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AnnMarie Thornburg Valerie Kennedy
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Margaret Ferguson
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

Mary Jo Salter
MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

Jon Stallworthy
OXFORD UNIVERSITY

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Versification

A poem is a composition written for performance by the human voice. What your eye sees on the page is the composer's verbal score, waiting for your voice to bring it alive as you read it aloud or hear it in your mind's ear. Unlike your reading of a newspaper, the best reading—that is to say, the most satisfying reading—of a poem involves a simultaneous engagement of eye and ear: the eye attentive not only to the meaning of words, but to their grouping and spacing as lines on a page; the ear attuned to the grouping and spacing of sounds. The more you understand of musical notation and the principles of musical composition, the more you will understand and appreciate a composer's score. Similarly, the more you understand of versification (the principles and practice of writing verse), the more you are likely to understand and appreciate poetry and, in particular, the intimate relationship between its form and its content. *What* a poem says or means is the result of *how* it is said, a fact that poets are often at pains to emphasize. "All my life," said W. H. Auden, "I have been more interested in technique than anything else." And T. S. Eliot claimed that "the conscious problems with which one is concerned in the actual writing are more those of a quasi-musical nature, in the arrangement of metric and pattern, than of a conscious exposition of ideas." Fortunately, the principles of versification are easier to explain than those of musical composition.

The oldest classification of poetry into three broad categories still holds:

1. **Epic:** a long narrative poem, frequently extending to several "books" (sections of several hundred lines), on a great and serious subject. See, for example, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (p. 165), Milton's *Paradise Lost* (p. 420), Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (p. 781), and Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (p. 948). With one notable exception, Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* (p. 1725), the few poems of comparable length to have been written in the twentieth century—for example, Williams's *Paterson* and Pound's *Cantos* (p. 1306)—have a freer, less formal structure.

2. **Dramatic:** poetry, monologue or dialogue, written in the voice of a character assumed by the poet. Space does not permit the inclusion in this anthology of speeches from the many great verse dramas of English literature, but see such dramatic monologues as Tennyson's "Ulysses" (p. 992), Browning's "My Last Duchess" (p. 1012), and Howard's response to that poem, "Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol, 1565" (p. 1778).

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3. Lyric: originally, a song performed in ancient Greece to the accompaniment of a small harplike instrument called a lyre. The term is now used for any fairly short poem in the voice of a single speaker, although that speaker may sometimes quote others. The reader should be wary of identifying the lyric speaker with the poet, since the "I" of a poem will frequently be that of a fictional character invented by the poet. The majority of poems in this book are lyrics, and the principal types of lyric will be found set out under "Forms" (p. 2039).

Rhythm

Poetry is the most compressed form of language, and rhythm is an essential component of language. When we speak, we hear a sequence of syllables. These, the basic units of pronunciation, can consist of a vowel sound alone or a vowel with attendant consonants: *oh; syl-la-ble.* Sometimes *m, n,* and *l* are counted as vowel sounds, as in *riddle (rid-dl)* and *prism (pri-zm).* In words of two or more syllables, one is almost always given more emphasis or, as we say, is more heavily stressed than the others, so that what we hear in ordinary speech is a sequence of such units, variously stressed and unstressed as, for example:

> A poem is a composition written for performance by the human voice.

We call such an analysis of stressed and unstressed syllables **scansion** (the action or art of scanning a line to determine its division into metrical feet); and a simple system of signs has been evolved to denote stressed and unstressed syllables and any significant pause between them. Adding such scansion marks will produce the following:

> Ă ṕoĕm ĭs ă cóṃpŏsítiŏn ‖ wŕittĕn fŏr pĕrfórmănce bў
> thĕ húmăn voíce.

The double bar, known as a caesura (from the Latin word for "cut"), indicates a natural pause in the speaking voice, which may be short (as here) or long (as between sentences); the ˘ sign indicates an unstressed syllable, and the ´ sign indicates one that is stressed.

The pattern of emphasis, stress, or accent can vary from speaker to speaker and situation to situation. If someone were to contradict my definition of a poem, I might reply:

> Ă ṕoĕm ís ă cóṃpŏsítiŏn . . .

with a heavier stress on is than on any other syllable in the sentence. The signs ˘ and ´ make no distinction between varying levels of stress and unstress—it being left to the reader to supply such variations—but some analysts use the sign ˋ to indicate a stress falling between heavy and light.

Most people pay little or no attention to the sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables in their speaking and writing, but to a poet there may be no more important element of a poem.

Meter

If a poem's rhythm is structured into a recurrence of regular—that is, approximately equal—units, we call it meter (from the Greek word for "measure"). For many centuries after its origins were lost in the mists of antiquity, meter was the principal feature distinguishing poetry from prose. There are four metrical systems in English poetry: the accentual, the accentual-syllabic, the syllabic, and the quantitative. Of these, the second accounts for more poems in the English language—and in this anthology—than do the other three together.

Accentual meter, sometimes called *strong-stress meter,* is the oldest. The earliest recorded poem in the language—that is, the oldest of Old English or Anglo-Saxon poems, Cædmon's seventh-century "Hymn" (p. 1)—employs a line divided in two by a heavy caesura, each half dominated by the two strongly stressed syllables:

> Hé aérĕst scĕŏp ‖ aéldă béarnŭm
> [He first created for men's sons]
> héofŏn tŏ hŕofĕ ‖ háliğ Sćyppĕnd
> [heaven as a roof holy creator]

Here, as in most Old English poetry, each line is organized by stress and by **alliteration** (the repetition of speech sounds—vowels or, more usually, consonants—in a sequence of nearby words). In a line structured by accentual meter, one and generally both of the stressed syllables in the first half-line alliterate with the first stressed syllable in the second half-line.

Accentual meter continued to be used into the late fourteenth century, as in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (p. 71), which begins:

> Iñ ă sómĕr śesŏn, ‖ whăn sóft wăs thĕ sónnĕ,
> [In a summer season when mild was the sun,]
> Ĭ shóp mĕ iñ shróuds, ‖ ăs Í ă shépe wĕre . . .
> [I clad myself in clothes as if I'd become a sheep . . .]

However, following the Saxons' conquest by the Normans in 1066, Saxon native meter was increasingly supplanted by the metrical patterns of Old French poetry brought to England in the wake of William the Conqueror, although the nonalliterative four-stress line would have a long and lively continuing life—structuring, for example, section 2 of Eliot's "The Dry Salvages." The Old English metrical system has been occasionally revived in more recent times, as for Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* (p. 2), or the four-

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stress lines of Coleridge's "Christabel" and Wilbur's "Junk" (p. 1638); and many English poets from Spenser onward have used alliteration in ways that recall the character of Old and Middle English verse.

Accentual-syllabic meter provided the metrical structure of the new poetry to emerge in the fourteenth century, and its basic unit was the foot, a combination of two or three stressed and/or unstressed syllables. The four most common metrical feet in English poetry are:

1. **Iambic** (the noun is *iamb*): an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable, as in "New York." Between the Renaissance and the rise of free verse (p. 2048) in the last century, iambic meter was the dominant rhythm of English poetry, considered by many writers in English as well as classical Latin the meter closest to that of ordinary speech. For this reason, iambic meter is also to be found occasionally in the work of prose writers. Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities,* for example, begins:

> It was | the best | of times, || it was | the worst | of times . . .

2. **Trochaic** (the noun is *trochee*): a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable, as in the word *London* or the line from the nursery rhyme,

> London | bridge is | falling | down . . .

Here, as in many other trochaic lines, the final unstressed syllable has been dropped. This shortening, which gives prominence to the stressed syllable necessary for rhyme (p. 2036), is called a **catalectic** line end.

