



UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA  
FILOLOGIA, LETTERATURA E LINGUISTICA

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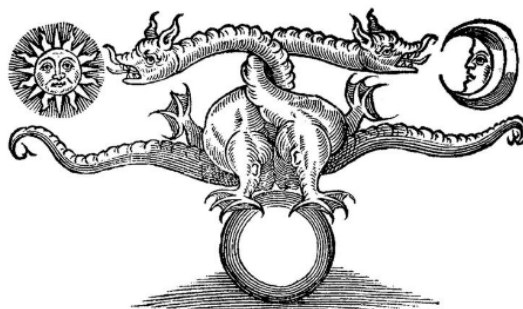
**ALCHIMIA, MAGIA E OCCULTISMO NELLA LETTERATURA INGLESE,**

**DAL *SIR GAWAIN* A "SAILING TO BYZANTIUM"**

**Dispensa dei testi primari**

**&**

**Fondamenti di analisi del testo poetico**



William Shakespeare  
"The Phoenix and the Turtle" (1601)

1. Let the bird of loudest lay
2. On the sole Arabian tree
3. Herald sad and trumpet be,
4. To whose sound chaste wings obey.
  
5. But thou shrieking harbinger,
6. Foul precurrer of the fiend,
7. Augur of the fever's end,
8. To this troop come thou not near.
  
9. From this session interdict
10. Every fowl of tyrant wing,
11. Save the eagle, feather'd king;
12. Keep the obsequy so strict.
  
13. Let the priest in surplice white,
14. That defunctive music can,
15. Be the death-divining swan,
16. Lest the requiem lack his right.
  
17. And thou treble-dated crow,
18. That thy sable gender mak'st
19. With the breath thou giv'st and tak'st,
20. 'Mongst our mourners shalt thou go.
  
21. Here the anthem doth commence:
22. Love and constancy is dead;
23. Phoenix and the Turtle fled
24. In a mutual flame from hence.

25. So they lov'd, as love in twain  
26. Had the essence but in one;  
27. Two distincts, division none:  
28. Number there in love was slain.

29. Hearts remote, yet not asunder;  
30. Distance and no space was seen  
31. 'Twixt this Turtle and his queen:  
32. But in them it were a wonder.

33. So between them love did shine  
34. That the Turtle saw his right  
35. Flaming in the Phoenix' sight:  
36. Either was the other's mine.

37. Property was thus appalled  
38. That the self was not the same;  
39. Single nature's double name  
40. Neither two nor one was called.

41. Reason, in itself confounded,  
42. Saw division grow together,  
43. To themselves yet either neither,  
44. Simple were so well compounded;

45. That it cried, "How true a twain  
46. Seemeth this concordant one!  
47. Love has reason, reason none,  
48. If what parts can so remain."

49. Whereupon it made this threne  
50. To the Phoenix and the Dove,  
51. Co-supremes and stars of love,  
52. As chorus to their tragic scene:

THRENOS

53. Beauty, truth, and rarity,
54. Grace in all simplicity,
55. Here enclos'd, in cinders lie.
  
56. Death is now the Phoenix' nest,
57. And the Turtle's loyal breast
58. To eternity doth rest,
  
59. Leaving no posterity:
60. 'Twas not their infirmity,
61. It was married chastity.
  
62. Truth may seem but cannot be;
63. Beauty brag but 'tis not she;
64. Truth and beauty buried be.
  
65. To this urn let those repair
66. That are either true or fair;
67. For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

John Donne

“Love’s Alchemy” (1595)

1. Some that have deeper digged Love's mine than I,
2. Say, where his centric happiness doth lie:
3.       I have loved, and got, and told,
4. But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
5. I should not find that hidden mystery.
6.       Oh, 'tis imposture all;
7. And as no chymic yet th'elixir got,
8.       But glorifies his pregnant pot
9.       If by the way to him befall
10. Some odorif'rous thing, or med'cinal,
11. So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,
12. But get a winter-seeming summer's night.
  
13. Our ease, our thrift, our honour, and our day,
14. Shall we for this vain bubble's shadow pay?
15.       Ends love in this, that my man
16. Can be as happy as I can, if he can
17. Endure the short scorn of a bridegroom's play?
18.       That loving wretch that swears,
19. 'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds,
20.       Which he in her angelic finds,
21.       Would swear as justly, that he hears,
22. In that day's rude hoarse minstrelsy, the spheres.
23. Hope not for mind in women; at their best
24. Sweetness and wit, they're but mummy, possessed.

John Donne

“A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy’s Day Being the Shortest Day” (1612?)

1. 'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's:
2. Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmasks;
3.       The sun is spent, and now his flasks
4.       Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;
5.       The world's whole sap is sunk:
6. The general balm th'hydroptic earth hath drunk,
7. Whither, as to the bed's feet, life is shrunk,
8. Dead and interred; yet all these seem to laugh
9. Compar'd with me, who am their epitaph.
  
10. Study me then, you who shall lovers be
11. At the next world, that is, at the next Spring,
12.       For I am every dead thing,
13.       In whom Love wrought new alchemy:
14.       For his art did express
15. A quintessence even from nothingness,
16. From dull privations, and lean emptiness.
17. He ruined me, and I am re-begot
18. Of absence, darkness, death – things which are not.
  
19. All others from all things draw all that's good –
20. Life, soul, form, spirit – whence they being have;
21.       I, by Love's limbeck, am the grave
22.       Of all: that's nothing. Oft a flood
23.       Have we two wept, and so
24. Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
25. To be two Chaoses, when we did show
26. Care to aught else; and often absences
27. Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses.

28. But I am by her death (which word wrongs her)  
29. Of the first nothing the elixir grown.  
30.       Were I a man, that I were one  
31.       I needs must know; I should prefer,  
32.       If I were any beast,  
33. Some ends, some means; yea plants – yea stones – detest,  
34. And love: all, all, some properties invest.  
35. If I an ordinary nothing were,  
36. As shadow, a light and body must be here.
37. But I am none; nor will my Sun renew.  
38. You lovers, for whose sake the lesser Sun  
39.       At this time to the Goat is run  
40.       To fetch new lust, and give it you,  
41.       Enjoy your summer all:  
42. Since she enjoys her long night's festival,  
43. Let me prepare towards her, and let me call  
44. This hour her Vigil, and her Eve, since this  
45. Both the year's, and the day's deep midnight is.

**George Herbert**

**“Prayer (I)” (1633)**

1. Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
2.           God's breath in man returning to his birth,
3.           The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
4. The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;
  
5. Engine against th' Almightye, sinners towre,
6.           Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
7.           The six-daies world transposing in an houre,
8. A kinde of tune, which all things hear and fear;
  
9. Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
10.          Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
11.          Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
12. The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
  
13.          Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud,
14.          The land of spices; something understood.

## Samuel Taylor Coleridge

### *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

- [The secondary imagination] dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.
- Fancy [...] has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definitives.
- Imagination [...] co-exist[s] with the conscious will.
- [The poet] diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant properties. . . .

### *Marginalia to Böhme's Aurora Consurgens*

- In the Deity is an absolute Synthesis of opposites

### “Kubla Khan” (1797)

1. In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
2. A stately pleasure dome decree:
3. Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
4. Through caverns measureless to man
5.       Down to a sunless sea.
6. So twice five miles of fertile ground
7. With walls and towers were girdled round:
8. And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
9. Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
10. And here were forests ancient as the hills,
11. Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

42. Could I revive within me
43.       Her symphony and song,
44.       To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
45. That with music loud and long,
46. I would build that dome in air,
47. That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
48. And all who heard should see them there,
49. And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
50. His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
51. Weave a circle round him thrice,
52. And close your eyes with holy dread,
53. For he on honey-dew hath fed,
54. And drunk the milk of Paradise.

**John Keats**

***Endymion* (I, 770-858)**

770. "Peona! ever have I long'd to slake  
771. My thirst for the world's praises: nothing base,  
772. No merely slumberous phantasm, could unlace  
773. The stubborn canvas for my voyage prepar'd--  
774. Though now 'tis tatter'd; leaving my bark bar'd  
775. And sullenly drifting: yet my higher hope  
776. Is of too wide, too rainbow-large a scope,  
777. To fret at myriads of earthly wrecks.  
778. Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck  
779. Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
780. A fellowship with essence; till we shine,  
781. Full alchemiz'd, and free of space. Behold  
782. The clear religion of heaven! Fold  
783. A rose leaf round thy finger's taperness,  
784. And soothe thy lips: hist, when the airy stress  
785. Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,  
786. And with a sympathetic touch unbinds  
787. Eolian magic from their lucid wombs:  
788. Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs;  
789. Old ditties sigh above their father's grave;  
790. Ghosts of melodious prophecyings rave  
791. Round every spot were trod Apollo's foot;  
792. Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,  
793. Where long ago a giant battle was;  
794. And, from the turf, a lullaby doth pass  
795. In every place where infant Orpheus slept.  
796. Feel we these things?--that moment have we stept  
797. Into a sort of oneness, and our state  
798. Is like a floating spirit's. But there are  
799. Richer entanglements, enthrallments far

