

Honors Literature and Short Stories
Week 16

Touching on Poetry

Rhythm and meter

Rhythm is the musical beat of the poem. Different words have different stresses place on them. Reading poetry aloud is the best way to see these different rhythms. You learned the accent on syllables long ago. For instance, in the following words, the accent is on the first syllable: BA-by, MOM-my, MONS-ter. In these words, the accent is on the second syllable: di-VINE, e-VAL-u-ate, for-EV-er. The heavy or light stresses is called **meter**.

As you read a poem, you can often sense something repeating in the rhythm – whether the words themselves are repetitive or not. Some poems follow the meter or rhythm closely, while others seem to follow it not at all. This is entirely up to the poet and the effect he or she wishes to create.

Syllabic Meter

Basing the meter on the number of syllables in a line or in a stanza is called *syllabic meter*. This can take the form of a certain number of syllables in alternating line, or it can be a pattern, such as four syllables, six syllables, twelve syllables, twelve syllables.

Foot Verse Meter

The *foot-verse meter* relies not just on the **number** of syllables, but also the **position** of the stressed syllables.

The combination forms *feet*, of which there are many kinds.

- ❑ The most common is called *iambic pentameter*. This is a line that is made up of five (penta) *iamb*s.
- ❑ An iamb is a two-syllable foot.
- ❑ The second syllable receives more stress than the first syllable. Think of some words that would form an iamb. (Examples: **indeed**, **between**, **mistake**.)
- ❑ Poems written in iambic pentameter have each line made up of five iambs.
- ❑ When searching for this pattern, you will exaggerate the meter to see it. Think of it as a drum beat:

Duh-**DUM** | duh **DUM** | duh **DUM** | duh **DUM** | duh **DUM**

I wish | **I knew** | what **eve** | ry **one** | would **do**.

Do you see the pattern? Poets don't always try to fit this exactly. They work to get the meter that works for their own poem. And often they may use the exact iamb for only some lines.

So why are we discussing this? It seems far too technical! Well, understanding some specific types of rhythm or meter of poetry will help YOU become more attuned to the rhythm of your own poetry. Your favorite bands and singers have to adjust their “poems” to fit into a specific rhythm or meter. You may not end up using the iambic pentameter, but you may use other types

of feet (again, the combination of the number of syllables and the stress of each syllable). Note in the Robert Frost poem that is coming up, there is what is called a *tetrameter* or one that is made up of four feet. Read it aloud and note the rhythm.

Sounds

The sounds of words create the effect of a poem. The most well-known method of using sounds, of course, is using words that rhyme. The rhyme scheme varies from poem to poem and may consist of every other line rhyming, or every line rhyming or any other variation. However, once the rhyme scheme is established, it is to be followed. There is a standard way to indicate a rhyme scheme. The first rhyme sounds is a, the second is b, and so on. In the following poem by Robert Burns, let us identify the rhyme scheme:

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

by Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Whose woods these are I think I know .	a
His house is in the village though ;	a
He will not see me stopping here	b
To watch his woods fill up with snow .	a

My little horse must think it queer	b
To stop without a farmhouse near	b
Between the woods and frozen lake	c
The darkest evening of the year .	b

He gives his harness bells a shake	c
To ask if there is some mistake .	c
The only other sound's the sweep	d
Of easy wind and downy flake .	c

The woods are lovely, dark and deep ,	d
But I have promises to keep ,	d
And miles to go before I sleep .	d
And miles to go before I sleep .	d

The rhyme scheme for this poem would be written as follows: aaba bbcb ccdc dddd

Remember, if you are asked to define the rhyme scheme for a piece of poetry, it MUST be written in the format (using the above poem as an example): aaba bbcb ccdc dddd.

Do not put the letters next to the lines (my example above with the letters next to the lines is for teaching purposes only).

Other effects using sound include *alliteration*. That is where two or more words begin with the same sound. Robert Burns uses this effect in several places in his poem. “To watch his woods...” is one place.

Consonance is similar to alliteration, however it is where the same consonant sound is repeated. Note the /s/ sounds in the Robert Burns poem.

Assonance is the repetition of a vowel sound. The words **mine** and **night** have assonance of the /i/ sound.

Applying one or more these techniques provides beauty and structure to a poem.

Structure of Poetry

This is a good point to introduce some vocabulary that is important in the structure of poetry. ***Verse*** – Poetry is written in *verse* – metrical (or rhythmic) language – as opposed to fiction stories which are written in *prose*.

Stanza – This is a repeated pattern of lines in a poem – what you might have been calling a verse. You will see a space between each stanza.

Couplet - Two succeeding lines of verse, usually rhyming, with the same meter.

Quatrain – A four line-stanza or a four-line poem.

Hexadual

This is a form made up of six ***couplets***. Note in the following poem that each couplet rhymes, and each couplet has the same number of syllables or meter. Some of the couplets vary in the number of syllables, but each line in a couplet has the same number of syllables.

In couplet #1, each line has 9 syllables. In couplet #2, each line has 8 syllables. In couplet #3, each line has 7 syllables. In couplet #4, each line has 8 syllables. In couplet #5, each line has 8 syllables. In couplet #6, each line has 9 syllables.

I will always wish upon a star
No matter if it is very far.

It seems that I will always see
Light in the sky made just for me.

Do I need to share my heart?
Perhaps it’s just a little start.

No one else seems to want to hear;
I really need a listening ear.

Please take my wish up high with you
Please make it mine, please make it true.

So all alone I stare through the night
I wait for the first star, shining bright.

Assignments

1. In the Robert Frost Poem, “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening”, find examples of **consonance**. **Due this week. 20 points**
2. In the following excerpt from *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, define the **rhyme scheme** as explained in this lesson. **Due this week. 20 points**

Excerpt from The Pied Piper of Hamelin
By Robert Browning

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladle's,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

3. Review **Hexadual** and write one of your own. **Due this week 40 points**
4. **Weekly Shorts: 5 points**
5. **Journal:** Finish Reading “Flowers for Algernon” In addition to other feedback, comment on how the style of writing contributes to the story. **10 points**

Winter Break

Choose a book from the following list and read it over the Winter Break. Once you let me know the book, I will give you a prompt (or prompts) to which you will respond at the end of Winter Break. These are long books, so be sure to begin reading right away.

Nathaniel Hawthorne:

The Scarlet Letter

The House of Seven Gables

The Marble Faun

The text of all of these is available at: <http://www.online-literature.com/hawthorne/>

Or you can easily find these at your library or bookstore.

Alexandre Dumás

The Count of Monte Cristo *The Man in the Iron Mask* *The Three Musketeers*

The text of all of these is available at: <http://www.online-literature.com/dumas/> or you can easily find these at your library or bookstore.