

**WAXING POETIC:
A PRIMER FOR BEGINNING POETICS**

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What is Poetry

Poetry (the term derives from a variant of the Greek term, *poiesis*, "making") is a form of literature that uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language—such as phonaesthetics, sound symbolism, and metre—to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, the prosaic ostensible meaning.

Poetry (ancient Greek: ποιέω (*poieo*) = I create) is an art form in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content. ... Poems frequently rely for their effect on imagery, word association, and the musical qualities of the language used. . We may feel we know what a thing is, but have trouble defining it. That holds as true for poetry as it does for, say, love or electricity. **Poems** frequently rely for their effect on imagery, word association, and the musical qualities of the language used. --- the definition of poetry and how great poets throughout history have painted vivid word pictures. --the art of rhythmical composition, written or spoken, for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or elevated thoughts ---

I consider myself to be an Appalachian/Inspirational writer. My first love is poetry and writing lyrics, but I also possess a love for writing history (Appalachian history, especially).

I was born, raised, and currently reside in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia! Within my heritage is included my famous/infamous great, great grandfather, "Devil" John Wright, his uncle Martin Van Buren Bates, the "Kentucky Giant" (he was 7' 11" tall & 450+ Lbs.) – and other ancestors which the author John Fox Jr. used to populate his famous novel, "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine!"

Hello fellow writers! Welcome to ‘WAXING POETIC!’ --- lessons in the skills, exploring the forms and metrics of classic poetics. These lessons are offered to help improve your skills in the craft of writing poetry. You are urged to take the information and write your own piece(s) using the given forms and metrics --- your individual expressions in a classic form.

Lastly, remember the words of Pablo Picasso. “It is important to learn the rules as a pro, so you can break them as an artist!”

- Philip Kent Church

CHAPTER ONE

MY HOUSE:

A POEM

BY SUE LOBO ©:

The house I live in, is constructed of words,
In old bricks of sentences, nouns & adverbs,
It's roofed in sonnets, & it's eaves are of odes,
The place I reside, where my soul now abodes.
My windows, look out upon stories in tomes,
Curtained & garbed, behind billowing poems,
In hearth of my warming, the embers of tales,
My house is my home, when all else just fails.
My house is the place where I do all my dwelling,
Each tile on the floor, duly paved by my spelling,

It is not very grand, & perhaps, not even select,
It is quirky, it's bijou, & really, it's not too erect.
The walls of my house, in loose letters are daubed,
Keeping me safe, warm & ever totally absorbed,
Upon front door of my house, & itally curled,
You'll find the words, "Welcome to my world".

STANZAS & WRITING THE SPENSERIAN STANZA

(lesson 4)

Writing a poem is like building a house. Just as a house is structured with rooms, poems can be structured with stanzas. As of a matter of fact, the word 'stanza' actually means 'room' in Italian! A stanza is simply a specific grouping of lines of verse. In this regard, stanzas are used in composing poetry (and songs) in much the same way paragraphs are used in composing stories. Of course, unlike paragraphs, stanzas will normally have a set number of lines, metering of syllables per line and employ a rhyming scheme.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE DIFFERENT STANZA TYPES IN POETRY.

THE COUPLET - A couplet is a stanza of 2 lines that usually rhyme. (a,a)

THE TERCET (OR TRIPLET) – A 3 line stanza, that also (usually) is rhymed. (b,b,b,)

THE QUATRAIN – A stanza of 4 lines that traditionally employs a ‘rhyming scheme.’ (a,a,b,b)or(a,b,a,b)

THE QUINTAIN (OR QUINTET) - Any ‘complete’ poem or stanza composed in 5 lines. Quintains can follow any meter and rhyming scheme. It is the specific metering and rhyming that determines the ‘type’ of Quintain, as there are many. For instance, the Limericks we learned as children are actually a specifically metered and rhymed type of Quintain! Another form of the Quintain is called a ‘CINQUAIN.’ Which utilizes a unique metering of syllables per line. The first and last lines of the Cinquain have only 2 syllables each. The second line has 4, the third has 6 and the fourth has 8 – so its syllabic meter would be 2-4-6-8-2. Then, there’s the ENGLISH QUINTAIN, which has no metering of syllables, but employs a unique rhyming scheme in its 5 lines of ‘a,b,a,b,b’ and is useful for longer poems.

THE SESTET - The Sestet is a stanza which has 6 lines. Sestet originates from an Italian word, sestetto, meaning sixth. The famous Italian poet, Petrarch was the first one to have introduced this poetic form in Italian sonnet. This is the second part of the sonnet, while the first part is called octave that comprises of eight lines. It has six lines, and also refers to a poem of six lines, or a six lined-stanza in a

poem that we could distinguish from other units with line breaks. Hence, a sestet could also be a complete poem of six lines, or could be a stanza in a poem. Sestets are used in many poetic forms with rhyme and meter, but they play a huge role in a somewhat peculiar poetic form called the SESTINA. The Sestina has the reputation of being one of, if not ‘the most complex’ of the classic poetic forms. Speaking strictly for myself, the Sestina is monstrous! I’ve accomplished only a single Sestina in my career – and that’s more than enough for me! The Sestina is a 39 line poem executed in 6 Sestets and one Tercet. Not relying on any rhyming scheme and meter in its construction, a sestina uses the last word of each verse in the opening Sestet as refrains, in a precisely arranged order throughout the next 5 Sestets and final Tercet. In the final Tercet, however, the 6 words must appear twice per line, in a prescribed order, in those last 3 lines! As stated, the Sestina is ‘MONSTROUS!’

