

## Form

*"A sonnet is a moment's monument."*--Dante Gabriel Rossetti

We use pattern every day. It begins when we get up in the morning and dress in a certain order, eat breakfast before or after dressing (depending on your pattern), and then go to work or school. However, within those patterns we make different choices for dress, different breakfast choices, and may or may not follow the same route to work every day. Another way we use pattern is when we make our oatmeal for the first time: we have to read the box for the pattern of cooking it, so we don't have lumpy or runny oatmeal unless we want it that way. We're used to the idea of pattern in making clothing, following a recipe, or even cutting out handouts for a church lesson. The idea of pattern in investigation of crime and poetry does sound a little out of place. But if we think of pattern as a series of steps for organizing and carrying out a task or as form or format to follow, the idea of pattern becomes more recognizable. For instance, the way to read poetry that we talked about earlier is a pattern. It's a series of steps that gives readers a way to begin looking at and investigating poetry. For this lesson, think of these words as interchangeable: format, pattern, recipe, forms.

Crime detectives use pattern in a couple of different ways. First, they use a pattern when they first begin investigating. Depending on what part of the "crime" police detectives have to consider, they investigate that crime following a different set of questions. If detectives have a body, they investigate the crime one way. If they have a suspect, but no body and no murder weapon, they investigate a different way. If they only suspect a crime of occurring, with a specific suspect, but no body and no murder weapon, crime detectives investigate yet a third way. Each specific situation leads to a specific pattern of investigation. The kinds of questions they ask, where they start looking for answers, and who and how they question all depend on which pattern they're working from. Similar to a criminal detective, poetry detectives use pattern in a couple of different ways. One of the first times poetry detectives must recognize pattern is in deciphering the difference between poetry and prose. Most of us can tell poetry at a glance, but why? What is it exactly that makes poetry different from prose? What is prose--and why are poetry and prose opposites? That is the first objective of this lesson.

But what about the second way crime and poetry detectives use pattern? The second time crime detectives use pattern is when someone has to decide what kind of crime has been committed and the corresponding punishment. Different kinds of crimes demand different kinds of punishments, and then judges have the authority to modify those punishments. Just as crimes like burglary and murder are different from each other and carry different punishments, so, too, can poetry differ. Poetry can differ within a category. The second time poetry detectives use pattern comes when we read poetry. We need to recognize the patterns that govern poetry. Some poems have externally set patterns and are referred to as closed forms, while other poems seem to have no set specific pattern but rather only an internal sense of pattern, and are referred to as open forms of poetry. This lesson will discuss some of the differences between open and closed forms--and some of the liberties poets take as they work within the forms.

## Poetry and Prose

As I taught an introduction to literature class one summer, a student asked me a startling question. He said, "What is prose? And how is it different than poetry?" I was a little stunned until I realized that I had just assumed students knew what I meant when I used the terms "poetry" and "prose." To help us decide the differences between poetry and prose, let's look first at Emily Dickinson's "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass." Trust me for a moment, and take my word that "narrow Fellow in the Grass" is a poem. What characteristics do you see? The most obvious should be format. What is it about the format of poetry that makes it instantly recognizable as such? Another difference, maybe not so obvious, would be language. What makes the language in "narrow Fellow" poetic, for want of a better term? The third difference that you should see would be feeling. I have yet to meet a neutral poem. Poetry always has some sort of tone, feeling, or attitude that it is trying to convey.

### A Narrow Fellow in the Grass

A narrow Fellow in the Grass  
Occasionally rides--  
You may have met Him--did you not  
His notice sudden is--  
The Grass divides as with a Comb--  
A spotted shaft is seen--  
And then it closes at your feet  
And opens further on--  
He likes a Boggy Acre  
A floor too cool for Corn--  
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot--  
I more than once at Noon  
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash  
Unbraiding in the Sun  
When stooping to secure it  
It wrinkled, and was gone--  
Several of Nature's people  
I know, and they know me--  
I feel for them a transport  
Of cordiality--  
But never met this Fellow  
Attended, or alone  
Without a tighter breathing  
And Zero at the Bone--

Now you're ready for some heavy duty differences and discussion. What kinds of things do you see when the teacher isn't giving you the answers? Let's try a little exercise. Compare these two ways of looking at frost:

### **Frost**

Frost is a pattern of ice crystals formed from water vapor on grass, windowpanes, and other exposed surfaces near the ground. Frost occurs mainly on cold, cloudless nights when the air temperature drops below thirty-two degrees F. (0 degrees C), which is the freezing point of water.

