

# THE ELEMENTS OF POETRY

## I TYPES OF POEMS:

A. **Narrative:** a recording of events, sometimes brief, sometimes long; is highly objective, told by a speaker detached from the action.

1. **Epic:** a long, dignified narrative poem about the deeds of a traditional or historical hero or heroes of high station.

### Conventions of the epic:

- a. Poet begins by announcing the theme, invoking the aid of a muse, and asking her an epic question, with the reply to which the story begins.
- b. He launches his action in medias res, in the middle of things.
- c. The action concerns a hero, a man of stature and significance, who performs many notable deeds.
- d. There are usually great battles in which the gods themselves take part.
- e. The poet adopts a style, dignified, elaborate and exalted, suitable to his theme.

### Types of epics:

a. **Classical epic:** has a dignified style, a background of warfare and good, heroic events.

*Homer, The Iliad, The Odyssey*

b. **Literary or Artificial Epic:** the epic style is used with later or different materials.

*John Milton, Paradise Lost*

c. **National or Folk Epic:** expresses the ideals, character, and traditions of a people.

*Beowulf*

d. **Mock Epic:** a trivial subject is made ridiculous by being treated with the elaborate and dignified devices of the epic.

*Alexander Pope, "Rape of the Lock"*

2. **Ballad:** a narrative poem, usually simple and fairly short, originally designed to be sung.

*John Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"*

### Characteristics of the ballad:

- a. Ballads begin abruptly, imply the previous action, utilize simple language, tell the story tersely through dialogue and described action, and make use of refrains.
- b. The ballad stanza is typically a quatrain of alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines rhyming abcb.

- B. **Lyric:** a subjective, reflective poem expressing the thoughts and especially the feelings of a single speaker; has a regular rhyme scheme.

*Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"*

1. **Song:** a poem in a regular metrical pattern designed to be sung.

*Shakespeare, "Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind"*

2. **Elegy:** a dignified poem mourning the death of an individual or of all men.

*Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"*

3. **Ode:** a lyric poem of some length, serious in subject and dignified in style; a poem praising someone or something.

*John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"*

4. **Sonnet:** a verse form containing fourteen lines, in English usually iambic pentameter, and a complicated rhyme scheme.

#### Types of Sonnets:

- a. **Petrarchan (Italian) Sonnet:** an octave and sestet, between which a break in thought occurs. The traditional rhyme scheme is abba abba cde cde (or, in the sestet, cd cd cd or any variation of c, d, e). The octave contains the problem, question, or theme, and the sestet presents an answer, a comment, or a proposition. An expression of indignation, desire, or doubt may occur in the opening lines which will be resolved in the sestet.

*John Milton, "On His Blindness"*

- b. **Shakespearean (English) Sonnet:** three quatrains and concluding couplet, rhyming abab cdcd efef gg or abba cddc effe gg. Each quatrain develops a different aspect of the subject, and the couplet makes a final comment.

*William Shakespeare, "Shall I Compare Thee?"*

- C. **Descriptive:** an impersonal word painting. A truly descriptive poem is objective; that is, the poet is more interested in depicting a scene than in his own emotions.

*Scott, "A Summer Storm"*

- D. **Dramatic:** includes comedies, tragedies, farces; narrative but tells a story by means of speech and action.

#### E. Special Kinds of Poems:

1. **Dramatic Monologue:** a poem consisting of the words of a single character, who reveals in his speech his own nature and the dramatic situation. It reveals place, time, and identities of the characters, and discloses the psychology of the speaker at a significant moment. The speaker addresses a listener who does not engage in dialogue but who helps to develop the speech.

*Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess"*

2. **Analogy:** an explanation of one thing by comparing it point by point with something else.

*Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Crossing the Bar"*

3. **Allegory:** an extended narrative which carries a second meaning along with its surface story; the people, and/or events are symbolic.

*Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott"*

4. **Pastoral:** depicts country scenes, dealing with shepherds and shepherdesses; its setting is marked by constant summer and fecund nature.

*Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"*

5. **Haiku:** Japanese verse in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, often depicting a delicate image.

6. **Limerick:** humorous nonsense-verse in five anapestic lines rhyming aabba, a-lines being trimeter and b-lines dimeter.

7. **Blank Verse:** unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter.

*William Shakespeare, Macbeth*

8. **Free Verse:** no consistency in line length, meter, rhyme, or stanza form; is very rhythmic, often patterned after the spoken word.

*T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"*

## II POETIC FORMS (VERSIFICATION):

### A. Types of Stanzas:

1. Couplet: a stanza of two lines.
2. Heroic or Classical Couplet: a pair of rhymed iambic pentameter lines.
3. Tercet: a stanza of three lines, generally connected by rhyme with another stanza of three lines.
4. Quatrain: a stanza of four lines which may follow a variety of rhyme schemes.
5. Cinquain: a stanza of five lines.
6. Sestet: a stanza of six lines.
7. Septet: a stanza of seven lines.
8. Octave: a stanza of eight lines.
9. Ottava Rima: a stanza of eight lines in iambic pentameter with a rhyme scheme of abababcc.
10. Terza Rima: interlocking tercets in which the second line of each one rhymes with the first and third lines of succeeding: aba, bcb, cdc, etc.
11. Spenserian Stanza: a stanza of nine lines with a rhyme scheme of ababbcbcc. The first eight lines are iambic pentameter. The ninth line is an iambic hexameter.

### B. Rhyme: the repetition of similar or duplicate sounds at regular intervals, usually the repetition of the terminal sounds of words at the ends of lines.

1. End Rhyme: rhyme occurring at the ends of verse lines; most common rhyme.
2. Internal Rhyme: a word in the middle of the line rhymes with a word at the end of the line.

*Old King Cole was a merry old soul.*

3. Perfect (Full, True, Complete): final accented vowels of the rhyming words and all succeeding sounds are identical while preceding sounds are different.

*bake-rake, heaven-seven*

4. Imperfect (Half, Approximate, Near): the spelling or sound is different.

*break-snake, come-home*

5. Rhyme Scheme: pattern of rhymes with a unit of verse; in analysis, each end rhyme-sound is represented by a letter. The first line and its subsequent rhymes are named "a," the second rhyme and its rhymes "b" and so forth.