

The Pantoum—A Malayan Poetic Form

(Acknowledgements to Mark Strand and Eavan Bolan's The Making of a Poem)

- Each pantoum stanza must be four lines long. This is called a *quatrain*.
- The length is unspecified but the pantoum must begin and end with the same line.
- The second and fourth lines of the first quatrain become the first and third lines of the next, and so on with succeeding quatrains.
- The final quatrain changes this pattern. In the final quatrain, the unrepeated first and third lines are used in reverse as second and fourth lines.

The following is an excerpt from Ari Siletz' The Mullah with No Legs. In this passage, the main character has been sent to buy some meat from the butcher and has spent the change rather than returning it to his mother & said the butcher shortchanged him:

It was still noontime as we set off to straighten out the butcher. The call to prayer was being sung. Across the neighborhood devout supplicants beseeched their maker:

*Guide us along the straight path
The path of those You have favored
Not of those with whom You are angry
Not of those who are lost.*

I was certainly lost. I was fighting the delusion like a drug, now dispelling it, now overwhelmed by it. When things were clear, I could see that I had done nothing wrong except fail to get permission to buy candy. The butcher made a mistake, I did not know about it, and I bought unauthorized candy. All I had to do was tell my mother and no crime would have been committed. The real crime was still a few minutes in the future, when I would endanger the reputation and livelihood of an honest man. I still had time to avert that. (49)

The following is a pantoum created using text from the previous excerpt:

Line	Text	Pattern Line
1	Along the straight path,	1
2	The call to prayer was being sung.	2
3	The reputation and livelihood of	3
4	Devout supplicants.	4
5	The call to prayer was being sung;	2
6	I did not know about it.	5
7	Devout supplicants,	4
8	Those You have favored.	6
9	I did not know about it	5
10	I would endanger	7
11	Those you have favored	6
12	Those who are lost	8
13	I would endanger	7
14	The reputation and livelihood of	3
15	Those who are lost	8
16	Along the straight path	1