HERE IS THE FORM FOR THE SESTINA:

First SESTET, ..1 ..2 ..3 ..4 ..5 ..6

Second SESTET, ..6 ..1 ..5 .. 2 ..4 ..3

Third SESTET, ..3 ..6 ..4 ..1 ..2 ..5

Fourth SESTET , ..5 ..3 ..2 ..6 ..1 ..4

Fifth SESTET, ..4 ..5 ..1 ..3 ..6 ..2

Sixth SESTET, ..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 if third line ..6, end of third line...1

Beyond the Sestet there is the ‘RHYME ROYAL’ - a 7 line stanza in iambic pentameter with a rhyming scheme of a,b,a,b,b,c,c. The Rhyme Royal can be found in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Then there is The ‘OTTAVA RIMA’ - which is a stanza of 8 lines rhymed a,b,a,b,a,b,c,c. Poems with stanzas will always have some type of structure to them, but not all poetry uses stanzas. An example would be ‘Free Verse’ poetry, which has no set, formal structuring. This brings us to a 9 line stanza and the obvious choice would be the “SPENSERIAN STANZA!

THE SPENSERIAN STANZA

Edmund Spenser (1552 – 1599) is one of the originators of English poetry and considered one of the greatest of the English poets in history. Spenser was probably best known for his epic poem “The Faerie Queene,” which is easily identified as an allegory of Queen Elizabeth I. The Spenserian Stanza is a form invented by Edmund Spenser specifically for “The Faerie Queene.” Each stanza contains 9 lines - 8 lines of iambic pentameter and ends with a single line written in iambic hexameter. This type of iambic hexameter line (a line of poetic meter comprising 12 syllables) is called an ‘Alexandrine.’ Alexandrines are common in early French poetry. Plays in English often used

Alexandrines, but during the times of Marlowe and Shakespeare, it was replaced by iambic pentameter (a line of poetic meter comprising 10 syllables).

HERE IS THE FORM FOR THE SPENSERIAN STANZA

As stated, the stanza's predominant meter is iambic pentameter with a final line in iambic hexameter. The rhyming scheme for the 9 lines is a,b,a,b,b,c,b,c,c. HERE IS ONE OF MY SPENSERIAN STANZAS AS AN EXAMPLE.

CREEKS AND AIR

A SPENSERIAN STANZA

By PHILIP CHURCH

- 1 - Appalachian living's as pure as air, - A
- 2 - Exhaled by deep mountain forests so green. - B
- 3 - A life to live without disdain or care, - A
- 4 - Upon the world outside, so hard, so mean. - B
- 5 - Up here pertains to Lord and life, so clean, - B
- 6 - As creeks from down mountains, to stream displayed;C
- 7 - Among the deep hollers to flow unseen, - B
- 8 - By all who live by sight of life dismayed. - C

9 - Or lose the track of care, of that in life, mislaid. – C -
(iambic hexameter – Alexandrine)

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own Spenserian Stanza, or other stanza types (even the dreaded Sestina, if you dare!) using any of the different forms described.

CHAPTER TWO

PICTURE POEMS AND WRITING THE FIBONACCI

(LESSON 5)

One of the joys of writing poetry is found within the versatility of poetry itself! There are myriad types, forms and methods to choose from in writing poetry and new types are being created all the time. Among the more modern types are 'Picture Poems!' Also known as 'visual' and 'concrete' poetry, 'picture poetry' is ideal for getting children involved in writing, or anyone who finds mixing poetry with art a novel idea. Picture poetry can be fun to create! Essentially, it is just an image, any image, created out of words. Although the term is modern, the notion of arranging letters to enhance a poem's meaning is ancient. This type of writing has been seen in Greek poetry, especially for religious art, as old as the 3rd century BCE! A classic example can be found in the works of 17th century poet George Herbert. His poem, "Easter Wings",

was printed on 2 pages - with one stanza per page turned sideways, to resemble a bird with outstretched wings. Picture poetry can be as simple or complex as you like. Rhythm, rhyming scheme and meter aren't as important in this form as it is in others. As of a matter of fact, a simple method is to draw an outline of your subject (trees, dogs, flowers etc.) and simply 'fill-in' the drawing with your poem's words!

Of course, there are some classic poetic forms which, executed correctly, result in a particular geometric shape. One example of this is known as 'The Diamante.' The Diamante is composed of 7 lines. These lines are written in such a way as to form the shape of a diamond, hence the name 'diamante!' The form is fairly modern, being developed in 1969 by the writer Iris Tiedt.

