
V. Ramos

**AMERICAN INDIAN POETRY.**See indigenous americas, poetry of the; inuit poetry; navajo poetry.

**AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE POETRY.**American Sign Language (ASL) poetry refers to poetry translated from another lang. into ASL or, more often, originally composed in ASL. Since ASL is one of more than 100 distinct, naturally occurring signed langs. in the world, ASL poetry is not the only signed poetic trad., but it is the most developed. In such works, the poet's body has a strong presence. By skillfully using space, hand shape, movement, facial expressions, and other elements, ASL poets produce three-dimensional poems that express meaning without depending on sound.

The beginnings of ASL poetry are elusive. ASL dates from the early 19th c., when deaf students began to come together at schools in the U.S. However, after the Civil War, some hearing educators started a campaign against sign lang., trying to abolish it from schools. Moreover, because ASL is not a written lang., we have no direct record of it before the advent of motion-picture technology in the 20th c. The first ASL performances are largely lost to us, existing only in what has been passed down through sign of hand.

ASL poets draw on the cultural trads. of the deaf community and on poetry in written langs. Early influences probably included ASL songs, folklore, and deaf literary organizations. Films from the 1930s show deaf Americans signing “The Star Spangled Banner” and “Yankee Doodle.” Deaf people also developed original forms like 1-2-3 songs, where crowds rhythmically sign together, and ABC stories, which performers relate using only 26 signs conforming to the hand shapes of the manual alphabet. At the same time, deaf literary groups promoted the trans. of Eng. poems into ASL. In 1939, e.g., Eric Malzkuhn gave a signed version of Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” in which he ingeniously recombined parts of everyday signs to convey Carroll’s nonsensical words, making something new.

The greatest effect on ASL poetry came in the 1960s, when linguists recognized ASL as a full human lang. Poets responded with renewed pride, composing more original poems in ASL. Sometimes they took on deaf themes. Thus Clayton Valli, in “Dandelion,” implicitly compares ASL to those plants that a gardener can never quite eradicate, and Ella Mae Lentz, in “To a Hearing Mother,” invites parents of deaf children to work with the deaf community in raising them. Other poems have less to do with deaf experience. Bernard Bragg’s “Flowers and Moonlight on the Spring Water” gracefully evokes the image in the title, while “Need,” by Peter Cook and Kenny Lerner, the deaf-hearing team of the Flying Words Project, protests America’s dependence on oil.

Like other poets, ASL performers may follow rigid structure or more open-ended forms. Among other techniques, they often use space in symmetrical fashion; choose signs with certain hand shapes to give visual rhyme; use eye gaze, mouth movement, head and body shifts, and other nonmanual indicators to add rhythm and meaning; and employ *simile, metaphor,* and *allusion.* By exploiting ASL grammar in multiple ways, they create layers of meaning and poetry that is vividly expressive.

ASL poets tend to be deaf, but not all are. Finally, not all deaf poets sign. Some, like David Wright, publish poetry in the dominant lang. of their nations.


C. Krentz

**AMERIND POETRY.** See indigenous americas, poetry of the.

**AMHARIC POETRY.** See ethiopia, poetry of.

**AMPHIBRACH** (Gr., “short at both ends”). In *classical prosody*, a metrical sequence consisting of a long syllable preceded and followed by a short one. The amphibrach is rare in cl. poetry either as an independent unit or as a continuous meter and equally a rarity in the accentually based prosodies of mod. langs., suggesting it may not exist except as an experiment. Amphibrachic word shapes (a stress flanked by slacks) are easy to finger, esp. polysyllabic formed of a monosyllabic prefix + base + suffix (e.g., inspection, romantic); but the amphibrach as a meter risks monotony and is very rare. Lord Byron tried it (“The black bands came over”); J. W. Goethe, Friedrich von Matthisson, and Ernst Moritz Arndt wrote a number of poems in amphibrachs in Ger. In running series with ambiguous ends, amphibrachic lines would be nearly impossible to differentiate from other ternary ones such as dactylic or anaplectic.

*See* binary and ternary.

T.V.F. Brogan

**AMPLIFICATION.** An ambiguous term, perhaps best avoided in lit. crit., which seeks to distinguish rather than to confuse rhetorical taxonomy. In cl. rhet., amplification is one of the “special” topics used in *epideictic poetry* or ceremonial discourse, usually for praise,