

Critical response

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Critical response Robert Frost —The Oven Bird This poem contains 14 lines and is written mainly in iambic pentameter with a little variation in some lines. Each line rhymes with some other line, but there is no regular rhyme pattern. Nevertheless, you can call this poem a sonnet in my opinion, because it contains the key features of a sonnet: iambic pentameter, an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines) and a theme linked to nature. As mentioned, the base metrical pattern of this poem is iambic pentameter, ten syllables in each line, an unstressed and a stressed syllable in sequence five times. Ten of the 14 lines are written in regular iambic pentameter, there are substitutions in four lines: Line 4 and line 7 both end in an amphibrach, that is an extra unstressed syllable in the last foot (“ for flowers”, “ in showers”). Whereas the other lines all end in stressed syllables, these two lines have a falling pattern in the end. This falling pattern corresponds with the content of these lines: Leaves and blooms fall down in fall and so does the reader’s voice here. The second line contains two substitutions of the base pattern: There is a trochee in the first foot (Loud, a...) and a spondee in the second (mid-summ). After the regular first line, the reader could expect that the poem continues in iambs. The stressed Loud interrupts the set-up rhythm and also marks a pause because it is followed by a comma. The reader is surprised and halts, as he would if he heard the unique sound of a real oven-bird. The compound word mid-summer in the next foot starts with two stressed syllables, a spondee. This metrical foot also lengthens the line and interrupts the fluency of the voice. The second line does not only take a special status in terms of metric, but also in terms of content: The main subject of the poem, the oven-bird, is introduced and described here. The

word mid-summer, which is responsible for the irregularity in line 2, reoccurs in the first foot of line 5. So this line starts with a spondee. Line 4 ended in the amphibrach for flowers and the next line is linked to this without punctuation, so there is an enjambment from line 4 to 5 and the unstressed syllable —wers is followed by the stressed Mid-, so there is not such a strong break in rhythm as in line 2. Another reason for starting this line with a stressed syllable might be that it is a comparative clause and if you compare two items, you usually stress both of them in spoken language. The main topic of the poem is the season of fall and what the fall brings with it. The oven bird is the medium in this poem, speaking directly to us three times and describing the changes of fall (He says..., lines 4, 7, 10). The main effect of fall is dying and decay: Blooms and later leaves fall off trees, flowers wither and eventually the birds cease to sing. The usual break in a sonnet after the octave can also be observed in *The Oven Bird*: In the octave, mid- and late summer is described, line 9 introduces the actual season of fall. Many words and images in the poem create a sullen atmosphere, like leaves are old, pear and cherry bloom went down in showers, overcast, The bird would cease... The oven bird leaves it open what the reader makes of this diminished thing, but I think the whole atmosphere of the poem directs our mind to the concept of decay and end: Every fall marks the end of a summer, of something beautiful and I cannot imagine that any young person desires to reach the fall period of his life. The oven bird is the loud, annoying reminder that nothing good lasts forever and that everything is subject to decay and death in the end. You cannot ignore your personal oven bird singing in your head.