The form is accomplished by word 'types,' rather than metered syllables, to form its lines. The important thing to remember is that the Diamante has 2 subjects – a 'beginning subject' and an 'opposite, ending subject.' So, the 'beginning subject' of the piece is named using only 1 word in the first line. Then, the second line must consist of 2 adjectives describing that subject. Then, the third line must have 3 verbs which are related to the subject. A fourth line then has four nouns, and here it gets a little tricky. Of the 4 nouns, the first 2 are related to the subject, but only the first two nouns are related to the first subject. The other two words describe, or are related to the 'ending or opposite subject.' The remaining lines are simply put in reverse, relating to the ending subject. Below is the form:

Subject

Adjective-Adjective
Verb - Verb - Verb
Noun-Noun ---- Noun-Noun
Verb - Verb - Verb
Adjective-Adjective
Subject

EXAMPLE:

(Author unknown)

DAY

Sunny Bright

Playing Sweating Burning

Sun Light Darkness Moon

Scaring Setting Sleeping

Black Stars

NIGHT

While there are many ways to compose a ‘picture poem,’ my favorite is called ‘The Fibonacci.’ I like the

‘Fibonacci’ – or ‘FIB’ – because of its simplicity to create and its profound role in the ‘language of creation’ – mathematics!

Known simply as Fibonacci, Leonardo Bonacci (1170 – 1250) was an Italian mathematician and considered to be "the most talented Western mathematician of the Middle Ages." In one of his many books, he addressed the growth of a rabbit population. What he discovered was a naturally occurring sequence of numbers. This would come to be known as the ‘Fibonacci Sequence.’ In the Fibonacci sequence, each number is the sum of the previous two numbers added together. The sequence is - 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, - etc. The Fibonacci Sequence is nature's numbering system. It can be found everywhere in nature, from plant leaves to the patterns of flower petals, the spikes of pinecones and those of pineapples. The numbers of the Fibonacci Sequence can be found in the growth of every living thing, including cells, and even human beings! Consider the fact that we humans have 8 fingers with 3 bones in each finger and 2 thumbs with 2 bones each, equaling 5 digits on each hand!

WRITING THE FIBONACCI

The Fibonacci poetic form, or ‘Fib’ was developed by writer Gregory Pincus. The ‘Fib’ is a Sestet, or 6 line stanza, containing 20 syllables. It is the syllable count per line which follows the Fibonacci Sequence of 1/1/2/3/5/8 – It’s just that simple! Below is an example of the form written by Pincus himself:

- (1) One**
 - (1) Small,**
 - (2) Precise,**
 - (3) Poetic,**
 - (4) Spiraling mixture:**
- (8) Math plus poetry yields the Fib.**

Gregory Pincus

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own 'picture poem,' or 'Fib' using any of the different forms described.

CHAPTER THREE

WRITING THE HAIKU

LESSON 6

Go outside for a stroll and take a good look around. Focus on the details you might normally miss. Grasp any exceptional moment, feeling or image you encounter in nature. Concentrate on how it makes you feel. Discover what is important about this encounter, hidden within the details. Is there something remarkable or surprising about the encounter? More importantly – is there a story to be told?

This is part of the pre-writing process of the famous Japanese form of poetry called 'Haiku.' The term Haiku is loosely applied to any short, impressionistic poem, but there are certain characteristics that are commonly associated with the genre. These would include, but aren't limited to, a focus on some aspect of nature or the seasons - a contemplative or impressionistic subject. Imagery predominates over ideas and statements in haiku, so that meaning is typically suggestive, requiring participation by the reader. The avoidance of metaphor and use of non-rhyming lines are hallmarks for the haiku form.

Previously called hokku, haiku was given its current name at the end of the 19th century. The fundamental aesthetic quality of both hokku and haiku is that - it is internally sufficient, independent of context, as a complete work. Haiku is just 1 of the 8 major Japanese poetry forms, which are: **haiku · haikai · kanshi · waka · hokku · renga · renku · tanka**

An English Haiku is a very short poem in the English language, following to a greater or lesser extent the form and style of the Japanese haiku. A typical haiku is a 3 line observation about a fleeting moment involving nature. The first haiku written in English date from the early 20th century, influenced by English translations of traditional Japanese haiku, and the form has grown in popularity ever since. Arguably, the first successful haiku in English was "In a Station of the Metro" by Ezra Pound, published in 1913, even though, excluding the title, it is only two lines long. A number of mainstream poets, including Pound,

wrote what they called hokku, usually in a 5 – 6 - 4 syllable pattern. Amy Lowell published several hokku in her book "What's O'Clock" (1925; winner of the Pulitzer Prize).

Individualistic haiku-like verses by the innovative Buddhist poet and artist Paul Reys appeared in print as early as 1939. Other Western writers and well-known English poets have written some haiku, including those of the Beat era, such as Jack Kerouac and Richard Wright, who all wrote original haiku in English. Unfortunately though, their haiku are not considered an important part of their work. However, Haiku has also proven popular in schools as a way to encourage the appreciation and writing of poetry among students.

HERE IS THE FORM FOR THE ENGLISH HAIKU

The English Haiku is written in a 3 line stanza composed of 17 syllables, arranged in a 5–7–5 syllabic meter. Preferably, the entire Haiku should be expressed in one breath. Haikus employ little to no punctuation or capitalization, except proper nouns which are usually capitalized.

1st LINE - 5 Syllables

2nd LINE -7 Syllables

3rd LINE - 5 Syllables

Consider this Haiku I wrote in 2012

BLUE RIDGE HAIKU

Misty, and brilliant, = 5 syllables

Formidable, blue mountains, = 7 syllables

Arcane, and ancient. = 5 syllables

- Philip Kent Church

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own Haiku using any information on the described form.

