Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

The Music of the Hemispheres

Poetics for Young Children

Third Edition

Compatible with The Music of the Hemispheres Student Book Second Edition

Instructor Manual

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Instructor Section

There may be no greater challenge, or joy, for the educator of elementary-age students than teaching young children to understand and love poetry. Few areas of high intellect are so inspiring—or have been the victims of such disrespectful stereotypes. Poetry is seen in preposterous terms, as unmanly, overemotional, and spontaneous. People think that poems are supposed to be pretty.

The truth is that poetry is a great intellectual discipline that also creates works of art, and these works of art represent some of humanity's best efforts to understand the truths of the world.

The Music of the Hemispheres focuses on the traditional elements and techniques of poetry: formal stanzas, rhyme schemes, traditional feet, alliteration—even though they are not always the most salient elements of modern poetry. This may seem stubbornly traditional unless you look as deeply into modern poems as we are looking into traditional poems, for it is not that modern poets do not know or employ these devices; it is that they subtly employ these devices and hide them under a thin covering of seeming irregularity. But silently, with genius, the traditional techniques are assembled, just under the surface. A perfect example comes from Sylvia Plath, whose poem "The Moon and the Yew Tree" describes the troubled interior landscape of her spirit. Plath wrote:

> This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary
> The trees of the mind are black. The light is blue....
> Fumy, spiritous mists inhabit this place.

Ah, we think. No end rhyme. No regular meter. No alliteration. She appears just to have written the lines spontaneously, from her feelings. Well, no, look again. The first line is primarily dactylic, the second line is primarily iambic, and the incredible third line is almost perfect, evil trochees; but for one unstressed syllable added to foot two and an

unstressed syllable turned into a stressed syllable in foot five, this would be perfect trochaic pentameter:

1 2 3 4 5
Fu my / spir it ous / mists in / hab it / this place.

Plath understood the power of meter and the way trochees cancel the reassuring normality of iambs. Having done that, she then filled the line with a hissing soundtrack to make the fumes and mists more real; we hear *f*'s, *s*'s, *h*'s, and *th*'s, and the line reeks of the *ih* sound of six *i*'s in six words:

Fu my / spir it ous / mists in / hab it / this place.

