RHYME’S REASON
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For Lizzy and Martha

Chosen illustrations of form get dafter
As they shy from Familiar Quotations;
Most examples follow too slowly after
    Their explanations,

Though even if I could improve the timing
There’s no one I could trust to do the graphics
And so, even as now I do in rhyming
    Horace’s sapphics,

Scorning such an account of rhyme as uses
Assembly-line quotations, then, I fill a
Book with verses handmade, the sterner Muses’
    Laughing ancilla.
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This is a guide to verse, to the formal structures which are a necessary condition of poetry, but not a sufficient one. The building blocks of poetry itself are elements of fiction—fable, "image," metaphor—all the material of the nonliteral. The components of verse are like parts of plans by which the materials are built into a structure. The study of rhetoric distinguishes between tropes, or figures of meaning such as metaphor and metonymy, and schemes, or surface patterns of words. Poetry is a matter of trope; and verse, of scheme or design. But the blueprints of verse can be used to build things made of literal, or nonpoetic material—a shopping list or roadside sign can be rhymed—which is why most verse is not poetry.

It is nonetheless common and convenient for most people who don’t read carefully to use "poetry" to mean "writing in some kind of verse," and to regard thereby the design without considering the materials. The most popular verse form in America today—the ubiquitous jingle readers identify with "poetry" even as, fifty or sixty years ago, they did anything that rhymed—is

a kind of free verse
without any special
constraints on it except
those imposed by
the notion—also
generally accepted—that
the strip the lines
make as they run
down the page (the
familiar strip with the
jagged
right-hand edge) not
be too wide
This is as automatic and unpoetic in its arbitrary formality as jingling rhymes on "June" and "moon" ever were; schemes and structures of free verse are as conventional and, for most writers, as "academic" as certain other "official" forms have been in other eras. Major poetry has been built in this form, even as Tennyson could employ the same rhyming schemes as writers of occasional verses for family parties.

Both verse and prose, then, are schematic domains. Literacy used to entail some ability to write in both modes, without any presumption of poetry in the execution of skill in the former. But today sportswriters on the few newspapers we have left know no Latin nor can write good witty verses. We no longer memorize poems at school. Young persons are protected from the prose cadences—so influential on writing in both modes—of the King James Bible by aggressive separatism and the churches themselves; all of us are shielded from Shakespearean rhythm by the ways in which both prose and verse are publicly intoned in America. The territory covered in this guide—this road map through the region of poetry in English—has itself tended to run back into second-growth timber, if not into wilderness.

Some day we will all be reading Blue Guides and Baedekers to what once were our own, familiar public places. In former times, the region of verse was like an inviting, safe municipal park, in which one could play and wander at will. Today, only a narrow border of that park is frequently used (and vandalized), out of fear that there is safety only in that crowded strip—even as the users' grandparents would cling to walks
that went by statues—and out of ignorance of landscape. The beauties of the rest of that park are there, unexplored save by some scholars and often abandoned even by them.

I am old enough to have grown up in the park, and to map a region one loves is a way of caressing it. (Goethe wrote of counting out hexameters on his Roman lady’s back as she lay in his arms: he was mapping her body’s curve even as he felt for the ancient rhythm.) I too set out now as a loving rather than merely dutiful tour guide. Even today, when touch seems casual and only discourse intimate, one can’t presume on Whitmanic relations with readers. I shall content myself (Inquiry’s too severe in prose; Verse puts its questions in repose) with tapping out my self-explaining diagrams and illustrations of the walks and alleys and bosks and ponds and parterres and follies and hahas and so forth that comprise my territory, as it were, on the reader’s hand. After all, this is a manual.

The schemes and designs to be explored here include: the structures of lines of verse; patterns of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance; schemes of syntax and word order; groups of lines called strophes or stanzas; overall patterns of repetition and variation (refrains, etc.); and larger arrangements of these. Over the centuries, these forms have come at various times to be associated with one or another kind of poetic use—or with what some critics would call a “theme,” a “subject” or an occasion. Sonnets, for example, start out by being about a particular philosophic conception of love, and end up in the twen-
tieth century as descriptions of pictures, explanations of myths, or analytic meditations. And yet the later poems in the history of the form’s life—when written by the finest poets—are always in some way aware of, and always engage, that history and the burden it puts on originality.

This little book contains examples of formal schemes of various sorts, and at various levels of organization. Since we are concerned only with verse in English, no historical sketch or comparative analysis of metrics and forms is given, save for a glance at what the meters of classical poetry have entailed for English. But it should be remembered that all poetry was originally oral. It was sung or chanted; poetic scheme and musical pattern coincided, or were sometimes identical. Poetic form as we know it is an abstraction from, or residue of, musical form, from which it came to be divorced when writing replaced memory as a way of preserving poetic utterance in narrative, prayer, spell, and the like. The ghost of oral poetry never vanishes, even though the conventions and patterns of writing reach out across time and silence all actual voices. This is why, to go back to the earlier analogy of architecture, a poet is always like both the builder of houses, with plans “at hand,” and the designer or executor of a complicated edifice, drawing and working from complex blueprints.

Verse can be organized according to very many metrical systems, depending upon the structure of the language in which the verse is written. The systems relevant to verse in English are:

1. *Pure accentual*—the meter of the earliest Ger-
manic poetry; it is preserved in nursery rhymes and in much lyric verse.

2. Accentual-syllabic—the verse system which involves such patterns as "iambic," "dactylic," etc., all somewhat confusingly named for Greek meters in a totally different system.

3. Pure syllabic—the basic system of modern French and Japanese, to cite two kinds of poetry that have used it for centuries; it has been used in English only in the last fifty years or so.

4. So-called free verse, of which there are many varieties, developed mostly in the twentieth century.

5. Quantitative verse which, save for some grotesque and failed examples, cannot occur in English, but which was the basis of Greek prosody and, later on, of Latin.

Since accentual-syllabism has been so dominant, and so important, during the course of the poetic history of the English language, we will start with it.

Accentual-syllabic verse is built up of pairs or triads of syllables, alternating or otherwise grouping stressed and unstressed ones. Syllables usually keep their word accent, or the accent they would have in phrases in normal speech. Iambic pentameter, a line pattern made up of five syllable pairs with the first syllable unstressed, can be illustrated by a line which most perfectly conforms to the pattern itself:

About about about about about

or this:

A boat, a boat, a boat, a boat, a boat
Iambic Pentameter

(for a monosyllable, with its preceding article, is accented like a word of two syllables). But actual lines of iambic pentameter, because they can't simply repeat identical pairs of syllables, have individual and particular rhythms which depart from the metrical pattern slightly. It is in this variation that the sound of poetry lives. For example, a simple variation of our first example—one that has become a standard pattern in itself—is actually a reversal of stressed and unstressed syllables in the first pair:

Almost "about about about about"

or in the second as well:

Nearly almost "about about about"

But there are ways of departing that seem to obscure the pattern so that they can no longer be considered variations from it:

Almost the sound of the line of "about"s

What we hear is a rhythm of four beats, not five, and the unstressed syllables are grouped into triads of dum de de, dum de de (called dactyls), even though there are, in fact, ten syllables in the lines.

Most interesting with regard to poetry are the variations—and almost every line of poetry exhibits them—that lie between these extremes. Any poem will be cast in one metrical form or another, and after we read three or more lines it will be obvious which of two patterns even the most ambiguous line is a variation of. Frequently, richness and significance of sound depend upon our ear hesitating for a while between patterns; but there is real ambiguity only
at the start of a poem. An extreme case is the opening of one of Keats's sonnets:

How many bards gild the lapses of time

We might think that a matching line would be:

Read this as dactyls and then it will rhyme

like the one we made up before. But in fact, the sonnet continues in iambic pentameter, and we realize that we had a wildly variant first line instead of a more patterned one. But a better example, also by Keats, can be seen in the second line of his “Ode on a Grecian Urn”:

Thou foster-child of silence and slow time

Here, although only the fourth pair has its order reversed, the line nevertheless resounds with other possibilities. Thus,

Thou foster-child of silence and slow time
Accentually pounding to só míme
An antiquated rhythm which had nó rhyme.