CHAPTER FOUR

WRITING THE PETRARCHAN SONNET

LESSON 7

Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) was born in 1304 in Italy and is considered to be the ‘Poet Laureate’ of the Renaissance. He was a renowned poet and scholar who travelled Europe and England, reviving interest in the classical literature, which existed prior to the Renaissance. Petrarch had a substantial influence on English poetry, beginning with Chaucer and lasting to the 1800s! It would be Petrarch’s sonnet structure which, with minor changes, would eventually become the structure for the Shakespearian, or English Sonnet. While the English Sonnet is a 14 line poem of ‘Iambic Pentameter,’ divided into 4 stanzas (3 quatrains & 1 couplet) - The Petrarchan Sonnet’s 14 lines of iambic pentameter are divided into only 2 stanzas. The first is composed of 8 lines and is called an ‘octave’ which is followed by the second stanza, composed of 6 lines and is called a sestet. The rhyming scheme for the octave is a,b,b,a,a,b,b,a, but the rhyming scheme for the sestet can be either of 2 schemes, which are c,d,e,c,d,e, or c,d,c,d,c,d! Classically, the Petrarchan Sonnet presents a question, an argument, or observation with the opening octave stanza. Then, the sestet stanza ‘answers’ – addresses - what has been posed. This creates the ‘turn,’ called the ‘volta’ between the 8th and 9th lines, just as the volta occurs in the structure of the English Sonnet.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER – “The ‘pentameter’ simply means a 10 syllable verse divided into 5 iambs, hence ‘penta’ (meaning 5). The ‘iamb’ is called an ‘iambic foot’ being comprised of 2 syllables where the first syllable is

unaccented and the second syllable accented. So, 5 iambic feet equals 1 line of verse in 'iambic pentameter!' To better understand the iambic foot, think of a heartbeat -- ta-DUM, ta -DUM, ta-DUM. Notice how the first syllable 'ta' is not accented, but the second syllable 'DUM' is accented – **ta-DUM is one iambic foot.** 5 iambic feet = iambic pentameter – **ta-DUM, ta-DUM, ta-DUM, ta-DUM, ta-DUM.**

HERE IS THE FORM OF THE PETRARCHAN SONNET

Remember, the sonnet is executed in 2 stanzas - the "octave" (8 lines) and the "sestet" (6 lines). The octave poses the theme or problem using the rhyming scheme a,b,b,a,a,b,b,a. Then the sestet resolves, or addresses the theme of the octave, following either the rhyming schemes of c,d,e,c,d,e or c,d,c,d,c,d. Here is an example of one of my Petrarchan Sonnets:

A PETRARCHAN SONNET

By Philip Kent Church

An octave with a sestet rhymed abbaabba & cdcdcd

A - The Sun proceeds the mountain's sky in kind,

B - As long traveled a trail is trekked to gain.

B - A life prevailed upon, journeyed to feign,

A - Like some ancient clockwork refused to wind.

A - The whole of truth, with which we hold in mind,

B - It's what we base ourselves upon, be lain.

B - We must remember all that may pertain,

A - Or find we are among the deaf and blind,

VOLTA (Turn)

C - As like autumn's dead leaves discard the trees,

D - And mountain peaks resound without reply.

C - We live our lives through all with aim to please,

D - But there remains, of hope, hopeful retry.

C - To gain the chance to change, as like the breeze;

D - Be warmed by Sun, upon which we rely.

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own Petrarchan Sonnet using either of the 2 rhyming schemes for the sestet described.

CHAPTER FIVE

LITERARY DEVICES

LESSON 8

As a departure this week, rather than discussing metrics or a specific form, the subject will involve exploring some extremely important ‘Literary Devices’ which are highly useful as a part of any poetry writer’s skill-set. These are –

CONSONANCE – The repeating of the consonant sounds at the ending of words.

ALLITERATION – The repeating of the sounds at the beginning of words, closely grouped together.

And lastly,

ASSONANCE – The repeating of vowel sounds of words in a verse, in order to set a mood for the poem.

Being a proud ‘son’ of the ‘Old Dominion’ state of Virginia and a poet, an obvious idol of mine is the famous 19th century Virginian and poet Edgar Allan Poe! Poe utilized all 3 of these devices masterfully, in his exceptional poetry. This is exemplified nowhere better than his masterpiece ‘The Raven!’ Please notice, as you read this excerpt from the piece, how Poe uses the ‘S’ sound to achieve consonance - the ‘R’ and ‘S’ sounds at the beginning of words for alliteration - and the ‘I’ and ‘UR’ sounds used in achieving assonance!

From **'THE RAVEN'**

by **Edgar Allan Poe**

“Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the
floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to
borrow

From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost
Lenore -

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels named
Lenore -

Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me - filled me with fantastic terrors never felt
before;

So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood
repeating`

'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door -

Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; -

This it is, and nothing more,”

As this piece reveals, the use of these 3 literary devices in writing masterfully, should not be underestimated. So, let's examine them, 1 at a time, more closely.

CONSONANCE

Consonance is, simply and basically put, a sound which is pleasing to the ear created by repeating consonant sounds within a line of verse. More often than not, this occurs at the ending of words, but may occur at the beginning or middle as well. Here are some examples of consonance - bitter & batter, pitter & patter, went & sent, tomorrow & sorrow etc. Now, here are examples of consonance being used in poems. These are excerpted from 2 very famous poems, by 2 very famous poets.

