

THE EXPRESSION OF SOME POETIC TERMS

Summary: The significance of poetic terms and information about the numerous methods of arranging words in poetry were investigated.

Key words: Verse, stanza, line, rhyme scheme, fixed form, ballad, sonnet, lyric

Poets are limited in the materials they can use in creating their works. All they have are words to express their ideas, emotions and feelings. These words need to be precisely right on several levels at once: they must sound right to the listener even as they delight their ears; they must have a meaning which might have been unanticipated, but seems to be the perfectly right one; they must be arranged in a relationship and placed on the page in ways that are at once easy to follow and assist the reader in understanding.

The English language contains a wide range of words from which to choose for almost every thought, and there are also numerous plans or methods of arrangement of these words, called poetic devices, which can assist the writer in developing cogent expressions pleasing to his readers. Words follow each other in a sequence determined by the poet. In order to discuss the arrangements that result, certain terms have been applied to various aspects of that arrangement process. Although in some ways these sequences seem arbitrary and mechanical, in another sense they help to determine the nature of the poem. These various ways of organizing words have been identified. Below we would like to look through some poetic terms of arranging words in poetry, in order to

have a better understanding of them, it is interesting to look at their definition and examples:

Point of View: The author's point of view concentrates on the vantage point of the speaker, or "teller" of the story or poem. This may be considered the poem's "voice" — the pervasive presence behind the overall work. This is also sometimes referred to as the *persona*.

1st Person where the speaker is a character in the story or poem and tells it from his/her perspective (uses "I"); *3rd Person limited* where the speaker is not part of the story, but tells about the other characters through the limited perceptions of one other person and *3rd Person omniscient* where the speaker is not part of the story, but is able to "know" and describe what all characters are thinking.

Line: The line is fundamental to the perception of poetry, marking an important visual distinction from prose. Poetry is arranged into a series of units that do not necessarily correspond to sentences, but rather to a series of metrical feet. Generally, but not always, the line is printed as one single line on the page. If it occupies more than one line, its remainder is usually indented to indicate that it is a continuation. There is a natural tendency when reading poetry to pause at the end of a line, but the careful reader will follow the punctuation to find where natural pauses should occur. In traditional verse forms, the length of each line is determined by convention, but in modern poetry the poet has more latitude for choice.

Verse: One single line of a poem arranged in a metrical pattern. Also, a piece of poetry or a particular form of poetry such as *free verse*, *blank verse*, etc., or the art or work of a poet. The popular use of the word verse for a stanza or associated group of metrical lines is not in accordance with the best usage. A stanza is a group of verses.

Stanza: A division of a poem created by arranging the lines into a unit, often repeated in the same pattern of meter and rhyme throughout the poem; a unit of

poetic lines (a “paragraph” within the poem). The stanzas within a poem are separated by blank lines. Stanzas in modern poetry, such as *free verse*, often do not have lines that are all of the same length and meter, nor even the same number of lines in each stanza. Stanzas created by such irregular line groupings are often dictated by meaning, as in paragraphs of prose.

Stanza Forms: The names given to describe the number of lines in a stanzaic unit, such as: *couplet* (2), *tercet* (3), *quatrain* (4), *quintet* (5), *sestet* (6), *septet* (7), and *octave* (8). Some stanzas follow a set rhyme scheme and meter in addition to the number of lines and are given specific names to describe them, such as, *ballad meter*, *ottava rima*, *rhyme royal*, *terza rima*, and *Spenserian stanza*. Stanza forms are also a factor in the categorization of whole poems described as following a *fixed form*.

Rhetorical Question: A question solely for effect, which does not require an answer. By the implication the answer is obvious, it is a means of achieving an emphasis stronger than a direct statement.

Example: *O, Wind,*

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Rhyme Scheme: The pattern established by the arrangement of rhymes in a stanza or poem, generally described by using letters of the alphabet to denote the recurrence of rhyming lines, such as the *ababbcc* of the *Rhyme Royal* stanza form.

