

"unconscious," such poetic testimony certainly would not generate the excitement that Milosz's poetry offers. And this is yet another proof that a poet has to deal with crucial moments in history, with what determines the "pulse" of a certain age. The value of his testimony and the value of the poetic work itself depend on that.

Therefore it seems necessary to think twice about Aristotle's advice. The consequence should not be, of course, a catalog of prescribed themes in which the building of a White Sea canal or the flight to the moon would be recommended as the Alexandrian feats of our age.

The poet is only partly a member of society; his speech is personal, and no one can prompt him as to what he should

say about. But his monologue is meant for others as well and, lacking response, becomes absurd. The reader must respond if art is to have any meaning at all. What today's reader should be told, I do not know; but it is certain that poetry should say much more than it does. Otherwise, the reader will become completely deaf to it.

You might not be aware of how the "Bop" was born. When a policeman hit a black on the head, his nightstick sang, "Be! Bop! Be-bop! Bop!" At least this is the explanation offered by Langston Hughes. Let it be, then, my own message to lovers and writers of verse: The stroke of this age upon our heads has to find its onomatopoeia in contemporary poetry.

THE NEW FREEDOM OF RHYME *by Peter Dale*

In the days of Latinate learning, there was an animus against rhyme which must have been a considerable nuisance in that heavily inflected language. In his *Observations on the Art of English Poesie* of 1602, the English poet and composer Campion remarked:

The facility and popularity of Rime creates as many poets as a hot summer, flies.



Peter Dale has written seven volumes of poetry including The Storms, Mortal Fire, and Too Much of Water.

Milton agreed with him in disliking the jingle of like endings, though both men were consummate rhymers themselves.

In the days of our polyglot fragmentation of learning, the days of free verse and free love, there is among poets a similar impatience with the artifice of rhyme—and very little impatience with the artifice of eccentric typography. As a consequence, most pupils, students, and the casual general reader would say—some even complain—that modern poetry does not rhyme. For the facility and popularity of free verse creates as many "poets" as a hot summer, flies. In fact, these readers are mistaken, though not to blame, for while this has been one of the great periods of rhyme, it has been rhyme with a difference. Our period has been one of wide-ranging experiment with all sorts of extension to rhyme systems and technique.

It could be argued maliciously that while the moderns have only popularized one new form, free verse (which cannot be the one and only acceptable form for all areas of poetic communication), the rhymers have invented so many new systems of rhyme that all forms of verse have been virtually renewed and refreshed. It is no longer possible to complain that rhyme is a difficult straitjacket in English now that the poet has so extensive a choice of rhyme systems.

Traditional pure rhyme in English is based on a tripartite system: difference of initial sound, similarity of vowel, similarity of termination: *hill/still*. This is not true of monosyllabic rhymes that open or close with a vowel—but these will not materially alter our understanding. There is, therefore, a proportion of one of difference to two of similarity. (Emily Dickinson seems the first in America to change rhyme systems and alter this proportion, but she does not systemize her variations.) It is with this proportion that the earliest experimenters played.

In France, Jules Laforgue seems to have been the first to experiment with new methods. The mute *e* which is pronounced in French poetry suggested a type of pararhyme to him which is more familiar to us through the work of Wilfred Owen. Laforgue changed the last vowel pro-

nounced but kept the consonant plus *e* to emphasize the change:

Non, non, ma pauvre cornemuse,
Ta complainte est pas si oiseuse;
Et Tout est bien une meprise,
Et l'on peut la trouver mauvaise . . .

(Poor bagpipes, the complaint you noise
Is not the tedium you suppose.
It's some contempt this Whole conveys
And you could find how bad it is.)*

The English version without the extra syllable is more difficult to hear.

Wilfred Owen developed pararhyme in which he shifted the difference of sound to the vowel. He may have derived this method from noticing an occasional license of traditional English verse such as Shelley's "*despair/appear*" rhyme in "Ozymandias." On the other hand, he may have developed it after hearing of experimenters in France such as Laforgue and Romain Rolland when he was out there. It is an effective rhyme, particularly for some of Owen's grim subject matter.

Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Naturally, an ear used to traditional rhyme has to acclimatize itself to these new sounds—which may account for common misapprehensions about rhyme and modern poets.

Owen's successors have only developed this system by widening the discrepancy of vowel sounds such as *loaves/lives*. Owen himself was forced to use what one might call close rather than pure pararhyme on occasion: *France/once* in the same poem "Futility."

Yeats made two changes in Owen's system—and if he learned from Owen disguised his debt by calling him a sandwich-board man of the revolution. Yeats dispensed with similarity of initial consonant so that his method could be called only final consonance, if one needed a name. He also discarded consistency, mixing the new rhymes like *spot/cut* with traditional pure rhyme and the old dodge of eye-rhymes. (He has been followed in this by many lesser poets and even a poet as substantial as Geoffrey Hill.)

While pararhyme was developing, the old pure rhyme was by no means defunct in hands such as Hardy's or Frost's. Eliot and a few others tried to develop it in new ways. Eliot wrote:

Freed from its exacting task of supporting lame verse, it could be applied with greater effect where it is most needed. There are often passages in an unrhymed poem where rhyme is wanted for some special effect, for a sudden tightening up, for a cumulative insistence, or for an abrupt change of mood.

Thus we hear very effective occasional uses of it in his work:

*Quoted from *The Poems of Jules Laforgue, translated by Peter Dale, by permission of Anvil Press Poetry (London)*

And the ground *swell*, that is and was from the
beginning
Clangs
The *bell*.

(Eliot also remarked that no verse was free to the man who wanted to do a good job. One wonders with what intent he allowed himself the phrase "for a sudden tightening up" in the first quotation.)

Eliot was followed, on the example of his minor poems, by the English religious poet Charles Williams in his Arthurian poems. American poets have also followed him in this usage. Jeffers will use rhyme to emphasize a point:

Those are the eyelids that never *close* . . .
The Eye.

And Jarrell, in his famous "Death of the Ball-turret Gunner" uses it to emphasize the aerial dogfight: I awoke to *black flak* and the *nightmare fighters* . . . Louis MacNeice was also experimenting by moving one rhyme into the line in a consistent rhyme scheme:

The sunlight on the *garden*
Hardens and grows cold. . . .

He also experimented with a system I first found in the Second World War poet Keith Douglas. I call it syllable rhyme because it involves rhyming the stressed syllable of a dissyllable and ignoring the light ending: *selfish/belfry*. This system has the tremendous advantage of freeing traditional rhyme from stressed line-ends and allowing a subtler music of light endings. It is a technique also found in MacLeish's "Conquistador." The finest example is Auden's "Music Is International."

During the same period, Dylan Thomas devised a system of assonance rhyme, which is best illustrated in his poem "Fern Hill."

Now as I was young and easy under the apple
boughs . . .
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the
apple *towns* . . .

Again, this system changes the basic proportion so that there is only one similarity, but because it is the vowel it seems easier to detect.

More recent poets, including George Macbeth and myself in England, have followed Dylan Thomas but improved the proportion by matching the initial in rhymes such as *feast/feed*. Others have reversed Yeats's final consonance into initial consonance with systems like *leaves/lance*—but it is almost undetectable.

Pasternak used to complain of translations which ignored his method of rhyming. Something of it can now be sensed by non-Russian speakers like myself in versions of Andrei Navrozov whose own work has been strongly influenced by Pasternak's.

But time would grow old, and pass. And pliant,
Like ice, armchair silk would melt and swell,
First audible, you stumbled and grew quiet,
The dream grew silent like the echo of a bell.

The rhyme *pliant/quiet* looks at first like a simple syllable

rhyme, but notice how the light syllable echoes the indistinct but similar sound obscured by the *n* of *pliant*. Navrozov makes ebullient use of such things in his own work:

Geisha—gazelle or gypsy,
Quietly sad or sly?
Wild, like spring in Ipswich,
Sudden, like winter's flight?