800. More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,  
801. To the chief intensity: the crown of these  
802. Is made of love and friendship, and sits high  
803. Upon the forehead of humanity.  
804. All its more ponderous and bulky worth  
805. Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth  
806. A steady splendour; but at the tip-top,  
807. There hangs by unseen film, an orb'd drop  
808. Of light, and that is love: its influence,  
809. Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,  
810. At which we start and fret; till in the end,  
811. Melting into its radiance, we blend,  
812. Mingle, and so become a part of it,—  
813. Nor with aught else can our souls interknit  
814. So wingedly: when we combine therewith,  
815. Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith,  
816. And we are nurtured like a pelican brood.  
817. Aye, so delicious is the unsating food,  
818. That men, who might have tower'd in the van  
819. Of all the congregated world, to fan  
820. And winnow from the coming step of time  
821. All chaff of custom, wipe away all slime  
822. Left by men-slugs and human serpentry,  
823. Have been content to let occasion die,  
824. Whilst they did sleep in love's elysium.  
825. And, truly, I would rather be struck dumb,  
826. Than speak against this ardent listlessness:  
827. For I have ever thought that it might bless  
828. The world with benefits unknowingly;  
829. As does the nightingale, upperched high,  
830. And cloister'd among cool and bunched leaves—  
831. She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives  
832. How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood.  
833. Just so may love, although 'tis understood  
834. The mere commingling of passionate breath,  
835. Produce more than our searching witnesseth:  
836. What I know not: but who, of men, can tell  
837. That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell  
838. To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,

839. The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,  
840. The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,  
841. The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,  
842. Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,  
843. If human souls did never kiss and greet?
844. "Now, if this earthly love has power to make  
845. Men's being mortal, immortal; to shake  
846. Ambition from their memories, and brim  
847. Their measure of content; what merest whim,  
848. Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,  
849. To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim  
850. A love immortal, an immortal too.  
851. Look not so wilder'd; for these things are true,  
852. And never can be born of atomies  
853. That buzz about our slumbers, like brain-flies,  
854. Leaving us fancy-sick. No, no, I'm sure,  
855. My restless spirit never could endure  
856. To brood so long upon one luxury,  
857. Unless it did, though fearfully, espy  
858. A hope beyond the shadow of a dream.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley**  
**“The Witch of Atlas” (1820)**

153. The deep recesses of her odorous dwelling  
154. Were stored with magic treasures -- sounds of air,  
155. Which had the power all spirits of compelling,  
156. Folded in cells of crystal silence there;  
157. Such as we hear in youth, and think the feeling  
158. Will never die -- yet ere we are aware,  
159. The feeling and the sound are fled and gone,  
160. And the regret they leave remains alone.
161. And there lay Visions swift, and sweet, and quaint,  
162. Each in its thin sheath, like a chrysalis,  
163. Some eager to burst forth, some weak and faint  
164. With the soft burthen of intensest bliss  
165. It was its work to bear to many a saint  
166. Whose heart adores the shrine which holiest is,  
167. Even Love's: -- and others white, green, gray, and black,  
168. And of all shapes -- and each was at her beck.
169. And odours in a kind of aviary  
170. Of ever-blooming Eden-trees she kept,  
171. Clipped in a floating net, a love-sick Fairy

172. Had woven from dew-beams while the moon yet slept;  
173. As bats at the wired window of a dairy.  
174. They beat their vans; and each was an adept,  
175. When loosed and missioned, making wings of winds,  
176. To stir sweet thoughts or sad, in destined minds.
177. And liquors clear and sweet, whose healthful might  
178. Could medicine the sick soul to happy sleep,  
179. And change eternal death into a night  
180. Of glorious dreams -- or if eyes needs must weep,  
181. Could make their tears all wonder and delight,  
182. She in her crystal vials did closely keep:  
183. If men could drink of those clear vials, 'tis said  
184. The living were not envied of the dead.
185. Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device,  
186. The works of some Saturnian Archimage,  
187. Which taught the expiations at whose price  
188. Men from the Gods might win that happy age  
189. Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;  
190. And which might quench the Earth-consuming rage  
191. Of gold and blood -- till men should live and move  
192. Harmonious as the sacred stars above;
193. And how all things that seem untameable,  
194. Not to be checked and not to be confined,  
195. Obey the spells of Wisdom's wizard skill;

196. Time, earth, and fire -- the ocean and the wind,  
197. And all their shapes -- and man's imperial will;  
198. And other scrolls whose writings did unbind  
199. The inmost lore of Love -- let the profane  
200. Tremble to ask what secrets they contain.
201. And wondrous works of substances unknown,  
202. To which the enchantment of her father's power  
203. Had changed those ragged blocks of savage stone,  
204. Were heaped in the recesses of her bower;  
205. Carved lamps and chalices, and vials which shone  
206. In their own golden beams -- each like a flower,  
207. Out of whose depth a fire-fly shakes his light  
208. Under a cypress in a starless night.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

“Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude” (1815)

29. In lone and silent hours,  
30. When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness,  
31. Like an inspired and desperate alchemist  
32. Staking his very life on some dark hope,  
33. Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks  
34. With my most innocent love, until strange tears  
35. Uniting with those breathless kisses, made  
36. Such magic as compels the charmèd night  
37. To render up thy charge:...and, though ne'er yet  
38. Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,  
39. Enough from incommunicable dream,  
40. And twilight phantasms, and deep noon-day thought,  
41. Has shone within me, that serenely now  
42. And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre  
43. Suspended in the solitary dome  
44. Of some mysterious and deserted fane,  
45. I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain  
46. May modulate with murmurs of the air,  
47. And motions of the forests and the sea,  
48. And voice of living beings, and woven hymns  
49. Of night and day, and the deep heart of man.
672. O, for Medea's wondrous alchemy,  
673. Which wheresoe'er it fell made the earth gleam  
674. With bright flowers, and the wintry boughs exhale  
675. From vernal blooms fresh fragrance! O, that God,  
676. Profuse of poisons, would concede the chalice  
677. Which but one living man has drained, who now,

678. Vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels  
679. No proud exemption in the blighting curse  
680. He bears, over the world wanders for ever,  
681. Lone as incarnate death! O, that the dream  
682. Of dark magician in his visioned cave,  
683. Raking the cinders of a crucible  
684. For life and power, even when his feeble hand  
685. Shakes in its last decay, were the true law  
686. Of this so lovely world! But thou art fled  
687. Like some frail exhalation; which the dawn  
688. Robes in its golden beams,—ah! thou hast fled!

**Percy Bysshe Shelley**  
**“The Triumph of Life” (1822)**

397. " 'Into this valley of perpetual dream,  
398.     Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why—  
399. Pass not away upon the passing stream.'
400. " 'Arise and quench thy thirst,' was her reply.  
401.     And as a shut lily, stricken by the wand  
402. Of dewy morning's vital alchemy,
403. "I rose; and, bending at her sweet command,  
404.     Touched with faint lips the cup she raised,  
405. And suddenly my brain became as sand
406. "Where the first wave had more than half erased  
407.     The track of deer on desert Labrador,  
408. Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled amazed
409. "Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore  
410.     Until the second bursts—so on my sight  
411. Burst a new Vision never seen before.—

**W.B. Yeats**

**Rosa Alchemica (1896)**

I

It is now more than ten years since I met, for the last time, Michael Robartes, and for the first time and the last time his friends and fellow students; and witnessed his and their tragic end, and endured those strange experiences, which have changed me so that my writings have grown less popular and less intelligible, and driven me almost to the verge of taking the habit of St. Dominic. I had just published *Rosa Alchemica*, a little work on the Alchemists, somewhat in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne, and had received many letters from believers in the arcane sciences, upbraiding what they called my timidity, for they could not believe so evident sympathy but the sympathy of the artist, which is half pity, for everything which has moved men's hearts in any age. I had discovered, early in my researches, that their doctrine was no merely chemical phantasy, but a philosophy they applied to the world, to the elements and to man himself; and that they sought to fashion gold out of common metals merely as part of an universal transmutation of all things into some divine and imperishable substance; and this enabled me to make my little book a fanciful reverie over the transmutation of life into art, and a cry of measureless desire for a world made wholly of essences.

I was sitting dreaming of what I had written, in my house in one of the old parts of Dublin; a house my ancestors had made almost famous through their part in the politics of the city and their friendships with the famous men of their generations; and was feeling an unwonted happiness at having at last accomplished a long-cherished design, and made my rooms an expression of this favourite doctrine. The portraits, of more historical than artistic interest, had gone; and tapestry, full of the blue and bronze of peacocks, fell over the doors, and shut out all history and activity untouched with beauty and peace; and now when I looked at my Crevelli and pondered on the rose in the hand of the Virgin, wherein the form was so delicate and precise that it seemed more like a thought than a flower, or at the grey dawn and rapturous faces of my Francesca, I knew all a Christian's ecstasy without his slavery to rule and custom; when I pondered over the antique bronze gods and goddesses, which I had mortgaged my house to buy, I had all a pagan's delight in various beauty and without his terror at sleepless destiny and his labour with many sacrifices; and I had only to go to my bookshelf, where every book was bound in leather, stamped with intricate ornament, and of a carefully chosen colour: Shakespeare in the orange of the glory of the world, Dante in the dull red of his anger, Milton in the blue grey of his formal calm; and I could experience what I would of human passions without their bitterness and without satiety. I had gathered about me all gods because I believed in none, and experienced every pleasure because I gave myself to none, but held myself apart, individual, indissoluble, a mirror of polished steel: I looked in the triumph of this