But the phrase “slow time” resolves itself in the poem because “time” rhymes there only with the monosyllable “rhyme” two lines below (there’s no “slow”/ “so” chiming, as in our example). When we scan a line of poetry, or mark the prominent syllables, we are really showing what its actual rhythm is, and then, by putting this rhythm in alignment with adjacent ones in the poem or stanza of the poem, deciding what their common pattern is. Thus, every line is at once unique and has family resemblances, usually very strong, to its companions in any one poem.
Accentual-syllabic verse is traditionally discussed as sequences of *feet*; and although the terminology is misleading, you can remember that:

A foot is just a group of syllables:
Trochees (like these), iambs, spondees, paired, while
Dactyls and anapests always are triads of syllables.

An iamb is a pair with a stress on the second syllable (as in "about"):

Iambic meter runs along like this:
*Pentameters* will have five syllables
More strongly stressed than other ones nearby—
Ten syllables all told, perhaps eleven.

But

* * *

"Dactyl" means "finger" in Greek, and a foot that was made up of one long
Syllable followed by two, like the joints in a finger was used for
Lines made of six, just like these, in the epics of Homer and Virgil,
Save that in English we substitute downbeats and upbeats for long-short.*

* * *

In an anapest up beats start out in reverse
Of the dactyl's persuasion but end up no worse.
(Yes, the anapest's name is dactylic—a curse?)

* * *

Slow spondees are two heavy stressed downbeats
They stand shoulder to strong shoulder this way.

*For more on this, see pages 34–36.
We can even observe the echoes of such accentual "feet" in natural speech:

Sô names such as "John Smith" seem spondees.
(Names of places, such as "Main Street"?*
Thése are mérely good old tróchees.)

It will be clear by now that different kinds of accentual-syllabic line will "interpret" a stress-pattern of natural speech in different ways. Disyllabic words are stressed either one way or another, and pairs of words that differ by virtue of stress alone will have to play different metrical roles:

These lînes can shôw you where the acents went,
But with their content I'm not yet content.

And trisyllables, for example, can submit to two readings. We would say that "typewriter" is normally dactylic-sounding, and placing it in a dactylic line elicits this character.

Listen, my typewriter clâters in dâctyls along with my prôse!

But "typewriter" is a compound word, once hyphenated ("type-writer") before constant use in speech had silenced the second stress; that ghost of accent can be summoned up:

My typewriter in verse divides its time
Between iamb and trochee. (Now I'll rhyme.)

Clearly, a little phrase like "open it" will work like a dactylic single word, just as "of the best" will work like an anapestic one. It will be apparent, also, that accentual-syllabic verse can make much of the variations of stress that occur when we are logically con-

*(But a tow'n's "main street" 's spon'daic )
10

Other Iambics

trating two words or phrases which differ by reason of their unstressed syllable. "A book" is an iamb; so is "the book"; but what we write as "the book" (and pronounce as something like "thee book") promotes the unstressed syllable, in emphatic contrast, to something having more of the power of "this book" or "that book." Thus we might, iambically,

Observe the whore outside the store.

But if we mean to single out the allegorical figure of Revelation 17 then she may become trochaic, when

Bábylón we mean here—the whore
(Not some hooker by the seashore).

When the older terminology of "foot" for "syllable pair" or "triad" is used, line length is described in terms of number of feet, as for example dimeter, trimeter:

If she should write
Some verse tonight
This dimeter
Would limit her.

But:

Iambic trimeter
Is rather easier.

And:

Tetrameter allows more space
For thoughts to seat themselves with grace.

Now:

Hére is pentameter, the line of five
That English poetry still keeps alive;
In other centuries it was official.
Now, different kinds of verse make it seem special.

* 

Six downbeats in a line that has twelve syllables
Make up the alexandrine, which, as you can hear,
Tends to fall into halves—one question, one reply.

The break that you heard in the last line is called caesura. Here it is at work in rhymed pairs of lines called couplets:

In couplets, one line often makes a point
Which hinges on its bending, like a joint;
The sentence makes that line break into two.
Here's a caesura: see what it can do.
(And here's a gentler one, whose pause, more slight,
Waves its two hands, and makes what’s left sound right.)

Two even longer measured lines:

Fourteeners, cut from ballad stanzas, don’t seem right for song:
Their measure rumbles on like this for just a bit too long.

and, used by early Elizabethans,

A poulter's measure (like a baker's dozen) cut
One foot off a fourteener couplet, ended in a rut.

Let us now consider groupings of lines, by rhyme or other means, remembering first that

A line can be end-stopped, just like this one,
Or it can show enjambment, just like this
One, where the sense straddles two lines: you feel
As if from shore you'd stepped into a boat;

and remembering secondly that there is a unique case, outside of line-groups. The one-line poem (in Greek, a monostich) is almost always really a couplet,
an epigram formed by the title and the line itself, as in

A ONE-LINE POEM

The universe

First, then, *blank verse*:

Iambic five-beat lines are labeled *blank Verse* (with sometimes a foot or two reversed, or one more syllable—"feminine ending").

Blank verse can be extremely flexible: it ticks and tocks the time with even feet (or sometimes, cleverly, can end limping).*

Shakespeare and others of his day explored blank verse in stage plays, both in regular and rather uneven and more rough-hewn forms. Occasionally, rhyming couplets sound out at scenes' endings, gongs to end the round.

Milton did other things: he made it more heroic than dramatic: although blind he turned its structure into something half heard, half seen, as when a *chiasm*† (words, phrases, sounds or parts of speech arranged in mirroring) occurs in *Paradise Lost* (he often *enjamb* this way) we see half a line that, reflecting its line-half, cannot sit still to be regarded like a well-made picture or inscription, but rushes ahead as sentences do, not like visual melody in a well-shaped line.

But back again to what blank verse can do: in time of old, inversions it contained of syntax, and Wordsworth and Tennyson more delicately such arrangements made. But Browning and more lately Robert Frost made their blank verse seem natural again, the kind of sound our sentences would make

*(Pentameters like this are called *scazons.*)

†And see page 49.
If only we could leave them to themselves—
The road our way of talking always takes,
Not, like a foul line or state boundary,
An artificially drawn line at all.

But:

The old fourteener William Blake found to his liking more
Than old "heroic" verse, pentameters, which must have
seemed
Far too official for him; so, like Milton with his ten
Syllables, Blake pushed ahead with the seven stresses he
heard beneath
The even fourteeners sanctified for him by balladry
(For two rhyming fourteeners can / be written out, you see,
In just a single ballad stanza, rhymed abab)
And common hymnody, and Chapman's Iliad, and all
Popular rhyming forms eschewed by Alexander Pope.
Blake, in Jerusalem and Milton, twisted the seven-beat line
With terrible vatic force, & claimed that he wrote in three
different keys,
"Terrific," "Mild & gentle," and "Prosaic"; yet it remains
Hard to distinguish their tones, as it were, from rhythmic
patterns alone.

Before we move into groupings made by rhyme,
let us consider the ways in which syllables them­
selves can reach through, or across, lines. They can
alliterate:

Alliteration lightly links
Stressed syllables with common consonants.

And they can, without actually rhyming, exhibit
assonance:

Assonance is the spirit of a rhyme,
A common vowel, hovering like a sigh
After its consonantal body dies.

