# CREATING POETRY

# An Experiential Way To Teach Literary/Poetic Devices

Cathy Oehler

In this paper, I would like to consider the teaching of poetry as a valuable tool for learning self-expression through writing in English. It is my belief that knowledge of how to write well and an ability to recognize and apply literary/poetic device will result in a better command of the English language. Those of us who have experienced the copious readings of ancient literature and their accompanying lectures about literary device can appreciate how poetry can pose a formidable obstacle to the learner regardless of how enjoyable the content may be. The complex, specialized terminology relating to English poetry, such as, meter, voice, metaphor, similie, imagery, onomatopoeia, personification, and so on, can stymie even the dedicated learner.

This paper will present a learning project combining knowledge of literary/poetic device with writing skills which should appeal to learners at intermediate and advanced levels. At first glance, this project may seem to be suited for the narrow margin of the most advanced group of learners. However, by limiting the scope of the content taught, the teacher can create a small or a large scale project appropriate to the ability level of the class. For example, by choosing to teach two literary/poetic techniques rather than six or eight, the project remains manageable at a less advanced level. Exceptionally advanced students may be challenged by focusing on a greater number of the techniques.

The following is a basic explanation of how to teach this poetry project. A completed project will be presented after this explanation.

1) The teacher must decide which elements of literary/poetic device the students would be able to grasp. For example, similie and metaphor might be appropriate for intermediate students whereas meter stress could prove to be too difficult.

2) The teacher should provide exposure to the chosen elements of study (which will later be applied to their own poems.) Students should be able to recognize and create examples of these devices before continuing to the next step. This could take days or weeks depending on the class.

3) The teacher should tell the class that they are about to make a class poem. He or she should then instruct the students to take-out a piece of paper on which each student is to write a phrase. This phrase can be anything at all. The teacher should then collect the phrases.

4) The teacher then makes some sort of poetic arrangement of the phrases. The teacher should type the "poem" and make copies for all the students.

5) After passing out the copies, the students are to take any words, phrases, parts of phrases, or stanzas from the class poem and add their own words and phrases to create a new poem. This poem should be written on a separate piece of paper.

6) Lastly, students should analyze their poem, as best as they can, by writing papers explaining what they did and why they did it.

Because of this experiential way of learning, the student derives a satisfaction from being a creator and explorer, using self-generated initiative in completing the project. The literary /poetic aspects progress from"dry"concepts into tools with which to express creative thought. The students feel a power in their increasing ability to manage and manipulate words; thus, confidence is gained, bringing about a better command of the English language. Learners do not hold the teacher responsible for their learning, but take responsibility for themselves using personal initiative. Therefore, what transpires in the learning process is more meaningful to the learner.

The following poetry project involves the literary/poetic elements of meter stress, lyrical style, third person voice, symbolism, stanza, personification, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and imagery.

FLIGHT
Into the evening dusk the rider rode,
The moon could not reflect upon his load,
Though weighing little on his sturdy horse,
The bulky weight was more than he could hold.

Some snow fell, drifting softly on his course,
"A storm across who's gathering her force,"
He said, "Will rasp her dying breath on me."
Yet, onward sped to finish his divorce.

Relenting not, the wind tore root and tree,
And chained and tortured everything t'was free,
The rider, wet, in misery, he cried,
"Did I once think escape tastes sweet to me?"

"My thoughts don't fit the plan I had," he cried,
"The storm grows worse and death rides close beside."
Imagine any grief so great as pride,
That kept this rider crouching on his ride!

Before composing, "Flight," I thought extensively about line form, meter, and stress because these elements had interested me in studying the poetry of Donne and Shakespeare. I concluded that the best way to learn how the great poets composed their works would be to try and apply similar techniques to my own poem. Thus, my poem strays quite drastically from the free-style phrasing of the original class "poem" in structure, length and subject.

I decided to use the iambic pentameter line form for a couple of reasons. Since my poem's

subject is rather serious, it seemed best to use a line length of at least five stresses. If I had intended a lighter subject, something like what is found in nursery rhymes, a two or three stress line would have been appropriate. For example, "Hickory, dickory Doc, the mouse ran up the clock· · ," has three stresses per line. I sought to pattern the rhythm somewhat after Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening."

Iambic pentameter appealed to me, also, because of its even rhythmic beat, including five units of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. Each line's rhythm counts as da Da/ da Da/ da Da/ da Da/ da Da/. The poem sounds almost musical when the iambic pentameter line form is accompanied by a certain rhyme pattern. After arranging the first few lines, I gained a new respect for poets who use meter seriously.

I noted one drawback in the iambic pentameter form. Its tendency was to become monotonous, possibly putting the reader to sleep, through its uniform line lengths and stresses. I dismissed my concern, however, after deciding to limit its length to four stanzas. Since the poem depicts a rider riding his horse, iambic pentameter helped to convey the horse's motion as he galloped into the storm.

Because I was interested in learning how to use rhythm and meter it seemed best to write the poem in the style of a narrative or lyrical poem. I wanted the poem to turn out as a story written in a smooth iambic pentameter rhythm with end-stopped lines, in an aaba, bbcb, ccdc, dddd rhyme pattern. However, these qualifications limited my use of most of the class poem's lines in their original forms. I could only use one complete original line, "Into the evening dusk the rider rode." Otherwise, I borrowed words, phrases, and ideas from those lines. For example, line two of "Flight" came from line five of the class poem; the only thing in common between those two lines is the moon. Other examples where I borrowed phrases are, "···will rasp its dying breath···," in line seven of my poem, and "My thoughts don't fit the plan," found in line thirteen. Actually, my poem is speckled with suggestion of the class poem, but very few complete quotes were incorporated into it. This is mostly because the syllables in each line of my poem had to be counted, noting the stress; also, rhyming line endings in an aaba, bbcb, ccdc, dddd pattern restricted my choice of words.

