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How to Read and Understand Poetry
Part I

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How to Read and Understand Poetry
Scope:
This course of twenty-four lectures will introduce students to a subject about which they already know—or remember—something. Even though most educated people can recall poems from childhood, from school, even from their university years, most of them are no longer fans or readers of poetry. There are many explanations for the drop in poetry's popularity since the nineteenth century: families no longer practice reading aloud at home; various forms of prose have gained preeminence; "free verse" has made many people think that poetry has lost its music; the heady days of "modernism," along with T. S. Eliot's insistence that poetry be "difficult," confused and troubled people who wanted things to remain (or so they thought) simple.

Many undergraduates, like many adults, are suspicious of poetry: they think it requires special skills and an almost magical ability to "decipher" it or to discover its "hidden meanings." This course will allay your fears and encourage you to respond to many different kinds of poems; it will (I hope) inspire you to continue to read and to listen to poetry. We will be less interested in those (perhaps nonexistent) hidden or "deep" meanings in poetry, and more concerned with how poets go about their business of communicating thought and feeling through a verbal medium that we all have heard since childhood.

Instead of asking, "What does this poem mean?" the questions I shall encourage you to think about all the time are these:

1. What do I notice about this poem?
2. What is odd, quirky, peculiar about it?
3. What new words do I see or what familiar words in new situations?
4. Why is it the way it is, and not some other way?

Although the course will cover a range of poems—from Renaissance England to contemporary America—it will not really be a historical "survey." Instead, it will focus on poetic techniques, patterns, habits, and genres, and it will do so with a special concern for the three areas which, taken together, can be said to define what poetry is and what distinguishes it from other kinds of literary utterance:

1. **Figurative language.** Whether metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, irony (all of these terms will be taken up), "figuration" is the crucial component of poetry. Aristotle, the first major Western literary critic, said in the Poetics that of all the gifts necessary for a poet, the gift of metaphor was the most important. If you have everything else (a good ear, a sense for plot or character) but you lack the gift of metaphor, you won't be a good poet; if you have it and you lack everything else, you'll still be a poet. We shall look at how representative poets seek to convey an idea or a feeling by representing something in terms of something else. Poetry is at once the most
concise literary language ("the best words in the best order," Samuel Taylor Coleridge called it) and the most suggestive. The combination of concision and suggestiveness encourages (indeed, requires) a reader to pay close attention to words and music, to see how things fit together, and to sense what kinds of relationships are stated, implied, or hinted at in the poet's characteristic maneuvers. Precisely because we are engaged in an act of "interpretation," we run the risk of getting it all wrong. There are areas of right and wrong, of course, but the most interesting area is the middle, gray one, in which many possible meanings, feelings, and effects of a poem are up for interpretation. If there were not more than one possible "meaning" or "effect" of a poem, it would not be a poem, but rather, a piece of unmistakable instruction ("Insert Tab A into Slot B") or a tautology ("A rectangle has four sides and four ninety-degree angles"). Even religious commandments ("Thou shalt not kill") are open to interpretation.

2. **Music and sound.** Most poetry in English until quite recently has been written in "formal" ways, hewing to patterns of rhythm and rhyme with which most of us are familiar, even if we don't know the exact nomenclature. When Walt Whitman, in the middle of the nineteenth century, began writing a new kind of "free" verse (but one whose subtle rhythms owe a great deal to the Bible as well as to political speech and operatic song) he began the move toward a new kind of verse, one which Robert Frost said, in a famous dismissal, was like playing tennis with the net down. All good poems, whether in conventional forms or in new, freer ones, have a strong musical basis, and we shall spend some time listening to and for the experiments in sound that all poets have made. Whether a poem is written in "conventional" or "free" verse, it is always a response to a formal problem: that is, the poet has at some point in the composition decided that this particular poem should be written in (say) iambic pentameter, or as a villanelle, a haiku, or a long-lined meditation, rather than in some other way. Sound, form, and meaning are all part of the same package.

3. **Tone of voice.** The subtlest, most elastic, and most difficult thing to "hear" in a poem. We usually define "tone" as the writer's attitude to his or her material, but of course it is a lot more. Almost any simple sentence ("How are you today?" "Pass the salt, please") can be uttered in a variety of ways and with many connotations or ironic suggestions. If we misinterpret the tone of someone's remarks, we can get into a lot of trouble. Delicacy of tone is precisely one of poetry's strongest assets, rather than a curse. Just because a poem is about a certain subject (love, death, God, nature) does not mean that it must maintain a prescribed attitude toward that subject. In fact, much of the play of poetry comes from the discrepancy between what we might reasonably expect a poet to say (or the tone of voice in which he or she might say it) and what he or she actually does say and in what tone. Once again, it was Frost who said over and over that the speaking voice in poetry is the most important thing of all. If we cannot hear the voice of an imagined person behind the poem, we'd be listening to a machine. Remember: a poem is a printed text that is like a play script. It is a blueprint for performance. Once you have thought through, and read through, a poem many times, you will be able to say it in your way, having decided what to play up and what to play down. Once you have it by heart, it will be as much yours as it is the author's.

Because of the thirty-minute length of each lecture, and because we shall be examining poems at close range, we shall have to limit ourselves to shorter works, or to a consideration of parts of longer works. Since this is not a historical survey (that would be another way of arranging a course in poetry), we shall not be able to talk about big poems, like Spenser's The Faerie Queene, Milton's Paradise Lost, Wordsworth's The Prelude, nor will we have much to say about medium-length narrative or contemplative poems. The focus will be on poems of no more than two pages in length, poems that you can get into your ears and memory, and learn—essentially—by heart.

The course has been arranged to consider aspects of the three major areas above, but each lecture (and the discussion of most of the individual poems) will deal, to some degree, with all of the areas, veering among them to produce the fullest readings of the works at hand. To get the most out of this course, you should read the poems discussed in the lectures—and others as well. The bibliography lists a number of books of collected poems, including the well-known standard college text, The Norton Anthology of Poetry (4th edition, ed. Margaret Ferguson et al.). This is the primary item for "Essential Reading" and will not be mentioned again in the lecture notes. In addition, virtually all of the poems are easy to find elsewhere.
Lecture One What to Look (and Listen) for in Poems

Scope: After an introduction to the ways in which such a course might be structured (along historical, or even biographical lines), we shall briefly cover some formal ways to think about poetry. Then we shall focus on two short poems on a similar theme (a beautiful woman)—Robert Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes" and A. R. Ammons's "Beautiful Woman"—to begin an exploration of how to read poetry, with emphasis on how to hear the sounds and music of a poem, how to identify its "figures of speech," and how to note its formal arrangements.

Outline

I. The road not taken: we could go through English poetry as a history from its earliest beginnings (roughly the eighth century AD), although this would prove difficult and time-consuming for many reasons.
   A. For one, Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) is essentially a foreign language, a branch of German, that requires separate study (for example, Caedmon's Hymn, c. 675 AD).
   B. After 1066, William the Conqueror made French the language of the English court, and it gradually permeated all of the spoken and written language. Middle English (e.g., Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, c. 1390-1400) is more understandable to us, but still not what linguists would call "modern English."
   C. After the "great vowel shift" of the fifteenth century, the patterns of modern English were established.
      1. Although pronunciation has changed over the past five and one-half centuries, we can hear and understand Shakespeare and his contemporaries with less difficulty than we can writers from before the sixteenth century.
      2. In the Renaissance, the first major book of lyric poetry is Tottel's Miscellany (1557), which contains sonnets and other poems by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (c. 1517-1547), who translated the sonnets of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374).

IF. Verse and poetry: a distinction. The first is the general term we shall use for anything involving "rhyme," or conventional "rhythm." A laundry list, a birthday greeting, any occasional light piece of rhyming can be considered verse, but we would not call it a serious poem.
   A. Verse is a matter of forms and schemes. We shall examine in subsequent lectures how the formal arrangements of sound (especially rhyme), meter (both conventional and free), and stanzaic or generic forms help to create poetic effects.
   B. Poetry proper is a matter of figures of speech, metaphors, "tropes."
      1. We shall examine in fuller detail how figurative language (which can be used in prose as well as verse) is the crucial determinant of poetic utterance.
      2. Thus, Aristotle (in the Poetics, fourth century BC), Sir Philip Sidney (An Apology for Poetry, c. 1580), and Percy Bysshe Shelley (A Defense of Poetry, 1820) all argued in vastly different eras of time.

III. Some practical examples. We shall examine two short lyrics to see what we can learn about them and about how they work, trying to answer some of the questions posed in the general introduction to this series of lectures.
   A. Robert Herrick (1591-1674), "Upon Julia's Clothes."
      1. Diction: the poem is straightforward enough; its longest word, "liquefaction," is both scientific and figurative. "Vibration," which makes an internal rhyme with "liquefaction," seems to hold a comparable place in the second stanza. Notice how in a poem with many one- and two-syllable words, longer words gain special prominence.
      2. Stanzas/sentences: the poem is written in two rhetorically parallel tercets, rhyming "aaa" and "bbb," and following a "first... then" sequence. This establishes a mini-narrative that also details the speaker's responses to his lover in various states.
      3. Grammar: it is never too simplistic to attend to the kinds of words a poet employs, or to consider the kinds of sentences he uses. In this case, please pay attention to the verbs in the two stanzas, and what they say about the poem's (and the poet's) development.
   B. A. R. Ammons (1926-), "Beautiful Woman." This poem is almost as short as a poem can be (Ammons veers between very short ones, like this, and much longer, indeed book-length poems), and about as simple as well. If it were said aloud, with no attention to its visible appearance on the page, it would sound like a single sentence.
      1. Lineation and stanzas: the poem is written in two rhetorically parallel tercets, rhyming "aaa" and "bbb," and following a "first... then" sequence. This establishes a mini-narrative that also details the speaker's responses to his lover in various states.
      2. The sentence: since it is only one sentence long, with no subordinate clauses, what can we say about the visible arrangement and how this affects our experience of the poem, and of the image (or idea) the poet is conveying?
3. Subject matter and the play of language: it is easy, of course, to understand the "theme" of this lyric (one to which we shall return at the very end of this series of lectures). Roughly, we might call the poem an observation and an elegy, with a touch of regret, for the decay of beauty. But Ammons is always playful and cunning, and the beginning and ending of his poem deliver more than we at first might have suspected. Consider the relation of verbs and nouns, and the multiple suggestions they have. We realize that simple observation has many possible ramifications.

4. Reaching beyond: it is not too much to think that the poem extends our attention to seasonal and mythological dimensions as well as to the nominal subject at hand. The title, and the many senses of "fall," are our primary cues.

5. Substitution: he uses the woman's (implied) foot to stand for her, a technique called synecdoche.

Suggested Reading:
Ammons, A. R., Brink Road.

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare the two poems discussed in this lecture. What kinds of action are described or implied in each (consider both the subject and the observer). Why is this action important to the poem?
2. Is there one "key" word in Ammons' poem? If so, what do you think it is, and why?
1. Wordsworth also includes—and in some cases repeats—references to the four classical elements: air, earth, fire, water.
2. The words "dance" or "dancing" appear in all four stanzas.

F. Overall unity: the poem not only recounts, but also dramatizes, the workings of the human mind (one of Wordsworth's great themes) and makes an important statement about the independent, unwilled, and uncontrollable faculty of memory. It does so, at its climax, with a telling and delightful use of alliteration and a particular emphasis on a preposition (a part of speech that Wordsworth used to great advantage), in this case "with," that links him to the flowers.

II. "The Solitary Reaper" (1805).
   A. As "mirror image" of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud": this poem is also an encounter of sorts, with a distant human being instead of a field of flowers.
   1. It is in a real way a mirror image of the daffodils poem.
   2. Look at its tenses: where is the poet, and where are we, at the poem's start, and at its finish?
   3. There is a reversal of the tenses as we encountered them in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud."
   B. As an encounter poem: "The Solitary Reaper" fits, as well, into a genre of poems (Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Wallace Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West" are other examples) that record a poet's experience of music, whether from a human or a non-human source. It is natural, of course, for a poet to be interested in music, and we can infer some specific reasons for Wordsworth's experience here.
   C. Poetry between music and language: one of the main themes of the poem is, of course, the poet's attraction to sheer music, a song being sung in a language he cannot understand (Erse or Gaelic). So the solitary reaper is herself de-personified and made into something like a bird.
   D. Themes of life and death: at the same time, we sense a kind of suggestiveness in her role as a reaper (not grim, certainly, but connected to the harvest).
   1. Solitude is definitely a theme.
   2. Perhaps the poem has other possibilities? In fact, once we realize that the direct address ("Behold," "stop," and so forth) to either the reader or the poet himself echoes the traditional language of epitaph poetry, then we get the sense that Wordsworth is recounting something like an experience from another dimension.
   3. Wordsworth is addressing himself from within himself.
   E. Reaching toward eternity.
   1. Such a dimension is implicit in the poem's commands, its address, its titular figure, its speaker's trouble with understanding her song, the various possibilities he infers for its themes, and above all, by its own use of present and past tenses.
   2. She is always singing to him in a continual present, alive, although far away and long ago herself.
   3. He hears her song in his heart, like a burden.

F. But did it happen this way? Unlike "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," "The Solitary Reaper" has no autobiographical origin. Wordsworth read a travel account describing the scene.
   1. We shall see whether this fact makes any difference in our appreciation and understanding of this poem—or perhaps of any poem.
   2. The nature of the "first-person speaker" in a lyric is as much a piece of fiction as any fable the poet can choose to employ.
   3. Never assume that it is the poet him- or herself who is actually having the experience, even when the poet is William Wordsworth, whose work is almost always about himself. One can be fooled.

Suggested Reading:
Stillinger, Jack (ed.). *Selected Poems and Prefaces of William Wordsworth.*

Questions to Consider:
1. If dancing is a motif of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," what physical action is a motif of "The Solitary Reaper"? How does Wordsworth play on this to affect the scene, sense, and sound of the poem?
2. Analyze the following words in "The Solitary Reaper" as we did those in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (Paragraph I.D): "single" and "profound" (stanza 1); "chaunt" and "Cuckoo-bird" (stanza 2); "lay" and "natural sorrow" (stanza 3); "song" and "bending" (stanza 4). Why are these certain words selected by the poet instead of synonyms that might have been used?
Lecture Three Poets
Look at the World

Scope: What do poets look for and look at? How do they record their visions? How does imagery work its way into a poem? This lecture will deal with imagery that does not (at least appear to) involve complicated figures of speech. In pursuing this topic, we will look at one strand of twentieth-century American poetry, namely "Imagism," and the importance of pared-down language in poets like William Carlos Williams.

Outline

I. Twentieth-century "Imagism": William Carlos Williams (1883-1963).
   A. "No ideas but in things": this little programmatic aphorism was repeated by Williams (a pediatrician/obstetrician as well as a poet) in several places.
      1. Clearly, part of his poetic achievement came from trying to reduce poetry, in both size and diction, and to get away from the worst excesses (as he perceived them) of late-nineteenth-century lushness (about which we'll have more to say in later classes on poetic sounds and rhythms).
      2. Influenced in part by his friend Ezra Pound, who himself came under the influence of Amy Lowell (1874-1925), and by translations from Japanese poetry, Williams urged upon poets a close, fresh look at the things of this world.
      3. His simplicity in form, his freedom of lineation, his unpretentious diction have all had a major effect on poetry by Americans in this century. Even A. R. Ammons, a more playful and speculative poet. can be said to have learned from Williams. We'll take a look at three famous short lyrics.
   B. "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923): what is missing from this poem? Why is it spaced and lineated as it is? Is it powerful in its simplicity or merely clever? How does the picture-making work, and how is it related to the poem's sounds?
   C. "This Is Just to Say . . ." (1934): a poem addressed to the poet's wife, this could refer to any domestic situation between two people.
      1. The question here (as above) is whether the poem is strong enough to carry the weight of its emotional or psychological impulses.
      2. One thing we notice about Williams is that, like Hemingway, his contemporary in prose, he is sparing in his use of adjectives.
      3. Does this fact make them—when we come upon them—more, or less, significant? "Delicious," sweet," and "cold": would they work as well with other fruits?
   D. "Poem" (1934): at last, a poem with a bit of action in it.
      1. Here is an example of a poetic vignette whose major impact is felt by the relation of language to spacing (as with Ammons' short poem from Lecture One).
      2. We must hear short pauses between the lines, and slightly longer pauses between the stanzas, in order to register the full aural effect of the poem's effort to depict feline activity.

   A. You are already a little familiar with Herrick's work, so here's the poem that stands as the introduction to his collected poems, all published in 1648. I call your attention to the way in which a simple statement of purpose, a catalogue, or a list, can have poetic effect.
   B. Notice he goes from the things of this world to things of the next.
   C. Notice, as well, the delicacy of alliteration at the beginning, to give a sense of order, and how that order in sound is extended by the temporal order of the months of the year in line 2.
   D. In addition to the moving outwards—to the human realm of youth, and love, and (the wonderful phrase in the poem's midst) "cleanly wantonness"—the moving upwards, toward weather, the exotic, and to the very processes of nature. The poem ends appropriately with a hope for heavenly favor. (Herrick was an Anglican clergyman as well as a poet.)
   E. And we notice, as well, the alternation between "I sing" and "I write."
      1. The effect stations us in our understanding of the poet's progress, but also reminds us of the convention that the earliest poets (such as Homer) were bards, who delivered their work orally instead of writing it down.
      2. Herrick handles the trope of singing as a synonym for, as well as an opposite to, the more modern art of "writing."

III. Imagery and social commentary: John Clare (1793-1864). "Gypsies" (c. 1840).
   A. Here, at last, is a poem full of verbs, that details an action, and that uses its imagery as a means of making a social commentary.
   B. Notice how unembellished the imagery is. There is nothing we could legitimately call "metaphor": rather, simple details do the job of conveying a picture.
   C. Internal rhyme (e.g., "tainted," "wasted," "half-wasted"), however, actually helps to brings differing things into conjunction with one another.
   D. Finally, the closing couplet packs the wallop Clare intended. By waiting until the end for his political summary, Clare has successfully prepared
his audience by means of the seemingly innocuous details he has been building up.

IV. Sight and sound.

A. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1892).

1. We end with two poems whose combination of visual detail, mostly unembellished with figurative language, and musical nuance, demonstrate the effectiveness of "imagery" in conjunction with sound.
2. Yeats's famous early poem uses repetition at the start to establish a musical lilt and, in conjunction with syntactic inversion and specific details, to render the scene both dreamy and practical.
3. It is easy to envision the individual details and to hear the soft, languorous rhythms in which Yeats lists them.
4. Here is a man eager, indeed anxious, to make an escape from "the pavements gray" of the dull city to the "purple glow" of noon in his Irish island retreat.


1. A lovely poem by a poet now less well thought of than during her lifetime. Like Yeats, Millay wants to combine simple visualization with complex musical effects.
2. The picture of the deer and the direct address to the sky establish a semi-reverie in the first stanza (notice the rhymes and the irregular meter), which is both shattered and continued by the daring single sixth line (notice the rhyme and the syntactic inversion) and the semi-metaphoric participle "scalding."
3. Unlike Yeats, Millay wishes to use her visual and musical senses to make a statement about human intrusiveness in nature, but she does so without overt condemnation. Notice the diction ("How strange a thing is death"), and the very absence in the poem of the real cause of death—the human hunter who has brought the buck down.
4. The poem ends with the image of the doe looking out on the scene.

Questions to Consider:

1. How effective is the "still life" poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" of Williams? Does the poem live up to its assertion that "so much depends on" the object described? Compare it to "Poem."

2. Compare and contrast "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" to Wordsworth's two "memory" poems studied in Lecture Two. To what extent is Yeats a "romantic" and subjective poet in the mold of Wordsworth? Can you reverse some of the images Yeats uses in describing the idyllic imagined life on Innisfree to figure out what is really going on in the life of the narrator?
Lecture Four
Picturing Nature

Scope: This lecture continues our investigation of imagery by looking at some suggestive poems from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a way of seeing how and why poets treat aspects of nature. Materiality in the last two centuries has become a major preoccupation of poetry.

