

Poetry for Physicists

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INTRODUCTION

There are very few reasons for becoming a poet, and certainly no good reasons. Reasons, of course, are ultimately based upon the so-called “laws of reason” which can not themselves be consistently proved as reasonable. This is intimately related to the fact that one can not teach one’s cat to speak French; they can’t pronounce the r’s correctly. Appropriately generalized considerations may be applied to other housepets. Furthermore, it certainly goes without saying that.

FAMOUS POETS

Gertrude Stein once famously quipped, “Rose is a rose is a rose.” Later she wrote this phrase down on a piece of paper and it became known as a poem. Subsequent versions of this poem appeared in various forms, often ended with a question-mark rather than a period, and once (when Stein was bed-ridden with a stuck Pyloric valve) she ended the poem with a semi-colon. When asked about the meaning of the semi-colon she replied, “Go make me a mother-fucking ham sandwich!”

T. S. Elliot is another famous poet. The S stands for “Steve”.

WRITING POETRY

Anyone can write poetry. All you have to do is put words down on a piece of paper in a certain order—or not. Which words do you put on the piece of paper? Well, that depends on which poem you are trying to write. If it’s a sad poem, then you should choose sad words like “sad” or “unhappy” or “grimpen” or “mango”. If it’s a happy poem, then you should choose happy words like “glad” or “happy” or “mango”. Most poems contain the word “mango”. Most sundials contain at least one gnomon. Thus, most poetry regarding sundials should probably read something like:

What stake upon which what fruit rests?
On a gnomon, mango.

But, if it’s a sad poem you write:

What bleak stake upon which what dark fruit rests?
On a gnomon, mango.

But, if it’s a happy poem you write:

What glad stake which upon rests brightly what fruit!
On a gnomon, mango. LOL!

Often, appending the acronym “LOL” is a good indicator for the reader that the poem is supposed to be happy. Sometimes I like to draw a funny picture at the end of the poem too.

The conscientious reader will no doubt have noticed that the order of the words, and in fact the very words themselves, in the first line of the poem do not matter. Thus we might write:

Which with what with what with which?
On a gnomon, mango.

With these changes our poem now applies to any situation whether it is happy, or be it sad, or be it either involving sundials or be it not involving sundials.

SYLLABIC CONSIDERATIONS

Some forms of poetry have a specific number of syllables per line. This seeming constraint on the poem is realized in the last analysis to be no constraint whatsoever. One simply notes that all poems, once written down, indeed must have a specific number of syllables per line. For example, nine syllables. Or, as another example, ten.

Haikus always end up having seven syllables per line, or five syllables per line. Or, in some cases, five syllables per line. Here is an example Haiku about a conversation I had with my cat:

Meow. What? Meow. What? Meow.
 What? Meow. What? Meow. What? Meow. What?
 Meow. Cherry Blossoms.

POETRY LENGTH

It was famously conjectured by the famous poet Ed Witten that all poems are in fact equivalent to poems that have only one line. Later this conjecture was strengthened to include the fact that the equivalent single line of poetry contains only one single word. The strong version of the conjecture is subject to the reasonable caveat that the single word be “very very long”.

The proof of the above conjecture which we may call “P” is simple given the truth of the following three axioms:

“Q”, “R”, and “P”.

Thus, “P”. Q.E.D. The truth of the axioms is self-evident.