

A NEW LETTER-UNIT RETEP SONNET

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I prefer nonsense, it's the maniac in me. Let us try an end-to-end PD sonnet, shall we? . . .

A word to those who feel dissatisfaction with so much nonsense. To write a PD that shall scan, agree in length and rhyme with a given example is so difficult that to add the further condition of continuity of sense renders the task hopeless. The writer's choice appears to lie between free verse with sense continuity, and rhymed nonsense. However, examples may prove me wrong.

~ J. A. Lindon, "A Wry Look at Palindromic Verse," *Word Ways*, Nov. 1972

In a companion article elsewhere in this issue dealing with word-unit RETEP sonnets, the sonnet verse form is reviewed and the term "RETEP" is explained. As is also noted in the other article, there are probably eight major forms of RETEP verse, namely, the letter-unit and word-unit expressions of AABB- and ABAB-rhymed RETEP quatrains and their multiples, and the letter-unit and word-unit expressions of RETEP limericks and RETEP sonnets. Examples of all of these RETEP verse forms have now been published, but not in anything like equal numbers; for instance, only one specimen of a **letter-unit RETEP sonnet** has ever been published, and that one had its debut forty-five years ago. In the course of preparing the other article, it occurred to me that it might not be too soon for someone to try to produce a *second* example of a letter-unit RETEP sonnet, and this article reports the result of my attempt to do so.

Lindon's Lasting Legacy

The first letter-unit RETEP sonnet ever seen was featured in noted palindrome pioneer and innovator J. A. Lindon's article "A Wry Look at Palindromic Verse" in the November 1972 issue of *Word Ways* (5:220). Also included in this article were several other long palindromic poems, including a three-quatrain ABAB-rhymed RETEP poem. At a time when the only other published RETEP verses were single quatrains, this poem and Lindon's RETEP sonnet considerably advanced the state of the art of RETEP verse composition. So far as I know, this article was his last published writing on the subject of palindromes, and one may speculate that this circumstance had something to do with the ambitiousness of those two RETEP verse compositions, i.e., that Lindon may have written that last palindrome article in part to be sure of leaving his mark on the field. Whether or not such was the case, it is a matter of record that no lengthier RETEP verse of any kind was published until 2004, and that no other letter-unit RETEP sonnet has ever been published until now.

Displayed at left below is Lindon's freewheeling, stream-of-consciousness 1972 letter-unit RETEP sonnet, "Dames Pale Lapse Mad," just as it appeared in his *Word Ways* article, except for two small alterations—concessions to modern sensibilities—which do no violence to his verse. On the right is my own somewhat more buttoned-down looking sonnet, the newly composed "No Llamas Were Sullied..."

Dames Pale Lapse Mad

An era's mood, a dud, a doom's arena
 Anita vacates lot, sips anon Asti
 Pug, *I dig* — no song, nor a sonatina
 Anon a gulp — an Italian, he wolfs *pasti*

Pug, Iris raps no door, but nabs a llama,
 An "Omo" pot (not new), a vat to fit on
 No, 'tis, O Ted — ah, sadness! — impure Kama
 A maker-up, Miss. End? A shade to sit on

"Not if," Ottava went on to Pomona
 (A mall, as Bantu brood on spars I rig up)
 "It saps flow, eh?" Nail a tin — a plug, Anona!
 Anita — no sarong, no song — I dig up!

It's Anona's pistol, set a cavatina —
 An era's mood, a dud, a doom's arena!

~ J. A. L., Word Ways, Nov. 1972

No Llamas Were Sullied...

"All in Avon, Amal, lade illusion—
 All!" I rap, as Ra sees smug disorder;
 "Rot! Can a *Tongan* abide reclusion?
 Cite capoc-toner as a rewarder!"

"Rot' carted *no* 'ladies reptilian'—
 Cite *O Pot! A Monofil Aroma!*"
 "Mola,' pal, *gnus* sung? Ah, Castilian!
 Nail it, Sacha—*gnus* sung 'La Paloma'—
 Moral, if onomatopoetic!"
 "Nail it, Perseid Al, on detractor
 Red—raw eras are *not* 'copacetic'!"
 "No? Is ulcered Iba, nag, not an *actor*?"
 "Red, Ros, I'd gums see—sarsaparilla?"
 "No..."—I sullied a llama—"No, vanilla."

~ J. P., Word Ways, Nov. 2017

The stylistic differences between these two poems clearly reflect their different authorship; still, there are certain similarities. Note, for instance, that both sonnets lack any semblance of overall thematic unity, and that, in fact, in both sonnets (but somewhat less so in mine) each *line* is more or less a semantic island, thematically isolated from its neighbors. This is a good indication that both authors composed their poems one pair of reversal lines at a time, without reference to the semantic content of any of their sonnets' other reversal line pairs.

Examination of Lindon's sonnet reveals that, by design or accident, all of his rhymes are double (or feminine) rhymes, although he does not appear to have selected his rhyme-word pairs before beginning the composition of his poem. As regards line length, he achieved a remarkable consistency, with thirteen of his sonnet's original lines being eleven syllables long and the fourteenth twelve syllables long. (Strict iambic pentameter would mandate ten syllables in every line, but it seems pedantic to quibble over a consistent one-syllable-per-line variance in a fourteen-line RETEP verse.) In addition, Lindon somehow manages to maintain a mostly iambic meter throughout the poem, further justifying his implication that his sonnet does in fact "scan."

In planning my own sonnet, I decided to emulate Lindon and use only double rhymes. I selected my seven rhyme-word pairs at the outset, which automatically gave me both the first few and the last few syllables of each line of my poem, and left me only the short central segments of each line to fill in. Twelve of my sonnet's lines are ten-syllable lines, and the other two are eleven-syllable lines. (But note that I rely for this count on the OED's division of the words *reptilian* and *Castilian* into four syllables each, and not on Merriam-Webster, which can hear only three syllables in either of those words.) Metrically, my sonnet seems to consist of a mélange of meters, with trochee probably being the predominant one; there is apparently scant scansion in it. I used quotation marks to try to turn the poem into the semblance of a disjointed conversation between a narrator, Ros, and several other persons, with what success the reader may judge.

Such is the current state of the slowly evolving art of letter-unit RETEP sonnet composition.