The wildness of spring in Ipswich is nicely qualified by the "wild" rhyme.

I do not know how far Dylan Thomas' experiments duplicate or overlap Pasternak's, but he has a very interesting development of what I think of as vowel-chime, where one consonant is repeated in varied endings and the echo is reinforced by par rhyme:

Be your ghost pierced, his pointed ferule,
Brass and the bodiless image, on a stick of folly
Star-set at Jacob's angle,
Smoke hill and hophead's valley,
And the five-fathomed Hamlet on his father's coral,
Thrusting the tom-thumb vision up the iron
mile . . .

I'm sure someone could use the system for a real poem.

Whether from tinkering with syllabic verse *à la* French or from certain Gaelic influences, another system of rhyme is one that ignores equivalence of stress. Marianne Moore has many stray examples: *Ming/something* and, in modern pronunciation, *defense/experience* from "Critics and Connoisseurs." Austin Clarke and Seamus Heaney also seem to use this type of rhyme, though no more systematically. Used systematically it can have a poignant effect:

And my hand, still dark to white on yours, though
wizened.
Enough now, was it ever enough to hold you,
this touch no words came close to in the end?
Love, leave the crazy tock of moth to window,
the lamplight's cone an auburn head shines
through.
Catch again the splendor of light in the wine-glow.

Again, it frees rhyme and meter from the necessity of endlessly stressed line-ends.

Another system may have come about from the influence of Gaelic or a systematizing of near rhymes traditionally used in tight spots. It is known as generic rhyme, which consists of matching consonants in families for rhyme according to their phonetic groupings. Examples from Gaelic—which I don't speak—may be: *bec/feit; faid/haig/ chraib*. English groupings might be *river/thither/stiffer* or *bulb/pulp*.

There are many other new rhyme schemes of greater and lesser ingenuity which space forces me to omit. Yet I must mention one of the most complex uses of rhyme which Auden employed on occasion: assonating the rhymes of different par rhymes:

That night when joy began
Our narrowest veins to flush,
We waited for the flash

Of morning's levelled gun.

You have to be as skillful as an Auden to go very far with that.

I have a suspicion that Owen, a tireless experimenter, was moving towards a synthesis of these systems into what could only be called musical rhyme involving the modulation of one rhyme into another by assonantal or consonantal overlap. A hint of it shows in "Insensibility":

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones;
Wretched they are, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the helpless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

The *st* of *stuns/stones* is echoed in the mid-line *paucity* and its partner *simplicity* and caught up in *reciprocity*. It returns in the par rhyme *stars*, whereupon the final consonant becomes an echo in *shores* as *r(e)s* ends the last four par rhymes. There are signs that the poem was not finalized, but it seems the way Owen's mind was moving.

In this short article, I have listed about eight rhyme systems now available to poets, not counting the opportunity offered by this last one. It seems to me that poets now have the freedom to choose a rhyme system as they once chose a meter and that this freedom is a greater, more expressive one than the freedoms in what now passes for free verse. Indeed, they should continue the advances bequeathed them and refine some of these techniques. When one's ear is attuned to these things, it becomes clear that a poem may dictate its own rhyme scheme as it chooses its own meter. I will end with a poem that did so but refrain from further analysis:

It's baffling, every time I pass, this shifty sense
that you had known the place, that we were
intimates
of something here: a path; this now vestigial
track; which wildflower clump? what leafy fugitive
whose glimpse we'd made our own? But nothing
tangible . . .
What is this? The lane is gone wherever it
goes . . .
Never much of a one in my experience
for walks or views, why play the local genius
of diminutions? We never were unanimous;
what chance you'd keep omniscience to a picnic
spot?

—I get you echoing, your voice a little wearier:
"Moments we had, the days, our days, are
vanishing."