Frost and dew form in much the same way. During the day, the earth's surface absorbs heat from the sun. When the sun sets, the earth begins to cool. . . . As the cooling continues, the water vapor in the air condenses to form dewdrops on objects. Some of these dewdrops freeze when the temperature falls below thirty-two degrees F. The frozen droplets grow, becoming frost crystals when the surrounding dewdrops evaporate and deposit water vapor on the crystals. . . .

The term frost also refers to below-freezing temperature harmful to plants. At such temperature, the fluids in plant cells freeze and expand, causing the cell walls to rupture. Farmers protect their crops from this type of killing frost by warming cold surface air with oil burning heaters. (*World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, p. 468)

What characteristics stand out to you about this particular way of looking at frost? What things do you notice about form, content, even meaning? Here's the second way to look at frost:

Apparently with no surprise  
To any happy flower,  
The frost beheads it at its play  
In accidental power.  
The blond assassin passes on,  
The sun proceeds unmoved  
To measure off another day  
For an approving God.  
---Emily Dickinson

What characteristics stand out to you about this particular way of looking at frost? What things do you notice? What differences do you see between these two ways of looking at frost? Are they different in format, in meaning, in style, and in tone? Or, are they more similar than different? Do you see similarities? On the basis of your comparison, list as many fundamental differences between poetry and prose as you can think of, and then list as many similarities as you can between the two.

I'm willing to bet that you came up with more differences than similarities, right? Your differences list should contain things like form, and shape, and attitude, but does it include things

like general and specific? The first way of looking at frost is more general, while the second way of looking at frost is more specific. One of the differences between poetry and prose is that poetry often, and I might even say usually, tries to create a specific picture or a specific moment in time using a limited number of words. Poetry also usually tries to extend a feeling about the topic, just as Dickinson tries to share her feeling about frost and its power.

Often, poetry is distinguishable by the shape of the words on the page. Prose tends to be in paragraphs, while poetry may only have one word per line. Crime detectives often consider a lack of clues to mean something. Poetry detectives consider things like white space, where there are no words, or capital letters in odd places, or even sometimes the lack of these traditionally used format clues as hints to influence how they should approach particular poems. Sometimes, the best way to know the difference between poetry and prose comes down to something you feel--and see.

Sometimes, seeing poetry helps us figure out why it is poetry and consider the different meanings that poetry can portray visually. For instance, read "Buffalo Bill's" by e.e. cummings below and consider carefully how e.e. cummings' poem hits the eye:

### **Buffalo Bill's**

Buffalo Bill's  
defunct  
who used to  
ride a watersmooth-silver  
stallion  
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeons justlikethat  
Jesus  
he was a handsome man  
and what I want to know is  
how do you like your blueeyed boy  
Mister Death

To see and hear how much cummings' form matters, how much he accomplished by laying out the poem as he has, read aloud the following rearranged version which deliberately flattens some special effects cummings highlights:

Buffalo Bill's defunct,  
who used to ride  
a watersmooth-silver stallion  
and break one, two, three, four, five  
pigeons just like that  
Jesus he was a handsome man  
And what I would like to who is  
how do you like your blueeyed boy,  
Mister Death?

Does the poem sound the same? What differences do you see? What gets lost? While this is still written as a poem, is it the same poem as the original? Now note the even more altered effect when you read aloud this "Buffalo Bill's" with conventional punctuation and set in a solid block as prose:

Buffalo Bill's defunct, who used to ride a water-smooth silver stallion and break one, two, three, four, five pigeons just like that. Jesus, he was a handsome man. And what I want to know is: How do you like your blue-eyed boy, Mister Death?

