

THE NONPATTERN SONNET PATHETIQUE

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How long can a nonpattern composition -- that is, one with no repeated words -- be? I'm sure we would all like to know, but the answer would not be interesting unless the writer religiously abstained from smuggling in long strings of adjectives or any other form of deliberate prolixity. I have taken the following sonnet which I wrote in 1941, and tried to rewrite it, staying within the sonnet form and repeating no words.

Sonnet Pathetique

And gray clouds massing in the Autumn sky.
We would have pushed new paths up hills overflowing
With sound of swollen rills, not caring why.
From seaward-holloing stream and tearful sky
Your clear eye would have turned to these last flowers
Before they all disrobed and said goodby
And left their naked stalks in all the bowers.

I cannot answer the question, "Where did you go?"
If Heaven exists you went to Heaven, I know.
If you only sleep in the ground, to you fair dreams.
But to me you were always one of Heaven's Daughters,
Allured of bright rills and seaward-holloing streams,
Imbued in an oral world of birds and waters.

In the nonpattern version below, I swelled the octave to ten lines, knowing that when the crunch of inarticulateness came, it would come fast. The idea of the sestet would have to be given short shrift within the space of a quatrain -- and this proved to be just possible.

You would have loved this day with wild winds blowing
And gray clouds massing in the August sky.
Remember how we pushed new paths up hills overflowing
As from sound of swollen rills, not caring why.
Once long ago on such an afternoon?
Backdropped by what mountainous murk-swathed rising moon,
Amid seaward-holloing streams, under tearful skies,
I dream your clear eye turns to these last flowers
Before they've all disrobed, or made goodbyes,
Strewing their naked stalks through Autumn's bowers.

Now haunting voices question, "Where did she go?"
 Perhaps wherever wander Heaven's Daughters.
 Whether Heaven exists is a thing they well may know,
 Who lived loving aural worlds, sweet songbirds, waters.

VERBATIM

This is the title of a new periodical dealing with the "multifarious aspects of language and with English in particular", written for the layman rather than the professional linguist. Edited by Laurence Urdang, Random House dictionary editor, it has appeared quarterly since May 1974 in a newsletter-style format of 16 pages (less in early issues), with a subscription price of \$2.50 per year (Essex, Connecticut 06426).

Words, the subject of recreational linguistics, can be examined in several ways: as collections of letters to be manipulated, as sequences of sounds with various properties, and as shorthand representations of ideas -- sight, sound and meaning. *Word Ways* emphasizes these aspects in the order listed; *Verbatim*, in reverse order. To illustrate, here is a selection of topics from the first 7 issues related to meaning: etymology (turkey, woman, darn, chemical element names), euphemisms (pygmalion for "bloody", you-know-what for various taboos), word misuse (Irish Bulls, advertising lingo), word-creation (nonce-words within the family, portmanteau words, Ameritalian and Spanglish), non-verbal communication (animal language, "clicks" such as tsk), dictionaries (pre-Johnsonian origins, the art of citation-reading, modern treatment of that four-letter word), and words with opposite meanings (cleave, let). Words-as-sounds are examined in articles dealing with Boston accents, word chains (healthy, wealthy and wise), and inter- and intra-lingual sound-alikes (heresy ladle furry starry for "here is a little fairy story").

Verbatim devotes many pages to extensive reviews of books relating to language (even novels such as Murdoch's A Word Child); many of these are offered for sale at reduced prices. Letters from readers are published in extenso. *Verbatim* authors are drawn principally from university linguistics and language departments; most articles are clearly written with a minimum of jargon.