We should also remember the following, about rhyme
itself:
The weakest way in which two words can chime
Is with the most expected kind of rhyme—
(If it’s the only rhyme that you can write,
A homonym will never sound quite right.)
A rhyme is stronger when the final words
Seem less alike than pairs of mated birds.
When meaning makes a gap which sound can span, it’s
As if the rhyme words came from different planets;
Or when a final verb, perhaps, will reach
Out to rhyme with some different part of speech;
Or when a word spelled in one way, like “off,”
Rhymes strictly, with a sort of visual cough
Of surprise; or when a common word like “love”
Which rhymed in Shakespeare’s time with “move” and “prove”
Ends up today a sight-rhyme, as above.
Some rhymes can trip you as you move along:
Their lines can seem as smooth as they are strong.
Like a typewriter’s final, right-hand bell,
A rhyme can stop a line, or it can tell
The sentence to go on and do its best
Till, at the next line’s end, it comes to rest.
And if the tone shows signs of letting up, let
There be a cute rhyme for a final couplet.
(A serious effect is often killable
By rhyming with too much more than one syllable.)

Internal rhymes can claim a word or name
And make two words mean something of the same:
Thus spring can jingle with its singing birds,
Or summer hum with two resounding words;
The red robes of October’s garish ball
Make fall recall that dropping leaves are all
We hear; the hard, dry stint of winter lasts
Through blizzards and through slow and snowy blasts,
Until lengthening sunlight hours will bring
Round in a ringlike way again, the spring.

One of the most important groupings of lines we
have had in English, particularly in the seventeenth
through the nineteenth centuries, has been the Eng­
lish couplet, paired rhymed iambic pentameter:
Heroic couplets, classical and cold,
Can make new matters smack of something old
And something borrowed (like a wedding, true,
But this comparison stops short of "blue"
Yet points out how the marriage of two lines
Brings forth long children as their length combines
—And sometimes triplets help to vary the designs).
This verse was called "heroic" for the way
It seemed equivalent, in Jonson's day—
The seventeenth century—to Homer's long
Unrhymed hexameters, and Virgil's song.
With Alexander Pope, we have so pure a
Way of arranging these, that a caesura
Makes this line pause, makes that one slowly wend
Its way to join its partner in the end.
An end-stopped line is one—as you'll have guessed—
Whose syntax comes, just at its end, to rest.
But when the walking sentence needs to keep
On going, the enjambment makes a leap
Across a line-end (here, a rhyming close).
—Milton, in his blank verse, makes use of those:
His long, dependent clauses are enjambed.
A somewhat sharp effect, as well, is damned
Easy—when, reading on, the reader learns
The maze of verse can have its sudden turns
And twists—but couplets take your hand, and then
Lead you back into end-stopped rhyme again.

Of course,

Couplets can be of any length,
And shorter size gives greater strength
Sometimes—but sometimes, willy-nilly,
Four-beat couplets sound quite silly.
(Some lines really should stay single:
Feminine rhymes can make them jingle.)

These anapestic tetrameter couplets, by the way,
were used widely in the late eighteenth and the early
nineteenth centuries; they can seem either active or
passively elegiac:
There are rhythms like this that you'll frequently meet:
They resound with the pounding of regular feet,
And their anapests carry a narrative load
(The hoofbeats of horses, of course, on the road).

★

But they lie by the side of a whispering stream
Flowing slowly as time, gliding by in a dream.

Now, then:

Tercets are groups of three; they are a band
—Playful, like couplets that get out of hand—
Of lines that fly far, then come back to land.

★

A *quatrain* has four lines

As one can plainly see:
One of its strict designs

Comes rhymed *abab*.

★

Another way of rhyme can come

From *abba* (middle two
Lines holding hands as lovers do)
In Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*.

★

After the heyday of such rhyme’s renown,
After the weariness of World War I,
Modern poets built in a sad letdown
By rhyming quatrains thus: *abax*.

★

The *ballad stanza*’s four short lines

Are very often heard;
The second and the fourth lines rhyme
But not the first and third.

★

The ballad stanza in a hymn

Waits on the music’s pleasure,
And hymnals (hardly out of whim)
Call it the "common measure."

(The attic heart's—theology
Reformed—this hymnal scheme
In Emily Dickinson's—Amherst—house
And slanted—away—the rhyme.)

"Long measure" in the hymnody
Means even quatrains just like this,
Whose music sets the spirit free,
Doctrine dissolved in choral bliss.

Translating Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*,
Edward Fitzgerald, it would seem, forgot
To rhyme the third line with the other ones.
(The last line underscored its lonely lot.)

He didn't, really: I meant no aspersion.
His gloomy quatrains were an English version
Of just that rhyme scheme (and God knows what else)
He found in the original in Persian.

Lord Byron, seeking out a verse to dally in
While roaming through *Don Juan*, came to see
The point of imitating the Italian
Poets back in the sixteenth century:
*Don Juan's* stanza, jumping like a stallion
Over its disyllabic rhymes, and free
Of too much room to roam in, came to seem a
Verse pattern all its own (*ottava rima*).

One more famous stanza should be described here;
It can come rhymed, unrhymed, or what you will, at
Least in English; it's named for the great Greek poet
Passionate Sappho . . .

*Sapphics*: four-line stanzas whose first three lines are
Heard—in our hard English at least—as heartbeats,
Then, in one more touch of a final short line,
  Tenderly ending.

*  

_Rhyme royal_ is a stanza form of seven
Pentameters, which Chaucer filled with scenes
From _Troilus and Criseyde_ and with heaven-
Sent birdsong in the _Parlement_, its means,
More limited than are _The Faerie Queene_’s.
“Royal”?—from a poem by Scotland’s first King James.
(Some scholars differ: so it is with names.)

*  

A true _Spenserian stanza_ wakes up well
With what will seem a quatrain first; in time
The third line rings its “a” rhyme like a bell,
The fourth, its “b” resounding like a dime
In a pay telephone—this paradigm
Demonstrating the kind of interlocking
Of quatrains doubling back on the same rhyme
Ends in an alexandrine, gently rocking
The stanza back to sleep, lest the close be too shocking.
(And so the questions that the last lines ask
The alexandrine answers, as a pleasant task.)

There is a famous way of interlocking tercets:

The unrhymed middle line, in the tight schema
Of tercets spinning out a lengthy text
(Dante gave us this form, called _terza rima_),

Rhymes, after all, with the start of the next
Tercet, then helps set up a new unrhyme
That, sure of foot and not at all perplexed,
Walks across blank space, as it did last time.
(A couplet ends this little paradigm.)

In general,

A _stanza_ in Italian means “a room”;
  In verse, it needn’t keep to square
Corners, as of some dismal tomb,
But wanders anywhere:
Some stanzas can be built of many lines
Of differing length;
Their variation then combines
With rhymes to give it strength.
Along the way
Short lines can play,
And, at the end, a longer and more solemn
Line extends below, a broad base for a column.

Sonnets can be of two general sorts—the so-called
Elizabethan form, with three quatrains and a couplet,
or the Italian kind, with an octave rhymed abba abba
and a sestet of various groupings of cde. Here are the
two types:

The kind of sonnet form that Shakespeare wrote
—A poem of Love, or Time, in fourteen lines
Rhymed the way these are, clear, easy to quote—
Channels strong feelings into deep designs.
Three quatrains neatly fitting limb to joint,
Their lines cut with the sharpness of a prism,
Flash out in colors as they make their point
In what logicians call a syllogism—
(If A, and B, then C)—and so it goes,
Unless the final quatrain starts out “But”
Or “Nevertheless,” these groups of lines dispose
Themselves in reasoned sections, tightly shut.
The final couplet’s tight and terse and tends
To sum up neatly how the sonnet ends.

