

# GETTING INTO POETRY by Barb Miller

## Poetry Workshop 4: Blank Verse Character Revelation

### Character

There is one form of poem that is a combination of two. Blank verse, like free verse, does not have rhyme — but it does have meter.

Think about something you would like to reveal about a character, or the speaker in the poem. It could be any quality: sadness, joy, courage, impatience, stubbornness, anger, love. Write this down. Then write down two other qualities your character has.

Even though the poetry does not rhyme, it must still be economical with words to maintain the meter. Sample:

### Pulling Dead Lambs

It's a simple equation.

    The lamb is dead;

The ewe is alive.

    If I give up pulling the dead lamb,

    The ewe dies too.

Hasn't she been through enough?

Don't tell my husband with the gun.

Go, get clean rags and salve.

There must be a way.

Push lamb legs back in; find the head, pull it around.

    But the lamb is enormous, like a giraffe.

The neck goes on forever in the small

Confines of the ewe.

It has been hours, and every minute

Brings a moan.

If I cannot deliver the lamb, she will die in agony.

    But she already is in agony.

I turn the problem inside out.

I must deliver her from the lamb,

    Her executioner.

I work her away from him,

A quarter of an inch at a time.

    She can't stand much more,

But I can't give up, not now,

    Not after all she has suffered.

Her life means more to me  
Now than my own.  
I'm all she has.  
One pull, like so many others,  
And the dead lamb comes.  
And the ewe looks normal.  
She drinks  
She stands  
And goes to the flock without looking back.  
She lives. I did not fail her.  
I look for her day by day  
She does not fear me  
We have a secret together  
Life is all that matters.

- B. Miller, 2003

What quality or emotion is revealed in this poem?  
What do we find out about the shepherdess?

Other suggested selections to read as examples: "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes, or on a lighter note, "Some Things Don't Make any Sense at All" by Judith Viorst, or "The Secret Place" by Tomie de Paola.

Chose one emotion to reveal about a character. The character could be an animal, not a person. Describe the character in the first line or two.

What problem are they facing?  
Why are they feeling this way?  
What happens to either enhance or dispel the feeling?  
Is the poem going to retain the same mood or switch?  
Use sensory detail to sharpen the emotion.  
Read your poem out loud to see if the emotion of the character comes through.

Now, send your poem somewhere, for example, to the Ligonier Valley Writers School Poetry Contest.