

LYRIC POETRY
BEYOND NEW CRITICISM

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lectual, not literary. It is the art of memory that remembers death, the art of history as *Erinnerung*. The emblem for interiorized memory, in Hegel, is that of the buried treasure or mine (*Schacht*), or, perhaps, a well.³⁰ Baudelaire, however, fond though he is of well-metaphors, uses "pyramid," which connotes, of course, Egypt, monument and crypt, but which also connotes, to a reader of Hegel, the emblem of the sign as opposed to the symbol.³¹ The sign, which pertains specifically to language and to rhetoric, marks, in Hegel, the passage from sheer inward recollection and imagination to thought (*Denken*), which occurs by way of the deliberate forgetting of substantial, aesthetic, and pictorial symbols.³² Baudelaire, who in all likelihood never heard of Hegel, happens to hit on the same emblematic sequence³³ to say something very similar. The decapitated painter lies, as a corpse, in the crypt of recollection and is replaced by the sphinx, who, since he has a head and a face, can be apostrophized in the poetic speech of rhetorical figuration. But the sphinx is not an emblem of recollection but, like Hegel's sign, an emblem of forgetting. In Baudelaire's poem he is not just "oublié" but "oublié sur la carte," inaccessible to memory because he is imprinted on paper, because he is himself the inscription of a sign. Contrary to Jauss's assertion—"for who could say with more right than the sphinx: j'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans"—the sphinx is the one least able to say anything of the sort. He is the grammatical subject cut off from its consciousness, the poetic analysis cut off from its hermeneutic function, the dismantling of the aesthetic and pictorial world of "le soleil qui se couche" by the advent of poetry as allegory. What he "sings" can never be the poem entitled "Spleen"; his song is not the sublimation but the forgetting, by inscription, of terror, the dismemberment of the aesthetic whole into the unpredictable play of the literary letter. We could not have reached this understanding without the assistance of Jauss's reading. His work confronts us with the enigma of the relationship between the aesthetic and the poetic, and, by so doing, it demonstrates the rigor of its theoretical questioning.

30. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Werkausgabe), vol. 3, sec. 453, p. 260.

31. *Ibid.*, sec. 458, p. 270.

32. *Ibid.*, sec. 464, p. 282.

33. That the coincidence may be due to common occult sources in Hegel and Baudelaire obscures rather than explains the passage. It distracts the reader from wondering why the use of this particular emblematic code can be "right" in a lyric poem as well as in a philosophical treatise.

JOHN HOLLANDER

Breaking into Song: Some Notes on Refrain

Edgar Allan Poe, in "The Philosophy of Composition," told a fable of the genesis of "The Raven" which became Symbolist, and eventually modernist, scripture. He speaks of having to start with what he calls a "point" (we would say a device, or scheme, or formal structure—but not a trope) of a purely musical sort, a timing device for a short (and thus authentic) poem. Poe's "pivot upon which the whole structure might turn" proved to be a minimal refrain, a condensation of it, a synecdoche of a returning burden whose name—*refrain*—is etymologically *refractus*, broken back or rebroken: in short, a single word. We know how Poe—and with what mixed consequences in France—declared that the *o* and *r* of "Nevermore" (the most "sonorous" vowel and the most "producibile" consonant) determined his choice of the word. This bit of visionary linguistics is phonetically nonsensical—the *o* and *r* he was characterizing are only those phonemes of the word "sonorous" itself. Moreover it represses a matter of allusive signification. Like the agent of a dream whose very sinews of meaning are woven on the warp of unacknowledgment, Poe's raven itself speaks deep and hidden truth (the author's account of the bird's utterance only stirs up the clouds). For Poe knew well that the squawk of the raven in the age of classical Rome's grandeur was rendered in Latin as "cras cras cras" (not "caw caw" as in English), and thus "tomorrow, tomorrow," thereby affirming the bird's prophetic powers. Poe's raven knows, in the dreary light of what Harold Bloom would call Romantic belatedness, that there is no poetic tomorrow ("a bird of ill-omen," Poe calls it), and so declares, albeit allusively. Perched on an emblem of wisdom washed out—not a beau-

tiful, dark, haunted Pallas, but an anemic Athena—the poetic bird speaks of the limits of art for the man whose name is part “poe-t” only. It is the “lost Lenore” that is in the poem for alliteration and rhyme, not the word of the bird. “Nevermore” cancels and refigures “cras.”