imagination at the birds of Hera, glowing in the firelight as though they were wrought of jewels; and to my mind, for which symbolism was a necessity, they seemed the doorkeepers of my world, shutting out all that was not of as affluent a beauty as their own; and for a moment I thought as I had thought in so many other moments, that it was possible to rob life of every bitterness except the bitterness of death; and then a thought which had followed this thought, time after time, filled me with a passionate sorrow. All those forms: that Madonna with her brooding purity, those rapturous faces singing in the morning light, those bronze divinities with their passionless dignity, those wild shapes rushing from despair to despair, belonged to a divine world wherein I had no part; and every experience, however profound, every perception, however exquisite, would bring me the bitter dream of a limitless energy I could never know, and even in my most perfect moment I would be two selves, the one watching with heavy eyes the other's moment of content. I had heaped about me the gold born in the crucibles of others; but the supreme dream of the alchemist, the transmutation of the weary heart into a weariless spirit, was as far from me as, I doubted not, it had been from him also. I turned to my last purchase, a set of alchemical apparatus which, the dealer in the Rue le Peletier had assured me, once belonged to Raymond Lully, and as I joined the *alembic* to the *athanor* and laid the *lavacrum maris* at their side, I understood the alchemical doctrine, that all beings, divided from the great deep where spirits wander, one and yet a multitude, are weary; and sympathized, in the pride of my connoisseurship, with the consuming thirst for destruction which made the alchemist veil under his symbols of lions and dragons, of eagles and ravens, of dew and of nitre, a search for an essence which would dissolve all mortal things. I repeated to myself the ninth key of Basilus Valentinus, in which he compares the fire of the last day to the fire of the alchemist, and the world to the alchemist's furnace, and would have us know that all must be dissolved before the divine substance, material gold or immaterial ecstasy, awake. I had dissolved indeed the mortal world and lived amid immortal essences, but had obtained no miraculous ecstasy. As I thought of these things, I drew aside the curtains and looked out into the darkness, and it seemed to my troubled fancy that all those little points of light filling the sky were the furnaces of innumerable divine alchemists, who labour continually, turning lead into gold, weariness into ecstasy, bodies into souls, the darkness into God; and at their perfect labour my mortality grew heavy, and I cried out, as so many dreamers and men of letters in our age have cried, for the birth of that elaborate spiritual beauty which could alone uplift souls weighted with so many dreams.

II

My reverie was broken by a loud knocking at the door, and I wondered the more at this because I had no visitors, and had bid my servants do all things silently, lest they broke the dream of my inner life. Feeling a little curious, I resolved to go to the door myself, and, taking one of the silver candlesticks from the mantelpiece, began to descend the stairs. The servants appeared to be out, for though the sound poured through every corner and crevice of the

house there was no stir in the lower rooms. I remembered that because my needs were so few, my part in life so little, they had begun to come and go as they would, often leaving me alone for hours. The emptiness and silence of a world from which I had driven everything but dreams suddenly overwhelmed me, and I shuddered as I drew the bolt. I found before me Michael Robartes, whom I had not seen for years, and whose wild red hair, fierce eyes, sensitive, tremulous lips and rough clothes, made him look now, just as they used to do fifteen years before, something between a debauchee, a saint, and a peasant. He had recently come to Ireland, he said, and wished to see me on a matter of importance: indeed, the only matter of importance for him and for me. His voice brought up before me our student years in Paris, and remembering the magnetic power he had once possessed over me, a little fear mingled with much annoyance at this irrelevant intrusion, as I led the way up the wide staircase, where Swift had passed joking and railing, and Curran telling stories and quoting Greek, in simpler days, before men's minds, subtilized and complicated by the romantic movement in art and literature, began to tremble on the verge of some unimagined revelation. I felt that my hand shook, and saw that the light of the candle wavered and quivered more than it need have upon the Maenads on the old French panels, making them look like the first beings slowly shaping in the formless and void darkness. When the door had closed, and the peacock curtain, glimmering like many-coloured flame, fell between us and the world, I felt, in a way I could not understand, that some singular and unexpected thing was about to happen. I went over to the mantelpiece, and finding that a little chainless bronze censer, set, upon the outside, with pieces of painted china by Orazio Fontana, which I had filled with antique amulets, had fallen upon its side and poured out its contents, I began to gather the amulets into the bowl, partly to collect my thoughts and partly with that habitual reverence which seemed to me the due of things so long connected with secret hopes and fears. 'I see,' said Michael Robartes, 'that you are still fond of incense, and I can show you an incense more precious than any you have ever seen,' and as he spoke he took the censer out of my hand and put the amulets in a little heap between the *athanor* and the *alembic*. I sat down, and he sat down at the side of the fire, and sat there for a while looking into the fire, and holding the censer in his hand. 'I have come to ask you something,' he said, 'and the incense will fill the room, and our thoughts, with its sweet odour while we are talking. I got it from an old man in Syria, who said it was made from flowers, of one kind with the flowers that laid their heavy purple petals upon the hands and upon the hair and upon the feet of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, and folded Him in their heavy breath, until he cried against the cross and his destiny.' He shook some dust into the censer out of a small silk bag, and set the censer upon the floor and lit the dust which sent up a blue stream of smoke, that spread out over the ceiling, and flowed downwards again until it was like Milton's banyan tree. It filled me, as incense often does, with a faint sleepiness, so that I started when he said, 'I have come to ask you that question which I asked you in Paris, and which you left Paris rather than answer.'

He had turned his eyes towards me, and I saw them glitter in the firelight, and through the incense, as I replied: 'You mean, will I become an initiate of your Order of the Alchemical Rose? I would not consent in Paris, when I was full of unsatisfied desire, and now that I have at last fashioned my life according to my desire, am I likely to consent?'

'You have changed greatly since then,' he answered. 'I have read your books, and now I see you among all these images, and I understand you better than you do yourself, for I have been with many and many dreamers at the same cross-ways. You have shut away the world and gathered the gods about you, and if you do not throw yourself at their feet, you will be always full of lassitude, and of wavering purpose, for a man must forget he is miserable in the bustle and noise of the multitude in this world and in time; or seek a mystical union with the multitude who govern this world and time.' And then he murmured something I could not hear, and as though to someone I could not see.

For a moment the room appeared to darken, as it used to do when he was about to perform some singular experiment, and in the darkness the peacocks upon the doors seemed to glow with a more intense colour. I cast off the illusion, which was, I believe, merely caused by memory, and by the twilight of incense, for I would not acknowledge that he could overcome my now mature intellect; and I said: 'Even if I grant that I need a spiritual belief and some form of worship, why should I go to Eleusis and not to Calvary?' He leaned forward and began speaking with a slightly rhythmical intonation, and as he spoke I had to struggle again with the shadow, as of some older night than the night of the sun, which began to dim the light of the candles and to blot out the little gleams upon the corner of picture-frames and on the bronze divinities, and to turn the blue of the incense to a heavy purple; while it left the peacocks to glimmer and glow as though each separate colour were a living spirit. I had fallen into a profound dream-like reverie in which I heard him speaking as at a distance. 'And yet there is no one who communes with only one god,' he was saying, 'and the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with, and the more does he come under the power of Roland, who sounded in the Valley of Roncesvalles the last trumpet of the body's will and pleasure; and of Hamlet, who saw them perishing away, and sighed; and of Faust, who looked for them up and down the world and could not find them; and under the power of all those countless divinities who have taken upon themselves spiritual bodies in the minds of the modern poets and romance writers, and under the power of the old divinities, who since the Renaissance have won everything of their ancient worship except the sacrifice of birds and fishes, the fragrance of garlands and the smoke of incense. The many think humanity made these divinities, and that it can unmake them again; but we who have seen them pass in rattling harness, and in soft robes, and heard them speak with articulate voices while we lay in deathlike trance, know that they are always making and unmaking humanity, which is indeed but the trembling of their lips.'

He had stood up and begun to walk to and fro, and had become in my waking dream a shuttle weaving an immense purple web whose folds had begun to fill the room. The room

seemed to have become inexplicably silent, as though all but the web and the weaving were at an end in the world. 'They have come to us; they have come to us,' the voice began again; 'all that have ever been in your reverie, all that you have met with in books. There is Lear, his head still wet with the thunder-storm, and he laughs because you thought yourself an existence who are but a shadow, and him a shadow who is an eternal god; and there is Beatrice, with her lips half parted in a smile, as though all the stars were about to pass away in a sigh of love; and there is the mother of the God of humility who cast so great a spell over men that they have tried to unpeople their hearts that he might reign alone, but she holds in her hand the rose whose every petal is a god; and there, O swiftly she comes! is Aphrodite under a twilight falling from the wings of numberless sparrows, and about her feet are the grey and white doves.' In the midst of my dream I saw him hold out his left arm and pass his right hand over it as though he stroked the wings of doves. I made a violent effort which seemed almost to tear me in two, and said with forced determination: 'You would sweep me away into an indefinite world which fills me with terror; and yet a man is a great man just in so far as he can make his mind reflect everything with indifferent precision like a mirror.' I seemed to be perfectly master of myself, and went on, but more rapidly: 'I command you to leave me at once, for your ideas and phantasies are but the illusions that creep like maggots into civilizations when they begin to decline, and into minds when they begin to decay.' I had grown suddenly angry, and seizing the *alembic* from the table, was about to rise and strike him with it, when the peacocks on the door behind him appeared to grow immense; and then the *alembic* fell from my fingers and I was drowned in a tide of green and blue and bronze feathers, and as I struggled hopelessly I heard a distant voice saying: 'Our master Avicenna has written that all life proceeds out of corruption.' The glittering feathers had now covered me completely, and I knew that I had struggled for hundreds of years, and was conquered at last. I was sinking into the depth when the green and blue and bronze that seemed to fill the world became a sea of flame and swept me away, and as I was swirled along I heard a voice over my head cry, 'The mirror is broken in two pieces,' and another voice answer, 'The mirror is broken in four pieces,' and a more distant voice cry with an exultant cry, 'The mirror is broken into numberless pieces'; and then a multitude of pale hands were reaching towards me, and strange gentle faces bending above me, and half wailing and half caressing voices uttering words that were forgotten the moment they were spoken. I was being lifted out of the tide of flame, and felt my memories, my hopes, my thoughts, my will, everything I held to be myself, melting away; then I seemed to rise through numberless companies of beings who were, I understood, in some way more certain than thought, each wrapped in his eternal moment, in the perfect lifting of an arm, in a little circlet of rhythmical words, in dreaming with dim eyes and half-closed eyelids. And then I passed beyond these forms, which were so beautiful they had almost ceased to be, and, having endured strange moods, melancholy, as it seemed, with the weight of many worlds, I passed into that Death which is Beauty herself, and into that Loneliness which all the multitudes desire without ceasing. All things that had ever lived seemed to come and dwell in my heart, and I in