THE ACROBATS

by Shel Silverstein

“I'll swing by my ankles.
She'll cling to your knees.
As you hang by your nose,
From a high-up trapeze.
But just one thing, please,
As we float through the breeze,

Don't sneeze.”

‘STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING’

by Robert Frost

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake.

The only other sound's the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

ALLITERATION

The definition of alliteration simply means to have 2 or more words together in a verse that begin with the same sounds. - An example would be ‘Woeful, Wailing, Winds.’

- Alliteration is simply repeating a sound, typically consonants, in a single line of verse, which are written closely to each other. Using alliteration can give a poem an almost musical flow!

Alliteration in poetry is almost as old as poetry itself, being present in such early works as ‘Beowulf,’ over 1200 years ago! Once again, consider Poe’s ‘The Raven,’ and notice how alliteration is employed in these excerpts.

From **'THE RAVEN'**

by **Edgar Allan Poe:**

“Once upon a midnight dreary while I pondered weak and weary”

The ‘W’ sound.

“And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain”

The ‘S’ sound

“Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before”

The ‘D’ sound

Actually, many of us have learned alliteration as the ‘twisting’ ingredient found in favorite ‘tongue twisters!’ Consider the following examples to see for yourself.

‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers - how many pickled peppers did Peter Piper pick?’

‘She sells seashells by the seashore!’

‘How much wood would a woodchuck chuck - if a woodchuck could chuck wood?’

Additionally, many of us encountered alliteration early on in nursery rhymes, in children’s books, such as the Dr.

Seuss books and in a myriad of commercial advertising slogans!

ASSONANCE

Assonance is probably the most difficult of the 3 literary devices to master when writing poetry. Assonance is achieved by vowel sounds being repeated in words written closely to each other in a line of verse. However, it is a powerful device for setting a ‘mood’ or ‘tone’ in a piece, as well as creating rhythms and cadence in a poem. Thus, it as an extremely helpful tool for any serious writer of poetry! Here are 2 universally accepted and very simple tips on how to use assonance to set ‘mood.’

1 – To create a ‘low-energy’ (sad or serious) mood, use words with the ‘long’ vowel sounds.

2 – Conversely, use ‘short’ vowel sounds to increase the ‘energy’ and lighten the poem’s mood.

Once again, let’s consider the work of Poe and see how assonance was employed in these excerpts from another of his masterpieces – “The Bells!”

From **'THE BELLS'**

by **Edgar Allan Poe**

“Hear the mellow wedding bells,
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!
From the molten-golden notes,
And an in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats.”

“What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone!
For every sound that floats

From the rust within their throats

Is a groan.”

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own poetry using any of the 3 literary devices described, separately or in combination.

CHAPTER SIX

LYRICS AND SONG WRITING

LESSON 9

LYRICS

The word 'lyric' comes to us from ancient Greece and the Greek word 'lyrikos.' It was derived as a term having to do with words being set to music of the ancient stringed instrument, the lyre. What does this have to do with poetry? The answer is that lyrics were employed in the singing of Greek 'lyric poetry' and were an ancient poetic form which existed as far back as the third millennium BCE! As of a matter of fact, it was part of ancient Greek mythology attributed to 'Euterpe,' one of the 9 'Muses' overseeing art and music. Lyrics were adopted as a distinct poetic form of English poetry, especially sonnets, in the 16th century. - Simply put, lyrics are words that make up songs. Classically this is accomplished by the combining of a stanza, called the 'verse' and a separate (often smaller) stanza, which is usually refrained in the song, called the chorus. The writer of lyrics is not only a poet, but is also called a 'lyricist.' A modern example of the importance of a lyricist in creating good music, by partnering with an

accomplished musician, would be Elton John, who took the words of the lyricist Bernie Taupin and created some of the most popular music of modern times! The point is – you don't have to be a musician to write great lyrics for great songs - you need only be poetic!

SONG STRUCTURE

Actually, writing a song is quite easy, as compared to other classic forms of poetry. There's no set meter or rhyming scheme – no fixed number of lines for either the verse or chorus and no emphasis regarding accentuation of the words employed. Indeed, songwriting can be a fun diversion for the serious poet, usually focused on metrics and format, turning lyricist and experiencing the liberties one can take in the subjects and wide open formatting available! The structure of a good song is comprised of only 3 basic parts – the verse, the chorus and the bridge. Many well-known songs, including modern 'hit' songs, follow the simple format of:

'VERSE/CHORUS/VERSE/CHORUS/BRIDGE'

THE VERSE

The verses of a song are simply the stanzas which present the story - the focus of the song. The song's entire verse is

usually comprised of 2 stanzas, separated by a chorus stanza. A good number of lines for each verse stanza would be a 6 line sestet, or an 8 line octave, but it could be more or less lines. That's up to the lyricist. A good amount of lines for the chorus stanza is a 4 line quatrain, but, just like the verse, that's up to the song's writer.

