

# Five British Writers

Day 18  
(of 28)



# Meter vs. Syllables

Meter is an overall pattern of stresses, whereas syllables are both stressed and unstressed units, basically everything pronounced. (Sometimes the former is called ‘accentual meter’ and the latter ‘syllabic meter’.) Single-syllable words can often be stressed or unstressed depending on where they appears in a phrase, but multi-syllabic words often have definite stress patterns.

For example, if we mark up a 9-syllable (enneasyllabic) phrase with capital letters representing the stressed units, we put

“EM pha sis on the RIGHT SYLL a ble”

It sounds wrong to use a different stress pattern, such as

“em PHA sis on THE right syl LA ble”

because there is a natural stress pattern to each of the multi-syllabic words in the phrase and a stress on “right” is connected to the phrase’s meaning.

The two lines below (from *La Belle Dame sans Merci*) have the same meter but slightly different syllable counts.

“And no birds sing” and NO BIRDS SING

(4 syllables, 3 stresses)

“On the cold hill side” on the COLD HILL SIDE

(5 syllables, 3 stresses)

The iambic pentameter line of poetry below (the first line of *Isabella*) has a metrical stress pattern of five iambs (one unstressed unit, then one stressed unit) and is decasyllabic (contains 10 syllables).

“Fair Isabel! Poor simple Isabel!”

Broken into syllabic units, with the stressed units capitalized, the line looks like this:

fair IS a BEL poor SIM ple IS a BEL

(five pairs of first stressed, then unstressed, units)

If rearranged, the line has the same syllable count (10) but it loses its metrical pattern:

“Fair poor simple Isabel, Isabel”

fair poor SIM ple IS a BEL IS a BEL

See how the stress pattern is now irregular, even though the line is still decasyllabic?

If you try to read the altered line with an iambic stress pattern, it sounds wrong, because you have to reverse natural stress patterns (“sim PLE” instead of “SIM ple”).

Sometimes a syllable is contracted or a stress added to fit: for example, “Cool’d a long age in the deep-delvèd earth”

# What is an 'Ode'?

“Ode” is Middle English word meaning a song

Around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the word “ode” came to designate a form of lyric poem, very popular into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Typically, an ode was an address to a particular subject, written in varied or irregular meter, and usually was no longer than 150 lines. Odes in which the same form of stanza is repeated regularly (homostrophic odes) are called Horatian odes (referring to the classical Latin poet Horace).

The typical English ode has a 10-line stanza with a rhyme pattern of ababcdecde.

Keats’s stanzaic pattern varies slightly between these three odes—they all begin ababcde...then they differ...

# *To a Nightingale* (236-8 in your edition)

The poem follows the typical ‘English ode’ rhyme pattern of ababcdecde throughout. It has 8 stanzas of 10 lines each. Every line is in iambic pentameter except the 8<sup>th</sup> line, which is in iambic tetrameter (only 3 stressed units, not 5, and only 5 syllables, not 10). What is the effect of this regular variation in meter/syllable?

What does a nightingale sound like?

What is the mythological significance of the nightingale?

How does the meaning of the nightingale change throughout the poem?

How does this ode relate to the poems read for our last class?

Note the repeated use of reference to the mythological “Lethe” (4) here and in *Isabella* (page 221) and the mention of “easeful death” (53) here and in “Bright Star” (page )

# *On a Grecian Urn* (page 238-39 in your edition)

First published in the *Annals of Fine Arts*

This poem is very regular in meter (iambic pentameter), in syllable count, and in stanza length... indeed there is a certain symmetry between the 10-line stanza and the decasyllabic (10-syllable) lines.

