

## **Forms of Breath and the Shape of the Line: Soundwork and Lineation in Hopkins, Plath, and Sharif**

### Purpose of the Class

#### **Purpose:**

Show three distinct types of line break/choreography (sprung rhythm, syntactic, omission) and their distinct effects on a work.

from: Opening Remarks

Jason Schneiderman, in his essay on the poetic line, likens the line to “the breath of a poem.” He goes on to say that “poems [are] beings of words choreographed for the breath, and the line break is a critical element in that score.”

It is this choreography that most intrigues me, how an emphasis on stress, syntax, or negative space within a work imbues the work with greater meaning, clarity, and resonance.

Ultimately, I have come to believe that how a line is choreographed falls in accordance with the vision of the artist. A well crafted poem should greatly consider equal attention to each line; doing so can help a work stand beyond particular poets and moments in time.

Sprung rhythm- A metrical system devised by Gerard Manley Hopkins composed of one- to four-syllable feet that start with a stressed syllable. The spondee replaces the iamb as a dominant measure, and the number of unstressed syllables varies considerably from line to line.

Spondee- A metrical foot consisting of two accented syllables.

Conceptual framework: how sprung rhythm as a craft element amplifies, among other things, tone, word choice, and subject matter.

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## Pied Beauty

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

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### To Guide Your Notes

1. As we read, mark the stressed words (seen in bold on Google Slides)
2. Notice moments of heavy stress within the poem: how do the stresses work in relationship to the words and subject matter?

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### Notes/Insights/Wonderings

*Blackberrying* by Sylvia Plath: Key Terms and Concepts

Enjambment- the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet, or stanza.

End-stopped- having a pause at the end of each line

Conceptual framework: how the employment of line breaks at the syntactic level (either enjambed or end-stopped) can further drive interest, energy, and surprise.

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## Blackberrying

by Sylvia Plath

Nobody in the lane, and nothing, nothing but blackberries,  
Blackberries on either side, though on the right mainly,  
A blackberry alley, going down in hooks, and a sea  
Somewhere at the end of it, heaving. Blackberries  
Big as the ball of my thumb, and dumb as eyes  
Ebon in the hedges, fat  
With blue-red juices. These they squander on my fingers.  
I had not asked for such a blood sisterhood; they must love me.  
They accommodate themselves to my milkbottle, flattening their sides.

Overhead go the choughs in black, cacophonous flocks—  
Bits of burnt paper wheeling in a blown sky.  
Theirs is the only voice, protesting, protesting.  
I do not think the sea will appear at all.  
The high, green meadows are glowing, as if lit from within.  
I come to one bush of berries so ripe it is a bush of flies,  
Hanging their bluegreen bellies and their wing panes in a Chinese screen.  
The honey-feast of the berries has stunned them; they believe in heaven.  
One more hook, and the berries and bushes end.

The only thing to come now is the sea.  
From between two hills a sudden wind funnels at me,  
Slapping its phantom laundry in my face.  
These hills are too green and sweet to have tasted salt.  
I follow the sheep path between them. A last hook brings me  
To the hills' northern face, and the face is orange rock  
That looks out on nothing, nothing but a great space  
Of white and pewter lights, and a din like silversmiths  
Beating and beating at an intractable metal.

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**To Guide Your Notes**

1. Notice how each stanza offers its own distinct pattern of line-breaks at the sentence level.
2. Consider how Plath utilizes line breaks at the sentence level and why.

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### **Notes/Insights/Wonderings**

## Reaching Guantánamoby Solmaz Sharif: Key Terms and Concepts

Omission: the intentional leaving out of words or phrases

Conceptual framework: how the employment of omission functions as a rupturing point in both meaning and form.

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from Reaching Guantánamo  
by Solmaz Sharif

Dear Salim,

Love, are you well? Do they \_\_\_\_\_ you?  
I worry to much. Lately my hair \_\_\_\_\_, even  
my skin \_\_\_\_\_. The doctors tell me it's \_\_\_\_\_.  
I believe them. It shouldn't \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. Please don't worry.  
\_\_\_\_\_ in the yard, and moths  
have gotten to your mother's \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, remember?

I have enclosed some \_\_\_\_\_ --made this  
batch just for you. Please eat well. Why  
did you \_\_\_\_\_ me to remarry? I told  
and he couldn't \_\_\_\_\_ it.  
I would never \_\_\_\_\_.  
Love, I'm singing that \_\_\_\_\_ you loved,  
remember, the line that went  
"\_\_\_\_\_"? I'm holding  
the \_\_\_\_\_ just for you.

Yours,

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**To Guide Your Notes**

1. Notice the form of the poem: a letter. What associations do we make with letter writing?
2. How does the lack of information inform the reader's experience of the poem?

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**Notes/Insights/Wonderings**