Outline

I. We shall begin with a short poem by a friend and contemporary of Ezra Pound, namely, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961); the poem is "Sea Violet" (1916).
   A. Clearly, for H. D., unlike Williams, there's more to be done than merely reporting the appearance of a thing. And again, unlike Clare or Millay, she does not want to use her titular flower as an example of some human theme.
   B. But we also notice that something in her description of the sea violet tends to personify it.
      1. Her verbs and adjectives ("fragile," "lies fronting," "frail," "catch the light"), without specifically rendering it human, make it at least not unlike a character in our world.
      2. In the third stanza, the direct address clinches the sense we have that the speaker might be identifying with the delicate blossom.
   C. And the last image, a metaphor really, lifts the delicate violet from its precarious position on the beach to a position of elevated prominence in the heaven.
   D. Poetic allusiveness: it may be that H. D. is thinking, at the end of her poem, of another violet, this one in a short lyric by Wordsworth, concerning a young girl who has died.
      1. In "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," Wordsworth compares his Lucy to
         A violet by a mossy stone Half hidden from the eye! —Fair as a star, when only one Is shining in the sky.
      2. H. D., like Wordsworth, uses movement between small and large, near and far, weak and strong, sensual exactness and metaphysical suggestiveness, to achieve her effect.

II. We will investigate two poems, written almost one hundred years apart, to discuss the idea we might term "nature and warnings."

   A. Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), "The Kraken" (1830).
      1. This poem by the very young future poet laureate is not only an example of the apocalyptic use of nature imagery in a short lyric; it is also an experiment in verse form and in description itself.
      2. One thing we notice from the start is that the poem sounds and looks like a sonnet, but is not. (For more on sonnets, we will wait until Lectures Fourteen to Sixteen). The first eight lines are two quatrains (with different rhyme patterns), and the next seven lines (as opposed to six—which would be normal for a sonnet) follow yet a third pattern. In addition, the first sentence of the poem ends at line 10, thereby breaking the poem into two parts, the first of which is twice as long as the second, but which extend beyond the normal divisions established by the poem's sounds. Why does Tennyson make such an experiment?
      3. Another interesting facet of the poem is the nature of its language and its descriptions. The kraken itself—a mythic sea-beast resembling the leviathan—is described mostly in terms of its surroundings (his surroundings, I should say). We do not have any real sense of what he looks like, only the world he inhabits.
      4. And along with this, we notice that all of the adjectives in the poem (those words one would expect to be multiple in any descriptive effort) relate to the kraken's surroundings and not to his appearance. He is, in fact, a vague menacing presence, sleeping with his "shadowy sides," which we cannot really see.
      5. The true shock of the poem—and one sign of Tennyson's early mastery—is that the monster awakes and appears only in the last two lines. Notice how he is seen—in the passive rather than the active voice—by "men and angels"—right before his only action in the poem: he roars, rises, and dies.
      6. There is an element of excess in the poem, which becomes understandable only at the end, as a sign of the end of the world. For one thing, there is the addition to what might have been a normal sonnet. For another, there is the ominous build-up to the last lines; third, and perhaps most important of all, there is the fact that the last line is an alexandrine (a line of twelve syllables, or six poetic feet), which signals—a long with the rhetorical balance of sounds and verbs—the finality of the end of the world.

   B. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'" (1915).
      1. This poem, whose title alludes to a verse from Jeremiah 51.20, and which appeared as World War I began, shows how the unembellished use of simple details can stand in for much preaching.
      2. We notice that the first quatrain is merely a sentence fragment, a small picture of a man, as if caught in an eternal progress.
3. The second stanza, by contrast, begins the same way ("Only") but then gives us a more complete sentence. It is as if Hardy is saying: "Here is a small detail" (stanza 1); then, "here is another small detail, but one which will endure" (stanza 2).
4. The third stanza offers yet a third vignette, this time with two independent clauses (subjects and verbs) that point to the end of the hostilities and the (paradoxical) relative unimportance of war, "annals," and "dynasties" in the face of ordinary human activities.
5. Hardy uses his miniatures, in other words, to stand against the big horrors implicit in the war that is about to destroy European civilization.

III. Gerard Manly Hopkins (1844-1889), "Pied Beauty" (1877).

A. This "catalog" poem clearly demonstrates the importance of lushness in observation and diction.
1. Hopkins (to whom we shall return in later lectures) was a Jesuit priest who followed a double vocation: he made poetry out of religious themes. This poem resembles others we have seen in its structure (it is a list), but it is obviously far richer in sounds and description than most of them. Hopkins, like Dylan Thomas, may be said to have written his own language in his poems.
2. Hopkins' characteristic language and rhythms are always lush, but he shows here that his "style" has a theological justification and dimension.
3. "Dappledness" or "piedness" is his central theme, and the poem proceeds as a list of examples.

B. Let us examine Hopkins' procedures more closely.
1. The form of the poem is simple: "Glory be to God for a, b, c, d, etc. Praise him." But why does Hopkins list the things he does and in the order he does? For one thing, notice how he moves from individual details, single things (11. 2-4), to larger, more generalized objects of his attention (11. 5-6), and from animals to landscape to human activity. In addition, he then moves to more general lists ("all things") and ends with a sequence of adjectives that stand in for nouns.
2. In other words, specificity and abstraction go hand in hand.

C. The images: in those opening lines, we notice that Hopkins resorts cunningly to similes, thinking of things in terms of one another. So his opening examples (skies as parallel to cows, rose-moles upon trout) are themselves a complex form of observing nature and of making a larger point about the pied beauty inherent in nature—and also in language.

D. The ordering: by the time we reach the adjectives (11. 7-9) we realize that single words are being followed by pairs of words (line 9) that are themselves opposites. Hopkins has reached the limits of abstraction, and perhaps, we might think, of logic.

E. But the purpose of all this is to thank God, whose own beauty is eternal and pure (as opposed to the constantly changing and spotted or impure things in this world that Hopkins is praising).
1. The very fact that He "fathers-forth" the pied things of an impure world may sound contradictory (after all, should not all of God's creations be as pure as He is?).
2. But Hopkins' greater point is that we see God in His creation (this is the old argument from design, which we shall deal with later in a sonnet by Robert Frost), His "book of nature," and that He is best served or represented by those aspects of His creation that attest to His infinite variety and His inclusion of everything.
3. A thorough account of God's goodness would involve nothing less than a list of all the multiple, impure, paradoxical, self-contradictory things of His world.

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare and contrast H.D.'s "Sea Violet" with Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (Lecture Two), both of which use flowers as their centerpiece. Look especially at the adjectives describing the flowers, then consider the verbs. Finally, what subjective meanings do the flowers have for the respective poets? Can we infer anything about the poets' individual personalities from these meanings?
2. In light of Hopkins' vocation as a priest, consider "Pied Beauty" as a prayer, specifically in comparison to the "Gloria" used in Christian services ("Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. We praise You, we worship You, we give you thanks for Your great glory..." etc.). Identify specifically how Hopkins changes the focus of the prayer with humor and human fervor to achieve the aim of glorification.
Lecture Five Metaphor and Metonymy I

Scope: This is the first of two lectures on metaphor and another poetic device, "metonymy," in which we shall examine how description and imagery (the things we looked at in the previous two lectures) can begin to assume more important and suggestive dimensions for poet and reader. Lecture Five focuses on metaphor, and specifically on simile, in which two things with a shared quality are compared to each other. We will look at three cases and illustrate them with poems drawn from different time periods. We will take up metonymy in Lecture Six.

Outline

I. The first term we want to consider is simile or the simple comparison—"x is like y."
      1. Everyone is familiar with this most commonplace of similes. But although the poem begins with two overt similes (my love is like a rose; my love is like a melody), it moves beyond them in the poem's three other quatrains.
      2. The second quatrain goes from a genuine simile to a comparison involving an "as" ("I am as much in love with you as you are fair"), which is sort of a simile, but sort of not. And the quatrain then moves into a rhetorical hyperbole ("I'll love you until all the seas run dry," etc.) which continues for six lines. The poem ends with another figure, this time one that combines hyperbole (exaggeration) and an implied simile ("my love is so strong that it can encompass vast space and time").
      3. One thing to look for in any simile or metaphor is something we shall see in a moment in a poem by Shelley, namely, the essential proposition that things can resemble one another only if they are not identical. That is, x is like y because and only when x is not y. Difference is as important as similarity. Thus, Burns ignores the commonplace implications of the simile of female beauty to a flower (i.e., that roses fade and so young maidens should make the most of their youthful energy and give themselves to their lovers immediately). But do we, as readers, ignore the same?
      4. Shakespeare in Sonnet 130 provides us with negative twist on the use of similes on the theme of female beauty ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun").
   B. Imagery as example: Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 ("My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun") is a playful, anti-Petrarchan sonnet (we shall look at examples of Petrarchan love sonnets later in these lectures). For the moment, I ask you to pay attention not to its formal arrangement as a sonnet, but to its use of visual material.
      1. An argument as a response: Perhaps Shakespeare has just heard another, more thoroughly conventional sonneteer begin to praise his own mistress, perhaps by saying "My mistress' eyes are very like the sun," and has decided to enter into a debate with him.
      2. His details, all highly imagistic, are in the form of examples; that is, he wants us to sense that he has a greater claim to understanding the real nature of things (love, women, personal attraction) than some highfalutin courtier.
      3. Each detail is, however, rendered in a slightly different way.
         a. Shakespeare is masterful, among other reasons, for the way in which he can vary conventional forms. In this case, it is a simple list of items pertaining to his lady's body.
         b. Notice how the grammar and rhetoric of each detail is slightly different from those of the others.
      4. The poem is in the form of a blazon, a medieval and Renaissance form that describes the lover's body from the top down. The lover is usually a woman, but in the case of Christopher Marlowe in "Hero and Leander," he describes a man.
      5. The trick of the poem, by now conventional to us, is that in spite of—or perhaps because of—all of the woman's imperfections, the poet is able to love her still more. Rhetorical exaggeration comes in at last in the poem's couplet.
   C. Percy B. Shelley (1792-1822), "To a Skylark" (1820).
      1. Similes as a state of mind and a mental habit: Shelley had this more than any other English poet. This complicated but characteristic poem is constructed as a veritable experiment in simile making.
      2. The poet seeks to compare the unseen but audible bird to a list of other things, all of which it resembles in part, for various reasons: it is invisible, it is hieratic, it is inspiring (like a poet), it has quasi-sexual impulses behind its creative endeavors, it is ephemeral (like the rose), and so forth.
      3. The list could go on forever. But what it most proves is that Shelley simply cannot know what anything is in itself but only in relation to other things: "what thou art we know not;/What is most like thee?" (11. 31-32). His questions, and subsequent answers, are a virtual demonstration of what all poets do, albeit less flamboyantly than he.
   D. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), "There's a certain Slant of light" (c. 1861).
      1. Dickinson's famous poem of spiritual warning, despair, and depression is significant for the way it begins and ends with similes, the second at a higher pitch than the first.
2. A mere detail in the weather (the way the light comes down in winter) is immediately characterized as oppressive in the same way as religious melodies. Exactly *what* that way is, we don't immediately know.

3. All we know (by stanza 3) is that the light comes to us (metaphorically), an "imperial affliction" from air (or heaven).

4. And at last we know that it affects humans and nature simultaneously and equivalently; the personified landscape seems to listen (to the light!) when it comes, but when it goes, "'tis like the Distance/On the look of Death." Another image or revelation, indeed of apocalypse, seems all the more troublesome because of its presumed initial ordinariness.

II. The more complex comparison: "x is y."

A. Shakespeare's Sonnet 146 ("Poor soul...") is a wonderful extended metaphor, in which the soul is "figured" in terms of economics, geography, interior and exterior decoration, economics and merchandising, and finally, of eating.

1. Shakespeare's rich and complex handling of his central metaphors ends with a shocking, perhaps even anti-religious message, which is at odds with the nominal Christian message to which the poem can be reduced (i.e., "Soul, take care of yourself and mortify the flesh").

2. He tells the soul that it had better do combat with its enemy on the enemy's terms, as if saying, "Don't give up money, just make proper investments; don't ignore feeding and clothing, just make sure you are feeding yourself in the right way; watch out for the cannibal death, and eat lest you be eaten!"

3. This rich and outrageous poem is not too far in spirit and technique from the equally complex poems of Shakespeare's near contemporary John Donne, whose metaphysical wit we shall examine in a later lecture.

B. Robert Frost (1874-1963), "Design" (1936).

1. A sonnet with a serious purpose, this playful experiment has a title with philosophical suggestions (although we perhaps do not realize them when we begin). The "argument from design" was a standard eighteenth-century way of proving the existence of God by examining the evidence of an orderly universe and then reasoning back from effect to cause.

2. Here, however, the universe is one in which order—an experiment in devilish, murderous whiteness—betokens only a possible malevolent spirit at work in the world.

3. Best of all, the tone of the poem, and the unspecified but implicit connotations of some the metaphors, work against the deadly seriousness of the theme. Consider, for example, line 1 (what would normally be considered "fat and white") and the implications of 11. 4 and 5 ("characters," "mixed ready," and "morning right"), as well as the wonderful grammatical ambiguity in "design of darkness to appall." The word "appall" here means "to make white."

III. The unstated comparison: "is x y?"

A. William Blake (1757-1827), "The Sick Rose" (1794).

1. Since we began with one rose, let's think of (almost) ending with another. Blake's poem (from his volume *Songs of Experience*) comes with his own illustration: a picture of a rose that includes two semi-human figures (the worm and a young girl), so we know that he intends his flower to have human significance.

2. But consider the case of my student who once began a paper by saying: "This is a poem addressed to the poet's girl friend, whose name is Rose." Our initial temptation would be to giggle or to correct her. But, in point of fact, we also have the distinct impression that this poem is not merely about some horticultural blight. How do we know?

3. The poem, images, and words work on the horticultural level.

B. Randall Jarrell (1914-1965), "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (1945).

1. This simple narrative of a man at war is evidently spoken from beyond the grave. The ball turret was a sphere placed beneath a B-17 bomber, and it held a single gunner who was able to revolve in his sphere in order to shoot at fighter planes beneath him. But this poem is not by any means only literal.

2. It is filled with motifs of successive births and falls: from a physical birth to a fall into military service. This is followed by a second incubation, during which time the gunner (wearing a fur-collared or fur jacket, probably) becomes another fetal creature. His next awaking is to a different reality, one that is paradoxically nightmarish.

3. The multiple metaphoric suggestions of the first four lines all come to a screeching halt in line 5, which is not only a single-lined sentence, but also the line in which the gunner is killed, and becomes (grammatically speaking) an object, a "me."

4. What is the relation of rich figurative language and such an icy finish? (We'll consider matters of tone in subsequent lectures.)

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Select one poem from each of the three categories ("x is like y," "x is y," and "is x y?") and follow a comparison (simile) throughout each poem showing how it is related to a central theme or purpose.

2. Insects and spiders are used in three of the poems as the basis of the simile (Shakespeare's "worm" in Sonnet 146, Frost's "dimples spider" and dead moth in "Design," and Blake's "worm That flies" in "The Sick Rose." Compare and contrast the use of this simile. Is one more effective than the others in conveying the essential thought? If so, why?

Lecture Six Metaphor and Metonymy II

Scope: This lecture continues the discussion of specific types of figurative language that we began in Lecture Five, but shifts to metonymy (replacement of the name of one thing with that of something related to it, for example, "the Pentagon" to stand for the U.S. military leadership). Metonymy is not as overt as a simile, which relates (usually) unrelated things ("x is like y"). We will take a close look at only two poems, each of which uses details and figurative language differently.

Outline

I. Details and metonymy as scene setting, background, and implicit comparisons: Robert Lowell (1917-1977), "Skunk Hour" (1957).
   A. The development of the poem: Lowell is one poet whose manuscripts tell us a lot about his processes of composition and his intentions.
      1. Originally, this poem (which he said was indebted to Elizabeth Bishop's "The Armadillo," in which an observation of animals is offset by the possibilities of human decay) began with its fifth stanza.
      2. The surrounding details, in other words, were second thoughts. What do they do?
   B. Notice the poem's construction.
      1. There are four stanzas devoted to individuals of his town.
      2. The poet appears in the middle.
      3. There are two stanzas about the titular animals.
   C. How does the first half of the poem prepare us for the "dark night" (of the soul) and the poet's madness?
      1. The hermit heiress is solitary, rich, absent.
      2. The summer millionaire (is he dead, or merely gone?) is also absent.
      3. The "fairy decorator" is so unsuccessful that he is considering going against his nature and marrying! (Remember these when we get to the end.)
   D. Notice the importance of imagery: bright colors and animals abound.
   E. Consider the various kinds of figurative language the poet uses to suggest his derangement: the "hill's skull" and especially the love-cars that "lay together, hull to hull." This is an example of catachresis (cars become boats). Metaphors start to become what a logician might call "category mistakes."
F. Notice the changes in tenses (we have moved from present to past to present again in stanzas 6-8).

G. And finally, the skunks: how does the poet use them and for what purpose?
1. They are a group, a family, in fact.
2. They are actively doing something. Notice the verbs the poet applies to them.
3. Notice the continuation of animal imagery, now for other animals! And at last, notice the almost military motif with which Lowell describes the skunks and their activity. Life, however it is rendered, is winning out in some peculiar way, over the dying town and its decaying inhabitants.

II. Extended metaphor/simile as a means of constructing an entire poem: John Keats (1795-1821), "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816).

A. This remarkable sonnet (Keats's first great poem, written when he was twenty) could be examined in terms of its structure (reconsider this when we get to Lectures Fourteen through Sixteen on the nature of the sonnet).
1. It has a "first... then" or "cause... and effect" or "provocation... and feeling" set-up.
2. The first eight lines (octave) reach a climax at the moment Keats hears his friend Charles Cowden Clarke read from George Chapman's translation of Homer (done between 1612-1615).

B. But we shall examine it in terms of its implicit and explicit similes and metaphors.
1. It follows a simple formula: reading is like traveling, although it never says so (think of Emily Dickinson's less interesting poem, "There is no Frigate like a Book/to take us Lands away"), and right from the start the speaker identifies himself as a traveler.
2. Notice the levels of suggestion (and therefore of metaphor) in the vocabulary: "realms of gold" begins an identification with Renaissance explorations and Spanish conquests of the New World; "demesne," "fealty," and to some extent "bard" suggest the Middle Ages; "bard" as well as "Apollo," "western islands," and of course Homer himself return us to the earliest days of Greek civilization.
3. We notice, as well, that the speaker's travels involve journeys across water.

C. Consider the nature of 11. 7-8, the climax of the first half of the poem. What does it mean to say that he never really "breathed" the pure essence of Homer-land, until he heard Chapman speak?
1. The poem is a series of displacements: Homer (who performed orally) to Chapman, who translated him (from one language to another and on paper), to Keats's friend Clarke (who read the poetry aloud to him), to Keats himself, who is listening (and perhaps even reading himself).
2. Being aware of Homer for the first time incites in Keats an excitement he can only describe in terms of "something else.

D. Why the two similes in 11. 9-14? Think how difficult it always is to describe feelings and why (therefore) Keats must say, "I felt like."
1. The astronomer (probably based on the contemporary William Herschel, who had discovered Uranus) has a different kind of adventure from the conquistador. (And, yes, Keats made a mistake: it was Balboa, not Cortez, who discovered the Pacific.)
2. Clearly Keats is only experimenting with the simile of the astronomer first (and devoting less space to it) before proceeding to his climactic simile.
3. By alluding to Cortez, Keats not only returns to the beginning of the poem (the realms of gold, or el dorado that the Spaniards hoped to uncover) but also gives a sense of physicality to his adventure (just as he had done in 11. 7-8): the astronomer doesn't go anywhere, but Cortez does.
4. And, at the last, we are watching Cortez as he is being observed by his men—another series of displacements that corresponds to what we saw in 11. 7-8.
5. Cortez is looking out and over the ocean, instead of up to the skies: his men are observing his own incredulity at what he sees, presumably because they have not seen it yet themselves. "Silence" is the final, and perhaps the best, response to any such overwhelming provocation, whether in literary or in physical experience.

E. The word "metaphor" in Greek is equivalent to the Latin word "translation!" Everything must be understood in terms of something else. There is no way to have an experience directly! All is metaphor!

Questions to Consider:
1. Identify the instances of metonymy in the two poems discussed in this lecture.
2. Both poems use the figure of "watching" or "looking for"—and of course seeing something that sparks some sort of deep response. Discuss how metonymy and metaphor raise the poems beyond a mere description of what is seen.
Lecture Seven

Poetic Tone

Scope: This lecture is the first of three on the subject of "tone" in poetry, by which I mean both the classic definition of "an author's attitude toward his or her subject" and the predominant mood of a work, which is comparable to the basic "tone" of a piece of music. The speaker's "voice" as well as various rhetorical ways of presenting facts, feelings, and ideas, will be our main focus. Another main thesis will insist that a poem's subject may suggest, but never dictate, its tone. Part of the excitement of experiencing any work of art derives from the relationship between what we might expect (say, a poem of sadness about a sad subject) and what we actually get (a poem that is brittle, witty, even unfeeling about the very same subject).