The word *London* may be a trochee, but it does not have to appear in a trochaic line. Provided its natural stress is preserved, it can take its place comfortably in an iambic line, like that from Eliot's *The Waste Land:*

> A crowd | flowed over | er Lon | don bridge . . .

Whereas iambic meter has a certain gravity, making it a natural choice for poems on solemn subjects, the trochaic foot has a lighter, quicker, more buoyant movement. Hence, for example, its use in Milton's "L'Allegro" (lines 25–29, for example, on p. 403) and Blake's "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence* (p. 733).

3. **Anapestic** (the noun is *anapest*): two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable, as in *Tennessee* or the opening of Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" (p. 834).

> The Assyr | ian came down | like the wolf | on the fold . . .

The last three letters of the word *Assyrian* should be heard as one syllable, a form of contraction known as **elision.**

4. **Dactylic** (the noun is *dactyl*): a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, as in *Leningrad.* This, like the previous "triple" (three-syllable) foot, the anapest, has a naturally energetic movement, making it suitable for poems with vigorous subjects, though not these only. See Hardy's "The Voice" (p. 1160), which begins:

> Woman much | missed, how you | call to me, | call to me . . .

Iambs and anapests, which have a strong stress on the last syllable, are said to constitute a **rising meter,** whereas trochees and dactyls, ending with an unstressed syllable, constitute a **falling meter.** In addition to these four standard metrical units, there are two other (two-syllable) feet that occur only as occasional variants of the others:

5. **Spondaic** (the noun is *spondee*): two successive syllables with approximately equal strong stresses, as on the words "draw back" in the second of these lines from Arnold's "Dover Beach" (p. 1101):

> Listen! | you hear | the grat | ing roar
> Of peb | bles which | the waves | draw back, | and fling . . .

6. **Pyrrhic** (the noun is also *pyrrhic*): two successive unstressed or lightly stressed syllables, as in the second foot of the second line above, where the succession of light syllables seems to mimic the rattle of light pebbles that the heavy wave slowly draws back.

Poets, who consciously or instinctively will select a meter to suit their subject, have also a variety of line lengths from which to choose:

1. **Monometer** (one foot): see the fifth and sixth lines of each stanza of Herbert's "Easter Wings" (p. 368), which reflect, in turn, the poverty and thinness of the speaker. Herrick's "Upon His Departure Hence" is a rare example of a complete poem in iambic monometer. The fact that each line is a solitary foot (⏑ ′) suggests to the eye the narrow inscription of a gravestone, and to the ear the brevity and loneliness of life.

> Thus I
> Pass by
> And die,
> As one,
> Unknown,
> And gone:
> I'm made
> A shade,
> And laid
> I'th grave,
> There have
> My cave.
> Where tell
> I dwell,
> *Farewell.*

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2. Dimeter (two feet): iambic dimeter alternates with iambic pentameter in Donne's "A Valediction of Weeping" (p. 300); and dactylic dimeter (´ ˘ ˘| ´ ˘ ˘) gives Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (p. 1005) its galloping momentum:

> Cannon to right of them,
> Cannon to left of them,
> Cannon in front of them
> Volleyed and thundered;
> Stormed at with shot and shell,
> Boldly they rode and well,
> Into the jaws of Death,
> Into the mouth of hell
> Rode the six hundred.

Lines 4 and 9, each lacking a final unstressed syllable, are *catalectic*, a common feature of dactylic as of trochaic poems.

3. Trimeter (three feet): Ralegh's "The Lie" (p. 154) and Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 1494) are written in iambic trimeter; and all but the last line of each stanza of Shelley's "To a Skylark" (p. 876) in trochaic trimeter.

4. Tetrameter (four feet): Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" (p. 478) is written in iambic tetrameter; and Shakespeare's "Fear No More the Heat o' the Sun" (p. 276) in trochaic tetrameter.

5. Pentameter (five feet): the most popular metrical line in English poetry, the iambic pentameter provides the basic rhythmical framework, or base rhythm, of countless poems from the fourteenth century to the twenty-first, from Chaucer's "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* (p. 19) and Shakespeare's sonnets (p. 257) to Hill's "Lachrimae" (p. 1834) and Schnackenberg's "Supernatural Love" (p. 2003). It even contributes to the stately prose of the Declaration of Independence:

> We hold | these truths | to be | self-ev | ident . . .

Anapestic pentameter is to be found in Browning's "Saul":

> As thy love | is discov | ered almight | y, almight | y, be proved
> Thy power, | that exists | with and for | it, of be | ing beloved!

A missing syllable in the first foot of the second line gives emphasis to the important word "power," which Browning (like many nineteenth-century Englishmen, but unlike most twenty-first-century Americans) probably pronounced as a single syllable.

6. Hexameter (six feet): The opening sonnet of Sidney's "Astrophil and Stella" (p. 213) and Dowson's "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae" (p. 1211) are written in iambic hexameter, a line sometimes known as an alexandrine (probably after a twelfth-century French poem, the *Roman d'Alexandre*). A single alexandrine is often used to provide a resonant termination to a stanza of shorter lines, as, for example, the Spenserian stanza (p. 2042) or Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (p. 1156), in which the shape of the stanza suggests the iceberg that is the poem's subject. Swinburne's "The Last Oracle" is written in trochaic hexameter:

> Day by | day thy | shadow | shines in | heaven be | holden . . .

7. Heptameter (seven feet): Kipling's "Tommy" (p. 1181) is written in iambic heptameter (or fourteeners, as they are often called, from the number of their syllables), with an added initial syllable in three of the four lines that make up the second half of each stanza.

8. Octameter (eight feet): Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's" (p. 1017) is the most famous example of the rare trochaic octameter.

Poets who write in strict conformity to a single metrical pattern will achieve the music of a metronome and soon drive their listeners away. Variation, surprise, is the very essence of every artist's trade; and one of the most important sources of metrical power and pleasure is the perpetual tension between the regular and the irregular, between the expected and the unexpected, the base rhythm and the variation.

John Hollander has spoken of the "metrical contract" that poets enter into with their readers from the first few words of a poem. When Frost begins "The Gift Outright"—

> The land | was ours | before | we were | the land's

—we expect what follows to have an iambic base meter, but the irregularity or variation in the fourth foot tells us that we are hearing not robot speech but human speech. The stress on "we" makes it, appropriately, one of the two most important words in the line, "we" being the most important presence in the "land."

Frost's poem will serve as an example of ways in which skillful poets will vary their base meter:

1. The land | was ours | before | we were | the land's.
2. She was | our land || more than | a hun | dred years
3. Before | we were | her peo | ple. | She was ours
4. In Mass | achu | setts, || in | Virgin | ia,
5. But we | were Eng | land's, || still | colon | ials,
6. Possess | ing what | we still | were un | possessed | by.
7. Possessed | by what | we now | no more | possessed.
8. Something | we were | withhold | ing made | us weak
9. Until | we found | out that | it was | ourselves
10. We were | withhold | ing from | our land | of liv | ing,
11. And forth | with found | salva | tion in | surren | der.
12. Such as | we were | we gave | ourselves | outright

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13. (The déed | of gíft | was mán | y deéds | of wár)
14. To the lánd | vagúely | réal | ízing | wéstward,
15. But still | unstór | ed, || aft | less, || un | énhanced,
16. Súch as | she wás, || súch as | she would | bécome.

The iambic pentameter gives the poem a stately movement appropriate to the unfolding history of the United States. In the trochaic "reversed feet" at the start of lines 2, 10, 12, and 16, the stress is advanced to lend emphasis to a key word or, in the case of line 8, an important syllable. Spondees in lines 2 ("our land") and 3 ("her people") bring into equal balance the two partners whose union is the theme of the poem. Such additional heavy stresses are counterbalanced by the light pyrrhic feet at the end of lines 4 and 5, in the middle of line 10, and toward the end of line 14. The multiple irregularities of that line give a wonderful impression of the land stretching westward into space, just as the variations of line 16 give a sense of the nation surging toward its destiny in time.

