POEMS IN PRAISE OF ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

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Our language is so very rich
that you can set a part apart
and still have quite enough with which
to sing some sort of song on pitch;
it's too arcane a form of art
for barbs that strike straight to the heart,
but fun -- and certainly not kitsch.
So study carefully this chart,
then turn the page, and I will start.

A Classification of Consonant Sounds in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>labial</th>
<th>spical</th>
<th>laminal</th>
<th>dorsal</th>
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</thead>
</table>

He

We          You

sonorant

Low        Row

Me          KNe

Van Fan THan THIn

obstruent

Zone So aZure SHoe

Joy CHIn

Ban Fan Do Too Gun Cat

semivowel
lateral
retroflex
nasal
smooth
rough
stop

voiceless

(the smooth and rough consonants are collectively termed spirant)

...and assorted screwy vowels and diphthongs.
I know a lazy sophomore
who never answers one with sass,
although one's nerves he will harass
with ceaseless songs of Elsinore,
lanthanum ore, the life of Thor,
or similar things of now or yore --
he overflows with useless lore.
His usual fare is farfel, or
alfalfa, saffron, sassafras:
his ethos allows him nothing more.
In summer with a roaring snore
(a shallow genre of snoring roar)
he loafes for miles along a shore
of river or of sea. Alas!
he never, never will amass
resources others have use for.

I want to make it mighty plain:
he can't abide to work at gain --
to work at all would bring him pain.
I ken he'd only try to try
to mount a hillock, not a high
and mighty peak. 'Twould be awry
were he a top goal to attain
by toil bucolic or urbane;
'twould trap von brain in endocrane
and break an archetype in twain.
Money to him became inane,
impractical -- he'd nought to buy.
Indeed, an indolent, idle guy,
undoubtedly in time he'll die
a pauper, poor like you and I.

Last Tuesday he set out to stroll
under a trestle, to stint the toll;
and there he sighted the trestle-troll
dressed in red sandals, a tattered stole,
and little else. This sort o' dress'll
soon daunt any undaunted soul.
He halted. He knew he had to wrestle
the troll to saunter on under the trestle,
or else retreat. A troll in stress'll
not sit idle -- they're hardly sessile.
The satyr stood on a little knoll
and stared a stare so hostile (yet droll)
that the hero decided to turn around desisl
and hunt a hideout, therein to nestle
until the runt'd returned to his hole.
He was kept at his hideout half a week. Each day, he poked his head out, to peek to see if the pixie was at the spot he'd picked to picket those who sought to bypass the viaduct. He got toasted feet (the dust was hot), cuts at head, gashes by cheek (the pixie had a jagged beak which got used quick if he chose to seek to get away). Yet, at the dot of eight of the sabbath, the pixie said "eek!" gave his digits a twisted tweak, so faded away. The boy, half shot, took his achy body, quite taut, off the spot at which he'd got caught back to the city, without a thought, without a squeak, too weak to speak, deposited it atop a cot to doze two days as a potted sot.

Don't pester me with your complaints about the pictures my poetry paints -- I've chosen to work within constraints. The moral of this silly story isn't to not be sophomory nor yet to decipher deep allegory, but just to determine what I've done, what types of sounds I decided to shun in each of the stanzas (except this one).

THEME FOR VARIATIONS

The bees were buzzing merrily along the road as I rode in; the birds were warbling in G (or maybe I mean B or D) and all the woods were yang and yin. As I rode down the lonely road the rain renewed the mud below. The reeds, the weeds, the woods, the woad all in a muddle, were a load I barely bore. I bore them though. Renewing vim and vigor then, the vinegar was eager. Angry words of bees and birds. Then bang! My rubber gone, my legs again removed me there beyond the glen. And all the woods were yin and yang: and all the world was young and yen.
Variation One On A Theme For Variations

A babbling river wandered by a wood.
A burly bull was grazing by the river;
a big bug nibbled on the bovine's liver,
deeing the menu only middling good.

A boy and girl drew nigh along the road,
ignoring woods and river, nibbler, grazer.
The lad was gazing eager on the load
the maiden lugged there under blood-red blazer.

The lazy bull, aroused, arose and ran,
rained ever nearer, breathing gamey air.
The bug abandoned bovined and began
a-boarding in the boy's legs (they were bare).
The bug then rode the boy away, and there
the girl amused the bull with large clan.

The drama done, the bored woods gave a yawn;
the river, unannoyed, meandered on.

Variation Two (Inversion) On A Theme For Variations

Sing a song for fifty cents,
a pocket stuffed with oats;
sixty pixie elephants
sporting fancy coats.
When a raucous klaxon toots
in yon circus tent
elephanty tusks and foots
relax, all passion spent.

A king sat counting in a house,
currency or cheques.
A queen went shopping for her spouse:
turnips, thirteen pecks.
A footman stretched out, tinkering at
a teensy foreign car,
when on it stepped an elephant
like practiced circus star.

CONSTRAINED SONNETS

I. Verses For Readers With Bad Colds

At dusk I gazed at Sagittarius,
That archer bold who gallops through the sky.
The air was clear; 'twas easy to descry,
Despite the other stars so bright, so various,
That, south of Aquila, his perch precarious,
He raised his bow, he let his arrows fly.
Largely westwards did their orbits lie,  
Towards Scorpio. 'Twas really quite hilarious.  

The recoil toppled Archer off his saddle.  
He twisted like a helix through the Zodiac.  
He tried to use his bow as oar or paddle;  
But I let out a laugh, a sort of throaty yak,  
For Scorpio bit his arse. He lost the battle;  
He fell to earth at Sioux Falls, South daKodiak.

II. Alone Of An Evening In Northern England  
(Variation Three On A Theme For Variations)

I wander down the lonely road alone.  
The woods are dim. The birds are warbling low;  
The bees are buzzing rather louder, though;  
The leaves are barely by the breezes blown.  
The weeds along the berm are newly mown --  
Or maybe newly grazed. There is a glow,  
A yellow glow above, and green below,  
Now visible, now glimmering, now gone.  

Then, moving round a bend, I view the moon,  
A golden gleam above the village burning.  
Though I am deadly weary, I dragoon  
My energy,-like journey near adjourning.  
The village inn lies nigh beyond the dune;  
A mug of lager there will end my yearning.

III. In The Catarrhine House

Ed, the young attendant, rose at dawn.  
To clear his head he lit a cigarette.  
He had to check the rhesus cages, yet  
He tarried at his cot to stretch and yawn.  
Like any other creature, he is drawn  
To laziness and dozing. His gillette  
He set aside -- that chore could surely get  
Delayed until the night had really gone.  

At last he staggered out and closed his door;  
The corridor resounded to his tread.  
His caged charges started then to roar  
Or screech or snicker, shaking hands and head  
To show their hunger.  
Neither rhesus nor  
The other catarrhines e'er dreaded Ed.

In each case, specify the category or categories of consonant sounds that have been avoided. Answers are in Answers and Solutions.