

CHAPTER 1

POETRY

"All poets are mad" - Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.
"I begin to suspect the young man of a terrible taint - Poetry"
Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*.

Poetry, like all the arts, had its origin in magic and ritual الطقوس. Much like the drama, which Aristotle considered the very root and stem of poetry, it has in the course of time become "secularised" أصبح علمانيا. But the essential nature of poetry has not changed much, though the position of the poet in society has changed. The more primitive the society the more likely is the poet to be accepted as a prophet, a seer عراف, even a judge; and the social and religious task of poetry was foremost in illiterate times.

Much of the earliest poetry known to us was of the epic kind البرع, such as the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh or Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Such poems, besides being entertaining, aimed to convey basic knowledge about the gods, the creation of the world, and so on. The poets also sought to inspire their audiences with the recitation of heroic deeds and please their patrons by assuring them of their long (and doubtless divine) ancestry. The whole purpose might be likened to that of what the Mass Media وسائل الإعلام are doing now: entertaining, giving information and directing public opinion.

In historical perspective poetry may seem to offer a bewildering variety of forms and modes and theories, many of which are contradictory. The Petrarchism البتراركية (نسبة إلى بترارك الشاعر الإيطالي) of the 16th century gave place to the "metaphysical" عيني poetry of the early 17th century; Augustan نسبة إلى أغسطس clarity followed that turbulence إحتراب, only to be swept away on the swollen tide of Romanticism الرومانسية; the Parnassians البارناسيون (نسبة إلى جى سان برناس) of 19th-century France demanded imagery of descriptive brightness, while a few years later the Symbolists الرمزيون were insisting on suggestive vagueness and the Surrealists السورياليون (سوق الواقعيون) attempted to transfer to paper the experience they dredged بسنجرح directly from the subconscious العقل الباطن.

What is poetry?

Though many have tried to define poetry, no one has succeeded in giving a satisfactory definition of it. Poetry seems to elude ^{براوغ} all attempts to describe it. Most of us would probably be inclined to evade the question with the words which St. Augustine once used in reference to other matters: "If not asked, I know; if you ask me, I know not." There have been many attempts to answer the question "What is poetry?" Johnson, in his Dictionary, called it "Metrical composition." Carlyle called it "Musical thought." According to Edgar Allan Poe, it is "the rhythmic creation of beauty." Matthew Arnold dubbed it "a criticism of life". W. H. Auden "memorable speech". William Wordsworth "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Louis MacNeice "a precision instrument for recording a man's reaction to life", Samuel Taylor Coleridge "the best words in the best order", and also, "poetry is the antithesis of science, having for its immediate object pleasure, not truth." Percy Bysshe Shelley "the expression of the imagination". Dante Alighieri, in "L'Amoroso Convivio", defined poetry as "speech harmonised by musical linkage", and discussed the four senses (literal الحرق , allegorical المجازى , moral الأخلاقى , mystical صوفى أو باطنى) in which a poem is to be understood. But all these summaries give individually a very biased ^{متحيز} view of poetry, and at the same time might easily be applied to many things other than poetry. Samuel Johnson is said to have replied to the question: "What is poetry?", by: "Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is." Perhaps therefore it is best to state only the most obvious grounds for differentiating poetry from other activities: that it is an art of which the basic material is language; that it requires all those resources of form, musical sound and rhythm, symbol and allegory, imagery, metaphor and simile, of which language is capable; that the result can be an artefact of language at its most intense and simultaneously ^{ون نفس الوقت} at its most simple and precise. The essential nature of such an artefact is more easily recognised than defined. We cannot even define poetry by its opposite: the contrary of prose ^{النثر} is not poetry but verse ^{النظم}, and a piece of writing in verse may or may not be poetry.

Poetry is as universal as language and almost as ancient. The most primitive peoples have used it, and the most civilized have cultivated it. In all ages and in all countries, poetry has been written, and eagerly read or listened to, by all kinds and conditions of people — by soldiers, statesmen, lawyers, farmers, doctors, scientists, clergy, philosophers, kings, and queens. In all ages it has been especially the concern of the educated, the intelligent, and the sensitive, and it has appealed, in its simpler forms, to the

uneducated and to children. Why? First, because it has given pleasure. People have read it, listened to it, recited it, or sang it because they liked it – because it gave them enjoyment. But this is not the whole answer. Poetry in all ages has been regarded as important, not simply as one of several alternative forms of amusement, as one person might choose bowling, another chess, and another poetry. Rather, it has been regarded as something central to existence, something having unique value to the fully realized life, something that we are better off for having and without which we are spiritually impoverished. To understand the reasons for this, we need to have at least a provisional understanding of what poetry is – provisional, because, as we have seen, people have always been more successful at appreciating poetry than at defining it.

