

WRITER'S INK THE WRITER'S WORKSHOP OF BLOOMINGDALE SEPTEMBER 2009

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Our September workshops will be on September 12th and September 26th, from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

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

Submission deadline for the 2010 calendar is September 15, 2009.

SIMILE SPOTLIGHT

“Like mental mice or cockroaches,
doubts and fantasies kept finding cracks
through which to invade her thoughts.”

Source:

Sprague, Gretchen. Thomas Dunne Books. 2003. *Murder in a Heat Wave*. p. 165.

DACTYLIC TETRAMETER

Four-beat lines using the dactylic foot (strong-weak-weak), which lends the poem a waltz-like rhythm.

**Picture yourself in a boat on a
river with tangerine trees and
marmalade skies...**

--Lennon/McCartney

Source:

Vaughn, Michael J. “Poetry: Meter/Why Meter Matters.” *Writer’s Digest*. Nov-Dec 06. p. 95.

COLUMN TWO PERSONALS

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



Xian, China

Versification
By: John J. Flaherty

What is versification? Timothy Steele, professor of English at California State University and author of the book, *all the fun's in how you say a thing*, calls it the making of verse. What is verse? At one time you might have been able to say, it is poetry. But in today's world, almost anything can be called verse. Strictly speaking, it is a type of poetry in which rhythm is present and in which the rhythms are regularized and systematized.

In today's poetry world, we have a lot of free verse. That is, stuff without consistent rhythm. The traditions of meter, rhythm, and rhyme have been tossed into the wastebasket. The rules are still there but are largely ignored. In the literary journals, it is hard to find any of the traditional forms and even harder to find poems with systemized rhythm and/or rhyme. In olden days the reverse was true.

Why is this so? Well for one thing, it is hard to write poetry in the traditional forms. The poet Frost has said that he has spent days trying to find the right word for a poem. Keeping track of the syllable count to get the consistent rhythm and finding words that have the proper sounds and endings that still fit the meaning of the tale can be frustrating. It is much easier to just write the story, line by line, in the free verse form. And we might ask, why do it the old way? Just because in olden days they did it that way, why do I have to follow those archaic rules? You might ask, as some modern poets have said, "I want to be free." *Vers libre*.

You can get an insight into this by spending some time reading very good traditional poetry. Read it very

slowly. Note the way the author has used certain words to get the rhythm consistent. Note that you can almost tell what the rhyme word is going to be even before you get to the end of the line. Notice how musical the verse is.

We can see this when we look at the first stanza of a work by Thomas Gray. It is titled, "Written In a Country Churchyard." This poem is written in iambic pentameter with the rhyme sequence ABAB.

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting
day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er
the lea
The plowman homeward plods his
weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness
and to me.

End Rhymes

As you read this did you find yourself pronouncing the last word in the second line as "lay"? Because we read the last word in the first line day with a long "a", the natural tendency is to do the same for the last word in the second line, *lea*. *Lea* is not a commonly used word, so our mind sort of guesses and we pronounce it as "lay". At least some or most of us do. If we thought about it, phonic rules tell us to pronounce *lea* with a long "e", like "lee". By the time we get to the last line and we notice the ending word *me*, we might realize that *lea* should match *me* and not be pronounced as "lay". So you can see that it is very natural for us to look for a rhyme sequence.

Rhythm

Notice the rhythm and how it is continuous for each line. I have repeated the first stanza of this poem with the meter indicated by scansion. ("x" indicates unstressed syllables, "/"

indicates stressed, and "|" separates the feet). I have used scansion to show the stresses and the resulting metric pattern. For those you who wish, you can check back to the September, 2008 newsletter for a detailed explanation of scansion and how to show metric patterns.

x / x /

x / x / x /

The Cur | few tolls | the knell | of par |
ting day,

x / x /

x / x / x /

The low | ing herd | wind slow | ly o'er
| the lea

x / x /

x / x / x /

The plow | man home | ward plods |
his wea | ry way,

x / x

/ x / x / x /

And leaves | the world | to dark |
ness and | to me.

It is clearly iambic; soft stress followed by hard stress and pentameter with five beats to the line. The imagery is very clear. We can hear that it is the end of the day and visualize the herd of cattle winding home. We can see the toil-worn plowman plodding home and the darkness of night coming to this world and to the poet.

Try to change the poem by using different words so as to break up the rhythm. Add an extra foot or two or remove some of the feet. Also change the end words so the lines do not rhyme. Then ask yourself, is this better? Is the image as clear as the way Grey wrote it?

As you examine other classic poems, look for use of other devices such as alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia. These terms are defined later. Look for mid-line rhymes well as end rhymes

Prose is wonderful and skilled prose writers can generate beautiful imagery. But metrification can expand the written word with the use of rhythm and in certain cases, rhyme, as well as other devices to show us more. Just putting prose in a series of lines in the form of a stanza and calling it a poem misses out on what it can be.

So try using consistent rhythm when you are working with your verse. Spend the time to get the rhythm consistent. Most of our language naturally speaks in iambic pentameter. All of Shakespeare's plays are written in iambic pentameter. But what is important is to have the rhythm consistent. It can be tetrameter or hexameter or it can alternate... it can have a line of 4 beats; then 5 beats, then 4 beats and so forth. You can even purposely put in an extra beat for emphasis in one of the lines. Remove or add words to get the proper number of beats in each line. Then make an effort to get the end words to rhyme. You also can use alliteration and assonance with or without end rhymes. Make your work sing back to you.

I have included some of the classic definitions of some of the devices used in poetry at the end of this monograph for your use. Incidentally, I have cut this out and have it pinned over my desk.

VERSIFICATION

VERSE- Form of literary composition in which the rhythms are regularized & systematized

METER- Systematization of rhythm by use of accented and unaccented syllables
Forming feet

TYPES OF FEET:

IAMB Unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (vo'id)

TROCHEE Stressed syllable followed by a unstressed syllable (on'ly)

ANAPEST Two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable (in'ter'vene)

DACTYL One stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables (hap'pi'ly)

SENSE DIVISIONS-Breaks that occur in speech or writing naturally (comma, period)

ALLITERATION Repetition of first consonant (leaves lives)

ASSONANCE Identity of vowel sounds (scream beach)

CONSONANCE Identity of consonant patterns (leaves lives)

EUOPNONY Agreeable relation between sounds (oh-ah, ee-ay)

ONOMATOPOEIA Imitate sounds they designate (bang- hiss-swish-boom)

RHYME- Words are said to rhyme when there is an identity of accented vowels and of all constants and vowels following.

IMAGERY- Representation of any sense experience, visual or otherwise

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

SIMILE stated comparison (like, as)

METAPHOR implied comparison without like or as (is- are)

RHYTHM- The repetition of the same or similar sounds, usually stressed in one or more syllables occurring at recognizable intervals

FREE VERSE- Verse without traditional metrical arrangement

BLANK VERSE-Unrhymed metrical verse, usually iambic pentameter

Sources:

Steel, Timothy, 1999, all the fun's in how you say a thing, Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, pp2, 3, 5, 8, 49, 223

Brooks, et al, 1939, Understanding Poetry, Henry Holt and Company, New York, NY, pp 510, 642, 646,643, 647,242-245

Deutsch, Babette,1981, Poetry Handbook, Barnes and Noble, pp 9,21, 56,69, 95,135

KEEP WRITING!

From: Mary Ann Lufkin
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Writer's Workshop of Bloomingdale
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