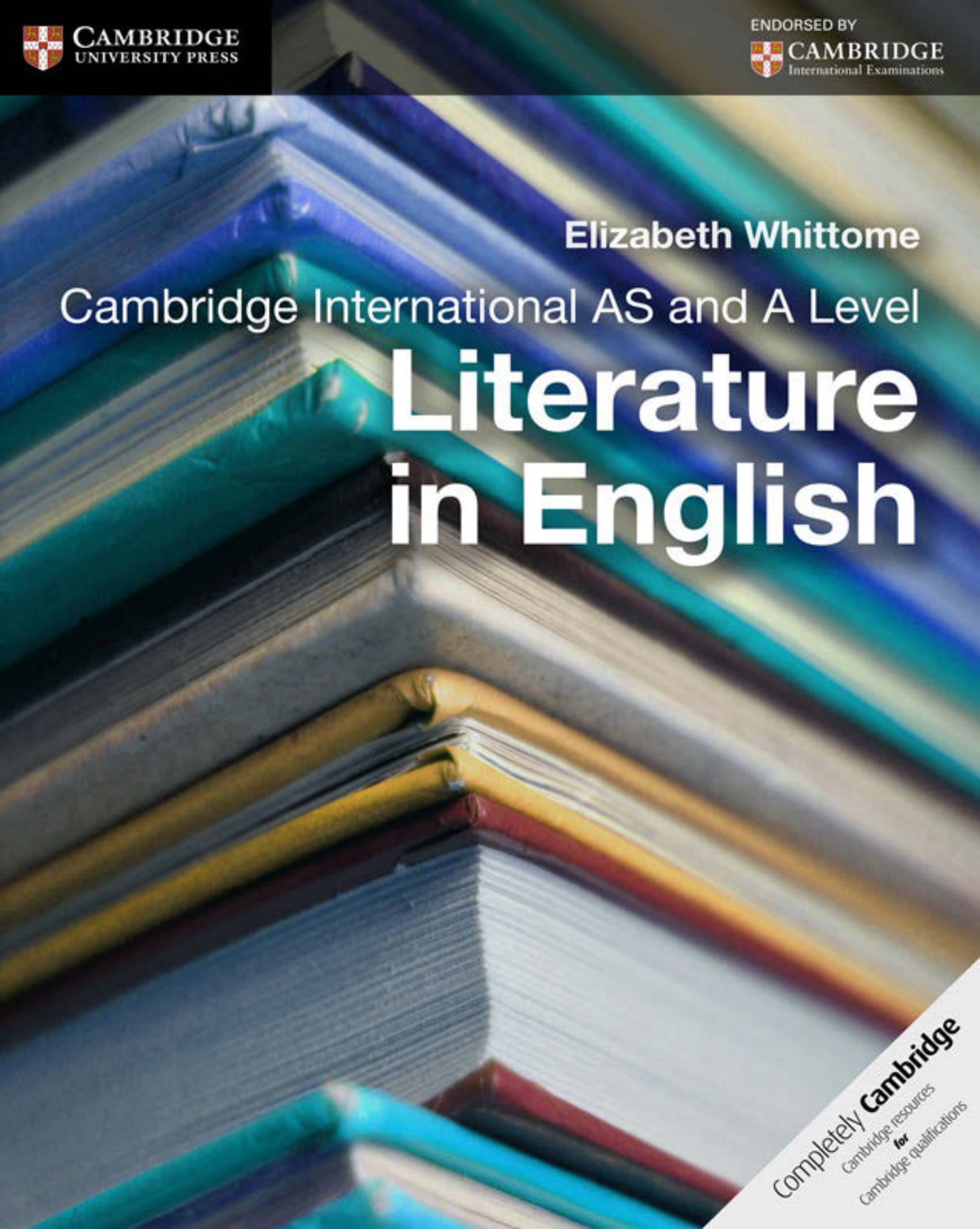
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Contents

Part 3 Essay Skills and Techniques

Introduction

This book is intended to inspire a love of Literature in English and greater confidence in reading, thinking and writing about it. It envisages a two-year course, with the first year devoted to AS Level, or first year studies, and the second year to Advanced work. However, there may be other learners with different educational experiences who can benefit just as much from the book and the Pathways grid on page vii is helpful in showing you how.

Some of you may have studied Literature already up to GCSE, IGCSE or O Level. For you the AS Level part of the book will contain some revision elements, though there is plenty of new and challenging material there too. If you haven't followed one of these courses, then pay particular attention to the early units on Poetry, Prose and Drama and you will soon come up to speed and be ready to tackle the Advanced level if you want to.

In the Advanced section of the book, all the knowledge and skills you've acquired during the first part of your course will be extended and refined. You'll learn different approaches and new technical terms.

Reading is central to this course. It demands concentration and focus. Don't be distracted by your phone, your texts, your messages. Switch them off and enjoy some quiet mental space to read. Enjoying Literature is also about discussing what you've read and expressing your thoughts; it includes writing essays, either for homework or tests and exams. The book focuses on sharing ideas and discussion, as well as writing particular kinds of essays on Poetry, Prose and Drama (including Shakespeare), with advice on comparisons and on longer essays such as coursework too.

You'll find that in every case, advice is given to show that there are many different ways of answering a question and they can all be valid. This is not a subject which has the 'model answer' to every question. The good answer for you is the one that shows off your interest, enthusiasm, knowledge of the text and ability to answer a specific question on it with good supporting evidence, expressing your thoughts as clearly as you can.

Set texts come and go (and come back!) and obviously some of the examples in the book will be from books you are not specifically studying. You will discover the range of activities can be transferred so that you benefit from all the examples given. Works quoted range across 650 years and reference is made to authors from 20 different national backgrounds, all writing in English. These references may inspire you to further reading – I hope so.

The activities in this book include reading, thinking, analysing and wider reading; writing critical essays; tackling passage questions, unseens, comparisons and longer essays; essay plan exercises; incorporating contextual material; and using the critics. Sample responses to many activities are provided, as an example of the kind of answers you might come up with, but these are not definitive or model answers; avoid looking at these until you have tried the activities for yourself.

The final section is a reminder to all students at this level of what skills and techniques you need for success, with the final unit on 'Troubleshooting' to help you to improve by being analytical and monitoring your own work.

Key terms are defined throughout the body of the book as they are used. If you need to look up a term, a final index will allow you to pinpoint exactly what you're looking for.

Reading literature is one of life's greatest pleasures. Appreciating it, writing about it and discussing it are all enhanced by sharpening your skills. I hope you enjoy the book and find it useful.

PARTS	UNITS	RELEVANT FOR CAMBRIDGE EXAMS
Part 1 AS Level or first year	Section 1 Poetry part 1 Units 1–6	AS Papers 3, 9; all A; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 2 Prose part 1 Units 7–11	AS Papers 3, 9; all A; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 3 Drama part 1 Units 12–17	AS Papers 4, 9; all A; Pre-U 2, 3, 4
Part 2 A Level or second year	Section 4 Poetry part 2 Units 18–20	All A; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 5 Prose part 2 Units 21–23	All A; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 6 Drama part 2 Units 24–26	All A; Pre-U 2, 3, 4
Part 3 Essay Skills and Techniques	Units 27–34	All

There are a number of features in the book to help you in your study:

LINK – This suggests related sections or pages from the book which will help you make connections between skills or texts.

LINK

Refer to the different methods of approaching passage questions in Unit 28 of this book.

TIP – This provides focused advice which you can apply to examination questions or to your study/revision.

TIP

The language of the passage is all-important and the beginning of your analysis.

KEY TERMS – These define important words that you need to understand or use in your studies.

KEY TERMS

Register is language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting.

FURTHER READING – This suggests additional guidance or supporting material that can be accessed elsewhere, for example on the web.

FURTHER READING

In *Stray Cats* by the Indian poet E. V. Ramakrishnan, he describes the way the cats *monitor the world from treetops / and hold their weekly meetings in the graveyard*, further developing ideas about cats at night that Hughes introduces in *Esther's Tomcat*.