Frost's reading of this poem at President Kennedy's inauguration differed at a number of points from the above scansion, in that it was more colloquial, less emphatic, but authors cannot control others' reading of their work as they control its writing. Scansion is to some extent a matter of interpretation, in which the rhetorical emphasis a particular reader prefers alters the stress pattern. Other readers of "The Gift Outright" might—no less correctly—prefer the following rhetorical variations of the base meter:

7. . . . wé now . . .
9. Until | wé found . . .

An important factor in varying the pattern of a poem is the placing of its pauses, or caesurae. One falling in the middle of a line—as in line 4 above—is known as a medial caesura; one falling near the start of a line, an initial caesura; and one falling near or at the end of a line, a terminal caesura. When a caesura occurs as in lines 13 and 14 above, those lines are said to be **end-stopped**. Lines 3 and 9, however, are called **run-on lines** (or, to use a French term, they exhibit **enjambment**—"a striding over"), because the thrust of the incompleted sentence carries on over the end of the verse line. Such transitions tend to increase the pace of the poem, as the end-stopping of lines 10 through 16 slows it down.

A strikingly original and influential blending of the Old English accentual and more modern accentual-syllabic metrical systems was **sprung rhythm**, conceived and pioneered by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Finding the cadences of his Victorian contemporaries—what he called their "common rhythm"—too measured and mellifluous for his liking, he sought a stronger, more muscular verse movement. Strength he equated with stress, arguing that "even one stressed syllable may make a foot, and consequently two or more stresses may come running [one after the other], which in common rhythm can, regularly speaking, never happen." In his system of sprung rhythm, each foot began with a stress and could consist of a single stressed syllable (´), a trochee (´ ˘), a dactyl (´ ˘ ˘), or what he called a **first paeon** (´ ˘ ˘ ˘). His lines will, on occasion, admit other unstressed syllables, as in the sonnet "Felix Randal" (p. 1168):

Félix | Rándăl, || the | fárrier, || Ó is he | deád then? || my |
dúty áll | énded,
Who háve | watched his | móuld of mán, || big- | boned
and | hárdy- | handsome
Pining, || pining, || till | time when | réason | rambled in it |
and some
Fátal | four dis | órders, || fléshed there, || all cón | tended?

A poetry structured on the principle that strength is stress is particularly well suited to stressful subjects, and the sprung rhythm of what Hopkins called his "terrible sonnets" (pp. 1167–72), for example, gives them a dramatic urgency, a sense of anguished struggle that few poets have equalled in accentual-syllabic meter.

A number of other poets have experimented with two other metrical systems.

Syllabic meter measures only the number of syllables in a line, without regard to their stress. Being an inescapable feature of the English language, stress will of course appear in lines composed on syllabic principles, but will fall variously, and usually for rhetorical emphasis, rather than in any formal metrical pattern. When Marianne Moore wished to attack the pretentiousness of much formal "Poetry" (p. 1329), she shrewdly chose to do so in **syllabics**, as lines in syllabic meter are called. The effect is carefully informal and prosaic, and few unalerted readers will notice that there are 19 syllables in the first line of each stanza; 22 in the second; 11 in the third (except for the third line of the third stanza, which has 7); 5 in the fourth; 8 in the fifth; and 13 in the sixth. That the poem succeeds in deflating Poetry (with a capital P) while at once celebrating poetry and creating it is not to be explained by Moore's talent for arithmetic so much as by her unobtrusive skill in modulating the stresses and pauses of colloquial speech. The result is a music like that of good free verse (p. 2048).

Because stress plays virtually no role in Romance languages such as French and Italian and in Japanese, their poetry tends to be syllabic in construction. One Japanese form that has taken root in English poetry on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond is the **haiku**, a three-line poem of seventeen syllables (divided 5, 7, 5). The haiku traditionally offers an image from the natural world—a flower, a branch of cherry blossom—and this convention Paul Muldoon adopts and adapts in his series of 110 "Hopewell Haiku":

Good Friday. At three,
a swarm of bees sets its heart
on an apple tree.

Brilliantly, the Irish Roman Catholic grafts on to a form inextricably linked with the Japanese Shinto religion an image of Christ dying on the cross at three in the afternoon on the first Good Friday. Ezra Pound adapted the Japanese form in a poem whose title is an integral part of the whole:

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In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The syllable count here (8, 12, 7) bears only a token relation to that of the strict Japanese pattern, but the poem succeeds largely because its internal rhymes (p. 2037)—*Station / apparition; Metro / petals / wet; crowd / bough*—point up a series of distinct stressed syllables that suggest, in an impressionist fashion, a series of distinct white faces. Other American masters of this form are Richard Wright (p. 1502) and Richard Wilbur (p. 1632), whose poem "Zea" (p. 1640) is composed of stanzas of rhymed haiku like Muldoon's.

A number of modern poets—among them Auden, Dylan Thomas, and Gunn—have written notable poems in syllabics; their efforts to capture the spirit—if not the letter—of a foreign linguistic and poetic tradition may be compared with those of many poets since the Renaissance who have attempted to render Greek and Latin meters into English verse, using the fourth metrical system to be considered here.

Quantitative meter, which structures most Greek, Sanskrit, and later Latin poetry, is based on notions of a syllable's "quantity," its duration in time (or its *length*). This is determined by various conventions of spelling as well as by the type of vowel sound it contains. Complexities arise because Latin has more word-stress than does ancient Greek, and hence there is often an alignment of stress and quantity in foot-patterns of later Latin verse. This is ironic in light of the efforts, on the part of some Renaissance English poets, to "ennoble" the vernacular English tradition by following classical metrical models. Although poets like Spenser and Sidney devised elaborate rules for determining the "length" of English syllables according to ancient rules, the theoretical prescriptions often generated poems in which "long" syllables are in fact stressed syllables. Indeed, one defender of quantitative meter in English, Thomas Campion, explicitly recommended a metrical system aligning stress with quantity; he illustrated his theory with some highly successful poems such as "Rose-cheeked Laura" (p. 280). Although some Renaissance experiments in quantitative meter produced poems distinctly less pleasing to the ear than to the (highly educated) eye, others, such as those in Sidney's *Arcadia,* work well and remind us that experiments in cultural translation—some more successful than others—have been an enduring part of the English poetic tradition from the Anglo-Saxon era to the present.

Rhyme

Ever since the poetry of Chaucer sprang from the fortunate marriage of Old French and Old English, rhyme (the concurrence, in two or more lines, of the last stressed vowel and of all speech sounds following that vowel) has been closely associated with rhythm in English poetry. It is to be found in the early poems and songs of many languages. Most English speakers meet it first in nursery rhymes, many of which involve numbers ("One, two, / Buckle my shoe"), a fact supporting the theory that rhyme may have had its origin in primitive religious rites and magical spells. From such beginnings, poetry has been inextricably linked with music—Cædmon's "Hymn" (p. 1) and the earliest popular ballads (p. 97) were all composed to be sung—and rhyme has been a crucial element in the music of poetry. More than any other factor it has been responsible for making poetry memorable. Its function is a good deal more complicated than may at first appear, in that by associating one rhyme-word with another, poets may introduce a remote constellation of associations that may confirm, question, or on occasion deny the literal meaning of their words. Consider, for example, the opening eight lines, or *octave* (p. 2042), of Hopkins's sonnet "God's Grandeur" (p. 1166):

1. The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
2. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
3. It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
4. Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
5. Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
6. And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
7. And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
8. Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

The grand statement of the first line is illustrated not by the grand examples that the opening of lines 2 and 3 seem to promise, but by the surprising similes of shaken tin foil and olive oil oozing from its press. The down-to-earthiness that these objects have in common is stressed by the *foil / oil* rhyme that will be confirmed by the *toil / soil* of lines 6 and 7. At the other end of the cosmic scale, "The grandeur of *God*" no less appropriately rhymes with "his *rod*." But what of the implicit coupling of grand God and industrial humanity in the ensuing *trod / shod* rhymes of lines 5 and 8? These rhymes remind Hopkins's reader that Christ, too, was a worker, a walker of hard roads, and that "the grandeur of God" is manifest in the world through which the weary generations tread.

