

17. Rhyme for a reason

Rhyme can be tricky. At one end of the continuum are those who believe that all poetry should rhyme, while at the other end are those who believe that rhyme is hackneyed, artificial and should never be used. Fashion often dictates which pole is in the ascendant, but too many people still only think of rhyme in terms of couplets with heavy end rhyme, as in nursery rhymes. Happily, most poets fall between the two extremes, and try to achieve a balance between form and content. It is almost expected that comic verse will rhyme, for example, but the use of rhyme in more serious poetry requires more careful consideration – too much, and even the most serious piece can be rendered comical. Used properly and in moderation, however, rhyme can be an extremely effective way of adding an extra dimension to your work.

The different types of rhyme and rhyme scheme will be discussed elsewhere, but here are a few things to think about.

- Arguably the only rule you should *always* adhere to is: *don't pervert the normal structure of modern English grammar and syntax simply in order to force an end rhyme.* Grammatical constructions that were fine in medieval times are far from fine in the 21st Century – using 'he did go' instead of 'he went', because you want a rhyme with 'low', is simply not acceptable. All you will succeed in doing is draw your reader's attention to your own clumsiness ...and they'll soon stop being your reader.
- Rather than aiming for full rhyme all the time, why not try half-rhyme/near-rhyme or even sight rhyme? The effect can be very subtle – the reader notes it almost subconsciously – and it avoids the contrived feeling that full rhyme sometimes has.
- Don't get hung up on rhyme at the initial stages of writing your poem. Concentrate on getting the sense right first and then look to see if there are any rhymes that have occurred naturally. You can then begin to build on these fortunate accidents and look for synonyms for other words you've used that might provide further rhymes.
- Buy yourself a rhyming dictionary. You may think it's a form of cheating, but in fact it will greatly expand your word power. Besides, you may discover words that will lead your poem in new and more fruitful directions.
- To get an idea of the full possibilities of rhyme, listen to rap music. It's not to everyone's taste – especially if you're easily shocked – but rhythm and rhyme are its twin hearts, and good practitioners such as Eminem use full rhyme and near rhyme in extremely inventive ways. Listen carefully, and you can even catch him using sight rhyme at times.
- Finally, remember the only rule that you should *always* adhere to? Well you may be able to write a very good humorous poem by consistently breaking it. The only *real* rule is, *if it works, do it.*