

# Structure

Structure refers to the arrangement of the various parts of a poem. This sounds simple enough, but it might be important to realize that, in poetry in particular, meaning dictates form, but in a very real sense form can also dictate meaning.

Certainly there are some very formal structures which have been created and used over the centuries: forms such as sonnets, sestinas, haiku and tanka, ghazal, elegies, couplets, villanelles, odes and more. The task for the poet is to create beauty within the tight confines of a structure. There, however, more open styles such as free verse, which mirrors the movement in art away from traditional linear patterns of thinking and expressing that thought. This note however, is not meant to overview each type. Instead, we will look at the variety of parts of a poem and offer a suggestion about how to consider structure analysis using these parts.

## RHYTHM and SOUND

Consider structure to be a architectural term--its the arrangement of sound and sense in combination, neither more important than the other. Thought from this approach, poetry like other architectural creations occupies a space. Its mark upon that space is often first encountered by the ear. This encounter falls under the poetic parts known as rhythm and sound. As you look at the poem look for patterns in either or both of these. Sounds may be euphonious (pleasing) or cacophonous (jarring) or any combination of both.

## LINE and STANZA

The basic unit of any poem is the individual word. Words are set down in lines, and lines arranged or rather grouped into stanzas. We read and hear, whether aloud or in our heads, the arrangement of these words and how they are voiced through the use of breaks and pauses. These can be created through punctuation or through the sounds created by specific words and the letter or syllable sounds within them.

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Good poetry combines all of these for effect. They are poetic choices involving where to end a line and whether that line should be carried in to the next line or stanza. These choices contribute to meaning and the effect a reading of the poem will have. Structure is always about arrangement. A good approach might be to take the poem under question and physically rearrange its original structure. See how meaning is altered or even lost when the structure is varied.