Outline

I. Setting a mood: two poems of tranquillity.
      1. The title and first line establish the evident theme and tone of this poem, but let's consider as well other details of the poem's effects.
      2. Notice the relation of the couplets to the sentences; which sentences are long, which short; the effect of the repeated phrases (to create a somnolent, almost hypnotic effect).
      3. Notice Stevens' characteristic vocabulary: how few verbs there are, other than verbs of "being" (and why this is significant). Notice the more intense verbs in 11. 6-7 ("leaned," "wanted") and why their inclusion and placement are important.
      4. Notice, too, the sense of equation that Stevens is constantly making: x is y.
      5. Finally, consider the predominant rhythm or meter of the poem (a subject to be taken up later) and how it affects the mood.
      1. In this autobiographical reminiscence, Hayden uses his language to convey a sense of loneliness and isolation with negative, rather than positive connotations. His apparent simplicity of means reveals a complex emotional response, both to his father and to his sense of his own youthful ignorance and ingratitude.
      2. The first stanza, with simple, predominantly monosyllabic words, and lots of internal rhyming (assonance), presents the father at his accustomed and unpleasant Sunday labors. He is alone in the stanza. The slightly ominous, short second sentence gets us ready for what is to come.

II. Subject and tone have nothing logical to do with each other.
   A. George Herbert (1593-1633), "Love" (III) (published 1633).
      1. This poem comes last in Herbert's volume The Temple, and some critics assume that it details the soul's entry into heaven. Others might assume that it is a rendering of the communion ceremony, as the speaker (Herbert himself, an Anglican clergyman) reads himself to give communion to others by first accepting God's love. Notice how the effects of long lines against short ones complement the dialogue, a sparring match between the two speakers.
      2. What is most wonderful about this poem is its tone: a veritable ritual of courtliness politeness, in an almost feminine way.
      3. Love Himself is at once the Lord and also a wonderful host, attentive to his guest's needs and uncertainties.
      4. We notice how the effects of long lines against short ones make the poem, a sparring match between the two speakers.
      5. And we notice, too, the gentle wit and punning gestures that Love uses to persuade the unworthy guest to sit and take communion.
      6. Without a knowledge of Christian theology, it might be possible to "hear" the poem in a purely secular vein—that is, its wonder.
   B. Donald Justice (1925- ), "Men at Forty" (1967).
      1. Another poem with a "quiet" tone that packs a wallop at the end.
      2. Notice how the sounds, off-rhymes and partial rhymes, give a softness to the tone, which complements the silences that Justice is describing.
      3. And notice the effect of the generalized subject: it is "men," not "I" or "this particular man" who are dealt with. It is universal, but one has the sense (the poet was forty when he wrote it) that it has a distinct autobiographical relevance to its author.
      4. Above all, notice how the fourth stanza falls into the fifth (the technical term is "enjambment"), running over in order to build up

3. "Cold" is the major word that appears in all three stanzas. Notice, too, that the middle stanza, slightly shorter, gives us an initial sense of Hayden the son as a boy with perhaps legitimate fears, which he never specifies. Notice that he uses the house as a metonymy for which I mean both the classic definition of "an author's attitude toward his or her subject" and the predominant mood of a work, which is comparable to the basic "tone" of a piece of music. The speaker's "voice" as well as various rhetorical ways of presenting facts, feelings, and ideas, will be our main focus. Another main thesis will insist that a poem's subject may suggest, but never dictate, its tone. Part of the excitement of experiencing any work of art derives from the relationship between what we might expect (say, a poem of sadness about a sad subject) and what we actually get (a poem that is brittle, witty, even unfeeling about the very same subject).
momentum (a momentum increased by the repetition of "filling" and the ominous sound of the crickets, the first image of sound in the poem) and to end with the resounding and desperate adjective that gives the essence of the poem at its close. More than houses, we might assume, have been "mortgaged."

HI. A comparison of poems on a single theme.

A. Ben Jonson (1572-1637), "On My First Son" (1616).
1. The question in this short, elegiac poem is this: how does Jonson persuade us of his grief? Notice that he frames his remarks in laconic heroic couplets and that he never names his son directly (although he alludes—punningly—to his name, Benjamin, which in Hebrew means "child of the right hand").
2. The opening figures of speech involve "sin" and "economics," the conventional motif of being lent a life, which must be repaid.
3. To the extent that this poem has a climax, it reaches it in the middle, with the exclamation "O could I lose all father now!" before retreating into generalizations concerning the good fortunes of an early death. We have the feeling, however, that the poet is using these cliches to mollify his own grief, which he is keeping under check.
4. Notice, as well, that all first-person references disappear from the poem after the mid-point. The poet puts fictive words into the mouth of his son, and then refers to himself rather stoically in the third person in the poem's last lines.
5. The poet concludes by reminding himself that he should not become too attached to any worldly thing, to anything that can be taken from him.

B. Wordsworth (1770-1850), "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" (1800).
1. This is the concluding poem in a series known as the "Lucy" poems, concerning the death of a young girl. The figure is not based on any (known) person, and even her age in the series of poems is ambiguous.
2. It is hard to imagine a more dispassionate, controlled statement of grief. Notice, among other things, that Lucy's name is not even mentioned in this poem (an appropriate gesture for the last in the series).
3. Notice, too, how the poem hinges on the break between lines 4 and 5: the first stanza is in the past tense, detailing the poet's thoughts and feelings when the girl was alive, and the second stanza is in the present, now that she is dead.
4. The question, however, is: what are we to make of his earlier thoughts? Was he in a dream? Did he think her immortal, only to be rudely shocked into a waking condition by her death?
5. Or was his earlier feeling (that she was "a thing that could not feel") in fact prophetic of her current state of deathly immobility? The "tone" of
6. the poem has been conditioned by its paradoxes. The death of a child, arguably the saddest event one can experience, has been given two different treatments by these two poets.

Questions to Consider:
1. Using the poems discussed in this lecture, identify places where tone, and therefore meaning, change.
2. We noted that the poem "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm" creates the tone, or sense, of equation and tranquility (even in the title). Other poems (e.g., "Men at Forty") create a tone of unease. Review the poems used in this lecture and try to arrive at a description of the tone of each. Then analyze the language (key words, unexpected words), construction (lines, stanzas), sound (alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia), and figures of speech (metaphor and metonymy) and explain how these are used by the poet to achieve the effect.
Lecture Eight The Uses of Sentiment

Scope: This lecture discusses the importance and presentation of "feeling" in poetry and how poets can sometimes encourage emotion and sometimes rein it in. In the previous lecture, we dealt largely with muted expressions of feeling. In this lecture, we shall examine more overt statements of feeling and attempt to draw a line between the expression of sentiment and a crossing of the line into overt sentimentality, which is traditionally defined as "excessive" or "unwarranted," "unproved" emotion. Sometimes the line is very hard to draw. And we shall move from the nineteenth century, supposedly a time of an outpouring of emotion, to various twentieth-century poets, whose wry commentaries on persons, feelings, history, and art have a distinctly cooler tone.

Outline

I. Victorian sentiment.
   A. The supposed reign of sentiment(ality) is the nineteenth century. When Shelley (in "Ode to the West Wind") proclaimed, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" he may have set hearts a-flutter, but he also produced what many subsequent readers have thought to be an outpouring of excessive, narcissistic emotion. The question before us is: when does a statement of emotion seem persuasive, or warranted, and when does it seem merely gushy?
   B. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Sonnet 43 (1845-46).
      1. There is no need to rehearse here the love story of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. But her Sonnets from the Portuguese remains an enduringly popular volume, especially because of its greeting-card sentiments and its bald statements of feeling.
      2. How persuasive is the poem, however? Does it have any originality in structure, statement, or formal arrangement? Is there anything interesting in its language, its metaphors, or its music?
      3. Would it be a different poem if the items in it were rearranged in another order? I think not, and this leads me to suggest that the poem is less interesting as a poem than other love poems are.
      1. Rossetti (whose brother, Dante Gabriel, we shall come to in a moment), has written a more interesting poem than Barrett Browning and for a very simple reason. The music of her "song" lulls us into a sweet sentiment, but the actual "message" she is conveying is one of utter stoicism.
   D. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), "The Woodspurge" (1856).
      1. Here is a poem that uses description, narrative, and statement of personal feeling in an interesting combination.
      2. The first quatrain suggests a causal relation between the workings of nature and the speaker's own movements.
      3. The poem makes us think that the speaker's condition (distraction, stoic refusal to speak, attentiveness to surrounding detail) may produce some revelation or at least a further embellishment or discussion of his emotional condition.
      4. But it does not: it refuses to moralize or even to continue its treatment of "perfect grief (or to tell us what has caused that grief). Instead, its focuses simply, almost shockingly, on the flower and ends with what might be considered an inappropriate lesson.
      5. What Rossetti proves, however, is that grief often opens one to the strangest, most inexplicable responses. Banality and simplicity are, after all, cousins.

II. Coldness and objectivity: some poems can shock, with their endings, or maintain a cool tone throughout. Here are some examples.
   A. We will start with the American poet E. A. Robinson (1869-1935), "Richard Cory" (1897).
      1. This is an easy poem to assess, precisely because it is always a surprise to read. Fifteen lines of heightened wonder and praise prepare us for a come-down and a shocking tragedy.
      2. What Robinson refrains from saying explicitly, however, is what gives the poem its frisson: namely, we can never know anyone at all, that between external manners and appearance and internal reality lies no congruence whatsoever.
      3. Although the poem has an unstated moral ("Don't envy anyone anything"), it's clear that this moral is not the major part of the...
poem's effect. Instead, that effect comes from the sharp discordancy between the first fifteen lines and the single, climactic last one.

B. Robert Frost (1874-1963), "Acquainted With the Night" (1928).
1. The tone of this simple poem could be far different from what it is. After all, the subject is despair, dejection, isolation, existential horror—a staple of twentieth-century literature—but Frost's method is cool and calm.
2. We notice, for one thing, the use (uncharacteristic for Frost) of Dantean terza rima (in sonnet form). The form carries some weight, since it encourages us to think that Frost is paying homage to Dante in his role as a guide to the underworld.
3. For another, we notice the use of anaphora, beginning successive lines with a repeated word or sound, to give the poem a hypnotic effect.
4. The bareness lends the poem a more chilling effect than if the poet had given more details concerning his condition.
5. The circularity of the poem—the last line repeats the first—combines with the rhyme scheme of interlocking sounds to give the sense of an eternal, inescapable condition. But the poem neither complains nor laments.

C. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), "The Convergence of the Twain" (1912).
1. One of the most startling poems ever written about human tragedy, this grim lyric proves that subject matter and treatment have nothing to do with one another.
2. We notice, straightaway, four important things in the poem. First, the oddness of its form: tercets with two short lines followed by a longer one. We might consider the effect of this.
3. Next, we notice the very heavy use of descriptive details—strings of adjectives that make the poem dense and almost cloying.
4. Third, we see that the poem has an almost perfect symmetry: midway through the eleven stanzas the poet turns from the ship to the iceberg, its "sinister mate," and proceeds to demonstrate the perfect marriage of these two partners, arranged by a god-like match-maker.
5. Last of all, whatever else Hardy is doing in this poem, one thing is perfectly clear: there is no lament for the loss of human life. Although personifications aplenty exist, there are no people in the poem, and therefore, no mourning.
6. One might say, in fact, that the tone is one of chilly celebration. How grim.

1. This famous ekphrastic poem (for ekphrasis, consult Lecture Twenty-Two), written on the eve of World War 11, is a wonderful exercise in tone, precisely because it dramatizes the very message it seeks to convey.
2. The speaker's tone is that of a dispassionate tour guide. We have come in the middle of his talk, and we are looking at three pictures by Brueghel.
3. The main "thesis" is that people are normally, even willfully, unaware of and uninterested in, human suffering, which we can see perfectly in the picture of Icarus descending into the sea, ignored by the passers-by.
4. But notice the music of the poem: it seems entirely conversational, with long lines duly imitating human speech. But it also (here's the shock!) rhymes, though in a slightly unpredictable way. By demanding that we hear how he is talking, Auden is able to bolster his claim that we are normally inattentive. The very casualness of the poem increases the power of its pronouncement. This is an example of irony, which we will study more in depth in the next lecture.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you see any possible religious symbolism or allusion in the Rossetti poem "The Woodspurge"? If you think there is, how does this affect the "sentiment" of the poem? (Parenthetically, it is worth reading about his life and the Pre-Raphaelite movement that he helped to found in the mid-nineteenth century.)
2. Compare "The Convergence of the Twain" with Frost's "Design" (Lecture Five) in the context of sentiment. Look at tone, message, construction, and language. Do you think the poets agree on the issue of "design" and "designer"? Is one more "sentimental" than the other?
Lecture Nine The Uses of Irony

Scope: This lecture will deal with the ancient rhetorical device of irony (by one definition: saying one thing and meaning another; more extensively, a way of undermining with a word, a nod, a tone of voice, something else that has been said). Some of the poems we looked at in the last lecture could easily be put into this category, but I now want to examine some of the other means and reasons for producing an ironic effect in a poem.

Outline

I. Brittle wit: irony and concision; Dorothy Parker (1893-1967), "Unfortunate Coincidence," "Resume" (1926).
   A. The facile cynicism of Dorothy Parker is both easy to sense and difficult to produce. These two famous lyrics are, of course, both very funny and very sad, and the relationship between humor and sarcasm is an intimate one. Oscar Wilde defined a cynic as a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.
   B. The "charm" (if one can use the term) of "Unfortunate Coincidence" derives in part from the slightly exaggerated diction (a pastiche of old Petrarchan notions of Romantic love), the single continuous sentence, the alternation of masculine and feminine line endings, and the punch delivered by the last line.
   C. "Resume" charms us with its alternating rhythms (each line has two stresses, but with different numbers of syllables and in different combinations), its nursery rhyme-like sing-song quality, and its resigned affirmation to a life that the speaker would probably prefer to leave.

II. Irony and social protest: William Blake (1757-1827), Songs of Innocence (1789).
   A. "Holy Thursday": This poem, about the annual ritual taking place on Ascension Day, requires us to consider the relationship of piety (and the kind of self-righteousness contained in the last lines) to religious hypocrisy and to religious and social oppression.
      1. The Songs of Innocence were designed to represent a condition, but one whose limited perspective Blake expects his readers to see through.
      2. Should we praise or condemn the attitude expressed in the poem?
   B. "The Little Black Boy": Likewise, this poem from Songs of Innocence gives us the perspective of the slave child, brought from Africa and living in England under a white master.

   A. Better known for his novels, Lawrence was also a poet, and this work shows him at the top of his form as a satirist.
      1. The free verse lulls us into thinking we are listening to an ordinary speaking voice.
      2. The speaker initially seems kindly and polite.
      3. But then he builds his way up to a climax.
   B. The point of the poem is a real put-down of the speaker and his point of view.
      1. We must accept his opening remarks, and then we realize we have been taken in by them.
      2. The multiple suggestions of the single word "nice" (which even seventy years ago was a practically meaningless term) build up throughout the poem, as we realize that niceness and fear, xenophobia, condescension, ignorance, and hostility are all the same thing.

IV. Irony as give-and-take (or "dialectic"): Henry Reed (1914-1986), "Naming of Parts" (1942).
   A. The use of two voices in a single poem as a source of irony is wonderfully illustrated in this poem, the first of a three-part sequence entitled "Lessons of War."
      1. We may not realize until we are well into the poem at what point a second person is speaking.
      2. The absence of quotation marks is part of the poem's effects.
   B. The contrast is clear once we have made up our minds to hear the two voices.
      1. The drill sergeant training his men in combat speaks in a flat, slightly bored and condescending tone.
      2. And the dreaming soldier, who'd rather be anywhere other than here, picks up the phrases and re-uses them.
C. Irony comes, in part, as a result of repetition, refrain, or echo. Theme and variation lead to a wonderful climax.

D. The *stretto*-Wke ending (the *stretto* is the final section of a fugue, which repeats all of the earlier musical motifs) makes us realize that the main theme of the poem (in case we didn't already know it) has to do with the discrepancy between death and life, warfare and sexuality.

V. Irony and "mock-heroism": Thomas Gray (1716-1771), "On the Death of a Favorite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes" (1747).

A. This poem might well be included in Lecture Twenty (on heroism) because it is an "ode," traditionally the highest form of lyric poetry, normally used for praise or for elevated subjects and normally written in elevated language with complex metric arrangements.

B. Mock-heroism is an obvious, delicious version of irony: it is a manifestation of the comic discrepancy between a heightened style or treatment and a lower (if not positively unworthy) subject.
1. Mock-heroism inflates the low. Cats are not nymphs, after all.
2. But it simultaneously deflates the high. By bringing two objects, or orders, into conjunction with one another, it creates a kind of middle plane, occupied by nymphs, deities, and heavenly messengers, along with cats and fish.

Questions to Consider:
1. Review some of the other poems introduced in earlier lectures and identify those that demonstrate irony. Show how they achieve the ironic effect: structure, language (use of specific words or figurative language), or tone.
2. Do you find Dorothy Parker's poems ironic or merely cynical? How about the others that we have discussed in this lecture? What is the difference (or perhaps we should ask, the distance) between irony and cynicism?

Lecture Ten Poetic Forms and Meter

Scope: Lecture Ten begins a series of four lectures on traditional poetic forms and rhythms, and the revolution (known as "free verse") that entered English poetry roughly in the middle of the nineteenth century. This lecture will survey various metric forms and demonstrate the effects of various rhythmic and sonic devices.

Outline

I. The relationship between meter and rhythm.
A. Meter can be thought of as a form, matrix, or grid that establishes the predominant "sound" of a poem.
B. Rhythm: a more casual term to define the actual sound of a line, a sentence, or a poem, as it is being uttered by a reader.

II. Types of metric form.
A. Accentual meter: the basis for Old English (Anglo-Saxon) poetry. Lines are organized by stresses (usually four to a line, with a break—or *caesura*—in the middle), and a heavy use of alliteration (repeated consonantal sounds). Two examples are:
   1. *Caedmon's Hymn* (mid-seventh century AD).
   2. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1375). Langland was a contemporary of Geoffrey Chaucer.
B. Syllabic meter: the basic mode of Japanese and French poetry (e.g., the Japanese *haiku*, with three lines of 5-7-5 syllables, respectively; the French alexandrine with 12 syllables), a mode that is difficult to "hear" in English but was made especially popular by Marianne Moore. Every line in a stanza has a (sometimes arbitrarily) prescribed number of syllables: e.g., Moore's "The Fish," the stanzas of which have five lines with 1-3-9-6-8 syllables, respectively.
C. Accentual-syllabic meter: the predominant English form after Chaucer (d. 1400 AD). This involves a combination of syllables (normally ten to a line for standard iambic pentameter) and "feet," or groups of syllables (five for a line of standard iambic pentameter), with attention paid to the sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables.
D. Quantitative meter: the standard verse forms of Greek and Latin poetry, based on the idea that a *long* syllable counts twice as much as a *short* syllable (length determined by kind, or placement, of vowels).
   1. Examples are the epic poems of Homer and Virgil (*Iliad, Odyssey, Aeneid*), which are composed in dactylic hexameter, six feet whose
basic heft goes: / x x / x x / x x / x x / x x / x x / x x / x x / x . (In which "/" = a long syllable, and "x" signifies a short one.)

2. This is a very hard meter to imitate in English, which uses basically four types of meter: iambic (/ x /), dactylic (/ x x), anapestic (x x /) and trochaic (/ x). These may be in varying lengths of lines: dimeter (two feet), trimeter (three feet), tetrameter (four feet), pentameter (five feet), hexameter (six feet).

E. "Free" verse: a kind of poetry popularized in this country by Walt Whitman, which ignores conventional forms and expectations, but makes the "line" of the poem into a central unit.
1. Such poetry can never be merely sloppy; instead, it must initiate a more delicate music for the reader.
2. It often plays games with the relationship between line endings and sentence structures. Like all things that look easy, it is hard to do well.

III. Iambic pentameter—our native "poetic" language.

A. Historical development.
1. The iambic heft (/ x /) comes to English after the Norman Conquest (1066 AD), which established French as the language of the court and gradually transformed Old English into a more Romance or Latinate tongue.
2. By the time of Chaucer at the end of the fourteenth century, what we now hear as iambic pentameter was beginning to gain currency in poetry, although it still vied with the older alliterative and accentual forms.
3. When Wyatt and Surrey translated the sonnets of Petrarch into English in the 1540s, iambic pentameter had gained primacy and continued to do so in much Elizabethan love poetry.
4. Following the example of Christopher Marlowe, whose "mighty line" established blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) as the vehicle for drama, Shakespeare used iambic pentameter blank verse in his plays, and rhymed iambic pentameter in his sonnets.

