

Just Another Note on the Significance of Line Breaks Ananda Esteve

Together with rhythm and rhyme, line breaks separate poetry from prose. I thought seriously about line breaks when I wrote my poem, *Hermanita Mía, Hija De La Tierra*. I wanted to convey both specific and double meanings. This poem talks about my sister coming of age, sprouting breasts, and becoming unfortunate enough to be represented in billboards as a Latina sex symbol. When we discussed the following chunk of *Hermanita Mía* in my workshop group, we decided that line breaks carry weighty consequences.

First I experimented with breaking the lines this way:

just another Latina
sex-symbol

"just another Latina" as its own line suggests the subject of the poem is a casual commodity. It also stresses her race; the word, "Latina" gets the emphasis when I say the line out loud. The next line informs the reader she's also a sex symbol. Breaking the lines in this way sets up a parallel between the two ideas: "just another Latina," therefore, equals "sex symbol."

Then I broke the lines this way:

Just
another Latina
sex-symbol

Having "just" on its own has a belittling connotation, like saying, "She's nothing more than." Placing "another" at the beginning of the next line puts the emphasis on "another" and implies she is one of many Latinas. It makes "another" mean "yet one more."

Finally I broke the lines:

just another
Latina sex-
symbol

Having "just another" on its own makes the reader depend on the next line to find out "just another what?" It sets up anticipation and a rhythm that

moves the reader from one line to the next. The second line, "Latina sex," repeats the rhythm (with the same number of syllables) and answers the question. It's Latina sex! This line division implies "Latina sex" might be different/more exotic than other sex. However, the next line is "symbol." So it's not just Latina sex we're considering, but Latina sex symbols or Latina sex as symbolic! Instead of climactic cymbals after the build-up of the preceding lines, we get stopped short. As a one-word line, "Symbol" punctuates the rhythm. It might even make the reader stop and think.



Poetry Should
Ride the Bus!
(photo by
June Jordan)