

NOTES

- 1 *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1945), pp. 666–79 and 680–6.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 666–7.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 671.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 672.
- 5 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1977), p. 241.

Christopher Prendergast, ed. Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introductions to Close Reading, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

APPENDIX

FRENCH VERSIFICATION: A SUMMARY

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(All examples in this appendix are drawn from nineteenth-century verse and, whenever possible, from the poems analysed in the body of the book).

The regular alexandrine

Ainsi/toujours poussés//vers de nouveaux/rivages,	2+4+4+2
Dans la nuit/éternelle//emportés/sans retour,	3+3+3+3
Ne pourrons-nous/jamais//sur l'océan/des âges	4+2+4+2
Jeter l'ancre/un seul jour?	3+3

The stanzas of Lamartine's 'Le Lac' are each composed of three alexandrines followed by a hexasyllable, i.e. 12, 12, 12, 6. The scansion of the first stanza immediately makes several things clear about the regular alexandrine:

1 It has a fixed medial caesura (marked //) after the sixth syllable, which enforces an accent (stress) on the sixth syllable. The only other *obligatory* accent in the line falls on the final (twelfth) syllable.

2 The caesura is a *metrical* juncture which usually coincides with a significant syntactical juncture (and thus a pause), for reasons which will become apparent. But it is first and foremost the line's principal point of rhythmic articulation, not its most obtrusive syntactic break. It divides the alexandrine into two half-lines (*hémistiches*). Each half-line *usually* contains one other accent apart from the one on its final syllable. This 'secondary' accent is mobile and may fall on any of the hemistich's other syllables. A schematization of the metre of the regular alexandrine would thus be:

- ' - - - ' // - - ' - - ' -

The brackets round the secondary accents indicate that these accents are

both mobile and optional. In other words, the alexandrine may have only two accents (on 6 and 12), or three (say on 2, 6 and 12, or 6, 9 and 12), but it normally has four which is why the regular alexandrine is called the *alexandrin tétramètre* (i.e. with four measures). There are thirty-six different possible rhythmic configurations of the regular alexandrine, ranging from the basic two-accent 6+6, through tri-accentual patterns (6+4+2, 3+3+6, etc.) to the tetra-accentual combinations (1+5+4+2, 3+3+2+4, 4+2+1+5, etc.).

3 The fact that the obligatory accents fall at the end of the half-lines indicates that French accent is by nature terminal (oxytonic): it falls on the last accentuable syllable of the word or word-group. During the course of its phonetic development, French accent has gradually weakened, so that it is not so much individual words which have accents as word-groups (syntactic segments) (i.e. accent is reinforced by intonation, by the rising or falling pitch of the voice). Thus a word which in one collocation might receive accent because it is the final unit will be without accent in other collocations in which it is not the final unit – 'un style' but 'un style orné'. Because verse intensifies our sense of rhythmicity and tends to increase the segmentation of utterance, it will usually accentuate more elements than 'normal' speech would; for example, it is unlikely that Lamartine's 'nouveaux' or 'nuit' would receive accents in non-verse contexts.

4 The weakness of French accent partly explains why, up to the latter years of the nineteenth century, rhyme was considered indispensable to French verse: rhyme gives more audibility to the final, line-demarcative accent of the line. The rhyme-scheme of 'Le Lac' is *rimes croisées* (alternating rhyme: abab); the other principal rhyme-schemes are *rimes plates* (couplets: aa, bb, etc.) and *rimes embrassées* (enclosed rhyme: abba).

5 When looking for the accentual pattern of a regular alexandrine, therefore, we can confidently place accents on syllables 6 and 12 and then identify the principal syntactic divisions (word-groups) within each hemistich, assigning an accent to the last accentuable syllable of any group which obtains. Thus we might describe our scansion of the first line of 'Le Lac' as

Adv. (governing whole stanza)/Adj. phrase describing 'nous'

Adv. of time+past part.//Adv. phrase of
place
Prep.+adj./Noun

We then notate the rhythm of the line by indicating the number of syllables within each syntactic segment, thus 2+4+4+2.

6 Syllables. Two major problems beset the counting of syllables: do two contiguous vowels, as in 'nuit', count as one syllable (synaeresis) or two

(diaeresis), and does one count mute 'e's' or not? The standard way of resolving the first problem, in classical verse at least, is etymological: since *nuit* derives from the Latin *nox, noctem*, which has only one root vowel, so *nuit* is counted as only one syllable (/nui/) rather than two (/nyi/). This principle is of course complicated as verse becomes freer and admits changes in current pronunciation.

