Period Poetic Forms

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Why look at poems? Well, for a start they are cool. If there is a better way to flatter a lady (or I presume a lord) than writing a poem for them, then I do not know what it is. It has worked for millennia and it is not going to stop. What is more they can be used in praise (psalms for instance) or to mock and entertain. What is more, once you have a poem, if you can find a talented person to write music for you, then you have a song.

Even considering just Europe, there are many types of poetry that were used within the SCA period. This is a brief look at several types giving examples of each. I am not going to seriously cover scansion or rhyme in this piece as that is a whole different subject. Although I will use some examples from the Continent, because most of us do not speak the languages used there I will mainly be using examples drawn from England or from things that I have written. I will admit that, whatever you write or do and however you play with these forms, there are really none in this Kingdom who know enough to correct you, and few elsewhere. Most people, even those acknowledged as poets, will usually only use one or sometimes two of these forms. In the SCA you will mainly see Couplets, Half-line and Shakespearian Sonnets used to the exclusion of many other fine forms, simply because this is what people know and are comfortable with.

Throughout this piece I will use a standard notation to denote the way a poem rhymes. This employs a single letter of the alphabet (‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ etc). Thus if I write AA it means that the first line rhymes with the second. ABAB means that the first line rhymes with the third and the second with the fourth.

Half-line and alliterative stanza

This form developed from the telling of stories and contains the earliest examples of what can be regarded as ‘English’ verse. The great heroic poem *Beowulf* was written using this form. The skalds of the time found that they were easier to remember and had a better reception if they told their stories to a rhythm. This use of a pounding beat also went well with their usual subjects of the sea and of battle. It is appropriate to consider using a bodhram to beat out the rhythm of what you say and to emphasise it. Although we now have a variety of beat structures in poems, this same pounding rhythm is rarely seen, although it continues and an excellent example can be seen in G. K. Chesterton’s poem *Lepanto*, written only last century, which is also about the sea and battle[1].

The Saxon skalds rarely rhymed their stanza but used the repetition of sounds within the lines to tell the story. The first line has two uses of the letter ‘m’ as an initial letter of a word on a beat, the second line used three ‘g’s, the third three ‘m’s and so on. This is called alliteration and emphasises the rhythmic feel of the poem.

For the ‘half line’ part of the poem, each line was also split in two and a pause of a beat is left between the two halves in the recitation. The first half of the line is used to tell the story and the second half provides no new information. It will only be used to expand upon an element of the previous half line, or complete it. In many ways each is an adjectival phrase completing the thought. Let us look at an example of this that is taken from Beowulf (lines 710-6):

‘Ðā cōm of mōre under misthleoþum
Grendel gongan, Godes yrre baer
mynte se māscaða manna cynnes
sumne besyrwan in sele þām hēan.
Wōd under wolcnum tō þaes þe hē wīnreced,

[1] *Lepanto* line 63-69. Read this aloud and you will hear that Chesterton, although he does not use alliteration as much as the originals, almost follows the half-line form in this poem with little new information being presented in the second half of the line. Following my bardic typology, this poem is periodoid, referring to period events and, like Kipling presented as song, can be used very effectively at most feasts.

But a noise is in the mountains, in the mountains, and I know
The voice that shook our palaces—four hundred years ago:
It is he that saith not 'Kismet'; it is he that knows not Fate;
It is Richard, it is Raymond, it is Godfrey at the gate!
It is he whose loss is laughter when he counts the wager worth,
Put down your feet upon him, that our peace be on the earth."
For he heard drums groaning and he heard guns jar,
(Don John of Austria is going to the war.)

goldsele gumena gearwost wisse.'

Translated, with an attempt to keep the alliteration and beat, this becomes:

'From the stretching moors from the misty hollows
Grendel came creeping, accursed of God
a murderous ravager minded to snare
spoil of heroes in high built hall.
Under clouded heavens he held his way
till there rose before him the high roofed house,
wine-hall of warriors gleaming with gold.'