Milton and Wordsworth made the sonnet sound
Again in a new way; not with the sighs
Of witty passion, where fierce reason lies
Entombed in end-stopped lines, or tightly bound
In chains of quatrain: more like something found
Than built—a smooth stone on a sandy rise,
A drop of dew secreted from the sky’s
Altitude, unpartitioned, whole and round.
The octave's over; now, gently defying
Its opening tone, the sestet then recalls
Old rhythms and old thoughts, enjambed, half-heard
As verses in themselves. The final word,
Five lines away from what it rhymes with, falls
Off into silence, like an echo dying.

There have been other slight variations on fixed
sonnet patterns, some of them—like film stars that
are shaped by, and shape, their roles—informing and
being blooded, at once, by major poetic occasions.

Another sonnet form, though hardly shocking,
Presents us with three quatrains, like the rest,
But runs the rhymes into an interlocking
Pattern that asks the poet for his best
As each new quatrain puts him to the test
(Or, her, as the case often is), by way
Of having at such moments to divest
Himself of rhyme-words waiting, an array
Of crowded sounds he'd treasured up all day.
No need for noisy ingenuities,
Though; one needs but two rhymes on d and a
(-Ay's the last c-rhyme: there were four of these.)
Such lines that intertwine, like cooked spaghetti,
Were used by Spenser in his Amoretti.

Milton once composed a "tailed sonnet" of twenty
lines:

After the sestet of a sonnet, six
More lines are added, playing more than tricks,
And thereupon we fix
Two shorter, caudal lines that cannot fail
To drag it out; we hammer on a nail
And thereby hangs a tail,
But I'll not tell it now; instead, we'll call
It quits, and close in couplet after all.

* *

And as for Modern Love, George Meredith,
Who brooded most ironically upon it,
Used an extended variant of the sonnet
To do his sad demystifying with
(Of Eros, and of Hymen, God of marriage,
Who, to the sound of flagrant, wailing willows
And low reproaches muttered on the pillows,
Descended in an armor-plated carriage).
Behold the form that disillusion takes!
The abba quatrain of the old
Italian mode, its stories oversold,
Goes rambling past the point at which it breaks
Off, and the sestet finishes. Unsweet
Sixteen, this sonnet-pattern might be named,
Ending in embers where once passion flamed,
Sadder and wiser and not half so neat.

* 
One final recent variant of sonnet form works
Its way purely syllabically,* in unrhymed lines
Of thirteen syllables, and then squares these off with one
Less line in the whole poem—a thirteener-by-thirteen.
But hidden in its unstressed trees there can lurk rhyming
Lines like these (for instance); as in all syllabic verse
Moments of audible accent pass across the face
Of meditation, summoning old themes to the fair
Courtroom of revision, flowing into parts of eight
And five lines, seven and six, or unrhymed quatrains,
Or triplets, that like this one with unaligned accents
Never jingles in its threes or imbecilities.
Then the final line, uncoupled, can have the last word.

Before we examine some of the more extended
traditional forms, we might consider the working of
other systems of verse listed on page 5. Pure accentual
meter, which we all know from the first oral poetry
we hear—nursery rhymes and so forth—measures
stressed syllables only:

In accentual meter it doesn’t matter
Whether each line is thin or fatter;

*See the next page for why this line doesn’t seem to scan.
What you hear (this matters more)
Is one, two, three, four.

In medieval times,

The oldest English accented meter
Of four, unfailing, fairly audible
Strongly struck stresses seldom
Attended to anything other than
Definite downbeats: how many dim
Unstressed upbeats in any line
Mattered not much; motion was measured
With low leaps of alliteration
Handily harping on heavy accents
(Echoing equally all vowels,
Consonant cousins coming together).

The spirit of purely accentual verse was summoned up by an eminent Victorian:

Sprung rhythm is modern accentual, counting the downbeats.
Instead of pentameter, Gerard Manley Hopkins' verse
Rains down in no shower, but as the sound of a town beats
Down on the ear in a queer-dear way; his terse
Compound words, noun-to-noun-tethered, togethered with strange
Wordings (not absurdings) roamed his rhythms' range.

* 

Verse called skeltonic
Is not cacophonic;
Jiggly and jumpy,
Loose, somewhat lumpy,
Pleasing or prating,
Graceful or grating,
It's always elating,
Often alliterating
Short lines, and neat,
With double downbeat
(Don't scan them in "feet")
Whose rhymes repeat
Forever—no feat
When the measure's meet—
Mixed in with lines like these,
Clearly accented in threes,
Named for John Skelton,
Scholar-poet who dwelt in
Diss, Norfolk, and then
Paraded his pen
To great reknown
In London town
(Born, as far as we know,
In 1460 or so,
Did this world resign
In 1529).
Such lines, so crammed,
Would be doubly damned
Before being enjambed,
Their line-endings lopped,
Criminally cropped
With syntax dropped.
They are all end-stopped.
A skillful skeltonic
May be macaronic.*

Pure syllabic verse—sometimes called "isosyllabic"—
is an importation into English from other languages.
Its lines can be of any length.

Whereas iambic verse will let you hear
Five downbeats, countable inside your ear,

*(In Latin, *id est,*
A magpie’s nest
Of languages various,
Stern or hilarious:
*Deutsch* and *Français*
Together can play
In this wanton way
With *la lingua Italiana,*
*Hoy y mañana*
When readers understand ’em:
*Quod erat demonstrandum.*)
Lines made up of ten syllables purely
Without any arrangement of downbeats
Will not seem to be in any meter,
And rhyme becomes something this form defeats.

Thus decasyllabic verse in French or
Japanese, unaccented, will sound like
Something strange to English ears, which still lust
For downbeats, drumbeats (something) in a line,
A last syllable at least, stressed, which hits
The nail of a rhyme-word: thus rhyme limits,—
If we are to hear it (not as above)—
Pure syllabic wandering. W.
H. Auden and Marianne Moore both wrote
In syllabic meter like this, which can
Always regain a pure iambic voice
By sorting out the accents in its words
In any line, or rush into hiding
Again, in caves of accentless shadow.

* 

And stanzas made
up of lines
of varying length
like this one—
with four, three, five, three, six
syllables, and then one of eight—

are quite clearly
of the same
form as each other;
but only
the counting eye can tell:
You use your fingers, not your ear.

One conventional pure syllabic form, borrowed from
Japanese poetry, has been popular in English verse
for over twenty years:

*Haiku*, with seven
Syllables in between two
Shorter lines of five,
Gently—like cherry
Blossoms in a breeze—allude
To just one season
Sometimes: they are a
Peculiarly Japanese
Form of epigram.
In them, brevity
Lights up with significance
Like a firefly.

The *cinquain* in older French verse was any kind of five-line stanza. But in English,

Cinquains
Have lines of four
Syllables, six, and eight,
Ending, as starting, with a line
Of two;
But when
Iambs align
To the trained ear these seem
To form a line of twelve, and then
Of ten.
Cinquains
In English verse
Were devised by a bard
Whose name (alas!) was Adelaide Crapsey.

Accentual-syllabic, pure accentual, and pure syllabic verse all count or measure units—either syllables or just accented ones or both—to determine a line. But various kinds of unmeasured verse exist, and have for ages. The most influential of these is the verse form of the Hebrew Bible, as it was translated into English and thereby resonated throughout the language in quotation, allusion, and echo.
The verse of the Hebrew Bible is strange; the meter of Psalms and Proverbs perplexes. It is not a matter of number, no counting of beats or syllables. Its song is a music of matching, its rhythm a kind of paralleling.

One half-line makes an assertion; the other part paraphrases it; sometimes a third part will vary it.

An abstract statement meets with its example, yes, the way a wind runs through the tree’s moving leaves.

One river’s water is heard on another’s shore; so did this Hebrew verse form carry across into English.