Initially, poetry might be described as a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language. To understand this fully, we need to understand what poetry “says.” For language is employed on different occasions to say quite different kinds of things; in other words, language has different uses.

The first and commonest use of language is to communicate information. We say that it is nine o’clock, that we liked a certain movie, that George Washington was the first president of the United States, that bromine and iodine are members of the halogen group of chemical elements. This we might call the practical use of language; it helps us with the ordinary business of living.

A second use of language is as an instrument of persuasion. This is the use we find in advertisements, propaganda bulletins, sermons, and political speeches.

But it is not primarily to communicate information that literary forms such as novels, short stories, plays, and poems are written. These exist to bring us a sense and a perception of life, to widen and sharpen our contacts with existence. Their concern is with experience. We all have an inner need to live more deeply and fully and with greater awareness, to know the experience of others, and to understand our own experience better. Poets, from their own store of felt, observed, or imagined experiences, select, combine, and reorganize. They create significant new experiences for their readers – significant because focused and formed – in which readers can participate and from which they may gain a greater awareness and understanding of their world, and of themselves. Literature, in other words, can be used as a gear for stepping up the intensity and increasing the range of our experience and as a magnifying glass for clarifying it. This is the literary use of language, for literature is not only an aid to living but a means of living.

Suppose, for instance, that we are interested in eagles. If we want simply to acquire information about eagles, we may turn to an encyclopaedia or a book of natural history. There we find that the family Falconidae, of which eagles belong, is characterized by imperforate nostrils, legs of medium length, a hooked bill, the hind toe inserted on a level with the three front ones, and the claws roundly curved and sharp; that land eagles are feathered to the toes and sea-fishing eagles halfway to the toes; that their length is about three feet and their wingspan seven feet; that they usually build their nests on some inaccessible cliff; that the eggs are spotted and do not exceed three; and perhaps that the eagle's "great power of vision, the vast height to which it soars in the sky, the wild grandeur of its abode, have commended it to the poets of all nations."

But unless we are interested in this information only for practical purposes, we are likely to feel a little disappointed, as though we had grasped the feathers of the eagle but not its soul. True, we have learned many facts about the eagle, but we have missed somehow its lonely majesty, its power, and the "wild grandeur" of its surroundings that would make the eagle a living creature rather than a mere museum specimen. For the living eagle we must turn to literature.

These three uses of language – the practical, the persuasive, and the literary – are not sharply divided. They may be thought of as three points of a triangle; most actual specimens of written language fall somewhere within the triangle. Most poetry conveys some information, and some poetry has a design on the reader. But language becomes literature when the desire to communicate experience predominates.

The Eagle

*He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.*

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809—1892)

Look how effectively the poet has chosen his words and expressions to heighten the impressions he wanted to impart:

crooked hands → age (falcons live long).

close to the sun → height (they soar high)

ringed with the azure world → loneliness

wrinkled and crawls → to show how puny the sea seems from his height

thunderbolt → the suddenness and inevitability of his attack like the thunderbolts of Zeus.

When "The Eagle" has been read well, readers will feel that they have enjoyed a significant experience and understand eagles better, though in a different way, than they did from the encyclopaedia article alone. For while the article *analyzes* our experience of eagles, the poem in some sense *synthesizes* such an experience. Indeed, we may say the two approaches to experience – the scientific and the literary – complement each other. And we may contend that the kind of understanding we get from the second is at least as valuable as the kind we get from the first.

Literature, then, exists to communicate significant experience – significant because concentrated and organized. Its function is not to tell us *about* experience but to allow us imaginatively to *participate* in it. It is a means of allowing us, through the imagination, to live more fully, more deeply, more richly, and with greater awareness. It can do this in two ways: by *broadening* our experience – that is, by making us acquainted with a range of experience with which, in the ordinary course of events, we might have no contact – or by *deepening* our experience – that is, by making us feel more poignantly and more understandingly the everyday experiences all of us have.

