

When, upon the well-wrought chest,
Fiercely heat the howling wind,
And the oceans heaving breast
Filled with terror Danae's mind;

All in tears, her arm she throws
Over Perseus, as he lay
O, my babe, she said, what woes
On thy mother's bosom weigh!

Thou dost sleep with careless breast,
Slumbering in this dreary home,
Thou dost sweetly take thy rest,
In the darkness and the gloom.

(Simonides of Ceos (556-468 B.C.), Fragment 01)

1. a. Poems written in ancient Greece that expressed deep feelings were often accompanied by the lyre or other stringed instrument. These **lyric poems** were short verses about an emotional experience. The poems did not have to rhyme but did rely on **meter**, either of the number of syllables or the stress placed on syllables, giving a musical quality to the verse. Today we call the words to a song *lyrics*.
- b. Count the number of syllables in each line of the above poem. What do you notice? What quality does this bring to the poem?
- c. The stressed syllables in poetry are known as its metrical pattern. The smallest of the metrical units is the *syllable*. In English, there are two kinds of syllables: accented or stressed, and unaccented or unstressed. After the syllable, the next largest metrical unit is the *foot*, which is a group of two or more syllables. Meter is determined by the number of stresses per line.

The six common kinds of feet in English metrics have names derived from Greek:

- 1) **Iambic** foot consists of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented. It can be heard in such words as *hello* and *goodbye*.
- 2) **Trochaic** foot consists of an accented syllable followed by an unaccented. These are trochaic words: *marry* and *pillow*.
- 3) **Dactylic** foot consists of an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables. You can hear the dactylic beat in these words: *beautiful* and *Stephanie*.

- 4) **Anapestic** foot consists of two unaccented syllables followed by an accented syllable. These words are anapestic: *tambourine* and *Marianne*.
- 5) **Spondaic** foot consists of two accented syllables. Ex: **aircraft**
- 6) **Pyrrhic** foot consists of two unaccented syllables. This foot is rarely used in English poetry.
- d. The next largest metrical unit is the **line**. A line is the regular succession of feet, and, though it is not necessarily a sentence, it customarily begins with a capital letter. The number of feet in a line of verse determines the measure or meter. A line containing only one foot is called a *monometer*; one with two feet, a *dimeter* line; three feet, a *trimeter*; four feet, *tetrameter*; five feet, *pentameter*; six feet, *hexameter*; seven feet, *heptameter*; and eight feet, *octameter*.
- e. What is the meter of the poem by Simonides at the beginning of this lesson?
- f. Here is the next stanza of the poem:

In thy little mantle there,
 Passing wave thou does not mind,
 Dashing o'er thy clustering hair,
 Nor the voices of the wind.

- g. Does it follow the same metrical pattern?

2. a. One of the most famous of the ancient Greek lyric poets, Pindar, born about 522 B.C. near Thebes, is credited with inventing the **ode**. In Greek, *ode* means "to sing or chant." Most of Pindar's odes were written to celebrate athletic victories and were sung by a chorus. Although we only have fragments of most early lyric poetry, most of Pindar's victory odes have been preserved.
- b. Pindar's work is difficult to read, not only because of the language problem, but because of the complexity of his poems and perhaps the monotony of his subject. Olympian 1 glorifies Pelops, founder of the Olympic Games and tells of Hieron's victory in the horse race at the Olympia of 476 B.C.
- c. Read the beginning of Olympian 1 by Pindar (translated by Sir Richard Francis Burton).

Best is Water of all, and gold as a flaming fire
 In the night shines eminent amid lordly wealth,
 But if of prizes in the games thou art fain, O my soul,
 To tell, then, as for no bright star more quickening than the sun

Must thou search in the void firmament by day,
 So neither shall we find any games greater than the Olympic
 Whereof to utter our voice: for hence cometh the glorious hymn
 And enters into the minds of the skilled in song,
 So that they celebrate the son of Kronos.
 When to the rich and happy hearth of Hieron they are come,
 For he wields the scepter of justice in Sicily of many flocks,
 Culling the choice fruits of all kinds of excellence:
 And with the flower of music is he made splendid,
 Even such strains as we sing blithely at the table of a friend.

- d. Summarize this part of the poem.
- e. The main part of the poem tells the myth of Pelops and his famous chariot race which led to the Olympic games. Research and read about this myth.
- f. The poem concludes with these lines:

Now the good that comes of to-day is ever sovereign unto every man.
 My part it is to crown Hieron with an equestrian strain in Aeolian
 mood: and sure am I that no host among men that now are shall I ever
 glorify in sounding labyrinths of song more learned in the learning of
 honor and withal with more might to work thereto. A god hath guard
 over thy hopes, O Hieron, and takes care for them with a peculiar
 care: and if he fail thee not, I trust that I shall again proclaim in
 song a sweeter glory yet, and find thereto in words a ready way, when
 to the fair-shining hill of Kronos I am come. Her strongest-winged
 dart my Muse hath yet in store.

Of many kinds is the greatness of men; but the highest is to be
 achieved by kings. Look not thou for more than this. May it be thine
 to walk loftily all thy life, and mine to be the friend of winners in
 the games, winning honor for my art among Hellenes everywhere.