Modern free verse, influenced by the inventiveness of Walt Whitman in English (and Arthur Rimbaud among others in French), can be of many sorts; since a line may be determined in almost any way, and since lines may be grouped on the page in any fashion, it is the mode of variation itself which is significant. Here are examples of a number of different types:

*Free verse* is never totally “free”:
It can occur in many forms,
All of them having in common one principle—
Nothing is necessarily counted or measured
(Remember biblical verse—see above).
One form—this one—makes each line a grammatical unit.
This can be a clause
Which has a subject and a predicate,
Or a phrase
Of prepositional type.
The in-and-out variation of line length
Can provide a visual “music” of its own, a rhythm
That, sometimes, indented lines
like diagrammed sentences
Can reinforce.
Our eye—and perhaps in a funny, metaphorical way, our breath itself—
Can be dragged far out, by some rather longer line, across the page,
Then made to trip
On short lines:
The effect is often wry.
Yet such verse often tends
To fall very flat.

★

Another kind of free verse can play a
sort of rhythmic tune at the end
of lines, moving back and forth from those that stop
to those that are enjambed as
sharply as that first one.
Aside from the rhythmic tension
Of varying the ebb and flow of
sense along the lines, of making them seem
more (like this one), or less, like measured lines
(like this one), this sort of free verse can direct our attention
as well as any iambic line, for
instance, to what our language is made up of:
it can break up compound words at line-ends, sometimes
wittily,
(like someone talking in winter of a whole hibernation of bears)
like tripping hurriedly over what, when you look down, turns out to have been a grave stone.

★

Some free verse is arranged in various
graphic patterns like this that suggest
the barely-seen but silent ghost of a
classical verse form
like a fragment of Sapphic . . .

★

Free verse can, like a shrewd smuggler, contain more
Measured kinds of line, hidden
inside its own more random-seeming
ones; and when a bit of song
comes, blown in on a kind of wind, it will move
across my country
'tis of thee, sweet land
of liberty,
of thee
I sing—the accented verses get cut up
by line breaks that reveal something about them we'd never seen before: it's a little
like putting a contour map over a street plan
(Customs inspector: are you trained to hear heroic couplets beating on the ear if they are hidden in the linings of free verse, as in the case of these above?)

* Free verse can build up various stanzalike units without rhyme or measured line length to hold them together, but the power of blank space between them marks out their rhythms as surely as the timing of some iambic clock but, of course, silently: the ear alone can't tell where they end.

* Free verse can be a way of making lines that surge With a power of rhythmic motion, pulsing and oceanic, then Break, as if a jetty of tumbled boulders had thrust a long finger out into the Surf, making the rumble of water irregular, keeping The lines from becoming too Metrical, marked with the yardstick Of dactyls.

* A milder kind of vers libre as it was called earlier in this century
Hardly ever enjambed its lines, but used the linear unit
and even stanzalike
gatherings of lines
as a delicate way of controlling,
of slowing
the pace of the reading eye
or speeding it up across the page again.

It could single out
words
and hang them in lines all their own
Like sole blossoms on branches,
made more precious
by their loneliness.

*  
And to be able to wander, free
   (in a wide field, as it were)
verse can amble about
   on a kind of nature walk
       the lines following no
           usual path, for
               then the poem might seem
                   to have wandered into
                       another kind of meter’s backyard
                           but
                               sometimes
                                   seeming
                                       to map out the syntax,
                                           sometimes
                                               seeming to do almost the
                                                   opposite,
                                                       this kind of meandering verse can
                                                           even
                                                               oddly
                                                                   come upon a flower
                                                                       of familiar rhythm
                                                                            a sight for sore
                                                                                ears, or encounter
                                                                                       a bit later
                                                                                           on,
                                                                                               once again a patch of
trochees growing somewhere
(like an old song)
and
take one by the
stem
and
break
it
off

And, finally, a unique kind of rhymed free verse,
but of a sort that really can only be considered as antiverse:

Because light verse makes meter sound easy,
And because saying something just for the rhyme is inept
and, well, cheesy,
Even when you spice up rhyme
With jokes about sagely beating thyme
(Although that line is more compelling
As a joke about English spelling)
A famous comic writer whose name follows developed a
deliberate and highly skilled method of writing lines that
didn’t even try to scan so that the general effect was of
a metrical hash:
Ogden Nash.

One formal aberration has reappeared from time
to time, in the Hellenistic age, in the Renaissance,
and in modern decades. The so-called pattern-poem
(or "shaped verse" or, as Guillaume Apollinaire re­
ferred to his own French exercises, "calligrammes")
is composed in, or typographically arranged in,
shapes of images of objects or abstract forms, from
some aspect of which the poem’s "subject" or oc­
casion will arise. An instance of a sort that is com­
posed directly, rather than arranged by a compositor
after being written, is this:
This is
a macrodot-shaped
poem by which we mean
not merely a disc or an
emblematic circle which a
text so figured might claim
meant sun moon world eternity
or perfection No Just a blown
up dot in lines of 7 up to 29
letters Past the middle the
lines of type get shorter
and move faster but all
adding up to too much
fuss about making
a point.

A Renaissance version of an ancient adage characterized poetry as speaking picture, and art as mute poesy. Poetic form can try to avoid the ear by hiding more and more in its visual areas. Pattern-poems are the most extreme instance of this that we have seen. But concrete poetry, a development in graphic art of the past thirty years or so (but developing from typographical experimentation going back to Mallarmé in the later nineteenth century) depends upon unique drawn, printed, or assembled representations of patterned inscription, punning rebus, etc. It most often cannot be read aloud the way all verse can (no matter how framed or commented-upon by visual aspects of its meter). Consider, for example, a little concrete poem I might call "On Touching Sunsets":

    c c
    u u

The reading ("To see's to use"—2c's, 2u's) makes a crepuscular epigram about the use and misuse of nature. This case is more translatable into speech
than most; the self-descriptive example prepared for this volume is, alas, too heavy for these light pages. I include not it, but instructions for realizing it; having followed same, readers will also realize why I have not burdened them with the actual example.

"Concrete Poem" by John Hollander is to be found in the keeping of the Yale University Press. It is (rather than, as in the case of real verse or prose, being "inscribed upon," "written across," etc.) a concrete slab, 2' × 2', heavily scuffed, scarred, rubbed—its surface texture very rough, cobwebbed, and active. Discernible upon it are inscribed words, disposed as represented below. The poem's surface is such that the last three letters of the word "texture" recede into its texture. Needless to say, the illustration given here is not, nor can ever be, the concrete poem. And just as well.
Repetition is a powerful and diversified element of formal structures. It is also a very ancient one: primitive work songs, or prayers, or danced rituals, all involved a solo singer or leader, who would chant new and developing material, and a chorus, who would repeat some shorter element over and over as a kind of punctuation of the new material. Before considering refrains and other modern kinds of repetition, we should distinguish between this primitive but continuing kind of solo-chorus structure and the vastly complex pattern of the Greek choral ode, whether used in tragedy or in public ceremonies. Although Greek verse, as we shall see shortly, used a system of syllable lengths rather than stressed accents, you can see what a typical pattern was like:

The *choral ode*

in ancient Greece was more
than just a verse form: for each section
(like this one), called a *strophe*
was sung—not recited—and danced,
and the dancers were singers.
These words to their music moved
with the dancers in one direction,
then finished their pattern
at the end of part of what they had to say.
The second part
of every section then
would have the same tune, the same rhythm,
the strophe had, and therefore
the whole *antistrophe* would move
with a parallel motion.
(This matching of verse to verse
is referred to as *contrafactum.*)
The dancers moved back then
as they sang with those same steps the other way.
And then a last, unmatching section
called an *epode*, or standing,
followed the strophe (or "turn")
and the antistrophe (or "counterturn")
and, rather more simply, perhaps,
completed the triad or section
of which there could be one or several.

