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# My Work in the Honors Course

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Grace O. Burton

English 460 -- English Honors Course

May 24, 1950

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## My Work in the Honors Course

In the English Honors Course, I am making a special study of lyric poetry, leading to the production of acceptable original verse. Lyric poetry, originally intended to be sung, now includes most standard forms of verse. This study has included various elements of poetry such as sounds, rhythm, meter, and poetic patterns.

"Writing which is beautiful must symbolize sounds <sup>gratifying</sup> ~~which are pleasing~~ to the ear."<sup>1</sup>  
"Among the vowels, a\_ as in ask, o as in ode, oo as in moon, and the two u sounds in tuneful are the most pleasing. Next come a as in ale, e as in well and in eve, and i as in white and in ill. And positively displeasing are u as in but, a as in all, o as in pod, u as in up, and ou as in out!"<sup>2</sup>

The consonants may probably be arranged something like this in descending order:

Beautiful: l, m, n, r, v, s, d

Negative: t, f, w, y

Ugly: k, b, p, h, g, j, z."<sup>3</sup>

Tennyson, who was a "consummate master of word music", used many long o's, i's, n's, l's, and r's. When it was necessary to use an unpleasant consonant like h, k, g, and p, he was careful to follow it immediately by a beautiful sound.

A study of sounds reveals that:

O, especially long o, implies solemnity and power, and often sadness.

I, especially long i, expresses brightness or joy.

Long a gives a feeling of stateliness, integrity, and deliberation.

Long e gives a feeling of keenness.

Long u and long oo are tuneful and soothing.

Short a as in nap, e as in death, and u as in mud are flat and sometimes depressing.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Creative Writing, Geo. G. Williams, p. 119

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid, p. 119

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid, p. 120



M and n imply soothing or sympathy.

R followed by a long vowel has a calm and musical effect.

L is light and liquid, suitable for use in describing the sea.

S unless followed by a long vowel implies swiftness.

B, t, p, and d and f signify abruptness.

G, h, and j have a rough sound.

Poe's poem, The Raven, presents a study in sounds. Dominant letters noticeably affect the thought and the feeling of a line. A good poetic pattern should have a certain amount of repetition, but not enough to become monotonous. "The essence of rhythm, like that of pattern, is repeat....."<sup>1</sup>

The thought presented is more acceptable if it is related to familiar things. Poetry, which is highly emotional and imaginative, aims to do one of three things --  
"to paint a picture, to convey an idea, or to convey or rouse a feeling..... Emotional intensity of all kinds is part and parcel of the symbolic life. This is characteristic of all artists and prophets."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>A</sup> Atmosphere can be created by using words which enrich the meaning and suggest images. Figures of speech add charm and variety. Concrete words are preferable, rather than those which are abstract, because concrete words are more imaginative. A concrete expression which suggests a thought is more dignified than a bald statement. The artist in words deals with the particular rather than the general. Yet he blends the particulars in such a way as to produce a pleasing and complete picture or idea. Poetry is art in the use of words, and since the significance of words changes, the writer must be familiar with the accepted meaning and pronunciation at a given time. "The knowledge of right words, appropriate phrases, and the more highly developed forms of speech, gives man a power over and above his own limited field of personal action."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Creative Writing, George G. Williams, p. 135.      <sup>2</sup> Language of Wisdom and Folly, Irving  
<sup>3</sup> J. Lee, p. 293.      Ibid, p. 241.



The sacredness and sometimes the mystical influence of the spoken word should not be overlooked.

No period of literature and no writer is purely Realistic, purely Classical, or purely Romantic. "The supreme artists..... are known..... by the perfection of their balance." There are in poetry<sup>1</sup> three fundamental elements of imagination, reason, and the sense of fact.<sup>2</sup> The artist's or poet's<sup>2</sup> appeal is sensuous, not intellectual; his function is not to prove, but to make you see, or hear, or feel."