We can avoid two mistaken approaches to poetry if we keep this conception of literature firmly in mind. The first approach always looks for a lesson or a bit of moral instruction. The second expects to find poetry always beautiful. Let us consider one of the songs from Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*:

Winter

*When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipped and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
"Tu-whit, tu-who!"
A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel¹ the pot*

*When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw²,*

¹ keel = skim

*And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs³ hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
"Tu-whit, tu-who!"
A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.*

William Shakespeare (1564—1616)

In this poem Shakespeare communicates the quality of winter life around a sixteenth-century English country house. But he does not do so by telling us flatly that winter in such surroundings is cold and in many respects unpleasant, though with some pleasant features too (the adjectives *cold*, *unpleasant*, and *pleasant* are not even used in the poem). Instead, he provides a series of concrete homely details that suggest these qualities and enable us, imaginatively, to experience this winter life ourselves. The shepherd blows on his fingernails to warm his hands; the milk freezes in the pail between the cowshed and the kitchen; the cook is slovenly and unclean; the roads are muddy; the folk listening to the parson have colds; the birds "sit brooding in the snow"; and the servant girl's nose is raw from cold. But pleasant things are in prospect. Tom is bringing in logs for the fire, the hot cider or ale is ready for drinking, and the cook is preparing the soup or stew. In contrast to all these familiar details of country life is the mournful and eerie note of the owl. Then why did the poet say: "a merry note"? Did he say it ironically? Or did he use it because in Anglo-Saxon culture the owl is a harbinger of good luck?

Obviously the poem contains no moral. Readers who always look in poetry for some lesson, message, or noble truth about life are bound to be disappointed. Moral-hunters see poetry as a kind of sugar-coated pill – a wholesome truth or lesson made palatable by being put into pretty words. What they are really after is a sermon – not a poem, but something inspirational. Yet "Winter," which has appealed to readers now for nearly four centuries, is not inspirational and contains no moral preachment.

Neither is the poem "Winter" beautiful. Though it is appealing in its way and contains elements of beauty, there is little that is really beautiful in red raw noses, coughing in chapel, nipped blood, foul roads, and greasy cooks. Yet some readers think that poetry deals exclusively with beauty – with sunsets, flowers, butterflies, love, God – and that the one appropriate

² saw = sermon

³ crabs = crab apples

response to any poem is, after a moment of awed silence, "Isn't that beautiful!" For such readers poetry is a precious affair, the enjoyment only of delicate souls, removed from the heat and sweat of ordinary life. But theirs is too narrow an approach to poetry. The function of poetry is sometimes to be ugly rather than beautiful. And poetry may deal with common colds and greasy cooks as legitimately as with sunsets and flowers.

Yet we should know something about poetry, and learn to cultivate our feeling for it, so that we may gradually come to recognise it, and know when it is present. The best we can do is to point out some essential characteristics of true poetry. Before we discuss these essential characteristics, let us try and understand the connection between poetry and verse. Verse is the form الشكل الخارجى of poetry. Poets generally (but not always) write their poetry in verse-form. But there is a lot of verse written which is no poetry at all. Verse is the body, and the poetry is the soul; and a body without a soul is a dead body. Or we may say that verse is the shell, while poetry is the kernel without which it is an empty husk. Consider the following lines:

*"Of Nelson and the North
Sing the glorious day's renown,
When to battle fierce came forth
All the might of Denmark's Crown."*

These lines might have been better expressed in prose, for, hampered by the limits of verse, the writer presents his ideas in a crabbed وعرج and vague fashion. What is the North? What was the might of Denmark's Crown? The phrase "glorious day's renown" is awkward. Why that cumbrous inversion "of Nelson and the North"! This kind of jingling versification النظم الرنان unfortunately abounds in English literature, and passes as poetry; small wonder that many plain, matter-of-fact minds, misled by such examples, condemn all poetry as useless nonsense. This particular set of verses, called the "Battle of the Baltic", appears from generation to generation in school readers, and helps to obscure the nature of poetry.

