

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dimensions of Literary Poetic Devices

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Accepted version published on July 5, 2026

ABSTRACT

A poem is a living entity, an organism and a complete whole. It demands, as a response, a reaction to this stimulus in verbal form and an expression of the vibrations in our person, the movement we read it. The poet 'teaches' and 'delights' by stirring the reader to an unusual pitch of excitement and by making all the discordant elements of his mind and body move together in perfect harmony. But what is the poet's secret, that he, with only the materials of the daily round of existence which we all share, can render back to us a heightened sense of the significance of our own lives together with a more serene detachment? The answer is-we do not know. We know simply that the poet probably does respond to what is going on about him more finely, more deeply, and with more variety than most of us do we know further, that together with a delicate emotional nature, the poet has a power to organize and arrange his thoughts and to fit them into ordered words; we suspect that this instinct for form not only helps the poet relieve his inner tension, but also actually enhances his original experience.

Keywords: Poetical devices, rhythm, meter, rhyme and images

FULL PAPER

Introduction

The daffodils in the poem are singled out; irrelevancies have disappeared. The meaning of the experience is felt and has achieved permanency through form, not only in the mind of Wordsworth, but in the minds of all who read the poem. The freshness, the surprise of daffodils in early spring is caught forever, while the memory of the actual walk died when Wordsworth died. "The emotion of art is impersonal," says T. S. Eliot. It has its life in the poem itself, not in the personal biography of the poet. The only word we have to explain this transformation of personal feeling into the complete and perfect poem is "form".

What we mean by the word can best be discovered by a further consideration of the elements of form, rhythm and meter, rhyme, and images. But we must always remember that there are no definite and fixed laws to help us. "In English, by the grace of God and the Muses, the poetry makes the rules, not the rules the poetry," says Saintsbury. Repeated and sympathetic reading of a poem leads one to tentative observations as to how it is organised, and curiously enough these observations as to the form of a poem usually bring one to a deeper and more satisfying understanding of its meaning. For form and meaning are inextricably bound together in a sense; the one is the other.

After one has enjoyed, to the full, saying aloud these resounding lines while they are still echoing in one's mind, one begins to realise that Milton is dealing with a problem which has always fascinated poets and scientists alike: the problem of time. He is, in this poem, placing Time in its relation to eternity and doing it so effectively that, though the lines are for the most part of a regular alternating heavy and light stress throughout, the pitch and intensity with which one reads them change from a nervous, almost irritable, impatience. At the same time, one is still concerned with Time, to a serene calm when one mounts with the poet to Eternity itself, there at last to triumph over Death and Chance and Time. The metrical scheme of the lines is stretched and enlarged by the rhythmic urge which animates the whole. *The two lines fly envious Time, till thou run out thy race and Attired with Stars, we shall for ever sit* have every ten syllables and five stresses; we read them with a more solemn tone and a more deliberated emphasis because of our sense of the slowly emerging meaning of the poem. The meter is regular, except for the three-stress lines which do not really break the meter, for one fills out these lines with pauses. The rhythm, however, is varied and shifted by the sense of the poem, which every reader will respond to with slightly different stress, for the thought itself may

be said to have a sort of rhythmic urge, quite apart from the metrical scheme of the lines. It is, in fact, this never-ending conflict between the meter of the line and the rhythm of the whole which gives to this poem, and to all poems, poetic intensity.

There are other ways in which Milton "organises" the poem, besides his use of meter and rhythm. Let us read the poet again. Beginning with impatience, earth-bound and confused, we are finally wafted into remote and shining regions where everything is sincerely good and perfectly divine; dividing the poem into two parts of ten lines each, the poem comes to the "individual kiss" of long Eternity, which frees us from our bonds. Notice that the rhyme scheme which Milton uses varies as the emotion mounts. Though the poem sweeps us along in one unbroken sentence with no complete stop until Time is finally vanquished, we might, if we like, consider the first two sets of four lines as two units each marked by its own rhyme scheme. Milton's rhyme in this poem follows no established rules at all; its effectiveness makes us realise his power to create form for his own purposes. The second four-line unit gains a kind of high and proud defiance by urging the reader through the two short intervening lines to bear down on the word 'gain', answering with such firmness in vain. These two units are then followed by five sets of rhyming couplets which whirl us up to the "Supreme Throne", and there, with the support of the final unit of our lines, linked as our second unit was linked, we find ourselves in a freer, milder atmosphere where Time cannot endure. Again, the form fills out the meaning, and the meaning gives the form significance, and that is the purpose of Time to make more secure, more firm, more concentrated, the intricately bound thought, which is always attempting to free itself. Besides Milton's suitable use of rhythm, meter, and rhyme, he makes a demand upon our power of seeing, which is another demand of form. One cannot see Time, Eternity, Joy, Truth, Peace, Love, Death, and Chance.

1. Rhythm:

John Livingston Lowes, in an interesting lecture on Shelley's poetic methods, based on a series of Shelley's revisions of a single poem, pointed out that, in his first sketch, the poet marked out the time with dashes and filled in only an occasional word. More words took their place among the dashes as the rhythm became established in his mind and he felt his way towards an articulate expression.

