Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

A World of POETRY

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A World of Poetry

From our earliest times, human beings have searched for words to describe what we see in the world. We have searched for words that express the world's beauty, its life, its power.

People have given their lives to the quest to understand the ocean, or the wind, or the stars. They have explored the nature of light, or the fossils in the rocks, or the smallest living organisms visible in microscopes.

They have probed into the molecules that make water, and studied the atoms and the smaller particles inside atoms.

And then they have had to find a way to express their observations with words. Some of these explorers became scientists. Some became poets.

We think of poetry and science as
very different, and there are differences.
But poets and scientists both devote
their lives to intense observation, and
both face the challenge of reporting
with words. Both poets and scientists
use extreme forms of language. Both
have had to develop creative and
original ways of expressing truth.
Both need great knowledge
to do what they do.

Scientists, more than we usually realize,
have had to resort to poetic devices
in order to describe strange phenomena.

Poets, more than we usually realize,
have turned their attention
to the ultra-close examination
of the world.


Gravity is a...
field.

SOUNDS

Poetry is not just expression in words. It is also expression in sounds. Poets compose sounds; they choose words that contain the sounds they need, and then they arrange the words into a composition that is an artistic combination of words and sounds. The result resembles the musical composition that a composer might write. There are the vowel sounds like flutes, oboes, woodwinds:

a, e, i, o, u, y

and there are the consonant sounds that provide texture and percussion:

b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p,

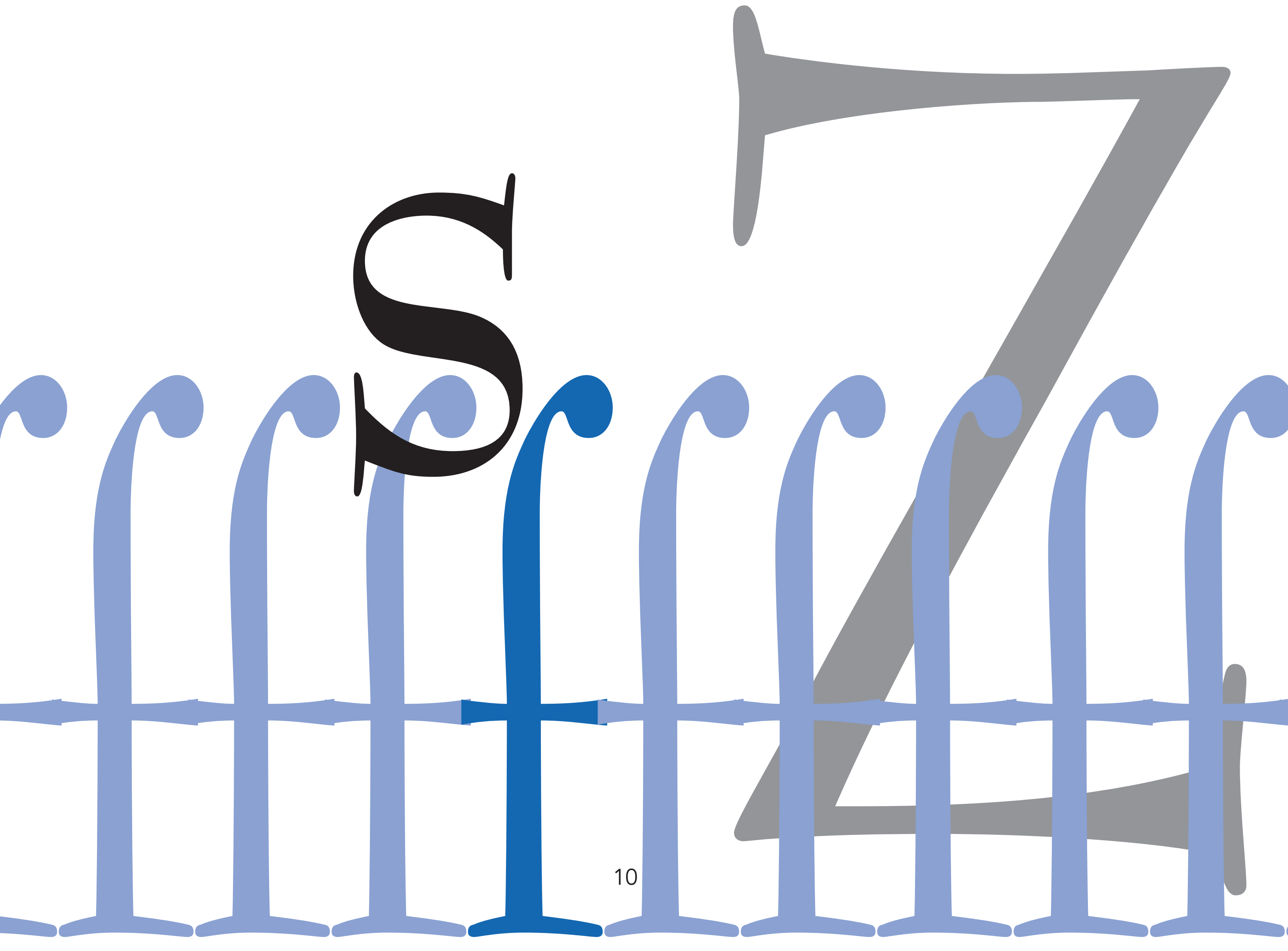
q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z.