Rhymes appearing like these at the end of a line are known as **end rhymes,** but poets frequently make use of **internal rhyme** such as the *then / men* of Hopkins's line 4, the *seared / bleared / smeared* of line 6, or the *wears / shares* of line 7. **Assonance** (the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds) is present in the *not / rod* of line 4. This sonnet also contains two examples of a related sound effect, **onomatopoeia,** sometimes called *echoism,* a combination of words whose sound seems to resemble the sound it denotes. So, in lines 3 and 4, the long, slow, alliterative vowels—"ooze of oil"—seem squeezed out by the crushing pressure of the heavily stressed verb that follows. So, too, the triple repetition of "have trod" in line 5 seems to echo the thudding boots of the laboring generations.

All the rhymes so far discussed have been what is known as **masculine rhymes** in that they consist of a single stressed syllable. Rhyme words in which a stressed syllable is followed by an unstressed syllable—*chiming / rhyming*—are known as **feminine rhymes.** Single (one-syllable) and double (two-syllable) rhymes are the most common, but triple and even quadruple rhymes are also to be found, usually in a comic context like that of Gilbert's

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"I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General" (p. 1144) or Byron's *Don Juan* (p. 837):

> But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,
> Inform us truly, have they not hen-*pecked you all?*

If the correspondence of rhyming sounds is exact, it is called perfect rhyme or else *full* or *true rhyme*. For many centuries, almost all English writers of serious poems confined themselves to rhymes of this sort, except for an occasional poetic license (or violation of the rules of versification) such as eye rhymes, words whose endings are spelled alike, and in most instances were pronounced alike, but have in the course of time acquired a different pronunciation: *prove / love; daughter / laughter*. Since the nineteenth century, however, an increasing number of poets have felt the confident chimes of perfect rhymes inappropriate for poems of doubt, frustration, and grief, and have used various forms of imperfect rhyme, including:

Off-rhyme (also known as *half rhyme, near rhyme,* or *slant rhyme*) differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme. See Byron's *gone / alone* rhyme in the second stanza of "On This Day I Complete My Thirty-sixth Year" (p. 862), or Dickinson's rhyming of *Room / Storm*; *firm / Room*; and *be / Fly* in "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -" (p. 1121).

Vowel rhyme goes beyond off-rhyme to the point at which rhyme words have only their vowel sound in common. See, for example, the muted but musically effective rhymes of Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill" (p. 1571): *boughs / towns*; *green / leaves*; *starry / barley*; *climb / eyes / light*.

Pararhyme, in which the stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants, is a term coined by Edmund Blunden to describe Wilfred Owen's pioneering use of such rhymes. Although they had occurred on occasion before—see *trod / trade* in lines 5 and 6 of "God's Grandeur"—Owen was the first to employ pararhyme consistently. In a poem such as "Strange Meeting" (p. 1389), the second rhyme is usually lower in pitch (has a deeper vowel sound) than the first, producing effects of dissonance, failure, and unfulfillment that subtly reinforce Owen's theme. The last stanza of his "Miners" shows a further refinement:

> The centuries will burn rich loads
> With which we groaned,
> Whose warmth shall lull their dreaming lids,
> While songs are crooned.
> But they will not dream of us poor lads,
> Left in the ground.

Here, the pitch of the pararhyme rises to reflect the dream of a happier future—*loads / lids*—before plunging to the desolate reality of *lads*, a rise and fall repeated in *groaned / crooned / ground*.

The effect of rhyming—whether the chime is loud or muted—is to a large extent dictated by one rhyme's distance from another, a factor frequently dictated by the rhyme scheme of the poet's chosen stanza form. At one extreme stands the monorhyme, a poem of no predetermined meter, line-length, or number of lines; the sole requirement being its one rhyme. The greater the length of a monorhyme, the greater the difficulty of achieving the conversational fluency and ease of Dick Davis's "Monorhyme for the Shower":

> Lifting her arms to soap her hair
> Her pretty breasts respond—and there
> The movement of that buoyant pair
> Is like a spell to make me swear
> Twenty odd years have turned to air;
> Now she's the girl I didn't dare
> Approach, ask out, much less declare
> My love to, mired in young despair.
>
> Childbearing, rows, domestic care—
> All the prosaic wear and tear
> That constitute the life we share—
> Slip from her beautiful and bare
> Bright body as, made half aware
> Of my quick surreptitious stare,
> She wrings the water from her hair
> And turning smiles to see me there.

At the other end of the spectrum of rhyme stands Paul Muldoon's use of the same (or virtually the same) rhymes of the ninety-line poem, "Third Epistle to Timothy" (p. 1981), in the same order, in four other ninety-line poems: "Yarrow," "Incantata," "The Mud Room," and "The Bangle (Slight Return)." Only marginally less remarkable is Dylan Thomas's "Author's Prologue," a poem of 102 lines, in which line 1 rhymes with line 102, line 2 with 101, and so on, down to the central couplet of lines 51–52. Rhyme schemes, however, are seldom so taxing for poets (or their readers) and, as with their choice of meter, are likely to be determined consciously or subconsciously by their knowledge of earlier poems written in this or that form.

Forms

Basic Forms

Having looked at—and listened to—the ways in which metrical feet combine in a poetic line, one can move on to see—and hear—how such lines combine in the larger patterns of the dance, what are known as the forms of poetry.

1. Blank verse, at one end of the scale, consists of unrhymed (hence "blank") iambic pentameters. Introduced to England by Surrey in his translations from the *Aeneid* (1554), it soon became the standard meter for Elizabethan poetic drama. No verse form is closer to the natural rhythms of spoken English or more adaptive to different levels of speech. Following the example

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of Shakespeare, whose kings, clowns, and countryfolk have each their own voice when speaking blank verse, it has been used by dramatists from Marlowe to Eliot. Milton chose it for his religious epic *Paradise Lost* (p. 420), Wordsworth for his autobiographical epic *The Prelude* (p. 781), and Coleridge for his meditative lyric "Frost at Midnight" (p. 810). During the nineteenth century, it became a favorite form of **dramatic monologues** such as Tennyson's "Ulysses" (p. 992) and Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" (p. 1026), in which a single speaker (who is not the poet) addresses a dramatically defined listener in a specific situation and at a critical moment. All of these poems are divided into **verse paragraphs** of varying length, as distinct from the stanzas of equal length that make up Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" (p. 995) or Stevens's "Sunday Morning" (p. 1257).