theirs; and I had never again known mortality or tears, had I not suddenly fallen from the certainty of vision into the uncertainty of dream, and become a drop of molten gold falling with immense rapidity, through a night elaborate with stars, and all about me a melancholy exultant wailing. I fell and fell and fell, and then the wailing was but the wailing of the wind in the chimney, and I awoke to find myself leaning upon the table and supporting my head with my hands. I saw the *alembic* swaying from side to side in the distant corner it had rolled to, and Michael Robartes watching me and waiting. 'I will go wherever you will,' I said, 'and do whatever you bid me, for I have been with eternal things.' 'I knew,' he replied, 'you must need answer as you have answered, when I heard the storm begin. You must come to a great distance, for we were commanded to build our temple between the pure multitude by the waves and the impure multitude of men.'

### III

I did not speak as we drove through the deserted streets, for my mind was curiously empty of familiar thoughts and experiences; it seemed to have been plucked out of the definite world and cast naked upon a shoreless sea. There were moments when the vision appeared on the point of returning, and I would half-remember, with an ecstasy of joy or sorrow, crimes and heroisms, fortunes and misfortunes; or begin to contemplate, with a sudden leaping of the heart, hopes and terrors, desires and ambitions, alien to my orderly and careful life; and then I would awake shuddering at the thought that some great imponderable being had swept through my mind. It was indeed days before this feeling passed perfectly away, and even now, when I have sought refuge in the only definite faith, I feel a great tolerance for those people with incoherent personalities, who gather in the chapels and meeting-places of certain obscure sects, because I also have felt fixed habits and principles dissolving before a power, which was *hysterica passio* or sheer madness, if you will, but was so powerful in its melancholy exultation that I tremble lest it wake again and drive me from my new-found peace.

When we came in the grey light to the great half-empty terminus, it seemed to me I was so changed that I was no more, as man is, a moment shuddering at eternity, but eternity weeping and laughing over a moment; and when we had started and Michael Robartes had fallen asleep, as he soon did, his sleeping face, in which there was no sign of all that had so shaken me and that now kept me wakeful, was to my excited mind more like a mask than a face. The fancy possessed me that the man behind it had dissolved away like salt in water, and that it laughed and sighed, appealed and denounced at the bidding of beings greater or less than man. 'This is not Michael Robartes at all: Michael Robartes is dead; dead for ten, for twenty years perhaps,' I kept repeating to myself. I fell at last into a feverish sleep, waking up from time to time when we rushed past some little town, its slated roofs shining with wet, or still lake gleaming in the cold morning light. I had been too pre-occupied to ask where we were going, or to notice what tickets Michael Robartes had taken, but I knew now from the direction of the sun that we were going westward; and presently I knew also, by the way in which the

trees had grown into the semblance of tattered beggars flying with bent heads towards the east, that we were approaching the western coast. Then immediately I saw the sea between the low hills upon the left, its dull grey broken into white patches and lines.

When we left the train we had still, I found, some way to go, and set out, buttoning our coats about us, for the wind was bitter and violent. Michael Robartes was silent, seeming anxious to leave me to my thoughts; and as we walked between the sea and the rocky side of a great promontory, I realized with a new perfection what a shock had been given to all my habits of thought and of feelings, if indeed some mysterious change had not taken place in the substance of my mind, for the grey waves, plumed with scudding foam, had grown part of a teeming, fantastic inner life; and when Michael Robartes pointed to a square ancient-looking house, with a much smaller and newer building under its lee, set out on the very end of a dilapidated and almost deserted pier, and said it was the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, I was possessed with the phantasy that the sea, which kept covering it with showers of white foam, was claiming it as part of some indefinite and passionate life, which had begun to war upon our orderly and careful days, and was about to plunge the world into a night as obscure as that which followed the downfall of the classical world. One part of my mind mocked this phantastic terror, but the other, the part that still lay half plunged in vision, listened to the clash of unknown armies, and shuddered at unimaginable fanaticisms, that hung in those grey leaping waves.

We had gone but a few paces along the pier when we came upon an old man, who was evidently a watchman, for he sat in an overset barrel, close to a place where masons had been lately working upon a break in the pier, and had in front of him a fire such as one sees slung under tinkers' carts. I saw that he was also a voteen, as the peasants say, for there was a rosary hanging from a nail on the rim of the barrel, and I saw I shuddered, and I did not know why I shuddered. We had passed him a few yards when I heard him cry in Gaelic, 'Idolaters, idolaters, go down to Hell with your witches and your devils; go down to Hell that the herrings may come again into the bay'; and for some moments I could hear him half screaming and half muttering behind us. 'Are you not afraid,' I said, 'that these wild fishing people may do some desperate thing against you?'

'I and mine,' he answered, 'are long past human hurt or help, being incorporate with immortal spirits, and when we die it shall be the consummation of the supreme work. A time will come for these people also, and they will sacrifice a mullet to Artemis, or some other fish to some new divinity, unless indeed their own divinities, the Dagda, with his overflowing cauldron, Lug, with his spear dipped in poppy-juice lest it rush forth hot for battle, Aengus, with the three birds on his shoulder, Bodb and his red swineherd, and all the heroic children of Dana, set up once more their temples of grey stone. Their reign has never ceased, but only waned in power a little, for the Sidhe still pass in every wind, and dance and play at hurley, and fight their sudden battles in every hollow and on every hill; but they cannot build their temples again till

there have been martyrdoms and victories, and perhaps even that long-foretold battle in the Valley of the Black Pig.’

Keeping close to the wall that went about the pier on the seaward side, to escape the driving foam and the wind, which threatened every moment to lift us off our feet, we made our way in silence to the door of the square building. Michael Robartes opened it with a key, on which I saw the rust of many salt winds, and led me along a bare passage and up an uncarpeted stair to a little room surrounded with bookshelves. A meal would be brought, but only of fruit, for I must submit to a tempered fast before the ceremony, he explained, and with it a book on the doctrine and method of the Order, over which I was to spend what remained of the winter daylight. He then left me, promising to return an hour before the ceremony. I began searching among the bookshelves, and found one of the most exhaustive alchemical libraries I have ever seen. There were the works of Morienus, who hid his immortal body under a shirt of hair-cloth; of Avicenna, who was a drunkard and yet controlled numberless legions of spirits; of Alfarabi, who put so many spirits into his lute that he could make men laugh, or weep, or fall in deadly trance as he would; of Lully, who transformed himself into the likeness of a red cock; of Flamel, who with his wife Parnella achieved the elixir many hundreds of years ago, and is fabled to live still in Arabia among the Dervishes; and of many of less fame. There were very few mystics but alchemical mystics, and because, I had little doubt, of the devotion to one god of the greater number and of the limited sense of beauty, which Robartes would hold an inevitable consequence; but I did notice a complete set of facsimiles of the prophetic writings of William Blake, and probably because of the multitudes that thronged his illumination and were ‘like the gay fishes on the wave when the moon sucks up the dew.’ I noted also many poets and prose writers of every age, but only those who were a little weary of life, as indeed the greatest have been everywhere, and who cast their imagination to us, as a something they needed no longer now that they were going up in their fiery chariots.

Presently I heard a tap at the door, and a woman came in and laid a little fruit upon the table. I judged that she had once been handsome, but her cheeks were hollowed by what I would have held, had I seen her anywhere else, an excitement of the flesh and a thirst for pleasure, instead of which it doubtless was an excitement of the imagination and a thirst for beauty. I asked her some question concerning the ceremony, but getting no answer except a shake of the head, saw that I must await initiation in silence. When I had eaten, she came again, and having laid a curiously wrought bronze box on the table, lighted the candles, and took away the plates and the remnants. So soon as I was alone, I turned to the box, and found that the peacocks of Hera spread out their tails over the sides and lid, against a background, on which were wrought great stars, as though to affirm that the heavens were a part of their glory. In the box was a book bound in vellum, and having upon the vellum and in very delicate colours, and in gold, the alchemical rose with many spears thrusting against it, but in vain, as was shown by the shattered points of those nearest to the petals. The book was written upon

vellum, and in beautiful clear letters, interspersed with symbolical pictures and illuminations, after the manner of the *Splendor Solis*.