Poe went on to observe of his broken refrain that its “application”—as he called its syntactic, logical, and rhetorical role *in situ* of each strophe that it concluded—was to vary, even as the word itself remained unchanged. In practice, the whole refrain line varied, the fragment “-more” only remaining constant, the full clause (“Quoth the Raven, ‘Nevermore’”) occurring in only five out of eighteen instances. Poe’s concern for his broken or refracted fragment as a device for breaking into an anxiety-ringed, hermeneutico-poetical circle of silence indicates a half-awareness that a formal element, or “point” previously used in song-texts, might itself be allegorized when employed in a true poem. In this case, the return of “Nevermore” denies the return of dead beauty to memory. In general, lyrics from the Renaissance on—poems whose relation to song-text is itself figurative—have tended more and more to trope the scheme of refrain, to propound a parable out of its structural role.

I am talking here of poetic, rather than merely schematic, refrain. This tradition starts perhaps with Theocritus, whose first idyll varies what Poe called the “application” of the repetend to signal phases of beginning, middle, and end of the whole poem itself.¹ Thyrsis’s song commences with (and I quote from Daryl Hine’s splendid recent translation)—“Start up the pastoral music, dear Muses, begin the performance” (*Archete bukolaiikas Moissai philai, archet’aoidas*), which returns at intervals of from three to five lines, until it modulates, now avowing in the changed verb its own earlier form: “Muses, continue the pastoral music, on with the performance” (*archete boukolaiikas Moissai, palin archet’aoidas*) and, finally, to “Muses, come finish the pastoral music, conclude the performance” (*legete boukolaiikas Moissai, ite leget’aoidas*), which reiterates, and completes, the self-referential effect.

But modern lyrical refrain derives in good part from the medieval carol burden, whose reiterations have a literal quality: a leader-singer will sing the strophes, the choral dancers will each time respond with the frequently macaronic burden which punctuates the periods of varying, and unfolding, monophonic material. Each occurrence of

the danced-to burden increases its redundancy, and tends to collapse it into a univocal sign (*That was all full of meaning; now meaning stops for a while and we all dance again*). Poetic refrain, on the other hand, starts out by troping the literalness of the repetition, by raising a central parabolic question for all textual refrain: *Does repeating something at intervals make it important, or less so? Does statistical over-determination—the criterion of redundancy-as-predictability—apply to such repetitions, or rather the interpreter’s concept of over-determination as implying an increased weight of meaning? It would appear that gradations of signification can appear, and operate, in any single case. We might suggest at first that the more complex the poem, the more it becomes necessary for it to confront the dialectic of these two emblematic readings of, say, the strophic fa-la-la. Feelings of “O, that again,” “We know,” etc. war with the incremental pain of each rapped knuckle; as we know, the ultimate story of modern poetic refrain is “What is it to mean this time around?”*

Refrain breaks into the unfolding or unrolling of any lyrical text. It partakes as well of that action of restraint invoked by our doublet word in English, “refrain” (Fr. *refrèner*, for *se retenir*, literally “to bridle oneself”). But the major tradition of poetic (some might say “literary,” some “self-conscious,” some “writerly”) refrain is rooted in a rhetorical self-consciousness. There is something allusive about all refrains, if only to their musical and conventionalized origins; and every attempt to make structures of permutation in what Poe called their application can only be a momentary confusion—as it were—against stay, a lie against repetition. We may perceive patterns of variation which are doomed from the outset to play themselves out, e.g., Algernon Charles Swinburne’s anaphoristic refrain pattern beginning with the scriptural “Watchman, what of the night?” and continuing through “Prophet, what of the night?” “Mourners, what of the night?” and on through the sequence “Dead men . . .,” “Statesman . . .,” “Warrior,” “Master,” “Exile,” “Captives,” “Christian,” “High priest,” “Princes,” “Martyrs,” “England,” “France,” “Italy,” “Germany,” “Europe,” and, finally, “Liberty, what of the night?” (“A Watch in the Night” from *Songs before Sunrise*).² Then there are those poems with paired refrains which depend upon a quasi-echoic rhyme; this is made a trope of decaying structure in Rossetti’s “Troy Town” (of which I quote the first of fourteen stanzas):

2. Swinburne explores refrains as short as a single word in his *A Century of Roundels*; in one of these, he characterizes the roundel’s refrain: “As a bird’s quick song runs round, and the hearts in us hear / Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught.”

1. See the treatment of repetitive forms in pastoral by Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), pp. 93–95.

