

"Only the very weak-minded refuse to be influenced by literature and poetry."

- Cassandra Clare

## Chapter Four

### Poetry

**P**oetry is a form of literature that uses aesthetic and often rhythmic qualities of language such as sound symbolism and metre to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, the prosaic apparent meaning.

Poetry has a long history – dating back to prehistoric times with hunting poetry in Africa, and to panegyric and elegiac court poetry of the empires of the Nile, Niger, and Volta River valleys. Some of the earliest written poetry in Africa occurs among the Pyramid Texts written during the 25th century BCE. The earliest surviving Western Asian epic poetry, the "Epic of Gilgamesh," was written in Sumerian. Early poems in the Eurasian continent evolved from folk songs such as the Homeric epics, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey".

Poetry uses forms and conventions to suggest differential interpretations of words, or to evoke emotive responses. Devices such as alliteration, assonance and rhythm may convey musical effects. The use of ambiguity, symbolism, irony, and other stylistic elements of poetic diction often leaves a poem open to multiple interpretations. Similarly, figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, and metonymy establish a resonance between otherwise disparate images—a layering of meanings, forming connections previously not perceived.

In poetry, there is a term called stanza, which is a grouped set of lines within a poem, usually set off from others by a blank line. Stanzas can have regular rhyme and metrical schemes, though stanzas are not strictly required to have either. There are many unique forms of stanzas. Some stanzaic forms are simple, such as four-line quatrains. Other forms are more complex, such as the Spenserian stanza. Fixed verse poems, such as sestinas, can be defined by the number and form of their stanzas.

## Poetic Devices

A poet is limited in the materials he can use in creating his works: all he has are words to express his ideas and feelings. These words need to be precisely right on several levels at once:

- They must sound right to the listener even as they delight his ear they must have a meaning which might have been unanticipated, but seems to be the perfectly right one
- They must be arranged in a relationship and placed on the page in ways that are at once easy to follow and assist the reader in understanding
- They must probe the depths of human thought, emotion, and empathy, while appearing simple, self-contained, and unpretentious.

### The Sounds of Words

Words or portions of words can be clustered or juxtaposed to achieve specific kinds of effects when we hear them. The sounds that result can strike us as clever and pleasing, even soothing. Others we dislike and strive to avoid. These various deliberate arrangements of words have been identified.

#### Alliteration:

Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words placed near each other, usually on the same or neighboring lines. A somewhat looser definition is that it is the use of the same consonant in any part of adjacent words.

### Assonance:

Repeated vowel sounds in words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines. These should be in sounds that are accented, or stressed, rather than in vowel sounds that are unaccented.

### Consonance:

Repeated consonant sounds at the ending of words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines. These should be in sounds that are accented, or stressed, rather than in vowel sounds that are unaccented. This produces a pleasing kind of near-rhyme.

### Cacophony:

A discordant series of harsh, unpleasant sounds helps to convey disorder. This is often furthered by the combined effect of the meaning and the difficulty of pronunciation.

### Onomatopoeia:

Words that sound like their meanings. In *Hear the steady tick of the old hall clock*, the word *tick* sounds like the action of the clock. If assonance or alliteration can be onomatopoeic, as the sound 'ck' is repeated in *tick* and *clock*, so much the better.

### Repetition:

The purposeful re-use of words and phrases for an effect. Sometimes, especially with longer phrases that contain a different key word each time, this is called parallelism. It has been a central part of poetry in many cultures.

## Rhyme:

This is the one device most commonly associated with poetry by the general public. Words that have different beginning sounds but whose endings sound alike, including the final vowel sound and everything following it, are said to rhyme.

## Rhythm:

Although the general public is seldom directly conscious of it, nearly everyone responds on some level to the organization of speech rhythms (verbal stresses) into a regular pattern of accented syllables separated by unaccented syllables.



## Emily Dickinson

(December 10, 1830 – May 15, 1886)

**E**mily Elizabeth Dickinson was an American poet. Little known during her life, she has since been regarded as one of the most important figures in American poetry.

Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts into a prominent family with strong ties to its community. After studying at the Amherst Academy for seven years in her youth, she briefly attended the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary before returning to her family's house in Amherst.

Evidence suggests that Dickinson lived much of her life in isolation. Considered an eccentric by locals, she developed a penchant for white clothing and was known for her reluctance to greet guests or, later in life, to even leave her bedroom. Dickinson never married, and most friendships between her and others depended entirely upon correspondence.

While Dickinson was a prolific writer, her only publications during her lifetime were 10 of her nearly 1,800 poems, and one letter. The poems published then were usually edited significantly to fit conventional poetic rules. Her poems were unique for her era. They contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation. Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality, two recurring topics in letters to her friends, and also explore aesthetics, society, nature and spirituality.