Notice the heavy drag of the first two lines, the balance and poise of the third, which in the next line is gathered in one despairing question--"When will return the glory of your prime?"-to sink away at last into utter dejection. The strong rhythmic feeling of Shelley's mood came to him before words were found to express it. It is to

rhythmic feeling, then, that we must ourselves first respond; the poem will yield its meaning gradually as we surrender ourselves to its emotion.

The physiological fact that we are ourselves creatures of rhyme is the reason we can share in the rhythmic expression, and thence in thought and feeling, of the poets of all ages, our breathing, our walking, the tempo with which we type a letter, is rhythmic, slow or rapid, regular or disjointed, according to the mood which we are thus unconsciously expressing in every gesture. Rhythm, then, underlies all life; it is not confined to art alone, and it may be defined as that in us which responds to recurrent time intervals. As in music and dancing, so in poetry, time is the chief factor. It was in terms of time that Shelley found expression for his melancholy mind; it is in terms of time that we come to share his mood.

Not only is there a definite rhythm to catch line to which one responds as completely as one can, but there is also a rhythm to the whole, and the stanzas indicate this. By refrains, by words repeated, by the thought enlarged and finally ended. The second stanza, and there are but two in this poem, reflects on the first when we re-read the whole and subtly influences how we modulate our voices. And for this reason, one must read the poem again, that the whole may play upon each part, backwards and forwards. The resignation, the exhaustion, of the second stanza, make the line. "No more Oh, never more!" sound on our ears more sadly than the same line at the end of the first stanza. One reads it the first time with less finality, with something of an upward urge; one reads it the second time with the quiet, even tone of despair. To D. H. Lawrence, "the hidden emotional pattern" of poetry. The rhythm shaped by the feeling of the poet was more important than meter.

2. Meter:

Metrical pattern, however, seems to be essential to transport us to the level of consciousness experienced by the poet himself, to enable us to share the thoughts and emotions which are beyond our ordinary range. Rhythm marks prose as well as poetry; meter or regularity of time parts within a line is the distinguishing sign of poetry. One has only to repeat, with exaggerated emphasis, Lawrence's sentence above to observe that it has a very beautiful rhythm. But it is equally clear that it has no regular sound pattern. For the sake of the contrast, repeat Shelley's stanza. The time-pattern is very regular; each stanza is made up of two three-stress lines and ends with a three-stress line. Perhaps irregular rhythmic patterns, such as those used by D. H. Lawrence himself, and many other writers of free verse, will finally displace the more regular material organisation of traditional verse. But it is not probable, since the physiological fact remains that in moments of excitement our

speech, gestures and steps fall into a more definitely marked rhythm, and poetry is the language of strong feeling. Though we enjoy free verse very much, our enjoyment is essentially that of our pleasure in rhythmic prose.

But to say that meter is essential to poetry is not to say that an unalterable metric pattern binds the poet. Though the beat of Shelley's poem is firm, it only approximates the exact rhythm we subconsciously feel should be there. However, the meter seems clearly defined for a line or two; it is swiftly shifted only to regain its original pattern. For the principle behind all art, which is always a struggle between inner spontaneity and other control, is that the rigidity of the scheme be constantly modified by the life which flows through it. After two lines of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables, Shelley, for instance, reverses his pattern and writes.

The first foot in each of these lines begins with a stressed syllable, perhaps to make us feel the physical strain of the weary climb. Despite this irregularity of meter, we stay close enough to the established pattern to feel the variation only as a deeply satisfying conflict between the urge of the emotion and the control of the form. And it is in this conflict, shifting and changing with every line, that the pleasure of reading poetry aloud is found. Should one read "O world! O life! O time!" with a mounting emphasis, or should one almost ignore the stress on "whose" in the next line, and place a borrowed emphasis on "last", which does not carry the stress? How long should one pause at the end of lines one and two and at the beginning of line five? For a whole beat, silently felt? The answer depends on the reader's age, his temperament, his mood now, for he, with the poet, is the "creator", by means of his rhythmic expressiveness of the poem which emerges.

It is clear, then, that though we mark all the stresses of a line in the same way, no two stresses are precisely alike. We shall, however, use the word "foot" in our discussion of various familiar meters to indicate a certain number of syllables in a unit, for one's perception of the basic rhythm of the poem is enlarged by training one's ear to hear more accurately the different patterns used by English poets.

They are Iambus: One unstressed and one stressed syllable. Imperious
Caesar dead/and turned/to clay.

Trechee: One stressed and one unstressed syllable Creep in/to
thy/narrow/bed.

Spondee: Two stressed syllables. The grey sea/and the long/black land.

Anapest: Two unstressed and one stressed syllable: I am lord/of the fowl/and the brute.

Dactyl: One stressed and two unstressed syllables. Swiftly walk/over the/Western wave.

The first three kinds of feet are sometimes called "duple" rhythm, each beat representing two counts. This is the rhythm of walking. The last two kinds of feet are often called "triple" rhythm. And may be compared to waltzing. Very little experience in reading poetry teaches one that poetry is not a matter of syllable counting. But a certain amount of syllable counting seems to make one's ear more sensitive to the organic rhythm underlying the whole.