2. The **couplet**, two lines of verse, usually coupled by rhyme, has been a principal unit of English poetry since rhyme entered the language. The first of the anonymous thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lyrics in this anthology (p. 15) is in couplets, but the first poet to use the form consistently was Chaucer, whose "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* (p. 19) exhibits great flexibility. His narrative momentum tends to overrun line endings, and his pentameter couplets are seldom the self-contained syntactic units one finds in Jonson's "On My First Son" (p. 323). The sustained use of such **closed couplets** attained its ultimate sophistication in what came to be known as **heroic couplets** ("heroic" because of their use in epic poems or plays), pioneered by Denham in the seventeenth century and perfected by Dryden and Pope in the eighteenth. The Chaucerian energies of the iambic pentameter were reined in, and each couplet made a balanced whole within the greater balanced whole of its poem, "Mac Flecknoe" (p. 517), for example, or "The Rape of the Lock" (p. 604). As if in reaction against the elevated ("heroic" or "mock heroic") diction and syntactic formality of the heroic couplet, more-recent users of the couplet have tended to veer toward the other extreme of informality. Colloquialisms, frequent enjambment, and variable placing of the caesura mask the formal rhyming of Browning's "My Last Duchess" (p. 1012), as the speaker of that dramatic monologue seeks to mask its diabolical organization. Owen, with the pararhymes of "Strange Meeting" (p. 1389), and Yeats, with the off-rhymed tetrameters of "Under Ben Bulben" (p. 1208), achieve similarly informal effects.

3. The **tercet** is a stanza of three lines traditionally linked with a single rhyme, although the tercets of Williams's "Poem" (p. 1275) and those of some other modern poets are unrhymed. It may also be a three-line section of a larger poetic structure, as, for example, the sestet of a sonnet (p. 2042). Tercets can be composed of lines of equal length—iambic tetrameter in Herrick's "Upon Julia's Clothes" (p. 359), trochaic octameter in Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's" (p. 1017)—or of different length, as in Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (p. 1156). An important variant of this form is the linked tercet, or **terza rima**, in which the second line of each stanza rhymes with the first and third lines of the next. A group of such stanzas is commonly concluded with a final line supplying the missing rhyme, as in Wilbur's "First Snow in Alsace" (p. 1632), although Shelley expanded the conclusion to a couplet in his "Ode to the West Wind" (p. 872). No verse form in English poetry is more closely identified with its inventor than is terza rima with Dante, who used it for his *Divine Comedy*. Shelley invokes the inspiration of his great predecessor in choosing the form for his "Ode" written on the outskirts of Dante's Florence, and T. S. Eliot similarly calls the *Divine Comedy* to mind with the tercets—unrhymed, but aligned on the page like Dante's—of a passage in part 2 of "Little Gidding" that ends:

> "From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
> Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
> Where you must move in measure, like a dancer."
> The day was breaking. In the disfigured street
> He left me, with a kind of valediction,
> And faded on the blowing of the horn.

4. The **quatrain**, a stanza of four lines, rhymed or unrhymed, is the most common of all English stanzaic forms. And the most common type of quatrain is the **ballad stanza**, in which lines of iambic tetrameter alternate with iambic trimeter, rhyming *abcb* (lines 1 and 3 being unrhymed) or, less commonly, *abab*. This, the stanza of popular ballads such as "Sir Patrick Spens" (p. 103), Coleridge's literary ballad "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (p. 812), and Dickinson's "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (p. 1115), also occurs in many hymns and is there called **common meter**. The expansion of lines 2 and 4 to tetrameters produces a quatrain known (particularly in hymnbooks) as **long meter**, the form of Hardy's "Channel Firing" (p. 1157). When, on the other hand, the first line is shortened to a trimeter, matching lines 2 and 4, the stanza is called **short meter**. Gascoigne uses it for "And If I Did, What Then?" (p. 144) and Hardy uses it for "I Look into My Glass" (p. 1153). Stanzas of iambic pentameter rhyming *abab*, as in Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (p. 669), are known as **heroic quatrains**. The pentameter stanzas of FitzGerald's "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám of Naishápúr" (p. 961) are rhymed *aaba*, a rhyme scheme that Frost elaborates in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (p. 1237), where the third line (unrhymed in the "Rubáiyát") rhymes with lines 1, 2, and 4 of the following stanza, producing an effect like that of terza rima. Quatrains can also be in **monorhyme**, as in Rossetti's "The Woodspurge" (p. 1105); composed of two couplets, as in "Now Go'th Sun under Wood" (p. 15); or rhymed *abba*, as in Tennyson's "In Memoriam A. H. H." (p. 996).

5. **Rhyme royal**, a seven-line iambic-pentameter stanza rhyming *ababbcc*, was introduced by Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseide* (p. 67), but its name is thought to come from its later use by King James I of Scotland in "The Kingis Quair." Later examples include Wyatt's "They Flee from Me" (p. 127) and those somber stanzas in Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" (p. 1479) that describe the twentieth century, as a contrast to the eight-line stanzas with a ballad rhythm that describe a mythic past.

6. **Ottava rima** is an eight-line stanza, as its Italian name indicates, and it rhymes *abababcc*. Like terza rima and the sonnet (below), it was introduced to English literature by Sir Thomas Wyatt. Byron put it to brilliant use in *Don Juan* (p. 837), frequently undercutting with a comic couplet the seem-

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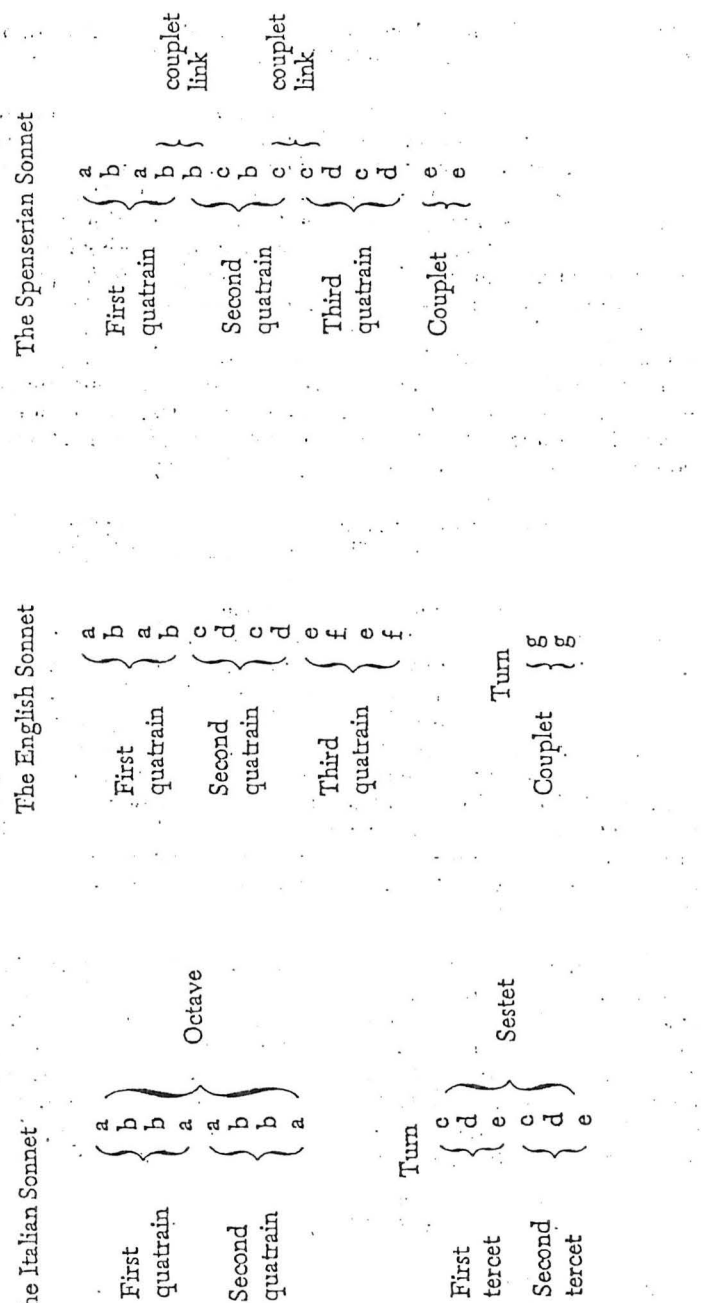
ing seriousness of the six preceding lines. Yeats used ottava rima more gravely in "Sailing to Byzantium" (p. 1199) and "Among School Children" (p. 1200).