Capital letters in the alphabetic rhyme scheme are used for the repeating lines of a refrain; the letters *x* and *y* indicate unrhymed lines.

In quatrains, the popular rhyme scheme of *abab* is called alternate rhyme or cross rhyme. The *abba* scheme is called envelope rhyme, and another one frequently used is *xaxa*.

Enjambment: The continuation of the logical sense — and therefore the grammatical construction — beyond the end of a line of poetry. This is sometimes done with the title, which in effect becomes the first line of the poem.

Form: The arrangement or method used to convey the content, such as *free verse*, *ballad*, *haiku*, etc. A variably interpreted term, however, it sometimes applies to details within the composition of a text, but is probably used most often in reference to the structural characteristics of a work as it differs from established modes of conventionalized arrangements: *Open poetic form* free from regularity and consistency in elements such as rhyme, line length, and metrical form; *closed poetic form* subject to a fixed structure and pattern; *blank Verse* is unrhymed iambic pentameter (much of the plays of Shakespeare are written in

this form); *Free Verse* lines with no prescribed pattern or structure — the poet determines all the variables as seems appropriate for each poem; in *couplet* a pair of lines, usually rhymed; this is the shortest stanza; *Heroic Couplet* consists of a pair of rhymed lines in iambic pentameter (traditional heroic epic form) and *quatrain* is a four-line stanza, or a grouping of four lines of verse

Fixed Form: A poem which follows a set pattern of *meter*, *rhyme scheme*, *stanza form*, and *refrain* is called a *fixed form*. Most poets feel a need for familiarity and practice with established forms as essential to learning the craft, but having explored the techniques and constraints of each, they go on to experiment and extend their imaginative creativity in new directions. A partial listing includes:

Ballad is a narrative poem written as a series of quatrains in which lines of iambic tetrameter alternate with iambic trimeter with an *xaxa*, *xbxb* rhyme scheme with frequent use of repetition and often including a refrain. The “story” of a ballad can be a wide range of subjects but frequently deals with folklore or popular legends. They are written in a straight-forward manner, seldom with detail, but always with graphic simplicity and force. Most ballads are suitable for singing: “Barbara Allen” is an example. Many of the oldest ballads were first written and performed by minstrels as court entertainment. *Folk ballads* are of unknown origin and are usually lacking in artistic finish, because they are

handed down by oral tradition, folk ballads are subject to variations and continual change. Other types of ballads include *literary ballads*, combining the natures of epic and lyric poetry, which are written by known authors, often in the style and form of the *folk ballad*.

Ballade is a French form and consists of three seven or eight-line stanzas using no more than three recurrent rhymes, with an identical refrain after each stanza and a closing envoi repeating the rhymes of the last four lines of the stanza.

Concrete Poetry is also known as *pattern poetry* or *shaped verse*, these are poems that are printed on the page so that they form a recognizable outline related to the subject, thus conveying or extending the meaning of the words. Pattern poetry retains its meaning when read aloud, whereas the essence of concrete poetry lies in its appearance on the page rather than in the words; it is intended to be perceived as a visual whole and often cannot be effective when read aloud. This form has had brief popularity at several periods in history.

Epigram is a pithy, sometimes satiric, couplet or quatrain comprising a single thought or event and often aphoristic with a witty or humorous turn of thought.

Epitaph is a brief poem or statement in memory of someone who is deceased, used as, or suitable for, a tombstone inscription; now, often witty or humorous and written without intent of actual funerary use.

Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry consisting of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. The elusive flavor of the form, however, lies more in its touch and tone than in its syllabic structure. Deeply imbedded in Japanese culture and strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism, haiku are very brief descriptions of nature that convey some implicit insight or essence of a moment. Traditionally, they contain either a direct or oblique reference to a season.

Limerick a light or humorous form of five chiefly anapestic verses of which lines one, two and five are of three feet and lines three and four are of two feet, with a rhyme scheme of *aabba*. Named for a town in Ireland of that name, the

limerick was popularized by Edward Lear in his *Book of Nonsense* published in 1846, and is generally considered the only fixed form of English origin.