English verse was strongly marked by meter long before rhyme was considered a necessary adornment of poetry. Though there has not been a revival of the alliterative verse of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry since the fourteenth century, blank verse, which came into vogue with the great Elizabethan dramas, is still the favourite meter for full-bodied and dignified poetry. Perhaps the essential reason for the hold of this five-stress iambic line is simply that it does not fall apart into two halves, as the four- and the six-stress lines are always in danger of doing. For instance, observe the four-stress line:

Bind up, bind up, your yellow hair And tie it on your neck And see you look as maiden-like As the day that we first met.

And now consider the six-stress line:

Then labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar; O rest ye, brother Mariners, we will not wander more.

Nor has the five-stress iambic line the song-like quality of the three-stress line.

3. Rhyme:

The greater part of English verse since the time of Chaucer has been rhymed—that is to say, the stressed vowels and the following consonants are alike at the end of two or more lines of verse. Rhymes are frequently arranged in pairs or couplets (aa, bb, cc, dd, and so forth), or else alternately (abab). There may be variations and combinations of these two principles. Such as ababab; ababcc; aabcba; abababec; and so forth. In quatrains, alternate lines are sometimes left unrhymed, thus: xaya. Let us now consider why it is that one's ears are pleased by rhyme, which is, after all, not essential to poetry, as rhythm and meter are.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the iambic pentameter line of blank verse was written in rhythmical couplets and was called "heroic" verse, though it sounds much less heroic to our ears than blank verse. Sir John Denham, standing on Cooper's Hill in 1642, looked down on the swiftly flowing, but self-contained Thames and thought of the river as a perfect example of how noble verse might be made to flow:

4. Images and Words:

We have said that organic form is the essence of poetry; that because of our common human response to rhythm, made stronger by meter and rhyme, the poet and the reader of poetry can share experience. What we wish to seize from this sharing of experience is a kind of truth, the poet's truth, and this, after all, is said to us in words, not in rhythm. Because of the poet's heightened emotional state, his words are never entirely abstract; because of our heightened emotional state when we read the poem, we can understand the abstract truth behind the concrete pictures the poet gives us. For the poet's language is the language of imagery, and his images, perfect and satisfying as they are, always represent truth, no matter how simple, no matter how difficult to translate again into abstract words. It is for the sake of this truth, which Keats says is as beautiful as beauty, that we are eager to enter completely into the thought of a poem.

Though the language of poetry is images, the vocabulary of settled poetry is the vocabulary we hear around us. The question was raised nearly a hundred and fifty years ago when he issued a blast against "poetic" words in his famous Preface and declared that he was going to use "a selection of language really used by men". At the same time Wordsworth hoped to cast over his words "a certain colouring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be unusually presented to the mind". By the strength of the feeling of the poet, ordinary words are made to sing themselves into our hearts and to speak their meaning. Masfield, in *Cargoes*, gives us two stanzas of "poetic" language, and then, in the third, makes use of "the language really used by men", over which "a certain colouring of imagination" has been cast.

5. Simile and Metaphor:

These two devices, by which we compare certain objects, feelings and attitudes with others, help to compensate for the inadequacies of language. They enable us to bring together various segments of our experience, whether real or imagined, in communicating other experiences. Poets are constantly dealing with the endless variety of experiences, thoughts, sensations, and emotions that

constitute living. Aristotle said: "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; and it is also a sign of genius." Through comparisons, poets are able not only to communicate the most complex material but also to do so more effectively and meaningfully to the reader. Comparisons in poetry fall into two main classifications: Similes and metaphors. A simile, according to the dictionary definition, is "a figure of speech by which one thing, action, or relation is likened or explicitly compared, often with as or like, to something of different kind or quality."

A metaphor is defined in the dictionary as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another by way of suggesting a likeness or analogy between them (the ship plows the sea, a valley of oaths)". A metaphor, then, as distinct from a simile, is an implied comparison. In the dictionary examples, the motion of the ship through the water is, by implication, compared with the motion of a plough through the soil; the oaths, by implication, are compared with bullets or arrows or other missiles. The poet, to make an effective use of simile, must look for an element of similarity in dissimilar things. This similarity, to be effective, must be real, credible and meaningful. We cannot call a lipstick a cannon because both are clinically shaped; it is not meaningful.

6. Symbol:

A Symbol is anything which stands for, or represents, or suggests something else. Our country's flag symbolises everything that our country means to us. In poetry, a rose stands for beauty, winter for old age, spring for youth, a road for life, and a sea for death. However, these symbols are not limited in their use. Sea can stand for life as well. If there is symbolism in the poem, it will work in harmony with all the other elements and enrich the meaning and overall effect.

7. Ambiguity:

When a statement can be understood in more than one way, it is considered ambiguous. Ambiguity in poetry can achieve depth of meaning provided it is controlled and intentional.

8. Tone:

Tone helps to express certain attitudes. As a poem is an utterance addressed to some audience, the problem of the attitude of the protagonist of the poem is important. The poet might be talking to himself as in a lyric or a meditative poem.

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