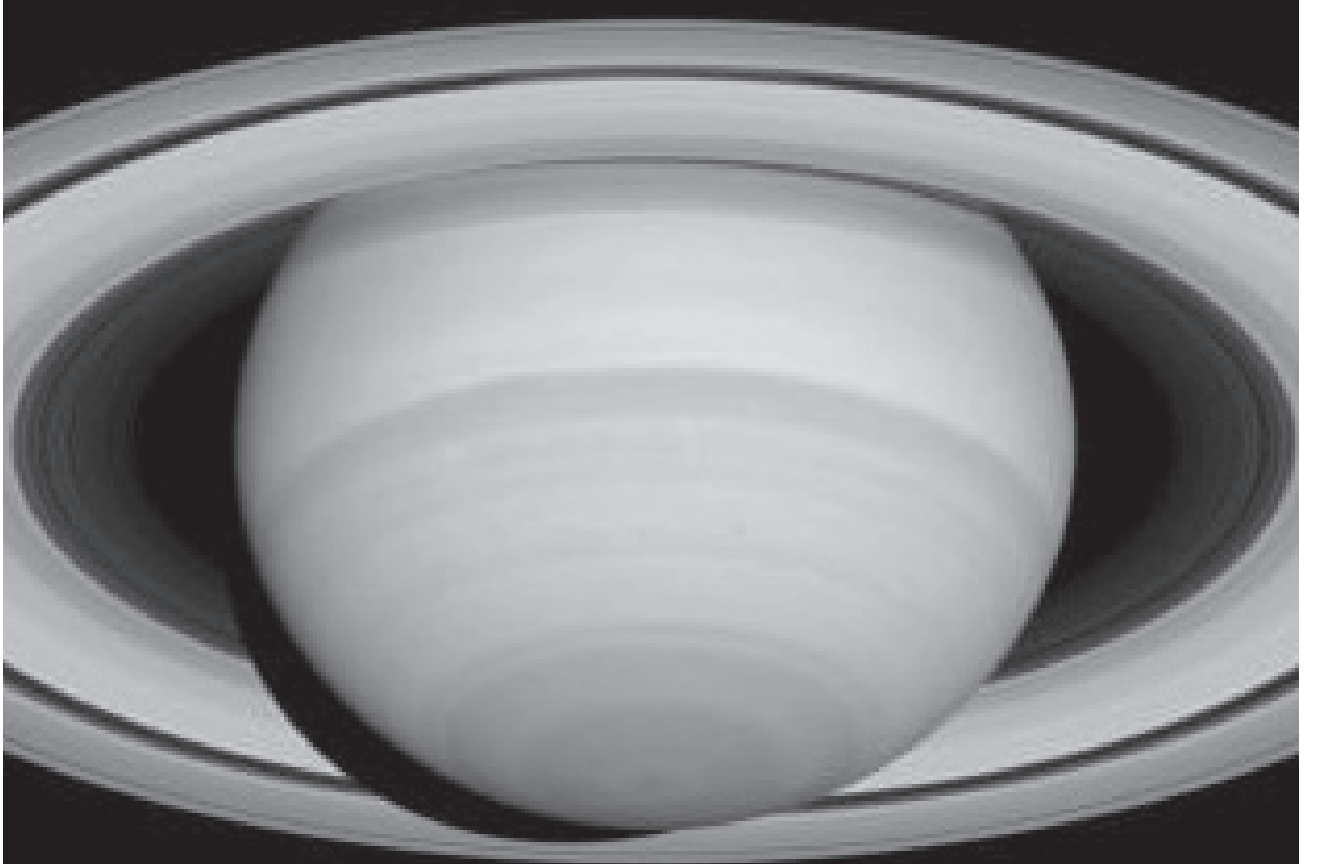
What we are seeing is not a poet who has abandoned the powerful techniques of traditional poetry but one who has learned to submerge those techniques just below a veil of protective spontaneity. Plath uses regular trochaic pentameter but switches two syllables to make it unnoticeable. She repeats vowel and consonant sounds but hidden within the words, rather than as alliteration at the beginnings of words, where it would be obvious. She avoids showy end rhyme but deftly puts *mists* and *this* in the same line as near internal rhymes. It wasn't that she didn't want to write real poetry; she just didn't want us to catch her.

In order to understand all true poetry, both traditional and modern, students need to have a solid grounding in the technical details of traditional poetry. Only in this way will they develop the "art detectors" that will enable them to enjoy both Robert Burns and Sylvia Plath.

Real poetry is far more powerful and accomplished than its stereotypes imply.

In *The Music of the Hemispheres*, I have tried to put a microscope on the small surfaces of words to let children really see the little things that become so large in poets' minds. To understand poetry, we must not look at whole stanzas or lines at a time; we must look at single consonants, or even a half of a consonant. Only with this maximum inspection will we see that a line like "Fumy, spiritous mists inhabit this place" is filled

The Music of the Hemispheres



Ask students if they think planets really make notes in space.

In the medieval ages,
philosophers believed that each planet,
as it zoomed around in orbit,
made a sound...
a note.
The sound of all the planets in space
was called *the music of the spheres*.

Today, we say the human brain
has two hemispheres,
and through the magic of human language,
we have poetry,
the ***music of the hemispheres***.

Discuss
the two
hemispheres
of the brain.

Language is human.
Many animals make sounds,
but only human beings make language.

We love language for lots of reasons,
and one of the most important
is that we love the beautiful
sounds of language.

Words are made of sounds.

When we write words,
we show the sounds with letters.

The letter *s*
sounds like

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

Sing the
letter *s* aloud
together:
SSSSSSS!

Some sounds sound like
woodwinds,
or horns,
or wind in the trees.

Brainstorm letters that sound like things in the world.


wh wh
ee ee
u

Some sounds in words are like
sounds in nature:

This little piggy cried
Wee wee wee
all the way home.

This is called

onomatopoeia

(AH no MAH toe PEE uh).

Discuss how the words on the next page sound like water.

ushshshsh


plop
trickle
splash
dip

There are two main kinds of sounds:
vowels and **consonants**.

