

SONGS OF CIRCUM/STANCE

-original poems and introduction

by

LIONEL JOHN KEARNS

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1961

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 1964

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia,
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date April 29, 1964

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a selection of original poems and an introductory essay which treats the subject of poetic form and sets out an original system of verse notation, called "Stacked Verse" which is used in laying out the poems.

The essay may be summarized as follows. Verse, in its widest definition, is language whose sound form has been ordered or stylized for special aesthetic effect. Because verse is a time art, its essential form is a rhythm, that is, a chronological set of points and their intervals. These points may be marked by any significant feature of the language, although in English verse the speech feature most commonly used as a basis for measure is syllable stress. Yet this term is ambiguous because in English speech there are two different systems of relative stress patterning operative at the same time. On one hand there is the relative stress within individual words. This type of patterning, which we call "word stress", is stable within the language, and has functioned as the basis of traditional English metre. The other system of relative stress patterning, which we call "rhetorical stress", varies according to the speaker and the occasion. Rhetorical stress patterning is a matter of

syllable groups, pauses, and equal time intervals between heavily stressed syllables. When this type of patterning is stylized we get what is known as "strong stress" verse measure. Although this latter type of measure has not occurred extensively in English verse since Chaucer's time, it has nevertheless come down to us in folk verse and in the work of such poets as Langland, Skelton, Coleridge and Hopkins, and is being practised increasingly by poets in our own day.

This brings us to the question of variable, as opposed to regular, form. The stylization of speech features does not necessarily imply regularization. The prevalence of run-on line endings both in strong stress poetry of the Anglo-Saxons and in metred blank verse since Shakespeare's day testifies to the fact that regularity has never been an indispensable feature of English verse.

Closely associated with variable verse measure is the theory of organic form. A poet may either begin his composition with some fixed model in mind, or he may choose to compose in utter freedom, letting the poem take the shape which his emotion, not his conscious intellect, gives it. The measure of this latter type of composition will naturally be variable, but if it is also to be organic in the sense of being truly correlative to the poet's emotion it must be based on a feature of the language that does in fact vary according to an

individual's emotional condition. Such a speech feature is rhetorical stress patterning, and therefore a validly organic verse form would be one based on variable strong stress measure.

The reason this type of measure is still relatively unrecognized is because it cannot be represented on the page by conventional transcription methods, our writing system being inadequate in marking the variable rhetorical stress patterns of English speech.

Because the following poems have their verse forms based on such variable strong stress measure, the writer has found it necessary to devise a system of verse notation which will handle this type of verse form on the page. The writer calls this notation "Stacked Verse".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Parts of this thesis have appeared in the following publications.

Prism

Delta

Poet

Evidence

Canadian Forum

Outsider

Genesis West

El Corno Emplumado

Tish

Tamarack Review

Envoi

Prometheus: The Young Socialist Quarterly

Poetry 64

CHQM

CBC

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PART I

VERSE

There remains...aesthetic discourse, manifested chiefly but not solely in poetry and other deliberately cultivated styles. This is at the bottom more a matter of form than of content. Content may be put into any form whatever. But features of style turn constantly both on the actual linguistic form and on the arrangement or order of the successive units of an utterance.

Joshua Whatmough: Language¹

Let us begin our definition by saying that verse is language, and that by "language" we mean simply an oral-aural system of human communication. This system is made up on one hand of the physical sound forms which originate in the mouth of the sender and are picked up by the ear of the receiver, and on the other hand, of the referents, or meanings, associated with the various sound forms in the minds of those people who speak the language. It is important that we are aware of this dual aspect of language, and whether we think of the matter in terms of form and content, sound and meaning, symbol and

¹ (New York, 1956), p.88.

referent, we must recognize the fact that unless both these elements are present an utterance cannot be regarded as a phenomenon of language.

All language, however, is not verse, and we must narrow our definition even more by saying that verse is language whose sound form has special aesthetic appeal. This is not to say that the referential side of verse is irrelevant; we are merely stating that no matter how much verse shares the quality of referential ordering with other forms of literary art---the story, for example---the distinguishing feature of verse is its sonic ordering.² This definition implies two categories of language art, verse and prose, categories which, of course, must be taken as cardinal rather than functional. There can never be any precise dividing line between the two genres; there can only be works that approach one side of the graph or the other, for all language may be said to have some aesthetic relevance

2 This fact explains why prose can be translated into another language, or even into other words of the same language, whereas verse cannot. The former depends for its effect upon reference, which is to a large extent interchangeable between languages. Verse, on the other hand, which depends as well upon its sound forms for its effect, cannot be translated because each particular language has its own particular set of sounds which is not wholly shared by any other language. That which passes for verse translation is usually a rendering of the prose sense of the work in the new tongue or at best some kind of crude reconstruction of the sound pattern of the original according to some approximate formula of correspondences between the sound systems of the two languages.

in its sound forms, however contingent or minimal this may be.

Having accepted the above definition of verse we are now ready to go on to discuss the nature of certain types of poetic form. The reader must realize, however, that our definitions force us to regard the poem as an entity of sound and that the written work is therefore merely a spacial transcription of the sonic form which is the actual poem.

PART II

MEASURE

Rhythm is a form cut into TIME
as design is determined SPACE

Ezra Pound ABC of Reading³

Verse, like music, is a time art, and its formal structure, therefore, may be thought of as rhythm, if we use this term to mean a chronological series of perceptible points and their intervals. In fact, we might even think of rhythm in this way as being time measured in the concrete. And just as the production and contemplation of spacial art—painting or sculpture for example—involves the principle of measure, so the creation and appreciation of verse form must involve this same principle, or perhaps we should say process.

In theory, verse measure can be based on any functional element of the sound system of the language in question. Such common poetic devices as alliteration and assonance or rhyme and word repetition involve the special repetition of particular sounds or sound groups in order to segment the sound continuum of the poem and so establish a structural rhythm. Particular

3 (New York, 1934) p.202.

sound qualities may also function in this way, and so we have poetic rhythms that are based on the relative loudness or duration of syllables.⁴ We should emphasize, however, that the particular voice qualities must also be operative elements in the sound system of the particular language involved. For example, the rhythmic structure of a French poem cannot depend upon the relative loudness of consecutive syllables because the average French speaker's ear does not take account of this difference. Similarly, it would be absurd to talk, as many traditional prosodists⁵ do, of verse structures in English

4 Although it does not directly concern this paper, it is of interest to bring attention to the analytical possibilities inherent in Roman Jakobson's theory of "distinctive features", a universal system of oppositional sound qualities which in combination form the segmental elements of the sound system of any language. See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, Fundamentals of Language ('S-Gravenhage, 1956). This system, if applied to poetry, would be something very similar to poet Robert Duncan's concept of an "absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance" in speech sounds upon which the poet ideally constructs his rhythmic patterns.

5 The idea of vowel duration as the basis of English metre is an example of terms relevant to the classical languages being misapplied to English. George Saintsbury, who is still regarded in some circles as the standard authority on English prosody, is a case in point. His works: A History of English Prosody (London, 1906-1910) 3 vol., and Manual of English Prosody (London, 1910), are of value only if we disregard his confused criteria for establishing the durational classification of syllables, see Manual, pp.19-23, and interpret his longs and shorts as being strong and weakly stressed syllables.

being based on vowel length, for vowel length is not an operative element in the English language; at least, it has not been for the last few hundred years. This is not to say that all English vowels are of equal duration; but because this kind of variation is not meaningfully significant in itself, it passed unnoticed by the ear of the average English speaker.

PART III

ENGLISH STRESS PATTERNS

As no science can go beyond mathematics, no criticism can go beyond its linguistics. And the kind of linguistics needed by recent criticism for the solution of its pressing problems of metrics and stylistics ...is not semantics..., but down to earth linguistics, micro linguistics, not metalinguistics.

