exemplified by, “…the real Me stands yet untouch’d, untold, altogether unreached”. He even acknowledges how ironic his poem is because *As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life* is trying to convey truths about him, a task he just described as “unreach’d” after years of writing poetry. If even he cannot find himself in his words, his meaning, then the poem must be trying to convey an incredibly complex idea, possibly one that even Whitman cannot communicate well. The second characteristic could is about how difficult it is to write poetry that reflects oneself. Whitman is a great poet and has talent that can tackle many of life’s darkest truths, but this may not be nearly as difficult as truly understanding oneself. A line such as “With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word I have written,” shows how Whitman looks upon his work and finds a completely lie inside the truths he tries to express. When analyzing a poem by its word choice, it’s important to pay attention to the manipulation of form and usage. Written forms usually have very concrete rules on how an author is able to write, with rigid grammatical rules set for logical transmissions of ideas. Poetry allows poets to break these boundaries. Poets not only twist grammatical rules, but also traditional usage of words, using descriptors that do not normally connect with what they are describing and making intangible ideas very real. Breaking these rules allows poets to express more abstract ideas than is usually possible in a way that is as clear or complicated as the poet wishes it to be. The written form has its own properties that allow for an expression of ideas unlike that of any other art forms.

Using words as an art form implies poems will have basic properties involving liberal expression. Words need to be used in order to express ideas. As an art form, poets aim to express ideas in ways that only poetry can. Poetry is nearly never direct and should not be taken just at face value because there are deeper meanings hidden within poems that an author can express by speaking of completely different subjects. Poetry is not immediately understandable, and although the author’s message may be cloudy, the way the ideas are communicated are emotional, and are many times much more powerful then logically written prose. Poets’ use of words is a means to an end, a means that the poet should manipulate in order to fit his or her needs. The poetic expression of writers requires the words to have a meaning and to have meaning in words.