**Music in Poetry**

(Adapted from a Tom Lux Craft Talk "The Music of Poetry" SLC - 11/03)

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**Good prose has music but good poetry depends on it. Three (four?) main ways to make music:**

1. Rhyme: End rhyme, off rhyme, half rhyme, assonance, consonance, (mid rhyme?) Alliteration (the most overused technique. Of initial, middle and final, the last two stick out least. Avoid initial s alliteration "Too many s sounds make one feel like being trapped in a rowboat full of geese." Houseman?) The attraction to rhyme is physiological. The pleasure centers in the brain light up.
2. Meter: The dance between the stressed and unstressed syllable. Writing in meter is usually working against the meter. The trick is breaking it at the right time. ("Meter working argument." Emerson.) Many stressed syllables slow down a line ("thrust parched…") 75% unstressed are too many; they'll flatten the line. ("Words exist first in the mouth and not in books." Frost.)
3. Onomatopoeia: In addition to specific sounds connecting to specific things, certain sounds have certain connotations: oohs and ahs are soft; i's are d's and b's are heavier and darker; grrrs are angry. Of all the consonants l sounds most like a vowel. Sounds do something to you physically. Use this to get under the reader's skin, to make him feel.
4. Syntax: How a sentence unravels..

What, I said, noise, I said, is you, are you, all? Yes scream yes shriek yes creel yes bawl. Yes hum, clink, boom, chink, slap, scrape, wail. But is, I said, noise, I said, something to nothing, is noise flight to fall? Is blue noise to black, or scorch to sow? Atom to vacuum, or *Please* to *No*? Riotous wave to staid shoreline? Cardinal to crow?

Or horizon to axis. Or exile to in. Barbarous tongue to *true* language. Me to him.

Karen Volkman

from *Spar*

# Fruitless in Florida. Not Florence *italicizing* our differences. Pilfering our peachlessness, our plumless, pitless, pitilessness. Did you? No. Don’t you? Won’t you? But no. Orangeless Clementine! Tangerine dreamlessness. Nope cantalope. Nope cantaloping, leaping, gamboling, careening, no preening, no pruning in my arborless grotto. My trees are picked clean, gleaming air. Your orchards *droop* with dark *weight* of *nothing*. Can you? No. Can’t you? Tilt you? Are you? Know you? Rome steals from Athens and I steal from you. Steel you. Are you? But no, I’ve said that.

JP – KV parody

It’s algebra! Algorhymes and rhythms, sum for sun, windstrewn for windblown. A melody of non sense — No, *sound-sense*. A *lib*ation, *liber*ation, yes, but with no *real* application? Just affectation, no implication*s*? Oh no, sir. I beg you: one lake breeze; one late day sky; two thin grey cumuli = one heart; one lie. This calculus, calculi of sound over sense, heart - no, *ear* over whence we come to know. Either/or; less than/more than; metaphor. A train leaves Chicago at a constant rate of speed. Where will it intersect? Include your work. Cross your t’s.

But. So. Why? You can’t *begin* to comprehend. Yet. There’s always a *yet.*

JP – KV explanation?

**The Radio Animals**  
by Matthea Harvey

The radio animals travel in lavender clouds. They are always chattering, they are always cold. Look directly at the buzzing blur and you'll see twitter, hear flicker—that's how much they ignore the roadblocks. They're rabid with doubt. When a strong sunbeam hits the cloud, the heat in their bones lends them a temporary gravity and they sink to the ground. Their little thudding footsteps sound like "Testing, testing, 1 2 3" from a far-away galaxy. Like pitter and its petite echo, patter. On land, they scatter into gutters and alleyways, pressing their noses into open Coke cans, transmitting their secrets to the silver circle at the bottom of the can. Of course we've wired their confessionals and hired a translator. We know that when they call us Walkie Talkies they mean it scornfully, that they disdain our in and outboxes, our tests of true or false.

The Life of an Ear

Snap, Blap, Ring, Ting.

Cha-Ching, Bling, Ding-a-ling.

Pow, Boom, Bam, Blam.

Crack, Screech, Clang, Slam.

Tic, Toc, Click, Clack,

Smick, Smack, Patty-whack.

Pit, Pat, Snip, Snap,

Zing, Blip, Clip, ZZZap,

Jingle, Dingle, Tingle, Tap.

Gurgle, Glug, Gulp, Plop,

Doink, Sizzle, Zoom, Pop.

Shhh.

Tom P

"Words are not antiseptic little meaning-cubes to be stacked neatly into sturdy towers of logic. They are wild; they make noise. They force the humans reading them to slurp and click and hoot and pop and tap their tongues. Such sounds, combined carefully, can carry their own meaning.

From *New Sentences* by Sam Anderson in The New York Times: 4-18--17