As far as the mute 'e' (*e atone*) is concerned, a distinction must be made between line-terminal 'e's' and line-internal ones.

(i) Line-terminal 'e's'. These are not counted as syllables (though they may attract some degree of enunciation); they indicate that the rhyme is feminine. Thus *rivages* has two syllables and *âges* has one, and together they constitute a feminine rhyme. From the middle of the sixteenth century up to the latter half of the nineteenth century, poets rigorously observed the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes (*la loi de l'alternance des rimes*): i.e. a masculine rhyme-pair must be followed by a feminine one, and vice versa.

(ii) Line-internal 'e's'. A line-internal 'e' is counted as a syllable, and pronounced, when it is immediately followed by either a consonant (even if mute) or an aspirate 'h'. A line-internal 'e' is elided (not counted) when it is immediately followed by a vowel or a mute 'h'. Thus in the first stanza of 'Le Lac', the final 'e's' of both 'éternelle' and 'ancre' are elided before a following vowel.

Summary to date and differentiation with English verse

The regular alexandrine has two obligatory accents on syllables 6 and 12, and usually two other accents, mobile and optional. Because it is fixed, the medial caesura is a *metrical* element, governing the rhythmic and syntactic distribution of the line. Often the caesura coincides with the major syntactic juncture within the line, but it need not do so. Above all, it acts as a fulcrum for the line, a rhythmic pivot encouraging relationships of symmetry, chiasmus, antithesis, complementarity, parallelism, between the two half-lines (*hémistiches*). In the English iambic pentameter, on the other hand, the caesura is mobile because it occurs at the major syntactic juncture within the line wherever that may be. It thus has no *metrical* significance, but does contribute to the rhythmic variety of a sequence of lines. Grammatically significant French words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) do not consistently enjoy a right to accent, do not have accent built into them, whereas their English equivalents do. French accent is directly related to syntactic structure, to word-group; English stress is word-related before it is phrase-related. Thus, very crudely put, in French verse rhythm derives from syntax, whereas in English verse a syntax or word-sequence is fitted to a metre.

Because of this distinction, variability of syntactic structure does not, in English verse, lead to metrical variety. In English syllable-stress metre, an iambic, or trochaic, or anapaestic foot is a repeated unit, repeated through thick and thin, albeit with conventional variations; and because English metre is constructed on repetition and recurrence, so the metrical structure of one line predicts that of the next. In French verse, on the other hand, although we may predict that one sequence of twelve syllables will be followed by another, we cannot predict the particular rhythmic configuration of a particular alexandrine on the basis of the alexandrine which precedes it; just as we cannot predict the rhythmic configuration of a second hemistich on the basis of the first. After the 2+4 of 'Le Lac's' first hemistich could we foresee the 4+2 of the second? After the 2+4+4+2 of the first line, could we predict the 3+3+3+3 of the second line? Because French accent is word(-group)-terminal, so in French verse there is a natural tendency for the end of the line to coincide with a syntactic break. This inevitably makes enjambement an unlikely phenomenon and together with the rhythmic unpredictability just described endows each alexandrine with a peculiar autonomy. But in English verse, thanks to the repetition of the foot and the continuity of the metre from one line to the next, enjambement is rhythmically non-disruptive, an unexceptional resource of verse. French verse is syllabic, and one syllable more or less is the difference between one kind of line, one set of possible rhythmic segmentations, and another; French verse thus necessitates very precise rules about pronunciation and the values of syllables. Whether contiguous vowels count as one or two syllables is a crucial question, as is the status of the *e atone* (mute e). English verse is less sensitive to the syllable, and whether certain syllables are pronounced or not ('heav'n' or 'heaven', 'stag'g'ring' or 'staggering', 'tow'r' or 'tower') matters little as long as the underlying metrical pulse is maintained; an iambic pentameter may vary between eight and twelve syllables without the English ear being unduly troubled.

Armed with these findings, let us turn to the second and third stanzas of 'Le Lac':

O lac!/l'année à peine//a fini/sa carrière	2+4+3+3 f.
Et, près des flots/chéris//qu'elle devait/revoir,	4+2+4+2 m.
Regarde!/je viens seul//m'asseoir/sur cette pierre	3'+3+2+4 f.
Où tu la vis/s'asseoir.	4+2 m.
Tu mugissais/ainsi/sous ces ro:/ches profondes;	4+2+3+3 f.
Ainsi/tu te brisais//sur leurs flancs/déchirés;	2+4+3+3 m.
Ainsi/le vent jetait//l'écu:/me de tes ondes	2+4+2+4 f.
Sur ses pieds/adorés.	3+3 m.