But "ode" has another sense, that of a neoclassical
lyric in some accentual-syllabic verse scheme perhaps
adapted from Horace. So:

Pindar's public, grand to-do
Andrew Marvell contracted to
The semi-private mode
Of his "Horatian Ode";

The rhyming first and second lines
Of this compactest of designs
Are followed everywhere
By a much shorter pair.

A consideration of the whole matter of neoclassical
form might be prefaced by some brief observations
about quantitative verse. Greek meter was based on
syllabic quantities, rather than contrasting stresses;
one long syllable (so determined by the length of the
vowel, and by a few positional rules) was set equal
to two short ones, like half notes and quarter notes
in musical notation. A foot in quantitative scansion
was like a musical measure: a dactyl was like one of
4/4 time that could have either two half notes, or a
half and two quarters (that is, a dactyl, \(-\circ\circ\), or
a spondee, \(-\-\-\)). In Latin, where spoken words
tended to have a stress accent on the penultimate
syllable, following the Greek rules which observed
no word accent (but instead placed a musical down-
beat on the long syllable in a foot or bar) made for
some phonetic confusion.
We are concerned only with English verse, however, and its attempts to "imitate" classical meters. Even more than in Latin, stress dominates English grammar and syntax, and in order to set up classical verse forms in English, some kind of metaphoric version of them had to be framed before poets of the Renaissance and later, yearning for the voice of antiquity, could imitate them in stressed, romance-trained English.

One early solution was to assign to English vowels the length of the analogous ones in Greek or Latin, and count any syllable "long" that was followed by two adjacent consonants. Audible stress-accent was discounted. And thus, in these putatively "quantitative" dactylic hexameters,

```
All such syllables arrang'd in the classical order
Can't be audible to English ears that are tūned to an accent
Mark'd by a pattern of stress, not by a quantitative crawl.
```

These lines "scan" only if we show that the pattern of "long" and "short" syllables falls into the classical "feet," or musical measures. The inaudibility of these quantities in any language that had stressed syllables was a factor in Latin verse; stressed syllables could either be placed in the positions of long ones, or not. In the former case, they are called (using the terminology of one modern scholar)

hómodyne | dáctyls

In the latter case, heterodyne. Stressed syllables

```
Sound'd out | each line's | end in | Virgil's | terminal | accents.
```

Later on, classical adaptations tried less to be so
literal, and replaced the classical feet, or measures of longs and shorts, with paired or trined stressed and unstressed syllables. Thus, the classical iamb, or short-long, became the English one, or da-dum. Some eighteenth-century German poets wrote in accentual elegiac couplets,

First a hexameter stretching its dactyls across to a cadence,
Then the pentameter line follows and falls to a close.

Accentual versions of stanza forms also occur. We have come across the accentual sapphic already (page 17). Another strophic type, named for the Greek poet Alcaeus, was adapted by Horace and then imitated from him:

This tight alcaic stanza begins with a
Matched pair of longer lines that are followed by
Two shorter ones, indented this way,
Making the meter declaim in English.

So ghosts of ancient structures survive even
Slow ruin: alcaics somehow outlasted the
Greek poets, Roman ones, and Germans
(Hölderlin, Klopstock) who made it modern.

Ultimately, modern quatrains of two longer, followed by two shorter, lines are all implicit versions of this stanza (see the so-called Horatian Ode stanza of Andrew Marvell, page 34).

One more version of "classical" stressed meter
Called hendecasyllabics (which is Greek for
Having syllables numbering eleven)
Starts right out with a downbeat, always ending
Feminine, with a kind of hesitation
Heard just after the pair of syllables (the
Fourth and fifth ones) which give the line its pattern.
Three stressed syllables sometimes open up this
Line, which, used in Latin by carping Martial
(‘Even more by fantastical Catullus)
Still holds on to its old, upbraiding cadence.

And this is as good a place as any for two kinds of tricky device, both neoclassical in origin:

*Acrostic verse* (‘‘top of the line,’’ in Greek)
Conceals, in a linguistic hide-and-seek,
Readable messages, gems sunk in fetters—
Only read down the lines’ initial letters.
Sometimes a loved name here encoded lies:
This instance names itself (surprise, surprise!)
Indeed, these final lines, demure and winning,
Confirm the guess you’d made near the beginning.

Descending from Alexandrian times through the eighteenth century, a witty device known usually as *echo verse* would simulate the syllabic repetitions and truncations of natural echoes for satiric effect:

Echo will have it that each line’s last word
(ECHO:) \textit{Erred}.
Echo will chop down words like “fantasize”
(ECHO:) \textit{To size}.
Out of what stuff is Echo’s wit then spun?
(ECHO:) \textit{Pun}.
Can English have a full, Italian echo?
(ECHO:) \textit{Ecco}!

We shall now return to the matter of repetition. One kind of medieval European dance song was called a *carol*, or ring dance. In a carol, the leader would sing the stanzas, and the dancers the refrain or *burden*:

The dancers flutter about
Like a circle of fluttering birds,
The leader stands in place
And remembers many more words.

Birdily, birdily bright
Their burden is very light.

The dancers circle about
Like a ring around the moon,
Their singing a kind of dance,
Their language a kind of tune.

Birdily, birdily bright
Their burden is very light.

Like grain when it is threshed,
Like hay when it is mown,
Making, instead of more sense,
A music of its own:

Birdily, birdily bright
Their burden is very light.

A literary lyric poem is a song only metaphorically; it is designed to be spoken or read, and a formal refrain can often serve as a kind of reminder or substitute for an earlier relation to music. Some refrains are literal imitations of music—"fa la la la la," etc. Others may be a thematic phrase or sentence; the structural richness of refrains in modern verse depends upon one simple phenomenon: repeating something often may make it more trivial—because more expected and therefore carrying less information, as an engineer might put it—or, because of shifting or developing context in each stanza preceding, more important.

What once was called a burden
Was seldom heavy to bear.
It was sung by the dancers, and heard in
Between the stanzas, like air
Rushing by between cars of a train,
Again and again and again.
Like the point of a sharpened tool
Blunted by too much use,
Or a lesson learned in school
Drummed into the obtuse,
Here comes the old refrain
Again and again and again.

Like a sound from the distant past
Of remembered waves on a shore,
Each echo means more than the last,
Once more, once more and once more.
But less is more: too much is pain
Again and again and again.
(Like the pounding of hard rain
Again and again and again.)

(Bored with this dulling song,
Clever stanzas may set
Out on a walk less long,
Shift their burdens, and get
Each time, with the old refrain,
Again and again and again.)

A Brief Digression: The three-beat accentual rhythm
of the last example reminds one of a problem men­
tioned at the beginning of this discussion, metrical
ambiguity. Keats’s line “How many bards gild the
lapses of time” was given as an example; this latest
example of refrain suggests another, reminding us
how

Some lines like houses will—for ill or good—
Take on the look of a whole neighborhood,
Clearing muddles in which, alone, they stood.

As before, when we said a refrain
“Rushes by between cars of a train”—
All the anapests in it rang out
At the other ones gathered about.

But context governs, and will always reign:
"Rushing by between cars of a train"
Becomes a five-beat line without much pain.

