



Again we travel to the exotic far east,  
not to Japan this time, but to Burma.  
Here we find an interesting example of  
rhymed syllabic versification -- the  
Than-Bauk. It has a bizarre, but fun  
rhyme scheme. After all, there is  
nothing like jumping in at the deep end.

The Than-Bauk is a three-lined poem with 4 syllables in each line.  
It is often humorous, but doesn't have to be. The rhyme scheme, which  
is sometimes referred to as a "climbing rhyme", takes some getting used  
to...

Line 1 -- the rhyme falls on syllable 4

Line 2 -- the rhyme falls on syllable 3

Line 3 -- the rhyme falls on syllable 2

Weird, huh?

This is another poem that I had never encountered until I  
stumbled upon <http://members.optushome.com.au>. At first I didn't  
think I liked it very much. My first attempts at it were dire:

I'm not a bard --  
this is hard -- buy  
a card instead.

I sit and stare  
full of care and  
don't dare to speak.

Back at the camp  
all is damp and  
the lamp is dark.

Not all that impressive, are they? I was ready to throw my notes on Than-Bauk in the bin when it struck me what my problem is: my poems sound unfinished and woefully incomplete. So, why not experiment with the form a bit? Why not try writing Than-Bauk poetry that has multiple verses? Perhaps then I will be able to round the poem off into something that feels whole. So I tried this...

The haunted shack  
had `round back a  
flame-blackened tomb.

There lies within  
one whose sin brought  
to him his doom.

But he, it's said,  
on one dread night  
though dead did arise --

With worms within,  
mold'ring skin and  
hell in blazing eyes.



His voice was low,  
and earthy though  
his moan was very clear.

Pass by -- `tis fine,  
but all are mine  
who try to enter here.

This poem started off with the best of intentions of sticking to the Than-Bauk formula and for the first four stanzas I just about managed to do it. I even got the last lines of the stanzas to rhyme which gave the poem needed cohesion. The last two verses, however, needed more flexibility to keep the poem flowing. So I cheated a bit. And why not? Just like in Haiku and Tanka, there are more important concerns here than stubborn adherence to formula. The way the poem flows, its overall effect is crucial. No one is going to read:

Back at the camp  
all is damp and  
the lamp is dark.

and compliment me on my genius at robotically keeping to a pattern, the result of which is boring. But you may enjoy the haunted house poem because it conjures up an image in your mind and it trips off the tongue like a good poem should.

So, as we've discussed before: learn the rules, then throw the rule book away. Do not sacrifice the flow of your words to formula, or the image you are building to a syllable count. Write free form Than-bauk, if

you wish. And most of all, remember the whole point of the exercise:  
have fun.