Harold Whitehall: reviewing
An Outline of English Structure,
by George L. Trager and
Henry Lee Smith.⁶

A feature of English speech which has frequently been used as a device of verse measure is syllable stress, or perhaps we should call it syllable prominence. In order to illustrate the way stress patterns can function as basis for formal verse rhythms we must first analyse a small segment of English speech. In so doing it will be convenient to adopt certain terms, categories and symbols from the linguists. Let us therefore use four degrees of stress: /' / primary or heavy; / ^ / secondary; / \ / tertiary; and / ˘ / weak. And let us also recognize those pitch shapes which occur, usually

6 Kenyon Review, XIII (1951), 713.

accompanied by a slight pause, at the ends of syllable clusters, and are called "terminal junctures". The three main types are: the double cross juncture /~~∞~~/, characterized by a falling pitch contour and occurring usually at the end of a sentence; the double bar juncture /||/, characterized by a rising pitch contour and occurring in a sequence such as

"He came /||/ he saw /||/ he conquered/~~∞~~/"

and the single bar juncture /|/, where the voice neither rises nor falls before articulation stops. According to An Outline of English Structure by George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith,⁷ a work which has become something of a standard among American linguists for its definition of terms and from which the above symbols have been borrowed, terminal junctures relate in the following way to stress patterns in English speech:

Between any two successive primary stresses there is always one of the terminal junctures, and every primary stress is followed by one terminal juncture at some point subsequent to it.

Any utterance made in English ends in one of the terminal junctures. If it is a minimal complete utterance it has no other terminal junctures within¹ it. In that case it must have...one—AND ONLY ONE—primary stress and may have one or more other stresses Such a minimal complete utterance may be called by the technical term PHONEMIC CLAUSE.⁸

7 Studies in Linguistics: Occasional Papers 3 (Normand, Oklahoma, 1951).

8 Outline, pp.49-50.

With the above categories in mind, let us analyse the stress patterns of the following sentence, "Henry has eaten Jack's elephant." The writer will articulate the passage himself, imagining three different contexts of situation.

(1) The speaker gives a casual explanation of the disappearance of a cookie:

Hénry[^] has^u éaten^u Jáck's[^] éléphant^u *

(2) The speaker gives a casual explanation of who has eaten whose elephant:

Henry[^] has^u éaten^u // Jáck's[^] éléphant^u *

(3) The speaker excitedly tells his wife, who is upstairs making the beds, what has happened to a plastic toy:

Henry[^] // has^u éaten^u // Jáck's[^] // éléphant^u |

It should also be noted that the heavily stressed syllables in the last utterance are approximately equally spaced in time, a phenomenon characteristic of English speech which we will call "isochronism".⁹

We could go on to imagine other situational contexts for the above passage and record the probable stress patterns for each occasion; however, the three examples are sufficient

⁹ For a technical discussion of this phenomenon see Kenneth Lee Pike, Intonation of American English (Ann Arbor, 1945), 3.6.2.

to illustrate a few basic points. To begin with, in all the utterances there is a constant relative stress relationship within particular words. The stress pattern of the word "eaten" for example is always in the order of stronger-weaker, and the word "elephant" has the characteristic pattern of strongest-weakest-medium. Had the speaker said "èléphánt", few listeners would have known what he was talking about, for this word is not known in English. Having noted this constant relative stress patterning which is characteristic of English words, let us refer to it for the remainder of this paper as "word stress".

The reader, however, will also have noted that there is another type of stress patterning which varies from occasion to occasion and seems to depend upon the speaker's response to the situation; in other words, it seems to be a manifestation of the speaker's immediate emotional, mental, or even kinesthetic, condition. This type of patterning is a matter of heavy stresses, terminal junctures, and the previously mentioned phenomenon of "isochronism", whereby the heaviest stressed syllables tend to space themselves out at approximately equal intervals from one another in time through passages of sustained utterance. In this respect we note that the first of the utterances transcribed above is made up of one "phonemic clause", to use the Trager and Smith term, for the whole

utterance contains only one primary stressed syllable and one terminal juncture. The second utterance, however, is broken into two phonemic clauses, and the third utterance is made up of no less than four of these units, each of which has its primary syllable in isochronous relation to the primary syllable either preceding it or following it, or to both. Let us call this latter type of stress patterning "rhetorical stress".

To summarize, therefore, we have distinguished two systems of stress patterning functioning simultaneously in English speech, each system making use of the relative degree of stress in the uttered syllables; but relating this stress in different ways.

PART IV
ENGLISH METRE

English poetry, deriving its basic 'heart beat' from the rhythms of oral discourse, as described by Trager and Smith, patterns binarily on a constantly varying stronger- weaker principle, or the reverse, and the iambic pattern, being statistically rather more possible of occurrence than the trochaic, is the overweening basic pattern.

Edmund L. Epstein and Terence Hawkes:
Linguistics and English Prosody¹⁰

Having recognized the two characteristic types of stress patterning that underlie most English speech rhythm, we can now go on to show how both these stress systems have been stylized to function as distinctive modes of English verse measure.

By far the best known type of English verse measure relates to what we have called "work-stress" and is generally referred to as "metre". To put it simply, metre occurs when the poet so arranges his words that syllables of weaker and greater stress alternate throughout the utterance. In discussing this kind of measure the theoreticians usually conceive of the utterance as being made up of two-syllable units which are called feet. An alternative and less frequent variant of this

¹⁰ Studies in Linguistics: Occasional Papers 7 (Buffalo, 1959), p.50.

type of measure involves arranging the words so that two weaker syllables will occur before or after every stronger syllable, and in this case the units or feet are conceived of as being made up of three syllables. However, because the majority of English metrical poetry is of the two-syllable variety, we will confine our remarks solely to it.

Historically speaking, we might note that metre gradually began to make itself felt in English verse forms after the Norman Conquest, and by the 14th Century was the dominant principle behind most verse forms, Chaucer, of course, being the greatest medieval master of this type of measure.

Bifil|thát ín|thát sēs|ōn ōn|ā dāy,
 Īn Sōuthwērk āt|thē Tābārd ās|ī lāy,
 Rēdy|tō wēndēn ōn|mý pīl|grýmāge
 Tō Cāun|tērbury|with fūl|dēvōut|cōrāge¹¹
 etc.

The first English metrical forms seem to have been derived from French syllable-counted verse models, and like them, shared the complementary device of end-rhyme. But when the English poets counted out groups of ten or twelve syllables

¹¹ Canterbury Tales, General Prologue, 19-24, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, F.N.Robinson, ed., second edition (Boston, 1957), p.17. Symbol code: /^u/ weaker stress, /-/ stronger stress, // foot division.

and marked them with pairs of like vowel-consonant clusters (end-rhymes) they discovered that, because of the different degrees of syllable stress characteristic of English speech, their lines took on the patterning of alternating weaker-stronger syllables and so became foot-counted, rather than strictly syllable counted, units of measure, a fact which allows for a certain amount of variation within the line. In illustration of this viewpoint, we have George Gascoigne, one of the first to theorize on English prosody, writing in 1575 that:

...Our father Chaucer hath used the same liberty in feet and measures that the Latinists do use. And whosoever do peruse and well consider his works, he shall find that although his lines are not always of one selfsame number of syllables, yet being read by one that hath understanding, the longest verse, and that which hath most syllables in it, will fall (to the ear) correspondent unto that which hath fewest syllables in it.¹²

In recognizing and exploiting this fundamental metrical potential of their language, and being anxious to give their own barbaric tongue literary prestige, English poets and theorists

12 "Certain Notes of Instruction concerning the Making of Verse or Rime in English, Written at the Request of Master Eduardo Donati", reprinted from Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols. (London, 1904), I. 49-54, with spelling and punctuation modernized in Discussions of Poetry: Sound and Rhythm, ed. George Hemphill (Boston, 1961), p.1.

associated native English syllable-stress metre with classical quantitative metre based on vowel length, and in consequence we have English prosodic theorists, even down to the present day, talking erroneously about "long and short" syllables being the bases of English metre.¹³

If we make allowances, however, for the inappropriate terminology of many of the theoreticians, we can recognize a considerable body of writing devoted to describing and illustrating the principles of this type of traditional English poetic measure. But because we are primarily concerned with another basic type of English measure in this paper, we will not dwell on the subject of metre except to emphasize the fact that it has dominated English poetry for the last five hundred years, surviving even such poetic revolutions as that outlined by Wordsworth in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth was to use as a basis of his poetic diction "the real language of men", but he was to adapt this language "by fitting it to metrical arrangement".¹⁴ And even today we have modern poets who refuse to consider any type of verse form outside the

13 E.g., Saintsbury, History, and Manual.

14 Reprinted in English Romantic Prose and Poetry, ed. R. Noyes, (New York, 1956), p.357.

strictly metrical tradition. The late Robert Frost, for example, had this to say on the subject:

And you see, a good many who think they're writing free verse are really writing old fashioned iambic.... Ezra Pound used to say that you've got to get all the meter out of it —extirpate the meter. If you do, maybe you've got true free verse, and I don't want any of it.¹⁵

15 Conversations on the Craft of Poetry, ed. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (New York, 1961), p.6.

PART V

STRONG STRESS MEASURE

Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that the words of the choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises. (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been once made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off by the change of language, the stresses came together and so the rhythm is sprung. (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason.

