Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

Building POEMS

Second Edition

Michael Clay Thompson

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We make buildings strong to resist
the wind, but why do we make
them beautiful?

Building Poems

We are the builders.
We are the makers.
Human beings make things.

Beautiful things.

We build with wood, glass, concrete, steel—
and we build with words.

The things we make—whether they are buildings or poems—have parts, and the parts fit, and they are arranged in a pattern for a purpose.

Like a glass tower that reflects the sky—that almost becomes part of the sky—a poem is built—with poem pieces.
A poem is a kind of building.

Brunelleschi's Dome

In 1418 Filippo Brunelleschi,
a grumpy architect from Florence, Italy,
was challenged to build
an enormous dome above the cathedral
of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence.

No one knew how to do it.

Even Lorenzo Ghiberti,
who had cast the great bronze doors
of Florence's Baptistery of San Giovanni,
could not do it.

The opening that the dome would
have to cover was huge—impossible—
138 feet across, and the walls
that would support the base of the dome
were 180 feet high—a long fall.

But Brunelleschi designed a hollow dome,
two dome-shells with space in between,
made of bricks in a strong herringbone pattern.

After six centuries
his dome still stands.

Like Brunelleschi,
poets solve problems,
but poets do not make
domes of brick. They build
domes of words,
arranging sounds
to confirm the meanings of ideas.

Poets use the sounds of words
as building materials.

When Thomas Hardy wanted
to describe thorny vines on a freezing day,
he used scratchy sounds—
k, *sk*, *st*, *t*, and *g*!

The tangled bine-stems
scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres...

The *k*'s and *g*'s
in English words can
sound scratchy and
rough, but if they are
present in a line full
of soft sounds, such as
l's, *m*'s, *n*'s, *f*'s, and *v*'s, they can lose
their sting. Here is a line of poetry
from William Shakespeare's
play *Romeo and Juliet*. When
Juliet's mother asks her if she
can like Count Paris, Juliet, who
really does not like Count Paris,
answers her mother:

I'll look to like,
if looking liking move.

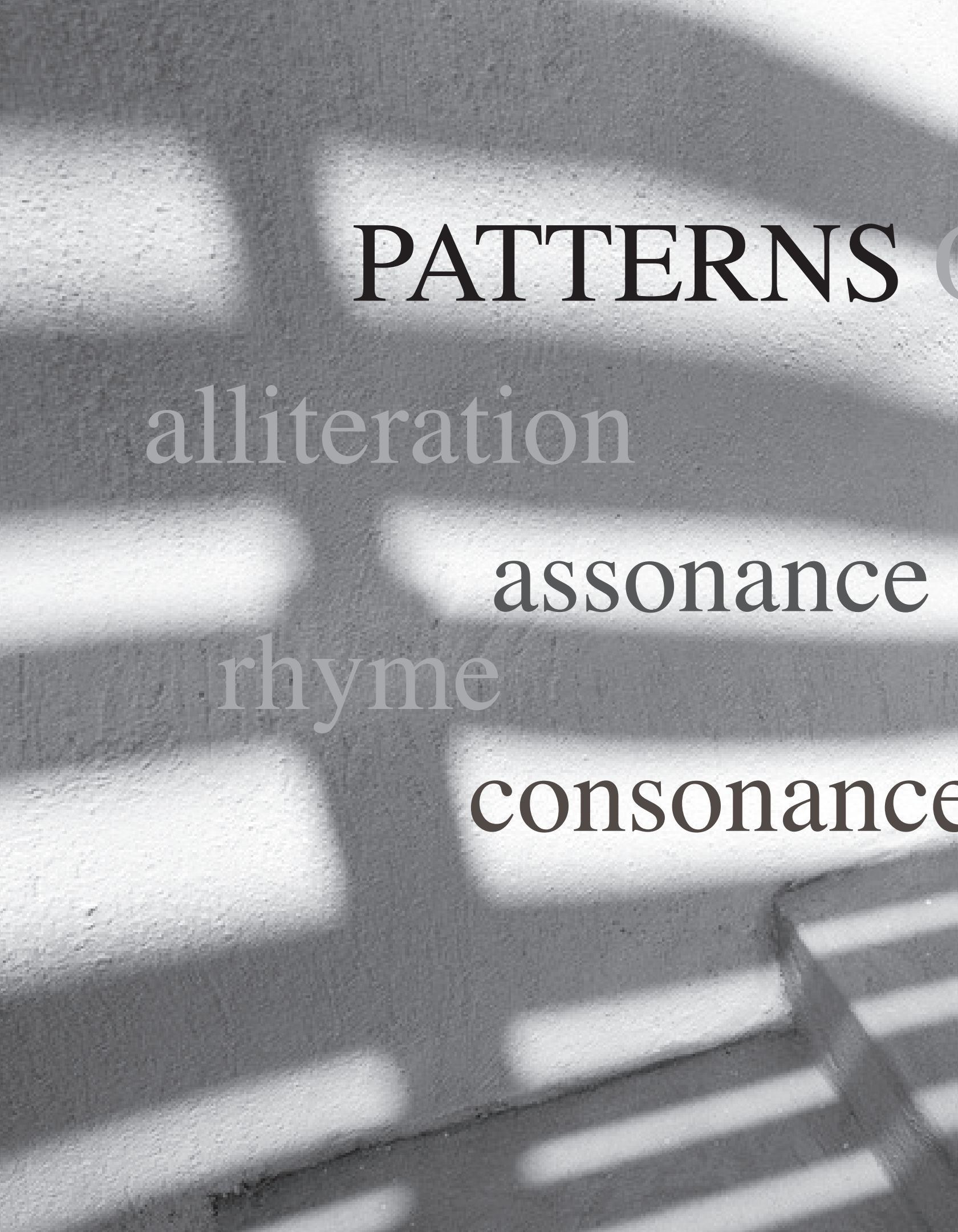
In other words, "I'll try to like him, if trying
can move me to like him"! Even though there
are some *k*'s in Juliet's words, the line
is soft; the *k*'s absorb the softness
of the rest of the sentence. Why do *f*'s and
v's sound soft? How are those two sounds
different from one another?

