

Analysis of slow, slow, fresh fount

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Rhythm exists in many aspects of our lives. Perhaps the commonality of rhythm comes from the fact that it exists within our natural processes: breathing and heartbeat. Other rhythmic activities that we perform every day that we do not consciously associate with rhythm include running and walking.

Socially, most of all existing performing arts contain some sort of rhythm. For example, rhythmic speech, in the form of singing or poetry reading, is varied to convey different intentions. Most commonly, quick and upbeat rhythm is associated with joy while slow and downbeat rhythm is associated with sadness.

Therefore, there is a critical relationship between rhythm and meaning. The poem “ Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount” by Ben Jonson uses various poetic devices to convey a sense of woe and grief. This poem details the story of Echo and Narcissus through the voice of Echo the nymph.

After learning of Narcissus’s death, Echo speaks and shares her grief and sorrow with nature. Through this process, Echo grieves the death of her unrequited love and expresses her pain of loss through singing this poem.

The irregularity of the meter within the poem, coinciding with the fact that Echo is sobbing while singing this poem, serves to highlight the process of Echo’s grieving. The first line consists mostly of spondees, which are groups of two stressed syllables. The following words are all stressed in the first line: slow, slow, fresh, fount, keep, time, salt and tears.

These continuous spondees slow down the reader as he/she reads through the poem. This places an emphasis on each stressed word.

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In addition, the use of a pyrrhic, two continuous unstressed syllables, emphasizes the following spondee: salt tears. Line 10 also contains all spondees, meaning each “ drop” is emphasized. However, starting from line two, the poem switches to the iambic pentameter, meaning each line contains five groups.

Each group consists of an unstressed syllable, followed by a stressed syllable. For example, line 4: “ Woe weeps out her di-vi-sion when she sings. ” This type of meter stops from lines 5-8 and restarts in line 9: “ Like melting snow u-pon some cragg-y hill. Each unstressed and stressed syllable is considered an iamb: such as “ u-pon. ” Line 11 also contains all iambs, but it has six groups instead of the usual five.

Therefore, the last line is considered an iambic hexameter. The rhyme scheme for this poem is ABABCCDDED, meaning lines 1 and 3 rhyme, 2 and 4 rhyme, and so on. The poem begins with a standard ABAB rhyme scheme but changes in something very different with the CCC in the middle of the poem and line 10 (E) which does not rhyme with any other line.

The changing meters attempts to convey Echo’s process of grieving. The iambic meter and spondees in lines 1-4 conveys that she is expressing her grief to nature in hopes of receiving some sort of sympathy or support. Her emotions overtake her from lines 5-8 where she sings in fragments.

The lines 5-7 ending with semi-colons make the reader pause at the end of each line. The pauses are there perhaps to convey that Echo is crying very hard and needs to catch her breath after each line. The pauses perhaps are filled by the sounds of Echo’s sobbing.

Her intense sobbing slows starting from line 9 when the meter returns to iambs. The use of spondees to emphasize the word “ drop” in line 10 creates a lingering effect on each of Echo’s tear drops almost as if each teardrop drops in slow motion.

This line, with the use of spondees, also slows down the rhythm of the poem as Echo’s intense grieving becomes more subdued and bitter. The last line is in iambic hexameter to convey that Echo has transitioned from her very emotional form of grieving to a more bitter but contained form of grieving.