1. What characteristics make the passage still recognizable as poetry? Rhythm? Concentration?
2. What is lost? Is it the implications of the way the lines are and the way they change? How about the stresses at the beginnings and endings of lines? Could it be the sense of movement in Cummings' eye-catching visual pattern?
3. Is there such a thing as a "prose poem"? Is that what that final version is, a poem in prose form? Or could it still be considered poetry? Is it just a list now?

We started our first lesson on poetry by talking about what poetry isn't. In this objective, we've tried to decide what poetry is. Consider this idea as we continue to refine our ideas about poetry. Much poetry is not translatable. When we try to translate it into another language or even paraphrase it to someone who speaks the same language, some of the poetry, the effect, and the meaning is lost. Ezra Pound defines poetry as "that which can't be translated." Italians say translations are like wives: "The faithful ones aren't beautiful, the beautiful ones aren't faithful." If we try to translate poetry to get all the nuances and meanings, it often turns out ugly. If we try to create pretty poetry, we often don't get the nuances and the meaning right. If poetry can't be translated, how does that affect how we view poetry and its personal position in our lives?

### **Closed and Open Forms of Poetry**

After determining that a specific kind of crime has been committed, detectives use pattern or format to look at the circumstances of the crime itself. Do the circumstances indicate first degree murder, second degree murder, negligent homicide, or self-defense? Each type of murder recommends a specific punishment. At this stage, crime detectives and judges look at the individual circumstances and, within a set of prescribed conditions, make a determination about what kind of crime was committed and how the recommended punishment should be given. For instance, judges could grant less time, suspended time, or more time depending on how they view the case.

The second way that poetry detectives use pattern in poetry is determine what kind of poem was created. Is the poem a closed form or an open form? A *closed form* poem follows an externally given pattern, while an *open form* relies on an internal sense of pattern. Even an internal sense of pattern can be strong.

The following puzzle is a lyric poem, an externally given pattern, and meant not as a trivial exercise but as a way to see the structure of a poem. Three of the following five stanzas belong to Wordsworth's poem entitled "Lucy Lee." The two extra stanzas were written by Edgar Allan Poe and have been taken from two of his poems. See if you can determine which two stanzas belong to Poe and not Wordsworth.

### Lucy Lee

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy Lee ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me!

She dwelt among the untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love:

Ah, broken is the golden bowl!  
The spirit flown forever!  
Let the bell toll! -a saintly soul  
Floats on the Stygian river;

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye!  
-Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling-my darling-my life and my bride,  
In the sepulchre there by the sea,  
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

If you selected the third and fifth stanzas as belonging to Poe, you were right. How did you figure it out? If you weren't as successful as you wanted to be, do you know why? What kinds of things fooled you? Were you reading carefully enough? What kinds of things lead to your downfall? How could you tell the Poe stanzas don't fit? Any formal clues? Is the rhyme different, or the rhythm? And do they interrupt the sense of the poem? Do they fit the narrative movement? What made you aware of the changes in order? Where is there a sense of closure, of climax? A sense of introduction?

Notice how the number of lines, rhyme scheme, and rhythm of the poem's real stanzas create a format--a pattern. How did the stanzas that didn't fit change the established pattern? What kind of changes did you recognize?

Closed form poetry can be dictated either by content or by pattern, while open formed poetry is a little more free. The next two objectives in this lesson will focus on the two forms of poetry.

### **Specific Closed Forms of Poetry**

One of the ways to think about poetry and pattern is to liken poems to using recipes when cooking. How many of us have had the experience of sharing a recipe with other people, only to have their end product taste, look, and be different than ours? In some ways it's a joke. If you give a recipe to six people so they can bring the same dish to a party, all six will turn out to be different. While the basic ingredients--the pattern or the recipe--are the same, what each person does with his or her dish makes a difference. In some ways, that's the same thing with poetry. There are several closed forms--patterns or recipes if you will--that poets and readers of poetry recognize almost instantly. However, what each poet does within the set pattern allows infinite variations within a recognizable form. There are two ways that a poem can be considered a closed form. The first way a poem can be considered a closed form is that it has a strictly prescribed format. For instance, one of the most recognizable closed forms of poetry is the sonnet.