Heavenborn Helen, Sparta's queen,
(O Troy Town!)
 Had two breasts of heavenly sheen,
 The sun and moon of the heart's desire:
 All Love's lordship lay between.
*(O Troy's down,
 Tall Troy's on fire!)*

The word "desire" terminates the fourth line throughout the poem, although as a half-suppressed sub-refrain, unmarked by the formal position, the italicization, etc. of the other three lines. The effect is to have "desire" in the text lead to "fire" in the refrain; but aside from the growing significance of this in the narrative, the refrain's mode of application does not change.³ It is the unvarying rhetoric of the Rossettian double-refrain (as in "Eden Bower," where it alternates in successive stanzas) which made it vulnerable to light-verse parody, as in Charles Stuart Calverley's "Ballad," the last stanza of which tweaks the nose of redundancy:

The farmer's daughter hath soft brown hair
(Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese)
 And I met with a ballad, I can't say where,
 Which wholly consisted of lines like these.

Aside from the matter of redundancy of application, there are questions of more specific allusiveness. Yeats, in many of his later lyrics, substitutes for the empty signaling of earlier poetical *fa-la-las*, which signal only "refrain here, now," defiantly "unmusical" prosaic phrases ("*Daybreak and a candle-end*"). But allusive fragments can be turned into refrain in a similar way; this will sometimes constitute an initial interpretation of the nature of the fragment's canonical quality. Consider, for example, how Catullus's "nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux, / nox est perpetua una dormienda" (Ben Jonson gives it as "Suns that set may rise again; / But if once we lose this light, / 'Tis with us perpetual night") becomes for Thomas Campion a varying refrain in his far from mere translation, "My Sweetest Lesbia." It reinterprets the momentary *memento mori* that breaks into the argument for immediate bed:

But soon as once is set our little light,
 Then must we sleep one ever-during night.

3. But see the dense and delicate variations of the refrain in Rossetti's "A Love-Parting."

The second variation refigures the "night" as a moral and spiritual benightedness:

But fools do live and waste their little light,
 And seek with pain their ever-during night.

The third and final stanza ends with a re-literalizing of the "night," and collapses eternity into mere hyperbole:

And, Lesbia, close up thou my little light,
 And crown with love my ever-during night.

There are many matters about refrains in poetry which I shall not take up in these remarks but which should at least be considered briefly. One of these is a spectrum or scale of lexical or syntactic variation, or of rhythm of recurrence (at regular or irregular intervals), along which particular applications of refrains in poems might be arrayed. Another is a sort of referential scale, with one pole at what used to be called the "purely musical"—the *fa-la-la* mentioned earlier, a univocal sign of music returning to embrace narrative or analytic information in the strophes. The other pole of such a spectrum would be one of optimum density of reference, in which each return accrued new meaning, not merely because of its relation to the preceding strophe (their glossing of each other), but as a function of the history of its previous occurrences in the poem. Such a mapping would reveal an interesting relation to the rhetoricity of the lyric form as such—the refrains of what Yeats called "words for music perhaps" have, as historical revisions of the burdens of song-texts, a special structural, or quasi-musical, "perhaps"-ness of their own. But in all these taxonomies, historically belated or locally troped refrains would seem to have the property of remembering: their own previous occurrence in the poem, their distant ancestry in song and dance and their more recent poetic parentage are recollected at each return.

Refrains can time a poem, tolling its strophic hours in the tongue of bells that may be wholly foreign to the noises of the stanzas' daily life. And poetic refrains can enact tropes, as well as schemes, of time and memory. Our English words "memory" and "remembrance" contain the meanings of both *la mémoire* and *un souvenir* (i.e., a phrase like "I have no memory of him" is ambiguous as to the nature of the verb's object). Thus we again observe that refrains *are*, and *have*, memories—of their prior strophes or stretches of text, of their own preoccurrences, and of their own genealogies in earlier texts as well.

The refrain lines of François Villon's ballades exhibit a range of

syntactic and rhetorical modes of Poe's "application." But the whole of ballade structure seems almost to have been reinvented for, and by, the first of the ballades dispersed throughout *Le Testament* (it is also the foremost in the canon), the famous "Ballade des dames du temps jadis"; I quote the first stanza, together with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's version:

Dites moi où, n'en quel pays
Est Flora la belle Romaine,
Archipiades, ne Thais,
Qui fut sa cousine germaine,
Echo parlant quant bruit on maine
Dessus rivièrè ou sus estan,
Qui beauté eut trop plus qu'humaine.
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

[Tell me now in what hidden way is
Lady Florà, the lovely Roman?
Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thais,
Neither of them the fairer woman?
Where is Echo, beheld of no man,
Only heard on river and mere,—
She whose beauty was more than human? . . .
But where are the snows of yester-year?]