Consider, as a contrast, the following lines by Keats:

*"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run."*

Here we have no unnatural inversions. The lines seem to flow on as spontaneously as the poet's thought, removing all sense of artificiality and effort, and producing a beautiful, harmonious rhythm. The cadence الإيقاع is slow, and at once suggests the languor جمول of autumn; while, at the same

time, without our being aware of it, we are led to visualise that season as a personage beneficent شخصية خيرة, kindly, and generous. How much more living does this personification تشخيص make the picture!

Verse is usually printed in a particular way, so that you can tell it from prose at a glance. ***But it is the ear, not the eye, which is the true test of verse; for when verse is read aloud it sounds quite different from prose.*** Just listen to the different sounds of these two passages, one in prose and the other in verse:

1- "The untrodden snow lay all bloodless on Linden, when the sun was low; and the flow of Iser, rolling rapidly, was dark as winter."

2- "On Linden. when the sun was low,
All bloodless lay the untrodden snow;
And dark as winter was the flow;
Of Iser, rolling rapidly."

The two passages are exactly the same in meaning. In fact, the very words are the same. No. (2) contains the first four lines of Campbell's poem called "Hohenlinden". No. (1) contains the same lines with the same words differently arranged. Yet, how differently they sound when read aloud! If we can hear this difference, we shall soon be able to tell the difference between prose and verse.

The first two points about the verse-form of the passage that we notice are its:

(1) **Regular Rhythm** الإيقاع المنتظم : As you read it, can you not hear the regular beat of sound, like the regular tramp رقع أقدام of soldiers marching; or the regular beat of the feet of people dancing? There is nothing like this regular swing in the prose passage. It is caused by the fact that the poet arranges his words in such a way that the accented syllables مقطع لفظي مشهور, on which we naturally lay stress in speaking, come at equal intervals. If all the accented syllables in the first line are printed boldly you will see that every second syllable must be pronounced more loudly or emphatically than the others.

"On Linden **when** the **sun** was **low**."

The regular rising and falling in the flow of sounds in poetry, these recurring intervals of strong and light sounds, like the beat of a drum regulating dance movements, is called rhythm; and rhythm is the chief, and most essential characteristic of verse, as distinguished from prose.

(2) **Rhyme** القافية والسجع : The next point we notice is that the words at the end of the first three lines all have the same sound: *low, snow, flow*. When words have the same vowel sound and end with the same consonant sound. they are said to rhyme. e.g.: *keep, peep // jump, lump // hate. late //*

crew, few // glide, slide. Rhyme is not necessary to verse (i.e. you can have verse without rhyme); but generally verse is rhymed. Rhyme serves two purposes; it makes verse more musical, by giving it pleasing sounds, like the chimes *رنات* of a bell; and it serves to preserve the verse-form in which the poem is arranged by marking the ends of the lines.

The third characteristic of verse, present in long poems, is:

(3) **Stanzas** المقاطع الشعرية: If you look at the whole of a poem, you will notice another characteristic of verse. You will see that the poem is divided up into units, called stanzas, and that all the units are exactly alike in form. These stanzas have different forms, one of them is used in ballads *القصة الشعرية* and called the Ballad metre *ميزان أو بحر*. It consists of four lines rhyming *abab*.

There are other forms which you will read about in the chapter on Prosody *علم العروض* or versification. Such units or divisions in a poem are called stanzas. Most poems, though not all, are written in stanzas; all of which are of the same pattern. Verse, then, is characterised by regular rhythm, rhyme and stanzas. Of these characteristics, rhythm is essential. You cannot have verse or poetry without rhythm. But while most poems have rhyme and stanza-forms, these are not essential characteristics of poetry, for we have poems written in blank verse *الشعر المرسل*, i.e. verse in which each line has ten syllables but there are no rhymes at the end.

Having discussed the superficial differences between verse and poetry, we shall now consider some essential characteristics of true poetry.