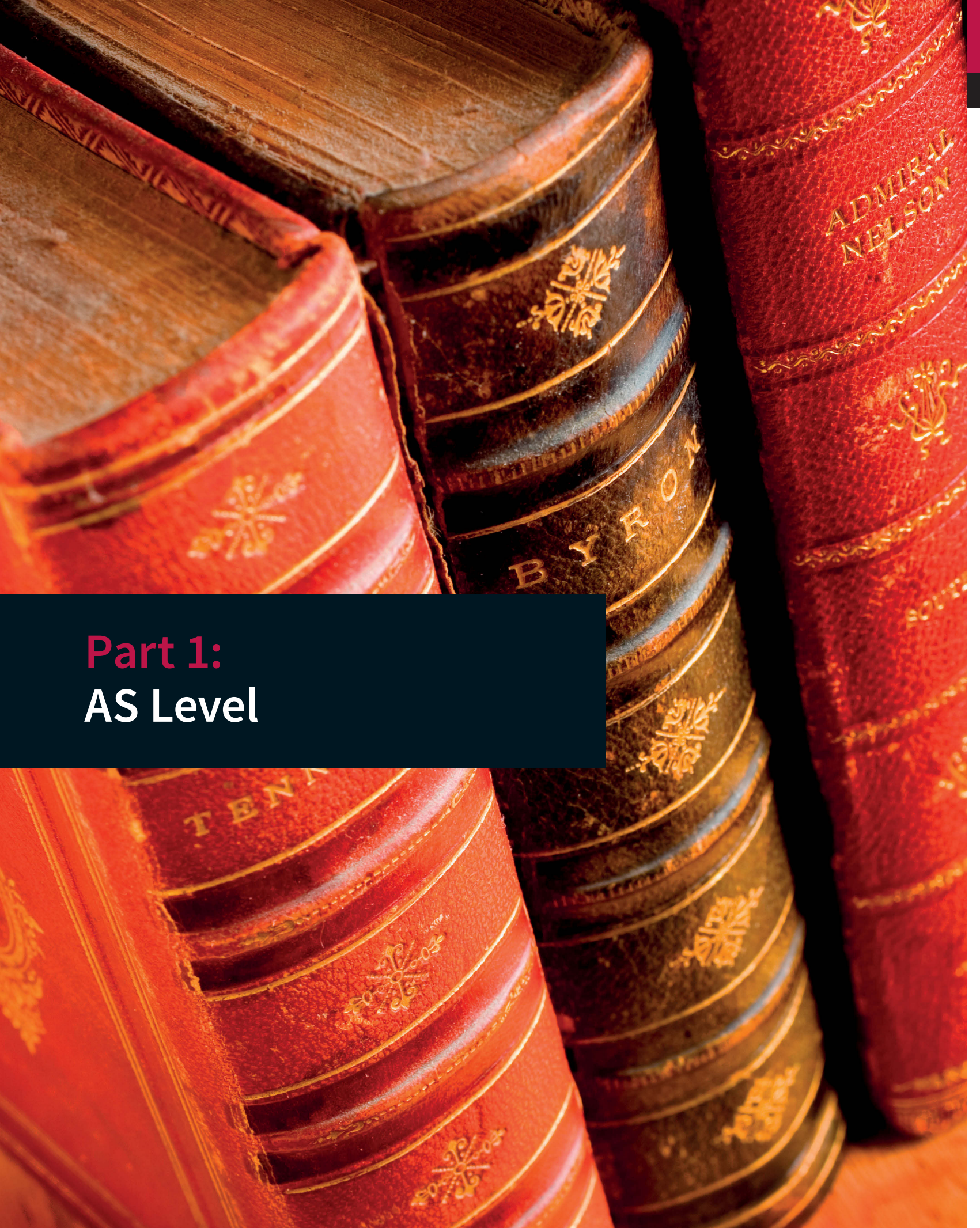
Pathways

	AS Level Poetry	AS Level Prose	AS Level Drama	A Level Poetry	A Level Prose	A Level Drama	Essay skills and techniques
I am an AS Level student	Units 1–6 provide core teaching	Units 7–11 provide core teaching	Units 12–17 provide core teaching	Of future interest	Of future interest	Of future interest	Essential advice for all
I am an A Level student	Units 1–6 provide foundation teaching and revision	Units 7–11 provide foundation teaching and revision	Units 12–17 provide foundation teaching and revision	Units 18–20 provide core teaching	Units 21–23 provide core teaching	Units 24–26 provide core teaching	Essential advice
I am a Pre-U student	Units 1–6 provide some of the core teaching required	Units 7–11 provide some of the core teaching required	Units 12–17 provide some of the core teaching required	Units 18–20 provide some of the core teaching required	Units 21–23 provide some of the core teaching required	Units 24–26	Essential advice
I am an AS/A Level student on another syllabus	Relevant background and basics	Relevant background and basics	Relevant background and basics	All useful activities	All useful activities	All useful activities	Essential advice
I am an adult on an Access to HE course or just interested	Relevant background and basics	Relevant background and basics	Relevant background and basics	All useful activities	All useful activities	All useful activities	Essential advice
I am a teacher	Good for less experienced students and revision	Good for less experienced students and revision	Good for less experienced students and revision	Many useful activities including passage questions and unseens	Many useful activities including passage questions and unseens	Many useful activities including passage questions and unseens	Essential advice – whole unit on Troubleshooting

Although specifically designed for the International AS and A Level, the activities in this book are all suitable for other Advanced students. The book contains a great deal of advice on undertaking passage-based questions which combine the skills of close reading with wider reference to the text. Part 1 begins with the basics of the subject and is very suitable for revision or for those who have not taken an earlier qualification such as O Level or GCSE or IGCSE in Literature, moving on to Part 2's more Advanced studies later. However, you should look closely at the specific requirements of your own syllabus, because there will be slight differences.

Reading Literature is one of life's greatest pleasures. Appreciating it, writing about it and discussing it are all enhanced by sharpening your skills. I hope you enjoy the book and find it useful.

Elizabeth Whittome



Part 1:
AS Level

Unit 1: Introduction to poetry

Responding to poetry and writing about it

This section of the book will help you to express your thoughts and feelings about poetry. The units on this topic are designed to help you to enjoy poetry to the full and to feel more secure about expressing your responses, formulating your own interpretations and supporting your ideas with examples.

Poetry can stretch words to their limit to record unique, direct impressions of experience. A word can achieve its full potential when a skilled poet combines it with other carefully selected words. The elements of a word – its meaning, associations, context, history, sound, even its shape and length – all combine with other words to produce the distinctive qualities of a poem. No wonder that many writers see poetry as the ultimate achievement of any language, the utterance that can never really be translated without losing some of its magic. Read any poem aloud to savour its sounds and rhythms; critical appreciation will follow with practice.

All syllabuses focus on a very important Assessment Objective that reminds us that every writer chooses forms, structures and words to shape meanings. Both the writer selecting the words and the reader absorbing their effects are important in this process. You are the reader, whose close listening and reading, personal experience and enjoyment are most significant for your appreciation. You may find that you observe and give emphasis in a different way from your classmate. Providing that both of you can express your feelings, identify the evidence from the poem you are discussing and argue your case, then neither of you is wrong, necessarily. Both of you are literary critics.

What makes a poem?

ACTIVITY 1.1

Discuss with your group, or teacher if possible, what qualities you think a poem should have in order to be defined as a poem, and make a list.

COMMENT

Here's a table for you, which shows where various points are discussed in the following Poetry units. You may have come up with some of these points in your discussion about the qualities that define poems.

Possible qualities of a poem	Where these are discussed
A Reading a poem out loud can be very exciting/thrilling/funny/sad even if you don't understand all of it completely.	
B It is usually 'about' something – a theme; but it doesn't have to tell a story.	Later in Unit 1
C The writer is expressing her/his thoughts on a particular subject so it can be full of humour or emotion such as anger or sadness.	Later in Unit 1

D The meaning can sometimes be difficult at first reading because: • the words aren't in the usual order • some of them even seem to be missing • they appear to be new words not in the dictionary, or don't have their usual meaning • the language is concentrated or ambiguous.	Unit 2
E The language can have lots of figures of speech (such as metaphor and personification) and be very descriptive.	Unit 2
F Sometimes words or phrases or ideas are repeated.	Unit 2
G It is written in lines and the sentences don't reach the end of the page.	Unit 3
H There is a pattern to the way it is laid out (e.g. in verses, stanzas or groups of lines).	Unit 3
I Sometimes it is very rhythmical and there are rhymes or other sound effects such as alliteration.	Unit 4 and 5

Of all the points in the list, it's probably **D**, with its range of challenges for readers, that worries students the most, especially when they have never studied poetry before or are looking at a poem for the first time. Try not to be too worried about what you see as difficulties of interpretation. Some students spend too much time trying to chase the 'meaning' of a poem and forget about the real words that are the poem. It's important to remember that the poet has made choices to create particular effects, and considering these in detail – their sounds, their rhythm, their combination together – often clarifies meaning where it has seemed tricky.

