WRITING ESSENTIALS IN STYLE & COMPOSITION

Week 4: Verse

It is important to distinguish verse from poetry. As the following excerpts make clear, the word "poetry" embraces much more than the word "verse"; however, in Ancient Greece (as in our own time), the word was sometimes applied to anything written in verse:

> "There is poetry, which, as you know, is complex and manifold. All creation or passage of non-being into being is poetry or making, and the processes of all art are creative; and the masters of arts are all poets or makers… Still…you know that they are not called poets, but have other names; only that portion of the art which is separated off from the rest, and is concerned with music and metre, is termed poetry, and they who possess poetry in this sense of the word are called poets." -*Plato, Symposium*

> [I]t is the way with people to tack on 'poet' to the name of a metre, and talk of elegiac-poets and epic-poets, thinking that they call them poets not by reason of the imitative nature of their work, but indiscriminately by reason of the metre they write in. Even if a theory of medicine or physical philosophy be put forth in a metrical form, it is usual to describe the writer in this way; Homer and Empedocles, however, have really nothing in common apart from their metre; so that, if the one is to be called a poet, the other should be termed a physicist rather than a poet. *–Aristotle, Poetics (chapter 1)*

> From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse -- you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do -- which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement, one as to what, say, Alcibiades did or had done to him. -*Aristotle, Poetics (chapter 9)*

Thus the original Greek word "poetry" included all imaginative literature; in its broadest sense, it even applied to the so-called fine arts (painting, sculpture, music, etc.). Verse (as distinct from prose) is writing which employs the natural sounds of our words, as well as their meaning.
The word "verse" is applied to words that have a certain rhythm and/or metre; the word "prose" is applied to words that do not have any particular rhythm or metre.

Now we are beginning to see the incredible potential of language: you may choose your words to accurately convey the meaning; you may arrange your sentence length and order to follow the meaning even more closely; you may use metaphors, examples, or analogies; finally, you may even pull in the sounds of the words themselves to reflect the meaning, or to have an effect on the reader.

Reading 1: Philip Sidney, from *An Apology for Poetry* (continued)

... the final end [of learning] is, to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by, their clay lodgings, can be capable of.

[How a Philosopher Teaches Virtue]

… [Philosophers], casting largess as they go, of definitions, divisions, and distinctions, with a scornful interrogative do soberly ask: Whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to virtue, as that which teaches what virtue is; and teaches it not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects; but also by making known his enemy, vice, which must be destroyed…

[How a Historian Teaches Virtue]

The historian ... denies, in a great chafe, that any man for teaching of virtue and virtuous actions, is comparable to him…. The philosopher, says he, teaches a disputative virtue, but I do an active; his virtue is excellent in the danger-less academy of Plato, but mine shows forth her honourable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt: he teaches virtue by certain abstract considerations; but I only bid you follow the footing of them that have gone before you: old-aged experience goes beyond the fine-witted philosopher; but I give the experience of many ages. Lastly, if he makes the song book, I put the learner's hand to the lute; and if he be the guide, I am the light. [Philosophy] gives the precept, and [history gives] the example.

[Poet, Historian and Philosopher Compared]

Now whom shall we find, since the question stands for the highest form in the school of learning, to be moderator? Truly, as me seems, the poet; and if not a moderator, even the man that ought to carry the title from them both, and much more from all other serving sciences. Therefore compare we the poet with the historian, and with the moral philosopher; and if he go beyond them both, no other human skill can match him…

[Both Philosopher and Historian Fall Short]

The philosopher, therefore, and the historian are they which would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by example; but both, not having both, do … [fall short] . For the philosopher, setting down with thorny arguments the bare rule, is so hard of utterance, and so misty to be conceived… For [the philosopher's] knowledge stands so upon the abstract and general, that happy is that man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he doth understand. On the other side the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be, but to what is; to the particular truth of things, and

not to the general reason of things; that his example draws no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine.