#### **Sonnet**

Sonnets have a strictly prescribed format. Sonnets are easy to recognize, and they are often considered the traditional poetry of "luv." But while the form--or recipe--is dictated, it is what the poets do within that form that makes for interesting poetry. (Because the sonnet and even poetry in general to some extent has been considered the "language of love," we're going to use some love poetry to talk about closed and open form, and a couple of poems I just like.) First, let's talk about the sonnet.

Two kinds of sonnet are popular. The basic format of the sonnet begins with fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter (see the lesson on sound). From there, poets have experimented with the basic format and created two subcategories of sonnet. The first subcategory of sonnet is the Petrarchan sonnet, named after an Italian Renaissance poet from whom others stole many ideas. Petrarchan sonnets are usually divided into two parts. The first eight lines, called the octave, usually ask a question or present a situation or idea. These first eight lines rhyme among themselves, typically following a rhyming pattern or *rhyme scheme* of abba abba. The last six lines, called the sestet, uses a slightly different rhyme scheme of cdcdcd or cdecde. If the first eight lines ask a question or present a situation or idea, the last six lines give an answer or provide a comment or example. Often, the poems talk about how wonderful a love was, or what the lost lover was like.

However, my favorite Petrarchan sonnet isn't about love, but instead asks a question I think we all ask at one time or another in our lives--a bigger question than "luv." Before I tell you the poem and before you read it, you should know that Milton was blind when he wrote this poem. Notice particularly the dates of his blindness and the publication of his major work and masterpiece, *Paradise Lost*. Now read "When I Consider How My Light is Spent" by John Milton.



### **When I Consider How My Light is Spent**

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest He returning chide;  
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"  
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
Either man's work or His own gifts. Who best  
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state  
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait."  
--John Milton

The biographical information should help you figure out the question he is asking in the first eight lines. He begins his answer in line eight--playing with the recipe--rather than waiting to begin the answer in line nine. What is the question he is asking--and why does it have relevance for us? You may also want to notice the reference to "And that one talent which is death to hide." That statement should ring some bells and give you a little more insight into his meaning. Milton plays with the recipe for the Petrarchan sonnet, and creates a masterpiece within an externally dictated form.

Milton, however, wasn't the first nor was he the last to play with the sonnet format. One other person who played with the sonnet format to a different and much larger degree was William Shakespeare. He and his contemporaries played with the form because the Petrarchan sonnet required too many rhyming words. In fact, he played with the sonnet to such an extent as to make a few changes in the recipe or the pattern--and the newly altered pattern was named after him. While the Shakespearean sonnet still contains fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, the rhyme scheme is different and the ideas are therefore grouped a little differently. There are four quatrains (groups of four lines)--usually rhymed abab, cdcd, efef, while the last two lines (a couplet) are rhymed gg.

Sonnets were traditionally love poems, and in Petrarch's time, the more overblown they were in praising the beloved, the better they were considered to be. But remember the poem "My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun"? It's a sonnet, but recall that Shakespeare wrote this poem in rejection of the traditional love sonnets; though he still explored the topic of love, he chose to look at it in a new, more honest way. Because most gentlemen have lost the manly art of writing poetry to impress their girlfriends, we borrow from sonnets written long ago to express our love.



### **My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun**

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.  
--William Shakespeare

### **How Do I Love Thee?**

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 every day'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 but love thee better after death.  
--Elizabeth Barrett Browning

One of the most popular love sonnets that we borrow words from today is "How Do I Love Thee?" written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her husband, the poet Robert Browning, whom we'll discuss shortly. Robert called Elizabeth his little Portuguese because of her dark hair and pale skin, and her collected sonnets are entitled *Sonnets From the Portuguese* (incidentally, for you romantics out there, Robert and Elizabeth's real-life love story is among the best in all literary history. You might like to read up on them if you are interested). Elizabeth actually plays with the rhyme scheme a little in this famous sonnet. She's not working strictly in the Petrarchan format, and she is playing with the Shakespearean format. Everybody who has ever been in love

knows the first line of this poem. However, while it is intensely personal, does it provide any specific images of love? Does the personal feeling transfer as strongly as it could? Do you relate to this poem? How do you feel when you finish this poem? Does it make you think? Why has this poem become so typical? Why do we laugh after hearing the first two or three words? While it may not have been sentimental when it was written, has it become so now--simply because we have used the first question so often and to refer to any and everything that it has lost its power and impact?