Then, in Unit 6 you focus on writing for an exam, with two different examples of questions. Throughout the units you will have Study and Revision tips. The examples used are from the Literature texts on Cambridge syllabuses, as well as others that are especially memorable or appropriate to illustrate particular points.

ACTIVITY 1.2

Look again at the table of qualities that could characterise a poem. How many of them can be seen in the following short poetic text?

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound *In a Station of the Metro* (1913)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

At first there do not seem to be enough qualities to make this into a poem as such. It has only two lines, which are not of the same length; there is no distinctive rhythm or rhyme and there is not even a verb to give action to the situation and point to a theme. (Some students think this is too fragmentary to be classed as a poem and you may have some sympathy with that view.) But it is a very descriptive fragment and it uses two different images – one in each line – to capture the poet's experience of seeing people in a crowded station. (The Metro is the Paris underground system. If you do not have an underground train system where you live, imagine crowds pouring off a train.) The poem's title is important because it places the poet's observation and allows the reader to conjure up similar experiences.

The first image is that the faces are an *apparition*, a word that means 'appearance', but also 'ghost', suggesting that they do not look like living beings and perhaps are pale and sad. The second image develops the idea by the metaphor of their faces being like petals on a wet black bough: perhaps the poet is suggesting spring when the trees have blooms but no leaves and the weather is still rainy; the petals are white or pale pink and delicate, easily blown away. Both images suggest helplessness and transience: there is nothing substantial or robust in the description at all. So although the poet has only offered us images, they are suggestive ones, haunting even, and the experience of seeing people as vulnerable in the hurly-burly of modern urban life has been communicated in two lines and two evocative images.

KEY TERMS

The **Imagists** were a group of early 20th-century poets who believed that experience was most effectively communicated through images of the senses and this approach is an important element in appreciating *what* a poet is expressing by considering *how* it is expressed. Sense images do not have to be metaphors. The senses are sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell; to these we can add the 'sense' of energy or movement, which could be termed the **kinetic** sense.

The poem is a good example of Imagism. Ezra Pound was one of a group of poets called **Imagists**.

Here is another example of a short poem with vivid images by Ong Teong Hean. Tai-chi was originally a training for Chinese martial arts, but is now considered a very valuable exercise regime.

the man of tai-chi
with such sequestered ease
creates a clean calligraphy
of graceful peace:
a centre of concentration
to pump his heart and arteries
with measured arm-motion
and steps of gnarled artistry.

Ong Teong Hean *The Tai-chi Man* (2010)

What are poems usually about?

ACTIVITY 1.3

Write down the names of five poems you have studied and in one or two sentences say what they are about. If possible, with your partner or in a group discuss in more detail how each theme develops as the poem progresses.

Poets can express thoughts and feelings about anything, so poems can have as their subject matter anything in the world you can think of, like the Underground or exercising in the morning! There are great poems created about apparently trivial objects like a lock of hair, insects such as a flea or mosquito, or growing things such as thistles or mushrooms. Major life dramas such as love, treachery and war do of course also feature. What the poet does with the subject matter, and how these ideas are developed, is the poem's theme, or it can be expressed as 'the poet's concerns'. These ideas are not separate from the words they are expressed in: the words *are* the poem.

Your exam syllabus for AS Level does not set longer narrative poems for study, so all the examples used in this part of the book will be of shorter lyric poems with distinct themes; you will find that length is not necessarily a criterion for excellence.

Themes in poetry

It is often easier to summarise the theme of a poem than it is to analyse the poet's methods and the effects of the language used. This poem is about the waste and futility of war, you might say, or the sadness of death, or the passage of time, or how relationships can be difficult, or how some people in power can make others suffer dreadfully.

Perhaps the poet gives a different example in each **stanza** and then concludes by emphasising his point, or uses a little anecdote that illustrates the issue. Or possibly the poet chooses images which are suggestive of a thought but don't express the thought directly, but we still grasp the gist of the argument.

KEY TERMS

Stanza is an Italian word that means 'room', a place to stop. Poetic stanzas can be irregular as well as regular (see page 18).

ACTIVITY 1.4

How would you describe the theme of this poem by William Blake? When you have answered, consider what other elements in the poem could affect the expression of this theme and your appreciation of it.

My mother groan'd! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud:
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swaddling bands.
Bound and weary, I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

William Blake (1757–1827) *Infant Sorrow*

SAMPLE RESPONSE

This poem, one of the *Songs of Experience*, presents a newborn baby uttering its thoughts and feelings, but this infant is very different from the sweet and innocent baby usually imagined being born into a loving, happy family environment. The baby is physically weak, but its spirit is already corrupt and aggressive. The poet may be suggesting that children are not born innocent and then corrupted by the world as they grow up. Rather, he suggests, they have an inborn nature which disposes them towards ill temper and sin from the moment they are born into this 'dangerous' world.

Illustration from William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience.*

What is missing from this response?

This answer interprets the theme of the poem quite successfully, but to focus on theme alone is to neglect other aspects of the poem that influence the theme very powerfully. Consider the effect of having the child's voice as the speaking voice of the poem – this creates a powerful impression of a character already formed.

Look at the simile *Like a fiend hid in a cloud* and what it suggests about the devilish and hypocritical potential of the child. The evocative descriptive words *struggling*, *striving* and the verb *sulk* are linked in sound as well as meaning, emphasising the child's hostile, resentful attitude and self-conscious behaviour. Similarly the words *hands* and *bands* rhyme, suggesting by the implication of their linkage that the hands of the father are restraining rather than lovingly protective. The concise lines, regular rhythm and rhyme give a confident certainty to the meaning and tone of the poem, and are thereby all the more shocking.

In a Station of the Metro, that little fragmentary poem, showed the importance of style in interpretation. You are reminded similarly by Blake's poem that the way a theme is expressed is vital to its meaning: all the work you do on analysis of style will help you to refine your ideas about theme and you will be able to return to your initial statement about the writer's concerns and make it more subtle and comprehensive.

TIP

The words make the poem: its meaning doesn't exist as a separate entity underneath or inside the words like a nut whose shell has to be cracked to find the kernel inside. If you changed some of the words to others with similar meanings but different sounds, the poem would disappear and become something else.

Students usually write about a poem's theme and say little about the poet's style and methods. Any close analysis of the language of a poem will enhance the quality of an essay.

Unit 2: The language of poetry

This unit will help you to appreciate and deal with some of the poetic uses of language: first, the figurative language that characterises many poems and expands their imaginative range; second, the uses of language that challenge your understanding.

The meaning of lines of poetry can sometimes be difficult to unravel because the words are new to you, they are not in the usual order, or perhaps some are missing, making the utterance ambiguous. It's important to remember that a poet's style is not seeking difficulty for its own sake but striving for freshness of presentation and thought, so that when you study the poem you will be engaged by it and remember it with pleasure as a unique utterance.

Metaphorical language

The language of poetry can be very concentrated. One of the reasons for this intensity of expression is the use of **metaphor**. Literal language – the language of fixed predictable meaning – is relatively straightforward, but as soon as language becomes figurative (filled with **figures of speech**) then it becomes highly suggestive and open to imaginative interpretation. Look at the difference between *My love is eighteen years old and has black hair* (literal) and *My love is like a red, red rose* (a figurative comparison).

Metaphor is a broad term which encompasses all the comparative figures of speech (**simile** and **personification**, for example) rather as the term 'mammal' includes a wide range of animals. It is based on comparison. In the hands of a skilled poet, metaphor can extend and enrich meaning, often working at more than one level of comparison and extending through several lines or a whole poem.

KEY TERMS

Figures of speech Don't be put off by the fact that many words for figures of speech are unusual, often deriving from ancient Greek. This shows that using them is an essential feature of language from ancient times. There are literally scores of them, but the list below gives you the most common.

Imagery refers to the images of any of our senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell) produced in the mind by descriptive language. These images are often being compared with something else, so frequently associated with specific figures of speech.

Metaphor is the most important and widespread figure of speech. It is a comparison in which unlike objects are identified with each other so that some element of similarity can be found between them. Here a comparison is made by identifying one thing with another, but without using *as* or *like*. In its identification of one thing with another it goes further than a simile.