Look there! Ladies'-slippers. Will they satisfy?
Let them. I'll track them down again. I promise
you.

STATE OF THE LITERARY ESSAY

by Thomas P. McDonnell

As a literary form, the essay was once thought to be doomed as the novel is said to be in its perennially announced demise. The familiar essay, in particular, brought to its classic perfection by Charles ("Elia") Lamb in the early 19th century, still finds some continuity today in our many personalized newspaper columns and even in the irreducible TV essays of—would you believe?—Andy Rooney. On a more substantial level, however, most contemporary essays are called articles. We are a pragmatic people, and we'd prefer not to be caught indulging anything as literary and useless as an essay; yet John McPhee's frequent contributions to *The New Yorker* are among the exemplary essays of our time. In an age dominated by the visual arts, we need—more than ever—people who can sit down and attempt to tell us what's to be made of it all.

The so-called literary essay has obviously failed to die on schedule. In fact, the literary essay is perhaps the chief staple we have in preserving the integrity of the language itself. Television, of course, is nearly illiterate in its slovenly use of the spoken word, and the careful listener can document this generalization almost at will. Also, there is the agreeable canard that the best use of English today may be found in the sports pages of our newspapers—a contention based mainly on the assumption that it is easily understood by people who move their lips when they read. On the contrary, the best expository writing in English today is to be found in periodicals that do not put an all but irrelevant value on both a sense of style and liveliness of interests.

Question: Why does the nonfictional prose of some of our most notable novelists often seem so much more attractive than their frequently dismal or severely disjointed narratives? John Updike is utterly boring—that is, as a novelist—but charming and even important as a writer of literary essays. You can have all but the earliest novels of Updike for one generous block of his essays like *Hugging the Shore* (1983). Is there really any good reason for reading the novels of Gore Vidal, for example, when you may have the delightfully outrageous wrongheadedness of the essays? It is curious, by the way, that poets generally write better prose than novelists and short-story writers and therefore make better essayists. Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and Auden are notable in this regard.

Publishers still manage to survive the cost of producing books of literary essays. There are plenty of them coming out all the time. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has recently published Volume One of a projected series, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (1904-12), which will complement the equally formidable edition which comprises the *Letters and Diaries*. Virginia Woolf the essayist is preferable to the more notable and celebrated novelist. Despite the calculated nihilism she inherited from her father, Leslie Stephen,

Woolf herself remains one of the great literary essayists in the language. Many of her best essays are still available in the two *Common Readers*, but nearly half the materials in the new series will be collected for the first time.

Oxford University Press has just brought out G.K. Chesterton: *A Half Century of Views*, edited by D.J. Conlon. Here, then, are the views of more than 50 essayists on perhaps the most prodigious essayist in English since Samuel Johnson and William Hazlitt. Among the contributors are such notables as George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Kingsley Amis, V.S. Pritchett, Anthony Burgess, W.H. Auden, Malcolm Muggeridge, as well as Chesterton's great contemporaries Hilaire Belloc and, only slightly later, Ronald Knox. Perhaps the first thing you have to say about Chesterton is that so many of his books have stayed in print. Though his output was enormous (some 115 volumes), he practiced a trade, journalism, which does not ordinarily guarantee such longevity. And yet there is something very persistent in Chesterton. As an essayist, he had the knack of a clear and direct line of communication with the reader, whereas, curiously enough, Belloc's superior style and greater learning did not assure the latter a similar place in the number of books still in print.

The more formal literary essay is on display in Richard Poirier's latest, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (Random House), which may be placed in the middle ground, say, between the eternally politicizing *New York Review of Books* and the appalling turgidity of the Yale critics' school of deconstructionism. There's a touch of the tedious in Poirier too, but it is more a hindrance than a roadblock. The trouble with books like Poirier's is the insistence on a rigidly given theme to which all subsequent ideas must gravitate. In this case, it is the theme of Emersonian skepticism and its effect upon what Poirier calls—turgidly again—the "cultural-literary inheritance,"



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