Essential Characteristics of True Poetry:

Poetry is characterised by: music, vision, imagery and emotion, We will discuss them one by one:

(1) Music

The first essential of poetry is "verbal music" *الموسيقى اللفظية*. The poet chooses instinctively *بالمسليقة* words of beautiful sound, and so arranges them that the words near each other will harmonise *تتناغم* in sound, so as to produce what may be called "word music." And he varies this music to suit the subject, so that the sound of the lines helps to make clearer their meaning. Look, how Alexander Pope discussed this point:

*"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance,
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense;*

*Soft is the strain when Zephyr⁴ gently blows,
 And the smooth stream in smoother number⁵ flows;
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
 The hoarse rough verse should like the torrent roar;
 When Ajax⁶ strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
 The line, too, labours, and the words move slow;
 Not so, when swift Camilla⁷ scours the plain,
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and shines along the main."*
 (Pope)

Verbal music depends not only on the musical sound of the words, but also on rhythm. It is the combination of lovely rhythms with sweet-sounding words that gives us the music of poetry. Here are two verses from Dryden's "Song for St. Cecilia's Day". The rapid rhythm of the first verse well expresses the excitement caused by the war alarm given by trumpet البوق and drum; the slow and quiet rhythm of the second verse suits the soft and tender music of the flute الفلوت and the lute العود.

*"The trumpet's loud clangour
 Excites us to arms.
 With shrill notes of anger.
 And mortal alarms.
 The double double double beat
 Of the thundering drum
 Cries, Hark! the foes come;
 Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat.*

*The soft complaining flute.
 In dying notes, discovers
 The woes of hopeless lovers,
 Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute."*

Now let us examine in detail how poets obtain some of the musical effects:

⁴ the west wind

⁵ rhythm

⁶ a powerful hero in the Iliad

⁷ the moon

(c) **Onomatopoeia** محاكاة اللفظ للمعنى : This is the name given to the figure of speech by which the sound of the words is made to suggest or echo the sense. There are many onomatopoeic words in English; e.g. *roar, bang, crash, clap, bump, bubble, scream, pop, moan, hum, murmur*, etc. When they are talking of sounds, poets will use words to represent those sounds if they can. For instance:

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmuring of innumerable bees." (Tennyson)

Can you not hear the cooing of the doves and the humming of the bees? How is it done? Some of the words are onomatopoeic, e.g. *moan, murmuring*; in others the soft vowels, and above all the *m* and *n* sounds, give a humming murmur, e.g. *immemorial, innumerable*.

(d) **Alliteration** المجازة الاسهالية : This is another figure of speech used in poetry. It brings together words which begin with the same consonant (or vowel) sound. For example :

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew
The furrow followed free." (Coleridge)

Here the (*f*) sounds give the impression of wind blowing.
for more examples see chapter 4.

(e) **Repetition** التكرار : Repetition of words and phrases not only serves to emphasise the meaning, but often also to increase the musical effect of a poem.

"The woods decay, the wood decay and fall." (Tennyson)

"What hope or answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.. " (Tennyson)

"A weary time! A weary time!
How glazed each weary eye!" (Coleridge)

"In ever climbing up a climbing wave." (Tennyson)

"The western tide crept up along the sand.

And o'er and o'er the sand."
And round and round the sand." (Kingsley)

(f) **Refrain** الازمة أو القرار : Refrain is a form of repetition. In some poems the same line, or part of it, is repeated at the ends of each stanza. Such a repeated line or phrase is called a burden or refrain. An example is the ballad of "Lord Randall" where every stanza ends with the two lines:

"Oh, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick of heart and I fain would⁸ lie down."

⁸ would like to

(2) Vision البصيرة

The second essential of poetry is vision. A great poet is a "seer", i.e. a "see-er" or a prophet; one who has spiritual insight and can see truths that others do not. The ordinary unimaginative man is aware only of what he perceives by his senses, and sees only the outward aspect of what he sees. But poets see much more. They have, in moments of vision, the power of understanding, by a kind of instinct, things, their qualities and the relations between them, which ordinary people cannot see. All true poetry is the product of vision or imagination for it is the expression of it.

Wordsworth wrote a poem about a matter-of-fact, unimaginative man, called Peter Bell. Peter Bell saw nothing but what he saw with his physical eyes. He had no "vision."

*"A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more."*

Now see what a primrose, or any common wild flower, is to a real poet, Wordsworth himself says :

*"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."*

The poet idealises the real. He helps us to see natural objects: "Apparelled in celestial light, the glory and the freshness of a dream."

There is suggestiveness in great poetry. It suggests or implies much more than it says. It has a depth of meaning that cannot be fathomed يسر غوره by one or two readings.