According to Aristotle, "poetry tends to express the universal....By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity." According to Edgar Allan Poe, ".... a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites by elevating the soul." The humor which is used in poetry should always be of the sympathetic type. We see the weaknesses of verbosity in the comment of an <sup>Indian</sup> old medicine man to a visitor: "White man's poetry no good; it talks too much." Poetry should not be a mass of words void of emotion. It should<sup>3</sup> "be the consolation and expression of the solitary poet," and at the same time give voice to truths of which the reader is partially aware.

Sidney Lanier made this statement:

"For the artist in verse there is no law; the perception and love of beauty constitute the whole outfit." & When Norwegian critics said Ibsen's Peer Gynt was not poetry because it did not conform to established rules, Ibsen replied:

"My book is poetry.... The Norwegian conception of what poetry is shall be made to fit my book."

The English language lends itself better to certain rhythmic patterns which we speak of as the traditional poetic forms. Rhythm is produced "when sounds are divided into equal intervals of time and when these intervals are marked by stresses."<sup>4</sup> The two elements of rhythm are "equal time-intervals, and the stresses which mark them."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Essentials of Poetry, Wm. A. Neilson, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 12. <sup>3</sup> Introduction to Poetry,

<sup>4</sup> Raymond M. Alden, p. 29. <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 156. <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 157.



Metre is characterized not only by equal time-intervals, but these are grouped into verses. The purpose of rhythm is to impress the hearer with a succession of pleasing sounds. Rhythm is also the natural expression of emotion. "Wordsworth suggested that not only does rhythm excite the emotions, but.... it relieves them through its regularity and makes them pleasant rather than painful."

Rhythmical units or feet used in the English language are trochaic, consisting of a stressed syllable plus an unstressed syllable; anapestic, composed of two unstressed syllables plus a stressed syllable; dactylic, made up of a stressed syllable plus two unstressed syllables; and iambic, consisting of one unstressed and one stressed syllable. Iambic and trochaic are the reverse of each other. A trochee is made of two syllables, the first long and the second short. A spondee is two long syllables.

The various types of feet are used to express certain moods. The poet unconsciously ~~falls into~~ <sup>adopts</sup> a certain rhythmical pattern, because it seems best suited to the thought in a particular poem. Iambic has a quality of dignity. Iambic pentameter is the traditional meter for the sonnet. Dactylic meter is used to express action as in Tennyson's *Rizpah*:

"Wailing, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and sea."

But this form of verse often breaks into anapestic in the same poem. It is difficult to maintain the dactylic meter. It is both descending and triple, and is not commonly used. Browning's *The Lost Leader* is dactylic. So is Noyes' *Unity*. A form of the classical dactylic <sup>hexameter</sup> is often used in elegies. Trochaic is less natural and anapestic less frequent than iambic in English verse.

Iambic and trochaic are duple meters. Trochaic feet are used in verse of four stresses like Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, and Poe's *Raven*. Trochaic "is the rhythm of the military march". Anapests are used to express triumph as in *Prospice* by Browning.



Iambic and anapestic types use "rising" or "ascending" rhythm. Trochaic and dactylic are characterized by "falling" or "descending" rhythm. Rising rhythm is more often used in English poetry.

The patterns of poetry which I have considered in this study up to this point are free verse, the couplet, the tercet, the quatrain, the quintet, the sestet, and the octave. The types of poems which I have written since beginning the Honors Course include both the Petrarchian and the Shakespearean sonnet, the triolet (a French type), the quintet, and the octave. The quatrain is illustrated in the stanzas of my poem Daffodils which was revised during this course.

I wish to submit the following original poems:

Allegory of the Sunrise -- free verse

Daffodils -- quatrains in iambic tetrameter (duple meter)

Spring Is Here -- quintet in (duple) iambic tetrameter

She Expected an A -- triolet

Wings -- octaves, dactylic and anapestic (triple meter)

Home -- Shakespearean sonnet in iambic pentameter (duple meter)

Spring Rain -- Petrarchian sonnet in iambic pentameter (duple meter)

The Symphony -- Petrarchian sonnet in iambic pentameter.

