



At long last we leave the bright shores of Japan and travel westward in search of more examples of syllabic versification. Take, for instance, the rictameter -- a poem with 9 unrhymed lines following this pattern:

- Line 1 -- 2 syllables (the same as line 9)
- Line 2 -- 4 syllables
- Line 3 -- 6 syllables
- Line 4 -- 8 syllables
- Line 5 -- 10 syllables
- Line 6 -- 8 syllables
- Line 7 -- 6 syllables
- Line 8 -- 4 syllables
- Line 9 -- 2 syllables (the same as line 1)

Rictameters are, quite frankly, a lot less profound than the poetry we've just looked at from Japan. But they are quite fun and offer a bit of a challenge. The shape of the lines resembles a rough circle and this is fitting because you have to bring your poem full circle back to its starting point. Here is an example...



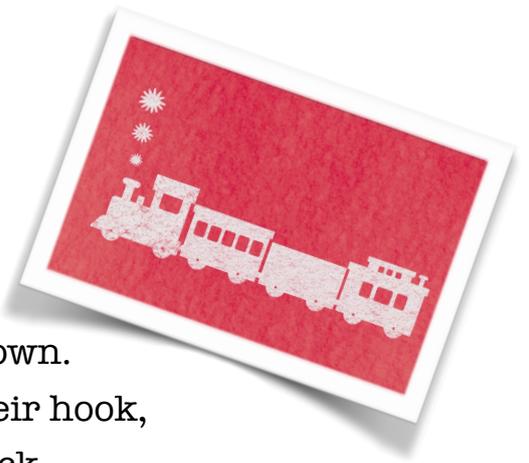
Coffee.
I hate the taste.
Cappuccino, latte --
each a bitterness on my tongue;
But when the percolator wafts the scent
to greet me when I return home,
like warm hands on my face,
I love the smell --
Coffee.

Here I brought the poem back to that first word by using a simple parallel construction. In creative writing a parallel construction consists of two statements that are put together the same way even though they say different things. Here, we have a very basic example of parallel construction found in lines two and eight: “I hate the taste” and “I love the smell.” It gives the poem cohesion and keeps the form tight. This is just one way to loop your poem back to its beginning.

Here are a few more to look at...

To My Son

Driving
to school and back
to the grocery store
to rugby and swimming and town.
I can't wait to hang my keys on their hook,
to stop, to sit and build a track
past wooden shops and schools,
for the train you're
driving.



Dolphins
with rubbery
skin, you don't feel quite real.
Yet, so wonderfully alive
you burst from the water, briefly airborne,
and I am a child again,
believing in magic,
delighting in
dolphins.

Picture
of tall pine trees --
eight shades of brown and green
carved by an ice-blue waterfall.
I'd like to lean against that trunk -- just there
and watch the water tumbling,
feel its spray on my face,
step into the
picture.

Dinner.
At 10 a.m.
I fill the slow-cooker
with vegetables and stewing steak.
It's like when I was small: I'll come home to
the welcoming scent of warm food
cooked while I was away,
ready now for
dinner.

Chilies
look like peppers
with the air let out and
stretched to look like gnarled fingers.
Chopping them up to put in fajitas,
so hot they burn my fingertips,
I ask how nature pours
such heat into
chilies.

There is one big difference between the Japanese poetry we've studied and a rictameter. In a haiku, senryu, or tanka, the emphasis is on brevity and simplicity. Both are so crucial that you can sacrifice the rules of form to achieve them: you can lop off as many syllables as you want. A rictameter, on the other hand, is not that philosophical. The thing about this type of poem is its form (its syllable count) and you have to stick to that. There is no such thing as a free-form rictameter. The challenge, then, is to say what you want to say in the space allowed by each line. Good luck with your own.