(3) Imagery التصوير الخيالي

The suggestion of vivid mental pictures, or images by the skilful use of words, is called "imagery". A poet can create or suggest beautiful sight-effects by means of words. This capacity is, of course, part of a poet's gift of imagination. Poetry, much more than prose, produces much of its effect by images. It often talks in pictures. The poet's pictures may be drawn from the real world, or the ideal world of imagination in which he dwells. Compare the following two sentences:

1. These words are offensive to me.
2. "These words are razors to my wounded heart."

(Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus)

The first is a bald, unimaginative statement of fact; the second expresses the same idea using imagery.

Imagery may then be defined as the representation through language of sense experience. Poetry appeals directly to our senses, of course, through its music and rhythms, which we actually hear when it is

read aloud. But indirectly it appeals to our other senses through imagery, the representation of the imagination of sense experience. The word image perhaps most often suggests a mental picture, something seen in the mind's eye – and visual imagery is the kind of imagery that occurs most frequently in poetry. But an image may also represent a sound (auditory imagery); a smell (olfactory imagery); a taste (gustatory imagery); touch, such as hardness, softness, wetness, or heat and cold (tactile imagery); an internal sensation, such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, or nausea (organic imagery); or movement or tension in the muscles or joints (kinesthetic imagery). If we wished to be scientific, we could extend this list further, for psychologists no longer confine themselves to five or even six senses, but for purposes of discussing poetry the preceding classification should ordinarily be sufficient.

Meeting at Night

*The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow, 5
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.*

*Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match, 10
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!*

Robert Browning (1812—1889)

“Meeting at Night” is a poem about love. It makes, one might say, a number of statements about love: being in love is a sweet and exciting experience; when one is in love everything seems beautiful, and the most trivial things become significant; when one is in love one's sweetheart seems the most important thing in the world. But the poet actually tells us none of these things directly. He does not even use the word love in his poem. His business is to communicate experience, not information. He does this largely in two ways. First, he presents us with a specific situation, in which a lover goes to meet his sweetheart. Second, he describes the lover's journey so vividly in terms of sense impressions that the reader virtually sees and hears what the lover saw and heard and seems to share his anticipation and excitement.

Every line in the poem contains some image, some appeal to the senses: the gray sea, the long black land, the yellow half-moon, the startled little waves with their fiery ringlets, the blue spurt of the lighted match – all appeal to our sense of sight and convey not only shape but also color and motion. The warm sea-scented beach appeals to the senses of both smell and touch. The pushing prow of the boat on the slushy sand, the tap at the pane, the quick scratch of the match, the low speech of the lovers, and the sound of their hearts beating – all appeal to the sense of hearing.

Poets have three ways of making us see mental pictures:

(a) By Description الوصف : He may, as a prose-writer does, describe a scene, real or ideal, in words. Here is Gray's description of an evening of a summer day :-

"The curfew⁹ tolls the knell of parting day,
 The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea.
 The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
 Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
 And all the air a solemn stillness holds.
 Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
 And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds."

(b) By certain Figures of Speech صور بلاغية such as simileالتشبيه , metaphorالاستعارة , and personificationالتشخيص which we will discuss in a following chapter. Read carefully the examples of simile, metaphor and personification given in that chapter. A poet compares one thing with another, and so suggests some important point about it by an image.

- "My love is like a red, red rose." (Simile) → a visual image.
- "'Rough wind that moanest loud grief too sad for a song" (Personification) → an auditory image.
- "Come o'er the eastern hills and let our winds kiss thy perfumed garments" (Personification) → an olfactory image. etc.

(c) By Picturesque Epithets الصفات الموحية : A poet can also call up a picture with a single illuminating word or phrase. Just examine the epithets of adjectives in these lines:

"All in a hot and copper sky,

⁹ evening bell

The bloody sun, at noon. (Coleridge)

What a picture of colour these two epithets (copper and bloody) call up!

(4) Emotion العاطفة

The fourth essential of poetry is emotion. Ordinary prose writing (other than fiction) appeals more to the mind than to heart; but the function of poetry is to touch the heart; that is, to arouse emotion. Who can read such lines as these without emotion?

*"And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand.
And the sound of a voice that is still !"*

(Tennyson)

But it is only emotion that can rouse emotion. If the poet feels nothing when he writes a poem, his readers will feel nothing when they hear it. Heart always speaks to heart.