Allegory of the Sunrise is free verse and makes no claim to rhyme or a definite rhythm. Its value, if it has any, is in the picture which it suggests and the suggested meaning of fleeting time and lost opportunity.

#### Allegory of the Sunrise

I arose and glimpsed the eastern sky

Where burst a glorious sunrise;

So beautiful it was, I held my <sup>breath</sup> ~~breath~~ in awe.

And then I went about some trivial thing, and thought:

"A little later I'll go out and view this gorgeous scene,

And feast my eyes upon its beauty."



But when at length I took the time to go  
Where I could better see the panorama of flaming sky,  
It was aflame no longer.  
The colors had gone,  
And there stretched across the heavens and earth  
A cold, grey dawn!

Daffodils \*

All winter 'neath the ground you've lain  
Asleep till spring should come again,  
And ere the snows have left the earth,  
Your sunny blooms are given birth.

With fringed cups a thousand fold,  
And gladness in each cup of gold,  
You are a regiment of cheer;  
A line of beauty growing there.

But some of you have slipped away  
To stand upon my desk today,  
And now each flaunting, golden bloom  
Brings gladness to my quiet room.

\* This poem and Allegory of the Sunrise won for the author first place in the poetry contest sponsored by The Colonnade <sup>this</sup> last session.



## Spring Is Here

How do I know that spring is here?

A robin chir-rups across the way;

He sings his song at break of day.

"Get up, cheer up," he seems to say.

That's how I know that spring is here.

How do I know that spring is here?

A crocus blooms in the flower bed,

Suddenly lifting a purple head.

Warm sunshine means glad days ahead.

That's how I know that spring is here.

## She Expected an A

She expected an A

But she got only a C.

She worked hard every day,

She expected an A;

The pro didn't agree,

So his estimate was C.

She sacrificed all play,

And at last she got a B.

Wings  
( To One in the A. A. F.)

Soaring aloft as an eagle flies,

Proudly and high in the sun-bathed air,



Into the infinite blue of skies,  
Far from the earth with its endless care,  
Winging, no danger or fear he knows,  
Piercing ethereal, lucid space;  
His mission lures him, and on he goes  
Above clouds of the filmiest lace.

Helpless am I to keep him from harm;  
I cannot shield him high in the air.  
But love is a talisman — a charm;  
I solemnly bow; I say ~~a~~ prayer.  
Eagles are safe beneath heaven's dome;  
Guided by instinct aloft they fly;  
And Love will bring him safely back home  
From beyond the blue veil of the sky.

#### Home

A simple cottage in a grassy plot,  
Big maple sheltering a robin's nest,  
A mass of blossoms in a garden spot —  
These help to make the home one loves the best.  
A place to prize and cherish evermore,  
Embellished with a charm that's always found,  
With hollyhocks beside an open door  
Where faith and hospitality abound.  
Home is all of these. Patience, joy, and love  
Abide and make of it a haven dear.  
One does not wish to ~~wander~~ <sup>loiter</sup> or to rove;  
This is no place, for discontent or fear.



Thus home inspires and guides unto the end,  
So real, so true, so like one's dearest friend.

Spring Rain\*

The sky opaque, a dome of grayish space  
Impenetrable, stretches over all;  
Recurrent, steady drops of water fall.  
They speed to earth as on and on they race.  
Who has not felt spring rain in upturned face,  
Or sensed the misty spray, a murky wall  
Of density, beyond the trees so tall,  
And known the passion of the rain's embrace?

When parting clouds let through the truant sun,  
The rhythmic fallings of the droplets cease.  
A blest relief as follows poignant pain  
Succeeds the pounding, mighty marathon  
Of rushing feet. A welcome, hallowed peace  
On earth descends, as plants drink in the rain.

\* Spring Rain has been accepted by Twentieth Century Press, and will appear in their new Mid-Century Anthology of Poetry.