B. Next we will analyze John Milton's (1608-1674), "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont" (1655).

IV. Two practical exercises in hearing and "scanning" traditional poems.

A. In Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), "My Papa's Waltz" (1948), we should take note of the following:
1. The variation in this iambic trimeter form.
2. Its use of masculine and feminine endings.
3. The ways in which rhythm and other sonic devices contribute to the poem's tone: jolly and rollicking but also vertiginous and slightly scary.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Go back and read some or all of the other poems studied up to this point and identify the basic meter and number of feet. (Hint: they're not all iambic pentameter!) Note places where the scansion breaks down, with perhaps two long syllables or two short. Why do you think this happens? How does it affect the sound and heft of the poem?
2. Compare the structure and sound of the two poems studied in this lecture. Is there significance to the trimeter used in "My Papa's Waltz"? Is there any predominate sound in this poem as there is in Milton's poem? Depending on your answer, state why the particular sonic quality of "My Papa's Waltz" is important to the overall effect. As for Milton, how well do you think this poem would have worked in other than the sonnet form and iambic pentameter?
Lecture
Eleven Sound Effects

Scope: We mentioned sound in the last lecture in connection with Milton's poem "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont." This lecture concerns itself specifically with various kinds of poetic sound effects, especially rhymes, but also alliteration, consonance, caesura, and enjambment, with special reference to nineteenth-century poems in various forms. The British poet Charles Tomlinson begins a poem entitled "The Chances of Rhyme" with a statement that is also a demonstration of a poetic principle:

The chances of rhyme are like the chances of meeting—In the finding fortuitous, but once found, binding.

Outline

I. The different sounds of some verse forms.
   A. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), "Hiawatha" and "Evangeline."
      1. We have mentioned these items in the previous lecture, but I wanted you to hear how in English certain non-iambic forms sound a bit foreign.
      2. Thus the trochaic (\(x\) ) tetrameter of "Hiawatha" and dactylic (\(x x\) ) hexameter of "Evangeline" strike us as peculiar experiments in versification. Longfellow was masterful, however, at such effects.
      3. Once the most memorized American poet, Longfellow has fallen from favor due to changing tastes.
   B. Robert Browning (1812-1889), "A Toccata of Galuppi's" (1847).
      1. This is a dramatic monologue, whose theme (the relationship of giddy carelessness, moral degeneration, and civic decay) is carried by rolling anapestic (\(x x\) /) meter.
      2. The poem is also based on a musical form, so the strong sonic effects relate both to the "old music" of the composer and to the theme of soul-killing folly.
      3. For an earlier example of galloping meter, read aloud and listen to Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib."

II. Varieties and effects of rhyme.
   A. The "comedy of polysyllabic rhyme." Lord Byron, W. S. Gilbert, and Ogden Nash are all masters of this verse technique (think of the "patter songs" from Gilbert and Sullivan).
   B. Off-rhyme and half-rhyme are two other techniques that yield interesting effects.

III. Assonance, alliteration, and other kinds of repetition, along with irregularity.
   A. Tennyson (1809-1892), "Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal, Now the White" (1847).
      1. This song (from The Princess) is a perfect example of how internal rhyme, plus repetition and end rhyme, go together to produce a musical effect that is appropriate to a poem of seduction.
   B. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), "Dover Beach" (1867).
      1. We notice that the lines and stanzas are of differing lengths but maintain an unpredictable rhyme pattern.

1. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), #613 ("They shut me up in Prose") (1862). We notice how the odd, half-rhyming words in the poem help to develop the mood of confinement and the opposing wish for release. One whole rhyme, right in the poem's middle ("round/Pound") is a sign of oppression and hostility.
2. Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), "Fern Hill" (1946). A poem of nostalgia for childhood, "Fern Hill" is proof that words that sound alike can mean alike; i.e., rhyme brings ideas and feelings, as well as sounds, into conjunction with one another. Thus, in the first stanza here, the last words have quite audible vowel rhymes, although these are not full rhymes. The effect enriches the poem.
   1. This sonnet is, among other things, an early ecological warning, but that is hardly its first claim on our attention.
   2. Its Petrarchan form demands an octave with an \(abba\ abba\) scheme, followed by a sestet with either three or (as in this case) two rhymes.
   3. All the rhymes are perfect; all are monosyllabic.
   4. The internal rhyme of the poem develops and maintains its momentum, and is used for ironic as well as serious purposes (e.g., the tedium implicit in "have trod, have trod, have trod").
   5. The rhymes work in conjunction with the imagery, syntax, and rhythm of the sentences to produce two differing sonic and tonal effects in octave and sestet. The first part of the poem is almost stentorian and aggressive, whereas the second is more fluid, gentle, and hopeful. There are religious dimensions and parallels to these two moods as well: an Old Testament God and a New Testament Holy Spirit in the two parts.
   6. Hopkins is a master of syntax and writes in a new way.
2. Arnold's reasons for constructing his poem this way must have something to do with his effort to depict a world in which there is both constancy (or sameness of situation) between people from one generation to another, and difference.

3. Just like the sea, with which the poem opens, always changing, always the same, the human situation remains predictable and fragile.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Review the poems studied in this lecture (or any previous ones) and identify the uses of anaphora (where the same word or phrase is used repeatedly, usually at the start of successive lines), assonance (repetition of vowel sounds), and alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds). Discuss how these devices enhance the tone of the poem.

2. One device we didn't really discuss is onomatopoeia in which the word has the sound of what it means or represents ("buzzing bees" is a common example). Again, review the poems studied already, look for uses of this device, and discuss how it enhances the tone of the poem.

Lecture Twelve Three
Twentieth-Century Villanelles

Scope: Form constitutes a type of muscle flexing for poets, showing that they can conform their vision to any prescribed structure. From Virgil on, the tendency has been to start with smaller forms and work up as mastery is gained. This concluding lecture of Part I consists of an investigation of three classic twentieth-century poems written in one such strict form, namely, the villanelle. This lecture will also ready you for three subsequent lectures in Part II (Lectures Fourteen through Sixteen) on that most enduring of strict, but popular, poetic forms, the sonnet.

Outline
I. We will investigate forms for stanzas (with examples).
   A. Couplet—two rhymed lines of verse usually of the same length (number of feet). Couplets are a regular feature in European, and especially, English poetry.
   B. Tercet—this form consists of three lines as a unit, usually rhyming with themselves or sometimes in an interlocking rhyme scheme with surrounding tercets. The terza rima (established by Dante) goes: aba bcb cdc, etc.
   C. Quatrain—a stanza of four (usually) rhymed lines, the most common arrangement in English poetry and widely used in other European languages as well. There are various rhyme schemes, such as: abab, abba, abcb.
      1. Ballads commonly use the quatrain stanzaic structure, usually in abcb form.
      2. Hymns tend to use "common measure" (or "common meter"), characterized by four stresses in the first and third lines and three stresses in the second and fourth lines. It is usually iambic and usually, but not always, in the abab pattern.
   D. "Rhyme Royal"—this form, also known as the Chaucerian stanza because Chaucer was the first to use it, consists of seven lines with five stresses each (iambic pentameter). There is a specific rhyme scheme: ababbc. It was used by many poets into the seventeenth century, but not so much in later periods.
   E. Ottava rima—this form was developed by Boccaccio (fourteenth century) and is an eight-line stanza with the following rhyme scheme: ababbc. It was adapted and adopted by English poets (the main adaptation being a switch from hendecasyllabic lines of eleven syllables to iambic pentameter).
F. Spenserian stanza—this form, used in English poetry (for example, by Edmund Spenser in his *Faerie Queen*), has nine iambic lines. The first eight lines are pentameters, while the ninth line is longer (either iambic hexameter or twelve-syllable alexandrine (a four-stress French form). It ends in a couplet and uses the overall rhyme scheme: \(ababbc\).  

II. Favorite poetic forms with which poets play.  
A. Sestina—as the name suggests, this form uses six 6-line stanzas and a three-line conclusion termed an *envoi*. There is no rhyme, but terminal words are repeated in a prescribed (often-complex) way.  
B. Ballade—this French form consists of three stanzas (eight lines each), an *envoi* of four lines, and one refrain (each stanza and *envoi* ends with same line).  
C. Rondeau—another French form, but used in English poetry as well, that is arranged in thirteen octosyllabic lines, further divided into three stanzas of five, three, and five lines, respectively. It uses only two rhymes (\(ab\)) and a refrain in a complicated way. The refrain is usually the first word or phrase of the first line.  
D. Triolet—this is an eight-line poem with only two rhymes. The first two lines are used as the last two lines and the first line also appears again as the fourth. Again, this is a French form that some English poets have employed.  
E. Limerick—this form is an English five-line verse, using anapestic (\(x\ x\ \slash\) ) meter and the *aabba* rhyme scheme. It is a relatively recent form, dating from the 1820s; its first popularizer was Edward Lear (c. 1846). A limerick is generally humorous and often even vulgar or obscene (or at least suggestive!).  
F. Pantoum—this form is written in quatrains, the first two sentences of which are on one subject; the second two sentences, on another.  
G. Sonatelle—a sixteen-line form.  
H. Heck-Hollander—a double-dactyl eight-line form; a modern development named after its inventors.  

III. The villanelle.  
A. Origins and form.  
1. The Italian "villanella" is a peasant dance or song. It came to England via France (various sixteenth-century French poets used it) and originally involved only a rustic subject and some kind of refrain.  
2. It reached its standard form in the seventeenth century: a nineteen-line poem, in five tercets and one concluding quatrain; the first and third line are repeated throughout at prescribed places.  
3. It became quite popular in late nineteenth century England and has prospered in this century. In addition to the poets below, the villanelle has received treatment at the hands of W. H. Auden, William Empson, Roy Fuller, Richard Hugo, James Joyce, James Merrill, and Sylvia Plath, among others.  

B. Three modern examples of the villanelle.  
1. Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1951). What we see in all villanelles is not only the importance of adhering to the form but also the choice of the lines that are to be repeated (almost like a refrain). In Thomas's case, the relation of "night" and "light" braces the poem, as does his switch from an imperative verb in the opening tercet, to declarative verbs (and single examples) in the four middle tercets, and back to commands in the concluding stanza.  
2. Theodore Roethke (1908-1963), "The Waking" (1953). Thomas's poem worked with the rival claims of "night" and "light"; Roethke's with the complementary ones of "slow" and "go." Like Thomas, Roethke varies his grammatical form—using questions in tercets 2 through 4—and he uses mostly end-stopped lines, as a means of portraying his condition. This is a poem about (I think) recovery: either a hangover (Roethke died of alcoholism) or some more generalized condition in which waking is equivalent to a dream state.  
3. Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), "One Art" (1976). This poem is a bit looser in its adherence to the strict form of the villanelle, but is perhaps the most powerful of the three. Bishop's poem moves from an almost lighthearted opening, a casual (or positively cavalier) assurance that mastery is something possible and desirable, through an ever-growing expansion and explanation of loss (the details are largely autobiographical, but one need not know them), to a final address to a dead lover, whose loss was obviously the original impulse behind the writing of the poem. "Master" and "disaster" are not only a significant pair of rhyming words, but they also point us back to the title. Art refers to poetry, to loss, and to life itself, all of which demand some kind of mastery and all of which exist in an uneasy balance, despite (and because of) Bishop's repeated lines.  

Suggested Reading:  
Hecht, Anthony, and Hollander, John. *Jiggery Pockery: A Compendium of Double Dactyls*  
Pack, Robert. *A Cycle ofSonnetelles*
Questions to Consider:

1. Now that we have introduced stanzaic forms, review previous poems to find examples of them (bearing in mind that we haven't studied sonnets yet, although we have read some). In general, do you prefer poems in stanzas or do you think it is too constraining to adhere to sometimes complicated structural arrangements of lines and rhymes? Support your opinion and evaluation regardless of which side of the issue you take.

2. Is it only the anaphoric effect of line repetition that gives the villanelle its punch or is there more to it in terms of structure or scansion? For example, compare "One Art" and "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night." To what extent can the villanelle (or any of the other forms in Paragraph II above) be compared (structurally) to contemporary "popular" music, especially that termed "country and western"?

Glossary

Alliteration: the repetition of a consonant or a cluster of consonantal sounds.

Anapest: metrical foot of two unstressed/short and one stressed/long syllables.

Anaphora: the use of a repeated sound, word, or phrase, at the beginning of a sequence of lines.

Apostrophe: a direct address to a present or absent object or person.

Assonance: the repetition of a vowel sound in a sequence of words.

Ballad: a traditional song (often anonymous and often transmitted orally with many variations over a period of time) that tells a story.

Ballade: an old French form inherited by English poets, consisting of three eight-line stanzas (rhyming ababbcbc) with a four-line envoy (or envoi) (rhyming bcbc) to close the ballade.

Blank Verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter. Used for the first time in England by the Earl of Surrey in his 1540 translation of Virgil's Aeneid, then popularized in drama by Marlowe and Shakespeare; the standard measure for Milton in his epics.

Blazon (sometimes "blason"): an itemization of a lover's (usually a woman's) features, starting with the hair or head and working down the body. It derives from the heraldic concept of blazon (or arrangement of figures on a knight's flag) and developed in the medieval and Renaissance periods, becoming common in English poetry in the Elizabethan age. In addition to the listing of attributes, the poet used poetic techniques of hyperbole and simile. Shakespeare, in Sonnet 130, creates an engaging parody of this conventional style.

Caesura: from the Latin word for "cutting," a pause in a line of verse, normally occurring as break in the middle of a line.

Catechresis: misuse of a word or extending its meaning in an illogical metaphor.

Chiasmus: a "crossing" or reversal of the order of terms in two parallel clauses.

Couplet: a pair of rhyming lines. The traditional form of Alexander Pope is "heroic" couplets, i.e., two iambic pentameter lines, often closed, with a strong rhyme and a rhetorical balance.

Dactyl: metric foot of one stressed/long and two unstressed/short syllables.

Dialectical Irony: Ironic, obtained by juxtaposing two different voices, alternating as in a conversation, with a single poem.

Double Dactyl: An eight-line poem in which each of the first three lines is metrically a double dactyl, the fourth and eighth lines rhyme and are abbreviated.
The first line is a nonsense word, on line must be a proper name and on line must be a six-syllable word. This is a relatively recent form.

**Ekphrasis:** a verbal representation of a visual representation, e.g., any piece of literature that either describes a work of art or else attempts to "speak" on behalf of the work.

**Elegy:** originally a term for a poem in a specific meter (the alternation of six-foot and five-foot lines); now simply a label for any dirge, lament, or extended meditation on the death of a specific individual.

**Enjambment:** a run-on line, i.e., one line of poetry that does not pause but, instead, goes swiftly into the following line.

**Free Verse:** a form that eschews traditional meter in favor of unspecified variety in line length; there are precedents for it in the eighteenth century, but it is essentially of nineteenth-century origin. In English, it is associated primarily with Walt Whitman and his successors.

**Iamb:** metrical foot of one unstressed/short and one stressed/long syllable.

**Imagism:** a movement of poetry that flourished immediately before World War I in England and America, the most famous practitioners of which were Amy Lowell and, for a time, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. It favored "direct treatment of the thing" in concentrated bursts of imagery and in some ways was modeled on Western ideas of Eastern (especially Japanese) poetry. In rebellion against extraneous description, discursiveness, and preachiness, it attempted to produce a sense of immediacy.

**Irony:** a term with multiple meanings, stretching back to the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues; as an *eiron* (a dissimulator), Socrates is the man who claims to know nothing but is actually wiser than everyone else. Likewise, irony as a rhetorical term is used to signify the process by which one thing can mean another, or say something different from what it purports or intends to do. Dramatic irony is, of course, something related but distinct.

**Limerick:** a form used in English verse that has five anapestic (q.v.) lines with the rhyme scheme aabba. Limericks are usually humorous and often bawdy.

**Metaphor:** a figure of similarity ("his stomach is a balloon"), normally implied as opposed to direct (in which case it would be a simile). It is at once the basic and most simple and also the most complex of literary figures. Conventionally we speak of a metaphor's *vehicle* (its actual language) and its *tenor* (what is represented or implied). Another way of thinking of metaphor or simile is as a tri-partite figure: A is to B in terms of C ("Bill is like a fox because both are sly").

**Meter:** from the Greek word for foot or measure. Meter is a means of measuring lines of conventional verse: e.g., tetrameter is four feet; pentameter, five; hexameter, six.

**Metonymy:** usually distinguished from metaphor (as a figure of comparison), the term refers to substitution, the use of one item to stand for another: e.g., "The White House announced today..."; or, in William Blake's "London": "How the chimney sweeper's cry/Every blackening church appalls" ("the church" stands for the Anglican clergy or the force of the religious establishment, not only the actual edifice that a chimney sweeper might be in or near). A version of metonymy is *synecdoche*, the use of a part for a whole (e.g., "All hands on deck").

**Mock-Heroism:** the implicit bringing down of heroic, epic, or serious persons and themes by using inflated language, figures, and tones for low or trivial subjects; e.g., Thomas Gray's "Ode: On the Death of a Favorite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes."

**Ottava Rima:** a stanzaic form developed and used in Italian epics and romances of the Renaissance; used most successfully in English by Lord Byron in *Don Juan* and, more seriously, by Yeats in "Among School Children" and "Sailing to Byzantium." The rhyme scheme is abababcc.

**Pantoun:** a poem composed in quatrains, in which the first two lines of each quatrain constitute a single sentence, and the next two lines constitute a separate sentence on a different subject. The two sentences are connected in rhyme, and by a trope, sound, pun or image.

**Periphrasis:** the use of several words instead of a single phrase or name to describe someone or something in an oblique and "decorous" way.

**Personification:** referring to animals or non-living things as if human.

**Quantitative Meter:** the classical meter of Greek and Latin poetry, difficult to maintain in English; based on the *length or duration* of syllables (a long syllable is thought to take twice as long to say as a short one) as opposed to hearing them as either stressed or unstressed.

**Quatrain:** a four-line stanza, typical in ballads, sonnets and hymns. The lines can be rhymed or unrhymed in this most commonly used stanza in Western poetry.

**Rhyme:** any pattern of repeated sounds, normally at the end of lines of verse. They may be full rhymes, part-rhymes, eye-rhymes (words that look alike although they sound different), or off-rhymes.

**Rondeau:** medieval French form also used in English. There are various formulas, but the most common is one of 12 eight-syllable lines, with stanzas of five, three and five lines. There are only two rhymes, with the first word or phrase repeating (aabba aabR aabbaR, where R is the repeat or refrain).

**Sestina:** a difficult, complex form, invented in Italy and perfected in the English Renaissance by Sir Philip Sidney (in "Ye gote-herd Gods"); it has six stanzas, with six lines apiece. Each stanza repeats the same end words (abcdef), but in
different order (thus, stanza 2 would be \textit{faebdc} and so forth); a three-line envoy repeats all six words one last time.

**Simile:** a stated, as opposed to an implied, comparison ("x is like y"). See "metaphor."

**Sonnet:** the standard fourteen-line lyric poem, begun in Italy and transported (and translated) to England by Wyatt and Surrey in the first half of the sixteenth century. It comes, traditionally, in two forms (although with many ingenious and subtle variations). The Italian form has an octave (eight lines that rhyme \textit{abbaabba}), followed by a sestet (six lines with either two or three repeated rhymes). The English (or Shakespearean) sonnet usually has three quatrains and a concluding couplet; the rhyme is \textit{ababcdedfegg}. The couplet is often the occasion for a summary or conclusion.

**Spenserian Stanza:** the nine-line stanza used by Spenser in \textit{The Faerie Queene}, and then by Keats ("The Eve of St. Agnes") and Shelley ("Adonais"); the rhyme scheme is \textit{ababbcc} and the last line is always an alexandrine (iambic hexameter).

**Spondee:** a metrical foot of two stressed/long syllables, often used to vary lines in iambic or other meters.

**Stanza:** from the Italian word meaning "room," a stanza is any formal unit of verse that stands alone.

**Synaesthesia:** related to \textit{catechresis}; using a word appropriate for one sensory experience to apply to another sensory experience (e.g., in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" by Keats, 11. 7-8).

**Syntactic Inversion:** reversing the normal word order to achieve poetic effect (e.g., to ensure rhyme or meter, or to place emphasis on a given word).

**Tercets/Terza rima:** a stanza of three lines. \textit{Terza rima} is a three-line stanza with interlocking rhyme (e.g., \textit{aba, bcb, cdc, ded}, and so forth), used by Dante in \textit{La Commedia Divina} and by Shelley in "Ode to the West Wind."

**Tone:** a speaker's attitude toward a subject; the predominant mood of an utterance.

**Triolet:** an eight line poem of only two rhymes, the first line repeating as the fourth line and the first two lines repeating as the last two lines (\textit{ABAaAB}).