But back to repetition. Two well-known forms, one from medieval Provence, one from France, delighted nineteenth-century makers of intricate verse and became important forms for meditative speculation in modern poetry. First, the villanelle:

This form with two refrains in parallel?
(Just watch the opening and the third line.)
The repetitions build the villanelle.
The subject thus established, it can swell
Across the poet-architect's design:
This form with two refrains in parallel
Must never make them jingle like a bell,
Tuneful but empty, boring and benign;
The repetitions build the villanelle
By moving out beyond the tercet's cell
(Though having two lone rhyme-sounds can confine
This form). With two refrains in parallel
A poem can find its way into a hell
Of ingenuity to redesign
The repetitions. Build the villanelle
Till it has told the tale it has to tell;
Then two refrains will finally intertwine.
This form with two refrains in parallel
The repetitions build: The Villanelle.

The other such form is the sestina: six stanzas, each of six lines, and a three-line envoy (or "send-off"), the repetition being not of lines, as in the villanelle, but of the terminal words of the lines of the first stanza:

Now we come to the complex sestina:
In the first stanza, each line's final word
Will show up subsequently at the ends
Of other lines, arranged in different ways;
The words move through the maze of a dark forest,
Then crash out, at the stanza’s edge, to light.

The burden of repeating words is light
To carry through the course of a sestina;
And walking through the language of a forest
One comes on the clearing of an echoed word
Refreshingly employed in various ways,
Until one’s amble through the stanza ends.

The next one starts out where the last one ends
As in the other cases, with the light
Sounds of two lines, like two roads or pathways
Meeting before they drift apart. Sestina
Patterns reveal the weaving ways a word
Can take through the thick clauses of a forest.

The poet dances slowly through a forest
Of permutations, a maze that never ends
(With seven hundred twenty ways those words
Can be disposed in six-line groups). But light
Falls through the leaves into the dark sestina
Picking out only six clear trails, six ways,

Like change-ringing in bells. The words find ways
And means for coping with an endless forest
By chopping out the course of a sestina.
Walking a known trail sometimes, one emends
The route a bit to skirt a green stone, light
With covering moss; or rings changes on words—

And so it is that the first stanza’s word
Order—“Sestina,” “Word,” “End,” and then “Ways”
(Three abstract, three concrete like “Forest,” and “Light”
Which interweaves with leaves high in the forest)—
With the words’ meanings serving different ends,
Repeats its pattern through the whole sestina.

Now the envoy’s last word: as the sestina’s
End words make way for curtain calls, in the light
That floods the forest as the whole poem ends.
Some of the lyric forms from France remain a kind of metric dance, without real poetry to say but good for literary play (light verse, vers de société).

The ballade has only one refrain, but its three full stanzas and short envoy are locked to the same rhymes throughout.

Where are the kinds of song that lay
Along the medieval shore
And then moved inland, light and gay,
Still in the ancient garb they wore
When speaking out of bed, and war,
And François Villon's coughs and fleas?
Where is their truth, their mighty roar?
Where are the old ballades like these?

Where are the eight-line stanzas' a bab, the beginning four
Following by quatrains which convey
The b-rhyme that had sung before
Its simple tune, in lines of yore?
Where are the busy final b's
That make the old refrain implore
"Where are the old ballades like these?"

Where are the words that used to play,
Winged, among the trees, and pour
Old-fashioned rhyme, they hoped, for aye?
Where's Rostand's rapier wit that tore
Off bits of Cyrano's? Wherefore
Did clever rhyming cease to please?
Since jingle became a crashing bore
Where are the old ballades like these?

ENVOY

Prince of Readers, I've ceased to soar:
With rhymes used up, it's a tighter squeeze.
The envoy ("send-off") asks, just once more,
Where are the old ballades like these?

Another French lyric form, the rondeau, repeats only
part—the opening two iambic feet, usually—of its first line:

The rondeau's French in origin.
For several centuries it's been
Of use for light verse, in the main;
Handling its lines can be the bane
Of someone with an ear that's tin.

The first words with which we begin
Return, like a recurring sin—
More Magdalen's than the crime of Cain.
(The rondeau's French!)

That's called the rentrement; and in
The course of hearing these lines spin
Themselves out, one may wait in vain
For more rhymes, or a full refrain.
With hardly any loss or gain
English replaces, with a grin,
The rondeau's French.

The triolet is the briefest of these, 5/8 of it being composed of its two refrains:

Triolets' second lines refrain
From coming back until the end;
Though the first one can cause some pain
Triolets' second lines refrain
From coming back yet once again.
(The form's too fragile to offend.)
Triolets' second lines refrain
From coming back until the end.

The pantoum comes, through French again, from Malay (pantun) and is rather like a combination of villanelle with the unfolding motion of terza rima (p. 18). There may be any number of quatrains, but, starting with the second one, they are generated by repeating the even-numbered lines of each as the
odd-numbered ones of the next. The final line of the poem repeats the opening one. In addition, a touch of riddle is preserved in that the first half of each quatrain is about something wholly different from the second half. Thus:

   Ever so maddening in the pantoum,
   The repetitions frame a subtle doom.
   Evening has entered, her patches of gloom
   Now settled in the corners of the room.

   The repetitions frame a subtle doom:
   Each quatrain’s first and third lines are refrains;
   Now settled-in, the corners of the room
   Attend the coming fever’s chills and pains.

   Each quatrain’s first and third lines are refrains,
   Returning from the previous second and fourth.
   Attend the coming fever’s chills and pains!
   The wind is ominous, and from the north.

   Returning from the previous second and fourth,
   All these are complicated here by rhyme.
   The wind is ominous, and from the north—
   We talk about the weather half the time.

   All these are complicated here by rhyme
   Cleverly woven on the maker’s loom.
   We talk about the weather half the time—
   Ever so maddening!—in the pantoum.

   Another form based on refrain: that wonderful modern mode of accentual oral poetry and song called “The Blues.” Musically, a 4/4 rhythm, usually slow, moves through twelve measures in a fairly fixed chordal sequence. [Musicians would identify it as I (IV) I IV V I.] The repetition of the first line is not merely decorative, nor expressive, as you will see. Blues are improvised by the singer, like this:
Ballads from Scotland told stories and sang the news—
But black America felt and thought the blues.

Now a blues has stanzas, stanzas of a funny kind—
Yes a blues has stanzas of a very funny kind;
(Do that line again, singer, while you make up your mind) . . .

Make up your mind, while the next line gives you time,
Make up your mind, yes, while this line’s giving you time,
Then your train of thought comes running after your rhyme.

You can quote a proverb; they say a new broom sweeps clean—
Yes, that’s what they say: it’s the new broom that sweeps clean,
So sing a new line—make that proverb really mean.*

You sing the blues upside-down: you begin with the refrain—
O you sing upside-down, you start out with the refrain,
And the end of a blues is like the falling rain.

—which leads one to remark that

In the words of “standards”—American popular song—
You’ll find the germs
Of prosodical terms
Used in a way that sound a little wrong.

This whole introduction, for instance, is called the “verse’’;
The lines with the tune
That’s familiar come soon
But who can remember this melody (that’s its curse)
(or worse . . .)

* You see,

Blues are like weddings, sad as a beat-up shoe
Blues are like weddings, sad as a beat-up shoe
With something borrowed, and something old or new.

Blues are also witty, epigrammatic, and passionate at once.
But now for that A,A,B,A,
The pattern unrolling before us
In a very familiar way:
There are thirty-two bars to the chorus.

Whether crooned by some creature we love
Or by voices that threaten and bore us
Or by neither of the above,
There are thirty-two bars to the chorus.

There's new music for section B;
It's called the "release"—but from what?
—The burden of symmetry?
—The repeated eight bars that it's not?

This paradigm may have a ring
As passé as a big brontosaurus,
But we keep coming back to one thing:
There are thirty-two bars to the chorus.

Of brief, comical forms of verse which have become, in themselves, more like the formats for jokes, the most celebrated is the limerick:

This most famous of forms is a fiddle
That we rub with a sexual riddle;
But the best of a limerick—
Though in Dutch or in Cymric—
Are the little short lines in the middle.

