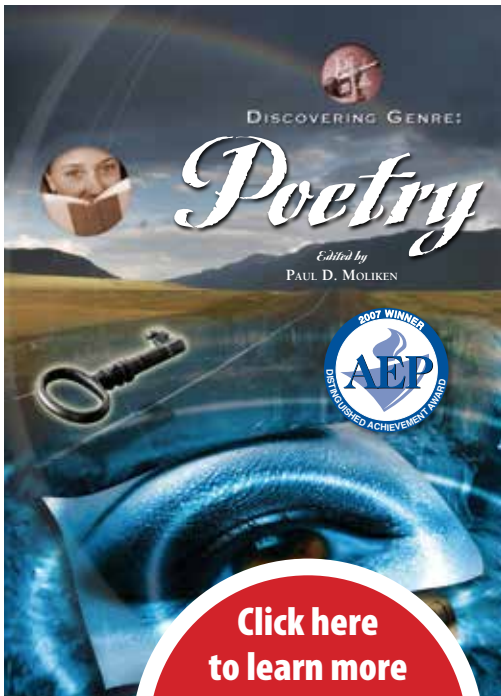




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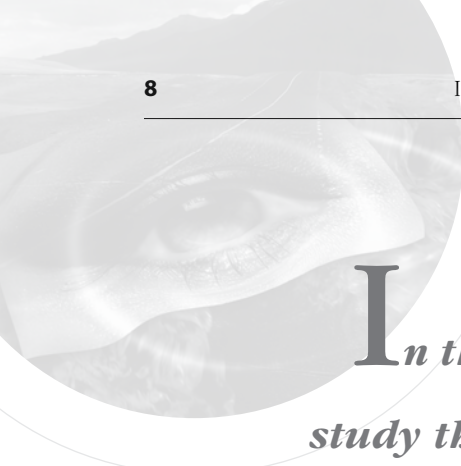


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In this book, you will study the art of the poem through an examination of what goes into each poem. Note the poet's use of words to show an emotion, to portray a situation, or to hint at the inexpressible that makes the poem unique.



I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE ART OF WRITING A POEM is a personal one that requires an author to communicate with readers on at least two levels. Readers should be able to understand the poem from a literal perspective—what happens in the poem— as well as a figurative one—what the poem means. The simplest types of poems communicate to us on these levels, and the more complex ones reach even deeper into our subconscious minds. While the cliché states that one picture is worth a thousand words, it is also quite true that one word can conjure up a thousand images. This is the essential nature of poetry—its Art.



Poetry is not, as many people think, a dying form of literary expression, one trailing into obsolescence. To refute that claim, this anthology offers many poems that were written in the twenty-first century. They are among the very best in this collection and are sure to inspire discussion about their construction and meaning. Older and better-known poems, however, have not been neglected. Your favorite poets—T. S. Eliot, Stephen Crane, William Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, William Blake, E. E. Cummings, etc.—are included.

A critic once claimed that poetry is two things: a combination of words that define something precisely and a combination of words that leaves the meaning completely open to interpretation. A poet's use of words, therefore, is what makes a poem, not the length, the rhyme, the arrangement, or the meter. The examples in this anthology range in length from Ezra Pound's two-line "In a Station of the Metro" to Edgar Allan Poe's multi-paged "The Raven." Some rhyme and contain a specific meter, while others do not. Many contain poetic devices such as similes or alliteration; some are unadorned and simple. A few tell stories, several paint pictures, and others merely present a single image. Yet, they all fit that critic's definition of poetry. ❶

Questions

A Noiseless Patient Spider

- 1** What is the effect of the repetition of the word “filament” in the beginning: “It launched forth filament, filament, filament”? What would be lost if Whitman had instead written, “It launched forth filament after filament”?
- 2** What is the overall tone of this poem? What does the poem’s speaker learn from watching the spider?
- 3** In the second stanza, the speaker compares the searching of his soul to a spider’s tentative exploration. What is he saying about his soul? The speaker seems, additionally, somewhat bewildered by what he has witnessed of the spider’s exploration. Explain his confusion.
- 4** How does Whitman link structure to sense with his stanza break?

in Just-

E . E . C U M M I N G S

in Just-
 spring when the world is mud-
 luscious the little
 lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddyandbill come
 running from marbles and
 piracies and it's
 spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
 old balloonman whistles
 far and wee
 and bettyandisabel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
 spring
 and
 the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
 far
 and
 wee

III

You tossed a blanket from the bed
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back
And the light crept up between the shutters
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.

IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.