

ELF EYRIE

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In the February 1998 Word Ways Elf Eyrie's elf, Scarfin' Fatback, and I stuck mostly with sonnet-form parodies of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, and there are more ways to do those too. For instance, a fun one to try is combining two well-known sonnets:

Shall I compare thee? Let me count the ways.

But there are other forms to get to, so let's finish off the sonnets.

Lewis Carroll invented a parody poem which keeps part of the original to launch an entirely new one. The first four lines of the original begin each of four new stanzas. It's the Tema con Variazioni. But Carroll wouldn't have written this:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art too cool to be so hot. The curtain,
Draw it. Not on paper! Closed! This way!
It's not thy brains I love I'm fairly certain.

Thou art more lovely, and more temperate
Than that vile wretch who waits for me at home,
Storming that dinner's cold (is it that late?),
Summarily re-scorching it. (The gnome!

Rough! Winds do shake!) The darling buds of May,
June and July I leave behind, as now
I see thee juxtaposed with them. I say,
How did I ever settle for that cow?

And summer's lease hath all too short a date! --
We go back to the city in September.
What, my love? A condo?! Thou dost prate!!
I'll see thee next week, dear, if I remember.

Up to here we've been using mostly Sonnet five-stress metre and Sonnet a-b-a-b or a-b-b-a rhyme schemes, and before we switch out of these, there are two more "sonnet-types" to show you. First, Chain Verse:

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In you, my mind expands--it shines!
 Beyond compare's your loveliness!
 To capture you, I'll write some lines.
 You are the breath of wind that whines
 Through canyons, peaks and vales. No less
 In you, my mind expands; it shines!

I'll pen of summer's twisted vines,
 Of ivy's curl, wisteria's tress,
 To capture you. I'll write some lines.

You'd rather they be wines and dines?
 And gifts? I should invest largesse
 In you? (My! Mined!; expand: zit shines.)

Lamb, summer fades so fast, and mine's
 The loss when age leaves you a mess.
 To capture (ewe!), I'll write sum lines:

Breathless and blind, this world declines ...
 I'll miss you, too! What's your address?
 In you, my mind expands; it shines
 To capture you. I'll write. (Some lines!)

And I love the Triolet:

Could summer pass as fast as this?
 A quick hug and a careless kiss?
 But I recall you in my arms:
 Could summer pass as fast as this?
 Your beauty next to mine was bliss.
 I never heard the fall's alarms;
 Could summer? Pass, as fast as this,
 A quick hug and a careless kiss.

I suppose you want Haiku, as counting syllables is what everybody's doing these days. Okay, the rules: learn to count. Show you have unusually sensitive perception. Start every line on the same margin so the whole thing will look like a Bonsai tree. There are so many variations they've stopped naming them, so you can make up your own. Shakespeare, you'll see, was ramblingly verbose, taking fourteen lines to say what fifteen syllables will do. Here's my Sep-Quin-Tri Haiku (syllable counts of 7-5-3):

Summer is ephemeral,
 But not your beauty,
 Caught in this.

And consider Stephen Schlitzer's "Love in a Hokku" (syllable counts of 5-7-5):

I could reach your heart--
 Perhaps make you immortal--
 But not in three lines!

In short, this suggests the Ballade, which is long. In fact, until starting work on these parodies, I thought the only rule for the ballade was that it be long. Au contraire, shall I compare? Ballades may be as short as 24 lines plus a four-line "Envoy" and each length and style must follow its own metre and rhyme scheme rules. Let me not compare, but just do the 28er and you'll see from it what its rules are:

She's fairer far than summer's fair,
 Than bird awing or bud abloom.
 Her soft awaited step on stair
 Makes light the curtained, darkened room,
 Where I would one day be her groom,
 And every day would taste of bliss,
 If but I had not this one doom:
 My only life, to write all this.

She's sweeter too than perfumed air,
 And warmer than hearth's flame and fume.
 More brilliant than the jeweler's ware,
 And brighter than the peacock's plume.
 And none of this would sound of gloom,
 And none of it would be amiss,
 Except for me, a lost dead rheum.
 My only life -- to write all this.

Sweet, warm, but there are just a pair
 Of months so dear; swept with the broom
 Of falling time and fallen hair,
 The past counts hard the years from womb.
 And beauty goes down to its tomb
 Like lemmings o'er the precipice.
 Deep from the depths such endings loom;
 My only life too. Write all this.

There's nothing, lads, you should assume.
 I've kissed the Avon lady's kiss.
 The curtain's up, the stage's boom
 My only life: too right all this.

And last, at last! Free Form, which calls for self-indulgence and reader-contempt, most faithfully expressed in disregarded rhythm and concealed (or absent) meaning. Images should be poignant with ambiguity and irony, and shock is nice. I find it helpful to start by writing something dully prosaic, or else a country lyric, and then splitting the stresses and throwing in a little strange typography to remind you that I am way over your head:

You
Remind me of bug blood
on windshield wipers...But

you
I can see through And!
I like your spray. So now the
Air-conditioner's BUSTed: BLOWing GUSTS of hot AIR hot AIR--
Busted...yes I can look

>>> forward

to that if they CA^mT^eCH
& you
across the line a/
cross the line
to geth er, darling
May.

We've made Shakespeare turn grave all over. Well, Rough winds to Shakespeare. Good and verse day to you.

A PLACE CALLED PECULIAR

Frank Gallant's 1998 book, part of the Merriam-Webster Lighter Side of Language Series (ISBN0-87779-619-X; \$14.95 in paperback), gives the stories behind 517 of American's oddest place names. He explains "What I found was a mixture of historical fact and legend and a no-holds-barred, call-'em-as-you-see-'em, idiosyncratic approach to place naming...American cities and towns...are also named for obscure political partices, slogans, salutations, drunken sentiments, long-forgotten local incidents, songs, slurs, virtues, hopes and aspirations, aromas, freaks of nature, crops, crackers and cereals, taverns, brutal translations of lyrical Indian words and phrases, protagonists, and puns." There's many beguiling matchups to be found in these pages, including Enigma/Paradox, Paradise/Hell, Dot/Two-dot, Aimwell/Cut and Shoot, Why/Whynot, Embarrass/Bumpass, Normal/Peculiar, Lotteryville/You Bet, Sleepy Eye/Wideawake, Frog Jump/Toad Suck, Bedbug/Scratch Ankle, and Intercourse/Tight Squeeze. Weird names like Usofa and Germfask are in reality acronyms; others, like Ho-Ho-Kus, are corrupted Indian names.