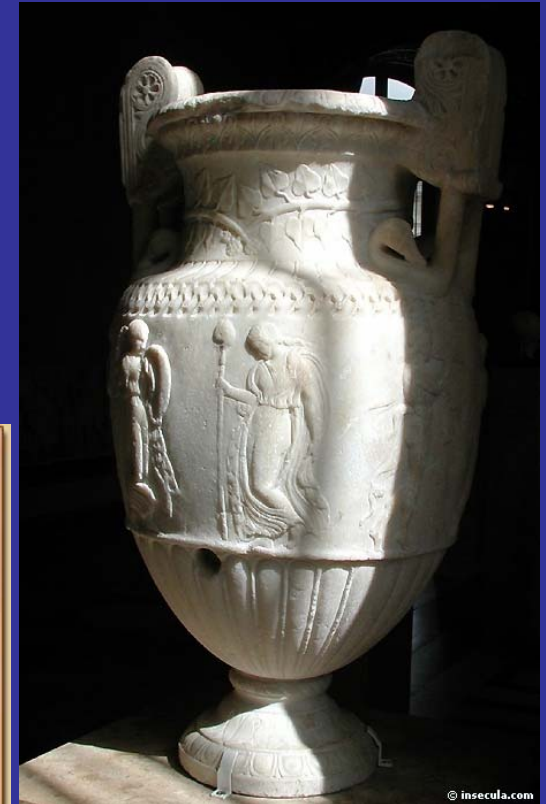
But the rhyme scheme varies—all begin ababcde but the pattern of the last three lines alters. There are two pairs of matching stanzas and one that is different... Identify them!

How do visual and verbal arts relate?

How is writing like a visual art? How is it like music? Let's consider both the vase Keats drew and a recent meditation on Keats's poem by the comics artist Scott McCloud.



Keats's drawing of the Sosibios Vase (in the Keats Shelley Museum). The antique vase is housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Keats was probably tracing his drawing from a drawing in Henry Moses's *A Collection of Antique Vases, Altars, Pasterae, etc.* (1814). The figures on this urn are taking part in a religious procession.



# *To Autumn* (249-50 in your edition)

“How beautiful the season is now—How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never lik’d stubble fields so much as now—Aye better than the chilly green of spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—this struck me so much in my Sunday’s walk that I composed upon it”

—Keats to J.H. Reynolds, September 19, 1819 (*Notes* 551)

*To Autumn* has three hendecasyllabic (11 line) stanzas in iambic pentameter—here the first stanza (ababcdedcce) differs in its rhyme pattern from the last three (ababcdecddde).



(249-50 in your edition)

Season of trust and unalloyed faithfulness.  
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun;  
Can journey with him how to load us with bliss,  
The vines with fruit that crown the thicket ever run  
To bend with apples the maple's cottage trees  
And fill all furrows with a meaning to the core  
To smelt the round, and plump the hazel shells  
With a white kernel; to set budding more  
And still more later flowers for the bees  
Until they think warm days with never cease  
For summer has begun'd their charming cells  
Who hath not seen thee? ~~for the plants are away~~  
Sometimes, whenever sicks ~~for these may find~~  
Thee "sitting" ~~on a grain any floor~~  
Thy hair soft lifted by the evening wind  
Whole light the sun plants through the ~~leaves~~  
Or on a half peat's ~~purging~~ ~~white~~ ~~asleep~~  
Or sound asleep in a half ~~stagnant~~ ~~field~~  
Dosed with red poppies; while they ~~reaping~~ ~~heads~~  
I have ~~from some slender~~ ~~minutes~~ ~~while~~ ~~some~~ ~~asleep~~  
Or on a half reaped furrow sound asleep  
Dosed with the fume of poppies, while they ~~heads~~  
I have ~~the~~ ~~nest~~ ~~syath~~ ~~and~~ ~~all~~ ~~its~~ ~~purple~~ ~~beds~~  
I have ~~for~~ ~~some~~ ~~stumble~~ ~~under~~ ~~the~~ ~~nest~~ ~~over~~ ~~at~~;  
And sometimes like a gleam that dash back  
Pleasy thy laden head across the brook;  
Or by a ~~By~~ ~~der~~ ~~pass~~ with patient look  
Thou watchest the last ~~young~~ ~~hours~~ ~~by~~ ~~leaves~~

Where are the songs of Spring? Sing, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hear'st their music, too—  
While a ~~few~~ <sup>board</sup> clouds ~~float~~ <sup>blow</sup> the soft dying day  
and ~~touching~~ <sup>and</sup> the stibble plains <sup>with</sup> very line—  
Then in a wailful voice the small goats moan  
among the river shallows, ~~on the~~ <sup>in the</sup> bone afots  
Or sucking as the light wind lins and deer;  
Then full grown damb, land beat from hilly bowen,  
Tledge crickets sing, and now again full soft  
The Redbreast whistles from a garden crotch.  
~~And now~~ <sup>And now</sup> ~~flock~~ <sup>flock</sup> ~~still~~ <sup>still</sup>  
And of ~~thinning~~ <sup>thinning</sup> Swallows twitter in the skies—

Original manuscript of John Keats  
Poem to Autumn. Presented to  
Miss A. Barker by the author's Father.