Vowels sound like singing:

a e i o u y

Ask students to explain all the ways vowels and consonants differ.

and consonants sound like clicks, and taps, and bumps:

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x z

We can even do a
vowel-consonant split
by putting vowels and consonants
on different lines.

What words are these?

```
  i   e
cr ck t
```

Sing the vowel lines by themselves: iiiii, eeeee, oooo....

```
  o e
fl w r
```

```
  u    e
p ddl
```

Are you beginning to think
that poets are aware
of every sound in their poems,
just as composers know
each note in their compositions?

You are right.
Poets know all the vowel sounds,
and all the consonant sounds,
and all the stresses,
and they arrange these sounds
at the same time that they arrange
the meanings of words.

Poetry doesn't have to be easy in order to be wonderful.

Rhyme *time* 1

Poets often put **rhymes** in poems.

A rhyme is a similar sound found
in two different words,
such as *rhyme* and *time*,
monarchy and *malarkey*.

The sounds do not
have to be spelled alike.

The team had a scheme it would seem!

Two-syllable rhyme, like *rascal* and *Haskell*, is feminine rhyme.

If the lines
rhyme at their ends,
that is called

end rhyme.

Weary with toil, I haste me to my **bed**, a
The dear repose for limbs with travel **tired**, b
But then begins a journey in my **head** a
To work my mind when body's work's **expired**. b