like

if move

ook liking

ooking


PATTERNS
alliteration
assonance
rhyme
consonance

1 OF SOUND

e

PATTERNS

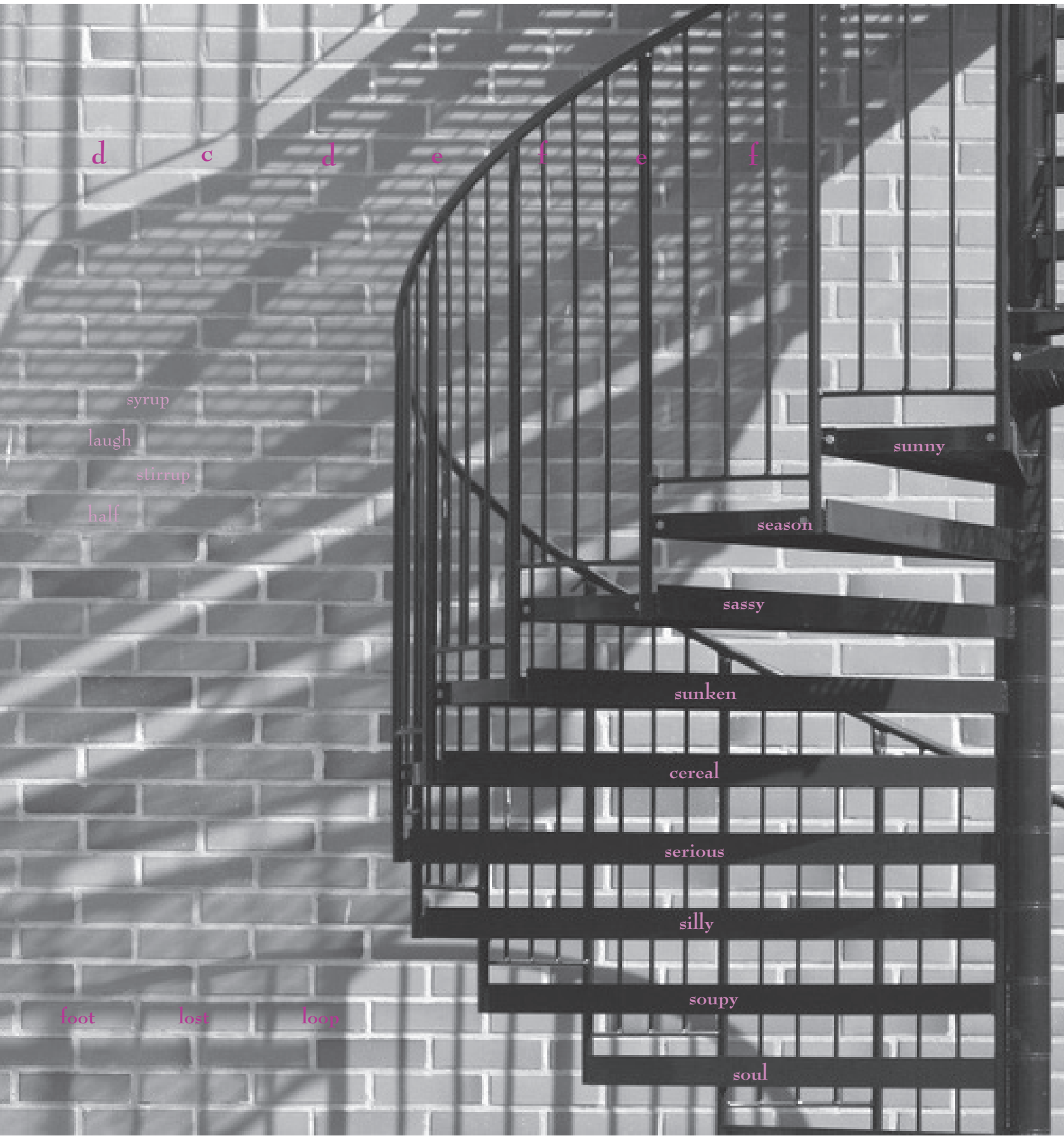
One thing to do with sounds
is to repeat them in patterns.
There are different ways to
repeat sounds.