The first chapter described how six students, of Celtic descent, gave themselves separately to the study of alchemy, and solved, one the mystery of the Pelican, another the mystery of the green Dragon, another the mystery of the Eagle, another that of Salt and Mercury. What seemed a succession of accidents, but was, the book declared, the contrivance of preternatural powers, brought them together in the garden of an inn in the South of France, and while they talked together the thought came to them that alchemy was the gradual distillation of the contents of the soul, until they were ready to put off the mortal and put on the immortal. An owl passed, rustling among the vine-leaves overhead, and then an old woman came, leaning upon a stick, and, sitting close to them, took up the thought where they had dropped it. Having expounded the whole principle of spiritual alchemy, and bid them found the Order of the Alchemical Rose, she passed from among them, and when they would have followed she was nowhere to be seen. They formed themselves into an Order, holding their goods and making their researches in common, and, as they became perfect in the alchemical doctrine, apparitions came and went among them, and taught them more and more marvellous mysteries. The book then went on to expound so much of these as the neophyte was permitted to know, dealing at the outset and at considerable length with the independent reality of our thoughts, which was, it declared, the doctrine from which all true doctrines rose. If you imagine, it said, the semblance of a living being, it is at once possessed by a wandering soul, and goes hither and thither working good or evil, until the moment of its death has come; and gave many examples, received, it said, from many gods. Eros had taught them how to fashion forms in which a divine soul could dwell, and whisper what they would into sleeping minds; and Ate, forms from which demonic beings could pour madness, or unquiet dreams, into sleeping blood; and Hermes, that if you powerfully imagined a hound at your bedside it would keep watch there until you woke, and drive away all but the mightiest demons, but that if your imagination was weakly, the hound would be weakly also, and the demons prevail, and the hound soon die; and Aphrodite, that if you made, by a strong imagining, a dove crowned with silver and had it flutter over your head, its soft cooing would make sweet dreams of immortal love gather and brood over mortal sleep; and all divinities alike had revealed with many warnings and lamentations that all minds are continually giving birth to such beings, and sending them forth to work health or disease, joy or madness. If you would give forms to the evil powers, it went on, you were to make them ugly, thrusting out a lip, with the thirsts of life, or breaking the proportions of a body with the burdens of life; but the divine powers would only appear in beautiful shapes, which are but, as it were, shapes trembling out of existence, folding up into a timeless ecstasy, drifting with half-shut eyes, into a sleepy stillness. The bodiless souls who descended into these forms were what men called the moods; and worked all great changes in the world; for just as the magician or the artist could call them when he would, so they could call out of the mind of the magician or the artist, or if they were demons,

out of the mind of the mad or the ignoble, what shape they would, and through its voice and its gestures pour themselves out upon the world. In this way all great events were accomplished; a mood, a divinity, or a demon, first descending like a faint sigh into men's minds and then changing their thoughts and their actions until hair that was yellow had grown black, or hair that was black had grown yellow, and empires moved their border, as though they were but drifts of leaves. The rest of the book contained symbols of form, and sound, and colour, and their attribution to divinities and demons, so that the initiate might fashion a shape for any divinity or any demon, and be as powerful as Avicenna among those who live under the roots of tears and of laughter.

#### IV

A couple of hours after sunset Michael Robartes returned and told me that I would have to learn the steps of an exceedingly antique dance, because before my initiation could be perfected I had to join three times in a magical dance, for rhythm was the wheel of Eternity, on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free. I found that the steps, which were simple enough, resembled certain antique Greek dances, and having been a good dancer in my youth and the master of many curious Gaelic steps, I soon had them in my memory. He then robed me and himself in a costume which suggested by its shape both Greece and Egypt, but by its crimson colour a more passionate life than theirs; and having put into my hands a little chainless censer of bronze, wrought into the likeness of a rose, by some modern craftsman, he told me to open a small door opposite to the door by which I had entered. I put my hand to the handle, but the moment I did so the fumes of the incense, helped perhaps by his mysterious glamour, made me fall again into a dream, in which I seemed to be a mask, lying on the counter of a little Eastern shop. Many persons, with eyes so bright and still that I knew them for more than human, came in and tried me on their faces, but at last flung me into a corner with a little laughter; but all this passed in a moment, for when I awoke my hand was still upon the handle. I opened the door, and found myself in a marvellous passage, along whose sides were many divinities wrought in a mosaic, not less beautiful than the mosaic in the Baptistery at Ravenna, but of a less severe beauty; the predominant colour of each divinity, which was surely a symbolic colour, being repeated in the lamps that hung from the ceiling, a curiously-scented lamp before every divinity. I passed on, marvelling exceedingly how these enthusiasts could have created all this beauty in so remote a place, and half persuaded to believe in a material alchemy, by the sight of so much hidden wealth; the censer filling the air, as I passed, with smoke of ever-changing colour.

I stopped before a door, on whose bronze panels were wrought great waves in whose shadow were faint suggestions of terrible faces. Those beyond it seemed to have heard our steps, for a voice cried: 'Is the work of the Incorruptible Fire at an end?' and immediately Michael Robartes answered: 'The perfect gold has come from the athanor.' The door swung open, and we were in a great circular room, and among men and women who were dancing

slowly in crimson robes. Upon the ceiling was an immense rose wrought in mosaic; and about the walls, also in mosaic, was a battle of gods and angels, the gods glimmering like rubies and sapphires, and the angels of the one greyness, because, as Michael Robartes whispered, they had renounced their divinity, and turned from the unfolding of their separate hearts, out of love for a God of humility and sorrow. Pillars supported the roof and made a kind of circular cloister, each pillar being a column of confused shapes, divinities, it seemed, of the wind, who rose as in a whirling dance of more than human vehemence, and playing upon pipes and cymbals; and from among these shapes were thrust out hands, and in these hands were censers. I was bid place my censer also in a hand and take my place and dance, and as I turned from the pillars towards the dancers, I saw that the floor was of a green stone, and that a pale Christ on a pale cross was wrought in the midst. I asked Robartes the meaning of this, and was told that they desired 'To trouble His unity with their multitudinous feet.' The dance wound in and out, tracing upon the floor the shapes of petals that copied the petals in the rose overhead, and to the sound of hidden instruments which were perhaps of an antique pattern, for I have never heard the like; and every moment the dance was more passionate, until all the winds of the world seemed to have awakened under our feet. After a little I had grown weary, and stood under a pillar watching the coming and going of those flame-like figures; until gradually I sank into a half-dream, from which I was awakened by seeing the petals of the great rose, which had no longer the look of mosaic, falling slowly through the incense-heavy air, and, as they fell, shaping into the likeness of living beings of an extraordinary beauty. Still faint and cloud-like, they began to dance, and as they danced took a more and more definite shape, so that I was able to distinguish beautiful Grecian faces and august Egyptian faces, and now and again to name a divinity by the staff in his hand or by a bird fluttering over his head; and soon every mortal foot danced by the white foot of an immortal; and in the troubled eyes that looked into untroubled shadowy eyes, I saw the brightness of uttermost desire as though they had found at length, after unreckonable wandering, the lost love of their youth. Sometimes, but only for a moment, I saw a faint solitary figure with a veiled face, and carrying a faint torch, flit among the dancers, but like a dream within a dream, like a shadow of a shadow, and I knew by an understanding born from a deeper fountain than thought, that it was Eros himself, and that his face was veiled because no man or woman from the beginning of the world has ever known what love is, or looked into his eyes, for Eros alone of divinities is altogether a spirit, and hides in passions not of his essence if he would commune with a mortal heart. So that if a man love nobly he knows love through infinite pity, unspeakable trust, unending sympathy; and if ignobly through vehement jealousy, sudden hatred, and unappeasable desire; but unveiled love he never knows. While I thought these things, a voice cried to me from the crimson figures: 'Into the dance! there is none that can be spared out of the dance; into the dance! into the dance! that the gods may make them bodies out of the substance of our hearts'; and before I could answer, a mysterious wave of passion, that seemed like the soul of the dance moving within our souls, took hold of me, and I was swept, neither consenting nor refusing,

into the midst. I was dancing with an immortal august woman, who had black lilies in her hair, and her dreamy gesture seemed laden with a wisdom more profound than the darkness that is between star and star, and with a love like the love that breathed upon the waters; and as we danced on and on, the incense drifted over us and round us, covering us away as in the heart of the world, and ages seemed to pass, and tempests to awake and perish in the folds of our robes and in her heavy hair.

Suddenly I remembered that her eyelids had never quivered, and that her lilies had not dropped a black petal, or shaken from their places, and understood with a great horror that I danced with one who was more or less than human, and who was drinking up my soul as an ox drinks up a wayside pool; and I fell, and darkness passed over me.

