

English 10

Poetic Terms

Ballad

Traditionally, a ballad is a song, transmitted orally from generation to generation, that tells a story and that eventually is written down. As such, ballads usually cannot be traced to a particular author or group of authors. Typically, ballads are dramatic, condensed, and impersonal narratives. A literary ballad is a narrative poem that is written in deliberate imitation of the language, form, and spirit of the traditional ballad.

Example. Ballad poem, "Bonny Barbara Allan."

Blank Verse

Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter. Blank verse is the English verse form closest to the natural rhythms of English speech and therefore is the most common pattern found in traditional English narrative and dramatic poetry from Shakespeare to the early twentieth century. Shakespeare's plays use blank verse extensively.

Example. "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love
And I'll no longer be a Capulet." (Shakespeare)

Free Verse

Also called open form poetry, free verse refers to poems characterized by their nonconformity to established patterns of meter, rhyme, and stanza. Free verse uses elements such as speech patterns, grammar, emphasis, and breath pauses to decide line breaks, and usually does not rhyme.

Example. Song of Myself (Walt Whitman)
"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass."

Lyric

Lyric is a type of brief poem that expresses the personal emotions and thoughts of a single speaker. It is important to realize, however, that although the lyric is uttered in the first person, the speaker is not necessarily the poet. There are many varieties of lyric poetry, including the dramatic monologue, elegy, haiku, ode, and sonnet forms.

Example. "What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"
Excerpt from "Ode On A Grecian Urn" by John Keats

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Refrain

A line or lines repeated at intervals during a poem, usually at end of each stanza. A refrain serves many purposes aside from helping to establish the meter and tone of the poem. Sometimes a refrain becomes an ironic commentary, changing in tone as the stanzas change.

Example. “The Raven”- Edgar Allan Poe
“And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted nevermore.”

The refrain in this poem is “nevermore” and “evermore.”

Sonnet

A sonnet is a fixed form of lyric poetry that consists of fourteen lines, usually written in iambic pentameter. There are two basic types of sonnets, the Italian and the English.

- The Italian sonnet, also known as the Petrarchan sonnet, is divided into an octave, which typically rhymes abbaabba, and a sestet, which may have varying rhyme schemes. Common rhyme patterns in the sestet are cdecde, cdcdcd, and cdccdc. Very often the octave presents a situation, attitude, or problem that the sestet comments upon or resolves.

Example. “Sonnet XLIII”- Elizabeth Barrett Browning
“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and if God choose,
I shall love thee but better after death.”

(sonnet continued...)

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- The English sonnet, also known as the Shakespearean sonnet, is organized into three quatrains and a couplet, which typically rhyme abab cdcd efef gg. This rhyme scheme is more suited to English poetry because English has fewer rhyming words than Italian. English sonnets, because of their four-part organization, also have more flexibility with respect to where thematic breaks can occur. Frequently, however, the most pronounced break or turn comes with the concluding couplet.

Example.

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

-Sonnet 18, William Shakespeare

Stanza

In poetry, stanza refers to a grouping of lines, set off by a space, that usually has a set pattern of meter and rhyme.

Example.

“The Tyger” (William Blake)
“Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?”

Mood

Mood is the feeling with which a reader reacts to something in a story.

Example. Excited, alarmed, fearful, melancholic, etc.

Tone

Tone is the author's implicit attitude toward the reader or the people, places, and events in a work as revealed by the elements of the author's style.

Example. Tone may be characterized as serious or ironic, sad or happy, private or public, angry or affectionate, bitter or nostalgic, or any other attitudes and feelings that human beings experience.

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The above definitions constitute the terms related to poetry that are examinable in English 10.

These definitions were gathered from public domain content at wikipedia.org, dictionary.com, for students in the Saint Thomas Aquinas High School English Department.

Poetic language could be used in any communication resembling poetry in beauty or the evocation of feeling. While these terms will be used in the study of poetry, they could be applied in any written or verbal expression.

Alliteration

Metaphor

Onomatopoeia

Personification

Rhyme

Rhyme Scheme

Rhythm

Simile

Speaker

Allusion

Figurative Language

Hyperbole

Image

Imagery

Oxymoron

Paradox

Symbol; symbolism

Theme

The above list constitutes the terms related to poetry that are have been covered in high school English and are included in the list of examinable terms for the English 10 Provincial Exam.