

Poetry Lessons for the Hard of Rhyming: 103

By

Kay Pluta

Once you start to watch your meter, you might watch it too closely. In Lesson 102, I showed you what happened if you paid more attention to syllable count than your metrical pattern. Now, I will show you what happens if you don't vary your meter.

Once you get the hang of this meter business, you might become a bit...oh...obsessive about it. I mean you have to make sure it's perfect, right?

Following are four lines with the same pattern. Read it aloud. Okay whisper it aloud, if you are afraid somebody's listening.

Duh DUM duh DUM duh DUM

duh DUM duh DUM duh DUM

duh DUM duh DUM duh DUM

duh DUM duh DUM duh DUM

Are you still awake? C'mon shake it off. That one was dull, sing-songy, a plain front mustard colored sweater.

Fine, you say. I knew this meter business wasn't what it was

cracked up to be. See, that sounded stupid. You pretty much said so yourself. So I should stop worrying about meter, and just write rhyme. It will turn out okay.

Okay then, let's see what happens if we just..ahem...forget about meter. Read this one aloud.

Duh DUM DUM duh duh DUM DUM duh

duh duh duh DUM duh

duh duh DUM duh duhDUM duhDUM duhDUM DUM

DUM DUM duh duh duh DUM duh

I will pause while you get both your brain and your tongue out of a twist. That one had no pattern. It was random. It was a mess. It was a sweater with every line knitted in a different pattern, and consequently it fell apart.

Okay, third try. Read these lines aloud.

DUM duh DUM, DUM duh DUM

DUM duh, DUM duh, DUM

DUM duh DUM, DUM duh DUM,

DUM duh, DUM duh, DUM

In this example, every other line is varied, but you have a pattern. Let's put words to this one.

Ice and snow, winds that blow,

Sidewalks glazed with white.

Stinging sleet, booted feet

Hurry home tonight.

This would be your classic solid color sweater with a pretty stripe. Or something like that. I think I've lost track of my sweater metaphor, but I hope you catch my drift.

Poetry is made up of patterns. The same pattern repeated is dull, sing-songy. An absence of a clear pattern results in confusing cacophony. A pattern with some design or variation is striking and pleasant.

If you want an example of really fun, kicky rhythm, read some picture books by April Pulley Sayre. Here is the first line from **Ant, Ant, Ant!**

Brush-footed Butterfly. Leaf-footed Bug. Bird Dropping Caterpillar. Slug. Slug. Slug!

Ummm, if you find yourself dancing to that line, go shut the blinds before you get too carried away.

So now go out and duh Dum duh DUm your way into an intricately knitted poem.

It's 10pm, do you know where your anapest is?

****These poetry lessons are dedicated to the memory of Mary Key Ferrell and John Edward Adams**