The letter *y* can be either a vowel, as in *very*, or a consonant, as in *yellow*.

Some of the consonants are breathy,
and when we make them,
we make airy sounds,
like *sssss*, or *fffff*, or *hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh*

Other consonants are hummy,
and when we make them,
we hum at the same time,
like *vvvvvvv*, or *jjjjj*,
or *zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz*.

Many consonants resemble
sounds in nature.



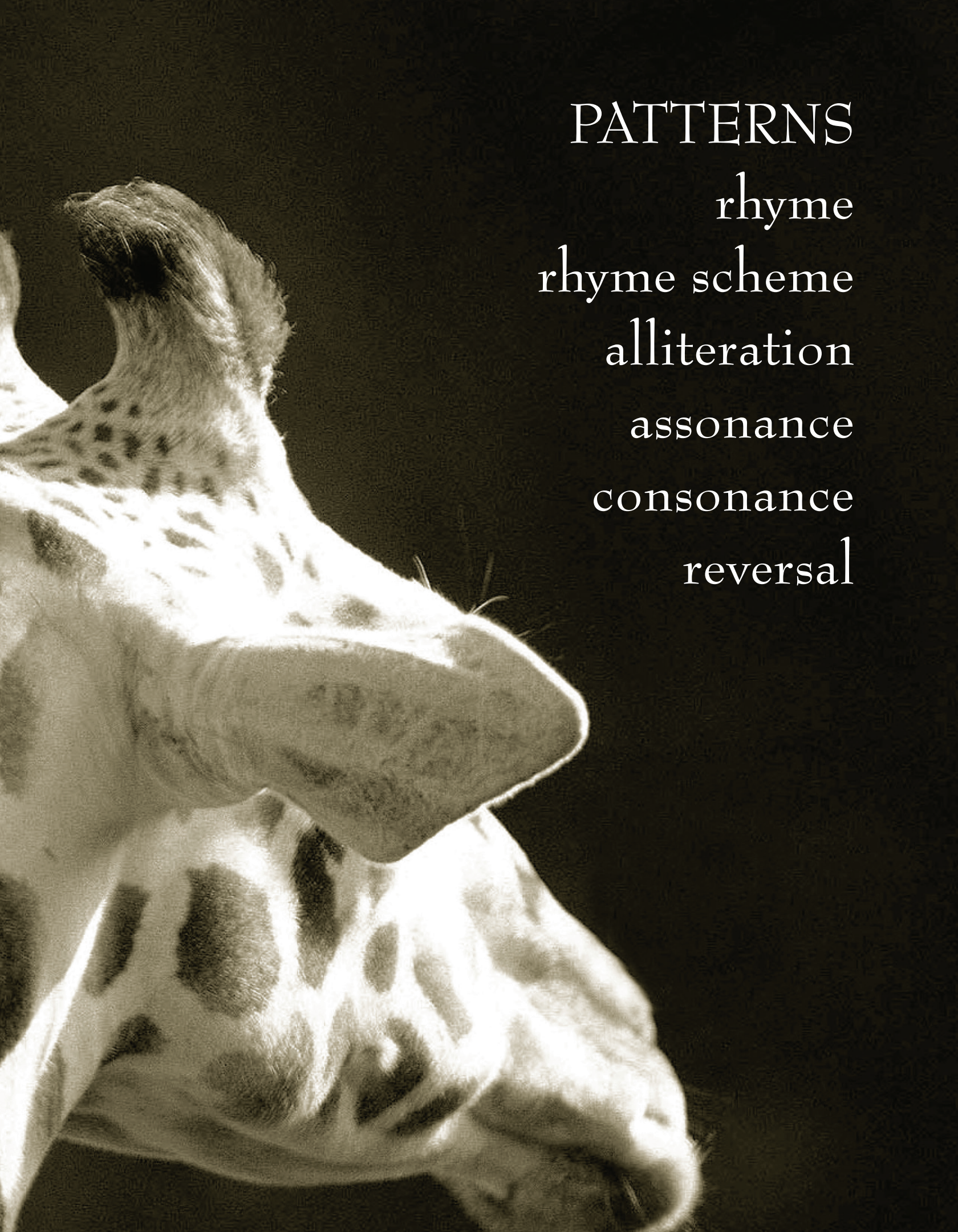
hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