[Poetry Completes Philosophy]

Now does the peerless poet perform both; for whatsoever the philosopher says should be done, he gives a perfect picture of it, by someone by whom he presupposes it was done, so as he couples the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture, I say; for he yields to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestows but a wordy description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul, so much as that other doth.… so, no doubt, the philosopher, with his learned definitions, be it of virtue or vices, matters of public policy or private government, replenishes the memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom, which, notwithstanding, lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy.

[Philosopher Compared to Poet as Teacher]

For conclusion, I say the philosopher teaches, but he teaches obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him; that is to say, he teaches them that are already taught. But the poet is the food for the most delicate of stomachs; the poet is, indeed, the right popular philosopher. Whereof Aesop's tales give good proof; whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts, make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from those dumb speakers.

The Sounds of Our Words

#1: Quality

All of our words are made up of many different types of sounds. Sounds are sudden (t, p, d, g, k, b, c, etc.), drawn out (e, w, y, u, i, o, a, h, f, r, l, z, v, n, m, etc.), smooth (ou, oo, ee, ea), harsh (s, f, z, v), or extremely harsh (sh, sk, ch, etc.).

#2: Rhythm (stress/accent)

Our words are all made up of syllables, or sections that go together when you pronounce them. Some syllables are emphasized more than others, and so when you pronounce the words they make a type of rhythm, much like beats in music.

Let "strong" represent an accented syllable and "weak" represent an unaccented syllable. There are several types of patterns of strong and weak syllables:

- weak, STRONG -iambic foot
- STRONG, weak -trochaic foot

Here are five words that are iambic (weak, STRONG):

- return – (rĭ-tûrn') reTURN
- mistake – (mĭ-stāk') misTAKE
- alive – (ə-līv') aLIVE
- ago – (ə-gō') aGO
- deceive – (dĭ-sēv') deCEIVE

Here are five words that are trochaic (STRONG, weak):

- enter – (ĕn'tər) ENter
- beauty – (byōō'tē) BEAUty
- faithful – (fāth'fəl) FAITHful
- ruler – (rōō'lər) RUler
- common – (kŏm'ən) COMmon

Identify the following words as either iambic or trochaic.

- picture –
- anew –
- winter –
- autumn –
- receive –
- forgive –

Accents apply not only to individual words, but also to entire verses.

A. The following verses are iambic:
A faithful king does not deceive.
He gives to all who will receive.
a FAITH ful KING does NOT de CEIVE
he GIVES to ALL who WILL re CEIVE
weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG

B. The following verses are trochaic:
Years ago the learned teacher
Went to see his friend the preacher.
YEARS a GO the LEARN ed TEA cher
WENT to SEE his FRIEND the PREA cher
STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak

Identify the following verses as either iambic or trochaic:
-Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater,
-She walks in beauty, like the night

Now, using the iambic and trochaic patterns and either eight or ten syllables per line, we create four different meters.

1. Iambic Tetrametre
-iambic = 2 syllables per foot: weak, STRONG
-tetrametre = 4 feet per line -2 syllables per foot × 4 feet = 8 syllables per line
-each line: weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG
-example:
the RING was FOUND in DARKness BLACK
by BILbo BAGgins ON his BACK
-8 syllables per line × 8 lines = 64 syllables in total for your assignment

2. Trochaic Tetrametre
-trochaic = 2 syllables per foot: STRONG, weak
-tetrametre = 4 feet per line -2 syllables per foot × 4 feet = 8 syllables per line
-each line: STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak -example:
IN good TIME and IN good MEAsure
BILbo BAGgins FOUND a TREAsure
(Notice how the word “In” in the first line would not normally be emphasized when we speak. This shows the flexibility of verse.)
-8 syllables per line × 8 lines = 64 syllables in total for your assignment

3. Iambic Pentametre
-iambic = 2 syllables per foot: weak, STRONG
-pentametre = 5 feet per line -2 syllables per foot × 5 feet = 10 syllables per line
-each line: weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG
-10 syllables per line × 8 lines = 80 syllables in total for your assignment

4. Trochaic Pentametre
-trochaic = 2 syllables per foot: STRONG, weak
-pentametre = 5 feet per line -2 syllables per foot × 5 feet = 10 syllables per line
-each line: STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak, STRONG, weak
-10 syllables per line × 8 lines = 80 syllables in total for your assignment

In class exercise: Identify the meter for each of the following poems. Are there any lines which depart from the meter?

