

# On Poetic Flow

Notes offered by Kate Reese Hurd

In his introductions to eurythmy performances<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Steiner explained that the beginnings of a poem are found in the sensing of a “rhythmic motion,” an “inner flow,” which is only afterward “embodied in a literal content.”<sup>a</sup> It is the poet’s “shaping and forming” of this flow<sup>b</sup> that leads to the creation of a sonnet, for instance; for “the meter, rhythm and structure are really the things that matter.”<sup>c</sup> The poet’s work is in “pursuit” of “an elusive melody, or some harmonious musical element,” which is then embodied in the structures, sentence forms, meter, and “all the artistic elements of language,” endowed with “the melodic quality, the imaginative, pictorial element, ... the sculptural, colorful elements.”<sup>d</sup>

Alan Howard, a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, spoke about the importance of these musical-poetic structure when he said that to the aspect of comprehending the meaning-sense of the lines must be brought “the other aspect, as the sounds or the textures, the rhythms.”<sup>2</sup> He summed up this aspect with the word, *apprehension* – a word “that we don’t quite understand so well he.” This is not ‘apprehension’ in the narrow sense of fearful foreboding – not at all. With this word, Alan was pointing to what it means to ‘apprehend’ something – simply put: *to seize, capture or lay hold of* something. “Apprehension, as opposed to comprehension.” And he explained what he meant by this in the context of their work:

*I think that apprehension to the Elizabethans was a very palpable form of being sensually highly aware ... of ... rhythm, sound, texture as a way of combining with comprehension to bring about ... a factor which goes beyond just the sense ... a kind of extra quality.*

To this, actor Ian McKellen added: “... something like music which would accompany wonderful lyrics.” Yes!

And their beloved teacher and Assistant Director of the RSC, John Barton said:<sup>3</sup>

*... [W]e learn so much of what goes on in [the] text, but ... when we do it I always feel a bit of a sense of failure, because we can’t put into the work more than a fraction of the things that we talk about and dig for.*

Note: In Rudolf Steiner’s work, ‘he’ is always inclusive of all genders.

(See other side)

And a bit later he candidly spoke of the continuing lack, that prevents Shakespeare’s blank verse from coming fully to life on the stage:

*And I suppose I feel a particular sense of failure when I talk about Shakespeare’s poetry. It’s a problem that’s haunted me over the years, and which I’ve never really solved. When I read a Shakespeare text, I’m moved and stirred by the power and the resonance of individual lines. ... Yet nothing I’ve said so far about marrying our two traditions, Elizabethans and moderns, necessarily helps to bring about what I can both hear and can feel in the lines as I read them. ... Yet I feel I’m missing something and in rehearsal I often don’t know what to say or how to help the actor.*

Blank verse is merely pentameter verse without rhymes. In the plays, rhymes appear here and there in the verse; and in *Romeo and Juliet*, the entire scene between Romeo and the Friar is rhymed pentameter.

Rudolf Steiner brought attention many times to the fact that Goethe rehearsed his plays, written in pentameter, hexameter and tetrameter, much as a conductor would a piece of music:<sup>4</sup>

*Over the last decades recitation and declamation have been steered more and more into a predilection for endowing with form the meaning-content of the words. A stress on the word-for-word content has become increasingly conspicuous. Our times have little understanding for such a treatment of the spoken word as was characteristic of Goethe, who used to rehearse the actors in his plays with special regard for the formation of speech, standing in front of them like a musical conductor with his baton. The speech-formation, the element of form that underlies the word-for-word content – it is really this which inspires the true poet as an artist.*

1) *An Introduction to Eurythmy*, Rudolf Steiner; published in English by the Anthroposophic Press, Spring Valley NY, 1984. Here are the specifics for the quotes:

a) III, p. 15, Dornach, Switzerland, Aug. 11, 1919; b) VI, p. 33, Dornach, Aug. 15, 1920; c) VII, p. 45, Dornach, Sept. 17, 1922; d) IX, pp. 51-52, The Hague, The Netherlands, Nov. 2. 1922.

2) See at 5:20 min./sec. into “Poetry and Hidden Poetry,” the ninth of nine episodes in “RSC Playing Shakespeare,” produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1984.

3) See at 3 min. into this same ninth episode.

4) *Poetry and the Art of Speech*, Lecture VI, July 30, 1921, Darmstadt, Rudolf Steiner. And also see *Revealing the Music of Pentameter: Putting Shakespeare Through His Paces*, by Kate Reese Hurd, posted at the EANA website, artistic category, 2021.

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