Gerard Manley Hopkins¹⁶

Having recognized and acknowledged metre as the dominant system of English verse measure, let us turn our attention to another important although often unacknowledged system which for convenience we will call "strong stress measure". In defining this system let us begin by going back in this paper to page 11 in order to consider what we have recognized

16 From author's Preface to M.S. collection of poems, C.1883, printed in Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, 1953), p.11.

as the "rhetorical stress patterns" in the transcribed example passages of English speech. We will remember that utterances are broken up into syllable groups which the linguists Trager and Smith have termed "phonemic clauses" (see page 10) and that these tend to be in lineal isochronous relation to one another within the particular utterance.

It is obvious that this rhetorical stress patterning is in fact a kind of natural system of speech measure in itself, and therefore might well be stylized to function as the underlying principle of a system of formal verse measure. And indeed, close examination of English literary history will bear out the fact that there has been from time to time English verse which takes the rhetorical stress pattern of the language (as we have defined it on page 11) as the basis of its formal rhythm rather than word stress patterns which, as we have seen, are the bases of traditional English meter.

Perhaps it would be advisable at this point in our discussion to acknowledge the fact that, in citing these two distinctive systems of verse measure, we do not try to force all English poetry to conform exclusively to either one. Rhetorical stress patterns as well as word stress patterns are present to some degree in all English speech and hence exist in all articulated English poetry. Inevitably there

will be some poems which rely on both these systems of stress organization for their aesthetic effect. However, for purposes of distinctive classification we may look on certain poems as having one of these stress systems underlying their formal rhythm. In such cases we might say that the other type of stress patterning merely contributes decorative effect. Admittedly this kind of arbitrary classification will be valid only for those poems whose sound form gives us reasonable evidence for inclusion in either category. At any rate, we should avoid a factionalist attitude that recognizes only one possible type of stress rhythm in English poetry and tries to analyse all poems in terms of this single system. With this idea in mind, therefore, let us turn to a few instances of rhetorical or strong-stress measure as it has occurred in English verse.

The largest single body of English strong-stress verse is that which comes down from the Anglo-Saxon period, having been first written down during and after the 7th Century A.D., but descending from an oral tradition which extended far into the Old Germanic past. In this type of verse the formal measure was based on a stylization of common speech rhythm,¹⁷ the strong

17 Kemp Malone, "The Middle Ages", Book I, The Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York, 1948), p.23.

stresses of the normal sound sequence having been "lifted" or exaggerated, by alliteration. In the following lines of the "Beowulf", such a stress pattern might well be represented as follows:

0ft Scyld | Scēfing | sceapēnā | Prēatūm |
 monēgūm | mægþūm | meodōsetlā | oftēah |
 ēgsodē | eorlās | syddān āerēst | wéard |
 fēasceaft | fūndēn ✕¹⁸

It is evident that the single unit of formal measure conforms very closely to the syllable cluster which we have defined as the phonemic clause. It is difficult to speculate as to whether the principle of isochronism between heavy stresses was a characteristic feature of this type of verse, but vocal interpretation of various modern readers would lead us to believe that this was the case.¹⁹

After the decline of Anglo-Saxon culture and the submergence of its literary traditions subsequent to the Norman Conquest, strong-stress verse never again achieved such prominence in English literature. Nevertheless, it does appear from time to time. In the last half of the 14th Century, for

18 Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, ed. Fr. Klaeber, third edition (Boston, 1941), p.1., ll.4-7.

19 See phonograph recordings: Harry Morgan Ayres, Selections from Beowulf, National Council of Teachers of English, no. 33; John C. Pope, Selections from Beowulf, Lexington, no. 5505; for a similar opinion see Martin Halpern, "On the Two Chief Metrical Modes in English", PMLA, LXXVII (1962); 181.

example, a period when the patterns of English metrical verse were being firmly established by such figures as Chaucer and Gower, there was also a brief resurgence of the old alliterative type of verse, albeit greatly modified from the classical Anglo-Saxon strong-stress models. In the following lines of "Piers Plowman", one of about 20 such poems which have come down to us from the period of about 1350-1400, we can note the characteristic features of alliterative stressed syllables, which mark the formal units of the verse measure:

In a sómēr | sésun, || wñen sóftē | wás þē sonnē, ||
 I schóp mē || into a shróud, || a schéep | ás I wére. X
 In hábite | óf an hérmitē || unhóly | óf wérkēs, ||
 Wende I wydenē | in þis world || wondrés | to here. X²⁰

However, after this brief flourish, which the literary historians call the "Alliterative Revival", strong-stress verse measure all but disappeared from the main stream of English poetry. It was in the less sophisticated verse of the folk that the old rhythmic tradition stayed alive. Humorous doggerel, nursery rhymes and popular ballads have continued to be based on strong-stress measure right down to the present. In this respect it is interesting to note that Northrop Frye sees a direct link between the old Anglo-Saxon forms and the folk ballad:

20 Text from Fernand Mossé, A Handbook of Middle English, trans. by G.A.Walker (Baltimore, 1952), pp.260-1.

The four-three-four-three stress quatrain of the ballads is actually a continuous four-beat rhythm, with a rest at the end of every other line. This principle of the rest, or the beat coming at a point of actual silence, was already established in Old English.²¹

It was probably an interest in ballad measure that led Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1797 to a rediscovery of strong-stress measure. He tells us, in the preface to his poem fragment, "Christabel", that the metre of the work

...is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.²²

With the above note in mind, we may read and transcribe a portion of "Christabel" in the following manner, noting how the lines analyse into the characteristic syllable clusters.

21 "Lexis and Melos", Sound and Poetry: English Institute Essays, 1956 (New York, 1957), p.xvii.

22 Coleridge, Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. Elisabeth Schneider (New York, 1951), p.70.

'Tis the middle || of the night || by the castle || clock,*
 And the owls | have awakened || the crowing || cock;*
 Tu|—whit! || Tu|—whoó! ||
 And hark || again! || the crowing | cock, ||
 How || drówsily | it | crew. #23

In other parts of *Christabel*, a reader has some difficulty in ascertaining the stressed syllables, but we will discuss this problem later in the paper.