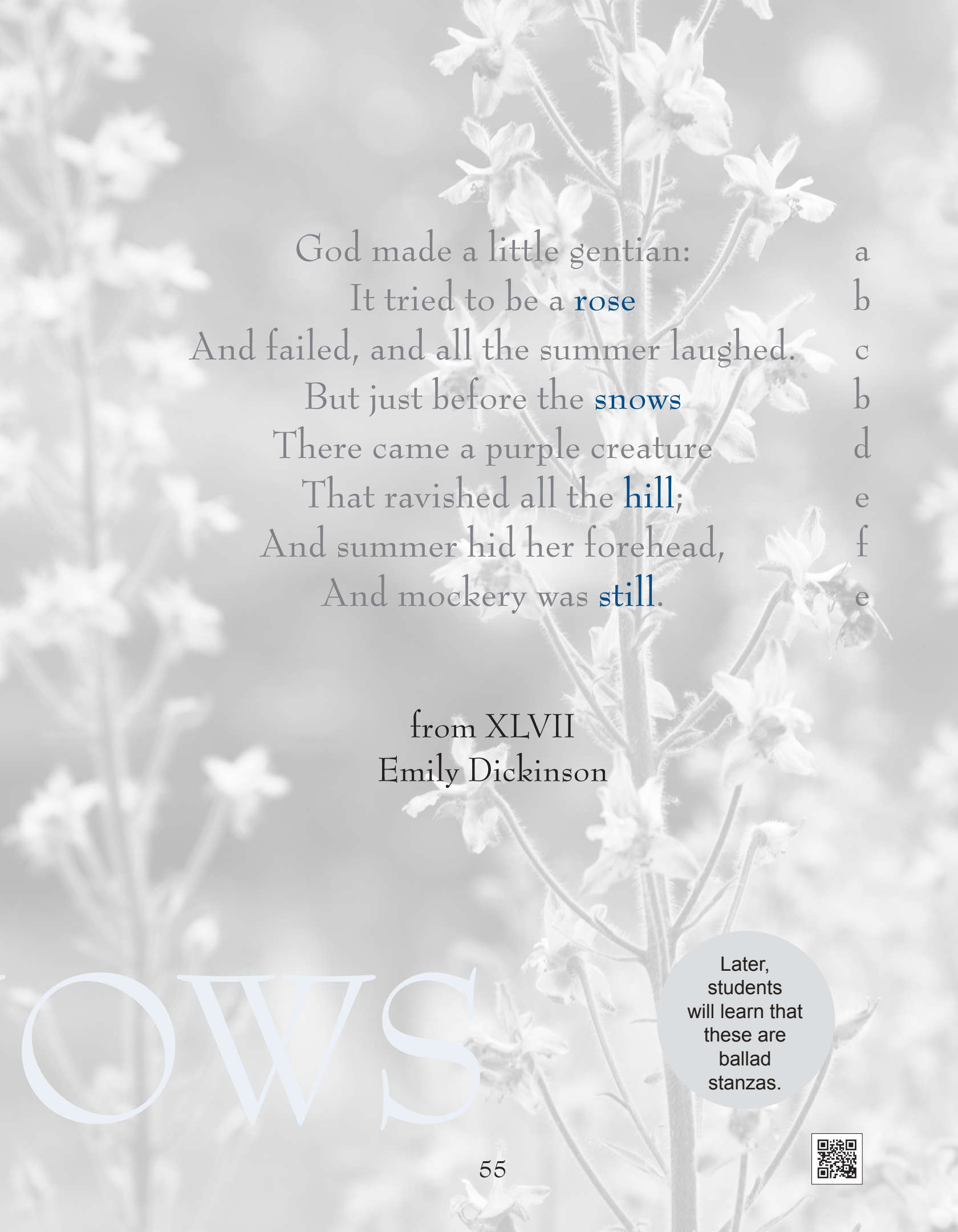
from Sonnet 27
William Shakespeare

Rhyme Scheme

If we want to study the **rhyme scheme** of a poem,
we assign the letter *a* to the first rhyme sound,
and the letter *b* to the second rhyme sound, and so on.
So the **rhyme scheme** of this poem is *abab*.
The **a** rhymes are **bed** and **head**,
and the **b** rhymes are **tired** and **expired**.

Rhyme scheme gives us an easy way to see the pattern of rhymes.

Emily Dickinson
used end rhyme
in this poem about a flower,
the gentian.
Dickinson rhymed the even lines,
2, 4, 6, and 8,
but not the odd ones.



God made a little gentian: a
It tried to be a rose b
And failed, and all the summer laughed. c
But just before the snows b
There came a purple creature d
That ravished all the hill; e
And summer hid her forehead, f
And mockery was still. e

from XLVII
Emily Dickinson

Later, students will learn that these are ballad stanzas.

Rhymes put
inside the lines are called

internal rhyme.

Shakespeare used internal rhyme in:

Double, **double**, toil and **trouble**.

William Blake
used both end rhyme
and internal rhyme
in his poem "The Tiger."

Notice that *distant* and *deeps* both begin with *d*.

In what distant deeps or **skies** a
Burnt the **fire** of thine **eyes**! a
On what wings dare he **aspire**? b
What the hand, dare seize the **fire**? b

from "The Tiger"
William Blake

Fire is an internal rhyme with *aspire*. Internal rhyme is more subtle.

Allite

INITIAL
is the key.
Alliteration
refers to the
first sounds.

Rhyme is not all that poets use
to compose the sounds of poems.
Another technique is alliteration,
the repetition of the first, *initial*, sounds of words:
"Baa, baa, black sheep."
Alliteration lets us emphasize a sound
that is perfect for the meaning.
Robert Burns used alliteration:

ration

John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first aquent:
Your locks were like the raven,
Your **b**ony **b**row was **b**rent.

from "John Anderson, My Jo"
Robert Burns

(The word *brent* means smooth in Scottish.)

A jo is a boyfriend, and *aquent* means acquainted.

William Shakespeare
used **alliteration** on the letter ***s*** in Sonnet 30.
Notice the interesting eye rhyme
with *past* and *waste*.

When to the **s**essions of **s**weet **s**ilent thought
I **s**ummon up remembrance of things **past**,
I **s**igh the lack of many a thing I **s**ought,
and with old woes new wail my dear Time's **waste**.

Notice the alliteration of *with*, *woes*, *wail*, and *waste*.

Alliteration often takes the form
of an adjective and its noun
that begin with the same letter.
A.E. Housman used alliteration this way
in "To an Athlete Dying Young":

So set, before its echoes fade,
the fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge cup.