Contrast this sonnet about love with "Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds" by William Shakespeare, which is a true Shakespearean sonnet. What specific images of love do you see? Look at the images line by line or idea by idea. Why do these images become more solid? Why is this so important? Which poem has more solid images of love and its enduring qualities? What strikes you as important? Which is your favorite?

### **Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds**

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error, and upon me prov'd,  
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

--William Shakespeare

The sonnet is easily one of the most recognizable of the closed forms of poetry because of its pattern. Other examples of closed form poetry with prescribed format would be a haiku such as "The Piercing Chill I Feel" and a limerick. Each of these formats have some combination of a prescribed rhyme scheme, line length and meter, and number of lines. You probably talked about these simpler poetic forms in elementary school.

### **The Piercing Chill I Feel**

The piercing chill I feel:  
my dead wife's comb, in our bedroom,  
under my heel . . .  
-- Taniguchi Buson

## Dramatic Monologue

The other type of closed form poetry is not dictated by pattern like the haiku, the limerick, or the sonnet, but by the content--the speaker of the poem and the ideas in the poem. The first of this type of closed form is the dramatic monologue. Maybe it's because I used to teach high school drama, but this form is one of my favorite forms. (Mostly, I love this form because I have a slightly bizarre sense of humor.) Robert Browning made this form famous and is one of its most respected practitioners. As mentioned last time, he was the husband of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. (She was more famous during their lifetimes, but he has become more famous now.) In this form, we hear one character speaking either aloud to someone else or silently to himself. One of the most intriguing aspects of this form is that because we are so close to a speaker, the audience often hears things that the speaker does not realize that he or she is revealing. If the readers/audience are careful, they find out many things about the speaker--more than the speaker knows he is revealing and more than he probably wants to reveal. Thus, both the content and the speaker dictate this closed form of poetry. "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" by Robert Browning is a dramatic monologue.

### Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!  
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!  
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,  
 God's blood, would not mine kill you!  
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?  
 Oh, that rose has prior claims--  
 Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?  
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

At the meal we sit together;  
*Salve tibi!* I must hear  
 Wise talk of the kind of weather,  
 Sort of season, time of year:  
*Not a plenteous cork crop: scarcely*  
*Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt;*  
*What's the Latin name for "parsley"?*  
 What's the Greek name for "swine's snout"?

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,  
 Laid with care on our own shelf!  
 With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,  
 And a goblet for ourself,  
 Rinsed like something sacrificial  
 Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps--  
 Marked with L. for our initial!  
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

*Saint*, forsooth! While Brown Dolores  
Squats outside the Convent bank  
With Sanchicha, telling stories,  
Steeping tresses in the tank,  
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,  
--Can't I see his dead eye glow,  
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?  
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

When he finishes refection,  
Knife and fork he never lays  
Cross-wise, to my recollection,  
As do I, in Jesu's praise.  
I the Trinity illustrate,  
Drinking watered orange pulp--  
In three sips the Arian frustrate;  
While he drains his at one gulp!

Oh, those melons! if he's able  
We're to have a feast; so nice!  
One goes to the Abbot's table,  
All of us get each a slice.  
How go on your flowers? None double?  
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?  
Strange!--And I, too, at such trouble,  
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

There's a great text in Galatians,  
Once you trip on it, entails  
Twenty-nine district damnations,  
One sure, if another fails;  
If I trip him just a-dying,  
Sure of heaven as sure can be,  
Spin him round and send him flying  
Off to hell, a Manichee?

Or, my scrofulous French novel  
On grey paper with blunt type!  
Simply glance at it, you grovel  
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe;  
If I double down its pages  
At the woeful sixteenth print,  
When he gathers his greengages,  
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

Or, there's Satan!--one might venture  
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave  
Such a flaw in the indenture  
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,  
Blasted lay that rose-acacia  
We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine...*  
'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratia*  
*Ave, Virgo!* Gr-r-r--you swine!  
--Robert Browning

Now, however weird you find this poem, the rule is that you have to love a poem that begins with "Gr-r-r." That's just the rule. Before you read the poem ask yourself these questions and make sure you know the answers before you go on: What is a cloister and what kind of people live there? How should they behave? What expectations do we have for our speaker? After you read the poem, consider these questions: How does our speaker violate our expectations? Does he know he is violating them?