Five further points should be added to the foregoing list of verse-features:

7 The bar-line which we use in scansion to divide one measure from the next is called a *coupe*, and since the accentuated vowel of the word-group closes the rhythmic measure, the *coupe* falls immediately after the accentuated vowel. The *coupe* is a fiction, a convenience of scansion, and does not bear on the enunciation of the line, other than where an articulated (unelided) *e* is involved.

8 The *e atone*, as its name suggests, cannot bear an accent. This is why, in speaking of the terminality of French accent, we needed to specify the 'last *accentuable* syllable of the word or word-group', since the accentuated word may end with an *e atone*. When the accentuated word does indeed end with an articulated, post-tonic 'e', the *coupe* usually continues to fall immediately after the accentuated vowel, thus pushing the final *e atone* into the following measure. This is called a *coupe enjambante*, because the accentuated word straddles or enjambes the *coupe* (see the first and third lines of the third stanza). The *coupe enjambante* helps to create a seamless continuity in the line, an intonational suppleness, an undulating ease.

9 On rare occasions, however, an *e atone* after an accentuated vowel cannot be assimilated into the following measure, for expressive or syntactic reasons. In these instances the *coupe* falls *after* the *e atone* and coincides with a pause, with a rupture in the rhythmic and syntactic chain. This kind of *coupe* is called a *coupe lyrique* (or *coupe féminine*). 'Regarde!' in the third line of the second stanza is an unsuppressible interjection, an interruptive imperative, bitterly requiring the lake to witness the poet's dispossession. How compromised and conciliatory it would sound were it to be enunciated with a *coupe enjambante*:

Regar:/de! je viens seul//m'asseoir/sur cette pierre 2+4+2+4

Instead we choose a 3'+3+2+4 reading, where the *coupe lyrique* is indicated by the apostrophe which accompanies the first 3.

10 It would be easy to assume that all rhythmic decisions relating to the classical alexandrine are cut and dried, that there is no room for interpretative choice. This is not true. For example, the third stanza takes up the 'Ainsi' of the first stanza and makes it an insistent, self-torturing refrain. I have treated it throughout the stanza as a separate measure. But may it not be that this word develops not so much a mechanical intensity as an exasperated weariness, becomes something taken for granted? Thus perhaps not:

Ainsi/le vent jetait//l'écu:/me'de tes ondes 2+4+2+4

but

Ainsi le vent/jetait//l'écu:/me de tes ondes 4+2+2+4

as the poet's attention shifts from his lingering sense of injustice to the natural theatre, highlighting the violence of the wind's activity. Equally we might wish to read the third line of the first stanza not as 4+2+4+2 but as 6+4+2, so that the whole construction of the modal verb – 'ne pourrions jamais' – is rhythmically undifferentiated, flat, will-less.

11 Of the even-syllabled (parasyllabic) lines, only the alexandrine and the decasyllable have caesuras. The octosyllable and, as here, the hexasyllable do not.

This completes our rapid exploration of the regular alexandrine. Before moving on to deal with other lines, we should mention some of the liberties taken with this metrical institution by nineteenth-century poets.

The 'alexandrin trimètre'

The principal 'transgression' practised is the substitution of a three-measure alexandrine (*alexandrin trimètre*), for the four-measure one (*alexandrin tétramètre*), or the substitution of a ternary structure for the standard binary one. This involves the erasure of the medial caesura and the consequent dislodging of the hemistich as the basic rhythmic building block. The alexandrine is invaded by syncopation, and the conceptualizing tendency of binarity yields to the contingent and intractable amalgam of three:

Je vis trembler/leurs traits | confus/et par degrés 4+4+4
Blanchir l'écume,/ou creuse | une on:/de dans les blés 4+4+4
(Hugo: 'La Pente de la rêverie', ll. 43, 124)

In both of these examples, even though the sixth syllable remains potentially accentuable and a spectral caesura still survives, the demands of the syntactic grouping over-ride the binary structure and argue for a three-measure segmentation. The *alexandrin trimètre* is to be found in seventeenth-century dramatic verse, particularly comedy, in La Fontaine, in the work of the late eighteenth-century poet André Chénier. But it achieves a polemical value and a concerted use only with the romantics, especially Hugo, and for this reason is often referred to as an *alexandrin romantique*.