THE CHORUS

This is, more likely than not, the most important component of a song, the chorus! All the verses in the verse stanzas should either build up to, or expound upon the chorus. Additionally, it is the chorus that most people commit to memory and sing along with, rather than the verses. The chorus is the 'heart' of a song! It is also the place where the song's 'hook' or 'tag line' is placed. The 'hook' or 'tag line' should be the most memorable line in the song and often is, or includes, the song's title. The best placement of the hook line is either as the first or last line of the chorus.

***A PERSONAL TIP**

As a lyricist I've found that the hook can be a great place to actually begin the writing of a song. Personally, I prefer the hook to be the last line of a 4 line chorus and the title of the song. My method is to choose a hook line from the myriad 'catch-phrases' and colloquialisms we hear in everyday speech. This is particularly the case for a good 'Country' song. Colloquialisms are rife in Country song titles and hook lines. Consider songs that include lines like

– “I Might Not Be As Good As I Once Was, But I’m As Good Once, As I Ever Was” or “Feeling Single, Seeing Double!” The list is never ending. Regardless, I recommend 1 good line that embodies the main point of the song and write it as the last line of the chorus. Then, create a line that will rhyme with the hook, which maintains the hook’s subject, or addresses the point in some way. Now, you have a rhymed couplet and have written a complete half of a 4 line chorus as well! To complete the chorus requires only 2 rhymed lines to begin the chorus, but are in keeping with the hook’s subject or point. That results in the ‘heart’ of the song being complete. All that’s left is composing 2 verse stanzas – 1 to precede the chorus, and 1 to follow, that, in turn, will precede the refraining (repeating) of the chorus. Now, you have a complete song, or an almost complete song that might only require a final step – the ‘bridge.’

THE BRIDGE

The bridge of a song is usually a single line, or a 2 line couplet which can appear as the first or last lines of a song. Placing a bridge in a song is optional. Some songs have bridges, many do not include them. The bridge can be a restatement of the song’s topic, rhymed or unrhymed, driving the point home. It can be a ‘moral’ to the song’s ‘story, or even a ‘twist!’ You can use the bridge to come right out and say what the song is about, if the piece is full of imagery or metaphor. It’s completely up to the lyricist to choose what the bridge says or does, or whether to even include a bridge in the song at all.

AN EXAMPLE OF AN ORIGINAL SONG

Here is one of my songs for an example. This song was actually set to music, recorded as a ‘demo’ and performed onstage in Nashville by the ‘up & coming’ Country artist Jody Pyles!

This song is composed in 2 ‘verse stanzas’ of 6 lines each (a sestet) and 2 choruses containing 4 lines (a quatrain) each. It has no bridge and the 2nd chorus is not a refrain of the 1st chorus, but it’s a good example of using a ‘hook line’ to title and anchor a piece.

The hook of this song is something that happens, especially in ‘rebound’ relationships, due to human nature. Folks who break up or divorce after a lengthy relationship, then enter into another relationship, can probably relate to this. Many times, if only by force of habit, we errantly call our new love interest . . . by our Ex’s name!

I CALLED HER BY YOUR NAME

By: Philip Kent Church © 2012

(1st Verse)

We spent so much time together, still it all went bad,

Sometimes we must lose, to see the good we had,

When loving is hard, it can be a rough ride,

We harden our hearts, to protect our foolish pride,
Though hearts may break, with every tear in our eyes,
All the dreams will disappear, and our love just dies,

(1st Chorus)

When I call out your name, you don't answer anymore,
I reach out to hold you, but you walked out that door,
Though my lips may stumble, it's my heart to blame,
When I look into her eyes, and call her by your name.

(2nd Verse)

After being so lonely, and so much time had passed,
In the arms of another, and over you at last,
Fooling myself that love, once again, I'd found,
But the cruelest bounce in life, can be the rebound,
Now, it's not fair to her, cause her love is true,
And it would break her heart, to know I still loved you,

(2nd Chorus)

But I'm still thinking of you, with every country song,
And I'm praying each night, that I could just move on,
But though I live with regret, and endless shame,
I look into her eyes, and call her by your name.

There you have it! Using this lesson, you're invited to write your own original song lyrics using the information described.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WRITING THE RONDEAU

LESSON 3

The rondeau, like the villanelle, began as a type of song centuries ago. Originating in medieval France, the rondeau (French for 'round') was used to address subjects such as spirituality, romance and seasonal changes. Just as the villanelle, the rondeau makes use of refrains, but instead of a single repeating word in refrain – the rondeau repeats (refrains) an entire line of verse throughout the poem. This repeating line is called the '**rentrement**'.

The rentrement begins as the rondeau's first line of verse. After this, it becomes the last line of the remaining stanzas. It is this 'echoing' rentrement which causes the rondeau to 'circle back' when recited – hence its name's meaning as

‘round!’ The rentrement also makes the rondeau a great utility for changing the meaning of the piece, or ‘driving home’ a topic. For instance, many rondeaus begin in sadness or melancholy, but end in triumph!

HERE’S THE BASIC FORM FOR A RONDEAU

The rondeau is a 15 line poem (remember each line of poetry should be kept around 10 syllables) composed in 3 stanzas. The first stanza has 5 lines of verse and is called a ‘quintet.’ The second stanza has 4 lines and is called a ‘quatrain.’ The final stanza is comprised of 6 lines and, accordingly, is called a sestet. Just like a villanelle, the rondeau only employs 2 rhymes (‘a’ & ‘b’) throughout the piece, including the rentrement.