**Trochee:** metrical foot of one stressed/long and one unstressed/short syllable.

**Trope:** a generic word for all types of literary figuration, including all versions of metaphor and metonymy, as well as irony and various kinds of literary allusions and echoes.

**Villanelle:** originally French, now a nineteen-line poem in English with five tercets and a concluding quatrain. Lines 1 and 3 are repeated—usually verbatim—at prescribed intervals throughout the poem, and become lines 18 and 19 at the end. Only two rhymes are used throughout.
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### How to Read and Understand Poetry

**Scope:**

This course of twenty-four lectures will introduce students to a subject about which they already know—or remember—something. Even though most educated people can recall poems from childhood, from school, even from their university years, most of them are no longer fans or readers of poetry. There are many explanations for the drop in poetry's popularity since the nineteenth century: families no longer practice reading aloud at home; various forms of prose have gained preeminence; “free verse” has made many people think that poetry has lost its music; the heady days of “modernism,” along with T. S. Eliot’s insistence that poetry be “difficult,” confused and troubled people who wanted things to remain (or so they thought) simple.

Many undergraduates, like many adults, are suspicious of poetry: they think it requires special skills and an almost magical ability to "decipher" it or to discover its "hidden meanings." This course will allay your fears and encourage you to respond to many different kinds of poems; it will (I hope) inspire you to continue to read and to listen to poetry. We will be less interested in those (perhaps nonexistent) hidden or "deep" meanings in poetry, and more concerned with how poets go about their business of communicating thought and feeling through a verbal medium that we all have heard since childhood.

Instead of asking, "What does this poem mean?" the questions I shall encourage you to think about all the time are these:

1. What do I notice about this poem?
2. What is odd, quirky, peculiar about it?
3. What new words do I see or what familiar words in new situations?
4. Why is it the way it is, and not some other way?

Although the course will cover a range of poems—from Renaissance England to contemporary America—it will not really be a historical "survey." Instead, it will focus on poetic techniques, patterns, habits, and genres, and it will do so with a special concern for the three areas which, taken together, can be said to define what poetry is and what distinguishes it from other kinds of literary utterance:

1. **Figurative language.** Whether metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, irony (all of these terms will be taken up), "figuration" is the crucial component of poetry. Aristotle, the first major Western literary critic, said in the *Poetics* that of all the gifts necessary for a poet, the gift of metaphor was the most important. If you have everything else (a good ear, a sense for plot or character) but you lack the gift of metaphor, you won't be a good poet; if you have it and you lack everything else, you'll still be a poet. We shall look at how representative poets seek to convey an idea or a feeling by representing something in terms of something else. Poetry is at once the most
concise literary language ("the best words in the best order," Samuel Taylor Coleridge called it) and the most suggestive. The combination of concision and suggestiveness encourages (indeed, requires) a reader to pay close attention to words and music, to see how things fit together, and to sense what kinds of relationships are stated, implied, or hinted at in the poet's characteristic maneuvers. Precisely because we are engaged in an act of "interpretation," we run the risk of getting it all wrong. There are areas of right and wrong, of course, but the most interesting area is the middle, gray one, in which many possible meanings, feelings, and effects of a poem are up for interpretation. If there were not more than one possible "meaning" or "effect" of a poem, it would not be a poem, but rather, a piece of unmistakable instruction ("Insert Tab A into Slot B") or a tautology ("A rectangle has four sides and four ninety-degree angles"). Even religious commandments ("Thou shalt not kill") are open to interpretation.

2. **Music and sound.** Most poetry in English until quite recently has been written in "formal" ways, hewing to patterns of rhythm and rhyme with which most of us are familiar, even if we don't know the exact nomenclature. When Walt Whitman, in the middle of the nineteenth century, began writing a new kind of "free" verse (but one whose subtle rhythms owe a great deal to the Bible as well as to political speech and operatic song) he began the move toward a new kind of verse, one which Robert Frost said, in a famous dismissal, was like playing tennis with the net down. All good poems, whether in conventional forms or in new, freer ones, have a strong musical basis, and we shall spend some time listening to and for the experiments in sound that all poets have made. Whether a poem is written in "conventional" or "free" verse, it is always a response to a formal problem: that is, the poet has at some point in the composition decided that this particular poem should be written in (say) iambic pentameter, or as a villanelle, a haiku, or a long-lined meditation, rather than in some other way. Sound, form, and meaning are all part of the same package.

3. **Tone of voice.** The subtlest, most elastic, and most difficult thing to "hear" in a poem. We usually define "tone" as the writer's attitude to his or her material, but of course it is a lot more. Almost any simple sentence ("How are you today?" "Pass the salt, please") can be uttered in a variety of ways and with many connotations or ironic suggestions. If we misinterpret the tone of someone's remarks, we can get into a lot of trouble. Delicacy of tone is precisely one of poetry's strongest assets, rather than a curse. Just because a poem is about a certain subject (love, death, God, nature) does not mean that it must maintain a prescribed attitude toward that subject. In fact, much of the play of poetry comes from the discrepancy between what we might reasonably expect a poet to say (or the tone of voice in which he or she might say it) and what he or she actually does say and in what tone. Once again, it was Frost who said over and over that the speaking voice in poetry is the most important thing of all. If we cannot hear the voice of an imagined person behind the poem, we'd be listening to a machine. Remember: a poem is a printed text that is like a play script. It is a blueprint for performance. Once you have thought through, and read through, a poem many times, you will be able to say it in your way, having decided what to play up and what to play down. Once you have it by heart, it will be as much yours as it is the author's.

Because of the thirty-minute length of each lecture, and because we shall be examining poems at close range, we shall have to limit ourselves to shorter works, or to a consideration of parts of longer works. Since this is not a historical survey (that would be another way of arranging a course in poetry), we shall not be able to talk about big poems, like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, nor will we have much to say about medium-length narrative or contemplative poems. The focus will be on poems of no more than two pages in length, poems that you can get into your ears and memory, and learn—essentially—by heart.

The course has been arranged to consider aspects of the three major areas above, but each lecture (and the discussion of most of the individual poems) will deal, to some degree, with all of the areas, veering among them to produce the fullest readings of the works at hand. To get the most out of this course, you should read the poems discussed in the lectures—and others as well. The bibliography lists a number of books of collected poems, including the well-known standard college text, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (4th edition, ed. Margaret Ferguson et al.). This is the primary item for "Essential Reading" and will not be mentioned again in the lecture notes. In addition, virtually all of the poems are easy to find elsewhere.
Lecture Thirteen

Free Verse

Scope: This lecture will discuss some of the aspects of the free verse revolution, begun in this country by Walt Whitman, and continued with differing effects by Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, in an effort "to break the back of the pentameter" and to liberate poetry from the strictures imposed upon it by traditional metric forms.

Outline

I. The origins of "free verse."
   A. The King James Bible was the one book in most households in England and America in the nineteenth century (the plays of Shakespeare would have been the other most widely owned book). The Psalms are poetry with meter, but no rhyme, and use other poetic devices as well.
   B. Public oratory of this period followed the cadences of the language in the King James Bible.
   C. Christopher Smart (1722-1771), "Jubilate Agno" (published 1939, written 1762).
      1. Borrowing from the repetitions of the King James Bible, Smart (who spent time in mental institutions, and who indeed went mad) is really the first free verse poet in English.
      2. William Butler Yeats considered Smart's A Song to David (1763) as the first Romantic poem.
   D. The long poems of William Blake (1757-1827) provide other early examples. Blake's major prophetic books (The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem) were never published conventionally until well after his death, but they have come (in this century especially) to have a strong hold over readers' imaginations, as much for their verse line and music as for their dense mythology and symbolism.

II. Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Leaves of Grass mark the true beginning of free verse in America. A. The opening lines of "Song of Myself" are revealing.
   1. Epic tropes and dimensions: Whitman is singing and celebrating. The newness of his style in part conceals the traditional nature of his project, which involves epic openings and the genealogical impulse behind all "big" poems.
   2. At the same time, he invokes classical notions of "pastoral" poetry, specifically invitation and "lolling" about at leisure.

III. Some recent examples of free verse.
   A. American poet e. e. cummings (1894-1962), "in Just-" (1923).
      1. The fun of cummings' poetry (which often, in spite of its irregularities, employs very conventional means—rhymes and sonnet forms, for example) often comes down to his typographic freedom and to the fact that some of his poems are literally unsayable (e.g., the one depicting the grasshopper making its jump).
      2. cummings plays with typography to reflect changes in the boys and girls who are reaching puberty.
   B. Alan Ginsberg (1926-1998), the opening of Howl (1956).
      1. This manifesto of the "Beat" generation established its author's fame, not to say notoriety, and it is as important in the history of post-war American poetry as it is in the tradition of social and political protest that it helped to maintain. Ginsberg took seriously the long-lined free verse tradition he inherited from Whitman via William Carlos Williams. His lines might be the longest in American poetry.
      2. One other cause for lines of such length was Ginsberg's claim that each line constituted a single unit of breath. Saying one whole line without pausing was a remarkable feat, but Ginsberg, with his own history of Eastern meditative practices, could usually manage it. The music is incantatory.
      1. This delectable poem is officially free, but we notice as well that each line maintains a consistent stress pattern (there are three beats to each line, regardless of location and of number of syllables).
      2. We have regularity and freedom going hand-in-hand (free verse with accentual predictability).

B. Representative samples of Whitman's art:
   1. "The Dalliance of the Eagles" (1880). There is a veritable drama in this short descriptive lyric that is maintained as much by verbal participles, caesuras, line lengths and line endings, and an impulsive rhythm as by the visual description of the birds themselves.
   2. "To a Locomotive in Winter" (1881). Here the address to the locomotive is heightened by anaphora (beginning successive lines with the same word or sound); apostrophe (the continuing address to, and personification of, the locomotive); the figurative language Whitman uses to compare the train to more conventional "singers"; and the rhythmic effects, especially in the poem's last three lines (which are perfectly regular iambic pentameter!).

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   A. American poet e. e. cummings (1894-1962), "in Just-" (1923).
      1. The fun of cummings' poetry (which often, in spite of its irregularities, employs very conventional means—rhymes and sonnet forms, for example) often comes down to his typographic freedom and to the fact that some of his poems are literally unsayable (e.g., the one depicting the grasshopper making its jump).
      2. cummings plays with typography to reflect changes in the boys and girls who are reaching puberty.
   B. Alan Ginsberg (1926-1998), the opening of Howl (1956).
      1. This manifesto of the "Beat" generation established its author's fame, not to say notoriety, and it is as important in the history of post-war American poetry as it is in the tradition of social and political protest that it helped to maintain. Ginsberg took seriously the long-lined free verse tradition he inherited from Whitman via William Carlos Williams. His lines might be the longest in American poetry.
      2. One other cause for lines of such length was Ginsberg's claim that each line constituted a single unit of breath. Saying one whole line without pausing was a remarkable feat, but Ginsberg, with his own history of Eastern meditative practices, could usually manage it. The music is incantatory.
      1. This delectable poem is officially free, but we notice as well that each line maintains a consistent stress pattern (there are three beats to each line, regardless of location and of number of syllables).
      2. We have regularity and freedom going hand-in-hand (free verse with accentual predictability).
1. When verse is "free," we must often attend to line endings and the
drama they can convey. Wright's poem of an encounter with two
horses is an example of the use of lines of various lengths.
2. Such a habit produces a drama in the lines and their endings.
Enjambment is extremely important, as we sense in the last three
lines, the only time in the poem where two lines (instead of one)
run on.

1. An "ars poetica" (the title derives from the poem by the Latin poet
Horace in c. 10 BC) is a self-justification, a statement of purpose,
or an instruction manual in the "art of poetry."
2. In Dove's case, we notice that the relative freedom of line and
meter is balanced by a control of the length of each stanza.
3. Thus, free verse and stanzaic experimentation go together, as the
poem moves from greater units (which stand for the dreams of the
male essayist and novelist) to a smaller one, representing the more
modest and pointed aspirations of the female lyric poet.

Suggested Reading:
Steele, Timothy. Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt Against
Form.

Questions to Consider:
1. Robert Frost dismissed free verse with the famous phrase that likened it to
"playing tennis with the net down." Do you agree or disagree with Frost?
Support your position based on what we have studied of form, meter,
language, etc., so far.
2. Can we draw any meaningful conclusions about why certain poetic forms
have flourished in certain periods of time? To what extent are the forms
expressive of the "tenor of the times?" What do you think the next direction
in poetry is likely to be?

Lecture Fourteen
The English Sonnet I

Scope: This lecture begins a series of three on the subject of that most enduring of
lyric forms, the sonnet, invented in Italy by Petrarch; transported to
English by Henry Howard, the Early of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt;
popularized in the late decades of the sixteenth century by Sidney,
Spenser, Drayton, and (above all) Shakespeare; continued by Milton,
Wordsworth, Shelley, Hopkins, and most important modern poets,
including Yeats and Frost.

Outline
I. History and definitions.
A. Although there are earlier precedents, the first important sonneteers
were Dante (1265-1321) and Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374). The
Italian "sonetto" means a little song or sound.
1. From the beginning the sonnet was a vehicle for the expression of
love, often with philosophical speculations.
2. The tradition of "courtly" love from which it derived often involves
the motif of an inaccessible woman, whom the poet loves but may
not have.
3. The Italian sonnet maintains a division between the octave (rhymed
abba abba) and the sestet (rhymed more casually in any variation
of cde cde). The break between the two parts, called the volta (or
turn), often encourages a shift in tone or emotion.
B. The sonnet was brought to England through the translations of Petrarch
by Wyatt and Surrey, written in the 1530s and 1540s and published in
Tottel's Miscellany (1557, one year before Elizabeth I ascended the
throne).
1. The "English" sonnet (also known as the Shakespearean sonnet
because of Shakespeare's mastery of the form) is composed of
three quatrains (rhymed abab, cdcd, efef) followed by a terminal
couplet (gg).
2. The work of Wyatt and Surrey initiated a vogue for sonnet writing
that flourished especially in the last quarter of the sixteenth
century.
3. The sonnet continued as the vehicle for love poetry. Sonnet
sequences, detailing the course of a love affair, were written by
Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Folke-
Greville, and others.
II. An experiment in comparative translation.

1. We have here a little drama of erotic excitement. The lover is inhabited by "love," here in the figure of a God, who causes him pain and embarrassment.
2. The lady tries to teach him to restrain his passion, but the lover, having been abandoned by his fearful "master" (the metaphors are military), feels that he must end his life.

B. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547), "Love That Doth Reign and Live Within My Thought" (published 1557, written c. 1540).
1. Here we read the same poem (a translation of Petrarch's Rime #140), with a different twist.
2. The speaker's breast is already "captive" (line 2).
3. The speaker insists more strongly upon his own guiltlessness.
4. Whereas Wyatt's poem ends with a reminder of a "good" life, Surrey's ends with a "sweet" death.

III. Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), Astrofil and Stella (1582).

A. The greatest of the sonnet sequences, Astrofil and Stella ("Star Lover and Star") has relevance to Sidney's own life.
1. He was perhaps in love with Penelope Devereux, who married Lord Robert Rich in 1581. Throughout the sequence Sidney puns on her name.
2. As an aristocrat, Sidney was a model of the perfect courtier and Renaissance man: a poet, statesman, fighter, etc.; he seemed to embody the virtues of the age.
3. Paradoxically, Astrofil, the hero and spokesman of the series, is often a bit bumbling in his efforts to persuade his lady of his love.

B. Sidney's art as a sonneteer.
1. Sonnet #31 ("With How Sad Steps, O Moon"). This poem is a marvelous demonstration of Sidney's mastery of meter and sound. The first line, completely monosyllabic, has a stately, slow pace, which is sped up only as the poem moves along. Notice, as well, the punning wit Astrofil employs in his eight different uses of the word "love" or its variants. And notice, as well, the sharp scorn of the last line.
2. Sonnet #52 ("A Strife Is Grown Between Virtue and Love"). This little courtroom poem, a debate between two personified abstractions, is also a nice balancing act. Astrofil tries to maintain impartiality, ceding to each contestant the Tightness of his claim to possession of Stella. It ends with a gesture worthy of Solomon when confronted with one baby and two mothers.
3. Sonnet #71 ("Who Will in Fairest Book of Nature Know"). Like the preceding sonnet, this one hinges on a rhetorical trick. As often happens in a Sidney sonnet, it is not the couplet that resolves the action or dilemma, but the single last line. In this case, line 14 manages to undo everything that the speaker, in his guise as courtly, neo-Platonic lover, has been spouting previously in praise of the virtues of his lady.

IV. Shakespeare and the perfection of the sonnet.

A. The publication of Shakespeare's sonnets in 1609 came well after the Elizabethan vogue for the sonnet sequence. Most were probably written in the 1590s.
1. The 152 sonnets are divided between the first 126 that address a handsome young aristocrat, whose favor the poet is seeking, and then 26 more (numbers 127-152) about a "dark lady" with whom both the poet and the young man seem, at one time or another, to be having an affair.
2. The last two sonnets (153-154) seem to be of a slightly different order altogether: versions of an older motif concerning Cupid and a nymph.
3. Speculation about the real identities of the persons involved has been rife for centuries. We can safely say that no one knows anything for certain, and that, moreover, it doesn't matter, because the sonnets stand on their own as models of poetic prowess and as the record of a complex (whether fictive or actual) erotic and emotional turbulence.
4. For our purposes, the sonnet does most of what any lyric poem can do, and it is for that reason that we shall look briefly at a few of them.

B. Shakespearean verse: Sonnet 12 ("When I do count the clock that tells the time").
1. This sonnet is a classic example of Shakespearean construction. Notice how each quatrain is self-contained in its rhyme.
2. Notice, also, that Shakespeare honors the convention of the volta by adopting (as he often does) a "When... Then..." construction for the action of the poem.
3. Although the theme of the poem is thoroughly conventional, and Shakespeare uses it throughout the first eighteen sonnets, notice how Shakespeare uses the couplet (urging the young man to marry) as a way of repeating, as well as countering, his earlier images.
4. And notice the many variations on the motif of time's inexorable progress throughout the poem: some refer to it as circular, some as linear; some are images involving beauty, some involve tragedy, and so forth.

C. Shakespearean verse: Sonnet 73 ("That time of year thou mayst in me behold").
1. This sonnet provides us with another example of theme and variations. In this case, the theme is the same (i.e., time's passage) but the structure of the poem and the conclusion are both different from those of Sonnet 12.
2. For one thing, each quatrain centers around a specific and separate example of time's passage.
3. But Shakespeare has arranged them to call attention to the differences among them as well as their similarities.
4. For this reason, the poem moves logically, almost inexorably, to its conclusion, but by the time we get to it, we have something of a shock.
5. The couplet doesn't quite say what we would expect it to; Shakespeare—always the master of multiple meanings and suggestions in language—encourages us to hear other possibilities in his concluding address to the young man.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare the Shakespearean sonnets discussed in this lecture with the selection (Sonnet 43) from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese (Lecture Eight). What are the differences? The similarities? In like manner, compare the sonnets in this lecture with Milton's "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont" (Lecture Ten). What techniques does Milton use to seemingly expand the strictures of the sonnet form? (We will look more at Milton as sonneteer in the next lecture.)
2. In your opinion, how well does the sonnet lend itself better to a heavy, tragic, serious topic (like the slaughter of the Waldensians) or to more lyrical (but not always lighthearted) love poetry, such as found in Sonnets from the Portuguese, Sidney's Astrofil and Stella cycle, or Shakespeare's sonnets? Support your answer.

Lecture Fifteen The English Sonnet II

Scope: This lecture continues our investigation of the growth of the sonnet as a genre, discussing what innovations in form, language, and subject matter are made by Shakespeare's contemporary, John Donne, and then by Milton later in the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century was not a time for sonnet writing, so we jump to the nineteenth century to Wordsworth, who (an interesting fact) wrote more sonnets than any other major English poet (including his Ecclesiastical Sonnets, a history of the Church of England in sonnet form!), and to Shelley, whose few sonnets are extraordinarily rich and dense expansions of the form's limits.