For example, *If music be the food of love, play on* (Shakespeare *Twelfth Night*): music to a lover is like food to a hungry person, feeding and sustaining.

The slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune (Shakespeare *Hamlet*): life's blows are like missiles thrown at us, but note that Fortune is also personified here.

Her skills have blossomed since she started lessons: her skills are growing like a plant – a bud has grown and has gradually become a beautiful flower.

Extended metaphor is where the identification of similar qualities is elaborated over a number of lines, and may run throughout a poem or paragraph of prose.

Simile is a figure of speech (really a kind of metaphor), in which two things are compared using *as* or *like*. A good simile will be clear and economical, but also suggestive; for example, *My love is like a red, red rose* (Robert Burns): beautiful, with soft skin like petals.

Personification is a form of metaphor in which the qualities of a person are transferred to non-human things or abstract qualities, to 'humanise' them and make them easier to understand; for example, *the street lamp muttered* (T. S. Eliot): the environment is just as alive as the person walking down the street.

Hyperbole is exaggeration – an over-statement, used for effect. It isn't used to disguise the truth, but to emphasise. It can be an ingredient of humour too; for example, *An hundred years should go to praise thine eyes* (Andrew Marvell, praising his lover).

Litotes is an understatement used for effect, often using a double negative (such as *not bad*); for example, Wordsworth uses *not seldom* to mean 'quite often' in *The Prelude*.

Antithesis or **contrast** places contrasting ideas next to each other for effect; often they are in balanced phrases or clauses. This placing can also be termed **juxtaposition** (see page 89). You will find many examples of this throughout the book.

Climax (from a Greek word meaning 'ladder') is the point of highest significance which is gradually reached; for example, *to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield* (Alfred Lord Tennyson). Its opposite, **anticlimax** or **bathos**, suddenly undercuts the climax (and may be humorous); for example, from a poem describing the survivors of a shipwreck (the cutter is the ship carrying foodstuffs): *they grieved for those that perished with the cutter / and also for the biscuit casks and butter* (Lord Byron).

Paradox is two apparently contradictory ideas placed together which make sense when examined closely; for example, *the child is father of the man* (William Wordsworth). If the contradiction is expressed in words in close proximity, it is called an **oxymoron**. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo makes a whole speech using them (e.g. *Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health*).

Repetition is extremely common for emphasis; if introductory phrases are repeated it is known as **anaphora**. The word **parallelism** is used for similar structures, phrase or clauses placed together. You will find many examples of this throughout the book; for example, Tennyson's *Mariana* (see page 12).

Irony in its simplest form involves a discrepancy between what is said by a writer and what is actually meant, or a contrast between what the reader expects and what is actually written. More complex forms of irony are dealt with in Part 2 of this book. The word **sarcasm** refers to speech rather than writing, though it would be appropriate for a character speaking in a play.

Examples

1 In Wilfred Owen's poem *Exposure*, the poet vividly depicts the experience of men in the trenches in winter, waiting for something to happen. The pattern of comparisons here is mostly one of personification, making the inanimate alive, and thereby emphasising the cruelty of the cold weather: *the merciless iced east winds that knive us*; *the mad gusts tugging on the wire*; *Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army*; the frost which will be *shrivelling many hands and puckering foreheads crisp*. At one point, Owen imagines home and its fire, with its *crusted dark-red jewels*: here he compares the shape of the glowing coals to red jewels, precious by virtue of their warmth and beauty.

2 When Ted Hughes describes the strong, viciously spiked thistles in his poem *Thistles*, he compares them throughout to invading Viking warriors:

a grasped fistful
Of splintered weapons and Icelandic frost thrust up
From the underground stain of a decayed Viking.

These images are visual and tactile too, creating impressions of shape, colour and texture. The final stanza reads:

Then they grow grey, like men.
Mown down, it is a feud. Their sons appear
Stiff with weapons, fighting back over the same ground.

This images the visual decay of thistles into grey-topped thistledown and the difficulty any gardener or farmer would have trying to eradicate them. Like an invading army they will return, renewed and strong like young warriors, to take revenge for earlier efforts to destroy them. The extended metaphor successfully images our attempts to control nature and the spirited defence put up to try to prevent it. Sadly, what more typical image is there of the relationship between people and nature than an extended feud, which is never over?

3 In *Sonnet 73* by William Shakespeare, a series of related extended metaphors is used. It is a typical Shakespearean sonnet (see Unit 3 page 18) with three sections of four lines followed by a couplet at the end, making 14 lines in all. The speaker of the poem is feeling his age and he relates his physical self to three extended metaphors: the season of the year, the time of day and the progress of a fire. You will notice that the unit of comparison gradually diminishes, down to the 'ashes' which are his last remains.

4 Here are some lines filled with very visual metaphors and similes from the poem *After Midnight* by Amit Chaudhuri (born 1962):

Last night the medallion moon was caught oddly
between sleek glowing channels of telephone wire.
No one stirred but a Pacific of lights went on burning in the vacant
porches ...
Twice I sensed hands,
Behind windows, strike a match, and a swift badge of flame
Open and shut like a hot mouth.

An extract from Amit Chaudhuri *After Midnight*

The *medallion moon* is silver, round, like a jewel printed with significant words, the lights are a vast sea like the Pacific Ocean, and the match is the same colour and shape as a red badge. *Like a hot mouth* is a personification, as if the flame speaks and is then quiet.

ACTIVITY 2.1

Look closely at the metaphors in the poems you are studying; then analyse some of them by writing clearly what things are being compared and what effects these comparisons have.

KEY TERMS

Diction is used for the writer's choice of vocabulary. (You may also come across the word *lexis* which is a term from the field of Linguistics.) Not to be confused with diction meaning style of pronunciation in speaking

Neologism see definition on this page.

ACTIVITY 2.2

Try to identify some poems in which new words have been created for a particular effect. Your teacher will help you here. You may need a dictionary to help you find the basic building-block words used by the poet.

TIP

Neologisms

One difference between most prose and poetry is that poets sometimes create new words (or **neologisms**) to draw attention to the meaning they are conveying. You need to work out what the effect of the new word is in its context. Here are two examples:

1 T. S. Eliot uses a character called Tiresias in his poem *The Waste Land* (1922) who can predict the future. He says: *And I Tiresias have foresuffered all*. The word *foresuffered* does not exist conventionally, but because we know how *fore* works when added on to the beginning of a word, we can guess that the word means 'foresee and suffer' or 'suffer before it happens'. The tragic situation of one who can foresee all the events of the future is emphasised in the use of this word, making the line of the poem more concentrated and requiring more thought on the part of the reader.

2 Thomas Hardy wrote many poems when his first wife died, remembering the love they had shared in earlier, happier days. In his poem *The Voice*, he imagines hearing her voice as he is out walking by himself and wishes he could see her as she once was, but she is *ever dissolved to wan wistlessness*. This last word is one coined by Hardy. *Wist* is an archaic word for 'know' and was old when Hardy was writing too. So *wistless* means 'unknowing' and *wistlessness* is the state of not knowing or unconsciousness. All together the word suggests someone who is gone, part of the past, no longer a thinking, feeling person; its sounds are soft, sad and wistful, a word very similar in sound which means 'longing'. In both sound and meaning, therefore, the word chosen by Hardy focuses the sense of loss when the living reflect on the absence of the longed-for dead.

Unusual syntax and omission of words (sometimes called 'deviation')

KEY TERMS

Syntax is the arrangement of words into sentences, so that the relationship of each word to the others can be appreciated. (Each language has its own conventions of syntax.) The Ezra Pound poem in Unit 1 (page 3) was not a complete sentence as it didn't have a finite verb (a verb which has a subject doing the action), appropriately for an utterance which records a fleeting impression rather than an action.

An important way in which the language of poetry can differ from the language of prose is in its occasionally unusual **syntax**; word order can be altered and some words omitted to create an interestingly different effect. In this way, the reader is forced to become more attentive to the words and is not able to skim the surface.

The following is the first part of an early poem by Sylvia Plath called *Two Sisters of Persephone* (1956):

Two girls there are: within the house
One sits; the other, without.
Daylong a duet of shade and light
Plays between these.

An extract from Sylvia Plath *Two Sisters of Persephone*

ACTIVITY 2.3

Try putting the four lines from *Two Sisters of Persephone* into syntactically accurate prose; then list the changes you had to make. (You don't need to explain the metaphor about light and shade at this stage.)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

There are two girls. One of them sits inside the house, and the other one sits outside. Throughout the day, a duet of light and shade plays between them.