The pattern of *ubi sunt* catalogue proceeds forward in time from the dead ladies of antiquity toward Villon's own age, and the first refrain is introduced with the nymph Echo—"Echo parlant quant bruit on maine / Dessus rivièrè ou sus estan / Qui beauté eut trop plus qu'humaine"—who re-presents momentarily vanished voice (if we were to cry "jadis!" she would sigh "y" in return), and momentarily appears as a sort of muse of refrain herself. Then come "les neiges d'antan," melting like Echo's body, in the post-Ovidian textual history, into mere voice, or even "melting" like sound into silent air. This is the bottom line, itself to be re-echoed and remembered—even though in the poem-as-warhorse it is too easy to misremember the refrain as "*Et où sont les neiges d'antan,*" an unstated but simple summary repetend, canceled by Villon's with its qualifying "but." Villon's line calls wonderful attention to the way in which the refrain can incorporate the rhetorical features of a "that's that for the moment" with those of an "and then . . ."

The dialectic of memory and anticipation enacted by the scheme of poetic refrain can become prominent when the scheme has become

most fully troped, or, to put it another way, when the formal occasion of redeploing the conventional lyric device, of making the words for music even more "perhaps," enters the allegory of the poem's own making. A magnificent example of this is the beautiful, problematic refrain of Trumbull Stickney's "Mnemosyne," a poem written fairly close to 1900 (I should guess) by a remarkable poet who died in 1904 at the age of thirty. The handful of powerful lyrics he left behind include some sonnets which belatedly recapitulate an American romantic Hellenism—indeed, in a sonnet beginning with one of his favorite *mises-en-scène* ("The melancholy year is dead with rain"), his own diction speaks of itself: "So in the last autumn of a day / Summer and summer's memory returns. / So in a mountain desolation burns / Some rich belated flower." His major summoning up of what he elsewhere calls "memory's autumnal paradise" is the poem originally called (on the manuscript) "Song," but then retitled:

It's autumn in the country I remember

How warm a wind blew here about the ways!
And shadows on the hillside lay to slumber
During the long sun-sweetened summer-days.

It's cold abroad the country I remember.

The swallows veering skimmed the golden grain
At midday with a wing aslant and limber;
And yellow cattle browsed upon the plain.

It's empty down the country I remember.

I had a sister lovely in my sight:
Her hair was dark, her eyes were very sombre;
We sang together in the woods at night.

It's lonely in the country I remember.

The babble of our children fills my ears,
And on our hearth I stare the perished ember
To flames that show all starry thro' my tears.

It's dark about the country I remember.

There are the mountains where I lived. The path
Is slushed with cattle-tracks and fallen timber,
The stumps are twisted by the tempests' wrath.

But that I know these places are my own,
I'd ask how came such wretchedness to cumber
The earth, and I to people it alone.

It rains across the country I remember.

Structurally, the refrain here is complicated by the ambiguity of its role; starting out the poem, it seems more like a thematic, expository opening, immediately qualified (a) by the white space separating it from the tercet which it should else have joined to make a regular quatrain, and (b) by the implied opening-up of the syntax. In the exposition of autumn as the condition of remembering summer, the full stop is almost put back two words, and "I remember" enjambed to the tercet.⁴ With one's realization, at the first repetition, that a varying refrain has indeed been thereby instituted, comes the further problem of the Janus-like line in its very liminal placement. We have to ask whether the *rentrement* introduces or concludes, whether the line in its paradigmatic recurrence is epistrophic to its preceding tercet, or anaphoric to its following one. The meticulously shaded echoic quality of the half-rhymes with the middle lines of the tercets, not to speak of the deep, inner resonance of the white space surrounding the refrain lines, underscores their liminal role. In their very placement, they control the mode of crossing from one chamber of remembrance, from one *topos*, to another. The white spaces are full of ellipsis: *But* (after the first tercet) "It's cold" or "*But now it's empty*" or "*Yet now it's lonely.*" and yet the last two returns are not governed by those *and yet*s—"You see, it's dark . . ." then leads to the vision of a ruined landscape in the next tercet, and the ellipsis of the refrain itself before the final one. The poem has a bipartite structure, controlled by the pattern of variation of the refrain line. Not only do we have the sequential narrative which leads us through the five successive predicates *autumn, cold, empty, lonely, dark.*⁵ In addition, there is the mode of attributing the adjectives, which we come to hear as a superimposed sequence of varied predication: *it's . . . in, it's . . . abroad, it's . . . down. It's . . . in* returns to open the second sequence

4. The syntactic ambiguity is threefold. (1) "It's autumn in the country that I remember." (2) "I remember that it's autumn in the (that) country." (3) "It's autumn in the country: I remember / How warm a wind," etc. Throughout most of the poem, (2) and (1) seem to combine in some way. Donald Wesling kindly pointed out to me that I had not emphasized the relation of (1) and (2) clearly enough.