7. The **Spenserian stanza** has nine lines, the first eight being iambic pentameter and the last an iambic hexameter (an **alexandrine**), rhyming *ababbcbcc*. Chaucer had used two such quatrains, linked by three rhymes, as the stanza form of "The Monk's Tale," but Spenser's addition of a concluding alexandrine gave the stanza he devised for *The Faerie Queene* (p. 165) an inequality in its final couplet, a variation reducing the risk of monotony that can overtake a long series of iambic pentameters. Keats and Hopkins wrote their earliest known poems in this form, and Keats went on to achieve perhaps the fullest expression of its intricate harmonies in "The Eve of St. Agnes" (p. 907). Partly, no doubt, in tribute to that poem, Shelley used the Spenserian stanza in his great elegy for Keats, "Adonais" (p. 879); later, the form was a natural choice for the narcotic narrative of Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters" (p. 988).

Ottava rima and the Spenserian stanza each open with a quatrain and close with a couplet. These and other of the shorter stanzaic units similarly recur as component parts of certain lyrics with a fixed form.

8. The **sonnet**, traditionally a poem of fourteen iambic pentameters linked by an intricate rhyme scheme, is one of the oldest verse forms in English. Used by almost every notable poet in the language, it is the best example of how rhyme and meter can provide the imagination not with a prison but with a theater. The sonnet originated in Italy and, since being introduced to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt (see his "Whoso List to Hunt," p. 126) in the early sixteenth century, has been the stage for the soliloquies of countless lovers and for dramatic action ranging from a dinner party (p. 1108) to the rape of Leda and the fall of Troy (p. 1200). There are two basic types of sonnet—the Italian, or Petrarchan (named after the fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch), and the English, or Shakespearean—and a number of variant types, of which the most important is the Spenserian. They differ in their rhyme schemes, and consequently their structure, as shown on p. 2043.

The Italian sonnet, with its distinctive division into **octave** (an eight-line unit) and **sestet** (a six-line unit), is structurally suited to a statement followed by a counterstatement, as in Milton's "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" (p. 418). The blind poet's questioning of divine justice is checked by the voice of Patience, whose haste "to prevent That murmur" is conveyed by the accelerated **turn** (change in direction of argument or narrative) on the word "but" in the last line of the octave, rather than the first of the sestet. Shelley's "Ozymandias" (p. 870) follows the same pattern of statement and counterstatement, except that its turn comes in the traditional position. Another pattern common to the Italian sonnet—observation (octave) and amplifying conclusion (sestet)—underlies Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (p. 905) and Hill's "The Laurel Axe" (p. 1835). Of these, only Milton's has a sestet conforming to the conventional rhyme scheme:



others, such as Donne's "Holy Sonnets" (p. 318), end with a couplet, sometimes causing them to be mistaken for sonnets of the other type.

The English sonnet falls into three quatrains, with a turn at the end of line 12 and a concluding couplet often of a summary or epigrammatic character. M. H. Abrams has well described the unfolding of Drayton's "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part" (p. 238): "The lover brusquely declares in the first two quatrains that he is glad the affair is cleanly broken off, pauses in the third quatrain as though at the threshold, and in the last two rhymed lines suddenly drops his swagger to make one last plea." Spenser, in the variant form that bears his name, reintroduced to the English sonnet the couplets characteristic of the Italian sonnet. This interweaving of the quatrains, as in sonnet 75 of his "Amoretti" (p. 194), makes possible a more musical and closely developed argument, and tends to reduce the sometimes excessive assertiveness of the final couplet. That last feature of the English sonnet is satirized by Brooke in his "Sonnet Reversed," which turns romantic convention upside down by *beginning* with the couplet:

> Hand trembling towards hand; the amazing lights
> Of heart and eye. They stood on supreme heights.

The three quatrains that follow record the ensuing anticlimax of suburban married life. Meredith in "Modern Love" (p. 1107) stretched the sonnet to sixteen lines; Hopkins cut it short in what he termed his curtal (a curtailed form of "curtailed") sonnet "Pied Beauty" (p. 1167); while Shakespeare concealed a sonnet in *Romeo and Juliet* (1.5.90–103). Shakespeare's 154 better-known sonnets form a carefully organized progression, or **sonnet sequence**, following the precedent of earlier sonneteers such as Sidney with his "Astrophil and Stella" (p. 213) and Spenser with his "Amoretti" (p. 190). In the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" (p. 947) continued a tradition in which the author of "Berryman's Sonnets" has since, with that title, audaciously challenged the author of Shakespeare's sonnets.

The twentieth century saw the introduction to English poetry of a Russian sonnet, the stanza form of Alexander Pushkin's verse novel, *Eugene Onegin* (1823–31). This was successfully translated—preserving its original form—by Sir Charles Johnston in 1977; but it was not until 1986 that the Pushkinian stanza first entered English poetry, in its own right, in Vikram Seth's verse novel, *The Golden Gate* (p. 1994). Arguably the most technically demanding of all English poetic forms, the Pushkinian stanza is composed of fourteen tetrameter (not pentameter) lines rhyming as follows:

a	feminine rhyme (p. 2037)
b	masculine rhyme (p. 2037)
a	feminine
b	masculine
c	feminine
c	feminine
d	masculine

d	masculine
e	feminine
f	masculine
f	masculine
e	feminine
g	masculine
g	masculine

9. The **villanelle**, a French verse form derived from an earlier Italian folk song, retains the circular pattern of a peasant dance. It consists of five tercets rhyming *aba* followed by a quatrain rhyming *abaa*, with the first line of the initial tercet recurring as the last line of the second and fourth tercets and the third line of the initial tercet recurring as the last line of the third and fifth tercets, these two **refrains** (lines of regular recurrence) being again repeated as the last two lines of the poem. If A^1 and A^2 may be said to represent the first and third lines of the initial tercet, the rhyme scheme of the villanelle will look like this:

tercet 1:	A^1	B	A^2	
2:	A	B	A^1	
3:	A	B	A^2	
4:	A	B	A^1	
5:	A	B	A^2	
quatrain:	A	B	A^1	A^2

The art of writing complicated forms like the villanelle and sestina (see below) is to give them the graceful momentum of good dancing, and the vitality of the dance informs triumphant examples such as Roethke's "The Waking" (p. 1500), Bishop's "One Art" (p. 1527), and Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (p. 1572).

10. The **sestina**, the most complicated of the verse forms initiated by the twelfth-century wandering singers known as troubadours, is composed of six stanzas of six lines each, followed by an **envoy**, or concluding stanza, that incorporates lines or words used before: in this case the *words* (instead of *rhymes*) end each line in the following pattern:

stanza 1:	A	B	C	D	E	F
2:	F	A	E	B	D	C
3:	C	F	D	A	B	E
4:	E	C	B	F	A	D
5:	D	E	A	C	F	B
6:	B	D	F	E	C	A
envoy:	E	C	A or A C E [these lines should contain the remaining three end words]			

The earliest example in this anthology is, in fact a *double* sestina: Sidney's "Ye Goatherd Gods" (p. 208). Perhaps daunted by the intricate brilliance of this, few poets attempted the form for the next three centuries. It was reintroduced by Swinburne and Pound, who prepared the way for notable

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contemporary examples such as Bishop's "Sestina" (p. 1520), Hecht's "The Book of Yolek" (p. 1566), and Ashbery's "The Painter" (p. 1736).