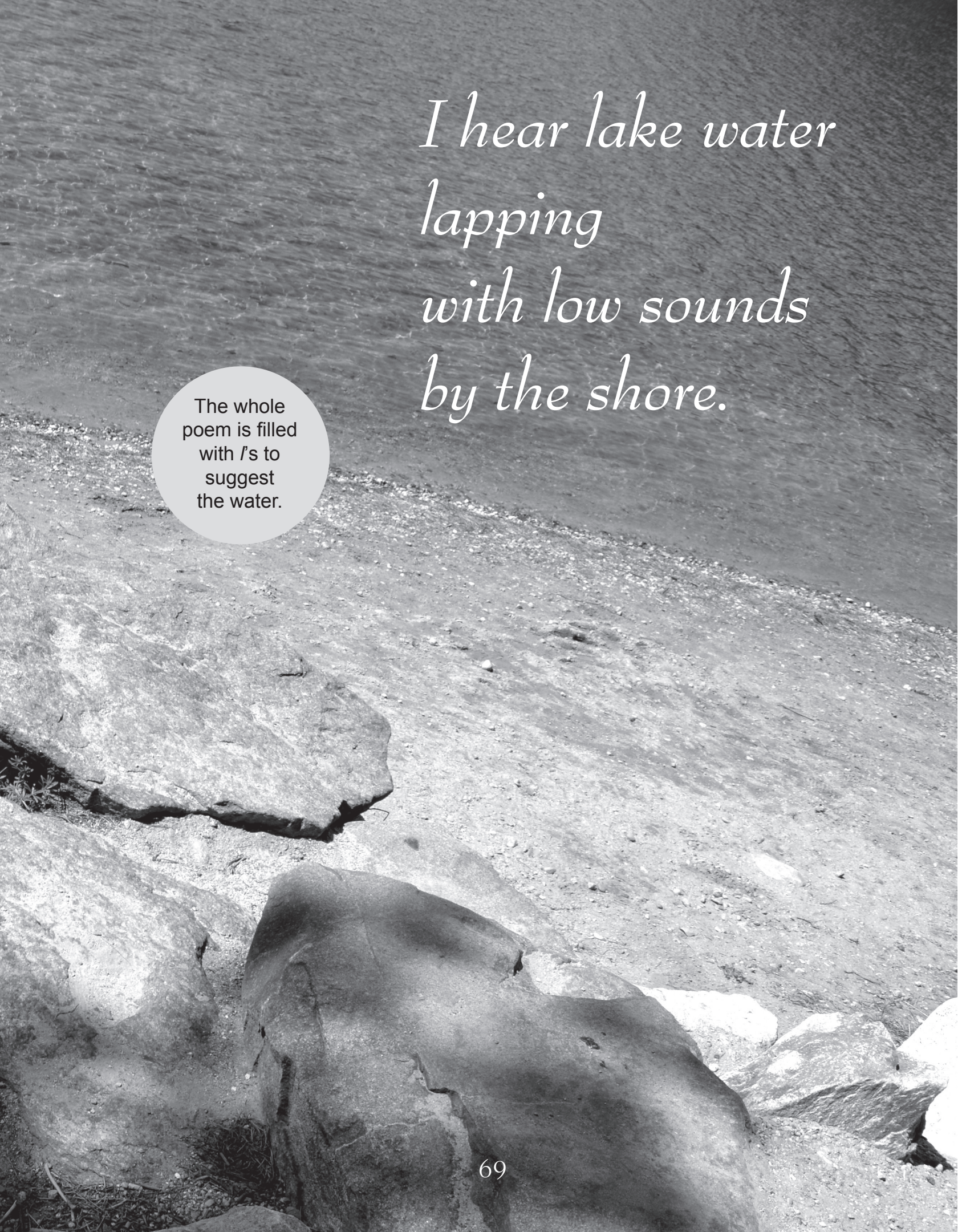
adj.	n.
fleet	foot

One poem may have
end rhyme, internal rhyme,
eye rhyme and alliteration, and more.
Look at these lines from
William Butler Yeats's (pronounced Yates) poem
"The Lake Isle of Innisfree."
Innisfree is a lake in County Sligo, Ireland.

I will arise and go now, for always night and **day**
I hear **l**ake water **l**apping with **l**ow sounds by the **shore**:
While I stand on the road**way**, or on the pavements **gray**,
I hear it in the deep heart's **core**.

Triple stress on *deep heart's core*: heartbeat.

Notice how Yeats supports the alliterated *l*'s with lots of other *l*'s inside words in this passage.


I hear lake water
lapping
with low sounds
by the shore.
The whole poem is filled with *l*'s to suggest the water.