5. We might schematize this repetitive pattern, R, as $R = f(r + x_1, r + x_2, r + x_3, \dots)$, where x is the varying predicate and r the invariant material.

(followed by *it's dark about*) which concludes with the ellipsis of the last intermediate refrain, and its displacement to the end of the poem, where it forms a kind of sonnet-sestet of the last two tercets, replacing the predicatory sequence of adjectives in the previous ones with a verb. And so much is going on in those tercets: the introjection of the landscape cumbered by what has come to pass; the realization that "the ruin, or blank," as Emerson calls it, is in his own eye, which causes the speaker to reject the rhetorical posture of a Noah; and the rain of the *rentrement* which follows (I shall refrain from calling it, in the manner of my colleague Geoffrey Hartman, a ref-rain, despite its saturated allusiveness, of which more later) portends no new deluge. (For the "wretchedness" came to "cumber" the earth in an array of that word's senses: *overwhelm, destroy, trouble, fill or block up, benumb with cold.*)

The second section of the poem is also distinguished by the only full rhyme in the sequence. The "lonely in . . . remember" and the "dark about . . . remember" lines embrace the remarkable trope of "staring the perished ember / To flames," which itself revivifies the latent allusion to Shakespeare's "glowing of such fire / That on the ashes of his youth doth lie," a precursor text of belated, autumnal, not-yet-totally post-erotic mediation. The "ember" morpheme is elicited by punning analysis, from "remember." The emphasis of that analysis in the one perfect rhyme underscores an etymological trope of Mnemosyne's scene as one of flame reduced to its hotter spores, rather than one of re-collection or regathering. The poem organizes its own derivatively autumnal quality (the late September of Stickney's almost Parnassian romanticism) in specific relation to Shakespeare and Keats (its swallows as yet ungathered, but like swift Camillas that "skim" the plain); to its scene of present hearth and wasted outdoors; to its autumnal time-scale, in which recent summer seems so very bygone (one of the effects of the biblical diction evoking the "sister lovely in my sight"); and, of course, to its own schematic form of threshold refrain, of the chant of the word "remember" itself.

The interwoven narratives of tercet and repetend here are also effective in allegorizing the poem's structure. The movement from summer's remembered "here" to autumn's present "there"; the extended meditative and moralizing moment of the last two tercets and the way in which the interposition of the refrain between them would seem a transgression of some more than structural line; the final avowal of the mythological nature of "these places"—they are the speaker's "own," fully possessed, fully, in Wallace Stevens's sense, "abstract"—this movement is played out against the refrain sequence

noted before, which could be said to name autumn and then unpack some of its store of predicates. *Autumn in . . . cold abroad . . . empty down . . .* (where the preposition is troped with such plangency), then the repeated preposition starting out the second part, in *lonely in . . . dark about* (with its echoes of "empty down"); then the displacement, and, at the end (one wants to say, "in the end," for this is what it all comes down to), "It rains across the country I remember." The rain is out of sequence in that it is not one of the attributes of the scene, and the refrain is framing a very different kind of statement from the others. Whether projecting (again, echoically and thereby belatedly) an original introjection of Verlaine (as if to say: "Il pleut sur le pays / Comme il pleure dans ma mémoire"); or momentarily realizing again the visionary geography of the now rainy country, Baudelaire's "pays pluvieux," the falling rain now plunging the whole poem in "l'eau verte du Lethé"; or indubitably evoking the refrain of rain raining every day in Feste's song in *Twelfth Night*, the final return is most complex. Apparently turning from emotional moralizing to the plenitude of plain statement, it cannot help but be over-determined, both by virtue of, and in demarcation of, its terminal position. It is no longer liminal, save that on the other side of its threshold is the endless Lethean flood.

This remarkable poem by a rather young man fictionalizes his very youth as latecoming and therefore, figuratively, old enough to look—we cannot say, "back at," but rather "across"—such a long landscape. "Memory," said Swift, "is an old man's observation"; here, imagination is a young man's memory. And yet Walter Savage Landor's octogenarian observes, in a great poem called "Memory," that the names of his dearest surviving friends get lost to him. Specifically, they cumber like blocked river water the threshold between storage and retrieval: "To these, when I have written and besought / Remembrance of me, the word *Dear* alone / Hangs on the upper verge, and waits in vain." And then Landor concludes: "A blessing wert thou, O oblivion, / If thy stream carried only weeds away / But vernal and autumnal flowers alike / It hurries down to wither on the strand." (If not, as for Spenser, "Flowers + flow-ers, things that move in water," then at least the flow of what has been remembered into what is re-remembered in the retrieval and articulation of it is seen as a flood that staves off the transverse flow of Lethe.) But for the young poet, there is no terror of a damming-up of the flow of eloquence. He is in sure control of the returning sequence of half-rhymes, and its own structural narrative (*slumber—limber—sombre—ember—timber—cumber*): framed by the *slumber* that comes to *cumber*, bracketed

within that by the *limber* now felled to *timber*, mediated by the Janus faces of "remember."