Using ‘R’ to denote the rentrement, the form is: abba
aabR aabbaR

1st Quintet – a,a,b,b,a

2nd Quatrain – a,a,b,R

3rd Sestet – a,a,b,b,a,R

Here is a rondeau written by Carlos Gomez and myself, for consideration.

“Witch Hunt (innocent blood) “

By: Carlos Gomez & Philip Church

A - Pointing fingers at those they hate

A - With fallacies - enforced their weight

B - With plunder and idolatry

B - They know not Jesus' piety

A - Condemning an innocent mate.

A - So called witches - tallied rate

A - Souls condemned from bridges of hate

B - By Puritan pride - ungodly

R - They point their fingers at those they hate

A - Innocents suff'ring wrongful fate

A - Saints buried beyond sacred gate

B - Hysterical – accusingly

B – The allegations made falsely

A – And the truth revealed – much too late

R - They point their fingers at those they hate

Lastly, a writing tip for composing a rondeau is to create an opening line, the all-important rentrement, to be the focus of the piece.

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own rondeau using the form, example and tips described.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ODE

Originally done quite theatrically and set to music, the 'ode' is an archaic form of lyric poetry, developed in Ancient Greece. In modern times, the ode has been refurbished into different types of poems in praise of, or dedication to particular persons, places, things, or events. This is especially true with the 'English Ode,' proponents of which have included such notable poets as Keats, Wordsworth and Percy Shelly.

The classic format for the English Ode would be stanzas consisting of ten verses --- with a rhyming scheme of a, b,

a, b, c, d, e, c, d, e. That notwithstanding, one of the three major types of odes is called the 'Irregular Ode,' which has no formal structure, meter or rhyming scheme whatsoever. The other two types of ode are called --- the 'Pindaric' and the 'Horatian' odes.

The 'Pindaric Ode' is named after the ancient Greek poet Pindar, who is generally credited with creating the form. These Pindaric Odes were normally performed ceremoniously at formal settings, or functions. This was especially true in celebrating military, or athletic victories.

As stated, the Pindaric Odes were quite theatric, set to music and began with an opening, called 'the strophe.' Comparable in some ways to the 'volta' used in sonnet forms, the word "strophe" simply means 'to turn.' In essence, the 'strophe' is likened to the first part of an argument. In ancient times it would be sung on the stage by a chorus. While performing the strophe, the chorus would 'turn,' moving in procession from stage-right, to stage-left.

The strophe would then be followed by the 'antistrophe.' If the strophe is seen as the introduction, or the "first part of an argument" --- the antistrophe represents the 'second part' of that argument. It may also simply be a deeper exploration of the topic, presented in the strophe.

Just as 'strophe' means "to turn" --- the word 'antistrophe' means "to turn back." Accordingly, the chorus would move, 'turning' in the reverse direction, while reciting the antistrophe. In this way, the antistrophe functions as a reply, or retort to the strophe. The antistrophe may also be

used as a 'red herring' to muddy the subject and make it difficult for the audience to guess the ode's conclusion.

Finally, the Pindaric Ode is concluded with an 'epode.' The word epode means "after the song." Comparable to a book's 'epilogue,' it is the last part, and gets 'the last word!' Also similar to the final couplet of a sonnet, the epode ties together any of the story's 'loose ends,' or serves as the 'moral of the story.' The epode is also where the chorus would move center-stage and convey, usually in a different meter of verse than the strophe and antistrophe --- the 'grand finale' of the ode.

**As an example, here's the opening of a Pindaric,
'English Ode' by William Wordsworth:**

**"Ode on Intimations of Immortality from
Recollections of Early Childhood"**

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore;--

Turn wheresoe'er I may

By night or day,

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The 'Horatian Ode' was developed in ancient Rome by the poet Horace. While following the Pindaric structure of strophe, antistrophe and epode, it is much more informal in its nature. This type of ode is not as ceremonial, or theatrical as the Pindaric Ode. It need only be narrated and may, or may not be performed with a chorus. It also differs in that the form of the first stanza, the meter of verse, must be repeated in subsequent stanzas, including the epode. However, the form and meter of the first stanza, is left up to the poet. Here's an example of a Horatian Ode stanza by John Keats:

Ode to a Nightingale

A Horatian Ode

By John Keats

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

'Tis not through envy of the happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,-
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singing of summer in full-throated ease.”

As mentioned, the third type of ode is called the ‘**Irregular Ode,**’ which only has the requirement of being a stanza of verse in praise of, or dedication to someone, something or someplace. This would be my personally preferred type of ode to craft. Here’s an example of one of my Irregular Odes --- and a personal favorite, to recite at public readings.

ODE TO THE EXOSKELETON

An ‘Irregular Ode’

(Excerpted from the book “In Search of an Eternal Buzz” - Philip Kent Church)

Though I prayed, swatted and sprayed,
To just keep my house neat,
And, time’s since, a bunch - the occasional crunch –
Beneath my feet.
Then my cat has no doubt, and spits it out,
With no free meal today,
Nothing truer has been said, though dead -
STINK-BUGS NEVER GO AWAY!

