

one unstressed syllable added to foot two, and an unstressed syllable turned into a stressed syllable in foot five, this would be perfect trochaic pentameter:

1 2 3 4 5
Fu my / spir it ous / mists in / hab it / this place.

Plath understood the power of meter, and the way trochees cancel the reassuring normality of iambs. Having done that, she then filled the line with a hissing sound track to make the fumes and mists more real; we hear *f's*, *s's*, *h's*, and *th's*, and the line reeks of the *ih* sound of six *i's* in six words:

Fu my / spir it ous / mists in / hab it / this place.

What we are seeing is not a poet who has abandoned the powerful techniques of traditional poetry, but one who has learned to submerge those techniques, just below a veil of protective spontaneity. Plath uses regular trochaic pentameter, but switches two syllables to make it unnoticeable. She repeats vowel and consonant sounds, but hidden within the words, rather than as alliteration at the beginnings of words, where it would be obvious. She avoids showy end rhyme, but deftly puts *mists* and *this* in the same line, as near internal rhymes. It wasn't that she didn't want to write real poetry, she just didn't want us to catch her.

In order to understand all true poetry, both traditional and modern, students need to have a solid grounding in the technical details of traditional poetry. Only in this way will students develop the art detectors that will enable them to enjoy both Robert Burns and Sylvia Plath.

Real poetry is far more powerful and accomplished than its stereotypes imply.