Whether or not *Christabel* is truly in the strong-stress mode or whether, as some prosodists claim, it is merely traditional metrics with a high degree of foot substitution,²⁴ really depends upon one's point of view.²⁵ There is no question at all, however, in the case of our next exponent of the strong-stress system, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Hopkins' preface to his unpublished collection of poems shows a remarkable insight into the whole question of prosody. His definition of the two distinctive genres of verse

23 Coleridge, Selected Poetry and Prose, op. cit., pp.70-71.

24 Saintsbury, Manual, pp.97-100.

25 Martin Halpern, in his "On the Two Chief Metrical Modes in English", PMLA, LXXVII (June, 1962), 177-186, having identified what we have called metrics and strong-stress measure, maintains that all English verse measure outside the strictly two-syllable foot type (iambic or trochaic) is in the strong-stress tradition, including regular anapestic or dactylic metre. Such a point of view would clearly put "*Christabel*" in the strong-stress category.

measure: "running rhythm" and "sprung rhythm" as he calls them, could hardly be stated more clearly and simply, even today with all our technical knowledge about the language. Consider, for example, his following remarks on strong-stress measure:

Sprung Rhythm...is measured by feet of from one to four syllables regularly, and for particular effects, any number of weak or slack syllables may be used. It has one stress, which falls on only one syllable.... Nominally the feet are mixed and any one may follow any other.²⁶

Clearly, the foot of Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm is equivalent to the Trager and Smith "phonemic clause" [cf. page 10]. It is also notable that Hopkins took account of the isochronous character of this type of measure, for he states that "in Sprung Rhythm . . . the feet are assumed to be equally long or short and their seeming inequality is made up by pause or stressing."²⁷

With the above ideas in mind, and paying attention to the diacritical marks which Hopkins included in his manuscripts as a guide to the poem's articulation, we might read and transcribe a few lines of Hopkins in the following manner:

26 Prose and Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, England, 1953), p.9.

27 Ibid., p.10.

Félix | Randal || the farrier || O is he dead then ||
 my duty | all ended ||
 Who have watched | his mould | of man || big-boned |
 and hardy | handsome ||
 Pining | pining || till time || when reason |
 rambled in it * and some |
 Fatal | four | disorders | fleshed there ||
 all || contended²⁸ ||

Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm has, to a great extent, been assimilated by modern poetry, so much so that today there seems to be more strong-stress poetry being written, and especially being read aloud, than ever before. There is, however, still great confusion about the theory of modern verse measure. Indeed, for at least thirty years academic criticism has neglected the subject entirely, and it is only since the structural linguists have turned their attention to verse forms, that there seems to have been any progress in bringing to light the principles involved in English strong-stress verse form.

28 Articulation based on reproduction of Hopkins' original manuscript, *ibid.*, p.230.

PART VI

VARIABLE VERSE FORMS

Freedom is existence, and in it, existence
precedes essence.

Jean Paul Sartre: Existentialist Psychoanalysis²⁹

...and the lady shall say her mind
freely, or the blank verse shall halt for it.

Shakespeare: Hamlet,³⁰ II, ii, 337-39

Compose by the sequence of the musical
phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Ezra Pound: Make It New³¹

Any discussion of English verse measure, especially in connection with modern poetry, is further complicated by the issue of variable form. In the minds of a few prosodic theorists the principle of regularity of pattern is implied in any definition of verse. How else, they argue, does verse differ from prose. To such doctrinaire exponents, the term "free-verse"

29 Translation by Hazel E. Barnes of a major part of L'Être et le néant (Chicago, 1962), p.43.

30 The Complete Works, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York, 1948), p.901.

31 (London, 1934), p.335.

is a contradiction. And it must be admitted that the great mass of English verse has been built upon some degree of formal regularity, enough, at least, to keep the prosodists happy in their investigations and tabulations of the norms of various types of verse measure. It is not surprising that a theorist would see strict regularity as a virtue if we remember that it is a much simpler undertaking to describe and theorize about regular, predictable patterns than about irregular ones.

Attitudes towards regularity, of course, differ from period to period, and more particularly, from individual to individual. Speaking generally, however, we can note that rigidly regular verse patterns become more flexible with use, until the regularity of the form becomes nothing more than an abstract theory, or, at most, a page convention. The principle of formal variability seems to be always at work. Consider, for example, the development of Anglo-Saxon verse. The so-called "pre-classical" form, from what we can gather from the few remaining fragments that have come down to us, was rigidly linear, the line being made up of two halves each containing two heavily stressed syllables and a varying number of slack syllables, or to use our technical terminology, each half-line was made up of two phonemic clauses. The two short lines were linked by alliteration (usually on the first three

heavily stressed syllables) to form the characteristic end-stopped, four-beat, long line. This highly regular verse form, however, gave way to a less rigid form in the later classical period by admitting expanded lines which contained more heavily stressed syllables than the usual four, and line endings which ran on without syntactic pause, this last device giving rise to plurilinear structural units of variable length. During the middle part of the classical period this variability was not excessive. But during the later stages of the period, although the bases of the form measure (strongly stressed syllables lifted by alliteration, etc.) remained, the regularity of the structural units disappeared, in some cases, almost entirely. To such a case Kemp Malone refers in the following passage:

Judith exemplifies the late stage of the run-on style. Here one can hardly speak of plurilinear units at all, or indeed of clear-cut units of any kind, apart from the fits [verse paragraphs]. If we follow the punctuation of Wulcker, only 11 of the 350 lines end with a full stop, and three of these mark the end of a fit. Since the sentences usually begin and end in the middle of a line, the syntactic and alliterative patterns rarely coincide at any point, and the matter is preserved en masse, so to speak. The verses give the effect of a never-ending flow, but this continuous effect is gained at a heavy structural cost.³²

32 "Plurilinear Units in Old English Poetry", RES, XIX (1943); 203-204.

Malone's concluding remark is worth noting in that it implies that structural regularity in verse is equivalent to structural excellence, an attitude which is not shared by the writer of this paper.

A parallel shift from regular to variable form can be seen in the development of English blank verse. When Surrey gave us our first sample of unrhymed iambic pentameter in his translation of the Aeniad he was very careful to mark the end of each of his lines with a distinctive syntactic pause, and at the same time to keep internal pauses to a minimum. That this should be the case is not surprising, since he was eliminating end-rhyme, the most prominent device for marking off the larger structural units of the verse form. Whereas the sense of the line could still be retained in run-on couplets because the repetition of similar vowel-consonant clusters marked the line endings, in this new unrhymed form the whole responsibility for the structural demarcation fell on the syntactic pause. And hence, if regular form was to be maintained, lines had to be fully or at least partially endstopped. When the Elizabethan dramatists took up blank verse as their medium they too tended to use it as a basis for structural regularity. Gradually, however, they began to treat the line with more flexibility, allowing run-ons

and internal breaks and stops, and hence blank verse lost its lineal, and regular, character. It became more and more a form of variable verse measure, the multi-foot structural units being phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs rather than five-foot lines. This development from regular to variable measure is especially evident in the work of Shakespeare. Compare the regular measure of the following lines, taken from his early Henry VI, Part III:

Warwick: I wonder how the king escaped our hands,
York: While we pursued the horsemen on the North,
 He slyly stole away and left his men.
 Whereat the great Lord of Northumberland,
 Whose warlike ears could never brook retreat,
 Cheered up the drooping army, and himself,
 Lord Clifford, and Lord Stafford all abreast,
 Charged our main battle's front and, breaking in
 Were by the swords of common soldiers slain.
Edward: Lord Stafford's father, Duke of Buckingham,
 Is either slain or wounded dangerously.
 I cleft his beaver with a downright blow.
 That this is true father, behold his blood.
 (I, i, 1-12)

with the variable measure of the following passage, taken from his later Tempest:

Prospero: If I have too austerely punished you,
 Your compensation makes amends. For I
 Have given you here a third of mine own life,
 Or that for which I live, who once again
 I tender to thy hand. All they vexations
 Were but my trails of love, and thou
 Hast strangely stood the test. Here, afore Heaven,
 I ratify this my rich gift. O Ferdinand,
 Do not smile at me that I boast her off,
 For thou shalt find she will outstrip all praise
 And make it halt behind her.

(IV, i, 1-11)

If we consider the use of blank verse since Shakespeare's time—in the works of Milton and Wordsworth, for example—we will have to admit that it has remained to this day predominantly a variable form of verse measure. We might even see a certain type of so-called modern "free verse" as blank verse which no longer preserves the old page convention of the five-foot line.

PART VII

ORGANIC FORM

But words came halting forth, wanting inventions stay;
 Invention, nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
 And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
 Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
 Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,
 Fool, said my muse to me, look in thy heart and write.

Sir Philip Sidney: Astrophel and Stella, I, 9-14.