These are the changes that had to be made:
- Word order had to be reversed in lines 1 and 2.
- *Within* is an unusual way of saying 'in' or 'inside'; changed to *inside*.
- *Without* had to be expanded to make it clearer, and *these* in the last line was changed to *them*.
- We generally say 'light and shade' not 'shade and light', so the more common form was used.

This short example shows clearly that the rearrangement of some words and the omission of others can be very effective. The rewritten version in the sample response is prosaic and utterly unmemorable.

In the poem, Plath contrasts two ways of living, as illustrated by the two sisters. Beginning with *Two girls* emphasises this from the outset. By using *within* and *without*, the contrast is pointed. *Shade and light* instead of *light and shade* draws your attention to a familiar phrase and makes it fresh again. Together with the arrangement of the lines and the use of half-rhyme (see Unit 5) an uneasy atmosphere is created and the reader is prepared for the contrasting descriptions which the poet will employ to present her theme, which incidentally moves beyond the domestic into the mythical, as Plath's poetry frequently does.

The well-known poem by W. H. Auden (1907–73) *Musée des Beaux Arts* begins by saying *About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters*, rather than *The old masters were never wrong about suffering*. This inversion stresses the suffering which is the poet's main concern by placing it directly at the beginning. The poetry of Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) is filled with inversions. For example:

A solemn thing – it was – I said –
A woman – white – to be – …
A hallowed thing – to drop a life.

ACTIVITY 2.4

Discuss with a partner the word order and syntax in some poems you are studying. In almost every one you will find deviations from the 'normal' word order, and you will find words omitted. Try to consider the effect these have. A good way to point out the difference is to do as you have done with the Plath stanza earlier in this unit – put the lines into sentences in the usual prose order, adding any words you need to make the meaning clear. The first thing you will notice is how much longer your version is, a reminder that poetry can often be very concentrated compared with prose. You will also notice that the magic has gone!

Brueghel the Younger's *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Brussels.

This feature is not confined to poetry. In the play *Death of a Salesman*, Linda speaks of her husband to her sons, saying: *Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person*. The word *attention* is emphasised by its position and by its repetition (rather than the more usual *You should pay attention to a person like that*).

ACTIVITY 2.5

Here is another example: a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins which uses unusual syntax and omits words to create specific effects. Analyse how Hopkins does this.

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 *Pied Beauty* (1877)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

Hopkins omits words and writes very concentratedly in this poem praising God's creation. One characteristic method he uses is to create double-barrelled words such as *couple-colour*, *rose-moles*, *fresh-firecoal* and *fathers-forth*, each of which would require many more words to paraphrase their meaning in prose. The four words *fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls* delightfully sum up the beauties of autumn when chestnuts fall, and fires are made to warm us and to roast the chestnuts. *Fathers-forth* suggests a loving and enabling parent who cares deeply but is not possessive. Hopkins also uses lists of words, whose meaning and sound work together to image the great variety of multicoloured and multi-charactered things and people in the world: *counter*, *original*, *spare*, *strange* … *swift*, *slow*; *sweet*, *sour*; *adazzle*, *dim*. He does not need to spell out with unnecessary extra words what he is referring to. The images of the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell and movement are all implied here), together with the sounds of the words, combine to create a picture of a great creation iridescent with change, and a great creator whose beauty, in contrast, depends upon his unchanging nature. Hopkins's poetry is rich with similar examples.

KEY TERMS

Parallelism see definition on this page.

Repetition and parallelism

Poetic method often includes exact repetition of words and phrases, or whole lines, in order to intensify effects. **Parallelism** is repetition which may have some subtle differences. The first example for you to consider is from Tennyson's poem *Mariana*. Here are the first two stanzas:

ACTIVITY 2.6

See if you can find examples of exact repetition in the two stanzas from *Mariana*. Then look to see if you can find parallelism, where the repeated phrase or construction has a slight variation. Don't include the rhyme at this stage, though it is, of course, a kind of parallelism.

With blackest moss the flower-pots
  Were thickly crusted, one and all:
The rusted nails fell from the knots
  That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
  Unlifted was the clinking latch;
  Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
    She only said, 'My life is dreary,
      He cometh not,' she said;
    She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
      I would that I were dead!'

Her tears fell with the dews at even;
  Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
  Either at morn or eventide.
After the flitting of the bats,
  When thickest dark did trance the sky,
  She drew her casement-curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
    She only said, 'The night is dreary,
      He cometh not,' she said;
    She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
      I would that I were dead!'

An extract from Alfred Lord Tennyson *Mariana* (1830)

Mariana in the Moated Grange by John Everett Millais.

COMMENT

The most obvious repetition is in the final four lines of each stanza where most of the words are the same (and this continues through the poem to the final stanza). Lines 2, 3 and 4 of the final quatrain (four lines) are exactly the same, but in quatrain 1 she says *My life is dreary* and in quatrain 2 she says *The night is dreary.* This pattern is found with *The day is dreary* used in other stanzas in alternation. The use of a line or lines repeated in this way is typical of certain kinds of poem, such as the ballad, and it is known as a refrain.

Her tears fell is repeated in lines 1 and 2 of the second stanza and there is a mention of the dews, though this is worded slightly differently.

There are other examples of parallelism, such as nearly every object being given a descriptive word (an adjective) to qualify it: *blackest moss*,

rusted nails, *broken sheds*, *clinking latch*, *ancient thatch*, *lonely moated grange*, *sweet heaven*, *thickest dark*, *glooming flats*.

There is a relentless pattern here, which is very appropriate for the repetitive, doomed existence of Mariana, waiting for the man who never comes. Her environment is dark and gloomy, and only the *heaven* (which she cannot face) is *sweet*. By the final stanza of the whole poem, the refrain's changes reveal a climax of desperation:

Then, said she, 'I am very dreary,
He will not come,' she said;
She wept, 'I am aweary, aweary,
O God, that I were dead!'

We shall now look at an example of a shorter poem by W. B. Yeats that depends equally upon these features. The whole poem is given below in Activity 2.7.

ACTIVITY 2.7

Identify the repetition and parallelism in this poem by W. B. Yeats: *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*, written about Yeats's friend Major Robert Gregory who died in the First World War.

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

W. B. Yeats *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death* (1919)

TIP

By paying close attention to the words in poems – their implications, their sounds and their arrangement – you will gradually become a skilled and responsive literary critic.

COMMENT

You should have had no difficulty in finding parallel and antithetical (contrasting) phrases and constructions here. Note also its regular metre and rhyme. (You will find discussion of regular rhythms and rhymes in Units 4 and 5.)

What effect does it have that the poem is written using such parallels and contrasts? Remember the 'I' of the poem is not Yeats: he is imagining the thoughts of his friend. What sort of person is the 'I' of the poem? What are his feelings about the war in which he is engaged? Think about the word 'balance' which is used twice towards the end.

ACTIVITY 2.8

Discuss with a friend or in class what you think about the lines: *A lonely impulse of delight / Drove to this tumult in the clouds*. I find them very memorable and moving (and they stand alone without repetition and parallelism in other lines). Compare this insight with other war poems you have studied.

Unit 3: Poetic structures and themes

In this unit, you will study the ways in which poetic structures enhance themes, and how the layout of poems differs from prose layout. You will also learn some of the technical vocabulary for discussing the way that lines of poetry are organised.

Theme and structure

The development of a poem's ideas will be made possible by the underpinning structure of the poem as a whole. Where does the poem start, how does it continue and in what way does it reach its conclusion? What relationship do the different sections of the poem have to each other? What effect does this have on the unfolding of the theme of the poem? Always ask these questions about structure, about how the poem is built.

Here are some common poetic structures.

- The poet recounts an experience or tells a little anecdote in the first few sections of the poem, and the final stanza or line is a philosophical reflection on the significance of the experience (e.g. many of Philip Larkin's poems).
- The poet speaks directly to the reader, adopting the persona of another person and expressing that person's thoughts in character (e.g. some of Robert Browning's or Donne's poems).
- The poet expresses many innermost feelings, sharing them with the reader in an intimate way (e.g., many of Plath's poems).
- The poet addresses something directly in the second person (*you*), and praises its qualities in an emotional, lyrical way (e.g. John Keats's *Odes*).
- The poem presents two sides of an argument, sometimes with two different voices, sometimes reaching a conclusion (e.g. poems by Marvell or Christina Rossetti).
- The poem is a description – of a person, place or event – moving from a particular experience to generality, or from general experience to the particular (many poets).