The Symphony \*

The maestro enters and lifts his baton;  
A whisper muted as fluttering wings  
Rises and swells, and is swept by the strings  
Into harmony beneath the great wand  
Of this master of music. Crowds look on  
And are lifted above all earthly things,  
Their ears attuned as each instrument sings,  
And the whole symphony breaks into song.

From whence this melody, this music rare?  
Did Orpheus visit the earth tonight?  
Was the orchestra touched by a magic hand  
Which charmed the harmonies out of the air?  
I rather think God gave us such delight  
To lift and lead us till we understand.

Up to this point, I have spent approximately sixty hours in study and creative work in the English Honors Course. I wish to thank each one on the Honors Committee for the co-operation and helpfulness you have given. During the summer semester, I expect to ~~study~~ continue my study of lyric poetry, the culmination of which will be a volume of original verse.

\* This poem was inspired by a concert given by Toscanini and the N. B. C. Symphony Orchestra.



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Grace O. Burton

English 460 — English Honors Course

August 9, 1950

(Supplement to Term Paper)



## My Work in the Honors Course for the Summer Term

Since last term, I have continued my study of lyric poetry. I have written some new poems, but a great deal of the time has been spent in the revision of those previously written. I have read Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads and some of his poetry. I have read part of Sidney Lanier's The Science of English Verse, and made a study of some of his poems including My Springs and The Symphony. As a continuation of the study of sounds, I have made a study in comparison of Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. I have also considered the poetry of the Psalms, especially Psalm 24, with reference to rhythmical quality and its use in choral speaking. I wish to give a brief summary of these references.

Wordsworth's theory is that the poet should use language which the common people can understand. He said he attempted "to adopt the very language of men". He believed that simple language was more permanent than the sophisticated style often adopted by poets. Wordsworth realized that the poetry which he was submitting to the public was very different from that of the contemporary poets, whose manner of expression was for the most part stilted and artificial. He chose themes from nature and simple life, and he especially liked to deal with pastoral subjects. Too much of our literature, he thought, had conformed to the hurry and perplexities of urban life. Wordsworth was trying to counteract this.

Much of the language of good poetry, except for the metre, is the same as prose. In Wordsworth's definition of a poet, he describes him as "a man speaking to men: a man..... endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind.... he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels...." In his poems about people, he must often "let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs...." The poet does not have to actually experience all that he



says. He often puts himself in the place of others and writes of their experiences.

Of poetry, he said "Its object is truth....Poetry is the image of man and nature. The poet's aim is to give immediate pleasure which is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love." "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge...."

"The poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner." "The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions." "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings....." Wordsworth said that he had a purpose in each poem which he wrote. His poetry reflects his high ideals of life and moral relationships. His poems are true to life, although he did not actually experience all the things about which he wrote. Typical of this was the little poem about the heirs of an old country estate who succumbed to the temptation to exchange their treasured land for money. After strangers had bought the land and lived on the estate, members of the family who had owned the land would pass and look over the fences into the fields, and they realized that they were the strangers then.

Lanier, in his Science of English Verse, places great emphasis upon the modulation of the voice in the reading of poetry. Modulation of tone in interpreting poetry has a distinct value. Appropriate inflection can make simple words appear fine and beautiful. Since Lanier had a keen musical sense, he was particularly sensitive to the inflection of words. He shows how identical words might have half a dozen different meanings, depending upon the inflection of the voice. He refers to the "musical declamation accompanied by the lyre which was so popular among the Greeks." From that time, poetry has continued to develop a "form of utterance which will be indeed in a sense musical but which will be so in a way to bring out, rather than obscure, the meanings of the words."

Because of his knowledge of music, Lanier was able to tell a great deal about the association of the twin arts, music and poetry. During the medieval period of



music, we note the first appearance of harmony. The Greeks had only melody which is "a succession of single tones". In polyphonic music, different melodies were played without discord. Harmonious chords were a later development. For along time words were "subordinated to the music". Musical recitative evolved from this.