j

V

ffffffffff

2



PATTERNS

rhyme
rhyme scheme
alliteration
assonance
consonance
reversal

ALLITERATION

When words begin with the same sound—like *boing*, *broom*, and *beet*, or *ammonia*, *about*, and *appoint*—that is called **alliteration**. Christina Rossetti used alliteration in her poem "When I Am Dead":

When I am **d**ead, my **d**earest,	a
Sing no **s**ad **s**ongs for me;	b
Plant thou no roses at my head,	c
Nor **sh**ady **c**yprus tree:	b
Be the **g**reen **g**rass above me	b
With **sh**owers and dewdrops wet;	c
And if thou wilt, remember,	d
And if thou wilt, forget.	c

Rossetti's poem is filled with soft sounds: *sh*, *w*, *r*, *m*.
We see **end-stopped masculine end rhymes**, including the nice **near rhyme** of *head* rhyming with *wet* and *forget*. *Head* rhymes perfectly, though, with the **internal rhyme** *dead*. Did you notice the quiet alliteration of *shady* and *showers*? The alliteration can be between words in different lines!

adj/n

Often, poets will alliterate an adjective-noun combination, as Rossetti did with *sad songs* and *green grass*. Often, but not always. Sometimes, poets want to scatter their technique, making it less noticeable. But it can also be extremely loud: look at the obvious alliteration in this short passage from Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem "Spring":

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring—
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing.

Hopkins is famous for his quirky lines, which often do not make literal sense and which sometimes seem to be more musical than logical. We somehow get his idea—most of it.

Hopkins's poem has a combination of enjambed and end-stopped lines. The third and fourth lines are **enjambed**, which suppresses the rhyme.

ASSONANCE

When words share the same vowel sound,
like *speak*, *sleet*, and *receipt*, that is **assonance**.
In Christina Rossetti's poem we saw assonance
in the *ow* sound of *thou* and *showers*. Robert Burns
used assonance beautifully to capture the sound
of an echo in the valley; we hear *ow*, then *oo*,
then *ow* and *oo* again:

Thou stock-dove
whose echo resounds
through the glen...