V

I awoke suddenly as though something had awakened me, and saw that I was lying on a roughly painted floor, and that on the ceiling, which was at no great distance, was a roughly painted rose, and about me on the walls half-finished paintings. The pillars and the censers had gone; and near me a score of sleepers lay wrapped in disordered robes, their upturned faces looking to my imagination like hollow masks; and a chill dawn was shining down upon them from a long window I had not noticed before; and outside the sea roared. I saw Michael Robartes lying at a little distance and beside him an upset bowl of wrought bronze which looked as though it had once held incense. As I sat thus, I heard a sudden tumult of angry men and women's voices mix with the roaring of the sea; and leaping to my feet, I went quickly to Michael Robartes, and tried to shake him out of his sleep. I then seized him by the shoulder and tried to lift him, but he fell backwards, and sighed faintly; and the voices became louder and angrier; and there was a sound of heavy blows upon the door, which opened on to the pier. Suddenly I heard a sound of rending wood, and I knew it had begun to give, and I ran to the door of the room. I pushed it open and came out upon a passage whose bare boards clattered under my feet, and found in the passage another door which led into an empty kitchen; and as I passed through the door I heard two crashes in quick succession, and knew by the sudden noise of feet and the shouts that the door which opened on to the pier had fallen inwards. I ran from the kitchen and out into a small yard, and from this down some steps which descended the seaward and sloping side of the pier, and from the steps clambered along the water's edge, with the angry voices ringing in my ears. This part of the pier had been but lately refaced with blocks of granite, so that it was almost clear of seaweed; but when I came to the old part, I found it so slippery with green weed that

I had to climb up on to the roadway. I looked towards the Temple of the Alchemical Rose, where the fishermen and the women were still shouting, but somewhat more faintly, and saw that there was no one about the door or upon the pier; but as I looked, a little crowd hurried out of the door and began gathering large stones from where they were heaped up in readiness for the next time a storm shattered the pier, when they would be laid under blocks of

granite. While I stood watching the crowd, an old man, who was, I think, the voteen, pointed to me, and screamed out something, and the crowd whitened, for all the faces had turned towards me. I ran, and it was well for me that pullers of the oar are poorer men with their feet than with their arms and their bodies; and yet while I ran I scarcely heard the following feet or the angry voices, for many voices of exultation and lamentation, which were forgotten as a dream is forgotten the moment they were heard, seemed to be ringing in the air over my head.

There are moments even now when I seem to hear those voices of exultation and lamentation, and when the indefinite world, which has but half lost its mastery over my heart and my intellect, seems about to claim a perfect mastery; but I carry the rosary about my neck, and when I hear, or seem to hear them, I press it to my heart and say: 'He whose name is Legion is at our doors deceiving our intellects with subtlety and flattering our hearts with beauty, and we have no trust but in Thee'; and then the war that rages within me at other times is still, and I am at peace.

## William Butler Yeats “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928)

### I

1. That is no country for old men. The young
2. In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
3. —Those dying generations—at their song,
4. The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
5. Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
6. Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
7. Caught in that sensual music all neglect
8. Monuments of unageing intellect.

### II

9. An aged man is but a paltry thing,
10. A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
11. Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
12. For every tatter in its mortal dress,
13. Nor is there singing school but studying
14. Monuments of its own magnificence;
15. And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
16. To the holy city of Byzantium.

### III

17. O sages standing in God's holy fire
18. As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
19. Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
20. And be the singing-masters of my soul.
21. Consume my heart away; sick with desire
22. And fastened to a dying animal
23. It knows not what it is; and gather me
24. Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

25. Once out of nature I shall never take
26. My bodily form from any natural thing,
27. But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
28. Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
29. To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
30. Or set upon a golden bough to sing
31. To lords and ladies of Byzantium
32. Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

## FONDAMENTI DI ANALISI DEL TESTO POETICO

## FONDAMENTI DI ANALISI DEL TESTO POETICO

Secondo Lotman (Lotman 1977, pp. 7- 23, 69-72) il testo artistico è una struttura di grande complessità, che fa un uso altamente specializzato della forma linguistica e dei suoi segni per trasmettere un volume di informazione che non sarebbe possibile trasmettere con altri mezzi:

- Sistema di modellizzazione secondario (“Art is a secondary modeling system”, Lotman 1977, p. 9)
- Interdipendenza strutturale, inscindibilità di contenuti da forme (Lotman 1977, pp. 10-12)
- Testo come ipersegnò (Lotman 1977, pp. 19-23)
- Ripetizione/deviazione; automatizzazione/deautomatizzazione (Lotman 1977, pp. 69-72)
- Semantizzazione degli elementi non semantici (“semantization of the extra-semantic [...] elements of natural language”, Lotman 1977, p. 21)

In poesia, l’orchestrazione fonico-ritmica del verso organizza in maniera del tutto peculiare gli elementi costitutivi del significante, i quali non soltanto trasmettono un volume di informazione al pari di tutti gli altri livelli (e.g. sintattico, semantico) ma rappresentano anche, più di altri, lo specifico della comunicazione poetica.

### I PRINCIPALI LIVELLI DI ANALISI DEL TESTO POETICO

1. Fonologico
2. Metrico-prosodico
3. Lessicale (~ *diction*)
4. Sintattico (~ paratassi e ipotassi)
5. Semantico (temi, motivi, isotopie)
6. Retorico-tropico
7. Elementi paratestuali e grafemici
8. I codici culturali e l’intertestualità

## PARTE I: LO STRATO FONOLOGICO

### I.1. Ricorsività e deviazione, automatizzazione e deautomatizzazione nel testo poetico: le ripetizioni foniche e la ricostruzione delle ISOTOPIE

TESTO 1: W.B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”, ll. 13-14

(addensarsi improvviso della fricativa alveolare sorda [s])

Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence

### I.2. Alcune ripetizioni foniche codificate e le loro funzioni: rima (rhyme), allitterazione (alliteration), consonanza (consonance), assonanza (assonance)

**TESTO 2: W. Wordsworth, “The Solitary Reaper”, ll. 5-8**

I listened, motionless and still;  
And as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more

**TESTO 3: W. Shakespeare, Sonnet 30, ll. 1-4**

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste [...]

**TESTO 4: W.H. Auden, “O Where Are You Going?”, ll. 13-16**

“Out of this house,” said rider to reader,  
“Yours never will,” said farer to fearer,  
“They’re looking for you,” said hearer to horror,  
As he left them there, as he left them there.

**TESTO 5: J. Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, ll. 1-2**

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time

### **1.3. Il rapporto significante-significato in poesia come problema semantico**

È evidente che nessun suono del testo poetico, isolatamente preso, ha un significato autonomo. La significanza del suono in poesia non deriva dalla sua particolare natura, ma viene supposta deduttivamente. L'apparato delle ripetizioni isola questo o quel suono nella poesia (in genere in un testo artistico) e non lo isola nella comunicazione linguistica quotidiana. Non appena sorge il concetto di testo completamente regolamentato, si forma l'idea della opposizione: «testo regolamentato, testo non regolamentato», e il testo poetico comincia ad essere percepito alla luce di questa antitesi come pienamente regolato. Sorge la possibilità di una interpretazione complementare. Il lettore comincia ad osservare dapprima le regolarità spontanee. Ma lo scrittore è pure un lettore, e così, convinto in partenza che l'organizzazione sonora ha un significato, comincia a organizzarla secondo il proprio particolare piano strutturale. Il lettore continua questo lavoro e completa l'organizzazione del testo in corrispondenza con le sue idee.

J.M. Lotman 1972, pp. 133-34

### **1.4. I “phonological universals” e il linguaggio poetico: Jakobson, Fònagy e Tsur**

- Jakobson, R., Waugh, Linda R., *The Sound Shape of Language*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1979;
- Fònagy, I., *La vive voix. Essais de Psycho-phonétique*, Payot, Paris, 1983;

Tsur, R., *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive?: The Poetic Mode of Speech Perception*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992.

1. Gli effetti sono inscindibili dai suoni che li producono
2. Questi effetti si esercitano sul piano fisico, emotivo e cognitivo
3. Questi effetti sono universali

Tratti pertinenti nell'analisi: modo e punto di articolazione; differenza tra periodico e aperiodico; differenza tra codificato e non codificato.

**I.5. Hrushovski's 'general model for sound-meaning relations in poetic texts' (Benjamin Hrushovski, "The Meaning of Sound Patterns in Poetry. An Interaction Theory", *Poetics Today*, vol. 2, 1980, pp. 39-56)**

1. Onomatopoeia, or Mimetic sound patterns
2. Expressive sound patterns
3. Focusing sound patterns
4. Neutral sound patterning

**TESTO 6: T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (V. "What the Thunder Said", ll. 341-42)**

There is not even solitude in the mountains  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

**TESTO 7: W. Shakespeare, *Sonnet 30*, ll. 1-4**

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste [...]

**TESTO 8: T.S. Eliot, "Ash-Wednesday" (V)**

Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word.

## PARTE II: FONDAMENTI DI METRICA

### II. Nozioni di base

#### II.1. Ritmo (Rhythm)

Sul versante del suono si ha, in poesia, una organizzazione particolare degli elementi costitutivi del Significante (accento, timbro, altezza, durata, melodia), che determina una serie di ‘deformazioni’ della lingua naturale [...]. Si può adottare la parola ‘ritmo’ quale termine comprensivo della maggior parte di queste ‘deformazioni’.

M. Pagnini 2002, p. 148

Rhythm is a patterning of energy simultaneously produced and perceived; a series of alternations of build-up and release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations and local inflections.

D. Attridge 1995, p. 3

#### II.2. Metro, verso (verse, line); metro quantitativo, sillabico, accentuale, accentuale-sillabico (quantitative, syllabic, accentual, accentual-syllabic); foot

#### II.3. Derek Attridge

*The Rhythms of English Poetry*, Longman, London and New York, 1982; *Poetic Rhythm. An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) 1995

- **Beat/offbeat (conventional symbols: B, o; /, \*, ;, ' , ~)**

Rhythm in its most elementary form [...] is the apprehension of a series of events as a regularly repeated pulse of energy, an experience which has a muscular as well as a mental dimension. The strongest perception of rhythm, however, comes not from a simple succession of stimuli, but from the repeated alternation of a stronger pulse and a fixed number of weaker pulses, usually one or two. The mind prefers to organize its perceptions in such alternating patterns, as is clear from the way in which we hear a clock's succession of identical ticks as a rhythm of stronger and weaker sounds. The strong impulses in such a rhythmic sequence are usually called *beats*, [...] and its opposite, *offbeats* [...].

