

WRITER'S INK

THE WRITER'S WORKSHOP OF

BLOOMINGDALE

SEPTEMBER 2008

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Our September workshops will be on September 13th and September 27th, from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

Format rules are: Minimum, 12-pt. font and double spaced with one-inch margins on all sides.

The deadline for submissions to the 2009 Bloomingdale Public Library Writer's Workshop calendar is September 15, 2008.

ONOMATOPOEIA:

(Pronounce it just as it is written! Another excerpt in a series of high school lit lectures. If you remained alert during sophomore lit, you may skip this section.)

“Onomatopoeia is the use of a word that, through its sound as well as its sense, represents what it defines. Frequently, though not always, such words are natural sounds. Bees **buzz**, for example, and cows **moo**; birds **chirp**, and thunder **rumbles**.”

Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the **tintinnabulation** that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells...”

Edgar Allen Poe, *The Bells*.

Source:

A Poetry Handbook, by Mary Oliver, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, p. 32.

(P.S. Just because “Runic rhyme” is alliterative, doesn't mean present-day readers recognize its meaning. That Edgar had quite the vocabulary! Some even claim he created his own words.)

There are several definitions of runic, but I think the one that applies here is:

“*Adj.* of the ancient Scandinavian class or type, as literature, poetry, etc.”

Source:

Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, Gramercy Books, 1994, p. 1254.)

COLUMN TWO PERSONALS

(Please send any Column Two Personals submissions to my e-mail address for inclusion in the next month's newsletter.)

SIMILE SPOTLIGHT

“Hair **as pale and fine as corn silk** fringed a domed forehead.”

“I was almost finished, whipping through the headlines **like a gambler shuffling cards** when I found a feature by Maggie Winslow...”

“He hunched in the corner of a worn sofa like a collapsed marionette, his long, thin arms wrapped around bent knees.”

“Pebbled glass covered the windows, so the light had a milky hue like tears on porcelain cheeks.”

“She shook her wiry hair like a spaniel coming out of a pond.”

Scudding clouds moved like ghostly pirate ships across the sullen pewter sky.”

Source:

Hart, Carolyn, Death in Lovers’ Lane, Avon Books, 1997, pp 18, 84, 85, 89, 134, and 142 respectively.

CHILDREN’S BOOKS

The general categories of children’s books are:

- ✚ Picture books
- ✚ Early readers
- ✚ Chapter books
- ✚ Middle grade books
- ✚ Young adult books (YA)

This month’s newsletter will address picture books.

Picture books are normally between twenty-four and thirty-two pages long, which includes the copyright page, title page, dedication, acknowledgement, and any other information pages. Their word counts normally range between 200 and 1,500 words.

“You shouldn’t state anything in your text that can be understood in the illustration. Enough action in the text should take place on each page to allow for an illustration.”

Types of picture books:

- ✚ Board or baby books
- ✚ Wordless picture books
- ✚ Novelty books (pop-ups or pull tabs)
- ✚ Concept books (no story, just colors, for example)

Source:

Bolton, Lesley, The Everything Guide to Writing Children’s Books, Adams Media Corporation, 2003, pp.19-29.

P.S. Rumor has it ABC books are always produced by publishing companies inhouse.

CAPITALIZATION

“Capitalize all names of the bodies of the solar system except for earth, moon, stars, and sun (unless they are personified or used in an astronomical context).

For example:

- ✚ the Milky Way
- ✚ the Great Bear
- ✚ the Big Dipper
- ✚ Venus
- ✚ Orion
- ✚ Cassiopeia’s Chair
- ✚ the North Star
- ✚ the Southern Cross”

Source:

Shertzer, Margaret, The Elements of Grammar, Collier Books, 1986, p. 72.

SUSPENSE

A recommended technique for creating suspense is using short sentences:

“Directly overhead now. Stopping.

Don't breathe.

He breathed. Softly

Don't move.

He moved. Purposefully.

Don't look up.

He was looking around. Carefully.”

Source:

Muller, Marcia, Till the Butchers Cut Him Down, Warner Books, 1994, p. 254.

POETRY CORNER

By: John Flaherty

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

I remember when I first heard about the iambic meter. It was a long time ago, and I was in my second year of high school. The English teacher was talking about poetic rhythm. No one could figure out what she was talking about. Most of us in class had written poems and they sounded pretty good. They had end rhymes and rhythm. Why did we have to formalize this? The rhythm just came naturally. Didn't it?

In our English language, we alternate stresses in our words and so generate a rhythm as we speak. She introduced all the different types of feet: iambic, trochaic, anapestic, etc., and confused all of us. In this article, I will deal only with the iambic. We will save the other poetic rhythms for another day. Iambic is the common one used in poetry with an occasional use of trochaic.

In the English language, we tend to speak with alternate stresses of light and then heavy; ***I am| I am| I am| I am| I am***. When a light stress is followed by a heavy stress, it is called iambic. The word, iambic is named after an old Greek woman whose name was Iambe. She is a character in an ancient Greek fable.

For two or three syllables, this combination of stresses is called a foot. In the previous example, '***I am***' is an iambic foot. When we have five feet in a line, it is called a pentameter. Hence iambic pentameter means five feet of iambic verse. Most of the lyrics of popular songs that we all love so much are written with four feet to the line. This form is called tetrameter.