It is generally assumed, and with much justification, that the *trimètre* of the romantics is itself conservative, that the ghost of a caesura is maintained by the continuing accentuability of the sixth syllable, as above, and that it most frequently falls into a 'regular' 4+4+4 pattern. This is why it is often difficult to decide, in one's reading of such lines, whether to treat them as *alexandrins trimètres*, or as *alexandrins tétramètres* with enjambement at the caesura, the central phrase straddling the two hemistichs. Thus, should one read:

Les deux pôles!/le monde | entier!/la mer, la terre

('La Pente de la rêverie', l. 57)

that is 4'+4+4, with a *coupe lyrique* at 'pôles', further separating the three elements and allowing the exclamation to die away in its own expansiveness? Or should one opt for:

Les deux pô:/les! le monde//entier!/la mer, la terre 3+3+2+4

where the *coupe enjambante* emphasizes the dynamism of the vision, its onrush as it encompasses vast spaces, a vision which suddenly comes to a suspended halt at 'monde', so that, triumphantly, the crescendo can release itself in 'entier'? Each reader will make up his own mind.

But we occasionally find a more asymmetrical distribution of the *trimètre*'s measures in romantic poetry:

Se réfléchit/avec ses riviè:/res de moire 4+5+3
(Hugo: 'La Pente de la rêverie', l. 66)

'Avec', it should be noted, has a capacity for accentuation which one might not expect and which derives from its acoustic fullness (compare the archaic form 'avecque'). This line of Hugo's should be compared with Vigny's:

Que l'homme a fait/avec les animaux/serviles 4+6+2
(Hugo: 'La Mort du Loup', l. 70)

and with Baudelaire's:

Qui l'observent/avec | des regards/familiers 4'+5+3
(Baudelaire: 'Correspondances', l. 4)

Here, too, I favour a *coupe lyrique* at 'observent', to imbue this look with something sinister, penetrating, a look whose strangeness creates a piquant oxymoron with 'familiers'.

But it is only in the *vers libéré* (see below) of the post-romantic, proto-symbolist poets, poets such as Verlaine and Rimbaud, that the *trimètre* accomplishes a complete eradication of the caesura and fully exploits its capacity to assemble irregular combinations. Although the opening line of Verlaine's 'Le Paysage dans le cadre des portières':

Le paysa:/ge dans le ca:/dre des portières

falls into a 4+4+4 pattern, 'dans' does not allow even the ghost of a caesura on the sixth syllable. And although the lines

Vont s'engouffrant/parmi le tourbillon/cruel
Où tom:/bent les poteaux min:/ces du télégraphe
Dont les fils/ont l'allure étran:/ge d'un paraphe

from the same poem, offer accentuability at the sixth syllable, the configurations which emerge from the trimetric readings they encourage are as varied as 4+6+2, 2+5+5, 3+5+4.

Hitherto we have dealt only with the alexandrine. We should now attend briefly to those even-syllabled lines which come next in order of descent, the decasyllable and the octosyllable.

The decasyllable

If we cast our eye over the first stanza of Baudelaire's 'La Mort des amants':

Nous aurons des lits//pleins d'odeurs légères,	5+3+2
Des divans profonds/comme des tombeaux,	3+2+5
Et d'étranges fleurs//sur des étagères,	3+2+5
Ecloses pour nous//sous des cieus plus beaux	2+3+3+2

we might suppose that the decasyllable, like the alexandrine, has a fixed medial caesura, after the fifth syllable, and that it usually has three accents per line (obligatory accents on 5 and 10, plus a mobile and optional third one), but may have as few as two and as many as four. Such a supposition would be largely mistaken. The 5//5 division is just one version of the decasyllable, a version particularly cultivated by nineteenth-century poets, and if we read on in 'La Mort des amants' we can see why Baudelaire has chosen it:

Nos deux cœurs seront//deux vastes flambeaux,
Qui réfléchiront//leurs doubles lumières
Dans nos deux esprits, //ces miroirs jumeaux.

Baudelaire's images of reflection, of perfect reciprocity and complementarity, call for the symmetry of 5//5. But the classical divisions of the decasyllable are in fact 4//6 or 6//4, with the hexasyllabic element usually containing two accents, and the tetrasyllabic element one.