We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves; every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep.... When this Verse was first dictated to me, I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence, like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming, to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild & gentle for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts; all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race. Nations are Destroy'd or Flourish in proportion as Their Poetry, Painting and Music are Destroy'd or Flourish! The Primeval State of Man was Wisdom, Art and Science.

William Blake:

"Of the Measure in which Jerusalem is Written"³³

When T.S.Eliot tells us that Free Verse was essentially "a revolt against dead form [and] . . . an insistence upon the inner unity which is unique to every poem, against the

33 The Writings of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, III (London, 1925), 167.

outer unity, which is typical",³⁴ he is emphasizing the academic attitude towards modern verse that has prevailed for the last forty years. The so-called New Criticism is, for the most part, a system for analysing and evaluating poetry without regard to the organization of its sound-form—this organization being, from the point of view of this paper, the very essence of verse. It is significant that, in the above remark, Eliot did not mention the possibility of an outer unity which might be (and in free verse often is) as unique as the inner. In this respect Eliot's attitude is typical of the reluctance on the part of many critics, and poets themselves for that matter, to recognize the concreteness of variable measure and the validity of organic verse form.

The contemporary failure to come to adequate terms with variable measure has resulted, if we may generalize to some degree, in two quite different schools of present-day poets. On one hand there are those reactionaries who tend to resurrect the old established metrical forms—the sonnet, rhymed couplets, or even regular blank verse—to use as models for their works. Usually the exponents of this tradition maintain that they are creating a poetic tension by counterpointing the normative

34 The Music of Poetry (Glasgow, 1942), p.26.

metrical patterns by the cadence rhythms of their own phrasing.³⁵ Typical of the attitude of this school is Robert Frost, who has been quoted on several occasions as saying that he would as soon write verse without metre as play tennis with the net down.³⁶ In other words, the basic form of the verse pattern is preordained and regular; the poet plays his own game, but abides by the rules and confines his activity to the marked-out area of the tennis court. The variation occurs not in the basic formal measure, but in the ornamentation of it.

At the other extreme there are the doctrinaire exponents of organic verse form. For them the poem shapes itself not in reference to any abstract or preconceived model, but according to the emotional response of the poet. Anything can happen. The poet himself has no idea of the formal outcome until the

35 The practice of counterpointing, in its various forms, is as old as the metrical tradition itself, and the theory behind it is also nothing new, See Hopkins' remarks on "running rhythm", Prose and Poems, pp.7-9. Edgar Allan Poe on "bastard" iambs and trochees in "Rationale of Verse", Complete Works, Vol. 14 (New York, 1902), 209-265. Saintsbury on "equivalent substitution" in Manual. For scientific statement on same subject, see Epstein and Hawkes, Linguistics and English Prosody.

36 See Conversations, Brooks and Warren. For a typical rejoinder to the remark from the opposition group, see Robert Duncan, "Ideas on the Meaning of Form", Kulture, IV (Fall, 1961), 73.

poem is finished. As Robert Creeley has put it, "form is an extension of content"³⁷ and content, in this sense, is the charge of the poet's expressive energy existing at the moment of creation.

The theory of organic form has never been expounded with anything like the detail that has gone into works on traditional prosody. One reason is that there has not been a common set of terms which can be applied to this type of verse form. The result is that there is great confusion about most aspects of variable measure and organic form, even among the poets who practise it successfully. To some of them, measure is to a large extent a matter of spontaneous intuition; often they break their lines up on the page quite arbitrarily, and then disregard line breaks altogether when they read the poem aloud.³⁸ In fact, the most embarrassing question that one can ask a contemporary poet of the non-traditional

37 Quoted by Charles Olson in "Projective Verse", New American Poetry 1945-1960, ed. Donald M. Allan (New York, 1960), p.387.

38 The reader may make the test for himself by comparing the written texts of poems by such poets as Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, or Kenneth Rexroth with phonograph recordings of the poets' own readings.

school is on what basis does he end his lines.

Charles Olson, in his much-read essay, "Projective Verse",³⁹ tries to deal with the question by maintaining that the breath is the basis of true line measure. Olson's idea is interesting and probably sound as far as it goes, yet ironically its value lies in the fact that the whole principle is vague enough to be unrestrictive when it is put into practice by the poet.

Another long-time exponent of organic verse form is William Carlos Williams, a man who struggled all his life to articulate the basis of his measure, which, he claimed, should not be considered properly "free". As he points out,

Whitman with his so-called free verse was wrong: there can be no absolute freedom in verse. You must have a measure to exclude what has to be excluded and to include what has to be included. It is a technical point but a point of vast importance.⁴⁰

What Williams seems to have arrived at is a system which might be called "covert measure", where the units do not depend upon concrete features of the sound sequence itself. In this regard,

39 New American Poetry, pp.387-397.

40 Letter to Richard Eberhart, Selected Letters, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York, 1957), p.320.

he explains that:

The stated syllables, as in the best present day free verse, have become entirely divorced from the beat, that is the measure. The musical pace proceeds without them.

Therefore the measure, that is to say the count, having got rid of the words, which held it down, is returned to the music.

The words, having been freed, have been allowed to run all over the map, "free", as we have mistakenly thought. This has amounted to no more (in Whitman and others) than no discipline at all.⁴¹

Williams has put his finger on one of the major problems involved with modern free verse form, but he has failed to come up with any real solution to it. His appeal to "the tune which the lines (not necessarily the words) make in our ears"⁴² is much too vague to be of value, like his much-talked about "variable foot" which also has never been adequately defined. His concept of "covert" measure seems to side-track the main issue of organic form altogether, because it goes outside the sound structure of the poem.⁴³

41 Letter to Richard Eberhart, Letters, p.326.

42 Ibid.

43 If Williams has made a contribution to modern prosody it is in his poems rather than in his writings on the subject. Samuel R. Levin, in his most interesting study, Linguistic Structures in Poetry ('S-Gravenhage, 1962), pp.34-35, suggests that the basis of Williams' measure is syntactic rather than prosodic, a theory which is much less mysterious than Williams' own utterances on the subject. However, syntactic measure is not directly relevant to the concerns of this paper.

If variable measure is to be the basis of a verse form, it must necessarily be as "overt" as the old regular measure; it must be based on some element (or elements) of the sound sequence of the poem, and if this verse form is to be considered truly organic, the patterning of these sound elements must relate in some direct way to the immediate emotional, mental and kinesthetic state of the poet.

The old regular verse forms are certainly not organic. Their measure is based on a stylization of various fixed elements in the language, the best example being word stress in the case of metre. But organic form, if the term is to have meaning must, in contrast to regular forms, depend upon those speech elements which vary with the speaker's (or poet's) emotional state. Hence, what we have defined as rhetorical stress patterning (page 11) is a very natural basis for variable verse measure. And variable strong-stress verse, the stylization of rhetorical stress patterning, is therefore one of the most authentically organic verse forms available.

PART VIII

NOTATION

Whatever the intellectual message of articulate language in its most general and diffused forms it carries a mighty burden of emotional meaning.

R. H. Stetson: Bases of Phonology⁴⁴

In our so-called civilized life print plays such an important part that educated people are apt to forget language is primarily speech, i.e. chiefly conversation (dialogue), while the written (and printed) word is only a kind of substitute---in many ways a most valuable, but in other respects a poor one---for the spoken and heard word. Many things^{that} have vital importance in speech---stress, pitch, colour of the voice, thus especially those elements which give expression to emotions rather than to logical thinking---disappear in the comparatively rigid medium of writing, or are imperfectly rendered by such means as underlining (italicizing) and punctuation.

Otto Jespersen: The Essentials of English Grammar⁴⁵

If strong-stress measure is as natural to English verse as we have made out in this paper, why has it not been used more in the past, and why today is it not recognized as the truly variable measure of modern organic verse form? The answer is

44 (Oberlin, 1945), p.20.