Outline

I. John Donne (1572-1631).
   A. Holy Sonnets (Number 10) ("Death, be not proud") (1633).
      1. Donne, like other of his contemporaries, uses the sonnet for religious exploration. The structure of this one is typical: it has an Italian beginning, but instead of a sestet it continues with a third quatrain and a concluding couplet.
      2. As an experiment in "tone of voice" this is a wonderful poem. Death is addressed, commanded, pitied, and condescended to, in various ways, although we realize that the speaker is—at least in part—making an argument for his own benefit.
      3. The poem also engages us at the rhetorical level of paradox. Death is personified as a fearsome ruler who then becomes a slave to other tyrants.
      4. Donne plays with the traditional associations of death with sleep as a means of assuaging his own fears: notice the quasi-logical force of his idea ("if we derive pleasure from sleep, then surely we shall derive more pleasure from Death").
      5. But then he also moves to a Christian sense of death as a temporary state that precedes eternal life. Think of the standard Christian paradox of having to die in order to be reborn, of losing your life in order to find it. It turns out that Christian salvation becomes, at the same time, a means of "killing" Death itself.
   B. Holy Sonnets (Number 14) ("Batter my heart, three-personed God") (1633).
      1. This poem too plays with different ways of approaching its theme, in this case the speaker's wish to be saved by God even though he realizes his own unfaithfulness.
2. Its haughtiness of address—and the commands Donne issues to God—fly in the face of what would be considered normal Christian humility, but the speaker is desperate. He knows that God cannot make him good or make him believe; he knows that his will is free, but evil seems irresistible.

3. We notice how he develops throughout the poem two related, but separate metaphors. He is like a town, enslaved but hopeful of delivery from an enemy to its proper lord, and he is like a bride (traditionally, the Christian soul is the bride of Christ) who wishes to be married to her true husband.

4. Finally, we notice that the poem ends with strong paradoxical language (chastity and ravishment, freedom and enthrallment seem to go together), which is the speaker's way of discovering the right terms to express his wishes to God.

II. John Milton (1608-1674).
   A. "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont" (published 1673, written 1655).
      1. You will want to review Lecture Ten to see how Milton performs a miraculous experiment with this sonnet.
      2. Consider the tightness of the poem's rhymes and how it plays with both the Italian and the English forms.
   B. "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" (published 1673, written 1652).
      1. Milton had become totally blind right before he composed this sonnet. The "talent which is death to hide" alludes to the parable of the talents (Matthew 25. 14-30) and, in Milton's case, refers to both his sight and, perhaps, his writing.
      2. Again, I call your attention to the way the sonnet overflows its boundaries. Nine lines are enjambed. Sentences tend to end in the middle, rather than the end, of lines. Speed is the essence of Milton's rhythms.
      3. The last line stands alone as a single utterance, very much as the speaker himself has come to realize he must. It offers a suitable sense of closure.

III. William Wordsworth (1770-1850), "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." (published 1807)
   A. This poem is both a description and an experiment in figurative language.
      1. We notice the relatively bare simplicity of the title, with its specification of place and time.
      2. The poem begins with the calm of simple generalization and evaluation, before proceeding to its first major simile in 11. 4-5.
      3. The city is most clothed when most bare.
      4. The city is most beautiful when most corpse-like (11. 13-14).

IV. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), "Ozymandias" (1818).
   A. Everything about this sonnet is peculiar except its theme.
      1. The decay of empires is a standard trope in literature.
      2. But look at the rhyme scheme and try to figure it out!
      3. Then look at the sentences and at where they stop and start. The first one, although with pauses for subordinate clauses and independent ones, goes from line 1 to line 11. The second one is the shortest and most striking. The third summarizes the experience.
   B. Consider the speakers and the chain of displacement.
      1. The poet (presumably but not necessarily the speaker) meets a traveler.
      2. The traveler gives his report in twelve lines.
      3. At the center of the report are the words of Ozymandias, engraved on the pedestal of his statue. (Earlier, the fragments "tell" us something.)
      4. And those words have been inscribed by a sculptor who is able to "read passions" as well as "mock" (imitate and make fun of) them.
   C. What is ultimately eternal? What survives, what disappears?
      1. Notice the anonymity of all the persons in the poem except for Ozymandias.
      2. Passion seems to be the one thing that survives (albeit in a depicted form), even though we normally think of passions as transient phenomena.

Questions to Consider:
1. Another set of comparisons, this time between Wordsworth ("Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802") and Shelley ("Ozymandias"): How are they alike in tone, language, tropes? How are they different?
2. Our overarching questions of this course (see Foreword) basically ask why the poet has arranged a poem one way and not some other way. Applying this specifically to Shelley's "Ozymandias," can you cite instances where this sonneteer has "broken the rules" of a supposedly strict poetic form—and gotten away with it? For example, where is the "couplet"? What is the rhyme scheme? What key words come to the rescue of what might be merely a well-intentioned travelogue?

Lecture Sixteen The Enduring Sonnet

Scope: We end this mini-survey with some examples of sonnets from this century. The tradition remains strong and, although we may lack book-length sonnet sequences to rival Shakespeare's, we certainly can boast, at century's end and in America, a number of young poets who feel obliged to experiment with this most elastic of forms.

Outline

I. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), "Leda and the Swan" (1923).
   A. Although Yeats was not famous for writing sonnets, here he has composed one of the most celebrated, stunning sonnets of the century. He has reinvigorated the oldest tradition by using his sonnet as a vehicle for a "love" poem.
      1. Leda was taken by Zeus disguised as a swan. She gave birth to Helen of Troy (and to her sister Clytemnestra, as well as to the twins Castor and Pollux, although there are various mythic interpretations of exactly which children Zeus fathered), who was one of many causes of the Trojan War.
      2. A brief note on the importance of this myth in Yeats's own religious-mythological system: Christianity was ushered in by an annunciation to, and an impregnation of, a mortal woman (the Virgin Mary) by an angel (Gabriel) speaking on behalf of a three-personed divinity. Renaissance depictions of the Annunciation always involve the presence of a dove, making its way to Mary's ears. She is impregnated by the Holy Spirit at the very moment Gabriel addresses her.
      3. Likewise, the previous 2,000-year cycle began with another annunciation and impregnation, this time by Zeus of Leda.
   B. The matter of point-of-view.
      1. We begin the sonnet from Leda's point of view; she does not know what has happened.
      2. Notice the parts of speech, the compilation of body parts, and the construction of the entire first quatrain. Not until line 4 do we reach the subject and verb of the whole sentence.
      3. The poem modulates between Leda's point-of-view and that of the narrator, who poses important questions about history and knowledge.
   C. The relation of octave to sestet.
      1. Line 9 in some way repeats line 1. And the final question in some way repeats (at least formally) lines 4-8.
      2. The climax—literal and figurative—comes in line 9.
3. And through it, Yeats is able to encapsulate a whole panorama of history: from Leda's impregnation through the Trojan war and the return of the Greek heroes after ten years, as captured in Homer and Aeschylus.

D. The issue of rape and love.
1. Many female readers take issue with the poem as a glorification of rape.
2. For his part, Zeus does not come off too well in the poem. He has his way and then abandons the girl.
3. But it is equally possible to think of the sonnet as a treatment of possession by divinity, and of the feeling of being overwhelmed by a super-human, sexual-religious force that leaves one, literally and figuratively, reeling.

E. History and knowledge.
1. The poem tests one of Yeats's often-repeated themes: namely, that the agents of history are often (always?) unaware of their effects.
2. Ending the poem with a question is an important decision. Is the question rhetorical or genuine?
3. Yeats had a fondness for ending poems with questions; he inherited this mostly from Shelley. It opens up the entire matter of what is appropriate closure for a work of art. Are we satisfied?

II. Robert Frost (1874-1973).
A. "The Oven Bird" (1916).
1. Observe the relationship (in all of Frost's sonnets) between the sentences and the stanzas or between the stanzas and their rhymes.
2. This poem begins with a couplet, and the sestet begins with another couplet. For the rest, the rhymes are unpredictable.
3. The poem tries to distinguish between singing and saying: the oven bird (also known as the "teacher" bird) does not sound like the others, preferring more prosaic forms of utterance.
4. But the bird—like the poet and the poem—is also a framer (of questions) and he reminds us that from spring to fall there is not too far a gap.

B. "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same" (1942).
1. We are aware of Frost's fondness for, and use of, birds in his poems. He is in the Romantic tradition in this respect.
2. Like the previous poem, this one deals with both birds and the motif of the (or, at least, a) Fall.
3. The poem refers to Adam, without naming him; his love for Eve is clearly a starting point for Frost's deliberations.
4. By the poem's turn (line 9) Frost himself injects a new tone, slightly more foreboding. We are meant to hear in "probably" a derisive, ironic thrust. We know that much is soon to be lost.

5. Frost treats the most serious of themes with the simplest and most ordinary language; thus, the poem's last line (also its last sentence) has a deliberately chilling effect. Our point of view is not that of Adam.

C. "The Silken Tent."
1. This love poem is one-sentence long and, therefore, something of a tour de force.
2. Like many poems, it is a performance of its own, as well as an homage to the loved woman.
3. It is an experiment in troping (i.e., the subject is "She" but after the first two words she disappears into the simile of the tent), and in syntax and rhythm, in order to demonstrate and discuss motifs of support and freedom.

A. This is a fine example of a sonnet by a contemporary woman poet.
1. It is a love poem and it follows a conventional theme, although its form is somewhat unconventional.
2. It begins with an Italian octave, but then instead of a volta, line 8 enjamb directly into line 9, carrying over the force of the argument.
3. Notice how lines 13-14 have the rhetorical force of a couplet, although they rhyme with earlier lines. Hacker is going in several directions at once.

B. Although it appears to break the rules, this sonnet is well within the tradition.
1. The details mentioned above, concerning the relation of rhyme to sentence, show how Hacker has learned from Frost.
2. The very title of the poem also implies an homage to the Shakespeare of Sonnet 73 ("That time of year"), whose lover will soon leave him, and life, as well.
3. The sonnet can obviously be understood as a self-contained utterance and as a chapter in an ongoing series, part of a relationship that looks both backward and forward.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. Compare Frost's "The Silken Tent" to Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes" in terms of imagery. What does the sonnet form allow in the way of additional "depth" as compared to the shorter stanzaic form used by Herrick?

2. We started out by describing the "restrictions" of the strict sonnet form and ending by stating that it is the "most elastic of forms." Review the sonnets we have read and try to track the changes that have occurred as succeeding generations tackled the challenges of the sonnet.

Lecture Seventeen
Poets Thinking

Scope: This lecture is the first of three, all of which will deal with the ways in which poets "think," or introduce abstract thoughts, make logical or figurative arguments, or attempt to reach philosophical conclusions via the medium of a poem. Some poets have been interested in abstract thinking (T. S. Eliot almost completed a doctorate in philosophy at Harvard; Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Shelley both read deeply in Plato and contemporary German metaphysics); others, who may produce works just as deep, do not have such a pronounced academic or metaphysical bent. In any case, we shall examine ways in which poets meditate and make arguments via a variety of means.

A poet can think in terms of images, and allow images to produce something like a sequence of ideas or feelings. In addition, a poet can make statements of either an abstract or specific sort, which resemble what we would call in prose "a thesis statement" for an argument. Poets can think logically, or analogically (using, in other words, figurative speech to develop a series of comparisons), clearly or vaguely. Throughout most of the Renaissance (up until probably the age of the British Romantics, in fact) poetry was closely allied to rhetoric (the art of persuasion), so it is natural to think of a poem in terms of the arguments it makes and its success in doing so.

In this lecture we shall examine three poets from an earlier period, all of whom "make arguments." John Donne and Andrew Marvell, both called "metaphysical" poets for the way in which they could spin elaborate metaphors (or poetic conceits), write wittily about serious subjects (the relationship of love to religious worship and the meanings of retreat and retirement) in "The Canonization" and "The Garden." Alexander Pope, in the neo-classical period, was able to use the balanced form of the heroic couplet as a means of not only making arguments but also of demonstrating (i.e., showing as well as telling) his points, in the marvelous Essay on Criticism.

Outline

We begin our exploration of how poets think by returning to John Donne (1572-1631) whose fervent, religious sonnets we discussed in Lecture Fifteen.

A. "The Canonization" (1633) is a dramatic, conversational poem that has an autobiographical background.
1. The poem begins as a conversation (an exasperated one) with someone who has apparently just criticized the speaker for his love affair.
2. In fact, we know that Donne was criticized for his own marriage.
3. Its five stanzas move away from a direct address to a meditation on the nature of love.

B. The shape of the poem.
1. The poem rises to a climax at its mid-point, where a single image (the paradoxical phoenix) embodies the mysteries of the speaker's love.
2. Before that, however, he shows how his love is not doing any harm to anyone else, and therefore, begs to be left alone.
3. The sexual nature of the love (in stanza 3) is succeeded by a realization of its religious, mysterious nature.

C. The uses of paradox, wit, and irony to develop thought.
1. Because the speaker wishes to be left alone, it comes as no surprise that the motif of a "hermitage" comes up at the end.
2. On the other hand, a religious retreat is not exactly the place one would expect to find two ardent lovers.
3. The very mystery of the love—its constant sexual energy—is what, paradoxically, assures its usefulness as a model to future lovers.
4. These people in future degenerate times will look back on us, Donne says, as models of constancy and treat us as saints who might intervene on their behalf with God.
5. Far from losing the world, at the end of the poem the two lovers become the "epitome" or microcosm of the entire world.

II. Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), "The Garden" (1681).
A. The garden tradition.
1. This poem belongs to a genre of poems that describe, analyze, and otherwise employ the trope of the garden, which is, after all, a standard image in Western literature, with both classical and biblical prototypes.
2. In Marvell's case, the garden functions both as a retreat from the world and an epitome or microcosm of the world.

B. Poetic structure.
1. Unlike Donne's poem, "The Garden" does not follow an argument per se; it is not dramatic in the way Donne's poem is, nor does it address a real human being.
2. There seems to be something random in its organization.
3. It begins by looking back on what has been left behind. It then surveys the wonders of the garden and becomes speculative and abstract at its mid-point.
4. Finally, the poet imagines his soul as a bird that is about to take his leave of this world; he then considers the impossible happiness Adam might have had were he in the garden without Eve (an impossibility in part because Adam desired a mate). 5. And the poem ends, perhaps as an afterthought, with the sundial made of flowers; the speaker seems to have returned to his normal condition and has re-entered time itself.

C. Poetic wit.
1. Marvell has a great deal of fun in this poem simply by virtue of verbal playfulness. The poem is full of punning, or at least ambiguous words, right from the start ("amaze," "vainly," "upbraid," "companies").
2. In addition, he plays with syntactic ambiguity (as in stanza 4).
3. And he plays as well with paradoxes: on the one hand, he claims that the garden is possibly a place of sexual purity; on the other, it is the place where Pan and Apollo found sexual satisfaction.
4. The poem is a series of variations on "green thoughts" (stanza 6) and as such is an intellectual game (suggesting that the mind is superior to the natural world), as well as a lyric expression.

III. Alexander Pope (1688-1744), from An Essay on Criticism, lines 337-373 (1709).
A. Pope made an important contribution to literary criticism.
1. This poem by the very young Pope is an important document in literary theory and criticism. It follows a tradition extending from Aristotle (the Poetics) and Horace through Sir Philip Sidney and other Renaissance poets up to the Augustan or neo-classical writers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
2. It speaks in favor of the virtues of good sense, wit, judgment, balance, and rationality in poetry.

B. Showing and telling.
1. What Pope so deftly, brilliantly achieves throughout this didactic poem is a synthesis of description, literary theorizing, and literary showmanship.
2. For example, consider the way these lines demonstrate the very phenomena they are describing: 11. 345-47, 350-353, 355-57.
3. The formula that Pope offhandedly tosses off ("True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance./As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance") is a model for a certain kind of artistic clarity especially with regard to the appropriateness of its simile.
4. There is a kind of art that hides art, thereby proving its own ease.
Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How do you evaluate "The Canonization" as a love poem? Is there anything new here? Is Donne overdoing it a bit? Since this lecture is on how poets think and put that thought into form, what clues to Donne's thinking about love (his particular love) can you infer from the poem?
2. How do you evaluate the excerpt from An Essay on Criticism discussed in this lecture? How do the "heroic" couplets sound to your ears after fifty lines? The classical allusions? Do you agree with Pope's dictum that "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance"?

Lecture Eighteen
The Greater Romantic Lyric

Scope: We continue our investigation of "poets thinking" by looking at two similar poems in a new mode. Long ago, the critic M. H. Abrams defined "the greater Romantic lyric" as one that begins in a specific time and place, then proceeds outward through a series of philosophical and meditative maneuvers, and finally ends back in the here-and-now, where it began. Coleridge invented the term "conversation poem" for this mode and, in "Frost at Midnight," he perfected it. Wordsworth, who learned a great deal from his friend, composed perhaps the most famous example of this kind of poem in what we call, simply, "Tintern Abbey," but whose real (and less thrilling title) is "Lines—Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1789." We shall examine these two poems to see how they work, and to show how two very similar poets can achieve startlingly different effects in their work.

Outline
I. "The Greater Romantic Lyric" is a poem of some length that starts in a specific time or place, makes an address to a present or absent person or object, goes through a series of philosophical speculations, and usually ends back where it began.

II. William Wordsworth (1770-1850), "Tintern Abbey" (1798).
A. The circumstances of the poem are important to understand before analyzing it.
   1. Wordsworth was making a walking tour of the Wye Valley with his sister, Dorothy; he had visited the spot five years earlier. In the intervening years he had been caught up in political activity (in London and in France), had sired an illegitimate child by a French woman, and suffered something akin to what we would term a nervous breakdown and a vocational crisis. By the time of this poem, he had met Coleridge, become reunited with his sister (from whom he had been separated after the deaths of their parents), and was on his way to settling down.
   2. The location: Tintern Abbey was a ruined abbey and, in 1798, it was inhabited by gypsies, vagrants, and other homeless people. It is significant that the poem never refers to the abbey itself, but merely to the landscape around it.
   3. The poem is concerned with motifs of absence and presence.
B. The shape of the poem is our first object of study.
1. Written in characteristically Wordsworthian blank verse paragraphs, the poem's several sections start with, and then return to, the landscape. Sameness and difference are its themes.
2. In the middle, Wordsworth rehearses his autobiography, contemplates the importance of this landscape, and deliberates on the relationship of landscape to morality. He considers not only how memory functions but also the very processes that enable a person to move from one stage of life to the next.
3. At the end, he (much to our surprise) addresses himself to his sister, who has been with him.

C. The poet "thinking."
1. Although it is easy to excerpt certain nuggets or truisms from the poem, what is more interesting is Wordsworth's means of developing "thoughts." Thus, the shape and scope of his sentences are as important as their content.
2. We would like to think of the poem as affirmative; in fact, its very dislocations and hesitations suggest that it is equally a poem of great doubt. The affirmations are hard won.
3. Were it not for the poet's interesting use of language—and his reliance on abstract words as well as concrete ones—we probably would not be as moved by the poem's statements.

III. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), "Frost at Midnight" (1798).
A. The circumstances of the poem: Coleridge was unhappily married, and the poem locates him in his cottage, with his first child (Hartley) sleeping by his side.
1. The poem takes the form of a description of the setting, a reminiscence of the poet's childhood, and then a prayer for the future of his son.
2. The "stranger" he refers to is a film, or piece of soot, that flutters on a fireplace; its presence, according to local folklore, often predicted the arrival of a friend or relative.
3. This little detail helps the poet begin his meditations.
B. The poem's "ideas."
1. The poem is concerned with the way we associate thoughts with one another, and it works by associating images and people as well. "Thought" in the first stanza is both a toy, something the poet is playing with, and the activity in which he is engaged. He tends to glorify and to demean himself simultaneously.
2. The images (or motifs) of echo and mirror (a motif we shall consider in Lectures Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four) allow the poet to associate himself with his son, his present with his past, his childhood self with his sister, and man's self to God's.
3. Repetition, reflection, and echo, in fact, give the poem a coherent shape.

C. The poem's structure.
1. One paragraph to set the mood leads to one of autobiography. The first two stanzas both end with images that promise something but fail to deliver it.
2. The third stanza contrasts the poet's childhood with the present life of his son and takes a hopeful look forward to a time at which a perfect reciprocity will exist between young Hartley and God.
3. The final stanza, a benediction, returns to the motifs of natural beauty and allies them with the motif of human reciprocity that Coleridge dealt with earlier. Coleridge effectively uses chiasmus (crossing or reversing images between two lines or clauses); see especially line 62. The poem rounds to its conclusion with the motif of the frost.
4. The trains of thought and feeling, not the ideas, are the essence of this poem.

Suggested Reading:
Fry, Paul. The Poet's Calling in the English Ode.