OW

A.E. Houseman used **assonance** to amplify the *ow* sound of his end rhymes in "To an Athlete Dying Young":

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honors out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

CONSONANCE

When words share the same consonant sound, like *hu**mm**ing*, *sli**mm**er*, *emu*, and *emit*, that is called **consonance**. Consonance lets poets pour music into lines of poetry, but to do it in an almost secret way. Both rhyme and alliteration are more noticeable than consonance. Look at the way T.S. Eliot introduced a kind of crunchy soundtrack into this passage of "Preludes" by using consonance on the *k* sound:

The winter evening settles down
With smell of stea**k**s in passageways.
Si**x** o'clo**ck**.
The burnt-out ends of smo**k**y days.

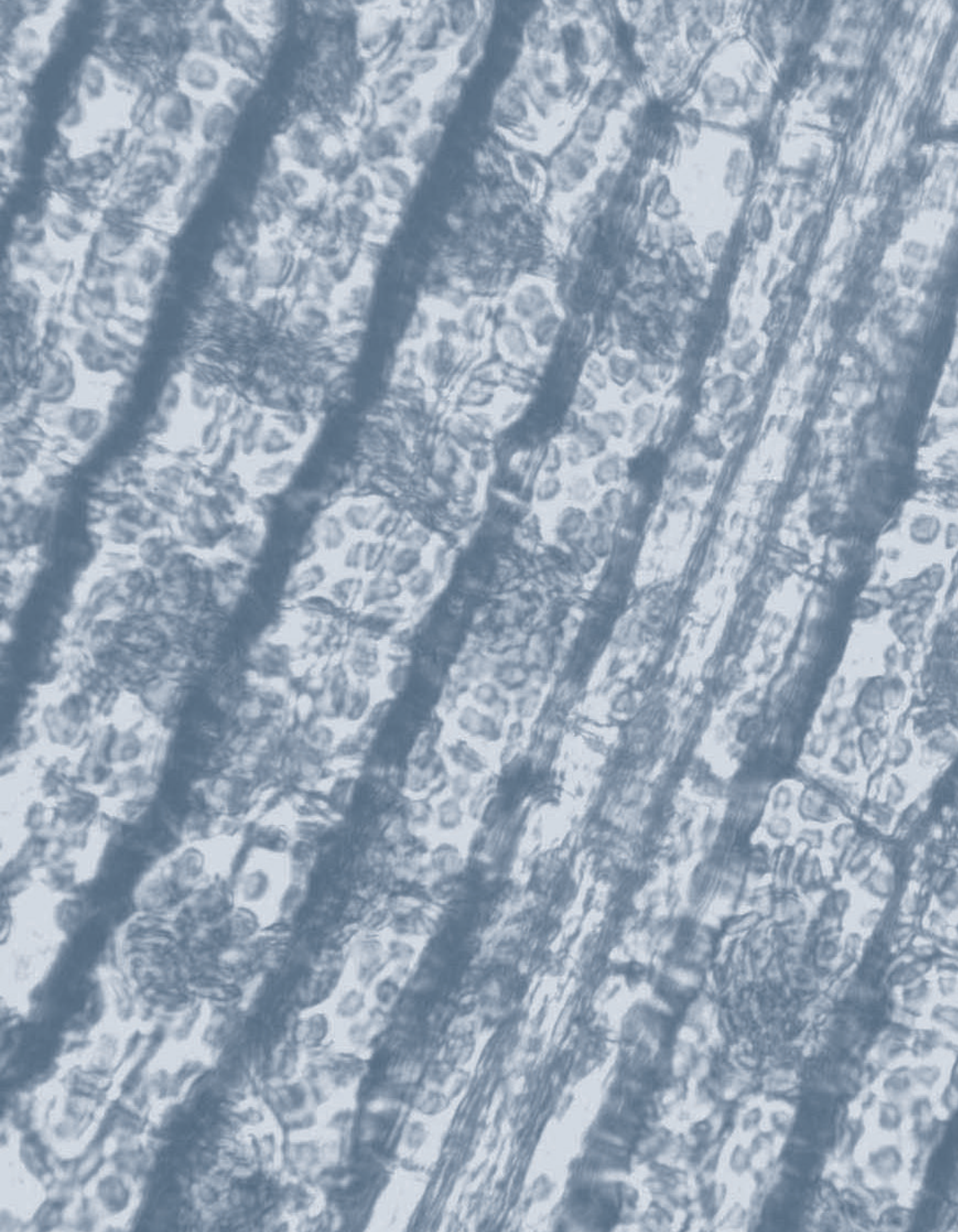
The **consonance** does not have to use the letter *k* every time; it is the sound, not the letter. Here we see the *k* sound as part of an *x*, and as a *c*, and as a *ck*, as well as *k*. The consonance in this poem is atmospheric. Did you notice the alliteration of *settles*, *smell*, *steaks*, *six,* and *smoky*, or the assonance in *steaks* and *passageways*?