45 (London, 1933), p.17.

quite simple. Our writing system does not indicate rhetorical stress patterning, and therefore conventional page layout cannot properly accommodate strong-stress verse. It is interesting to note that it was precisely on these grounds that Edgar Allan Poe attacked Coleridge's "Christabel" experiment:

Out of a hundred readers of "Christabel", fifty will be able to make nothing of its rhythm, while forty-nine of the remaining fifty will, with some ado, fancy they comprehend it, after the fourth or fifth perusal. The one out of the whole hundred who shall both comprehend and admire it at first sight—must be an unaccountably clever person—and I am by far too modest to assume, for one moment, that that very clever person is myself.⁴⁶

For all his sarcasm, Poe is quite right. There are passages of "Christabel" which are difficult to read without hesitation, at least without some experimentation, on the part of the reader. In the same essay Poe sheds further light on the subject by going on to discuss the strong-stress rhythm as it occurs in nursery rhymes.

Pease porridge hot—pease porridge cold—
Pease porridge in the pot—nine days old.

Now who of my readers who have never heard this poem pronounced according to the nursery conventionality, will find its rhythm as obscure as an explanatory note; while those who have heard it will divide it thus

46 The Complete Works, Vol. 14 (New York, 1902), p.238.

Pease | porridge | hot | pease | porridge | cold |
 Pease | porridge | in the | pot | nine | days | old. | 47

Again we must acknowledge Poe's insight. Nursery rhymes, which are definitely a strong-stress verse form, have survived because they come down in the oral tradition, and do not therefore depend upon page transcription for their preservation. This is also true of popular ballads, another strong-stress verse form, although the rhythm patterns in this case are also preserved in their accompanying melodies, which are transcribed in musical notation. And in all other instances of the successful practice of strong-stress measure there have been special techniques for preserving the rhythmical patterns. In Anglo-Saxon verse the devices seem to have been alliteration to mark stressed syllables and spaces between the written words to mark every second juncture. Hopkins, the true master of the strong-stress form, was forced to invent a whole system of diacritical marks to indicate his Sprung Rhythm. Unfortunately, editors are in the habit of leaving out these diacriticals, and consequently there is still a great deal of unnecessary confusion today about the nature of Hopkins' measure.

If we turn again to Poe's essay, we note his comment that:

47 The Complete Works, op. cit., p.238.

The chief thing in the way of this species of rhythm [strong-stress] is the necessity which it imposes upon the poet of travelling in constant company with his compositions, so as to be ready at a moment's notice, to avail himself of a well understood poetical license—that of reading aloud one's own doggerel.⁴⁸

Today, of course, the poet may also avail himself of the phonograph and tape recorder, and the fact that these modern devices have in the past few years made contemporary poetry more and more an oral art form, accounts for the increasing use by contemporary poets of variable strong-stress verse measure.

Even so, the bulk of this verse still ends up on the page, and here, as we have noted, its formal structure disappears, or at best, is greatly obscured. Various poets have tried to work out systems of verse notation, yet none have hit upon one that is satisfactory in correlating the essential rhythmic form of the poem's sound structure with the space design of the poem on the page. In consequence, the writer has found it expedient to work out a system of verse notation which he feels can handle the variable strong-stress measure of his own verse.

48 The Complete Works, op. cit., p.239.

PART IX

STACKED-VERSE

"What do you say", Mr. Bounderby, with his hat in his hand, gave a beat upon the crown at every little division of his sentences, as if it were a tambourine, "to his being seen—night after night—watch the Bank?—to his lurking about there—after dark?—To it striking Mrs. Sparsit—that he could be lurking for no good..."

Charles Dickens: Hard Times⁴⁹

When it comes to reproducing the melody and rhythm of speech, typography is helpless and the notation of ordinary music worse than useless.... The patterns of the voice traced by the oscillograph are much closer to what a proper poetry notation would be.

Northrop Frye: "Lexis and Melos"⁵⁰

Stacked-Verse is a system of verse notation designed to accommodate on the page the formal rhythms of my own poems which are written in variable strong-stress measure. Specifically it indicates such essential features of English speech as terminal junctures, primary stress, and isochronism (see pages 7-9 for explanation of these terms), and relies on the

49 (New York, 1958), p.169. First published London, 1854.

50 In Sound and Poetry, English Institute Essays 1956 (New York, 1957), p.xxiii.

syllable cluster or "phonemic clause" (see page 8) as its basic unit of measure. Correlating, where possible, these speech features with the traditional terms of versification, we come up with the following set of definitions.

The basic unit of stacked-verse is the STACK-FOOT, a group of syllables containing one primary stress and ending in a terminal juncture. Each stack-foot is written horizontally on the page, with no more than one stack-foot appearing on a single level. In particular cases, however, the stack-foot is preceded, followed, or replaced by an OUTRIDER, a group of syllables ending in a terminal juncture but containing no primary stress. The terminal juncture which separates the outrider from an accompanying stack-foot is signalled on the page by either a space or a regular juncture signalling punctuation mark (.,:;?! ____). The STACK proper or STACK-VERSE is a group of one or more stack-feet which on the page are strung on a vertical STRESS-AXIS, a line which passes through the first letter of the vowel nucleus of the heavily stressed syllable in each stack-foot. Naturally the stress-axis does not touch the outriders. The stresses along the axis are ISOCHRONOUS for the duration of the stack, that is to say there is an approximately equal time interval between each primary stress regardless of the number of intervening syllables and junctures.

At the end of the stack there is a definite break in the isochronous beat. A STACK-STANZA is made up of a number of consecutive stacks using a common stress-axis.

Because the strong-stress measure which Stacked-Verse accommodates is a stylization of normal English speech rhythms, the notation system can handle any English speech rhythm, be it in verse or not. I will, for example, stack the analysed passages of speech which we were using for illustration earlier in this paper (page 9). The first passage, being made up of a single phonemic clause, would be indicated in a one-foot stack:

Henry has eaten Jack's elephant.

The second passage, containing two phonemic clauses, would be handled in a two-foot stack:

Henry has eaten
Jack's elephant.

And the third, where the speaker's emotion breaks the sound sequence up into four isochronously related phonemic clauses, would make up a four-foot stack:

Henry
has eaten
Jack's
elephant!

* * *

The poems in the following collection, therefore, are written in Stacked-Verse. The forms of the poems themselves are based on variable strong-stress measure as it has been defined and discussed in the above essay.

PROCESS

The first time
I saw
a diesel locomotive
we were across the line;

I shouted
and my father
drove
into a ditch.

---Coughing up
the residue
of past intensities,
Measuring it out
on the page.

AMBERGRIS: A STATEMENT ON SOURCE

Over spire
and flag-pole

Past aerial
and chimney-pot

Shrouded
in nylon

Or naked
in the wind

With clouded eye
and scar of autopsy---

Ghostly
floaters
on the tide
of morning

These clotted forms
in the ectoplasmic
dawn

To shed sleeve
or thigh-bone

Wrist
or meaty calf,

To litter pavements
and corrupt the air:

(continued)

Rotting noblemen
and bearers
of wisdom
|
Leprous members
of a garbled
vision.

COMPOSITION

Frost
 melting
 in the sun,

Bright
 blue
 fall morning
 sky
 still nippy-cold;

I run
 down to get
 water;

Two
 whiskey-jacks
 in the brush,

Skim
 of ice
 at the lake edge,

I pack the water
 back
 up the trail.

Fried egg
 and bacon smell
 coming
 from the tent,

My old dad
 with matted hair
 and grey whisker stubble

(continued)

Bends over
the gas stove
in his woolly undervest; he

Fries rice,
boils coffee;
we eat.

An hour earlier
even before sunrise
we were lying there

Warm
in our sleeping-bags

Listening to
someone

Chopping wood
on the other side
of the valley,

Each
stroke
distinct,

Echoing
once
in the distance;

"Carries for miles
when it's this cold,"
he said.

While the tent-canvas
dries
in the sun

(continued)

I go
down to the lake
and shoot at a can
with the twenty-two.

He
leans on a stump
and writes something
in his book.

NOW

What about now?

I mean I remember the day
my dog died,
I mean

I came home from school
and my mother told me
they'd taken him to the vet.

Can you imagine that?

I mean

What kind
of an end
was that?

And what value
that life
now?

THE SCHOLAR AT FIVE

Cold air

And luminous brilliance
of pale blue sky
behind silhouette fir trees...