ACTIVITY 3.1

Take three poems that you are studying and summarise the structure of each one. Can you add any categories to the list opposite?

Layout

Here is an example of prose layout taken from a short story by Katherine Mansfield. You can see by its descriptive quality that it is literary prose, not the language of, say, a newspaper article.

> Over by the breakwater the sea is very high. They pull off their hats and her hair blows across her mouth, tasting of salt. The sea is so high that the waves do not break at all; they thump against the rough stone wall and suck up the weedy, dripping steps.
>
> Katherine Mansfield *The Wind Blows* (1920)

TIP

The poet George Macbeth (1932–1992) said: *A poem is always laid out on the page in a way which has some significance*.

ACTIVITY 3.2

Compare the appearance of the piece of prose above (or a page of a novel or short story, or a magazine article), with the following short poem, which is on a similar topic to the passage above:

Whitecaps on the bay:
A broken signboard banging
In the April wind.

Richard Wright *This Other World* (1998)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

In the prose example, the space on the page is filled with words from left to right; the designer of the book makes the most of the available space on the page, according to the size and format of the book as a whole. Where lines begin or end on the page is irrelevant to the meaning of the sentences written. In a narrow newspaper column, the words have to fit the space too.

In the poem example, the writer has shaped or patterned the words on the page deliberately, making choices for effect. Some of the lines are longer, some are shorter, but none of them uses the whole space.

Concrete poems

Poets can sometimes use extreme methods when they lay out a poem on the page, knowing that we will be reading it and assimilating its 'shape'. Here is an example from a poet whose work often deviates from the normal conventions of punctuation and layout. The arrangement of the words symbolises the meaning they express, and thus describe the poem's character. This sort of poem is known as a **concrete poem**.

KEY TERMS

Concrete poem see definition on this page.

ACTIVITY 3.3

See if you can find some other examples of poems where the layout is significant in the way it creates shapes or patterns on the page. Try writing a descriptive poem yourself in which you vary the size and layout of the words to give a visual image of the subject of the poem.

e
n o r t
Steve is almost i c h en .
David talks *Good Sense*.
Jane is often v e r y v a g u e
Lucy. **VERY DENSE**.
Catty Cora's fffffull of ssss*pite*.
O
Dick is rather D
D.
a l
n e
Liz is quite an G , but
Alan thinks he's **GOD**.

Attributed to e e cummings

End-stopped lines, open lines, enjambment and caesura

The poem that follows shows that a less extreme layout can also be very expressive. It was written by Siegfried Sassoon for Armistice Day, the day when the First World War ended in 1918. You can imagine the poet's intense joy at this experience: he had been an officer in the army and had experienced action himself. You are now going to see whether the arrangement of the words into lines in the poem helps to communicate his feelings to you. You will learn some useful technical terms too.

The poem is structured in two stanzas:

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on—on—and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

Siegfried Sassoon *Everyone Sang* (1918)

KEY TERMS

End-stopped line is where a line expresses a complete thought. The second line, although it makes sense on its own, needs the third line to complete it and is therefore an **open line**. By the time you get to the end of the fourth line, the meaning is running on into the fifth; *white* needs *orchards* to complete the meaning of the phrase. This is known as a run-on line or **enjambment** (from a French word meaning 'straddling' or getting its leg into the next line).

The slight natural pause in the second line after *filled* and in the third line after *birds* is known as a **caesura** and most lines of poetry, unless they are very short, have such a pause. Sometimes this is emphasised by a punctuation mark to indicate where you might take a breath if you were reading.

ACTIVITY 3.4

Look at the second stanza of the poem to see if you can find further examples of end-stopped lines, open lines, enjambment and caesura.

COMMENT

In the second stanza, lines 1 and 2 are end-stopped; lines 3–4 and 4–5 are run-on lines (enjambment). There are weak caesuras in lines 1 and 2 and strong ones in lines 3 and 4, with two strong ones in the final line.

ACTIVITY 3.5

Read the whole poem again and try to consider what effect this arrangement of the lines has. Discuss this with a partner or in a group.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

Stanza 2 begins more calmly than the previous one, with the end-stopped lines suggesting that the poet is in control of his thoughts and feelings. But as he continues, it seems that these cannot be contained in end-stopped lines and must burst out into the following ones, culminating in a long emotional line to end each section of the poem, where the caesuras and pauses suggest spurts of emotion. The final words *on—on—and out of sight* and *the singing will never be done* give a sense of infinite freedom and joy, and the lengths of these lines compared with the earlier ones enhance this impression.

If the poem was being read out loud to an audience who did not have the text in front of them, the reader would have to be very skilful to create the same effects that you grasp visually.

Verse and stanza

Regular **verses** or **stanzas** of different lengths have special names as follows:

Number of lines	Name
2	couplet
3	triplet or tercet
4	quatrain
5	quintain
6	sestet
7	septet
8	octave or octet

Larger groupings than this are much more unusual, and might even be called a verse paragraph if there are no breaks.

KEY TERMS

The difference between a **verse** and a **stanza** is that a verse is usually the regular unit of structure within a hymn, song or rhymed poem. As these units can also be called stanzas, the term 'stanza' is extremely useful, as it describes both regular and irregular units. (The word 'verse' can also be used to mean poetry in general, for example Rudyard Kipling's verse means his poetic works.)

The sonnet

Poets sometimes follow a traditional pattern in the structures they adopt, and there are many such traditional forms. The one you are most likely to encounter at this stage is the **sonnet**, a 14-line poem with particular variations of rhyme, rhythm and structure. The sonnet is derived from two main varieties: the Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet and the Shakespearean (or Elizabethan) sonnet. Shakespeare's *Sonnet 73*, whose metaphors you looked at in Unit 2 (see page 8), is a perfect example of a Shakespearean sonnet. Many poets have adjusted the strict rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet to suit themselves, but usually they follow one of two structures. The first form is an octave (eight lines) followed by a sestet (six lines) which generally groups the ideas or reflections into these two sets of lines. At this point there can be a change of idea or mood, known as a **volta**.

A volta can be seen in the following sonnet, *Upon Westminster Bridge* by the Romantic poet William Wordsworth.

KEY TERMS

Sonnet see definition on this page.

A **volta** is a change of idea or mood in a sonnet, usually at line 8 or line 12.

Earth has not any thing to shew more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth *Upon Westminster Bridge* (1802)

TIP
The shaping and arrangement of lines in a poem reinforce and support its ideas. You could express this in another way: form is essential to meaning.

The first eight lines (the octave) are linked in sound by their rhyming pattern, but also in meaning, all being one sentence. The poet describes the beauty and majesty of the city of London as equalling any natural scene (you may think surprisingly for a nature-loving Romantic poet). The final six lines (the sestet) are also linked in their intertwined rhymes and the way in which they become more personal and exclamatory in their tone of wonder and awe. (Note too the inversions that emphasise: *Never did sun*, *Ne'er saw I*).

This beautiful poem is not just a good example of a Petrarchan sonnet structure, but worthy of further study of its language and imagery; for example, its use of extended personification and cumulative lists, abstract nouns, parallel phrases and inversions, all of which express and emphasise the meaning with great delicacy.

An early 19th century engraving of Westminster Bridge.

The second form that sonnets take is the Shakespearean division of three sets of four lines followed by a final couplet which clinches the main idea of the poem. Here is an example:

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-fixèd mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring 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 proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Shakespeare *Sonnet 116*

TIP

Never forget that the poet's choice of form, structure and language shapes meaning.

The first four lines assert the permanent and reliable quality of love between true minds; the second group of four lines forms an extended metaphor suggesting that love is like a star which is used by seafarers to guide their way, even in tempests at sea, representing life's vicissitudes. The final quatrain claims that even the passage of time does not alter love, and Time is here personified traditionally as an old man with a sickle.

So firmly does the poet believe what he has written, that he sums up in the final couplet by staking his reputation as a writer and experience as a lover to confirm what he has said. This is typical of the Shakespearean sonnet: the three quatrains are self-contained but are all variations on a theme, often using metaphor to extend and amplify the thought, and the final couplet confirms the theme strongly. Once again the brevity and self-contained perfection of the sonnet form are very effective for expressing the poet's thought. You will study closer analysis of the rhythmical and rhyming patterns of poems such as these in Units 4 and 5.