* 

The mad limericks of one Edward Lear
Took a turn that was rather severe:
Their last rhymes—the same
As their first—were too tame.
That repetitive old Edward Lear!

The clerihew, invented by E(dmund) C(lerihev) Bentley, is a skewed quatrain that frames a way of turning rhyming jokes on names, and other jokes on rhymes, and spoofing metrical neatness in the mode of Ogden Nash (see page 30):
A clerihew
Will hardly transport you, or ferry you
Over toward Parnassus
(Better use some poetic Onassis).

Finally, a recent offshoot of the clerihew, invented
by Anthony Hecht and first published by him in
collaboration with this author: the double-dactyl is a
pair of quatrains of two accentual dactylic feet, with
the following conditions placed on it:

Starting with nonsense words
(“Higgledy-piggledy”),
Then comes a name
(Making line number two);
Somewhere along in the
Terminal quatrain, a
Didaktyliaios*
Word, and we’re through.

Or, in a perfect instance,

Higgledy-piggledy
Schoolteacher Hollanders
Mutter and grumble and
Cavil and curse,

Hunting long words for the
Antepenultimate
Line of this light-weight but
Intricate verse.

Before leaving scheme and figure of word and
sound, we might remark that there are a number of
rhetorical schemes associated with prose as well as
with verse. We might consider a few of them that
are commonly used in poetry. One of the most fa-

*Greek for “composed of two dactyls.”
mous, and most important for early poetry, is the so-called *epic simile*:

Even as when some object familiar to us all—
A street, a spoon, a river, a shoe, a star, a toothache—
Is brought to our attention, called up from our memory
To light up the darkened surface of something we've barely known of
—So did the epic simile sing of a silent past.

Zeugma's syntactic punning, sharp and terse,
As on in's senses, which we now rehearse:
"Zeugma is used in earnest and this verse."

*Anacoluthon* is a breaking-off
Of what is being—a syntactic cough.

*Apostrophe! we thus address*
More things than I should care to guess.
Apostrophe! I did invoke
Your figure even as I spoke.

*Anaphora* will repeat an opening phrase or word;
Anaphora will pour it into a mould (absurd!);
Anaphora will cast each subsequent opening;
Anaphora will last until it's tiring.
Anaphora will seem to batter the hearer's mind,
Anaphora will make mere likeness seem unkind;
Anaphora will sound like some rhetorical fault,
Anaphora will be reformed by Whitman, Walt.
Or else it can caress you with a gentle hand
Or else it can be text for hope to understand,
Or else it can become a kind of incantation,
Or else it can shape up into a proclamation.

*Homoeoteleuton* is the opposite: like ending,
Where the same word will make a similar ending
Other schemes of placement were never classified by rhetoricians, perhaps because they only came up in English verse and in the context of English word order. The way in which a pair of adjectives modifying the same noun can be arranged, for example, has consequence for our verse. For

Polysyllabic long words, preceding short ones,
deliver
Adjectival, sharp blows
to the
modified next noun.

On the other hand, for example, we learn by scanning a pattern of

Coupled adjectives dynamic,

of their

Slower disclosure and instructive.

* 

Thus, at the end of an iambic line,
This scheme could find a lasting place, and fine.

We conclude with a general afterthought,

Let us talk of variation:
In a very boring meter
Like this blank (unrhymed) trochaic
—Four beats, so tetrameter—the
Chance for any subtle rhythm
To develop, making any
Line sound much more like itself than
Like the others all around it
Isn't very high at all (a
Cycle written in this verse form
By the poet Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow—it's most well known—is
Called The Song of Hiawatha,
Or, perhaps, as in Latin, a chunk of case-ending,
Or, as in English, a participial —ing,
Or even, if you wish, and perhaps bending
The usual sense of it, a rhyming sort of ending.

**Chiasmus** is a general scheme of patterning two pairs of elements; its name is derived from the Greek letter \( \chi \) (chi); in English, we might call it X-ing. Its elements can be merely those of paired vowel-sounds, as in

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Resounding syllables} \\
\text{In simple nouns.}
\end{array}
\]

Or the crossing can be one of syntactical elements,

- Echoing adjectives,
- And nouns resounding.

Or, muting the funny sound of inversion for modern ears with its archaic and heroic cast, we can do as Milton did, and enjamb the adjectival participle to modify the grammar:

- Echoing adjectives and nouns resounding
- Deep in the draughty vastness of a scheme.

Or the crossing can arrange particular words, as in

- Imagined mirrors mirror imagining

or this:

- Speech which in part reflects on parts of speech

— or even a metaphoric pattern, although here we touch on realms of trope, not scheme; an example which interlaces syntax and image leaves the penultimate word cast as noun and adjective:

- The burning darkness and the *light* freezing.
Variation

Imitated from the Finnish
Meter of an epic cycle
Called—in Finnish—*Kalevala*.

But let us move into a form—
*lambic*, with four beats the norm—
And listen to the way that lines
Tap out their rhythms, while designs
Of rhyme and reason, overlaid
On the straight tune that's being played
Can make these lines (although they rhyme)
Less like a clock that ticks the time
Or wakes us up with an alarming chime.
Lines may be varied with a rare
Misplaced syllable here and there,
Even two beats together, strong
Enough to shove their words along
The line a bit, until they drop
Into the next, and finally stop.
Rhythms can shimmer, just like this;
Two lines can delicately kiss;
Some words' slow burdens make them bleed
And, fudged, bunched, clustered, hurt to read;
Each line can echo what it says;
Yet family resemblances
Still hold between the various faces
Of lines in their respective places.

The effects of sound observed in the preceding
lines represent a more general matter, that of so-called "imitative sound" or, more technically, "verbal mimesis." In its own way, this is a kind of myth-making at the smallest level, and can be considered not so much a scheme or pattern, but a mode of trope itself: the myth is one of semantic presence in a place of nonreferential sound (or, as some might want to put it, a natural relation occurring in a conventional one that has, indeed, just been established in the verse). Thus,
Readers who are not already familiar with my great original should acquaint themselves with Pope's heuristic, self-descriptive verses in *An Essay on Criticism*, lines 337–83. Spenser, Coleridge, Tennyson, and Robert Bridges all wrote metrical experiments and examples, which can be found in their collected works. Wordsworth, Keats, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti have sonnets on the subject of the sonnet. Karl Shapiro's *An Essay on Rime* is in verse, with some self-descriptive bits. In French, Vincent Voiture (1598–1648) wrote a famous rondeau on how to write a rondeau.

Technical mastery should not astound—
The sense must seem an echo to the sound,
And verse can be a charm to conjure up
A ghost of meaning in an empty cup,
That nymph the linguists call "Morpheme"—a naiad
Of sense—from out a cell of sound. This triad:
"The fires of autumn dwindle to December,
A spark of meaning hides in its grey ember
And kindles in its name what we remember"
—Illustrates well the point: nothing in e's
M's and b's means "residual." But these
Are tropes, like rhyme, purporting to have found
In a mere accident of common sound
A hidden jewel of meaning, hard and bright,
Bred by the pressure of the ear's delight.
Thus: m-sounds can feel flabbier or firmer
When heard in "mime," or overheard in "murmur";
There's nothing in that general object, it,
That suits it for its role in "spit" or "shit"
(Low comedy), or, properly, in "fit."
H's are only breathless when in "hoarse"
("Horses" run smoothly from the start, of course).
Sl as in "slip" and "slap" and "sleet" and "slide"
Etcetera, perhaps connotes a glide
Of unimpeded motion; I suppose
That stuffed, initial sn suggests the nose.
But mostly, all these morphophonemes that
Poetry seems to pull out of its hat
Are verse's metaphors of having found
Buried significance in natural ground.
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—Washington Post Book World

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