Percy Bysshe Shelley used consonance on the *k* sound to suggest fragmentation and ruin in his poem "Ozymandias." Shelley imagined the rubble of a great statue abandoned far in the desert. On the fragments these words appear:

> "My name is Ozymandias, King of kings:
> Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Notice the alliteration in *boundless* and *bare*, and *lone* and *level*.

We see in these two examples that poets can use similar techniques to create different effects. The sounds are in a kind of dance with the meanings, and a *k* might seem crunchy in one poem, scratchy in another, and cracked or broken in another.

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stanza

STANZA

Poems are typically made from repeating sections called stanzas. The word *stanza* comes from the Italian *stanza*, a room.

Stanzas can be named for the number of lines they contain:

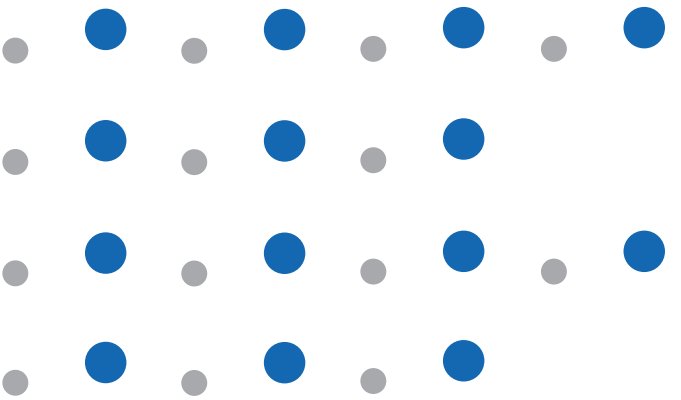
couplet: a two-line stanza
triplet: a three-line stanza
quatrain: a four-line stanza
quintet: a five-line stanza
sestet: a six-line stanza

There are various special stanzas that have become important in the history of poetry in the English language. One example is the ballad stanza.

ballad

BALLAD

The ballad stanza is a quatrain, four lines, rhyme scheme *abcb*, with lines one and three in iambic tetrameter and lines two and four in iambic trimeter.



Among the geniuses of the ballad stanza was Emily Dickinson. Here is part of her poem about the blue jay. The poem is made of ballad stanzas.