11. The **canzone**, another verse form initiated by the twelfth-century troubadours, has a history of varying lengths and patterns. It often consists of five twelve-line stanzas and a five-line envoy, all employing the same five line-end words. A common pattern of repetition is that followed (with minor variations) by Agha Shahid Ali's "Lenox Hill" (p. 1959): *abaacaadaee / eaeebeeccedd / deddaddbbcc / cdcceccaacbb / bcbbdbbeebaa / abcde.*

12. The **pantoum**, a Malayan form in origin, entered English poetry by way of nineteenth-century French poetry. It may consist of any number of quatrains, lines 2 and 4 of which are repeated as lines 1 and 3 of the next quatrain. The poem rhymes *abab / bcbc,* and so on, and generally ends with a quatrain whose repetons (repeated lines) are lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza in reversed order, or in a **repeton couplet** consisting of lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza in reversed order. See Donald Justice's "Pantoum of the Great Depression" (p. 1687) and Greg Williamson's "New Year's: A Short Pantoum" (p. 2024).

13. The **limerick** (to end this section on the first of two lighter notes) is a five-line stanza thought to take its name from an old custom at convivial parties whereby each person was required to sing an extemporized "nonsense verse," which was followed by a chorus containing the words "Will you come up to Limerick?" The acknowledged Old Master of the limerick is Edward Lear (p. 1041), who required that the first and fifth lines end with the same word (usually a place-name), a restriction abandoned by many Modern Masters, though triumphantly retained by the anonymous author of this:

There once was a man from Nantucket
Who kept all his cash in a bucket;
But his daughter named Nan
Ran away with a man,
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.

14. The **clerihew**, named after its inventor, Edmund Clerihew Bentley (1875–1956), is a short comic or nonsensical poem about a famous person, consisting of two rhymed couplets with lines of unequal length. Some of the best are to be found in W. H. Auden's "Academic Graffiti"—this, for example:

John Milton
Never stayed in a Hilton
Hotel,
Which was just as well.

Composite Forms

Just as good poets have always varied their base rhythm, there have always been those ready to bend, stretch, or in some way modify a fixed form to suit the demands of a particular subject. The earliest systematic and successful pioneer of such variation was John Skelton, who gave his name to what has come to be called **Skeltonic verse.** His poems typically—see, for example, the extract from "Colin Clout" (p. 92)—have short lines of anything from three to seven syllables containing two or three stresses (though more of both are common), and exploit a single rhyme until inspiration and the resources of the language run out. The breathless urgency of this form has intrigued and influenced modern poets such as Graves and Auden.

Another early composite form employed longer lines: iambic hexameter (twelve syllables) alternating with iambic heptameter (fourteen syllables). This form, known as "poulter's measure"—from the poultryman's practice of giving twelve eggs for the first dozen and fourteen for the second—was used by sixteenth-century poets such as Wyatt (p. 126), Queen Elizabeth I (p. 142), and Sidney (p. 208), but has not proved popular since.

The element of the unexpected often accounts for much of the success of poems in a composite form such as Donne's "The Sun Rising" (p. 295). His stanza might be described as a combination of two quatrains (the first rhyming *abba,* the second *cdcd*), and a couplet (*ee*). That description would be accurate but inadequate in that it takes no account of the variation in line length, which is a crucial feature of the poem's structure. It opens explosively with the outrage of the interrupted lover:

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus
Through windows and through curtains call on us?

Short lines, tetrameter followed by dimeter, suggest the speaker's initial shock and give place, as he begins to recover his composure, to the steadier pentameters that complete the first quatrain. Continuing irritation propels the brisk tetrameters that form the first half of the second quatrain. This, again, is completed by calmer pentameters, and the stanza rounded off like an English sonnet, with a summary pentameter couplet:

Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

This variation in line length achieves a different effect in the third stanza, where the brief trimeter suggests an absence contrasting with the royal presences in the preceding tetrameter:

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.

And these lines prepare, both rhetorically and visually, for the contraction and expansion so brilliantly developed in the poem's triumphant close. Similar structural considerations account for the composite stanza forms of Arnold's "The Scholar-Gypsy" (p. 1089) and Lowell's "Skunk Hour" (p. 1601), though variations of line length and rhyme scheme between the six-line stanzas of Lowell's poem bring it close to the line that divides composite form from the next category.

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Irregular Forms

A poet writing in irregular form will use rhyme and meter but follow no fixed pattern. A classic example is Milton's "Lycidas" (p. 410), which is written in iambic pentameters interspersed with an occasional trimeter, probably modeled on the occasional half-lines that intersperse the hexameters of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Milton's rhyming in this elegy (a formal lament for a dead person) is similarly varied, and a few lines are unrhymed. The most extensive use of irregular form is to be found in one of the three types of ode.

Long lyric poems of elevated style and elaborate stanzaic structure, the original odes of the Greek poet Pindar were modeled on songs sung by the chorus in Greek drama. The three-part structure of the regular **Pindaric ode** has been attempted once or twice in English, but more common and more successful has been the irregular Pindaric ode, which has no three-part structure but sections of varying length, varying line length, and varying rhyme scheme. Each of Pindar's odes was written to celebrate someone, and celebration has been the theme of many English Pindaric odes, among them Dryden's "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" (p. 524), Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (p. 1417), and Lowell's "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" (p. 1592). The desire to celebrate someone or something has also prompted most English odes of the third type, those modeled on the subject matter, tone, and form of the Roman poet Horace. More meditative and restrained than the boldly irregular Pindaric ode, the **Horatian ode** is usually written in a repeated stanza form—Marvell's "An Horatian Ode (Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland)" (p. 486) in quatrains, for example, and Keats's "To Autumn" (p. 939) in a composite eleven-line stanza.

Open Forms or Free Verse

At the opposite end of the formal scale from the fixed forms (or, as they are sometimes called, **closed forms**) of sonnet, villanelle, and sestina, we come to what was long known as free verse, poetry that makes little or no use of traditional rhyme and meter. The term is misleading, however, suggesting to some less thoughtful champions of **open forms** (as free-verse structures are now increasingly called) a false analogy with political freedom as opposed to slavery, and suggesting to traditionalist opponents the disorder or anarchy implied by Frost's infamous remark that "writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down." There was much unprofitable debate in the last century over the relative merits and "relevance" of closed and open forms, unprofitable because, as will be clear to any reader of this anthology, good poems continue to be written in both. It would be foolish to wish that Larkin wrote like Whitman, or Atwood like Dickinson. Poets must find forms and rhythms appropriate to their voices. When, around 1760, Smart chose an open form for "Jubilate Agno" (p. 678), that incantatory catalog of the attributes of his cat Jeoffry proclaimed its descent from the King James translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and, specifically, such parallel cadences as those of Psalm 150:

> Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary:
> praise him in the firmament of his power.

> Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him
> according to his excellent greatness.
> Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise
> him with the psaltery and harp.

These rhythms and rhetorical repetitions, audible also in Blake's prophetic books, resurfaced in the work of the nineteenth-century founder of American poetry, as we know it today. Whitman's elegy for an unknown soldier, "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night" (p. 1071), may end with a traditional image of the rising sun, like Milton's "Lycidas" (p. 410), but its cadences are those of the Hebrew Scriptures he read as a boy:

> And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in
> his rude-dug grave I deposited,
> Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battle-field dim,
> Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)
> Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day
> brighten'd,
> I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
> And buried him where he fell.

Whitman's breakaway from the prevailing poetic forms of his time was truly revolutionary, but certain traditional techniques he would use for special effect: the concealed *well / fell* rhyme that gives his elegy its closing chord, for example, or the bounding anapests of an earlier line:

> Oné lóok | Ĭ bŭt gáve | whĭch yŏur déar | eÿes rĕturn'd |
> with ă lóok | Ĭ shăll név | ĕr fŏrgét. . . .