- g. Summarize this part of the poem.
 - h. Has the way we view sports changed from the way Pindar feels about the Olympics? Write a short paragraph stating your opinion.
3. a. Horace (65-8 B.C.), a great ancient Roman lyric poet, began writing poetry to gain a place in Roman society after having lost his property in the civil war following the assassination of Julius Caesar. He is best known for his collection of poems called *Odes*. Up until his time, odes were written for ceremonies and other public gatherings. Horace's odes expressed more personal thoughts.

- b. In Ode 1.11, “Carpe Diem,” Horace advises his friend, Leuconoe:

Strive not (Leuconoe) to know what end
 The Gods above to me or you will send:
 Nor with Astrologers consult at all,
 That you may better know what can befall.
 Whether, you live more winters, or your last
 Be this, which Tyrrhen waves ‘gainst rocks do cast;
 Be wise, drink free, and in so short a space,
 Do not protracted hopes of life embrace.
 While we are talking, envious Time does slide;
 This day’s your own, the next may be deny’d.
 (Translated by Thomas Hawkins, 1666)

- c. *Carpe diem* is Latin meaning *seize the day*. Is this a good name for the poem?
- d. Translating literary works from ancient languages is hard. Translating poetry presents even more difficulties because the translator is bound by the meter and/or rhyme scheme (will be discussed in Lesson 10, 4.f.) of the poem. Here is another translation of “Carpe Diem.”

I pray you not, Leuconoe, to pore
 With unpermitted eyes on what may be
 Appointed by the gods for you and me,
 Nor on Chaldean figures any more.
 ‘T were infinitely better to implore
 The present only: — whether Jove decree
 More winters yet to come, or whether he
 Make even this, whose hard, wave-eaten shore
 Shatters the Tuscan seas to-day, the last —
 Be wise withal, and rack your wine, nor fill
 Your bosom with large hopes; for while I sing,
 The envious close of time is narrowing; —
 So seize the day, — or ever it be past, —
 And let the morrow come for what it will.
 (Translated by Edward Arlington Robinson, 1897)

- e. Compare the two. Which do you prefer? Why?
- f. Do you agree with the philosophy of *carpe diem*? Write a paragraph using examples from your life that supports or opposes this philosophy.

4. a. While lyric poetry tends to be short and usually deals with the poet's personal experiences and feelings, poems that are longer and tell a story of heroes who accomplish extraordinary deeds are called *epics*. One of the earliest is *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to which you were introduced in Lesson Three.
- b. Elements usually found in epic literature include:
- 1) A hero who exemplifies the ideal man of his culture. He usually is an offspring of a god or has superhuman qualities.
 - 2) An important task that must be accomplished by the hero.
 - 3) Gods who freely interact and intervene.
 - 4) A broad setting that moves not only geographically, but even into the underworld, the heavens, or other times.
 - 5) A language style that is formal.
- c. It has been said that if you want to know someone, look at who his heroes are. This is also true when you want to know more about a culture. Epic poetry can be found in most cultures. The ancient Greek poet Homer, often called the father of epic poetry, is credited with writing *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, two epic poems that tell the story of the end of the Trojan War and Odysseus's journey home. These two poems are considered to be the beginning of Western literature.
- d. The Greeks of Homer's time were polytheists. They believed in and worshipped many gods. In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer presents these gods with all their flaws and weaknesses. Born seven hundred years before Christ, Homer's writings would eventually help to expose the falsehood of believing in these flawed deities.
- e. Read the summary of the Trojan War found in *A World Literature Anthology*, 4.e. What caused the war? Who fought in the war? Where was it fought? How long did the war last? Who won the war?
5. a. The first of these two important epics is *The Iliad*. *The Iliad* tells of the last two years of the Trojan War. The main characters are Achilles, the son of a sea-nymph and a soldier, and Agamemnon, the King of Mycenae and brother of King Menelaus, the King of Sparta.

Review the summary of the Trojan War you read yesterday. What elements of epic poetry listed on 4.b. can you identify?

- b. *The Iliad* is famous for Homer's use of simile. Remember that in a simile two different things are compared using the words *like* or *as*.

Ex: "As ravenous wolves come swooping down on lambs...so the Achaeans mauled the Trojans."

The use of simile makes the description much more vivid.

- c. A **Homeric simile** or **epic simile** is a simile that compares an epic event with a commonplace happening that the reader would find familiar. Read the following from *The Iliad*, Book XI, and identify the similes:

And now as a band of reapers mow swathes of wheat or barley upon a rich man's land, and the sheaves fall thick before them, even so did the Trojans and Achaeans fall upon one another. They were in no mood for yielding but fought like wolves, and neither side got the better of the other. Discord was glad as she beheld them, for she was the only god that went among them. The others were not there, but stayed quietly each in his own home among the dells and valleys of Olympus. All of them blamed the son of Saturn for wanting to give victory to the Trojans, but father Jove heeded them not. He held aloof from all, and sat apart in his all-glorious majesty, looking down upon the city of the Trojans, the ships of the Achaeans, the gleam of bronze, and alike upon the slayers and on the slain.

- d. Read a brief summary of *The Odyssey* either from the library or online.