

# POETRY

RHYTHM & METER  
SOUND & MEANING

# RHYTHM & METER

- Rhythm: the alternation between accented & unaccented syllables
- Meter: the pattern of sounds that give poems written in verse their distinctive rhythm.
  - Verse: metrical language
  - Prose: non-metrical language

# RHYTHM & METER

- Accents appear in the dictionary
- Foot = basic metrical unit; usually consists of one accented plus one or two unaccented syllables
- Mark for accented syllables = /
- Mark for unaccented syllables = u
- Scansion = the process of measuring verse
- Stanza: a group of lines whose metrical pattern is repeated throughout a poem

# TYPES OF METRICAL FEET

- Iamb/Iambic: in-ter
- Trochee/Trochaic: en-ter
- Anapest/Anapestic: in-ter-vene
- Dactyl/Dactylic: en-ter-prise
- Spondee/Spondaic: true blue (a variant of the above feet)

# Naming the feet in a line

The line is measured by naming the number of feet in it. The following names are used:

Monometer—one foot

Dimeter—two feet

Trimeter—three feet

Tetrameter—four feet

Pentameter—five feet

Hexameter—six feet

Heptameter—seven feet

Octameter-eight feet

# Types of Meters

## ■ Monometer:

Adam

Had'em. (from "Fleas")

## ■ Dimeter

Wild nights--/Wild nights!

Were I/with thee

Wild nights/should be

Our lux/ury!

Emily Dickinson

# Types of Meters

## **Tetrameter**

Whose woods these are I think I know  
His house is in the village though,  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow. (Frost)

## **Pentameter**

The woods decay, the woods decay and  
fall

The vapours weep their burthens to the  
ground

# Types of Meters

- Hexameter: (rare in English verse)

I will arise and go now, and go to  
Innisfree,

And a small cabin build there, of clay  
and wattles made.

# SOUND & MEANING

Pease porridge hot,  
Pease porridge cold,  
Pease porridge in the pot  
Nine days old.

# SOUND & MEANING

I

Hear the sledges with the bells -  
Silver bells!  
What a world of merriment their melody  
foretells!  
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
In the icy air of night!  
While the stars that oversprinkle  
All the heavens, seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -  
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells -  
Golden bells!  
What a world of happiness their harmony  
foretells!  
Through the balmy air of night  
How they ring out their delight! -  
From the molten - golden notes,  
And all in tune,  
What a liquid ditty floats  
To the turtle - dove that listens, while she  
gloats  
On the moon!  
Oh, from out the sounding cells,  
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!  
How it swells!  
How it dwells  
On the Future! - how it tells  
Of the rapture that impels  
To the swinging and the ringing  
Of the bells, bells, bells -  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -  
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

# SOUND & MEANING

III

Hear the loud alarm bells -  
Brazen bells!  
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency  
tells!  
In the startled ear of night  
How they scream out their affright!  
Too much horrified to speak,  
They can only shriek, shriek,  
Out of tune,  
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the  
fire,  
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and  
frantic fire,  
Leaping higher, higher, higher,  
With a desperate desire,  
And a resolute endeavor  
Now - now to sit, or never,  
By the side of the pale - faced moon.

Oh, the bells, bells, bells!  
What a tale their terror tells  
Of Despair!  
How they clang, and clash and roar!  
What a horror they outpour  
On the bosom of the palpitating air!  
Yet the ear, it fully knows,  
By the twanging,  
And the clanging,  
How the danger ebbs and flows;  
Yet the ear distinctly tells,  
In the jangling,  
And the wrangling,  
How the danger sinks and swells,  
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of  
the bells -  
Of the bells -  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells -  
In the clamor and the clanging of the bells!

# SOUND & MEANING

## IV

Hear the tolling of the bells -  
Iron bells!  
What a world of solemn thought their  
monody compels!  
In the silence of the night,  
How we shiver with affright  
At the melancholy menace of their tone!  
For every sound that floats  
From the rust within their throats  
Is a groan.  
And the people - ah, the people -  
They that dwell up in the steeple,  
All alone,  
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,  
In that muffled monotone,  
Feel a glory in so rolling  
On the human heart a stone -  
They are neither man nor woman -  
They are neither brute nor human -  
They are Ghouls: -  
And their king it is who tolls: -  
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,  
Rolls

A paean from the bells!  
And his merry bosom swells  
With the paean of the bells!  
And he dances, and he yells;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the paean of the bells: -  
Of the bells:  
Keeping time, time, time  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the throbbing of the bells -  
Of the bells, bells, bells: -  
To the sobbing of the bells: -  
Keeping time, time, time,  
As he knells, knells, knells,  
In a happy Runic rhyme,  
To the rolling of the bells -  
Of the bells, bells, bells -  
To the tolling of the bells -  
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells, -  
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

# SOUND & MEANING

- Sound reinforces meaning and intensifies communication
- Purpose of poets is to convey not sounds but meaning or experience *through* sounds

# How does sound create meaning?

1. Poet chooses words whose sound in some degree suggests their meaning. Ie: onomatopoeia, phonetic intensives (fl= flame, or moving light)
2. Poet chooses words that have pleasing (euphonious) or harsh (cacophonous) sounds.

# How does sound create meaning?

3. Poets control the speed and movement of the lines by the choice and use of meter, the arrangement of vowel and consonant sounds, and the addition of pauses. (long vs. short vowels)

For example, it takes longer to say "Watch dogs catch much meat" than to say, "My aunt is away", though the number of syllables is the same.

# How does sound create meaning?

4. Poets control both sound and meter in such a way as to emphasize words that are important in meaning.

For example, poets highlight words through alliteration, assonance, consonance, or rhyme.

# SOUND & MEANING: phonetic intensives

- fl- = moving light (flame, flare, flash, flicker, flimmer)
- gl- = unmoving light (glare, gleam, glint, glow, glisten)
- sl- = smoothly wet (slippery, slick, slide, slime, slop, slosh, slobber, slushy)
- st- = strength (staunch, stalwart, stout sturdy, stable, steady, stocky stern, strong, stubborn, steel)
- short -i- = smallness (inch, imp, thin, slim, little, it, chip, sliver)
- long -o- = melancholy or sorrow (moan, groan, woe, mourn, forlorn, toll, doom, gloom, moody)
- Final -are = big light or noise (flare, glare, stare, blare)
- medial -att = particled movement (spatter, scatter, shatter, chatter, rattle)
- final -er and -le = repetition (glitter, flutter, shimmer, whisper, jabber, chatter, clatter, sputter, flicker, twitter, mutter, ripple, bubble, twinkle, sparkle, jiggle)

# Sound and Meaning:

- Onomatopoeia: the use of words, which, at least supposedly, sound like what they mean, such as:

HISSSNAPBANG

# SOUND & MEANING

**Euphony:** smooth and pleasant sounding syllables

“So smooth, so sweet, so silvery is thy voice.”

**Cacophony:** rough and harsh sounding.

“As, could they hear, the Damned would make no noise,”

**Assonance:** the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds, usually in stress syllables.

Examples:

What large, dark hands are those at  
the window/Grasping in the golden  
light/Which weaves its way through  
the evening wind/At my heart's  
delight?

**Consonance:** the repetition of final consonant sounds or sounds following different vowel sounds in proximate words (made/wood)

Odds and ends

First and last

Short and sweet

A stroke of luck