

# Introduction to Poetry - English Poetry Notes

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## [Definition](#)

- Poetry is the study of poems and the poetic language. A poem is a creative composition usually written in verse and that uses diction, imagery and economy of words to communicate.
- Poetry expresses language more powerfully than prose. Poetry can be compared to a palace if prose is a house. So just as a palace is more than a house, but it must be a house at least so also poetry is more than prose but it must still be language at least.

## [Poet, Persona, Subject and Theme of a Poem](#)

- A **poet** is someone who writes poems.
- The voice speaking in a poem is called the **persona**. What the **persona** refers to or talks to in a poem would be the **subject** and the issue that is being talked about or being raised is the **subject matter** or **theme**.
- In many cases the voice speaking in the poem or the **persona** is different from the **poet**. The persona can be a female voice denouncing men but the writer of the poem is male.

### The girl next door by G.R. Lazarus

She was the girl next door  
Beautiful booming and shy  
Our interaction was measured  
Our chemistry guarded  
But she was curious and hideous  
Then she was of age and I married  
But more lustful and hideous ~ **By G.R Lazarus**

- In the poem above the **poet** is Lazarus. The **subject** of the poem is the **girl next door** because the persona is referring to her.
- The **subject matter** or **theme** of the poem is **love/lust** because the persona is attracted to the girl next door and although he later gets married to someone else he still sees her.
- The **persona** in the poem is a man who neighbours the girl (she was the girl next door). Remember the **persona** is different from Lazarus, the **poet**.

## [Structure of a Poem](#)

### Lapobo by Cliff Lumbwa

Lapobo,

Tall but not too tall  
Short but not too short  
She is of medium height

Lapobo

Her teeth are not as ash  
Nor the colour of maize flour  
Her teeth are as white as fresh milk

The whiteness of her teeth  
When I think of her Lo!  
Makes food drop from my hand

Lapobo

Black but not too black  
Brown but not too brown  
Her skin colour is just between black and brown

Lapobo

Her feet have no cracks  
Her palms are smooth and tender to touch  
Her eyes—Ho! They can destroy anybody

- The **structure of the poem** refers to how the lines in a poem are arranged. For example, a poem can have four stanzas and each stanza can carry five lines. In some cases like in this poem by Lumbwa, the structure of the poem is made to resemble a picture of a beautiful woman whose features are well arranged.
- In this poem the **poet** is Cliff Lumbwa, the **persona** is a lover who admires Lapobo (Lapobo, black but not too black), the **subject** is Lapobo (Lapobo, her teeth are white as fresh milk), subject matter is love—the persona loves Lapobo (Her eyes—ho! They can destroy anybody)

### **Clementine** by Okot P'Bitek

Ocol is no longer in love with the old type  
He is in love with a modern girl  
The name of the beautiful one is Clementine

Brother when you see Clementine  
The beautiful one aspires  
To look like a white woman

Her lips are red-hot like glowing charcoal  
She resembles the wild cat  
That has dipped its mouth in blood

Her mouth is like raw meat  
It looks like open ulcers  
Like the mouth of an ogre

Tina dusts powder on her face  
And it looks so pale  
She resembles the wizard  
Getting ready for the midnight dance

### **Questions**

Identify the structure, the persona, the poet, the subject and the subject matter of the poem.