To sum up, therefore, the essentials of poetry are: music, vision (including imagery), and emotion. So we may say that poetry springs from imagination roused by emotion, and is expressed in music and imagery. This is not a definition of poetry for, as we have seen, we cannot define it, but it is a description of poetry's essential characteristics.

How to read a poem?

The primary purpose of this book is to develop your ability to understand and appreciate poetry. Here are some preliminary suggestions:

1. Read a poem more than once. A good poem will no more yield its full meaning on a single reading than will a Beethoven symphony on a single hearing. Two readings, at least, may be necessary simply to let you get your bearings. And if the poem is a work of art, it will repay repeated and prolonged examination. One does not listen to a good piece of music once and forgets it; one does not look at a good painting once and throws it away. A poem is not like a newspaper, to be hastily read and cast into the wastebasket. It is to be hung on the wall of one's mind.

2. Keep a good dictionary by you and use it. It is futile to try to understand poetry without troubling to learn the meanings of the words of which it is composed. You might as well attempt to play tennis without a ball. One of your primary purposes while in college should be to build a good vocabulary, and the study of poetry gives you an excellent opportunity. few other reference books also will be invaluable. Particularly desirable are

a good book on mythology (your instructor can recommend one), a Bible, and a collection of Shakespeare's plays.

3. Read so as to hear the sounds of the words in your mind. Poetry is written to be heard: its meanings are conveyed through sound as well as through print. Every word is therefore important. The best way to read a poem is just the opposite of the best way to read a newspaper. One reads a newspaper as rapidly as possible; one should read a poem as slowly as possible. When you cannot read a poem aloud, lip-read it: form the words with your tongue and mouth even though you do not utter them. With ordinary reading material, lip-reading is a bad habit; with poetry, it is a good habit.

4. Always pay careful attention to what the poem is saying. Though you should be conscious of the sounds of the poem, you should never be so exclusively conscious of them that you pay no attention to what the poem means. For some readers, reading a poem is like getting on board a rhythmical roller coaster. The car starts, and off they go, up and down, paying no attention to the landscape flashing past them, arriving at the end of the poem breathless, with no idea of what it has been about. This is the wrong way to read a poem. One should make the utmost effort to follow the thought continuously and to grasp the full implications and suggestions. Because a poem says so much, several readings may be necessary, but on the very first reading you should determine the subjects and objects of the verbs and the antecedents of the pronouns.

5. Practice reading poems aloud. When you find one you especially like, make friends listen to it. Try to read it to them in such a way that they will like it too. (a) Read it affectionately, but not affectedly. The two extremes oral readers often fall into are equally deadly. One is to read as if one were reading a tax report or a railroad timetable, unexpressively, in a monotone. The other is to elocute, with artificial flourishes and vocal histrionics. It is not necessary to put emotion into reading a poem. The emotion is already there. It only wants a fair chance to get out. It will express itself if the poem is read naturally and sensitively. (b) Of the two extremes, reading too fast offers greater danger than reading too slow. Read slowly enough that each word is clear and distinct and that the meaning has time to sink in. Remember that your friends do not have the advantage, as you do, of having the text before them. Your ordinary rate of reading will probably be too fast. (c) Read the poem so that the rhythmical pattern is felt but not exaggerated. Remember that poetry, with few exceptions, is written in sentences, just as prose is, and that punctuation is a signal as to how it should be read. Give all grammatical pauses their full due. Do not distort the natural pronunciation of words or a normal accentuation of the sentence to fit into what you have decided is its metrical pattern. One of the worst ways to read

a poem is to read it te-tum te-tum te-tum with an exaggerated emphasis on every other syllable. On the other hand, it should not be read as if it were prose. An Important test of your reading will be how you handle the end of a line that lacks line-ending punctuation. A frequent mistake of the beginning reader is to treat each line as if it were a complete thought, whether grammatically complete or not, and to drop the voice at the end of it. A frequent mistake of the sophisticated reader is to take a running start upon approaching the end of a line and fly over it as if it were not there. Some poems encourage this type of reading. When this is so, usually the poet has not made the best use of rhythm to support sense.

The line is a rhythmical unit, and its end should be observed whether there is punctuation or not. If there is no punctuation, you ordinarily should observe the end of the line by the slightest of pauses or by holding on to the last word in the line just a little longer than usual, without dropping your voice.