1. *Sir Henry Wotton, "A Hymn to My God in a Night of my Late Sickness"*
O thou great power, in whom I move,
For whom I live, to whom I die,
Behold me through thy beams of love,
Whilst on this couch of tears I lie;
And cleanse my sordid soul within,
By thy Christ's blood, the bath of sin.
No hallowed oils, no grains I need,
No rags of saints, no purging fire,
One rosy drop from David's seed
Was worlds of seas to quench thine ire.
O precious ransom, which once paid,
That 'consummatum est' was said:
And said by him that said no more,
But sealed it with his sacred breath.
Thou then, that hast dispunged my score,
And dying wast the death of death,
Be to me now, on thee I call,
My life, my strength, my joy, my all.

2. *John Milton, "On Shakespeare. 1630"*
What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones
The labour of an age in pilèd stones,
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid

Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a live-long monument.
For whilst to th'shame of slow-endeavouring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book,
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

3. *Alfred Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam A.H.H."*
Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

4. *Henry Vaughan, "The Quaere"*
Oh tell me whence that joy doth spring
Whose diet is divine and fair,
Which wears heav'n like a bridal ring
And tramples on doubts and despair?
Whose eastern traffic deals in bright
And boundless empyrean themes,
Mountains of spice, day-stars and light,
Green trees of life, and living streams?
Tell me, oh tell, who did thee bring
And here, without my knowledge, placed,
Till thou didst grow and get a wing,
A wing with eyes, and eyes that taste?
Sure holiness the magnet is,
And love the lure, that woos thee down;
Which makes the high transcendent bliss
Of knowing thee so rarely known.

5. *Shakespeare, Sonnet XVIII*
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

6. *Shakespeare, Twelfth Night*
If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.

7. *William Wordsworth, The Daffodils*
I wandered, lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er dales and hills
When, all at once, I saw a crowd
A host of golden daffodils.

8. *Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*
Through the forest have I gone.
But Athenian found I none,
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower's force in stirring love.
Night and silence.--Who is here?
Weeds of Athens he doth wear:
This is he, my master said,
Despised the Athenian maid;
And here the maiden, sleeping sound,
On the dank and dirty ground.
Pretty soul! she durst not lie
Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.
Churl, upon thy eyes I throw
All the power this charm doth owe.
When thou wakest, let love forbid
Sleep his seat on thy eyelid:
So awake when I am gone;
For I must now to Oberon

Assignment:

- Pick one of the four metres given above: iambic tetrametre, trochaic tetrametre, iambic pentametre, trochaic pentametre.
- Take a passage from one of your favourite authors (Homer, Virgil, Tolkien, Lewis, etc.) and put it into verse.
- If you wish to use an author that is not a Great Books author, please consult with me first.
- Indicate directly on your assignment, which passage you are rewriting and which meter you are using. I wish to see the original passage so that I can compare it with your reworking of it.
- Put the original passage in your own words. Do not just rearrange, or switch out some of the words of original passage. Keep the original idea, but express with NEW words.
- Your lines of verse do not have to rhyme. It is very helpful to make it rhyme, since this gives you a strong framework and ensures that your poem will flow smoothly.
- Write at least eight lines of verse in one of the four metres given above.
- Give your poem a title.
- Type out the original passage on the second page of your document. Keep it short.

Here is the proper format for this assignment:

Sally Student

Mrs Teacher

Advanced Writing

September 19, 2016

YOUR TITLE → A Mad Mad Woman

PASSAGE YOU ARE REWRITING → Shakespeare's Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 5, Lines 385-410

METER YOU ARE USING → Iambic Tetrameter

Invention

Passage you will rewrite: _____

Meter you will use: _____

Title of your poem: _____