

# Narrative Poetry

**Narrative poetry** is poetry that tells a story. Like a short story, it has a plot, characters, a setting, and a theme. However, it is written in verse, with a **rhythm**, and sometimes a **rhyme scheme**. Just as stories are broken up into paragraphs, poems are divided up into **stanzas**. Often, each stanza has the same number of lines and the same rhyme pattern.

## Casey at the Bat by Ernest L. Thayer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day,  
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play.  
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,  
A pall-like<sup>1</sup> silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go, leaving there the rest, 5  
With that hope which springs eternal within the human breast.  
For they thought, "if only Casey could but get a whack at that."  
They'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat.

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake. 10  
And the former was a pudd'n, and the latter was a fake.  
So on that stricken multitude a deathlike silence sat;  
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all.  
And the much-despised Blakey "tore the cover off the ball."  
And when the dust had lifted, and they saw what had occurred, 15  
There was Blakey safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from the gladdened multitude went up a joyous yell—  
It rumbled in the mountaintops, it rattled in the dell;  
It struck upon the hillside and rebounded on the flat;  
for Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat. 20

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place,  
there was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on Casey's face.  
And when responding to the cheers he lightly doffed his hat,  
No stranger in the crowd could doubt t'was Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt. 25  
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;  
Then, while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,  
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

---

<sup>1</sup> **pall**: a cloth that is spread over a coffin or tomb

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,  
and Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur<sup>2</sup> there. 30  
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped;  
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,  
Like the beating of the storm waves on a stern and distant shore. 35  
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;  
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity, great Casey's visage shone,  
He stilled the rising tumult, he made the game go on;  
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew,  
But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said, "Strike two!" 40

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered "Fraud!"  
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed;  
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,  
and they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer has fled from Casey's lip, the teeth are clenched in hate. 45  
He pounds with cruel vengeance his bat upon the plate.  
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,  
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright,  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light; 50  
And, somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,  
But there is no joy in Mudville: mighty Casey has struck out.

writhe (v) to twist, as in pain, struggle, or embarrassment

sneer (v/n): a scornful facial expression or manner

visage (n) the face or facial expression of a person

awe (n) a mixed emotion of reverence, respect, dread, and wonder inspired by authority,  
genius, great beauty, or power

---

<sup>2</sup> **haughty grandeur**: arrogant greatness

1. How does Thayer show the reader what Casey's personality is like? Give 2 examples.

2. How is the ending of the poem ironic? Which type of irony is it?

3. Give an example of each of the following in the poem and why that technique was used in that particular example:

**alliteration:**

**hyperbole**

**onomatopoeia:**

**simile:**

4. What is the **rhyme scheme** of "Casey at the Bat"? Write it below.

# Meter

The meter of a poem is its rhythmical pattern. This pattern is determined by the number and types of stresses, or beats, in each line. How do we determine meter? Follow the steps below.

1. Count the number of syllables in each line. You can do this by clapping on each syllable like you did in elementary school. Number each syllable in the line below.

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville Nine that day

2. Find the first two-syllable word in the line and figure out which syllable has the stress on it. In the above line, the word "outlook" has the stress on the word OUT, so you would mark that syllable with the / over it. The syllable LOOK is unstressed, which is indicated by the ∪ symbol. Based on this, you should be able to notice a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables throughout the line.
3. Divide the stressed and unstressed syllables into groups using a parenthesis between each set of syllables. Each of these groups is called a **foot**.
4. Figure out what type of feet the line contains. Below are the most common types of feet in English poetry:

**iamb:** a foot with one unstressed and one stressed syllable, as in the word

( ∪ / )  
"be/fore" This foot is **IAMBIC**

**trochee:** a foot with a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, as in

the word ( / ∪ )  
"glo/ry" This foot is **TROCHAIC**

**anapest:** a foot with two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable,

as in the phrase ( ∪ ∪ / )  
"a/ra/besque" This foot is **ANAPESTIC**

**dactyl:** a foot with one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables,

as in the word ( / ∪ ∪ )  
"won/der/ful" This foot is **DACTYLIC**

( / / )  
**spondee:** a foot with two strong stresses, as in the word "space/walk"  
This foot is **SPONDAIC**

Depending on the type of foot that is most common in the poem, the lines of poetry are described as iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, or spondaic. However, for our purposes, the only types of meter you need to identify are **IAMBIC** or **TROCHAIC**.

Lines are also described in terms of the number of feet in each line, such as:

1: **Monometer:** a line with one foot

Example: All things/ Must pass/ Away

2: **Dimeter:** a line with two feet

Example: When up aloft/ I fly and fly

3: **Trimeter:** three foot lines

Example: I know not whom I meet/ I know not where I go

4: **Tetrameter:** four foot lines

Example: Had we but World enough, and Time,/This coyness Lady were no crime.

5: **Pentameter:** five foot lines

Example: But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

6: **Hexameter:** six foot lines

Example: To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails

7: **Heptameter:** seven foot lines

Example: O could I feel as I have felt, or be what I have been,

8: **Octometer:** eight foot lines

Example: Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary

9: **Nonometer:** nine foot lines

10: **Decameter:** ten foot lines

A complete description of the meter of the line includes both how many feet there are and what type of feet are most common in that line. Thus, Romeo's monologue to Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* would be described as being in **iambic pentameter**.

## Scansion Homework

Scan each line below to determine the meter. Remember, first you count the syllables, then you figure out which syllables are stressed (check the two syllable words first), then divide into feet. Determine which type of foot the poem contains, and then count the feet to determine the name of the meter. *You only have to scan the first line of each*, as both lines will have the same meter. All meters below are either **iambic** or **trochaic**.

1. He thrusts his fists against the post
2. Workers earn it.
3. Double, double, toil and trouble
4. There they are, my fifty men and women
5. When I consider how my life was spent
6. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
7. Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good.
8. Dark behind it rose the forest,
9. The dinosaurs are not all dead
10. All the saints adore thee