Another idea to keep track of is the typography of this poem. While this is mostly an internal monologue in which we hear someone's thoughts, those words printed in italics are usually said aloud. So, you have two levels of conversation going on here. If there are two levels of conversation going on, what is the difference or gap between those two levels and why is that important? How does that gap reveal the character of our speaker?

Two final clues that you may appreciate: the speaker is not Brother Lawrence, who is a gardener, although he figures prominently in the poem. If you read this poem out loud in kind of a "na na" voice--you know, the kind you use when you're tormenting someone you don't really like or when you're mocking someone who really annoys you--it makes it even better. Make sure you check out the pronouns to see what they reveal about our speaker, and be sure to look up the words you don't get.

## **Biblical Poetry**

The second type of closed form poetry that is dictated by speaker and by content is biblical poetry--yes, I said biblical poetry. We read it often, but we take it for granted because it doesn't necessarily look like poetry. However, 2 Nephi 4:14-35 is often called the Psalm of Nephi, and psalms are a type of poetry. However, let's look at a more traditional Hebrew psalm. On the basis of this example of a Hebrew psalm, determine the formal pattern of biblical poetry. Notice that the poem is structured neither by rhyme nor by meter: What then is the formal basis of this type of poetry? What makes a psalm a poem? Would it help to know that psalms were often set to music? How does the speaker and the content dictate this as a form of poetry?

### **Psalm 24**

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof;  
The world, and they that dwell therein.  
For he hath founded it upon the seas,  
And established it upon the floods.  
Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?  
Or who shall stand in his holy place?  
He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;  
Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.  
He shall receive the blessing from the Lord,  
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.  
This is the generation of them that seek him  
That seek they face, O Jacob.  
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;  
And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors:  
And the King of glory shall come in.  
Who is the King of glory:  
The Lord strong and mighty,  
The Lord mighty in battle.

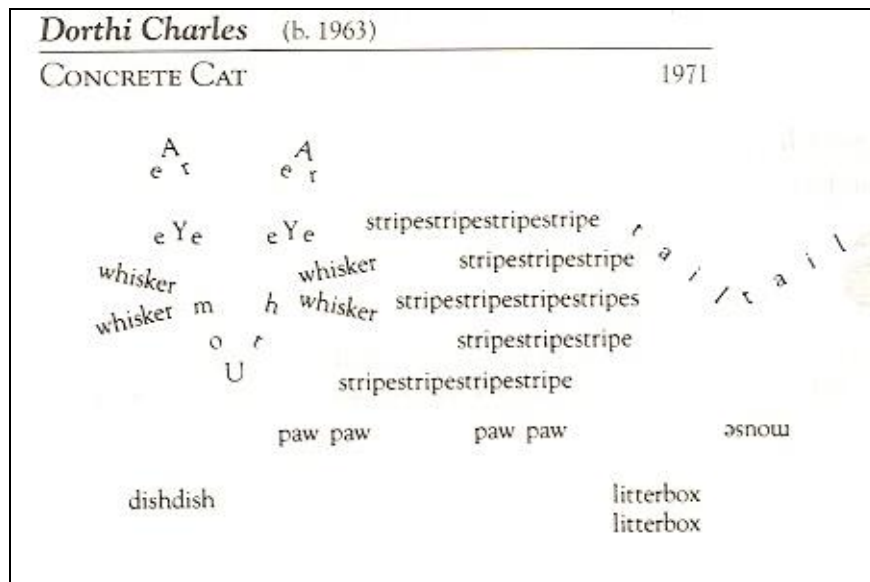
Most would agree psalms are among the most profound of poems, because psalms often speak to our deepest fears and spiritual needs. How, without rhyme and meter, is Psalm 24 a poem? What's poetic about his psalmic passage? One person's answer, Bishop Lowth, finds the poetry in the *parallelism*, or repetition of concepts--notice how each line is echoed by the following line. In objective 1, we talked about the translation of poetry. Biblical poetry breaks the rule about translation. Because the poetry in biblical poetry is in the idea more than in the form, biblical poetry is eminently translatable. With Hebrew poetry, if you can get the idea, you get the poem. Hebrew poetry and dramatic monologues are two types of closed form poetry where the closed form is dictated by the speaker and the idea.