CHAPTER NINE

WRITING THE VILLANELLE

LESSON 4

While it is born in writing, poetry is very much about the spoken word. Indeed, it has long been held that poetry originated from oral traditions recited generationally by ancient peoples at the dawning of our societies. I personally believe all poets should recite their poetry aloud

as an integral part of the editing process, before committing their words to the final draft. Words, spoken together as a line of verse, can create certain rhythms. These rhythms, combined with other verses in a stanza, can create a cadence to the piece as a whole. These cadences and rhythms can be pleasing to the ear, regardless of the subject matter within the poem. Thus, good subject matter delivered with good rhythm & cadence make for a doubly enjoyable piece to the hearer/reader of that piece.

A simple device used to create rhythm and cadence, while stressing what's being communicated, is the use of 'refrains.' A refrain is simply repeating a line of verse, or verses within the body of a poem. Just as in everyday speaking, repeating a topic adds weight to what's being said – in poetry a repeated (refrained) verse can create many different effects upon rhythm and cadence, depending on what is being refrained and how the refrains are placed within a poetic structure. The great part is that poets can use the effects caused by refrains to create different moods or ambience within the 'flow' of their writing. One of the classic poetic forms which incorporates this beautifully in its metrics is called the Villanelle. The 'echo effect' of the structured refrains in the Villanelle can be enchanting and wonderfully rustic, with an almost haunting quality!

The Villanelle has come to us from the troubadours of the Renaissance and were originally non-structured dancing songs. The word Villanelle is thought to be from the Italian word villano, which meant 'a peasant.' The original Villanelles spoke of the simple and rustic lives of the peasantry. While there is disagreement on when the

Villanelle first became a formatted type of poem - it wasn't until the 1800s that it was defined as the fixed structure we have today. For instance, Oscar Wilde was a proponent of the Villanelle form.

HERE'S THE BASIC FORM FOR THE VILLANELLE

The Villanelle is a poem of 19 lines with a simple 'rhyming scheme' of only 2 repeating rhymes and two refrains. The form is made up of 5 tercets (a tercet is a 3 line stanza) and concluded with a quatrain (4 line stanza). The first and third lines of the opening tercet are repeated alternately in the last lines of the succeeding stanzas; then in the final stanza, the refrain serves as the poem's 2 concluding lines. Using capitals for the refrains and lowercase letters for the rhymes, the form is –

***1 2 *3 4 5 *6 7 8 *9 10 11 *12 13 14 *15
16 17 *18 *19**

**A1, b, A2 / a, b, A1 / a, b, A2 / a, b, A1 / a, b, A2
/ /a, b, A1, A2.**

Here it's seen that the Villanelle's 19 lines use only two rhymes (a & b) throughout the whole form. The very first line is refrained (repeated) as lines 6, 12 and 18 and the third line is refrained as lines 9, 15 and 19.

Notice how the lines which form the first tercet 'echo' throughout the poem and then together form the conclusion as the last 2 lines of the poem in the final quatrain.

Probably the best example of the form is Dylan Thomas's famous Villanelle, shown here. See if you can get a sense of the 'echoing' effect of the refraining of the first & third

lines in the opening tercet repeated throughout, then ending the piece in the last 2 lines.

“DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT”

By: Dylan Thomas

(1st Tercet)

01 - Do not go gentle into that good night, (A1)

02 - Old age should burn and rave at close of day; (b)

03 - Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (A2)

(2nd Tercet)

04 - Though wise men at their end know dark is right (a)

05 - Because their words had forked no lightning they (b)

06 - Do not go gentle into that good night. (A1)

(3rd Tercet)

07 - Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright (a)

08 - Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay, (b)

09 - Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (A2)

(4th Tercet)

10 - Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight, (a)

11 - And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way, (b)

12 - Do not go gentle into that good night. (A1)

(5th Tercet)

13 - Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight (a)

14 - Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay, (b)

15 - Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (A2)

(Ending Quatrain)

16 - And you, my father, there on the sad height, (a)

17 - Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray. (b)

18 - Do not go gentle into that good night. (A1)

19 - Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (A2)

As for metering the Villanelle's verses, obviously the Dylan Thomas piece is using iambic pentameter (10 syllables per line of unaccented and accented syllables alternately as iambs) but there doesn't seem to be any universal agreement whether Villanelle's require metered lines as part of the form. My take on the subject, is do

whichever you prefer. If you like iambic pentameter then go ahead, if not – just write absent of metering syllables. It is the structure of stanza and refrains which make the Villanelle so hauntingly beautiful in its cadence and flow, not the meter of the syllables inscribed.

Lastly, here's my personal writing 'tip' on composing a good Villanelle and how I've written my own. Think up 2 lines of fully rhymed verse as a couplet. These 2 lines are the 'meat' – the focus of the poem, so you want to really state your topic well in these 2 lines of rhymed verse. In the Dylan Thomas poem the 2 lines would be "Do not go gentle into that good night – Rage, rage against the dying of the light." By creating just those 2 lines you've also created the concluding lines of the poem & the first and third lines beginning your poem and the remaining 4 refrains as well. In other words, by creating one good rhyming couplet of 2 lines, you've actually written 8 of the poem's 19 line total! And yes, you've begun at the end of the poem by doing it this way and can honestly claim you can compose a complex classic poetic form by . . . writing it backwards!

There you have it! Using this information, you're invited to write your own Villanelle using the form, example and tips described.