Unit 4: Scansion

KEY TERMS

Scansion and **rhythm** see definitions on this page.

The analysis of poems into stanzas, lines and pauses is part of a process called **scansion**. This includes rhythm and rhyme and their effects. Your work here will help you to appreciate the way that word sounds affect meaning. This unit focuses on rhythm and you will look at rhyme in Unit 5.

Rhythm

Rhythm comes from an ancient Greek word meaning 'flow'. Nothing could be more familiar to us: all around us, natural and human-made rhythms – repeated and regular – give movement and shape to our lives. The seasons follow each other in a regular pattern; night and day alternate in regular succession; inside our bodies, our hearts and lungs work rhythmically. Clocks strike, car engines tick over and music throbs, all switching between one state and another (tick-tock-tick-tock, dark-light-dark-light and so on).

ACTIVITY 4.1

Discuss with a partner or in a group some other examples of rhythms at work in our lives.

Syllables

We dance and sing and make music, creating our own rhythms in an obvious sense, but our language too has its own rhythmical patterns, flowing in an undulating or wave-like arrangement of stronger and weaker elements. Individual words have their own rhythms, depending on how many syllables they have. A syllable is one sound and each word we utter is made up of one or more syllables.

red know find	Each has one syllable.
better pencil movement	Each has two syllables.
poetry computer advising	Each has three syllables.

In each of these words some of the syllables are stressed, or emphasised, when you say them out loud and some are not stressed. It is the pattern created by the alternation of the stressed and unstressed syllables which creates the rhythmical effect of words, and, in turn, the sentences or lines of poetry that they form. (You may come across the words 'strong' or 'weak' used instead of 'stressed' or 'unstressed'.)

Marking stressed syllables

If you are analysing rhythm and want to show that a syllable is emphasised or stressed, use the mark ´ or ¯ on top of the syllable. If the sound is not stressed, the accepted notation is a ˘ or ο shape. Later, when you become more experienced, you won't need to use these: you'll be able to glance at a poem, speak it in your head and hear at once what the pattern of rhythm is.

The rhythms of poetry are easiest to see when the lines have a regular pattern, and this is your next area for study. Later in this unit, you'll analyse some less regular lines and what is known as **syllabic verse** (see page 27).

Metre

Metre means 'measure' and you already use it to measure length (centimetre) and distance (kilometre). (In the USA it is spelt *meter*.) In poetry, metre is the measurement of an arrangement of rhythms, and it has its own terminology which is traditional and common to many languages. When you analyse the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry, you are identifying the characteristic metre, especially if it's regular. This is part of the process known as scansion, one aspect of which you are familiar with already – line division. Another aspect of scansion to consider is the rhyme scheme, which you will study in Unit 5.

KEY TERMS

Metre is the name for the organisation of rhythms into regular and recurring patterns, such as you find in poetry.

A **foot** is where two or three syllables recur in a pattern to form a metrical unit of rhythm (the plural is **feet**).

A **trochee** is a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one.

How to scan a regular line of poetry

Identify the syllables in each word and decide whether they are stressed or unstressed, marking them on top with a ‒ or ˘ as you go. Use your common sense about the sound of the word, then read it aloud, exaggerating the whole line slightly to identify the beat.

Count the number of **feet** in the line, marking the divisions between the feet with a vertical line. Marking syllable divisions with a line when you start is helpful but this won't be necessary when you become more experienced. Similarly, you will soon be able to count the number of feet without using the line divisions, or even marking the stresses, though this will take a little more practice.

Here are some examples for you to try. I've done the first line for you as a guide and marked the syllables (but not the feet). Copy the extract and mark the syllables and feet.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darkened wholly ...

An extract from Alfred Lord Tennyson *The Lady of Shallot* (1751)

In the stanza above, the recurring pattern (or foot) is ‒ ˘, repeated four times in each line. This pattern is called a **trochee** (the *ch* pronounced like a *k*) or you can call it a trochaic foot. It has a falling rhythm – try reading it out to yourself and listening to the regular rhythms of each line and the way it dies away.

ACTIVITY 4.2

Copy the following verses. Divide the lines into syllables, marking those which are stressed and those which are unstressed. Remember they are all regular patterns.

1
The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

An extract from Thomas Gray *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751)

2
The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

An extract from Lord Byron *The Destruction of Sennacherib* (1815)

3
Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her mournfully,
  Gently and humanly,
Not of the stains of her,
All that remains of her
    Now is pure womanly.

An extract from Thomas Hood *The Bridge of Sighs* (1844)

COMMENT

1
This foot (˘ –) is known as an **iambus** or you can call it an iambic foot. It has a rising rhythm.

2
This is another rising rhythm, but the pattern here of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one (˘ ˘ –) is called an **anapaest** (or anapaestic foot).

3
The pattern here is known as a **dactyl** (– ˘ ˘) and these are dactylic feet. It has a falling rhythm which seems to suit very well the meaning of the poem's lines here, reflecting on a suicide: doomed and melancholy.

A useful verse

More than 200 years ago, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a little verse for his son to teach him the basic feet which you've just been working out. Here it is; I've marked the stresses for you.

Trōchēe trīps frŏm lōng tŏ shōrt;
From long to short in solemn sort

Slōw **spōndēe** stālks; strōng fōot! yet ill able

Ēvĕr tŏ cōme ŭp wĭth dăctyl trĭsyllăblĕ.

Ĭambĭcs mărch frŏm shŏrt tŏ lōng;

Wĭth ă lēap ănd ă bŏund thĕ swĭft ănăpaests thrōng.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge *Metrical Feet – a lesson for a boy* (1834)

KEY TERMS

Spondee is an occasional foot with two stressed syllables; obviously you couldn't have a whole poem made up of them. (Why not?)

If you count the number of feet in the extracts you've analysed, you'll find the following: in your examples there are four feet in the Tennyson and Byron, five feet in the Gray and two in the Hood. Here are the technical names for this analysis:

1 foot = monometer
2 feet = dimeter
3 feet = trimeter
4 feet = tetrameter
5 feet = pentameter
6 feet = hexameter

TIP
Don't confuse blank verse with free verse – see later in the unit.

Longer lines of seven, eight and nine feet are sometimes, but rarely, found. Now you know the correct terminology to describe the metre of a particular regular line: dactylic tetrameter or iambic pentameter, for example.

Iambic monometer is extremely rare, but an example follows:

Thus I
Passe by,
And die:

This is the first stanza from *Upon His Departure Hence* by Robert Herrick. Most lines of poetry are longer than this, though these spare, depressive lines are very effective for the poet's wretched mood.

The most common regular metre in English poetry is iambic pentameter, which has been used by every great traditional poet in English. Those parts of Shakespeare's plays that are in verse are in iambic pentameter, which is known as **blank verse** when it has no rhyme at the end of each line. You'll see more examples of Shakespeare's language in Sections 3 and 6 of this book. A line of iambics with six feet (in other words 12 syllables in all) is known as an **Alexandrine**. The poet Alexander Pope (see page 154 for one of his poems) famously characterised the Alexandrine's potential to slow or speed the flow of a poem in a rhyming couplet consisting of an iambic pentameter followed by an Alexandrine:

KEY TERMS
Alexandrine and **blank verse** see definition on this page.

A needless Alexandrine ends the song
That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

Alexander Pope *An Essay on Criticism* (1711)

TIP
Knowing the technical vocabulary is helpful and interesting, but your knowledge must always be directed towards appreciation of the effects of what you have observed. It is the means to an end, not an end in itself.

In this unit, you've moved quickly from the rhythms of individual words to their measurable flow in regular lines of poetry. The terminology you've learned applies usefully to many older poems, though you will find little irregularities within basically regular pieces.

Variations in the pattern

If you speak lines of poetry out loud and listen to their sound, the natural, conversational rhythms of the words being used to express particular thoughts are obvious. These may not fit a perfectly regular pattern and you'd have to distort the natural pronunciation and stress of the words to force them into one. If every foot and every line in poetry were perfectly regular, or exactly like all the others, it would be precise in a mathematical sort of way, but it would be monotonous and inflexible.

TIP

Some of the most effective lines of poetry contain skilful variations which emphasise important words. The reader's attention is caught because a potentially smooth rhythm has been disrupted.

Now that you know the basic metres, you will be in a position to appreciate variations and feel their effects. Even in lines you consider to be basically regular, there are some small deviations from the basic pattern where the meaning or natural pronunciation demands it.