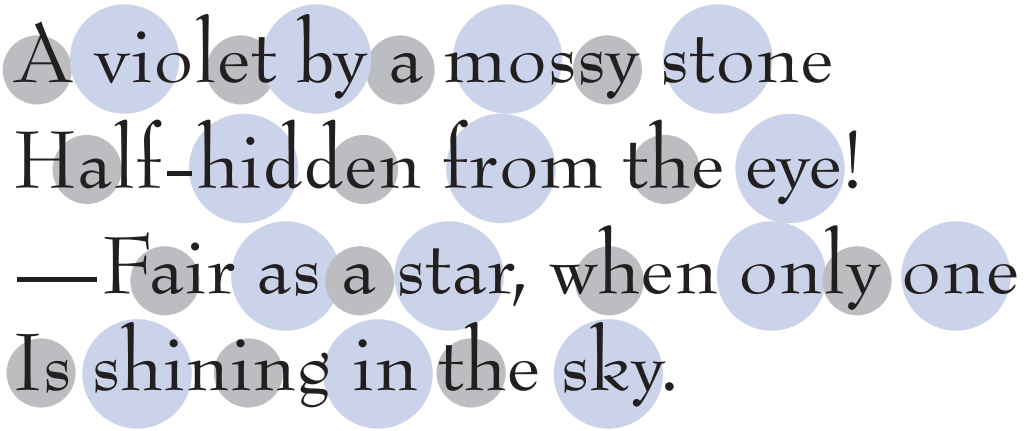
No brigadier throughout the year — a
So civic as the J**ay**. — b
A neighbor and a warrior too, — c
With shrill felicit**y** — b

Pursuing winds that censure us
A February d**ay**,
The brother of the universe
Was never blown aw**ay**.

The snow and he are intimate;
I've often seen them pl**ay**
When heaven looked upon us all
With such severit**y**.

William Wordsworth used the ballad stanza
for his poem "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways."
The poem has three ballad stanzas; here is the second:

A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.



Notice the eye rhyme of *stone* and *one*.

SONNET

The sonnet, a fourteen-line poem of iambic pentameter, is a major stanza form in English poetry. It has been used by many poets and is the form of some of the most important poems in the language, including a famous series of sonnets by William Shakespeare.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) first introduced the sonnet into English poetry; he used the form called the Italian or Petrarchan (after Francesco Petrarch, Italian poet, 1304-1374) sonnet. The English form of the sonnet was later developed by William Shakespeare and by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey.

ITALIAN or PETRARCHAN

abbaabba cdecde

The Italian sonnet breaks into **an octave and a sestet**. The rhyme scheme of the octave is usually *abba abba*, and the sestet is usually *cde cde*, but these forms vary. The Italian sonnet develops a problem in the octave and then turns (this is called a *volta*) and resolves it in the sestet.

ENGLISH or SHAKESPEAREAN

abab cdcd efef gg

The English sonnet breaks into **three quatrains and a couplet**, *ababcdcdefefgg*. The English sonnet may introduce a problem in the first quatrain, make it more complicated in the next two quatrains, and then solve it in the final couplet.

SHAKESPEARE

One of the most beautiful Shakespearean sonnets
is this one by William Shakespeare himself, expressing
the consolation love can bring, even in the worst of times:

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,	a
I all alone beweep my outcast state,	b
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,	a
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,	b
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,	c
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,	d
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,	c
With what I most enjoy contented least;	d
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,	e
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,	f
Like to the lark at break of day arising	e
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate	f
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings	g
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.	g

Notice that all of the lines are end-stopped until line eleven,
when the speed of the enjambed line captures the take-off of the lark;
Shakespeare enhanced the flight effect by adding an unstressed syllable
to line eleven in aris*ing*. Notice how much less dynamic it would have
sounded if the line had been perfect iambic pentameter:

Like to the lark at break of day in flight / from sullen earth
Like to the lark at break of day arising / from sullen earth

SHELLEY

Earlier we looked at consonance in Shelley's poem "Ozymandias." Now we can see the whole poem and discover that it is a sonnet. Is it Shakespearean, Petrarchan, or an original rhyme scheme?

I met a traveller from an antique land	a
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone	b
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,	a
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,	b
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,	a
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read	c
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,	d
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:	c
And on the pedestal these words appear:	e
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:	d
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"	e
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay	f
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare	e
The lone and level sands stretch far away.	f

Ozymandias was the Greek name for Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II. The hieroglyphics on Ramses's statue across the Nile from Luxor have been translated as "King of Kings am I, Ozymandias. If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works." Can you find alliteration in the poem? A spondee?