The octosyllable

Much of the rhythmic ambiguity and fluidity of the octosyllabic line derives from its lying between the three-accent-per-line norm of the decasyllable and the two-accent norm of the hexasyllable; it thus frequently invites both a two-accent and a three-accent reading:

A l'horizon monte une nue,	4+4/4+1+3
Sculptant sa forme dans l'azur:	4+4/2+2+4
On dirait une vierge nue	3+5/3+3+2
Emergeant d'un lac au flot pur	5+3/3+2+3

(Gautier, 'La Nue')

Whereas the alexandrine is the line of sustained discourse, usually enjoying a certain syntactic completeness, the movement of the octosyllable outstrips the development of syntax and parcels it into a sequence of momentary tableaux, near-autonomous images or cryptic utterances, which are able to stand in a variety of potential relationships with each other. These are the qualities which made the octosyllable attractive to Gautier (*Emaux et camées*, 1852) and to the symbolist poets after him. The rhythmic volatility of the octosyllable – it has only one fixed accent, on its eighth syllable – and the swift return of its rhymes have also given it a reputation for alertness, zestfulness, impertinence even, suitable for lighter varieties of verse. Henri Morier describes the octosyllable as 'un vers que nous avons déclaré capricieux et insubordonné par définition'.

The alexandrine, the decasyllable and the octosyllable are the three principal (parisyllabic) lines of classical French prosody. Before moving on to the imparisyllabic lines (*vers impairs*) which are associated with the liberated verse (*vers libéré*) of the latter half of the nineteenth century, we should give some further consideration to rhyme.

Rhyme

As already mentioned, rhyme was, until the end of the nineteenth century, considered indispensable to French verse. It was a device which clearly marked verse's status as verse, by strengthening the line-terminal accent and itself performing a line-demarkative function with its homophonic mechanism. French rhyme distinguishes itself from English rhyme in three important respects: rhyme gender, terminality of accent and rhyme degree.

Not only does French verse differentiate between masculine and feminine rhymes, it systematizes the differentiation by insisting on the alternation of rhyme-pairs of different gender (see 6(i) above). Many commentators feel that masculine and feminine rhymes have different expressive tonalities too: masculine rhymes are abrupt, peremptory, hard, uncompromising, while feminine rhymes are gentle, melting, yielding, evanescent. This prosodic sexism cannot be applied very convincingly to the stanza from Gautier's 'La Nue' quoted above, but then the rhymes here are unusual in that the feminine rhymes 'nue'/'nue' end in vowels (when it is more usual for masculine rhymes to do so) and the masculine rhymes 'azur'/'pur' in consonants (when it is more usual for feminine rhymes to do so).

The terminality of French accent and the relatively high inflectedness of the language mean that rhyme falls more often than not on suffixes and endings. This automatically increases the rhyme vocabulary available in French (as opposed to English). It also means that rhyme tends to semanti-

size endings, to underline the modality of tenses and to invest suffixes with more than a purely suffixal meaning.

French verse analysis differentiates between different degrees of rhyme: *rime pauvre* (or *faible*), *rime suffisante*, *rime riche* and *rime léonine*. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rhyme classification distinguished between phonemic material following the tonic (rhyming) vowel and phonemic material preceding it, producing the scale:

- (a) rhyme of tonic vowel alone: *rime pauvre* (*faible*)
- (b) rhyme of tonic vowel + following consonant(s): *rime suffisante*
- (c) rhyme of tonic vowel + preceding consonant(s) (*consonne(s) d'appui*) + any following consonants: *rime riche*
- (d) rhyme of tonic vowel + preceding syllable(s): *rime léonine*