Stickney's poem clearly tropes its scheme of refrain as a fable of memory, but less obviously, it makes refrain a matter of autumn. Wallace Stevens's not-quite-blank-verse sonnet, "Autumn Refrain," grapples directly with earlier voices (as if to say, "Where are the songs of autumn? Where are they?"), and picks its way through sun and moon and evening and song and nightingale, hearing in these Miltonic and Keatsian tropes not available refrains, but burdens of the past. The poem itself (which I have discussed in more detail elsewhere) employs only broken recurrences, true *refractions*, in its scattered repetitions of word and phrase.⁶ The autumn in the poem is that of the poet's silent aftermath of eloquence, an autumn of stillness that is "all in the key of that desolate sound" that is the residuum of the voice of the fictions of the past. In a sense, Stevens's poem takes the trope of an autumn refrain and embodies it in an original scheme of belated structure—all the *tra-la-las*, all the *forlorns*, tolling like bells, lie about in bits of fractured echoic hearsay, in rumors of *rentrement*. In Stevens's sole poem of 1931, an aftermath of refrain makes for an extreme schematic pattern of a sort of *durchkomponiert* stuttering, or of an ungathering of the fragments which are collected into a full, line-terminal refrain in a passage from *Paradise Lost* (V., ll. 180–204).⁷ But I should like to move back in time, to a poem with another kind of refrain structure, and another way in which autumn, memory, and schematic return enter into figurations of each other.

Composed sometime between 1913 and 1917 (almost midway between Stickney's and Stevens's poems), Thomas Hardy's "During Wind and Rain" presents a typically problematic Hardyian formal face: as always, we want to ask, with a kind of modernist (but perhaps callow) earnestness, how he ever allowed himself to get trapped in his singsong stanzas' awkward rooms. Frequently some marvellous lyric or short-story-in-verse of Hardy's will seem to have been composed by letting an opening take up a self-generated formal space, and then passively accepting the strophic fiat for the successive stanzas. But many do not, and the scheme of this poem, its pattern of minor and major variation, and its remarkable meta-refrain in the ultimate line of each stanza mark out the places of remembering and the moments

6. See "The Sound of the Music of Music and Sound," in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*, ed. Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton, 1980), pp. 248–50.

7. This gradual accumulation of the varying refrain lines, all ending in "[some verb] his praise," I have discussed in detail in *The Figure of Echo* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981), pp. 37–41.

of judgment of what has been summoned up in a way totally different from Stickney's.

They sing their dearest songs—
He, she, all of them—yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss—
Elders and juniors—aye,
Making the pathways neat
And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all—
Men and maidens—yea,
Under the summer tree,
With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them—aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And brightest things that are theirs. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

The four strophes of the poem frame four vignettes of an elliptical family novel, presented in strains interrupted by minimal, fragmentary refrains—"yea" and "aye" of ironic assent in alternating strophes, "Ah, no; the years O!" alternating with "Ah, no; the years, the years," and the repetition of "He, she, all of them" in the last stanza bringing full rondure, albeit with the "aye" now replacing the initial "yea." The refrains seem to be uttered by almost antithetical voices, the second one recoiling with ironic dismay—even disgust—from the initial affirmations and particularly, in the even-numbered

stanzas, from the punning reading of "aye" as "ever" (rather than "ay," perhaps from the "I" of voice-vote: "Ever, eh?—Ah, no; the years, the years"). And then the problematic closures, the terminal lines which, for each stanza, are summary, interpretive, offered by the second voice as if in evidence, or as cause, of its distaste. These four lines are like one-line poems in their own right. The novelistic vignettes—two indoors, two outdoors; the first set, possibly, in a cheerful winter evening, the other three in spring and summer—move chronologically toward greater wealth, the proliferation of generation, the sense of in-dwelling rather than merely inhabiting. The first refrain is merely schematic, merely an exercise of the rhetoric of verse rather than prose; the second refrain, as syntactic herald of the terminal line, is the voice of the poet reminding the novelist that he has suppressed exactly what his characters have. Seasonal cycle may unroll in strophes, as the providential cycle of the months unfolds its pageant of the working year in *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, but such cycles are often rooted in spring or summer without knowing or avowing it. The chronicler in this poem purports to believe in the beneficence of cycle, of seasonal pattern, of unrolling, of (and here Hardy shudders) *developing* time. The poet reminds him, in the terminal lines, that it is always autumn and that, indeed, chronicle of the foregoing sort is always being recounted as a defense against the autumnal sense of the entropy of consequence. The poet of the terminal lines reads the genre-scenes in the brightly painted stanzas, and groans as he sees that each is an unwitting *memento mori*.