All this
a jolt
after that

Pressing atmosphere
of the library stacks.

New moon.

And vapor-trail rubric
over the strait.

FORMULA

"The whole thing is ordered,"
 he said.

"You get exactly
 what you deserve.

It all
 works out!"

And it was funny
 that first time---
 him struggling
 and grunting
 underneath the tractor

That was before I knew
 he was actually planning to be
 a missionary.

Sad
 afterwards
 of course---

When the roadway
 fell in again
 and Charley
 and Alec
 got it.

Sad

To witness
 the power of faith
 under those conditions.

THINGS

Tail-lights
 on the bridge;
 |
 Somewhere
 squealing tires;
 |
 The faint pulse
 of tug-engines
 off the inlet;
 |
 Even the instant flick
 of a swallow
 past the street-lamp

---Are nothing
 without
 a center,
 |
 Awake,
 exposed,
 suffering
 it all:
 |
 The witness,
 the subject, the

Me
 shivering on the balcony,
 aware
 |
 Of Revati
 pregnant
 and retching
 in the background
 |
 And the slight
 wind...

(continued)

Over the roof-tops
among flashing
neon signs
|
the clock-face
on the distant
city-hall
|
Is a small
splotch of red.

RECALL

It is quietly
 awesome
 to be
 Born
 at the same
 time
 and grow
 Up
 under the same
 approximate
 conditions
 Especially
 if one's memory
 is at all
 functional
 And blurts out
 the same
 kind of music
 upon occasion.

But why
 speak of it
 here?
 Those of us
 who are of it
 know;
 The others
 have no claim,
 no right.

(continued)

Should they
|
come upon ·
our secret
rhythms

|
They
will perceive only
an insignificant

|
Hiss
of words
in the wind.

RESIDUE

He was flying
DH9As then,
rickety land-planes
over the Channel

And later
in Russia

For money
and excitement
or perhaps
prestige.

"Never got over
being scared,"
he told me---

Open cockpit,
no chute,
no radio.

And a few
old snaps

Of machines
he cracked up
before
his court-martial.

Nothing else
left now
but these,

And his words
fluttering around
in my mind.

PRESENCE

Jolted
by an imagined
glimpse
of long
black hair

Or that
tingling
on my neck
like breath---

You
lurking
in the murky nowhere

Just beyond
my ragged rim
of light.

THAW

Brown patches growing
in the grimy snow,

Smell of new earth:
Spring!

And me digging out
my ball-glove
or oiling up the bike
in the basement,

Though out on the road
the kids are still playing shinny
in the slush.

But now
here in this

Sunless city
of well-swept streets
and immutable concrete

I find myself
packing in
a crate of books
to the used-book dealer,

Getting barely enough
for a jug of Berry-Cup
and half a tank
of gas.

FAMILY

Angelo
 ducking his head
 below the dash,

Puffing
 to catch the flicker
 of Ivo's lighter;

Me beside them
 in the front seat
 watching the road
 twist away to the left...

The car
 speeding straight
 on

End-over-end
 once slowly
 waiting for the
 and one
 and two rolls gently
 and three and
 stop

We climbed up
 from beach level
 and the wreck,

Noticing
 where the car
 had crashed down
 through the brush:

(continued)

Small trees
sheared
right off,

A scrape
on the great douglas fir
by the side
of the road.

Seven forty-five
P.M.

---Maria Ludavicci,
her five brothers
and me,

Struggling up
in the rain
onto the highway;

Mrs. Ludavicci
at Benediction;
Old Ludavicci
at home,

Drinking his wine
alone
in his big house.

IN BED BEFORE SUNSET

Smell of pine-pitch
and bush-rat

And outside
the cabin

Bird-noise
and talk

Of trap-lines
and horses

And later that night
one mosquito whining
inside the window-netting

DEPARTURE

Not emptiness
or sorrow
but turmoil
|
In that house
of vampires.

But things will gradually
settle down.

See now
their pale eyes
pressed against
the window,
|
Their tender proboscides
twitching
beneath the door.

PRECIPITATION

I saw
a big brown girl
in the 2-Minute-Car-Wash
opposite
the English Linen Shop.

She was straddling
a Caddy fin,
stretched out
trying to get at
a spot of chrome
on the other side

When the foreman came up,
winked at me,
and goosed her
with the hose.

There she was
against the fender
squeezing her sponge,
her wet jeans
almost bursting...

On the way back
to my apartment
it clouded up

And was raining hard
before I reached
the door.

LEVITATION

Viscous
 shadows
 of city,
 Vacant
 newsstands,
 Chairs
 on the tables
 in the dark
 cafeteria.

Ghostly hands
 among my guts.
 Menace
 of cold
 dawn.

Suddenly a Sanitary-Unit spray-truck
 rounding the corner and
 Six or seven
 uniformed members
 of the flanking
 broom-team
 Flush me
 up a flight
 of stairs.

SITUATION

Coffee beans
in the morning sun,

A giant hog
asleep
between the trays,

And once
Alfonso
climbed the hill

And talked
and stayed.

And in the afternoon
we sat in the finca
sipping coco-nuts
and rum

With faint guapango rhythms
drifting up
from some marimba band
down in the village,

Music
on the wind,
that
was enough.

Small-talk
at the stall
of Mama Lupita;

Funny stories
over at
the cantina;

(continued)

A ride
to Catamaco,
reflections
on the lake.

And because
it was Sunday night

The big band
had already
set-up
in the plaza

And everybody
was there
jumping up to mambos
and cha-cha-chas,

The trumpets
bouncing off the cathedral wall,
crackling
into the night.

It was part
of the good-life:

Friends
and their families,

All you could eat
and drink
every day.

And there was
love in that town
too,

(continued)

But that
was largely a matter
of brothers and guns,

Of dying young
among fists
and curling lips.

THE REQUISITION OF CATABOLISM

You say, "There
I've caught you at it
again---
breathing!"
I
try to hold my breath.

But that too
has its own
punishment,
Like any act
of silence.

DECOMPOSITION

Too much.
 It is time now
 to drop it all
 quit.

He lays his face
 in his arm-pit
 and refuses
 to breathe.

As for his position
 in the room,
 he stands
 hunched against
 the filing cabinet.

Must he leave his bones
 stacked neatly
 in the corner?

His intestines
 coiled up
 steaming
 beside the desk?

Oh it is that
 "enough-enough" sickness:

Nothing nothing
 nothing thankyou.

(continued)

Having failed to achieve
total evanescence
through creative detumescence

He now decides
merely
to decompose
on the spot.

So please,
if you will slip
his suspenders
His bulk will immediately
crumple to the floor.
Yes
He will gently
let go,
end.

VISION

My eyes
 definitely
 going now,
 |
 With those kids
 on tricycles
 just blobs
 of color
 |
 And the mountains
 a mere approximation...
 But remember

| George Shearing
 blind
 |
 No other piano
 like it
 at all. Remember

Blind guitarist
 on roaring
 second-class-Mexico-City-bus,
 |
 Braced,
 ragged,
 his boy
 collecting centavos...
 |
 The blind
 old beggar
 singing purest
Malagueña

MEASURE

Melody
 curls from the flute
 in the evening air;

Mind
 slips
 to the fingers---

Pure sound
 spreading
 on the wind.

Notes
 suppress words,
 deny them.

I experience
 freedom in this
 loosening of
 the brain-knot:

Seconds
 of joy!

Words control
 my inner dimension
 through a sequence
 of definitions;

It's a process
 of containment;

Makes for
 unity,
 but enforces
 a limitation.

(continued)

Words
for everything,
|
Though frequently
there's that blockage
between gut
and pennib;
|
Maybe I need
a transformer in the arm
to relieve
the congestion.

Meditations
too
are strong-armed
by words---
|
I concede to them
now,
thinking
|
That man's
life
futile as
|
A melody
on the evening wind.

POETIC

It is dangerous
to think in a poem
and doubly so
to dream.

At night
words grow
too big for the man
I know,

Having strained my limbs
in quixotic attempts
to encompass them.