Two forms of poems were originally intended to be sung or recited to musical accompaniment. These include the sonnet which means sounding (of the lute), and the ballad "from ballare (to dance)". In the sixteenth century -- the beginning of the modern period -- recitative was very popular. "Poetry and music each strove for separate existence. Music was expressed by the singing voice which is comparable to a reed instrument, but poetry was expressed through the speaking voice tune." After the time of Palestrina, music really came into its own. This was due to its being freed from necessary association with poetry. At the same time poetry profited from the separation of the two. The singing recitative was never real, for real people do not carry on conversation by singing.

Lanier referred to a primitive expression of rhythm, patting, which Southern negroes used for accompaniment. He gave a humorous illustration of the chanting of a negro preacher.

An impressive incident was related in Lanier's book. A poor minstrel stood on a bridge and sang his poems as wealthy traders passed by him on their way into the town. Today no one knows the names of the traders, but one of them would give all his money just to be the author of one of those songs.

The value of sounds in producing an effect in poetry is illustrated by Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. In the first, the sounds of the letters imply happiness, lightness, and joy. In Il Penseroso, the prevailing sounds help to convey the idea of melancholy. Oo and long e are among the most pleasing sounds. I expresses brightness and joy. Long e implies keenness and alertness. In L'Allegro, the poet uses many double o's, long e's, and long i's, as illustrated in these lines:

"There on beds of violets blue,

And fresh-blown roses washed in dew."



"Quips, and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,  
Nods, and Becks, and wreathed Smiles,  
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,  
And love to live in dimple sleek;  
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,  
And Laughter holding both his sides."

.....

"Through the sweet-briar or the vine,  
Or the twisted eglantine."

In lines 91 - 110, there are nine long i's, sixteen short i's, three double o's, and ten long e's. L which is light and liquid is used twenty times in these twenty lines. S which implies swiftness is used 24 times. The sounds used in these lines of L'Allegro are typical of those in the entire poem.

In Il Penseroso, there are numerous e sounds as in death and long o sounds which are the saddest in the English language. This is illustrated by such lines as:

"The hairy gown and mossy cell,  
Where I may sit and rightly spell."

.....

"Of woody Ida's inmost grove,  
Whilst yet there was no fear of Jove."

.....

" The spirit of Plato, to unfold  
What worlds or what vast regions hold."

In lines 20 - 40, there are eleven e's with the sound as in death, five oo sounds (which give a soothing effect), ten long o's (which imply sadness), and nine long a's (which give a feeling of deliberation).

The above study proves that Milton was not only a master in the use of words to convey meaning, but also in the use of sounds to create atmosphere.

A study of lyric poetry would be incomplete without considering some of the



great poetry of the Bible, especially the Psalms. Psalm 24 is not only great poetry, but it naturally adapts itself to choral speaking. It is an anthem for the inauguration of Jerusalem. The first part deals with outward beauty; the second part deals with ethical beauty. There are two principal divisions of the psalm -- (1) at the foot of the hill and (2) before the gates. Two choirs answer each other throughout the psalm.

I wish to thank again Mr. Grainger and the others of the Honors Committee -- Miss Sutherlin, Miss Patterson, Mr. Coyner, and Mr. Vickers for the suggestions and criticisms offered in this course. This work in lyric poetry has included the study of some of the world's greatest poets and their poetic contributions. It has also dealt with the analysis of the structure of various rhythmical patterns, the effects produced by sounds, and the search for exact words to express particular thoughts. It has resulted in the production of a small volume of original verse, the title and dedication of which are self-explanatory. Since I was a child I have wanted to write and have made a hobby of the writing of verse. This course has been like opening the windows of one's soul. I feel that I am better prepared to write effectively, and shall continue to write with the aim that I shall (quoting from one of my own poems)

" .....ere sunset weave a thing of beauty --  
A flaming pinion flung from earth to sky."



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