The first of these repudiating monostichs is emblematically autumnal, and at the same time merciless in its trope—via Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"—of sick leaves ("Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red") in throngs ("pestilence-stricken multitudes") of dying generations. The terminal line sings for Hardy's poet the Shelleyan refrain. Formally considered, these terminals rhyme only with the stanzaic openings, six lines back, the effect being first to render them almost blank, but then, on reconsideration, to link them in a violent antithetical couplet with those openings ("They are blithely breakfasting all": "And the rotten rose is ript from the wall"). Rhetorically, each subsequent emblem of autumn and decay underlines its own mode of pseudo-refrain in that the expected return is, in each case, an autumnal emblem as the accountant's bottom line of a cheerful and hopeful scene, of "luxe" and "calme" ("volupté" not sorting well with the others in England, even in dream). And the bottom line of the emblem-sequence is the most self-aware, rhetorically: culminating the sequence of powerful verbs—*reel, wing, is ript*—comes the terrible

ploughs of the terminating trope of rain. The rain, which conventionally weeps over tombstones, here plows down the already furrowed, text-blossoming stone, apparently to trace names out with a commemorative finger, but actually with the effect of eventually effacing them altogether. Here again, as in Stickney's poem, the falling rain sings the final refrain, and claims the role of autumn's ultimate emblem.

This resonant raining engulfs a welter of allusive streams. The wind and rain of the title are those of the poem's formal paradigmatic precursor, Feste's final song in *Twelfth Night*. There, the paired alternating refrains, "With hey, ho, the wind and the rain" and "For the rain it raineth every day," enact the trope of refrain as marking a redemptive cycle, and a reclamation of the generality of rain from autumnal and wintry claims to it. Feste's vignettes of the phases of life are framed by his music of rainfall. For Hardy, the usurpation by autumn of all scenes of remembrance has long been irreversible. In addition, the short refrains of "During Wind and Rain" echo those of a slightly earlier poem, "The Change," which similarly looks back grimly at moments of innocent pleasure and calm ("And who was the mocker, and who the mocked when two felt all was well?"), and similarly employs narrative material from the life of Hardy's first wife, Emma Gifford (a scene of candlelit singing, in this case, of duets with her sister). The sequence of refrains both modifies and alternates: "Who shall read the years O!"; "Who shall spell the years, the years!"; "Who shall unroll the years O!"; "Who shall bare the years, the years!"; "who shall lift the years O!"; finally coming down to "Who shall unseal the years, the years!"—and thus framing the whole lyric in the textual tropes of reading and unsealing. Hardy echoed this refrain, and its very mode of alternation ("the years, O" and "the years, the years"), in the later poem, but he assigned it to the lyrical ironist of his final lines, rather than to his putative chronicler of the vignettes. The terminal, image-bearing lines of each stanza are, as has been observed, quasi-refrains in that they time, pace, and return to their mode of moralizing-by-riddling, as it were (rather than moralizingly interpreting the tropes they adduce). Their return is like a bell at the end of a line of manual typewriting, rather than Feste's wind and rain refrain, which tolls like a church bell in certain fictions of simple, organic village life finding a providential comfort in reminders of transience.

A glance at Hardy's revisions of his original text of the poem, by the way, shows how he came to realize the different schemes of the refrain sequence. Originally, the odd- and even-numbered stanzas were

identical in their repetends—"aye" was "yea" throughout, as was "the years o." (These revisions may have accompanied, or followed by some time, those of "The Change," which likewise introduced the alternation of the two half-lines.) But more significantly, the rhythm of the terminal lines can be seen to have emerged from an earlier, more regular conception, notwithstanding the changes in diction. The terminal lines originally read: "How the sickened leaves dropped down in throngs!"; "See the webbed white storm-birds wing across"; "And the wind-whipt creeper lets go the wall"; and, at first, "On their chiselled names the lichen grows" (in manuscript), then, "Down their chiselled names the rain-drop ploughs." The acephalic pentameters yield to tetrameters with a starting dactyl or anapest, which catches up the bits of triple movement throughout the poem, and allows the monostich of the terminal lines to return an echo of these mingled with the sobs, in all but the third one, of spondee.