Although Dickinson's acquaintances were most likely aware of her writing, it was not until after her death in 1886—when Lavinia, Dickinson's younger sister, discovered her cache of poems—that her work became public. Her first collection of poetry was published in 1890 by personal acquaintances Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, though both heavily edited the content.

A complete, and mostly unaltered, collection of her poetry became available for the first time when scholar Thomas H. Johnson published "The Poems of Emily Dickinson" in 1955.

“Hope” is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all.

And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.

—EMILY DICKINSON





## Summary

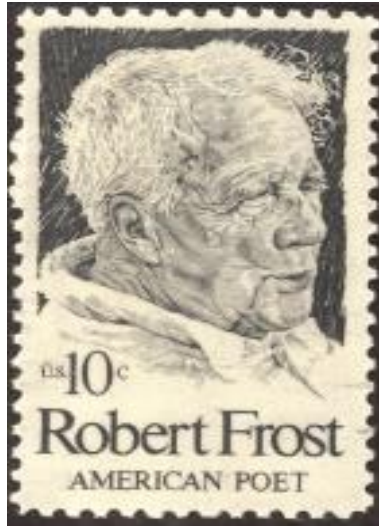
**T**he poem is a popular poem by the American poet Emily Dickinson. In the poem, "Hope" is metaphorically transformed into a strong-willed bird that lives within the human soul—and sings its song no matter what.

Essentially, the poem seeks to remind readers of the power of hope and how little it requires of people. The speaker makes it clear that hope has been helpful in times of difficulty and has never asked for anything in return.

"Hope is the Thing with Feathers" is one of a number of poems by Dickinson that breathes new life into an abstract concept by using surprising imagery and figurative language.

### Study Guides on the Poem

- 1- Do people ever give up on hope completely?
- 2- When is hope the "sweetest"?
- 3- Has hope ever demanded anything of the speaker?
- 4- What is hope compared to? What words help carry out the comparison?



## Robert Frost

(March 26, 1874 – January 29, 1963)

**R**obert Lee Frost was an American poet. His work was initially published in England before it was published in the United States. Known for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech, Frost frequently wrote about settings from rural life in New England in the early 20th century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes.

Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime and is the only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry. He became one of America's rare "public literary figures, almost an artistic institution." He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960 for his poetic works. On July 22, 1961, Frost was named poet laureate of Vermont.

In 1960, Frost was awarded a United States Congressional Gold Medal, "In recognition of his poetry, which has enriched the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world," which was finally bestowed by President Kennedy in March 1962. Also in 1962, he was awarded the Edward MacDowell Medal for outstanding contribution to the arts by the MacDowell Colony.

# *The Road Not Taken*

Robert Frost, 1874 - 1963

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

## Summary

**H**ave you ever found yourself caught between a rock and a hard place, trying to make a difficult decision? Maybe you've had to choose between two equally desirable things, like following a career path to become an astronaut or a doctor. You may have considered the different paths of study or activity each choice would lead you down. We've all been faced with challenging decisions in our lives, and sometimes the difficulty of making those decisions arises from the fear of not knowing if what we choose is right, or what will happen as a result of our choice.

Well, the poet in this poem describes this feeling exactly. The final lines in particular are often quoted and referred to as inspirational words that challenge us to overcome obstacles in life.

The poem describes someone standing at turning point, in a road in the woods, trying to decide which path he's going to take. He looks down one road as far as he can see, and after thinking for another minute, decides to take the other one because it looks like nobody's been that way yet, and he's curious about where it leads.

The poet thinks maybe he might come back another day and try out the other path but he has a feeling that the road he's chosen will lead him to new places and discoveries, and he probably won't be back. He thinks wistfully about that road, the road not taken, and where he might have wound up if he'd gone that way instead. Part of him regrets his decision, but he also realizes that the things he's seen and the places he's gone because of the direction he chose has made him who he is.

## Study Guides on the Poem

- 1- What was the speaker sorry about?
- 2- Why did he choose the "other" road?

- 3- Did the speaker doubt that he could ever come back to take the other road?
- 4- Which road did he seaker tke? Did his choice make a difference?
- 5- What do you think the speaker means by "road"? Ellaborate.



Alfred E. Housman

(26 March 1859 – 30 April 1936)

**A**lfred Edward Housman, usually known as A. E. Housman, was an English classical scholar and poet. His cycle of poems, "A Shropshire Lad" wistfully evoke the dooms and disappointments of youth in the English countryside.<sup>[1]</sup> Their simplicity and distinctive imagery appealed strongly to Edwardian taste, and to many early 20th-century English composers both before and after the First World War. Through their song-settings, the poems became closely associated with that era, and with Shropshire itself.