I chose the aaba, bbcb, ccdc, dddd after looking at the rhyme schemes in the Italian Sonnet, the English Sonnet, and the Heroic Quatrain. The English Sonnet seemed intriguing, but since I wanted part of the rhyme in each stanza to carry over to the following stanza, I arrived at the aaba, bbcb, ccdc, dddd pattern. I like the flow and unity that rhyme scheme created in the poem. I used the final dddd stanza to imply an emphasis on the conclusion.

My goal in composing this poem was to draw a picture of ourselves as seen inside the costume of the story. The story was not intended to merely entertain, but also remind us of our human need to share with each other. The "Flight" symbolizes this need. The poem implies that each of us may be "the rider". We may ride away from the problems and tensions (loads) that we carry in our minds. When more problems arise as 'snow falls on our courses,' our "loads" become harder to carry. As storms develop in our lives we may ask ourselves if escape by running really answers our dilemmas, as the rider asked when he said, "Did I once think escape tasted sweet to me?" The poem's closing is meant to convey the idea that our pride may keep us from turning to others and seeking their support, and

it leaves us riding eternally into the storm. We are too independent and self-assured to admit our need to share.

The overall arrangement of the stanzas in the poem is meant to assist the other poetic devices (personification, imagery and so on) in conveying the mood and tone of each section along with unifying the stanzas. The first stanza is quite passive. Nothing exciting or dramatic happens. It basically creates a background for the action. The second stanza adds some tension when the snow begins falling and the rider begins to worry about the storm. The action comes to a climax in the third section when the storm breaks loose and the rider doubts that he should ever have started his ride. In the fourth stanza, the action continues its intensity until the narrator steps in drawing the poem to a conclusion. Within this framework it seemed that alliteration, personification, imagery and the other poetic devices would more effectively tell the story than a looser arrangement of the stanzas would.

I tried to incorporate alliteration throughout the poem to emphasize intensity or gentleness. I used alliteration of the s sound in line five to make the falling snow seem gentle against the rider. It reads, "Some snow fell, drifting softly···" This line later contrasted the line, "Relenting not, the wind tore root and tree," where I used alliteration of the t sound to convey the intensity and harshness of the storm. It almost seems ironic that the gentle snow could become a relentless storm against the rider. I emphasized, "grief", and, "great", in "grief so great" by using alliteration of the g sound to make them more noticeable to the reader.

The wind, death, and the moon are three forces which are personified in the poem. Having human characteristics makes them more graphic and intense hinderances for the rider. Personification also helps the underlying idea of the poem come across to its readers through causing the reader to identify with wind, death and the moon in personal terms. The wind was given female gender. Females have been stereotyped as talking a lot, so wind could therefore, logically be female. Death was riding close beside the rider. Since he was riding "close," he must have been ready to move in on him when the occasion presented itself. Death seems more aggressive, a male stereotype, so it seemed appropriate to give it male gender. The moon was given human characteristics by not being able to reflect on the rider's load. Because these three forces were doing something involving intelligence, they were personified.

I tried to put a lot of imagery into the poem to present its meaning in a more vivid and colorful manner. The snow drifting, the wind gathering force, death riding close beside, and so on, helps compensate for the uniformity in rhythm and keeps the reader interested in what could happen next. I tried to use colorful verbs, like, "tastes," "reflect," "tortured," etc. instead of passive forms of to be and other non-descript verbs. I also tried to select descriptive, colorful adjectives, and I especially tried to use them sparingly so that the poem wouldn't sound gawdy and overdone. I believe description can enhance writing in a more interesting way rather than using many adjectives; plus, it seems more creative.

There are really no metaphors in this poem, although the poem as a whole may be identified as one since it is actually a picture of people. However, that seems to be using the term, "metaphor," loosely.

The voice in the poem is not the speaker, the rider, but is the omniscient narrator behind the scenes who seems to be watching the rider and telling the reader his predicament. The narrator's point of view conflicts with the rider's perception of himself. Whereas, the rider believes he is handling himself correctly by escaping, the narrator sees him as foolish and prideful in his attempt to escape. The rider has a shallow understanding of the human need to share. The narrator, however reflects great insight into that need and suggests a note of sympathy for the rider's lack of insight when he says, "Imagine any grief so great as pride, that kept this rider crouching on his ride." The narrator can almost be seen as a demigod who observes the rider until he intervenes with a revelation which can open man's eyes into himself. The rider seems like man trying to take care of himself through his limited human understanding.

In conclusion, the process of applying the elements of literary/poetic device in creating my own poem created a very real literary struggle at times. On my own personal initiative it was necessary to turn to many sources to find examples of all I hoped to incorporate into my poem. Through this process I believe I have learned writing and literacy skills that will be a part of me forever.

In Dylan Thomas' poem, "In My Craft Or Sullen Art," I find a summary of my feelings about the creative process of writing. Dylan says he writes as a process of intimate contact with himself-an expression, a release, a creative drive. As compared with lovers who have an intimate relationship, Dylan suggests this relationship with his writing. I agree that through writing we can communicate all our thoughts, feelings insights, and griefs without reservation. Therefore, the more I can learn about writing, the better able I can express myself. The struggle is worth it.

（英文学科）