Elements of Poetry I

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Subject:

what a poem literally and physically discusses - "just the facts."

Theme:

the unifying concept or idea of a literary work - a reader's interpretation of what the poem comes to mean.

Tone:

the poet's attitude toward the subject of a poem as expressed through the use of diction, sounds, and other poetic devices.

Elements of a Poem

Poems Have Two Subjects:

1. The initiating or "triggering" subject (*what starts or "causes" the poem to be written*).

2. The real or "generated" subject (*what the poem comes to say or mean, and what is discovered in the poem during its writing–it is the poem's "theme"*).

~ Courtesy *The Triggering Town*, By Richard Hugo

Speaker:

the narrative voice of a poem. The speaker may or may not be in the poem itself. The *speaker* is never to be confused with the *author* of the poem.

Image:

word picture that relates sensory details - language that addresses the senses.

Imagery:

most good poetry appeals to sensory details and images: sight, sound, touch, taste, & smell.

Diction:

the word choice in a poem—poets choose their words carefully so as to impart the right imagery, meaning, sound, rhythm, and tone. What do these decisions reveal about the poem?

Lineation:

(line construction in poetry)

Line:

a sequence of words printed as a separate entity on a page.

The South China Sea
drives in another herd.
The volleyball's a punching bag:
Clem's already lost a tooth
& Johnny's left eye is swollen shut.
Frozen airlifted steaks burn
on a wire grill, & miles away
machine guns can be heard.
Pretending we're somewhere else,
we play harder[...]

Excerpt from **A Break from the Bush** *by Yusef Komunyakaa*

Stanza:

a grouping of lines set off by a space - a poetic paragraph.

A poem's not
A black cat hiding
Under the bed
In a dark room.

Poem's the cat
That jumps to life
At mice of ideas
Roaming around[...]

Excerpt from **Poem's a Poem** *by Tirupathi Chandrupatla*

End-Stopped Line:

a poetic line with a stop at the end that does not have to continue to the next line for its meaning.

> *The volleyball's a punching bag:*
> *Clem's already lost a tooth*
> *& Johnny's left eye is swollen shut.*

Enjambed Line: (*enjambment*)

a poetic line that ends without a stop and continues to the next line for its meaning.

> *A poem's not*
> *A black cat hiding*
> *Under the bed*
> *In a dark room.*

Meter:
the basic rhythmic structure in a line of poetry - the *beats* in lines of poetry.

Trochee - STRESSED/unstressed - DUH-duh: "GAR-den"

Iamb - unstressed/STRESSED - duh-DUH: "be-LONG"

Dactyl - STRESSED/unstressed/unstressed - DUH-duh-duh: "EL-le-phant"

Anapest - unstressed/unstressed/STRESSED - duh-duh-DUH: ""ov-er-COME"

Spondee - STRESSED/ STRESSED - DUH-DUH: "DOWN-TOWN"

Villanelle:

Like the sonnet and the sestina, the villanelle is a fixed-form poem: structured poems with prescribed rhyme schemes and meters. Villanelles consist of five three-line stanzas followed by one four-line stanza in the rhyme scheme of:

$$A_1 \ bA_2$$
$$abA_1$$
$$abA_2$$
$$abA_1$$
$$abA_2$$
$$abA_1 \ A_2$$

Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" is probably the best known villanelle, along with "One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop.

"One Art"
By Elizabeth Bishop

The art of losing isn't hard to master;	A_1
so many things seem filled with the intent	b
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.	A_2
Lose something every day. Accept the fluster	a
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.	b
The art of losing isn't hard to master.	A_1
Then practice losing farther, losing faster:	a
places, and names, and where it was you meant	b
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.	A_2
I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or	a
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.	b
The art of losing isn't hard to master.	A_1
I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,	a
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.	b
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.	A_2
—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture	a
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident	b
the art of losing's not too hard to master	A_1
though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.	A_2

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...but wait, there's more...

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- e.e. cummings