

‘Form and Birth’:

- Poetry governed by traditions and schemes (rhyme schemes), which can be utilised or disregarded. Form influences the type of poem, and helps inform our views of content. Each form has implicit rules and conventions.
- Three simple forms:
 - Quatrain – ABAB or ABCB. Called ‘Common Metre’. Often paired with the couplet to make up other forms of poetry (e.g. A Sestet = Quatrain + Couplet). Unyielding, offers little in the way of alternative interpretations.
 - Couplet – Two lines that rhyme, has been a unit of English poetry since rhyme entered the language. Often paired with Quatrains to make up other forms of poetry. Couplets are a flexible form of poetry, as can be compared through Ben Johnson’s *On My First Son* and Joanna Baillie’s *A Mother to Her Waking Infant*. Baillie uses open couplets and frequent enjambment, stressing connection between lines but also between child and the fascinating world beyond – the verse stretches beyond limits itself. Conversely, Johnson uses ‘closed couplets’ which have no obvious continuity and no sense of relationship between couplets. The form of *On My First Son* mirrors the bereavement commemorating the death of his heir, being fragmented, deathlike and conclusive, which documents the voice’s disruption of grief.
 - Tercet – Each stanza has three lines and is often associated with a specific context, with its most famous user being Dante in his *Divine Comedy*. The tercet gives the idea of focusing on a particular centre, and this idea is both adopted and contradicted in Sylvia Plath’s *Morning Song*.
- *Morning Song*:
 - The poem has two distinct moods, the centre being ‘I’m no more your mother’, a short line that effectively shifts the mood and sentiment. This line also marks the first time that the voice uses the personal pronoun ‘I’. However the line does not mean to renounce the child, but to recognise that both mother and child are part of a larger movement of life.
 - The stanzas are linked together by imagery: ‘fat gold watch’, ‘magnifying’ (evokes images of a magnifying glass), ‘mirror’, ‘pink roses’, ‘cat’s mouth’ and ‘balloons’. These images are united by their circularity, a fact that perhaps echoes Dante’s circles of Hell. The circularity of the poem is also emphasised by the repetition of sounds in the first and last stanzas.
 - The first three symbols – mechanical and cold, things to be seen rather than interacted with. The last three symbols – Tactile, made to be touched and played with. The change in imagery reflects the mother’s journey from distance and isolation to contact – division becoming acceptance.
 - Poem shows how form can both compliment and contradict – Tercet form can both emphasise two lines and two ideas – both a centre, or a fixed point, and a circle.