The poetic revolution that Whitman initiated was continued by Pound, who wrote of his predecessor:

> It was you that broke the new wood,
> Now is a time for carving.

Pound, the carver, unlike Whitman, the pioneer, came to open forms by way of closed forms, a progression reflected in the first four sections of Pound's partly autobiographical portrait of the artist, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (p. 1298). Each section is less "literary," less formal than the last, quatrains with two rhymes yielding to quatrains with one rhyme and, in section 4, to Whitmanian free verse. A similar progression from the mastery of closed forms to the mastery of open forms can be seen in the development of poets such as Lawrence, Eliot, Auden, Lowell, Rich, and Plath (pp. 1284, 1340, 1465, 1592, 1791, 1836, respectively).

Pound may have called himself a carver, but he, too, proved a pioneer, opening up terrain that has been more profitably mined by his successors than the highlands, the rolling cadences explored by Smart, Blake, and Whitman. Pound recovered for poets territory then inhabited only by novelists, the low ground of everyday speech, a private rather than a public language. He was aided by Williams, who, in a poem such as "The Red Wheelbarrow,"

used the simplest cadences of common speech to reveal the extraordinary nature of "ordinary" things:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

Each line depends upon the next to complete it, indicating the interdependence of things in the poem and, by extension, in the world. "The Red Wheelbarrow" bears out the truth of Auden's statement that in free verse "you need an infallible ear to determine where the lines should end."

Other Forms of Poetry

Probably no century of the sixty since people began writing saw more experimentation in the arts generally, and in poetry particularly, than the last. The twentieth-century pioneers of what came to be known as the Confessional, Imagist, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and Objectivist "schools" of poetry defined these modes by aesthetic or philosophic criteria, rather than by any distinct formal characteristics (that would qualify them for inclusion in this essay).

By contrast, the twentieth century witnessed the development of at least five other categories of experimental poetry that *can* be defined by their formal characteristics:

1. **Prose poetry** originated in nineteenth-century France, reaching perhaps its highest point in the work of Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. A prose poem may have any or all of the features of the lyric, except that it is set out on the page for the eye—though not the ear—as prose. Hill's "Mercian Hymns" may look like prose, but the poet insists that his lines are to be printed exactly as they appear on pp. 1833–34; and the reader's ear will detect musical cadences no less linked and flowing than in good free verse, with which prose poetry has much in common.

2. **Found poetry**, a twentieth-century offshoot of prose poetry, converts a passage or passages of someone else's prose—from a novel, a newspaper, even an advertisement—into a poem. This may involve some modification, like that described, for example, in Brownjohn's footnote to his poem "Common Sense" (p. 1829).

3. **Shaped poetry** has a distinguished lineage, extending from ancient Greece to modern England and America. Eye and ear together are never more dramatically engaged than in the reading of shaped poems such as Herbert's "Easter Wings" (p. 368), Hollander's "Swan and Shadow" (p. 1775), and Corn's "A Conch from Sicily" (p. 1930).

4. **Concrete poetry** is an exception to the generalization at the start of this essay: "A poem is a composition written for performance by the human voice." (All generalizations are false, as the French say, including this one.) The term *concrete poetry* was coined by a group of Brazilian poets in 1952 to cover a loose category of verbal explorations by avant-garde artists and poets around the world. These range from ingenious typographic structures that, unlike the shaped poems mentioned above, cannot be "voiced"—Mahon's "The Window" (p. 1923), for example—to Jonathan Williams's "Three ripples in Tuckasegee River," which can:

TSI KSI TSI
KSI TSI KSI
TSI KSI TSI

The poet's note to this says: "Tsiksitsi is a Cherokee onomatopoeia for the sound of running water."

5. **Sound poetry**, extending the latter, more abstract form of concrete poetry into a kind of music, has been called "the ultimate performance poetry." Its performative nature is engagingly demonstrated by Edwin Morgan's poem "Interview," which begins:

—When did you start writing sound-poetry?

—Vindaberry am hookshma tintöl ensa ar'er.
Vindashton hama haz temmi-bloozma töntek.

—I see. So you were really quite precocious.
And did your parents encourage you?

—Zivva mimtod enna parahashtom ganna,
spod zivva didtod quershpöt quindast volla!
Mindetta brooshch quarva tönch bot.
Spölva harabashtat su!

Suggestions for Further Reading

Poets have been making poems for as long as composers have been making music or carpenters furniture, and just as it would be unreasonable to expect to find the lore and language of music or carpentry distilled into one short essay, so there is more to be said about the making and appreciating of poems than is said here. The fullest treatment of the subject is to be found in *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, by George Saintsbury (3 vols., New York, 1906–10), and the *Princeton Ency-*

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clopedia of Poetry and Poetics, edited by Alex Preminger, Frank J. Warnke, and O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Princeton, 1965; enl. ed., 1974). More suitable for students are *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms,* edited by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (New York, 2000), *The Poem's Heartbeat,* by Alfred Corn (Ashland, Ore., 1997), *An Introduction to English Poetry,* by James Fenton (London and New York, 2002), *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form,* by Paul Fussell (New York, 1965; rev. ed., 1979), *The Structure of Verse,* edited by Harvey Gross (New York, 1966; rev. ed., 1979), *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse,* by John Hollander (New Haven, 1981; enl. ed., 1989), *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism,* by John Lennard (Oxford and New York, 1996), and the appropriate entries in *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* by M. H. Abrams (New York, 1957; 6th ed., 1990), and *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry,* edited by Ian Hamilton (Oxford and New York, 1994). Each of these has its own more detailed suggestions for further reading.

JON STALLWORTHY

Poetic Syntax

In Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" (5.47; p. 619), there is a line few native speakers of English can grasp on first reading: " 'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms." What do we make of such a line, which is punctuated as a self-contained unit of thought? And why does it occur in the work of a poet renowned for his elegance and clarity of expression? The answer, or at least one answer, is that Pope is using *poetic syntax* to mimic the hurried confusion that soldiers experience in battle. Describing a moment when two pairs of Greek gods are arming themselves to fight each other, as related in Homer's *Iliad,* Pope adapts a classic syntactic pattern with a Greek name—*zeugma*—for his own poetic purposes. Zeugma occurs when a single verb governs several parallel words or clauses (verbal units, discussed below on p. 2056). Using a pattern that some but not all of his English-speaking readers would have recognized, Pope makes a densely compressed line that slows any reader down, impeding easy comprehension. But perhaps that is part of Pope's aim, as he constructs a linguistic analogue for certain aspects of the imagined battle scene. In so doing, Pope uses syntax not only to communicate ideas but also to create certain dramatic and meaningful effects by the very structure of his lines.

What Is Syntax?

Syntax has been defined in many ways; we can begin our own inquiry into the theory and various historical practices of **poetic syntax** by saying that it concerns transactions between poets and their audiences—readers and listeners—about the meanings of certain sequences of words. The meanings emerge as words unroll in time and also—if we are reading the poem—in space. But meaning is also a function of how words and groups of words hark back to earlier ones, sometimes with the effect of suspending or even contesting time's forward motion.

The word *syntax,* from the Greek words *syn* (together) and *tax* (to arrange), denotes the "orderly or systematic arrangements of parts or elements." At the most general level, these elements involve symbols, including mathematical ones, that are arranged to create propositions or statements. The symbols that matter most for poetic syntax are words and groups of words; but punctuation marks, line shapes, stanza forms, metrical schemes, and rhyme patterns are also important for understanding poetic syntax as an arrangement of words that generates meaningful statements.

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