When words end
in the same sound, like
flake and *ache*, that is **rhyme**.

When words begin with
the same sound, like
moon, *milk*, and *meanie*,
that is called **alliteration**.

When words share the
same vowel sound, like
croon, *dupe*, and *newt*,
that is **assonance**.

And when words share
the same consonant sound, like
begin, *aghast*, *snuggle*, and *rigging*,
that is called **consonance**.


d c d e f e f
syrup
laugh
stirrup
half
sunny
season
sassy
sunken
cereal
serious
silly
soupy
soul
foot lost loop

Rhyme, words that end alike,
is one of the most important
techniques in poetry.

When poets put the rhymes
at the ends of the lines,
that is called end rhyme.
There are wonderful end rhymes
in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*:

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,
"And your hair has become very white,
And yet you incessantly stand on your head—
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," Father William replied to his son,
"I feared it might injure the brain;
But, now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again."

end

es lakes said white head right son brain none again falls walls shakes

When the rhymes are inside the lines,
that is called internal rhyme.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, used
internal rhyme in his poem "The Splendor Falls":

The splendor **falls** on castle **walls**
And snowy summits old in story;
The long light **shakes** across the **lakes**,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.

internal rhyme

Simple Simon met a pieman...

kes lakes said white head right son brain none again falls walls shakes

When the rhyme looks the same
but does not sound the same,
that is called **eye rhyme**.
The British poet Thomas Hardy
used this eye rhyme in his poem
"The Darkling Thrush":

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a fullhearted evensong
Of joy illimited.

Among and *evensong* are eye rhyme because
they rhyme only to the eye!
They look like rhymes, but they do not
end with the same sounds.

seen tough though rain again sand thousand how below not depot worry sorr

eye

rhyme

orry beak steak moss gross flower grower hour pour edge knowledge frown gro


I
ne
ver
saw
a
pur


ple
cow
meter

Words have rhythm.

When we speak, we give more emphasis
to some words or parts of words than to others.
We stress sounds by pronouncing them with
a higher volume and with more firmness.

We say CHICKen, not chickEN.

We say baNAna, not banaNA.

By controlling the pattern of stressed and unstressed
syllables in poems, poets can create regular
rhythm, called meter. They do this by
using small units of meter;
each unit is called a foot.

foot

The American poet Gelett Burgess,
who was born in 1863,
is remembered for one poem.
Look at the stressed syllables, in
purple, and notice how he arranged
the patterns of stress into a regular meter:

I never saw a purple cow,
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.

Did you notice the way Burgess alternated between unstressed and stressed syllables? Every other syllable is stressed. We could say that the pattern in this poem is a two-syllable pattern, with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

A two-syllable foot with the stress on the second syllable is called an **iamb**.

If we broke Burgess's poem into its iambs
and put slashes between the feet,
it would look like this:

I ne / ver saw / a pur / ple cow,
I ne / ver hope / to see / one;
But I / can tell / you, an / y how,
I'd ra / ther see / than be / one.

Notice that the foot is made up of syllables; "ver saw" is an iambic foot, and "a pur" is an iambic foot. When we talk about the poetic foot, we are only thinking about the pattern of stresses, not about the words. A foot can be part of a long word, or the end of one word with the beginning of the next.

Notice that Burgess's poem has four iambs in the first and third lines. Four iambs per line are called

iambic tetrameter.

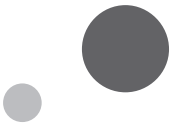
Notice, too, that lines two and four have three iambs followed by a single unstressed syllable. When we add a final unstressed syllable this way, it is called a **feminine ending**.

There are four main kinds of foot in English poetry.
They are called the iamb, the trochee (pronounced TROkee), the dactyl, and the anapest.

The iamb and trochee have two syllables. In an iamb the stress is on the second syllable, and in a trochee the stress is on the first.

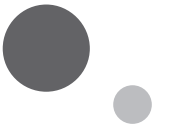
The dactyl and the anapest each have three syllables. In a dactyl the stress is on the first syllable, and in an anapest the stress is on the third.

iamb



There was a crooked man...he went a crooked mile.
The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts...
I do not like thee, Doctor Fell; the reason why I cannot tell.

trochee



Barber, barber, shave a pig...
Mary, Mary, quite contrary...
Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

dactyl

Hickory, dickory...
Home again, home again, jiggety...
Ladybird, ladybird, fly away...

anapest

an old woman who lived in a shoe
an old lady upon a white horse
there I met an old man

There are many who say
that a dog has his day.
(Dylan Thomas)