D. Attridge 1982, pp. 76-77

- **Double offbeat (conventional symbol: ð)**  
two syllables functioning as a relatively weaker rhythmic pulse, as in the example below:  
G.G. Byron, “The Destruction of Sennacherib”, l. 19

ð B ð B ð B ð B

And the tents were all silent, the banners alone

## II.4. Scansion

TESTO 9: W. Blake, "The Tyger", ll. 1-4 (4x4)

B o B o B o B  
|Ty ger | Ty ger | burn ing | bright,|

B o B o B o B  
|In the| forests |of the| night;|

B o B o B o B  
|What im | mortal | hand or | eye, |

o B o B o B o B  
|Could frame |thy fear|ful sym|metry?|

## II.5. Giambico, trocaico (iambic: o B; trochaic: B o)

TESTO 10: T. Gray "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", ll. 1-2

o B o B o B o B o B  
The curfew tolls the knell of parting day

TESTO 11: R. Browning, "One Word More", l. 1

B o B o B o B o B o  
There they are, my fifty men and women

TESTO 12: S.T. COLERIDGE, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 119-122

Water, water, every where,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, every where,  
Nor any drop to drink.

## II.6. Anapestico, dattilico (anapaestic: ð B; dactylic: B ð)

TESTO 13: G.G. Byron, "The Destruction of Sennacherib", l. 1

ð B ð B ð B ð B  
The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold

TESTO 14: R. Hodgson, "Eve", ll. 1-2

B    ǒ    B o B  
Eve, with her basket, was.  
B    ǒ    B o B  
Deep in the bells and grass.

## II.7. Spondaico, pirrico (spondaic: |BB|, pyrrhic: |oo|)

TESTO 15: T. Gray, "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat", l. 31

|B   B | o B |o B |o B|  
Eight times emerging from the flood

TESTO 16: Sir P. Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, 50, ll. 6-8

| o o | B B |o o|o B |o B|  
Nor so fair level in so secret stay,

| o o | B   B | o    B|o B |o B|  
As that sweet black which veils the heavenly eye;

| B   o |B o |o B |o B |o B|  
There himself with his shot he close doth lay.

## II.8. Rising rhythms (o B; ǒ B); falling rhythms (B o; B ǒ)

## II.9. Duple metres (B o; o B); triple metres (B ǒ; ǒ B)

## II.10. Monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter (Alexandrine), heptameter (fourteneer), octameter

## II.11. Iambic pentameter (five-stress/ five-beats iambic verse); blank verse (lines of iambic pentameter which are unrhymed – hence the term "unrhymed")

TESTO 16: W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 5.1

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,  
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and fly him,  
When he comes back; [...]

TESTO 17: J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, l. 1-10

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit

**Letteratura inglese (LINGTRA-ITAL)**  
**a.a. 2019-20**  
**Fondamenti di alchimia**

Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,  
Sing, heavenly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed  
In the beginning how the heavens and earth  
Rose out of Chaos [...]

**TESTO 18: G.G. Byron, "Darkness", ll. 1-5**

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.  
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars  
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,  
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth  
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;

**II.12. The functions of poetic rhythm (Attridge 1995, pp. 285-315, Chapter 9)**

1. Iconic
2. Expressive
3. Associative
4. Emphasis and connection
5. Pattern and cohesion

# *A Glossary of Literary Terms*

SEVENTH EDITION



**M. H. ABRAMS**  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY



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**Meter** is the recurrence, in regular units, of a prominent feature in the sequence of speech-sounds of a language. There are four main types of meter in European languages: (1) In classical Greek and Latin, the meter was **quantitative**; that is, it was established by the relative duration of the utterance of a syllable, and consisted of a recurrent pattern of long and short syllables. (2) In French and many other Romance languages, the meter is **syllabic**, depending on the number of syllables within a line of verse, without regard to the fall of the stresses. (3) In the older Germanic languages, including Old English, the meter is **accentual**, depending on the number of stressed syllables within a line, without regard to the number of intervening unstressed syllables. (4) The

fourth type of meter, combining the features of the two preceding types, is **accentual-syllabic**, in which the metric units consist of a recurrent pattern of stresses on a recurrent number of syllables. The stress-and-syllable type has been the predominant meter of English poetry since the fourteenth century.

There is considerable dispute about the most valid way to analyze and classify English meters. This entry will begin by presenting a traditional accentual-syllabic analysis which has the virtues of being simple, widely used, and applicable to by far the greater part of English poetry from Chaucer to the present. Major departures from this stress-and-syllable meter will be described in the latter part of the entry.

In all sustained spoken English we sense a **rhythm**; that is, a recognizable though varying pattern in the beat of the stresses, or accents (the more forcefully uttered, hence louder syllables), in the stream of speech-sounds. In meter, this rhythm is structured into a recurrence of regular—that is, approximately equivalent—units of stress-pattern. Compositions written in meter are also known as **verse**.

We attend, in reading verse, to the individual line, which is a sequence of words printed as a separate entity on the page. The meter is determined by the pattern of stronger and weaker stresses on the syllables composing the words in the verse-line; the stronger is called the “stressed” syllable and all the weaker ones the “unstressed” syllables. (What the ear perceives as a strong stress is not an absolute quantity, but is relative to the degree of stress in the adjacent syllables.) Three major factors determine where the stresses (in the sense of the relatively stronger stresses or accents) will fall in a line of verse: (1) Most important is the “word accent” in words of more than one syllable; in the noun “accent” itself, for example, the stress falls on the first syllable. (2) There are also many monosyllabic words in the language, and on which of these—in a sentence or a phrase—the stress will fall depends on the grammatical function of the word (we normally put stronger stress on nouns, verbs, and adjectives, for example, than on articles or prepositions), and depends also on the “rhetorical accent,” or the emphasis we give a word because we want to enhance its importance in a particular utterance. (3) Another determinant of perceived stress is the prevailing “metrical accent,” which is the beat that we have come to expect, in accordance with the stress pattern that was established earlier in the metrical composition.

If the prevailing stress pattern enforces a drastic alteration of the normal word accent, we get a **wrenched accent**. Wrenching may be the result of a lack of metrical skill; it was, however, conventional in the *folk ballad* (for example, “fair ladie,” “far countrée”), and is sometimes deliberately used for comic effects, as in Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819–24) and in the verses of Ogden Nash.

It is possible to distinguish a number of degrees of syllabic stress in English speech, but the most common and generally useful fashion of analyzing and classifying the standard English meters is “binary.” That is, we distinguish only two categories—strong stress and weak stress—and group the syllables into metric feet according to the patterning of these two degrees. A foot is the

combination of a strong stress and the associated weak stress or stresses which make up the recurrent metric unit of a line. The relatively stronger-stressed syllable is called, for short, “stressed”; the relatively weaker-stressed syllables are called “light,” or most commonly, “unstressed.”

The four standard feet distinguished in English are:

(1) **Iambic** (the noun is “iamb”): an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

Thè cùr | lèw fólís | thè knéll | óf pár | tìng dáy. |

(Thomas Gray,

“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”)

(2) **Anapestic** (the noun is “anapest”): two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable.

Thè Ás sýr | læn cæme dówn | líke á wólíf | ón thè fóld. |

(Lord Byron,

“The Destruction of Semicherb”) )

(3) **Trochaic** (the noun is “trochee”): a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable.

Thère thèy | áre, mý | fíf tý | mén ánd | wó mén. |

(Robert Browning, “One Word, More”)

Most trochaic lines lack the final unstressed syllable—in the technical term, such lines are **catalectic**. So in Blake’s “The Tiger”:

Ti gèr! | trí gèr! | búrn ìng | brìght |

In thè | fó rést | óf thè | níght. |

(4) **Dactylic** (the noun is “dactyl”): a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.

Ève, with hër | bás kèt, wás |

Dèep in thè | bélls ánd gráss. |

(Ralph Hodgson, “Eve”)

lamb and anapest, since the strong stress is at the end, are called “rising meter”; trochees and dactyls, with the strong stress at the beginning, are called “falling meter.” Iamb and trochee, having two syllables, are called “duple meter”; anapests and dactyls, having three syllables, are called “triple meter.” It should be noted that the iamb is by far the commonest English foot.

Two other feet are often distinguished by special titles, although they occur in English meter only as variants from standard feet:

(5) **Spondaic** (the noun is “spondee”): two successive syllables with approximately equal strong stresses, as in each of the first two feet of this line:

Góod stróng! thíck stújpè fjý | ìng inícènsè smóke. |

(Browning, “The Bishop Orders His Tomb”)

**Pyrrhic** (the noun is also “pyrrhic”): a foot composed of two successive syllables with approximately equal light stresses, as in the second and fourth feet in this line:

Mý wáy | 'is tó | bæ gín | with thē | bæ gín mǐngl  
(Byron, *Don Juan*)

This latter term is used only infrequently. Some traditional metrists deny the existence of a true pyrrhic, on the grounds that the prevailing metrical accent—in the above instance, iambic—always imposes a slightly stronger stress on one of the two syllables.

A metric line is named according to the number of feet composing it:

**monometer:** one foot  
**dimeter:** two feet  
**trimeter:** three feet  
**tetrameter:** four feet  
**pentameter:** five feet  
**hexameter:** six feet (an **Alexandrine** is a line of six iambic feet)  
**heptameter:** seven feet (a **fourteener** is another term for a line of seven iambic feet—hence, of fourteen syllables; it tends to break into a unit of four feet followed by a unit of three feet)  
**octameter:** eight feet

To describe the meter of a line we name (a) the predominant foot and (b) the number of feet it contains. In the illustrations above, for example, the line from Gray's “Elegy” is “iambic pentameter,” and the line from Byron's “The Destruction of Sennacherib” is “anapestic tetrameter.”