The incidence of *rime riche* increased with the romantic poets and became an important plank in the aesthetic platform of the Parnassians (e.g. Banville: 'Sans consonne d'appui, pas de Rime et, par conséquent, pas de poésie'). In the hands of these poets, rich rhyme was looked to to provide more resonance, colour, dramatic presence, to guarantee the depth and authenticity of thought and feeling, and to safeguard the rigour of the poetic vocation. But to twentieth-century analysts, the nineteenth-century system of classification has seemed too crude, particularly as it classes rhymes like 'bonté'/'cité' as rich, while denser accumulations of phonemes (e.g. 'tordre'/'mordre', 'arche'/'marche') are merely *suffisantes*. Accordingly a purely numerical approach to rhyme-classification has been adopted, whereby the more identical phonemes there are, whether preceding or succeeding the tonic vowel, the richer the rhyme. Thus in Leconte de Lisle's 'Midi', 'bleu'/'feu' (/ø/), 'fin'/'divin' (/ɛ̃/) are *rimes pauvres* (identity of one element, the tonic vowel), 'dorée'/'sacrée' (/Re/), 'rire'/'maudire' (/iR/) are *rimes suffisantes* (identity of two elements, the tonic vowel + consonant, but note that 'dorée'/'sacrée' would be *riche* under earlier classification), and 'plaine'/'haleine' (/len/), 'd'ombre'/'sombre' (/ɔbr/) are *rimes riches* (identity of three or more elements in tonic syllable; but note that 'd'ombre'/'sombre' would be *suffisante* under earlier classification). For examples of *rime léonine* (identity of two or more vowels/syllables, the tonic syllable and one or more vowels/syllables preceding it) we might turn to Nerval's 'El Desdichado' ('abolie'/'Mélancolie', 'consolé'/'désolé'). Variation in rhyme degree may have a structural function, or may affect the focus of images (from soft to sharp) or may be expressive in other ways: weaker rhymes suggest the prosaic, the unassuming, the weary, the deprived, the impoverished, etc.; richer rhymes suggest the confidently poetic, the authoritative, the alert, the abundant, the opulent, etc.

The 'vers impair'

The imparisyllabic line, the *vers impair* (13, 11, 9, 7 or 5 syllables), is remarkable by its scarcity in the classical canon of verse. It occurs intermittently throughout French verse history – e.g. *Aucassin et Nicolette*, sixteenth-century ode, Malherbe, La Fontaine, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Hugo – but it is particularly associated with the *vers libéré* of poets such as Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue, because in their work it is exploited more frequently and more tendentiously. Because of its lack of self-assured equilibrium – Leconte de Lisle was of the opinion that 'le vers français vit d'équilibre, il meurt si on touche à sa parité' – the *vers impair* can be seen as intrinsically anti-oratorical and peculiarly suited to the depiction of moods which are unstable, nervous, indeterminate, or ironic and mischievous. Slightly 'out of true', a kind of *vers faux*, the *vers impair* provokes a tentative, exploratory reading appropriate to vague, even anxious feelings; but at the same time, by increasing the reader's alertness to syllabic values, it can achieve modal and tonal effects of great subtlety. Verlaine's 'Art poétique', in lines of nine syllables (enneasyllables), advocates the *vers impair* in these terms: 'De la musique avant toute chose, / Et pour cela préfère l'Impair / Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air, / Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.'

'Vers libéré'

Vers libéré was not liberated by virtue of its cultivation of the *impair* alone. It also made more uninhibited use of the *alexandrin trimètre*, eradicating the caesura and favouring rhythmically asymmetrical configurations, as we have seen. And it flaunted its increasingly bold enjambements. All these developments contributed to the rhythmic destabilization of the line and undermined its integrity. Rhythms lost their firm contours and consequently their aptitude for eloquent and lapidary utterance. Instead they acquired a certain looseness, fluidity, indeterminacy which favoured the intimate, the prosaic, the impromptu, the *fantaisiste*. But this was not all. The poets of *vers libéré* (Baudelaire, Corbière, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue) also took liberties with the classical rules of rhyme. From time to time they disregarded the *loi de l'alternance des rimes*, pairing masculine with feminine or exploiting the expressive potentialities of single-gender rhyme sequences. They did not scruple, when necessary, to rhyme singulars with plurals. And in more extreme instances, half-rhyme was resorted to (e.g. Verlaine: 'vêpres'/'cortège', 'mauves'/'jaunes', 'liturgiques'/'mélancolie'; Rimbaud: 'facile'/'elle', 'étonne'/'infortune', 'auberge'/'perche').

But for all its erosions of traditional practice, *vers libéré* stopped short of

dislodging those two factors which are the very foundation of regular verse: the principle of syllabic regularity (isosyllabism) – which also meant, of course, that the poets of *vers libéré* observed the conventions concerning the syllabic status of the *e atone* (see 6, above) and contiguous vowels (synaeresis and diaeresis, see 6 above) – and the principle of rhyming, where rhyme, whatever its degree or gender, is seen as an indispensable demarcator of the line, a guarantor of the line's integrity and the sole source of stanzaic structure.