Questions to Consider:
1. "Tintern Abbey" was actually one of Wordsworth's first poems and it basically launched the English Romantic movement. Compare this "greater Romantic lyric" poem to the shorter works "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and "The Solitary Reaper" (Lecture Two), "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" (Lecture Seven), and "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" (Lecture Fifteen) in the context of the poet thinking. How consistent—and compelling—is Wordsworth in his thinking and his way of presenting his thoughts? Do you think the shorter works "work better" than the longer "Lines" in expressing thought or demonstrating how the poet thinks?
2. We stated in the lecture that Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" shows thoughts in the process of being thought, that is, a process of association of one thought with another. Lines 20-23 explicitly state the motifs of "echo" and "mirror." Examine the poem carefully to find instances of how the structure reinforces the idea of repetition, reflection, and echo through such devices as anaphora, alliteration, assonance, chiasmus, synaesthesia, and word repetition, as well as direct images of "reflection" (in a physical sense).
Lecture Nineteen Poets
Thinking—Some Twentieth-Century Versions

Scope: This lecture proceeds from the previous ones, in order to show how poets can express "thought" (as well as individual thoughts) through a wide range of means: direct statement, supple syntax, shifting images, and the asking of questions. It moves from the relatively preachy style of Robinson Jeffers, to the elegant conundrum posed by Wallace Stevens in "The Snow Man," and to Yeats's "Among School Children," a poem that resembles in some ways the nineteenth-century nature lyrics of Wordsworth and Coleridge and in some ways the metaphysical speculation inherent in Marvell's "The Garden." The lecture ends with a consideration of Robert Hass's "Meditation at Lagunitas," a poem with an overt philosophical theme.

Outline

   A. Language, form, and style.
      1. The poem has the long lines of Whitman, but it also has the "heft" of a sonnet (i.e., six lines in one key, then four in another).
      2. It is loose and wordy in its reliance on (perhaps excessive) adjectives and examples.
      3. It uses a slightly archaic, almost prophetic, tone to sound authoritative.
   B. Tone and address.
      1. The poem is preachy right from the start, but its imagery (protest as a bubble popping out) enlivens what would otherwise sound like empty complaint.
      2. Although the poem seems conventional in theme (a protest against vulgarity, empire, materialism, human vanity), it makes a surprising turn in the second half, when Jeffers turns resolutely away—and hopes the children will as well—from the "love of man," and a new anti-humanism sweeps across his lines.
      3. The poem oddly mixes politics, history, human feeling, nature and cosmic imagery, and prophetic advice. Jeffers' ideas may be troubling and his methods are equally bizarre.

II. Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), "The Snow Man" (1923).
   A. By comparison to Jeffers, Stevens is cool and bare.
      1. The poem has only a single sentence, although it is fifteen lines long.
      2. The major pronoun is "one."
      3. There are few adjectives.
   B. The poem proceeds from a philosophical proposition toward a paradox.
      1. The initial image (coming from the title) poses implicit questions: what exactly is a "mind of winter?" The genitive case here is somewhat ambiguous.
      2. The concluding image is almost Zen-like in its demand that we distinguish between two kinds of "nothing."
      3. Its main theme (as often in poetry) is a conventional one: the relationship between humanity and nature, the conflict between our desire to place ourselves at the center of a universe and our realization of our own unimportance.
   C. But the syntax of the poem is its true glory.
      1. We notice how the poem takes a new turn in line 6 ("One must have... and not to think").
      2. And then it weaves back upon itself, parading certain repetitions to give us a double sense of fullness and emptiness at the same time.
      3. Ultimately, the poem is self-enclosing and circular.

   A. This is an updated "conversation" poem in ottava rima; it begins loosely and ends with a concentrated burst of lyrical passion.
      1. Yeats was serving as a school inspector, and the poem at least begins with the realistic circumstances pertaining to a visit to an Irish Montessori school.
      2. The initial details suggest the dialogue between Yeats and the nun, and the opposition between him and the school children.
      3. Rather than leaving the here and now, speculating, and then returning (as Wordsworth and Coleridge might) to a specific place and time, Yeats works ever outwards (or inwards), using the present moment as a springboard to other speculations.
   B. Associations.
      1. We notice how various elements in the poem lead from one "thought" or "idea" to the next: a real child permits the poet to dream of a child in his past, and he speculates on how she has moved from childhood to old age.
      2. The idea of "images" becomes central, as it is the means by which the poet makes his associations and clarifies his ideas. The "1" with which the poem begins has dropped out.
      3. One kind of child, and one kind of image, provoke thoughts of the "images" that mothers dream of and that children represent.
   C. Potentiality and actuality.
      1. Just as an egg contains the genetic material for a whole individual, so a child is (as Wordsworth would say) "the father of the man," but what mother could ever imagine her own child grown into old age?
2. Various philosophers (stanza 6) have proposed different theories about the relationship between the physical universe and the world of ideas, but these hardly matter, because all the thinkers grew old and died.

3. Images can convey the very essence of ideas. For example, the images of an egg or an embryo, a chestnut tree or a dancer, encourage us to contemplate growth and decay, labor and performance, possibility and actuality.


A. The importance of a thesis.
   1. Hass begins with a philosophical statement, then proceeds (with a degree of wit) to undermine it.
   2. Even before he uses the word "elegy" (line 11), he has prepared us with his first sentence.
   3. The idea of loss and thinking pervades the poem's tone as well as its meditating.

B. The relationship of the idea to the image.
   1. The casual reminiscences and off-handed tone suggest a sad wisdom with regard to the inherent meaning in all human affairs, as well as humans' attempts to make sense of their affairs.
   2. Mere words ("blackberry," "justice": the specific and the abstract) are slippery, but they are all we have. What is the relationship between words (general, abstract) and things (particular, concrete)?
   3. The motifs are desire, distance, loss. The poem is as much an elegy as a meditation. Words are elegiac (they memorialize a fleeting and illusory world of particular things), but they are also vivifying.
   4. Thus, the poem undermines its own initial thesis by suggesting that moments of religious epiphany are possible.

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare Jeffers' vatic poem, "Shine, Perishing Republic" with Hass's more elegiac "Meditations at Lagunitas." What does each poet say about life? What is the main concern or, we might say, locus of existence for each (as reflected in the poems)?
2. Compare "Among School Children" with "Lines" ("Tintern Abbey") by Wordsworth (Lecture Eighteen) as examples of "greater Romantic lyric" or "conversation poem" (to use Coleridge's phrase). Find the similarities and the differences (the lecture gives one major difference, but there are others) in message, structure, language.

Lecture Twenty
Portrayals of Heroism

Scope: From its earliest appearance, poetry has been a vehicle for transmitting ideas of heroism, heroic ideals, and heroic behavior. In the Greek and Latin epics, Achilles, Odysseus, Aeneas, and others conveyed a sense of the values prized by their societies. Likewise, the earliest English epic, Beowulf, is a story of a warrior king. Obviously it is not possible in a course like this to discuss in detail very long poems; rather, it is my plan over the next two lectures to say something about poems that treat heroic figures and subjects and to show how human values can be portrayed through lyric means.

Outline

I. We begin our investigation of heroism as portrayed in poetry by considering the medieval ballad, "Sir Patrick Spens" (c. 15th century).

A. We do not know the author of this powerful short balladic poem, first printed in 1765, but probably based on an actual occurrence in the late thirteenth century.
   1. Ballads, like folk songs, were anonymous and were handed down, with variations, through centuries.
   2. The relative familiarity of the figures and the stories would mean that a singer or poet did not need to supply too much background information.
   3. Like the hero, the ballad is a vehicle of few words.
   4. Details are important: a single metaphorical gesture ("blood-red wine") can make a big effect.
   5. In addition, ballads tend to use metonymy as a means of classifying and characterizing. The fans and shoes in this ballad are among its salient details.

B. Typical of its genre, this work shows economy of means.
   1. Like the hero, the ballad is a vehicle of few words.
   2. Details are important: a single metaphorical gesture ("blood-red wine") can make a big effect.
   3. In addition, ballads tend to use metonymy as a means of classifying and characterizing. The fans and shoes in this ballad are among its salient details.

II. The Renaissance: George Peele (1557-1596), "His Golden Locks Time Hath to Silver Turned" (1590).

A. As representative of an age, and of a kind of poem, this lyric is hard to beat.
   1. It works entirely by metonymy or substitution: individual details are the organizing principle behind each of the three stanzas.
   2. It conveys an image of heroic valor based on two models: the active and the contemplative lives.

B. Various aspects of the Renaissance ideal gentleman or courtier.
   1. The poem refers or alludes to beauty and strength, warfare and love, and the life of the court.
2. And Sir Henry Lee—in a stage of silver locks, bodily slowness—must exchange the tools of war for those of religion.
3. The knight becomes a beadsman. The poem makes this sequence seem inevitable and natural.

III. Heroism through allusion: John Dryden (1631-1700), "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" (1684).
A. The strength of heroic couplets.
1. Dryden writes his elegy in heroic couplets for a poet-friend who died young. Almost every line is end-stopped; the rhythm and pacing confer a stately dignity upon the subject.
2. The couplets are varied with a tercet (11. 19-21), and by two alexandrines—lines of twelve syllables—in lines 21 and 25, to lend a tone of gravity and finality to the subject.
B. Allusiveness.
1. Dryden "figures" Oldham in part by comparison to heroic figures from history and literature: Nisus and Euryalus from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book 5) and Marcellus, the nephew and heir of Augustus Caesar, who died young. The "hail and farewell" in line 22 is also an echo of the Roman poet Catullus (84? BC-54? BC).
2. He thereby implicitly puts his friend in the company of mythic, historical, and literary figures.
C. Metaphor.
1. Allusion is one kind of comparison, but Dryden resorts as well to more conventional figurative language.
2. The motifs of nature and ripening are used to supplement the references to human figures.
3. Thus, Dryden uses two diverse, but complementary means of portraying a tragic, potentially heroic literary confrere.

IV. Mock-heroism: Lord Byron (1788-1824), "Written After Swimming from Sestosto Abydos" (1812).
A. Playing with and reversing history: Leander swam from Abydos to Sestos (from the Greek to the Asian shore of the Hellespont), whereas Byron goes the other way.
B. His tone and his versification suggest that we take his complaint none too seriously.
1. He is a "degenerate modern wretch."
2. The feminine rhymes at the very start ("December/remember") suggest a playful tone, and they are repeated at the end ("plague you/ague").
3. Modern heroism is probably only heroics, but how can we be sure?

V. Lyric heroism: Tennyson (1809-1892), "Ulysses" (1832).
A. This dramatic monologue is ambiguous about heroism.

Questions to Consider:
1. Assess how the poems discussed in this lecture reflect the views of heroism in the time in which they were written. Try to determine what point of view twentieth-century "heroic" poems will take (no fair looking ahead to Lecture Twenty-One!).
2. What is your assessment of Ulysses in Tennyson's poem? Do you think he is still the heroic figure of the Trojan War and his eponymous epic? Or do you agree with the possible interpretation (paragraph V.C.4) that he is off on a last quixotic fling to relive old glories and therefore no hero at all?
Lecture Twenty-One
Heroism—Some Twentieth-Century Versions

Scope: Although we often think of the twentieth century as the age of the anti-hero, or as a time in which old-fashioned heroism and heroics are no longer fashionable or possible, it remains to be noticed that many poets continue to use their work to praise heroes and to define heroic actions. Whether in the form of political commentary or mythic encounters, twentieth-century poets from Yeats to Adrienne Rich have seriously considered types of heroism and harnessed their ideas about human behavior to their poetic craft.

Outline

   A. "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death (1919).
      1. The poem commemorates the death of Major Robert Gregory, whose mother Augusta was a friend and patron of Yeats's and who died in World War I.
      2. The style of the poem (octosyllabic quatrains) is a beautiful way of maintaining poetic poise and grace, appropriate to the character and style of the man who is speaking it.
      3. Yeats creates a sense of aristocratic heroism in his figure, by allowing him barely any passion: he fights for the sheer of joy it, having no connection to either his countrymen or his nominal enemies.
      4. Hero and artist seem inextricably connected as roles. The two most important and revealing words in the poem are "balance" and "delight."

   B. "Easter 1916" (1916).
      1. We notice how this poem exists on several temporal levels. It begins with the poet's recollection of a time in his past (when the old Boston Aquarium existed) and then pushes farther backward to previous geological eras.
      2. The poem returns at the end to Lowell and contemporary Boston.

II. Robert Lowell (1917-1977), "For the Union Dead" (1964).
   A. As a first-person lyric poem.
      1. We notice how this poem exists on several temporal levels. It begins with the poet's recollection of a time in his past (when the old Boston Aquarium existed). And it then pushes farther backward to previous geological eras.
      2. The poem recalls the 54th Massachusetts regiment of black soldiers led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw.
      3. It places the achievement and failure of that regiment into a counterpoint with contemporary efforts of the civil rights movement one hundred years later. Thus, past and present exist in a continuum.
   B. As a historical record.
      1. As usual, Lowell uses complex and colorful imagery to develop a sense of the present, the past, of himself, and of Colonel Shaw and his regiment.
      2. Animals are everywhere, both literal and metaphorical ones.
   C. As an experiment in imagery.
      1. Shaw's noble effort seems to have been a failure: not only at the time of the Civil War, but also with regard to contemporary events.
      2. The St. Gaudens bas-relief fronting the Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill may offer the surest definition or portrayal of heroism: only through art and memory does heroism stay alive.
      3. With an ironic, satiric touch, the poem concludes mordantly to remind us (in its last lines) that what was once "service" (see the epigraph from the Order of the Cincinnati) has now become mere "servility."
III. Women and heroism.

A. Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), "The Fish" (1946).

1. As versions of heroism, many poems by women play against the cliches of male heroics and swaggering bravado, and none does so more subtly than this easy narrative by Elizabeth Bishop.
2. It is significant that the fisher is a woman and the fish is a male—a military male at that.
3. It is equally significant that, instead of detailing a heroic, Hemingway-esque fight, Bishop makes her catch of the fish an easy matter.
4. Notice the details by which she comes to understand her adversary: the importance of aestheticizing and domesticating him.
5. And notice, as well, the fact that when she throws the fish back, she achieves a victory for both of them.
6. So instead of being a fish story of "the one that got away," the poem makes a new kind of statement: "the one I threw away!"
7. But can we take this too seriously? After all, she took the fish home and ate him.

B. Adrienne Rich (1929-): the politics and forms of feminism.

1. Our most prominent feminist poet-critic, Adrienne Rich, has had an exemplary career, moving from early precocity (her first book was published in the distinguished *Yale Younger Poets* series when she was twenty-two), through a gradual coming-to-terms with feminism, radical politics, lesbianism, and other political and ideological movements from the 1960s to the present day.
2. We can examine the relationship of political statement and depictions of human heroism to poetic form by looking at an early poem and a later one.
3. "Aunt Jennifer's Tiger" (1951) is written in easy rhyming quatrains to demonstrate not only Rich's mastery of her craft but also the confinements that oppress her titular character.
4. "Diving into the Wreck" (1973), the title poem from a signature volume twenty years later, breaks form to develop a new hero and a new myth for female adventure.
5. "Free" verse has its own music, however; the hallucinated and repeated phrases, as well as the poem's play with pronouns, suggest a new way of writing and a new way of performing and creating a heroic human self.

Questions to Consider:

1. At the end of the last lecture, we asked that you conjecture on the direction that poems on heroism might take in the twentieth century. Now that you have heard this lecture and read these poems, was your conjecture justified? Cite specific poems to back up your answer, discussing how they either show a continuation of the heroic tradition or a turning away from it.
2. To the extent that you believe that we are in the age of the anti-hero or even the non-hero, develop an argument for why this might be so. Assuming that there is still heroism in the world, who (contemporary person—last fifty years) or what (contemporary event—last fifty years) would be your choice for a good "old-fashioned" poem on heroism?

Suggested Reading:

Lecture Twenty-Two Poets
Talking to (and for) Works of Art

Scope: In this lecture, we shall look at a canonical poem (Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn") as an excellent example of "ekphrasis," the use of language to describe, or to speak on behalf of, a silent work of art, such as a painting, a sculpture, or in this case, an urn. This is a genre of poetry extending all the way back to Homer, who in *The Iliad* offers a lengthy description of the shield of Achilles (Book 18, 11. 478-608); this motif is picked up by subsequent epic poets and by lyric poets, as well. Another example (which we have already examined in an earlier lecture) is W. H. Auden's "Musee des Beaux Arts." The most important contemporary ekphrastic poem is John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1976) about the famous self-portrait of the Italian Renaissance painter Parmigianino.

Outline

I. Ekphrasis as a mode.
   A. Literary people have always been interested in the visual arts; the two have long been identified as "sister arts." From the time of Simonides and Horace, it has been commonplace to think of a painting as a silent poem and a poem as a talking picture.
   B. Ekphrastic (or descriptive) poems give voice to an object that is otherwise mute (sometimes the actual works of art—or characters in them—speak out to us) or, more generally, produce a verbal representation of a non-verbal representation.
   C. Since most art until the twentieth century has been "representational" (i.e., capable of being discussed in terms of its depicted content), it is a natural and easy step for any writer to attempt to describe what he or she sees in a work of art. The attention can be directed at a mimetic level (the things being represented), at the formal level (i.e., what one notices about matters such as technique, color, line, and symmetry), or at the level of significance ("what does this painting mean?").
   D. The work of art being described can be either an actual one or an invented one (what the poet-critic John Hollander refers to as a "notional" ekphrasis).

II. John Keats (1795-1821), "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819).
   A. Keats composed the poem in May 1819, his *annus mirabilis*; it was printed in a serial (*Annals of the Fine Arts*) in 1820 and then in Keats's (last) volume of 1820. We shall look at it in several ways, paying attention to Keats's treatment of his subject.

1. To begin, it needs to be said that although Keats saw plenty of Grecian urns and other statuary in the British Museum, there is no known original for this urn. He invented it, imagining details for it that he probably saw on other works.
2. And to get rid of something troubling right at the start: people have long been exercised over the question of who says what to whom at the end of the poem. The difficulty comes from two differing uses of quotation marks in the earliest versions of the poem, but most editors now agree to place the last two lines in quotation marks, awarding them to the urn, which is, therefore, speaking out to us.

B. The overall shape of the poem.
   1. Five stanzas (we should take notice of the rhyme scheme): each ten lines long and each a curtailed or partial sonnet (one quatrain, one sestet).
   2. An apostrophic poem, addressed first of all to the urn itself, personified in interesting ways; then to the individually rendered figures on the urn; and again, at the end, to the urn itself.

C. The grammar of the poem.
   1. We should take notice how each stanza is conditioned by a predominant grammatical mode: the first and fourth, by questions; the second, by statements; the third, by exclamations; the last, by statements again.
   2. In this regard, we also notice the way the speaker in the first stanza comes to describe the stilled action of the figures on the vase with nouns, more than verbs.

D. The emotional tonality of the poem.
   1. The first stanza begins quietly and then works its way through a series of increasingly shorter questions to a nervous ecstasy.
   2. The second statement, identifying the various characters on the urn, makes propositional statements, as if trying to apply those truths to the figures depicted on the urn.
   3. In the third stanza, the speaker seeks confidently to address and to reassure the lover and the piper that their efforts are immortal, although he here lays the ground for paradoxical disappointments that are going to appear more boldly in the second half of the poem. The poem seems to reach a climax in the ecstasies of this stanza as the speaker gives advice, while implicitly acknowledging that the superiority of art also contains the seeds of its inferiority status.
   4. The fourth stanza resumes questioning, but this time of a second scene on the urn. Has the speaker walked around the urn? Or has he turned it around? Why is it significant that this scene is one of a group of people in a religious procession? Where are they going? Where are they coming from? Why does he ask? And can he ever know?
5. The fifth stanza works its way up to a paradoxical exclamation right at its mid-point ("Cold pastoral!")), one that is capable of rival interpretations simultaneously. The solace that the speaker offered to figures on the urn in stanza 3 is now offered back to us via the speaking urn in the last lines.

E. The paradoxes in the poem.
1. The urn as a personified "still unravished bride" is one paradox, made even more ambiguous by the word "still"—is it an adjective or adverb? Notice what Keats does throughout the personifications in this stanza and how he returns to them afresh in the last one.
2. Motifs of quiet/sound, stasis/movement, happiness/despair, cold/warmth are ways of organizing a response to the poem.

F. Keats's play of language.
2. Notice as well the more generalized movements among description, proposition, direct address, specific detail, and philosophical speculation.

G. Keats believed that art should be humanizing and consoling, not just an artistic enterprise.

Suggested Reading:
Vendler, Helen. The Odes of John Keats.
Wasserman, Earl. The Finer Tone: Keats' Major Poems.