ACTIVITY 4.3

In Unit 3, you looked at a poem by Siegfried Sassoon from the point of view of its layout in lines and stanzas. Now look again at the first stanza of the poem and try scanning it. You should always consider the effects as you work through it.

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on—on—and out of sight.

Siegfried Sassoon *Everyone Sang* (1918)

COMMENT

Line 1: The first two feet are dactyls, followed by two trochees (four feet, so it is a tetrameter).

Line 2: This is a regular iambic tetrameter.

Line 3: This is iambic, but the last foot has an extra unstressed syllable – the 'dom' of 'freedom'. (This pattern is known technically as an amphibrach and may occur in this way at the end of a line.)

Line 4: This has two trochaic feet followed by two iambic ones.

Line 5: This is an unusually long line, with six feet instead of four. It also has an unusual pattern of stresses too, which throws particular emphasis on certain words:

Orchards	*and dark*	*green fields;*	*on—on*	*and out*	*of sight*
trochee	iambus	spondee	spondee	iambus	iambus

ACTIVITY 4.4

Analyse the second stanza of the poem by Sassoon. You will find it printed in full in Unit 3. Discuss your analysis with a classmate or your teacher.

TIP

It's important to realise that where the stresses come may be a matter of opinion, not scientific fact; you might have disagreed with this analysis of line 5 of the Sassoon poem. The word *green* could be unstressed or stressed, for example: if unstressed, that would have been another iambic foot. If both *green* and *fields* are emphasised, it draws attention to their similar sound and lengthens the phrase effectively. Look at the way in which the meaning of the final line is also enhanced by its length: on—on—and out of sight.

The next example is a poem written in basically iambic pentameter with many skilful and effective irregularities. These enhance the poet's emotional state as well as emphasising particularly important words. The poet is Sir Thomas Wyatt, who was writing in the 1530s and 1540s, and the subject is his rejection by women, one in particular, who used to love him. You will note that the passage of centuries has not affected certain basic human themes, though more recent feminist critics might have something to say about his attitudes. The spelling has been modernised and you are given the meaning of words now out of date.

ACTIVITY 4.5

Scan the following poem and see where the stressed syllables are.

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek — **sometime** = once
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild, and do not remember
That sometime they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once, in special,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise, — **array** = clothing
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall, — **guise** = masked ball
And she me caught in her armes long and small, — **small** = slender
Therewith all sweetly did me kiss
And softly said, 'Dear heart, how like you this?'

It was no dream; I lay broad waking:
But all is turned, through my gentleness,
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;
And I have leave to go of her goodness,
And she also to use newfangledness. — **newfangledness** = liking new things
But since that I so kindly am served,
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542) *They Flee from Me*

The rhythms of this are complex and subtle. Your scansion will show some regular lines and others where variations occur. Here are three examples, though you probably found more than this.

COMMENT

1 *They flee from me, that sometime did me seek*
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.

Line 1 is regular iambic pentameter, establishing an overall pattern at the beginning. Line 2 begins within the pattern, with the first two feet iambic. But the word *stalking* upsets this pattern, emphasising the strong determined movement referred to (and emphasising the wild animal images used).

2 *And she me caught in her armes long and small*

At the time of writing the word *armes* would have two syllables, not one as *arms* does today. Imagine this line made regular:

She caught me in her armes long and small.

The line as written by Wyatt has a completely different emphasis: the phrase *she me caught* with its three stresses focuses powerfully on the action and creates a pause after the word *caught* (the caesura) before the delicate description of her long slender arms.

3 *It was no dream; I lay broad waking:*

The line begins regularly enough, but after the caesura pause (*dream*) there are four stressed syllables: I, lay, broad, wak-(ing). (Even if you decide that 'I' should be unstressed, there are still three together.) The poet is reminding himself that he is wide awake, not daydreaming or asleep; these experiences were real and in sharp contrast to his present state of dejection because he has been forsaken. The stressed syllables draw attention to this.

Syllabic verse

You may have noticed that all the examples of basically regular poetry here were written centuries ago. Of course there are more recent examples, but it's certainly true that modern and contemporary poets don't use those traditional forms as consistently as their predecessors. More modern poets may have written regular poems in which the regularity is achieved only in the number of syllables per line: this is known as syllabic verse. You might well find it easier to scan this more recent verse that doesn't fit the traditional metrical patterns. You count the syllables *whether they are stressed or not* and see whether each line has the same number.

ACTIVITY 4.6

Look in an anthology and see if you can find any poems that don't seem to fit a traditional metrical form. If it's obviously a more modern piece, try counting the syllables. If it appears to have no regular structure at all, is not syllabic and has no rhyme, then it is probably free verse (see below).

ACTIVITY 4.7

Try counting the syllables in the following lines by Derek Walcott and you will see how easy it is to scan this kind of poetry.

Each line has 12 syllables.

Days thick as leaves then, close to each other as hours
and a sunburnt smell rose up from the drizzled road

The cloud passes high like a god staying his powers –
the pocked sand dries, umbrellas re-open like flowers

Derek Walcott from *Midsummer (XVII and XXVI)* (1984)

ACTIVITY 4.8

The following poem is complete. Its title, *Metaphors*, is a reference to a figure of speech with which you are familiar, and the poem is a kind of riddle. If you count the syllables here, as well as the number of lines used, you will perhaps be able to guess what the answer to this riddle is.

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Sylvia Plath *Metaphors* (1966)

COMMENT

The poet, Sylvia Plath, is writing a poem about pregnancy. The nine syllables and nine lines are particularly appropriate in this case, suggesting in their form the length of time her physical being is affected and combining well with some very descriptive metaphors.

Haiku

Haiku is a kind of syllabic verse that is great fun to write yourself. It was originally a Japanese verse form consisting of 17 syllables altogether in three lines of five, seven and five syllables. Because it's so short it can only express one idea, feeling or image, but this can be very effective: it is like a snapshot in words.

Provided that you can count syllables, it isn't difficult to write a haiku of your own. A class were given a list of subjects and here are three of the results, for the titles *Memory*, *Food* and *Summer*.

The smell of roses	5 syllables
Reminds me of my mother	7 syllables
Filled the house with love	5 syllables
Bring me a coffee,	5 syllables
Chocolate fudge cake with cream!	7 syllables
(Diet starts Monday)	5 syllables
Dust swirls on the road.	5 syllables
The sun has yellowed the fields.	7 syllables
Summer haze floats down.	5 syllables

Free verse

At first sight, free verse has no apparent regularity in its form, but it is in fact designed cunningly in the cadences and breath groups of the speaking voice. It is given shape by the use of repetition, parallelism, enjambment (run-on lines) and pauses, and is as carefully designed as regular iambic pentameters.

ACTIVITY 4.9

Identify examples of repetition, parallelism, enjambment and pauses in the following poems and discuss their effect. The first is an example from D. H. Lawrence, who wrote many free verse poems in contemplation of animals.

Climbing through the January snow, into the Lobo canyon
Dark grow the spruce-trees, blue is the balsam, water sounds
still unfrozen, and the trail is still evident.

Men!
Two men!
Men! The only animal in the world to fear!

They hesitate.
We hesitate.
They have a gun.
We have no gun.

Then we all advance, to meet.

Two Mexicans, strangers, emerging out of the dark and snow
and inwardness of the Lobo valley.
What are you doing here on this vanishing trail?

D. H. Lawrence *Mountain Lion* (1923)

The second example of free verse is from *The First Breakfast: Objects*, by Dilip Chitre (born 1938).

This morning is tasteless, colourless, odourless:
I sit alone at the big table.
The waiter is watching me.
In the deadly white dish
lie two fried eggs.
Two containers of salt and pepper.
A bowl of butter. A bowl of jam.
Two oranges. A heap of toast.

Dilip Chitre *The First Breakfast: Objects*

SAMPLE RESPONSE

In *Mountain Lion* the word *men* is repeated three times in one- and two-word sentences with exclamation marks to emphasise their destructiveness. The third stanza uses parallelism in *They hesitate. / We hesitate.* and *They have a gun. / We have no gun.* Both parties are uncertain, but only one group has a weapon.

Enjambments are used as part of the natural description at the beginning and end of the extract, lending an emphatic quality to the words *sounds* and *still* in the first section and *snow and inwardness* in the last. Additionally, the first lines of the first and fifth stanzas do not contain a finite verb, giving a sense that the actions of 'climbing' and 'emerging' are still continuing, also