

## Poetry techniques 2

(based on the books by Sandy Brownjohn)

### 1. Rhyme and rhythm

**RHYME:** Poems don't need to rhyme, but sometimes a rhyming pattern can improve a poem. Try near rhymes (rain/tin; sand/blend; summer/dimmer; heat/leak, and internal rhymes i.e within rather than at the ends of lines. Don't force a poem to rhyme – though often a rhyme will come naturally.

If a poem does have a regular rhyme scheme, you can identify it by marking each rhyme with a small letter. When the rhyme changes, the letter changes; when the rhyme is repeated, the letter is repeated. This can be useful when studying poetry as you can identify the rhyme scheme and see how the poet has used it – often a rhyme will be broken for effect. If it is too regular you can produce a sort of nursery rhyme effect which can sound immature and grow tedious very quickly. Here's an example of a more subtle rhyme scheme:

The splendour falls on castle walls (a)  
And snowy summits old in story: (b)  
The long light shakes across the lakes, (c)  
And the wild cataract leaps in glory: (b)  
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying, (d)  
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying. (d)

**Rhythm :** There are many formal rhythms, one of the most common being iambics. In an iambic rhythm, each 'foot' (like a bar in music) will have two syllables: the first will be weak (unstressed), the second will be strong (stressed). This is where the name iambic comes from – it is from the Greek word for limping.

If you have five feet in a line it is called **iambic pentameter** . Here's an example (stressed syllables in italics):

e.g. 'When *I* do *count* the *clock* that *tells* the *time*

They *flee* from *me* that *some* time *did* me *seek* (Shakespeare uses this a lot.)

If you have four feet to a line it is called **iambic tetrameter**.

e.g. 'had *we* but *world* *enough* and *time*'

Try just choosing a theme and writing some lines about it in one of these these rhythms; start with iambic pentameter. Try to work out a simple rhyme scheme but perhaps don't keep it too regular (as in the example from Tennyson above).

Here are a some suggested first lines:

'I have long walked in worlds unknown to you'

'I saw a hundred flaming guards'

'I saw the sky alight with fire'

## 2. Running on lines

It is important to be aware that a line of a poem does not need to be complete in itself. The sense can run from one line to the next – and the punctuation can emphasise this. It is much more effective (and natural) if the lines run on.

It was a perfect day  
For sowing; just  
As sweet and dry was the ground  
As tobacco-dust.

I tasted deep the hour  
Between the far  
Owl's chuckling first soft cry  
And the first star.

A long stretched hour it was;  
Nothing undone  
Remained; the early seeds  
All safely sown.

Write a few sentences on any theme, then try putting them into lines with the sentences and meanings running on. Punctuate as necessary to keep the sense.

## 3. Alliteration and assonance

**Alliteration** (the repetition of a first letter in several words) can be very effective if it is not overdone or done too consciously.

A more subtle technique is that of **assonance**, the repetition of similar vowel sounds (e.g. "Hear the mellow wedding bells", "Try to light the fire").

Have a go at using these with this exercise:

- Start with a line placing you somewhere :

e.g. 'Perched at the top of the tallest tree'  
or 'Down at the bottom of the deep blue sea',  
or 'Way up high in the misty mountain'

- Then follow this with descriptive lines using plenty of alliteration and assonance; start each with the same word. Write several lines before bringing the poem to a close in any way you like.

e.g. 'Way up high on a misty mountain,

Above the shouts and shrieks of the streets,

Above the lumbering and laughter of the days,

Above the echoes and bellows and beats,

Above the boats that float on the bay.....

Note: in poetry, 's' sounds are referred to as 'sibilants', l sounds as 'labials'; f sounds as 'fricatives'; p sounds as 'plosives'

## **4. Similes and metaphors**

### *a) similes*

(i) A simile is a device by which one thing is likened to another e.g 'his smile was as cold as ice', 'the hare ran like the wind'

(ii) Take some well known similes and give them different endings e.g

As cold as -----

As fast as -----

Shiny like -----

Hard like -----

He ran like -----

She sang like -----

They fought like -----

It burned like -----

(iii) Choose an interesting subject and write a list of four or five similes to describe it. No need to rhyme them at all, just try to build up an interesting description through simile. You wouldn't normally use so many but this is just practice!

(if you can't think of one to get started, try seasons (one or all); animal(s); insect(s); a building; space)

### *b) metaphors*

Metaphors are a bit different from similes because instead of saying one thing is like another, they say one thing IS another. e.g. 'the road was a ribbon of moonlight' 'the sea was a roaring lion'. They are trickier to use but less hackneyed and more effective sometimes.

(i) Try these:

The wind is -----

The baby's smile was-----

The army was -----

(ii) Try listing a few metaphors of a few related objects as in the similes exercise above – e.g. jungle animals; planets

## **5. Haiku and tanka**

### *(a) Haiku*

Haiku is a Japanese form of poem which consists of three lines of seventeen syllables. The first line has 5 syllables, the second 7 and the third 5. The purpose of this exercise is to force yourself to be limited in how much you can write per line – you have to be careful and economical and say as much as you can with very few words. It is important to remember that poems should be very economical with no redundant words if possible. Every word should have a part to play and a

reason for being there.

If you give a haiku a title, this means you don't have to mention the subject by name in the poem, which can make it more mysterious.

e.g.

### **The flock**

A kingdom of birds, (5)

The voice of wings fluttering, (7)

A tune gathering. (5)

Choose any subject and try to write a haiku about it. If you are stuck, try looking out of the window and see what catches your eye.

### *(b) Tanka (Book 1 p40)*

Tanka is similar to haiku but has 5 lines with 31 syllables in this pattern: 5, 7, 5, 7 and 7. e.g

Across I travel (5)

Desolate and cold it is. (7)

My shadow follows. (5)

Just whistling to pass the time - (7)

It helps when you're so lonely (7)

Try having a go at one – it gives you scope to say a bit more than the haiku but you are still forced to limit yourself.

## **7. The Rondolet (French, pronounced, rondolay)**

A traditional poetic form- a little roundel, meaning it repeats a refrain. It has seven lines, with lines 1,3 and 7 being exactly the same, and only two rhymes – the rhyme scheme is A-b-A-a-b-b-A (the capital is the repeated word/line). The rhythm is iambic – limping, di-dum/di-dum. The repeated line should have two feet; the others four.

Here is an example:

There she flies

Across the open muddy glade,

There she flies,

Hears echoes of her lonely cries,

With bits of leaves and twigs she played

And in her nest an egg was laid.

There she flies.

Choose any subject given in these notes that you haven't used yet, and have a go at a *rondolet*. Be careful to choose two ending words that are easy to rhyme!

## **8. The sonnet**

The sonnet was the a popular poetic form in Elizabethan times and was famously used by Shakespeare. It consists of 14 lines written in iambic pentameter with a definite rhyme scheme (this varies from poem to poem). It follows the pattern abab, cdcd, efef, gg (three 'quatrains' and a rhyming couplet). The first twelve lines express the subject/problem, and the last two express the poet's reflection/solution. We will be studying a few sonnets in some detail as it is an important English verse form (though it was originally Italian and quite different!).

Sonnets are very difficult to do well, but have a go! Spend a good while choosing your subject first.