Questions to Consider:
1. Now that we have looked at ekphrasis in some detail, return to Lecture Seven and closely reread Auden's "Musee de Beaux Arts." What is its tone? Where is its emphasis? How well does it work as an example of ekphrasis?
2. "Musee de Beaux Arts" starts with a strong declarative statement, asks no questions, and ends with what can only be considered an understated observation, while "Ode on a Grecian Urn" starts with a less forceful statement, poses numerous questions, and ends with a strong (and very famous) concluding statement. Return to Lectures Seventeen through Nineteen (on poets "thinking"). How has each poet developed his thought through language, syntax, structure and, of course, the use of ekphrasis? What are the key contrasts and similarities?

Lecture Twenty-Three
Echoes in Poems

Scope: As we move into our last two lectures, we shall begin to look at, and listen to, how poems talk back to one another, and how they often fall into a tradition, to which successive poems add by "alluding" to, repeating, or echoing earlier ones. The matter of allusion is difficult and complex, of course, whereas the matter of a mere "repetition" (as in a refrain) within a single poem is a lot simpler. This lecture will demonstrate what poet-critic John Hollander has called "the figure of echo" and how it works in a series of nineteenth- and twentieth-century poems that have as their central theme, or trope, the motif of echo itself.

Outline
   A. It is important to know the place of this passage in the overall larger work.
      1. In Wordsworth's epic autobiography, the passage known for its hero as "The Boy of Winander" comes in a discussion of "books" and their place in education.
      2. We know from the manuscript that the "boy" was originally Wordsworth himself; in his presentation here, he makes the anecdote a third-person story and has the boy die young.
      3. The whole anecdote is a vignette detailing the processes of education by and in nature.
   B. This passage can be considered as a parable of learning, listening, reading, and responding.
      1. The boy is a natural mimic.
      2. He listens to the owls and answers them.
      3. When he is baffled by silence, another kind of revelation descends upon him.
   C. It can also be viewed as a parable of "echo" and repetition.
      1. The passage confuses our sense of what is "original" and what is "responsive" and, therefore, can be taken as a parable of all literary endeavor.
      2. The motif of the entry of the "visible" scene that enters into the boy's mind is another complicated example of repetition, absorption, and doubling.
      3. The sad thing is that the entire episode leads only to death.
II. Robert Frost, "The Most of It" (1942) is an updating, or "echo," of "The Boy of Windander."
   A. Frost writes of an unnamed, unspecified man (or boy?) in nature looking for some response.
      1. What is the nature of "original response"? We are reminded of the notion of origin, the place of beginning.
      2. Man and nature exist in an uneasy reciprocal relationship.
   B. This is a distinctly Frostian (original) poem.
      1. We notice that instead of owls, Frost's character gets his response in the form of a buck.
      2. We notice, as well, the importance of "it" (line 10).
      3. Not only is the "thing" unspecified for a while, but it also comes as a surprise since it is not "human.”
      4. And it comes in the form of a simile ("as a great buck").
   C. The notion of identity, like the notion of origin, has been blurred or complicated for us.

III. Elizabeth Bishop, "The Moose" (1976).
   A. First, we will consider this as a poem of encounter.
      1. The poem is like those earlier Wordsworthian encounters ("Resolution and Independence," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," "The Solitary Reaper," etc.).
      2. Significantly, the setting involves a group, instead of a solitary speaker.
      3. Bishop has a keener sense of community than Wordsworth, but is also a lone traveler on the bus, overhearing the conversations of her fellow passengers.
   B. We can also consider this poem to be a response to Frost as well as to Wordsworth.
      1. The moose—perhaps a threat—turns out to be harmless and unaggressive.
      2. It is a female (unlike Frost's "great buck").
      3. It produces, as opposed to consternation and confusion, a shared feeling of joy.

   A. We can consider this to be a "learned poem" for several reasons.
      1. We notice how the poet begins in the library.
      2. And is involved in an exercise in translation, which uncovers a remarkable (or so he thinks) fact about a certain word that then inspires him to create a "herd of meanings" for a single word and its family.
      3. But learning always involves self-correction, aftershocks, and afterthoughts, so it comes as no surprise that the second part of the poem repeats and revises an earlier misapprehension.
   B. This poem is an excellent study of origins, originality, echoing, and lyric self-consciousness.
      1. Mislooking (with an "errant eye") means making mistakes.
      2. And it also involves an unwanted, aggressive first-person pronoun (eye = I!).
      3. Mislooking and mishearing are united.
   C. The poem reminds us that lyric consciousness and feeling are not antithetical to allusiveness, wit, and historical learning.
      1. Hollander subtly puts himself into a tradition by referring to it (viz., explicitly to Frost and indirectly to Wordsworth).
      2. But he also tells his readers much of what they need to know about his subject. (He is not merely showing off.)
      3. The poem makes a serious statement—through lighthearted means—about the nature of "ego" or "self and its relationship to originality.
      4. We all come from somewhere, and all literary creation involves, therefore, the necessity of "semantic play." In this sense, there is no real "originality"; it is a myth in poetry, as in life.

Suggested Reading:
Hollander, John. The Figure of Echo.
--------. Harp Lake.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you find other poems in this lecture series that allude to earlier works? Compare the initial poem with its imitator.
2. Do you agree that originality is not possible in poetry? Is it necessary for a poem to be "original?" Consider the many forms that originality might take. Consider also Hollander's "decree": "In all Originality/Where once God was, let ego be."
Lecture Twenty-Four
Farewells and Falling Leaves

Scope: In this final lecture of the entire course, we shall continue a motif from the previous one, i.e., how poets respond to, imitate, and echo one another. And we shall do so with regard to perhaps the most resonant trope in Western literature, the motif of the "falling leaves," which we shall follow from its source in Homer's Iliad through various reappearances up to the present day. Perhaps the enduring nature of elegy as a form has persuaded our poets for more than two millennia to use and reuse this motif of seasonal death and rebirth.

Outline

I. The trope of "falling leaves" starts in Homer (Iliad, Book 6).
   A. In battle, the Trojan warrior Glaucus encounters the Greek Diomedes, who inquires of his lineage.
   B. Glaucus responds to the "Great-souled son of Tydeus" by likening the "generations of men" to "generations of leaves" and pictures the scattering of leaves, their decay, and the rebirth of new leaves in the spring. In like manner, Glaucus says, with men, one generation dies out only to give rise to another.
   C. The same sentiment appears as well in Ecclesiastes (Old Testament).

II. Virgil in his Aeneid^ Book 6 (which was consciously written to imitate the Iliad and Odyssey), continues the trope; he simultaneously echoes, varies, and amplifies Homer.
   A. Virgil repeats, but with important differences, Homer's original simile.
      1. Aeneas, the founder of the Roman nation, has descended into the underworld to learn from Anchises, his father, the next steps he must take.
      2. At the River Styx, he is greeted by the souls seeking transport by the ferryman Charon to the other side.
   B. Virgil's simile mingles the motif of the leaves with that of migrating birds, thus increasing the relevance of the original in Homer.

III. We jump forward to the Renaissance and to Dante's Inferno, Canto III (c. 1314), to pick up the trope again.
   A. Now in the underworld, with Virgil as his guide, Dante encounters Charon at the River Styx.
      1. Notice the symbolic importance of Virgil's position in the poem (an "echo").
      2. And notice as well the fact that—as with Virgil and Homer—homage is being paid to a previous master in a different language.
   B. The Christian underworld is different from the pagan one, and Dante emphasizes the sense of punishment that awaits the souls.
      1. It is Adam's "evil seed" that is compared to the leaves of the tree.
      2. A falcon is now the bird troped in Virgil.
      3. These souls have no hope for rebirth, unlike the leaves of trees.

IV. Moving forward several centuries, we see the image of falling leaves reappear in Milton's monumental Paradise Lost, Book 1,11. 295-313 (1667).
   A. We find ourselves once again in the underworld, but now it is Satan who is addressing his fallen angelic troops.
      1. Milton alludes to Dante, by referring to Vallombrosa, near Florence, Dante's native city.
      2. The troops are about to be raised and inspired; unlike Virgil's and Dante's souls, they are not yet moving.
   B. Milton extends the simile to include a reference to God's destruction of the Egyptian pharaoh as the Israelites crossed the Red Sea during the exodus.
      1. This doubles, or at least extends, the historical and religious range of the original simile.
      2. It also reminds us that Satan and the fallen angels, like Pharaoh and his soldiers, are on the wrong side of justice in the world Milton is describing.

V. Our next stop is in the Romantic era and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (1820).
   A. Composed in Florence, this ode pays homage to both Dante and Milton.
      1. Notice that it is a sonnet, but written in Dante's form, terza rima.
      2. The same tempestuous wind that Shelley invokes is the one that Milton would have noticed in Vallombrosa.
      3. There is a sly reminiscence of Paradise Lost, Book I, in these lines.
   B. We are back above the earth.
      1. Shelley's setting is naturalistic rather than mythological, and Judeo-Christian notions of damnation and salvation are not his primary concern.
      2. But death and rebirth are of concern, as befits the trope.
      3. The leaves become seeds that will be reborn, when spring—autumn's sister—brings new fruitfulness and life to the earth.
   C. This is a lyric poem, not an epic, and Shelley has changed the nature of his simile.
      1. By alluding to his predecessors, he has lifted his lyric to the level of a greater utterance.
      2. By personalizing the simile ("If I were a deaf leaf thou mightest bear" he exclaims), he includes himself among the fallen and the soon-to-be uplifted leaves.
3. The poet has become an instrument (lyre) and an agent of a greater force.

VI. Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" (1913) is an early twentieth-century homage to the previous poems we have discussed in terms of "falling leaves."

A. Here we encounter an even shorter lyric poem, more like haiku and an imagist experiment—a detail reduced to its smallest components.

B. The simile is significant: faces of people in the subway are like petals.
   1. They stand out like jewels in the foil of a setting (the bough).
   2. Once again, the human and vegetative worlds are brought into balance.

C. But we notice the location.
   1. An "apparition" (rather than, say, a mere "appearance") suggests something ghostly.
   2. The metro station suggests a descent into an underworld.
   3. Pound has placed himself within the epic tradition as delicately as possible.

VII. Howard Nemerov, in his "For Robert Frost, in the Autumn, in Vermont" (1967), gives us a late twentieth-century version of the "falling leaves" trope.

A. This poem acts as a simile with multiple applications.
   1. It serves as an homage to the classic "New England" poet.
   2. It is also a satire directed at leaf-peeping tourists in the fall.

B. On another level, it gives a reminder of death and rebirth in regard to nature, to human beings and to Frost (who died in 1963) himself. Even the word "shade" in the last line conveys multiple suggestions (shade of the leaves, souls of the damned).

C. Finally, this is a parable of looking, seeing, and reading.
   1. It employs the trope of the liber naturae (God's "book of nature") and makes us see the natural world as a work of art.
   2. The natural world is used as a trope for the pages of Frost's own poetry.

VIII. A farewell to falling leaves.

A. Let us reconsider our beginnings, by returning to A. R. Ammons' "Beautiful Woman" with its use of the word "fall" and the tropes it brings to mind.

B. Even this delicate lyric adheres to the most enduring truth of all: our sense of our humanity and our relationship (both parallel and adversarial) to the natural world.

Suggested Reading:

Ammons, A. R. Brink Road.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you find other poems in these lectures (or elsewhere) that play on the trope of falling leaves? Develop their relationship to the Homeric original as well as the other subsequent poems, noting each case of direct and indirect reference to any predecessors.

2. Finally, how well has this course helped to give you a new understanding of the poetic art and meet the learning objectives mentioned in the overall course scope statement? Specifically, we set out to equip you with specific knowledge of how to read poetry with a stress on recognizing the figurative language, music and sound, and tone of voice (the element that Frost deemed most important). We also covered structure (poetic forms and meter). Do you feel more able at this point to reading any poem with greater insight into what it says and how it says it? If so, please enjoy the pleasure of poetry in the future, whether seeing old favorites with new eyes or encountering totally new poems.
**Glossary**

**Alliteration:** the repetition of a consonant or a cluster of consonantal sounds.

**Anapest:** metrical foot of two unstressed/short and one stressed/long syllables.

**Anaphora:** the use of a repeated sound, word, or phrase, at the beginning of a sequence of lines.

**Apostrophe:** a direct address to a present or absent object or person.

**Assonance:** the repetition of a vowel sound in a sequence of words.

**Ballad:** a traditional song (often anonymous and often transmitted orally with many variations over a period of time) that tells a story.

**Ballade:** an old French form inherited by English poets, consisting of three eight-line stanzas (rhyming ababbcbc) with a four-line envoy (or envoi) (rhyming bcbc) to close the ballade.

**Blank Verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter. Used for the first time in England by the Earl of Surrey in his 1540 translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, then popularized in drama by Marlowe and Shakespeare; the standard measure for Milton in his epics.

**Blazon** (sometimes "blason"): an itemization of a lover's (usually a woman's) features, starting with the hair or head and working down the body. It derives from the heraldic concept of blazon (or arrangement of figures on a knight's flag) and developed in the medieval and Renaissance periods, becoming common in English poetry in the Elizabethan age. In addition to the listing of attributes, the poet used poetic techniques of hyperbole and simile. Shakespeare, in Sonnet 130, creates an engaging parody of this conventional style.

**Caesura:** from the Latin word for "cutting," a pause in a line of verse, normally occurring as break in the middle of a line.

**Catechresis:** misuse of a word or extending its meaning in an illogical metaphor.

**Chiasmus:** a "crossing" or reversal of the order of terms in two parallel clauses.

**Couplet:** a pair of rhyming lines. The traditional form of Alexander Pope is "heroic" couplets, i.e., two iambic pentameter lines, often closed, with a strong rhyme and a rhetorical balance.

**Dactyl:** metric foot of one stressed/long and two unstressed/short syllables.

**Dialectical Irony:** Irony obtained by juxtaposing two different voices, alternating as in a conversation, with a single poem.

**Double Dactyl:** An eight-line poem in which each of the first three lines is metrically a double dactyl, the fourth and eighth lines rhyme and are abbreviated.

The first line is a nonsense word, on line must be a proper name and on line must be a six-syllable word. This is a relatively recent form.

**Ekphrasis:** a verbal representation of a visual representation, e.g., any piece of literature that either describes a work of art or else attempts to "speak" on behalf of the work.

**Elegy:** originally a term for a poem in a specific meter (the alternation of six-foot and five-foot lines); now simply a label for any dirge, lament, or extended meditation on the death of a specific individual.

**Enjambment:** a run-on line, i.e., one line of poetry that does not pause but, instead, goes swiftly into the following line.

**Free Verse:** a form that eschews traditional meter in favor of unspecified variety in line length; there are precedents for it in the eighteenth century, but it is essentially of nineteenth-century origin. In English, it is associated primarily with Walt Whitman and his successors.

**Iamb:** metrical foot of one unstressed/short and one stressed/long syllable.

**Imagism:** a movement of poetry that flourished immediately before World War I in England and America, the most famous practitioners of which were Amy Lowell and, for a time, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. It favored "direct treatment of the thing” in concentrated bursts of imagery and in some ways was modeled on Western ideas of Eastern (especially Japanese) poetry. In rebellion against extraneous description, discursiveness, and preachiness, it attempted to produce a sense of immediacy.

**Irony:** a term with multiple meanings, stretching back to the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues; as an eiron (a dissimulator), Socrates is the man who claims to know nothing but is actually wiser than everyone else. Likewise, irony as a rhetorical term is used to signify the process by which one thing can mean another, or say something different from what it purports or intends to do. Dramatic irony is, of course, something related but distinct.

**Limerick:** a form used in English verse that has five anapestic (q.v.) lines with the rhyme scheme aabba. Limericks are usually humorous and often bawdy.

**Metaphor:** a figure of similarity ("his stomach is a balloon"), normally implied as opposed to direct (in which case it would be a simile). It is at once the basic and most simple and also the most complex of literary figures. Conventionally we speak of a metaphor's vehicle (its actual language) and its tenor (what is represented or implied). Another way of thinking of metaphor or simile is as a tri-partite figure: A is to B in terms of C ("Bill is like a fox because both are sly").

**Meter:** from the Greek word for foot or measure. Meter is a means of measuring lines of conventional verse: e.g., tetramer is four feet; pentameter, five; hexameter, six.
Metonymy: usually distinguished from metaphor (as a figure of comparison), the term refers to substitution, the use of one item to stand for another: e.g., "The White House announced today..."; or, in William Blake's "London": "How the chimney sweeper's cry/Every blackening church appalls" ("the church" stands for the Anglican clergy or the force of the religious establishment, not only the actual edifice that a chimney sweeper might be in or near). A version of metonymy is synecdoche, the use of a part for a whole (e.g., "All hands on deck").

Mock-Heroism: the implicit bringing down of heroic, epic, or serious persons and themes by using inflated language, figures, and tones for low or trivial subjects; e.g., Thomas Gray's "Ode: On the Death of a Favorite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes."

Ottava Rima; a stanzaic form developed and used in Italian epics and romances of the Renaissance; used most successfully in English by Lord Byron in Don Juan and, more seriously, by Yeats in "Among School Children" and "Sailing to Byzantium." The rhyme scheme is abababcc.

Pantou: a poem composed in quatrains, in which the first two lines of each quatrain constitute a single sentence, and the next two lines constitute a separate sentence on a different subject. The two sentences are connected in rhyme, and by a trope, sound, pun or image.

Periphrasis: the use of several words instead of a single phrase or name to describe someone or something in an oblique and "decorous" way.

Personification: referring to animals or non-living things as if human.

Quantitative Meter: the classical meter of Greek and Latin poetry, difficult to maintain in English; based on the length or duration of syllables (a long syllable is thought to take twice as long to say as a short one) as opposed to hearing them as either stressed or unstressed.

Quatrain: a four-line stanza, typical in ballads, sonnets and hymns. The lines can be rhymed or unhymed in this most commonly used stanza in Western poetry.

Rhyme: any pattern of repeated sounds, normally at the end of lines of verse. They may be full rhymes, part-rhymes, eye-rhymes (words that look alike although they sound different), or off-rhymes.

Rondeau: medieval French form also used in English. There are various formulas, but the most common is one of 12 eight syllable lines, with stanzas of five, three and five lines. There are only two rhymes, with the first word or phrase repeating (aabbaaR aabbaR, where R is the repeat or refrain).

Sestina: a difficult, complex form, invented in Italy and perfected in the English Renaissance by Sir Philip Sidney (in "Ye gote-herd Gods"); it has six stanzas, with six lines apiece. Each stanza repeats the same end words (abcdef), but in different order (thus, stanza 2 would befaebdc and so forth); a three-line envoy repeats all six words one last time.

Simile: a stated, as opposed to an implied, comparison ("x is like y"). See "metaphor."

Sonnet: the standard fourteen-line lyric poem, begun in Italy and transported (and translated) to England by Wyatt and Surrey in the first half of the sixteenth century. It comes, traditionally, in two forms (although with many ingenious and subtle variations). The Italian form has an octave (eight lines that rhyme abbaabba), followed by a sestet (six lines with either two or three repeated rhymes). The English (or Shakespearian) sonnet usually has three quatrains and a concluding couplet; the rhyme is ababcdedefgg. The couplet is often the occasion for a summary or conclusion.

Spenserian Stanza: the nine-line stanza used by Spenser in The Faerie Queene, and then by Keats ("The Eve of St. Agnes") and Shelley ("Adonais"); the rhyme scheme is ababbaabbaR and the last line is always an alexandrine (iambic hexameter).

Spondee: a metrical foot of two stressed/long syllables, often used to vary lines in iambic or other meters.

Stanza: from the Italian word meaning "room," a stanza is any formal unit of verse that stands alone.

Synaesthesia: related to catechresis; using a word appropriate for one sensory experience to apply to another sensory experience (e.g., in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" by Keats, 11. 7-8).

Syntactic Inversion: reversing the normal word order to achieve poetic effect (e.g., to ensure rhyme or meter, or to place emphasis on a given word).

Tercets/7m« rima: a stanza of three lines. Terza rima is a three-line stanza with interlocking rhyme (e.g., aba, bcb, cdc, ded, and so forth), used by Dante in La Commedia Divina and by Shelley in "Ode to the West Wind."

Tone: a speaker's attitude toward a subject; the predominant mood of an utterance.

Triolet: an eight line poem of only two rhymes, the first line repeating as the fourth line and the first two lines repeating as the last two lines (ABaAabAB).

Trochee: metrical foot of one stressed/long and one unstressed/short syllable.

Tropes: a generic word for all types of literary figuration, including all versions of metaphor and metonymy, as well as irony and various kinds of literary allusions and echoes.

Villanelle: originally French, now a nineteen-line poem in English with five tercets and a concluding quatrain. Lines 1 and 3 are repeated—usually
verbatim-at preserved intervals throughout the poem, and become lines 18 and 19 at the end. Only two rhymes are used throughout.
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*The Odes Of Keats*. Cambridge, 1983