While the final line of Lear's limericks usually was a repetition of the first line, modern limericks generally use the final line for clever witticisms and word play. Their content also frequently tends toward the ribald and off-color.

Lyric is derived from the Greek word for lyre, *lyric poetry* was originally designed to be sung. One of the three main groups of poetry (the others being narrative and dramatic), lyric verse is the most frequently used modern form, including all poems in which the speaker's ardent expression of an emotional element predominates. Ranging from complex thoughts to the simplicity of playful wit, the melodic imagery of skillfully written lyric poetry evokes in the reader's mind the recall of similar emotional experiences.

Ode is any of several stanzaic forms more complex than the lyric, with intricate rhyme schemes and irregular number of lines, generally of considerable length, always written in a style marked by a rich, intense expression of an elevated thought praising a person or object. "Ode to a Nightingale" is an example.

Pantoum is derived from the Malayan *pantun*, it consists of a varying number of four-line stanzas with lines rhyming alternately; the second and fourth lines of each stanza repeated to form the first and third lines of the succeeding stanza, with the first and third lines of the first stanza forming the second and fourth of the last stanza, but in reverse order, so that the opening and closing lines of the poem are identical.

Rondeau is a fixed form used mostly in light or witty verse, usually consisting of fifteen octo- or decasyllabic lines in three stanzas, with only two rhymes used throughout. A word or words from the first part of the first line are used as a (usually unrhymed) refrain ending the second and third stanzas, so the rhyme scheme is *aabba aabR aabbaR*.

Sestina is a fixed form consisting of six 6-line (usually unrhymed) stanzas in which the end words of the first stanza recur as end words of the following five

stanzas in a successively rotating order, and as the middle and end words of each of the lines of a concluding envoi in the form of a tercet.

The usual ending word order for a sestina is as follows:

First stanza, 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6

Second stanza, 6 - 1 - 5 - 2 - 4 - 3

Third stanza, 3 - 6 - 4 - 1 - 2 - 5

Fourth stanza, 5 - 3 - 2 - 6 - 1 - 4

Fifth stanza, 4 - 5 - 1 - 3 - 6 - 2

Sixth stanza, 2 - 4 - 6 - 5 - 3 - 1

Concluding tercet:

middle of first line - 2, end of first line - 5

middle of second line - 4, end of second line - 3

middle of third line - 6, end of third line - 1

Sonnet is a fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter with a prescribed rhyme scheme; its subject was traditionally love. Three variations are found frequently in English, although others are occasionally seen. There are several types of sonnets such as: *Shakespearean Sonnet* is a style of sonnet used by Shakespeare with a rhyme scheme of *abab cdcd efef gg*; *Italian (Petrarchan) Sonnet* is a form of sonnet made popular by Petrarch with a rhyme scheme of *abbaabba cdecde* or *cdcdcd*; *Spenserian Sonnet* is a variant of the Shakespearean form in which the quatrains are linked with a chain or interlocked rhyme scheme, *abab bcbc cdcd ee*;

Sonnet Sequence is a series of sonnets in which there is a discernable unifying theme, while each retains its own structural independence. All of Shakespeare's sonnets, for example, were part of a sequence.

Triolet is a poem or stanza of eight lines in which the first line is repeated as the fourth and seventh lines, and the second line as the eighth, with a rhyme scheme of *ABaAabAB*, as in Adelaide Crapsey's "Song" (the capital letters in the rhyme scheme indicate the repetition of identical lines).

Villanelle is a poem consisting of five 3-line stanzas followed by a quatrain and having only two rhymes. In the stanzas following the first stanza, the first and third lines of the first stanza are repeated alternately as refrains. They are the final two lines of the concluding quatrain. The villanelle gives a pleasant impression of simple spontaneity.

As we have seen above that there are different terms of arranging words in poetry. These terms have been applied to various aspects of that arrangement process. Although in some ways these sequences seem arbitrary and mechanical, in another sense they help to determine the nature of the poem. These various ways of organizing words have been identified and explained above.

References:

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