in ancient Greece, a poem accompanied by a musical instrument, usually a lyre. Although the word is still often used to refer to the songlike quality in poetry, it is more generally used to refer to any short poem that expresses a personal emotion, be it a sonnet, ode, song, or elegy. In early Greek poetry a distinction was made between the choral song and the monody sung by an individual. The monody was developed by Sappho and Alcaeus in the 6th cent. B.C., the choral lyric by Pindar later. Latin lyrics were written in the 1st cent. B.C. by Catullus and Horace. In the Middle Ages the lyric form was common in Christian hymns, in folk songs, and in the songs of troubadours. In the Renaissance and later, lyric poetry achieved its most finished form in the sonnets of Petrarch, Shakespeare, Spencer, and Sidney and in the short poems of Ronsard, Ben Jonson, John Donne, Herrick, and Milton. The romantic poets emphasized the expression of personal emotion and wrote innumerable lyrics. Among the best are those of Robert Burns, Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Lamartine, Hugo, Goethe, Heine, and Leopardi. American lyric poets of the 19th cent. include Emerson, Whitman, Longfellow, Lanier, and Emily Dickinson. Among lyric poets of the 20th cent. are W. B. Yeats, A. E. Housman, Rainer Maria Rilke, Federico García Lorca, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Wallace Stevens, Elinor Wylie, Dylan Thomas, and Robert Lowell.

See Cohen, J. M., The Baroque Lyric (1963);
Lewis, C. D., The Lyric Impulse (1965);
Erskine, J., The Elizabethan Lyric (1967);