While sonnets and dramatic monologues are the only two closed forms we'll discuss in this chapter, you have read several closed form poems--a couple of haiku and several sonnets. Poets often take the basic patterns--seventeen syllables of a haiku and the five lines of a limerick--and play with the form. While closed form poetry may seem to stifle creativity, poets can play within the structure to create a masterpiece. Just because a format is dictated doesn't mean all the poem becomes the sum of the format. It is how the poets play that creates great poetry. However, what happens when poets play with open forms?

### **Open Forms of Poetry**

We've talked about closed forms and how rigidly they seem to be defined, but an open form doesn't necessarily mean there is no structure or pattern. While a closed form has a recognizable pattern dictated from outside the poem and even outside the poet, an open form has a pattern dictated only by the poem and the poet. An open form poem is kind of like those people who cook without a recipe, but follow their taste, their nose, or whatever as they create a culinary delight that may or may not be reproducible. Open form poetry is sometimes referred to as *free*

verse, and you can see why. One of the transition kinds of poetry between open and closed forms of poetry is called *concrete poetry*, or visual poetry. Concrete poetry is easy to define--it takes the shape of the meaning of the poem.



One of my favorites are "Concrete Cat" by Dorthi Charles. While not a fixed form, concrete poetry is not an open form either. The poem can only be shaped by the meaning of the poem, and the pattern or logic becomes internal rather than external. However, the shape of the poem differs from meaning to meaning.

One of the most recognizable poems that demonstrates an open form of poetry is "Pied Beauty" in Lesson 13. Another poem similar in theme and in form is "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" by Emily Dickinson in the lesson on sound. In many ways, Hopkins played with an open form, yet the poem is a tightly constructed piece, especially in Hopkins' use of rhythm. In "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" Dickinson uses her rhythm to create an internal pattern that contributes to the meaning of the poem.

### Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things--  
 For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;  
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
 Landscape plotted and pieced--fold, fallow, and plough;  
 And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;



He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise Him.  
--Gerard Manley Hopkins

### **I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed**

I taste a liquor never brewed –  
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –  
Not all the Frankfort Berries  
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of air – am I –  
And Debauchee of Dew –  
Reeling – thro' endless summer days –  
From inns of molten Blue –

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee  
Out of the Foxglove's door –  
When Butterflies – renounce their "drams" –  
I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –  
And Saints – to windows run –  
To see the Tippler  
Leaning against the – Sun!  
--Emily Dickinson

Let's look at one final poem in open form. While the sonnets dealt with love, they were very structured. In some ways that's good and in some ways that's bad. One of my favorite open form poems is "somewhere I have never travelled" by e.e. cummings.

### **somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond**

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond  
any experience,your eyes have their silence:  
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,  
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will uncloset me  
though i have closed myself as fingers,  
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens  
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and  
my life will shut very beautifully ,suddenly,  
as when the heart of this flower imagines  
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals  
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture  
compels me with the color of its countries,  
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes  
and opens;only something in me understands  
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)  
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands  
--e.e.cummings

It, too, is a love poem. However, how does the open form of this poem strengthen or compare to the idea of love? What kind of internal logic is cummings using to create this interesting love poem? As an open form, it doesn't have the instantly recognizable form of the sonnet. Yet, what kind of powerful ideas does it mention about love in a more open form? What kind of images does this open form bring to the idea of love that would have been difficult in a fixed form such as a sonnet? I have to confess that I don't even get all of this--but I really like the last line--"Not even the rain has such small hands." If you're a Woody Allen fan, you might recall the use of this poem in the film *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Out of the three love poems we've looked at in this lesson, which would you most like to receive? Why?

Looking at closed and open form poetry can provide clues to help us discover poetry. Sometimes, the poetry comes in how poets manipulate a fixed form to create poems that say similar things in such different ways. Sometimes, the poetry comes in how poets create such an internal sense of form that they sweep us away to a form and world of their imagining.