To scan a passage of verse is to go through it line by line, analyzing the component feet, and also indicating where any major pauses in the phrasing fall within a line. Here is a **scansion**, signified by conventional symbols, of the first five lines from John Keats' *Endymion* (1818). The passage was chosen because it exemplifies a flexible and variable rather than a highly regular metrical pattern.

- (1) Á thing | óf béau | tý 'is | á jóy | för é vēr: |  
 (2) Its löve | li nēss | 'in créas | 'és; // ít | wíll név 'er |  
 (3) Päss 'in | tó nóth | 'ing nēss, | // büt stíll | wíll kēep |  
 (4) Á böw | 'ér qui | 'ét för | 'ús, // ánd | á slēep |  
 (5) Füll óf | swēet dréams, | ánd héalth, | ánd qui | 'ét bréath 'ing. |

The prevailing meter is iambic pentameter. As in all fluent verse, however, there are many variations upon the basic iambic foot; these are sometimes called “substitutions.” Thus:

- (1) The closing feet of lines 1, 2, and 5 end with an extra unstressed syllable, and are said to have a **feminine ending**. In lines 3 and 4, the closing feet, because they are standard iambs, end with a stressed syllable and are said to have **masculine endings**.

(2) In lines 3 and 5, the opening iambic feet have been “inverted” to form trochees. (The initial position is the most common place for inversions in iambic verse.)

(3) I have marked the second foot in line 2, and the third foot of line 3 and line 4, as pyrrhics (two unstressed syllables); these help to give Keats' verses their rapid movement. This is a procedure in scansion about which metric analysts disagree: some will feel enough of a metric beat to mark all these feet as iambs; others will mark still other feet (for example, the third foot of line 1) as pyrrhics also. And some metrists prefer to use symbols measuring two degrees of strong stress, and will indicate a difference in the feet, as follows:

Its löve | li nēss | 'in créas | 'és.

Notice, however, that these are differences only in nuance; analysts agree that the prevailing pulse of Keats' versification is iambic throughout, and that despite many variations, the felt norm is of five stresses in the verse-line.

Two other elements are important in the metric movement of Keats' passage: (1) In lines 1 and 5, the pause in the reading—which occurs naturally at the end of a sentence, clause, or other syntactic unit—coincides with the end of the line; such lines are called **end-stopped**. Lines 2 through 4, on the other hand, are called **run-on lines** (or in a term derived from the French, they exhibit **enjambement**—“a striding-over”), because the pressure of the incomplete syntactic unit toward closure carries on over the end of the verse-line. (2) When a strong phrasal pause falls within a line, as in lines 2, 3, and 4, it is called a **caesura**—indicated in the quoted passage by the conventional symbol // . The management of these internal pauses is important for giving variety and for providing expressive emphases in the long pentameter line.

To understand the use and limitations of an analysis such as this, we must realize that a prevailing metric pattern (iambic pentameter, in the passage from Keats) establishes itself as a perceived norm which controls the reader's expectations, even though the number of lines that deviate from the norm may exceed the number that fit the norm exactly. In addition, scansion is an abstract scheme which deliberately omits notation of many aspects of the actual reading of a poem that contribute importantly to its pace, rhythm, and total impression. It does not specify, for example, whether the component words in a metric line are short words or long words, or whether the strong stresses fall on short vowels or long vowels; it does not give any indication of the *intonation*—the overall rise and fall in the pitch and loudness of the voice—which we use to bring out the meaning and rhetorical effect of these poetic lines; nor does it indicate the interplay of the metric stresses with the rhythms of the varied phrasal and clausal structures within a sustained poetic passage. Such details are omitted in order to lay bare the essential metric skeleton; that is, the pattern of the stronger and weaker stresses in the syllabic sequence of a verse-line. Moreover, an actual reading of a poem, if it is a skillful reading, will not accord mechanically with the scansion. There is a difference between the scansion, as

an abstract metrical norm, and a skilled and expressive oral reading, or performance, of a poem; and no two competent readers will perform the same lines in precisely the same way. But in a performance, the metric norm indicated by the scansion is sensed as an implicit understructure of pulses; in fact, the interplay of an expressive performance, sometimes with and sometimes against this underlying structural pattern, gives tension and vitality to our experience of verse.

We need to note, finally, that some kinds of versification which occur in English poetry differ from the syllable-and-stress type already described:

- (1) **Strong-stress meters or accentual verse.** In this meter, native to English and other Germanic languages, only the beat of the strong stresses counts in the scanning, while the number of intervening light syllables is highly variable. Usually there are four strong-stressed syllables in a line, whose beat is emphasized by *alliteration*. This was the meter of Old English poetry and continued to be the meter of many Middle English poems, until Chaucer and others popularized *Piers Plowman* (later fourteenth century) the four strong stresses (always divided by a medial caesura) are for the most part reinforced by *alliteration* (see *alliterative meter*); the light syllables, which vary in number, are recessive and do not assert their individual presence:

In a sómer séon, // whan sóft was the sónné,  
I shope me in shroudes, // as I a shépe were,  
In hábits like an héremite, // unholý of wórkes,  
Went wýde in this world, // wónders to hére.

Strong-stress meter survives in *folk* poetry and in traditional children's rhymes such as "Hickory, dickory, dock" and was revived as an artful literary meter by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Christabel* (1816), in which each line has four strong stresses but the number of syllables within a line varies from four to twelve.

What G. M. Hopkins in the later nineteenth century called his **sprung rhythm** is a variant of strong-stress meter: each foot, as he describes it, begins with a stressed syllable, which may either stand alone or be associated with from one to three (occasionally even more) light syllables. Two six-stress lines from Hopkins' "The Wreck of the *Deutschlant*" indicate the variety of the rhythms in this meter, and also exemplify its most striking feature: the great weight of the strong stresses, and the frequent juxtaposition of strong stresses (*spondees*) at any point in the line. The stresses in the second line were marked in a manuscript by Hopkins himself; they indicate that in complex instances, his metric decisions may seem arbitrary:

The l sóur | scýthe | cringe, and the | bíar | sháre | c'óme. |  
Our | héar's | charity's | héar's | fire, our | thóught's | chivalry's |  
thróng's | Lórd. |

(See Marcella M. Holloway, *The Prosodic Theory of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1947.) A number of modern metrists, including T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, skillfully interweave both strong-stress and syllable-and-stress meters in some of their versification.

- (2) **Quantitative meters** in English are written in imitation of classical Greek and Latin versification, in which the metrical pattern is not determined by the stress but by the "quantity" (duration of pronunciation) of a syllable, and the foot consists of a combination of "long" and "short" syllables. Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Campion, and other Elizabethan poets experimented with this meter in English, as did Coleridge, Tennyson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Robert Bridges later on. The strong accentual character of English, however, as well as the indeterminateness of the duration of a syllable in the English language, makes it impossible to sustain a quantitative meter for any length. See Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighted Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Meters* (1974).

- (3) In *free verse* (discussed in a separate entry), the component lines have no (or only occasional) metric feet, or uniform stress-patterns.

George Saintsbury, *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (1910), and R. M. Alden, *English Verse* (1930), are well-illustrated treatments of traditional syllable-and-stress metrics. For later discussions of this and alternative metric theories see George R. Stewart, *The Technique of English Verse* (1930); Seymour Chatman, *A Theory of Meter* (1965); and W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Concept of Meter" (1959). This last essay is reprinted in W. K. Wimsatt, *Half-Full Contraries* (1965), and in Harvey Gross, ed., *The Structure of Verse* (1966)—an anthology that reprints other useful essays, including Northrop Frye, "The Rhythm of Recurrence," and Yvor Winters, "The Audible Reading of Poetry." See also W. K. Wimsatt, ed., *Versification: Major Language Types* (1972); Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. 1979); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (1981); Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (1983); T. V. F. Brogan, *English Versification, 1570–1980* (1981).

**Miracle Plays, Morality Plays, and Interludes** are types of late-medieval drama, written in a variety of verse forms.

The miracle play had as its subject either a story from the Bible, or else the life and martyrdom of a saint. In the usage of some historians, however, "Miracle play" denotes only dramas based on saints' lives, and the term **mystery play**—"mystery" in the archaic sense of the "trade" conducted by each of the medieval guilds who sponsored these plays—is applied only to dramas based on the Bible.

The plays representing biblical narratives originated within the church in about the tenth century, in dramatizations of brief parts of the Latin liturgical service, called **tropes**, especially the "Quem quaeritis" ("Whom are you seeking") trope portraying the visit of the three Marys to the tomb of Christ. Gradually these evolved into complete plays which were written in English instead

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## INDICE

W. Shakespeare, “The Phoenix and the Turtle”	1
J. Donne, “Love’s Alchemy”	4
John Donne, “A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day...”	5
George Herbert, “Prayer I”	7
S.T. Coleridge, <i>Biographia Literaria</i> , <i>Marginalia</i> , “Kubla Khan”	8
J. Keats, <i>Endymion</i>	9
P.B. Shelley, “The Witch of Atlas”	13
P.B. Shelley, “Alastor”	16
P.B. Shelley, “The Triumph of Life”	18
W.B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”	19
W.B. Yeats, “Rosa Alchemica”	32
Fondamenti di analisi del testo poetico	34