Housman was one of the foremost classicists of his age and has been ranked as one of the greatest scholars who ever lived.<sup>[2][3]</sup> He established his reputation publishing as a private scholar and, on the strength and quality of his work, was appointed Professor of Latin at University College London and then at the University of Cambridge. His editions of Juvenal, Manilius and Lucan are still considered authoritative.

# When I Was One-and-Twenty

BY A. E. HOUSMAN

When I was one-and-twenty

I heard a wise man say,

“Give crowns and pounds and guineas

But not your heart away;

Give pearls away and rubies

But keep your fancy free.”

But I was one-and-twenty,

No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty

I heard him say again,

“The heart out of the bosom

Was never given in vain;

’Tis paid with sighs a plenty

And sold for endless rue.”

And I am two-and-twenty,

And oh, ’tis true, ’tis true.

## Summary

In the first lines of this poem, the speaker describes how when he was 21 years old a wise man gave him some advice. He was told that he would have better luck in love if he gave all his money away first. And surprisingly the speaker did not take the wise man's advice and so he did not give away his possessions. But, as the poem concludes, the speaker says that now he's 22 and understands that the man was right.

The poet makes use of several literary devices in this poem: alliteration, enjambment, and repetition. The latter is seen through the use and reuse of the refrain "When I was one-and-twenty" in both stanzas.

Alliteration occurs when words are used in succession, or at least appear close together, and begin with the same sound. For example, "fancy free" in line six of the first stanza and "heard him" and "heart" in lines two and three of the second stanza.

## Study Guides on the Poem

- 1- What did the wise man tell the speaker that he should not give away?
- 2- What did the wise man say would happen if the speaker "gave his heart away"?
- 3- Was the wise man right about his advice to the speaker?
- 4- Why couldn't the speaker take the advice of the wise man?
- 5- What happened to make the speaker realize that the wise man's words were true?





## Elizabeth B. Browning

(6 March 1806 – 29 June 1861)

**E**lizabeth Barrett Browning was an English poet of the Victorian era, popular in Britain and the United States during her lifetime. She wrote poetry from the age of eleven. Her mother's collection of her poems forms one of the largest extant collections of juvenilia by any English writer. Her first adult collection of poems was published in 1838 and she wrote prolifically between 1841 and 1844, producing poetry, translation and prose. She campaigned for the abolition of slavery and her work helped influence reform in the child labour legislation.

Elizabeth's volume *Poems* (1844) brought her great success, attracting the admiration of the writer Robert Browning. Their correspondence, courtship and marriage were carried out in secret, for fear of her father's disapproval. Following the wedding she was indeed disinherited by her father. She died in Florence in 1861. A collection of her last poems was published by her husband shortly after her death.

Elizabeth's work had a major influence on prominent writers of the day, including the American poets Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson. She is remembered for such poems as "How Do I Love Thee?" (Sonnet 43, 1845) and "Aurora Leigh" (1856).

# 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

## Summary

**H**ow Do I Love Thee is a famous love poem and was first published in a collection, "Sonnets from the Portuguese" in 1850. The poem deals with the speaker's passionate adoration of her beloved with vivid pictures of her eternal bond that will keep her connected to her beloved husband even after death.

"How Do I Love Thee" as a Representative of Love:

As this poem is about love, the speaker counts how she adores her beloved. To her, love is a powerful force that can conquer everything in the universe. As an epitome of her expression of love, she details the ways how her love will get stronger with every passing phase of life. At the outset, she attempts to discuss the depth of her passion by drawing analogies between her love and religious and political ideals. Later, she expresses the unique quality of her enduring love when she says that her love will get better after death.

Major Themes in "How Do I Love Thee":

Love and faith are the major themes filling this poem. The poem is primarily concerned with the love of the speaker with her significant other. She expresses her deep and innocent love in captivating ways. Also, to show the intensity of love she feels, she details how her love will eventually get stronger with time.

## Study Guides on the poem

- 1- The speaker describes her love in terms that sound spiritual or religious. Give an example.
- 2- In which way the poet has challenged herself in this poem?

- 3- Talk about the contrast between the attempt to measure the poet's love with rational language - depth, breadth, height - and the use of the words Soul, Being and Grace, which imply something intangible and spiritual.
- 4- Is the poet's love an ordinary love?
- 5- Describe the poet many ways of love for her husband.
- 6- Comment on the following lines:
  - If God grants it, she'll carry on loving her husband even more after she dies.
  - I love thee to the level of everyday's  
Most quite need, by sun and candle-light
  - I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.