Hardy's and Stickney's unrolling patterns of refrain in their respective autumnal songs are ultimately descendents of Poe's in that his "Nevermore" was avowing the *poetic* impossibility of merely formal—others might have said merely "musical"—refrain. Nevermore can refrain be merely *tra-la-la*, stand for "now everybody sings," trope the turning of a page to a new chapter, allow the singer to rest. Poe claimed falsely that his refrain was a true *fa-la*, a true bit of verbal music, but his schematic arguments for its varying "application," the ways in which "Nevermore" continues to answer every question the speaker puts (and thereby reveals the rhetorical nature of each question), merely go back to the echo-device which descends from Ovid through the Renaissance. For Poe, refrain is the trope of reiteration of reiteration, of how "jadis!" is the only musical cry. For Stickney and Hardy, it is a much more complex matter. Memory, time, autumn, penultimateness, all enter into the structure of their fables of refrain. And the ultimate point is that for *poetry*, rather than mere verse, to employ a refrain, it must thereby, therein, therewith, propound its own parable of the device itself, its etiology or its effect, or its emblematic reading, or whatever.

I should like to conclude these observations in a somewhat unusual way, particularly for a theorist. Premonitory glimpses of much in the foregoing observations came to me in a poem of my own called "Refrains" (one of the sections of the long sequence entitled *Powers of Thirteen*). It is not trivial or merely decorative, I think, that four poets (congenial to each other, but radically different in their work) should have read their poems as part of this conference. Ordinarily, one would feel the concerns of the contemporary poet and of the literary

historians were totally divergent (save, I suppose, for hagiographical longings, half-acknowledged wishes to be canonized by the same critical judgments the poets had affected to despise). But in a strange way, some of the areas intruded upon by the theoretically oriented critic—such as the larger question of the troping of what is schematic (a better way of coping with what was once called the matter of the “content” of “form” itself)—are just those in which the poet most privately dwells. It is those areas, too, which the poet withdraws from discussing overtly, either because of some kind of principled reticence or out of despair at being able to do so in any genuine way other than in, and by, the poems themselves. The thematizing and periodization of older forms of academic criticism mean little to the poet, whose very oeuvre—if it is genuine poetry—will somehow deconstruct such notions as “form,” “content,” “persona,” “lyric voice,” etc. But the attempt by sophisticated criticism to get below (and beyond) such notions is one the poet must recognize as being akin to his or her own imaginative work. (The poets at this conference all felt this to be true.)

But such “new new criticism” is in itself more aware of the critical dimensions in all poetry, even if—especially if—it is not didactic. (If anything, it is so aware to a fault.) My own meta-formal broodings over the poetics of refrain originated in the following poem, which started out with a willful misprision of the great refrain line of the late Latin *Pervigilium Veneris*, “*crās amet qui numquam amavit, quiquam amavit cras amet*” (“tomorrow those new to loving will love, those used to loving will love tomorrow”), and led me on through a play on the two etymologies of “refrain” discussed earlier, but by means not of philology, but of the homonyms *break* and *brake*, as the reader will observe. As for the poem’s conclusion, it is also that of this entire paper.

*Refrains*⁸

Cras amet qui numquam amavit, quiquam amavit cras
Moriatur—“those who never loved before will love
 Tomorrow, those used to loving will tomorrow come
 To die”—The old refrains all come down to this: either
 Reduced to *tra-la-las* at whose regular return
 Children look at each other and, smiling, mouth the words
 And old people nod heads in time, or, if they retain
 Meaning at all, they always end up in whispering
 “Death” in the deep chambers hidden among their tones.

8. From *Powers of Thirteen* (New York, 1983).

Breaking into Song

That is how *Greensleeves*, her smock stained from love in the grass,
 Outlasts all the boys who had a go at her. That is
 How *nonny-nonny-no* etcetera can survive
 The next stanza, and the next, and the next, and the next.

Breaking off the song of the refrain, putting the brakes
 On the way that the ever-returning chorus tends
 To run away with the whole song—well, that may well be
 Breaking away from a frightening joyride before
 The wrap-up of metal around some tree or other.
Yes, you say, but something has to get out of hand so
That we can go on: and, yes, I answer, but better
 Let it be the new material in each stanza
 That bridles at sense, reckless of disaster, and leaps
 Up into the less and less trustworthy air. The same
 Old phrase comes back anyway, waiting for what we say
 To be over and done, marking its time, the heavy
 Burden of the tune we carry, humming, to the grave.