Recount for yourself
those frantic apprehensions of
the vision-in-the-glass-of-beer,
myopic miscalculations
of rudimentary organs and

Other
natural
phenomena:

Poems
jumping from the tips
of my immature fingers,
Reams of conjured testimony
falling in disorder
under my desk...

Value
lives in the mind
of an economist.
Beware

(continued)

Twisting metaphor
and hardening
animal matter.

The authentic dance
is the wobbly stance
of a living
man.

IN-GROUP

No one
ran up
and shook
Christ's hand.

The only others
with that kind
of inclination

Had theirs
nailed down
too.

VASTATION IN THE STACKS

There is the agglutinous
 WORD
 Which from the beginning
 extends
 in the dark,
 Filling the mouths
 and ears
 of men,
 Stopping
 their blood.

Interval
 or intellect?
 Feet in the
 shade of it;
 Lethal cryptology
 there
 on the shelf.

Hysterical signs
 in the dusty air!
 Hand,
 lip
 and flickering synapse:
 My faltering rhythms
 from under the rack.

(continued)

But I would usurp
that adhesive godhead
of WORD,

Making my poem
with a knife.

IT

The inane
justice
of gratuitous
insanity,
the poem

Crashes down
during the night
of the big wind

And is discovered
next morning
among fallen branches
and other debris,

A thing
apart

To be used
or discarded

Or kept on the mantel
as decoration

Or thrown into the fire

THE CHARNEL-HOUSE OF DHARMA

Obscuring the sun,
sterilizing the atmosphere,
the mystical condom
slumps in the sky
---a menace to geese.

Blister there,
Bulbous
Abnormity,
Staggered vision
above
my vision,
O Rubbery
Muzak
of Sphere,
you monster
my jab!

But old Rumpelstiltskin
who was then on guard,
neglected to dub me
INCON-
CEIVABLE
With a flick of his
forensic cathode,
as I
crept by
(Eyes masked
with polaroid goggles,
my seven apertures
bunged with
sprigs of rhubarb---
DEFENSE
DE CRACHER);

(continued)

The upshot
 being
 that I worked on
 incog-
 nito,
 shamelessly
 inscrutable
 to scholars.

And now as distant reports
 and repeated detonations

Omen this nebulous structure
 of cosmic disavowal, I

(Clad only in tartan jock
 and white bow-tie)
 jump up
 in my cork-lined lab---

The subversive man
 with a portent
 device:

My tongue-struck
 charge
 of utter
 CANT

Exploding
 towards urge
 of absolute
 BANG!

THE YOGI AS HUMORIST

Confusion
at the Blood Clinic!
The man
won't bleed.

They have jabbed him
several times
in the arm

Without
producing
a drop.

They try
the other arm.
Nothing!

They cannot
extract
the needle.

Three of them
are straining
at the hose.

Now
the head-nurse
(distinguished
as usual
by a crisp
white uniform
and red face)

Pushes through
the astonished group,

(continued)

Fixes
her bloody regard
upon the prostrate
form and

Slips
the needle out
with an air
of subdued
alacrity.

Bending
over
the needled
donor,

She examines
the dry incision
in the flesh.

Without warning
a thick jet
of yellow bile
hits her
in the eye.

FRIDAY AT THE EX

His beard
 knotted
 in a make-shift
 loin-cloth,

His arms
 around a sagging
 cardboard-box
 half-filled
 with cake-mix samples
 and raffle-slips
 from hearing-aid firms,

He stumbles
 over empty bottles,
 apple cores
 and crumpled
 program leaves

---An escapee
 from the Shrine
 Circus.

As the Whip cracks,
 the Zoomo-Plane
 takes people up
 and the Snake
 gives them six-minute
 thrills,
 he whispers:

"This midway
 isn't licensed
 for wine,

(continued)

But they
 can spin candy
 out of flesh,"

And goes on
 tossing hoops
 at cupie dolls
 and panda bears.

Now
 he crosses
 his legs
 in full lotus

Just behind
 the Crown & Anchor stand

Where agents display
 thirty brands
 of silver-base
 deodorant

And pitchmen
 ramble
 in their stalls
 about a fountain-pen
 that writes
 on walls.

But the crowd
 from the Fun-House
 kick him
 and jeer,

(continued)

Though the star
contortionist
(having always
been good
at guessing
weight)
pivots
on one pointed
breast,
And wipes
her eyes
with her tattooed
heels,
While the sky
streaks red
above the row
of floodlights,
And they jostle him
up the hill
towards
the three
Ferris Wheels.

STUNTMAN

This time
 in the darkness
 a twelve-foot
 pleasure-launch
 sleek
 and gleaming white,

The crew
 (both male
 and female)
 in bikinis,
 laughing;

And in tow
 two water-skiers
 doing acrobatics.

At the back of the boat
 instead of an out-board engine
 a man
 has been bolted into place.

He kicks his feet
 in frantic
 propulsion.

His arms
 are fastened
 to the steering cables.

Blood
 trickles
 into the water.

His neck
 seems broken
 too.

(continued)

But now
there is scarcely
any noise

For the boat
is moving faster
than the speed of sound.

APPOINTMENT

The nightmare dog-pack
 prowls
 the suburb.

Yellow-eyed,
 snarling,
 they set their teeth
 on parked cars
 and lamp-posts,
 or urinate
 on the darkened
 shopping center.

Yards
 and sidewalks
 lie torn open
 by their ravening
 But they have not yet
 turned directly
 on the homes.

A black slit
 opens
 in the sky.
 Look,
 A little boy
 is climbing
 out of an abandoned
 bus.

REMAINS

Have you ever noticed
how a dead man's
personal articles

Take on a certain
contentious
air

As if they're offended
for being left

And are making things
difficult
out of spite.

What
to do with them?

Books
aren't a problem,
but what about

These other
scraps of uselessness:

A piece
of shabby lace,

This old photograph
of God-knows-who
with something scribbled
on the back,

(continued)

Or that
unfinished manuscript

An inch
in dust
and dedicated

To his son?
Imagine that!

And him
with no family
at all.

PROTOTYPES

Consider the deaths
of Indians
in T-V westerns---

How undisturbingly
spectacular:

Falling off horses
out of trees
or over the high
precipice

Always
at the right
moment.

Yes everybody
should die
like a T-V Indian---

On the face of it
only a brief aaaaaah
or ugh-ugh
or even
stone-lipped
silence

And no tears
and no great waste
of ammunition.

CONTRA DICTION

At worst
I think poetry
only a hobby,

An activity
similar to

The youthful
assembly
of silent
model planes---

My mother
commenting:

"So constructive
and it teaches something
too."

My father
at his guns,
clearing his throat
in reply.

THEOLOGY HAIKU

Taking God
all around
like a dough-nut
Oscar saw
into the heart of things

THE SENSATIONALIST

If you stand on a hill
 and open your side
 with a spear

Or wrap
 your guts
 around a tree

It's not going to
 enhance your place
 in the community

Or even
 strengthen
 your character

And chances are
 that while the crowd gathers
 and the reporters
 are trying to get the details
 and the camera-men asking
 for another reverse shot

Some smart-guy
 will be ransacking
 your house

And joyously
 giving your wife
 the best screwing she's had
 in years

(continued)

And however things
turn out
Whether your kids
go insane
or die
or grow up to be
respected torturers
You'll have the satisfaction of knowing
it's all your fault
And by Christ
that's a damned uncomfortable
position

REPORT

Watching the ambiguous people
turning away
from the Anti-Nuclear-Arms
petitioners,

I am filled
with wordless
imperative.

She and I
are still living
in this house
on the corner.

In these days
of vapor-trails
and statistics

We raise a few
flowers and children
as fast as we can.

HOMAGE TO MACHADO

Watch it Driver!
There isn't any
road.
There's only the sound
of tires
in the night.
You see, Driver,
you make it
by burning it up,
Yeah, you
and your horn
and your headlights
Jabbing
into the black
---that's
the highway.
But don't bother
to look
in the rear-view mirror,
Driver,
Because it's a trail
of exhaust.

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