

INTRODUCTION

Reading Poetry

All study of poetry starts with reading. The first thing you should remember is that reading poetry is an art of discovery and revelation. The simplest way to respond to a poem is through the emotions. One first *feels* a poem, comprehending what it is about without necessarily understanding it. During the first reading, the reader should be open and loose, allowing the rhythms, the images, and flow of the poem to impress themselves. Since most of the poems in this book are short, they can be read several times in a short period of time. Additional readings after the first will bring increased comprehension, then understanding.

Active readers become involved and ask questions about the use of words and clarify the intended use of language. They listen for the music of the poem; for the sound of the poem reinforces its meaning. They stop to summarize and to paraphrase the poems meaning. Finally, they pull together all the elements of the poems and add to them their own evaluations.

What Is Poetry?

The word "poetry", in fact comes from a Greek verb which means "to make". Poetry is a language that says more than ordinary language and says it with fewer words and in less space. Poets use language in a special way. Like other writers, poets choose words for their sense, but they also choose words for what they hint at or suggest, for the way they sound, and for the word pictures they create. Ordinary language makes sense. Poetry makes sense and sound, rhythm, music, and vision.

Short stories, essays, newspaper articles, your college books, and so on, are written in prose. Poetry is usually in verse. Verse is a language with a definite rhythm, or beat. It is usually arranged in columns down the page. Sometimes these columns of lines are divided into units called stanzas. Lines of verse often (but not always) rhyme. Although you could say that poetry is what is written in verse, it is always more than rhythm and rhyme. Poetry, as a great poet said, is the more memorable kind of language.

Kinds of Poetry

Though poetry ranges from limerick to epic, there is general agreement about three major categories of poetry, lyric, dramatic, and narrative.

A lyric poem is fairly short and subjective, usually expressing the emotions and thoughts of one person, the speaker of the poem. Originally written to be sung to accompaniment of a lyre. Lyrics are often strongly melodic. Hymn, song, sonnet, ode, elegy, pastoral, and perhaps haiku are all types of lyrics. Though entirely different in mood, what these lyrics have in common is that they express through image, event, and scenes an individual state of mind.

Dramatic poetry employs dramatic form or technique. It is a poetry in which the speaker is clearly someone other than the poet. The essential feature in all dramatic poems is the personal character created by the poet and placed in a situation that involves some conflict or action. A dramatic poem may involve a single character or more than one, but the characters speak always in their own voices, which are not to be confused with the voice of the poet. Some of the best dramatic poetry consists of a dialogue in which more than one character speaks. As you read this poem in the book, look for the way in which death becomes a character.

Narrative poetry is poetry that tells a story, recounts a series of events. Like a short story, a narrative poem has a plot, characters, a setting and a theme. (Unlike a short story, it is written in verse, language with a definite rhythm, or beat. In many, but not all narrative poems, the verses rhyme. Narrative poems, like other kinds of poetry, are often divided into stanzas, or groups of lines that form a unity. The stanzas of a poem usually have the same number of lines and the same rhyme pattern. The narrative poems may be very long, running to many thousands of lines in epics such as Homer's Odyssey or John Milton's Paradise Lost. But a narrative may be compressed to the brevity of a single quatrain.

Figurative Language

It is the language that uses figures of speech. A figure of speech is a way of saying one thing and meaning another. For example, when Tennyson says that the eagle "claps the crag with crooked hands" (p. 7), he means that the eagle's claw are angular, bent, and bony - looking - reminding him of mangled human hands.

Three of the most important figures of speech are simile, metaphor, and personification. A simile compares one thing to another using the word like or as; for example, "This bread is like rubber". A metaphor compares one thing to