In English we use a lot of the parts of speech called particles; articles like “the”, “a”; conjunctions like “but”, “or”, “and”; pronouns like “he”, “she”, “it”. These are monosyllabic and are stressed lightly. They are usually followed by heavier stressed nouns and verbs which point our language toward iambic rhythm. There is a lot of poetry that is written with four and six feet to the line. However, the majority is written in iambic.

Shakespeare's works are written in iambic pentameter. The lines in his plays do not have ending rhymes, rather are written in blank verse. They do have an unmistakable rhythm though. We will be examining one of his sonnets shortly and they have a pattern of end rhymes.

Scansion

To aid us in our reading and writing of poetry, we can use a device called “scansion” or scanning. This uses a specific form of notation to delineate the syllables, highlight the stresses, and count the metric feet. Scansion is not without its detractors. Some poets refuse to use

it because it is somewhat unnatural and breaks up words. But we are looking at the rhythm of the line when we scan, not its meaning.

To start scanning, double or triple space between the successive lines. Then look at the words and draw a straight line between each foot (two syllables form a foot in iambic verse). Look up the words in a dictionary to determine the syllable count if necessary. Start by assuming that we are dealing in iambic verse. Don't get upset if a foot does not seem to be iambic. Next, number the feet.

Note the alternating pattern of light and heavy stresses. Place an "x" over the lightly stressed syllable in the foot and a slanted line over the heavier-stressed syllable. Work on one foot at a time.

Here is an example of scansion as applied to a stanza of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18:

1	2	3	4	5
x /	x /	x /	x /	x /
<i>Shall I compare thee to a sum mer day?</i>				

1	2	3	4	5
x /	x /	x /	x /	x /
<i>Thou art more love ly and more tem perate;</i>				

1	2	3	4	5
x	/	x	/	x
/				
<i>Rough winds do shake the dar ling buds of May,</i>				

1	2	3	4	5
x /	x /	x /	x /	x /
<i>And sum mers lease hath all too short a date;</i>				

Note the separation of the feet with a vertical bar, '|'. Each foot is two syllables. Note the foot count and the marking of the stresses with 'x' and '/' marks. This is an exact iambic pentameter, five feet per line. Some words are broken up in the scan to form a foot like "*a sum*" in line one or "*more love*" in line two, so that is somewhat strange. We are trying to define the rhythm. In some cases, a word has two syllables that form a foot like "*compare*" in line one.

As far as stress is concerned, look at line three. The first word, "*Rough*" is highly stressed but the second word, "*winds*" is just a bit more stressed, thus forming an iambic foot. Now you may disagree and think "*winds*" has lighter stress than "*Rough*", i.e., a heavy then a light rhythm. That would be a trochaic foot shown with a forward slash first and then an "x". The rest of the feet in the third line have a definite light-to- strong stress pattern and are clearly iambic. It may be difficult to justify that the foot is iambic and different readers may stress the words differently. Even in those cases where a foot is clearly trochaic, if the majority of the feet are iambic, the line is iambic. Majority rules!

This up-and-down stress forms the rhythm in these lines. Sometimes the word 'beat' is used to indicate a stressed syllable. This is a carryover from music. The foot may be called a measure, which is another carryover from music.

In his play, "Romeo and Juliet", Shakespeare wrote this famous line in Iambic Pentameter:

Good night, good night, Parting is such sweet sorrow

We can scan this as follows:

1 2 3 4 5
x / x / / x x / x /
(x)

*Good night,| good night!| Parting| is such| sweet
sor|row*

Five feet are delineated as shown. Feet 1, 2, 4 and 5 are iambic with the third foot trochaic or sometimes called inverted iambic. We also see a lightly stressed syllable, “*row*” at the end. This type of ending is called a Feminine Ending. This naming is based on the use in French of the letter ‘e’ which is placed at the end of a word to change it to the feminine gender. Since it has little or no stress, it has no effect on the line’s rhythm. The third foot’s trochaic rhythm flows well in the line. As stated earlier, since the majority of the feet are iambic, the line is considered iambic. So we can end pentameter lines with an extra syllable and still maintain the iambic rhythm and count of five feet.

Now try to scan some of your favorite poems. It might be best to write or type them out with a few spaces between the lines. Use a pencil with a good eraser as it is easy to mess up as you generate the foot notation.

A lot of poets do not think much about iambic or trochaic rhythm. They just write. That’s why I asked rhetorically, in the first paragraph of this article, “It just comes naturally, doesn’t it?” Nevertheless, scanning is a good way to make sure the rhythm and meter in your poetry is perfect and professional.

Sources:

Deutsch, Babette. Poetry Handbook. HarperCollins Publishers Inc. New York, NY. 1974. Pp. 69, 95 and 97.

Ferguson, Margaret, et al. The Norton Anthology of Poetry. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY. 1970. p.235.

Steele, Timothy. All the Fun’s in How you Say a Thing. Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio 1999), Pp. 9, 17, 13, 52, 63, 66 and 336.

ENJOY AUTUMN!

From Mary Ann Lufkin
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