June Nov 15. 1839

Given to my Granddaughter  
Elizabeth Ward May 14<sup>th</sup> 1796  
Anna H. B. Ward

# To Autumn (249-50 in your edition)

Season of Mists and mellow fruitfulness

Close bosom friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

The Vines with fruit that round the thatch eves run

To bend with apples the moss'd Cottage trees

And fill all furrows with sweetness to the core

To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

With a white kernel; to set budding more

And still more later flowers for the bees

Until they think warm days with never cease

For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells—

Who hath not seen thee <sup>oft amid thy store[s]?</sup> [?] [(nor *altered to*) for thy haunts are many]

Sometimes whoever seeks <sup>abroad</sup> [for thee] may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor

Thy hair soft lifted by the winnowing (wing *altered to*) wind

[While bright the Sun slants through the <sup>husky</sup> barn];—

[<sup>on on a half reaped furrow sound asleep</sup> Or sound asleep in a half reaped field]

(Dosed *altered to*) Dost with reaped poppies; while thy reaping hook

[Spares for] [Some slumbrous]

[minutes while warm slumbers creep]

Or on a half reaped furrow sound asleep

Dost with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

<sup>Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers</sup>

[Spares for (one *altered to*) some slumbrous minutes the next swath];

And sometimes like a gleams thou dost keep

Steady thy laden head across the brook;

Or by a Cyder-press with patent look

Thou watchest the last oozing hours by hours

Where are the songs of Spring? Aye where are they?

Think not of them thou hast thy music too—

While [a] <sup>barred</sup> [gold] (cloud *altered to*) clouds <sup>bloom</sup> [gilds] the soft-dying day

<sup>And</sup> [And] Touch[ing] [the] the stubble plains <sup>with</sup> a rosy hue—

Then in a wailing quire the small gnats mourn

Among the river shallows, [on the] borne aloft

Or sinking as the light wind lives and dies;

[The *cancelled by*] And full grown Lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn,

Hedge crickets sing, and now again full soft

The Redbreast whistles from a garden croft:

[And new flock still]

[The *cancelled by*] And (Gathering *altered to*) Gather'd Swallows twitter in the

*Original manuscript of John Keats'*

*Poem to Autumn—Presented to*

*Miss A Barker by the author's Brother.*

*L<sup>ms</sup>. Nov 15. 1839.*

*Given to my Granddaughter*

*Elizabeth Ward May 14<sup>th</sup> '96*

*Anna H. B. Ward*



# Commentaries on Keats

- Leigh Hunt, 1816 (579)

A radical poet, imprisoned briefly for printing criticism of the Prince Regent; his journal the *Examiner* was the first to publish Keats's poems

- John W. Crocker, 1818 (580), John G. Lockhart, 1818 (582)

Reviewers of Keats's poetry in leading literary magazines of the day—note their association of Keats with Hunt and the importance of class to their reviews

- Matthew Arnold, 1880 (584)

A Victorian poet who is now best known for his writings about literary criticism and the goals of literary study—Arnold advocated culture as a means of promoting both an intellectual and moral good, in a famous phrase, “the pursuit of sweetness and light”

- T.S. Eliot, 1933 (591)

An American Modernist poet, who won Nobel Prize for literature in 1948, well known for works such as *The Waste Land*; the musical *Cats* is based on his book of poetry for children, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*

- Walter Bate, 1963 (593)

American scholar and biographer who won a Pulitzer for his biography of Keats in the 60's; Bate went on to write other works on Keats, including one titled *Negative Capability*

# *Next Class: Day of Discussion!*

No additional reading assigned.

Think over the poems by Keats that you've read (and his selected letters and others' commentary) and either respond to your classmates' posts or post more questions—either a comment or a posting will count as fulfilling the participation for this Monday.

You can also use this time to start in on your second essay!