'Vers libre'

The emergence of *vers libre* (free verse) occurred in 1886, in the pages of the review *La Vogue*, edited by Gustave Kahn, where in rapid succession were published Rimbaud's free-verse *Illuminations* 'Marine' and 'Mouvement' (1872–3), translations of Whitman by Laforgue, poems by Kahn later to be published in his *Les Palais nomades* (1887), the first collection of *vers libre*, ten of Laforgue's own free-verse poems (to be collected in his *Derniers Vers*, 1890) and other specimens of the new verse by Jean Moréas and Paul Adam. To this list of initiators, Jean Ajalbert, Édouard Dujardin, Albert Mockel, Francis Vielé-Griffin, Henri de Régnier, Adolphe Retté and Maurice Maeterlinck added their names in the years immediately following.

The poets of *vers libre* undermined syllabicity either by claiming that they did not count syllables any more (they only counted accents and measures) or by casting doubt on the syllabic status of the *e atone*, allowing it to be counted in the conventional way, but equally allowing its suppression both at the ends of words (*apocope*) or within words (*syncope*); additionally they impeded the urge to count by indeterminate and inconsistent practice in relation to synaeresis and diaeresis. Laforgue's line:

Oh! et puis, est-ce que tu connais, outre les pianos
(*'L'Hiver qui vient'*, l. 75)

might be as long as fifteen syllables or as short as twelve syllables, a ragged 3+5+4 *trimètre*:

Oh! et puis, est-ce que tu connais, outr' les pianos (/pjano/)

or anything between. So the *verslibristes* felt free to use lines of any length (where length can no longer be reliably determined) in indiscriminate combination. And the indiscriminate combination of lines was abetted by free-rhyming stanzaic structures. By 'free-rhyming' I mean not only the freedoms introduced into rhyming by *vers libéré*, but also freedom with

rhyme patterning, and the freedom to use repetition and rhymelessness as the occasion demanded. In the opening lines of '*L'Hiver qui vient*',

Blocus sentimental! Messageries du Levant! ...
Oh, tombée de la pluie! Oh, tombée de la nuit!
Oh, le vent! ...
La Toussaint, la Noël et la Nouvelle Année,
Oh, dans les bruines, toutes mes cheminées! ...
D'usines ...

'nuit' apparently has no end-rhyme partner – instead it creates an internal rhyme with 'pluie' (/qi/); but 'nuit' and 'usines' form a half-rhyme on /i/, a half-rhyme validated and mediated by the line-internal 'bruines' (/qin/) (i.e. 'nuit' (/qi/) → 'bruines' (/qin/) → 'usines' (/in/), itself, like 'usines', enjoying an acoustic kinship with 'cheminées'. Rhyme freedoms permit an intrication of acoustic association. They also enable the poet to vary the intervals between rhymes in order to situate the poem at different levels of consciousness. Thus the real end-rhyme partners of 'usines' are 'bruine' (l. 13) and 'ruine' (l. 15), but the distance between them means that the connections are made lower in the consciousness, subliminally even, compared with the highly self-conscious irony of the couplet:

Ah! nuées accourues des côtes de la Manche,
Vous nous avez gâté notre dernier dimanche!

where our awareness of the traditional enemy's hand in undoing the poet's sentimental adventure ('Blocus sentimental/continental' → 'des côtes de la Manche') is rendered more piquant by the fact that the 'Manche' compels the poet self-righteously to ally himself and his amatory hopes with a day – 'dimanche' – which represents all he abominates.

Vers libre can claim, with some justification, to have 'psychologized' verse-structure, to have made the act of writing apparently simultaneous with the changing movements of mind: 'Une poésie n'est pas un sentiment que l'on communique tel que conçu avant la plume. Avouons le petit bonheur de la rime et les déviations occasionnées par les trouvailles, la symphonie imprévue vient escorter le motif' (Laforgue, *Mélanges posthumes*). By allowing the aleatory and the improvised to inhabit verse, by exploiting the psychological layering produced by variable rhyme-interval and variable margin, by locating verse at the intersection of multiplied co-ordinates (rhyme, rhymelessness, repetition, the metrical, the non-metrical, etc.), by using linguistic structures to attract and activate paralinguistic features (tempo, pause, tone, accentual variation, emotional colouring), *vers libre* established its affinities with the stream of consciousness of contemporary fiction and proposed a stream of consciousness of reading.