One feature of the half-line form is the use of conventions, mainly in the second half of the line. Thus a ship will be described 'with billowing sail' travelling 'like a flying bird'; a battle happens 'with dripping swords' or a hero can be 'most eager for fame'. From the frequency with which they occur in the poems that we have, the audience seems to have expected these conventional phrases and so anyone trying to write this form of poetry is well advised to get copies of these types of poems and, while writing and using original first halves of the lines, to find appropriate second halves and use them.

It should be noted that, if a person is writing such forms, they should not be used for a romantic theme. They are meant for the themes of war and quest. Both Mitchell and Lewis (see bibliography) note that this form is used for '… the 'heroic' love of man for man'. This would change in the middle ages, when other forms of poetry were used 'to the 'romantic' love of man for woman.' 'Romantic' love rarely figures in this type of poetry.

This is a short half-line I wrote, but I could not resist rhyming it. Notice that I do use the convention of no new information in the second half of the poem. This is called *Fire*.

'Terrible bright, light in the night
Eating any dry, making sparks fly
Swift to ignite, so hard to fight
Blackens the sky, smoke it does fly

Dark clouds like ink, reek and the stink
Leaves ash behind, smoke it does blind
Has just a chink, does not like a drink
Thus water can bind keeps it confined.'

Kyrielles

Many of the early poems, including those written in Latin or other languages followed the forms (and when sung used the tunes) of Church pieces. Gerald of Wales (12-13th century) tells of a love song like this that the parish priest ended up singing in a service as his mind wandered. One of these forms was based on the Kyrie Eleison (Greek for 'Lord Have Mercy') a typical part of many liturgies.

In a Kyrielle the last line of each stanza echoes the liturgical refrain of 'Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison' by remaining constant and being different in some way from the rest of the stanza. Thus we usually see a rhyme scheme of ABAX, CDCX. In a more complex form the rhyme could be interlinked to give ABAX, CBCX, DEDX, FEFX and so on. In the strictest interpretation each line has eight syllables, but this is not essential.

These are the first two stanzas of a Kyriele I wrote called *Hope is Betrayed*, from the refrain line.

'The Frankish Knights come from the West
To Constantine's proud new city.
Of Chivalry we need the best,
Hope is betrayed, the Empire lost.

With Usurp and with Mussulmen,
We hoped forlornly for pity.
These came from in our Ecumen.
Hope is betrayed, the Empire lost.'

Couplets and Heroic Couplets

This is the first type of poem that most people will think of and usually the first that they will attempt to write. It is the easiest possible stanza to construct with a simple structure of one line rhyming with the next. The next two then have the same rhyme and so on. If the author is using quatrains (stanzas of four lines) this will almost always have a rhyme scheme of AABB CCDD or it may go AABB AABB or several other ways. The poet may also make no attempt to form a stanza and may go through the whole narrative just pairing lines together. These are usually called couplet stanzas. In the simplest forms there is no attempt to structure the rhyme scheme beyond this.

When these couplets form a series of lines (or verses) with five beats (or ten syllables, five being stressed and the others soft) each, then these are referred to in English verse as Heroic Couplets. This form of beat, generally, is called iambic pentameter when it occurs in any verse form.

One of the most famous examples of this form of poetry can be seen in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. In this Chaucer writes using an AABBCCDD rhyme scheme and so on for the whole piece. This poem is usually regarded as being the real birth of a truly English poetry. Up until then poetry in England (unless it was very early and in one of the Saxon tongues) was written either in Latin or French. Chaucer was innovatively writing for the wider audience in what we now call Middle English. It is actually easier to understand when spoken that when reading it, but I have placed a translation beside it. It opens thusly:

‘Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heath
Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(so priketh hem nature in hir corages);
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.’

When April with his showers sweet with fruit
The drought of March has pierced unto the root
And bathed each vein with liquor that has power
To generate therein and sire the flower;
When Zephyr also has, with his sweet breath,
Quickened again, in every holt and heath,
The tender shoots and buds, and the young sun
Into the Ram one half his course has run,
And many little birds make melody
That sleep through all the night with open eye
(So Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage)-
Then do folk long to go on pilgrimage,
And palmers to go seeking out strange strands,
To distant shrines well known in sundry lands.
And specially from every shire's end
Of England they to Canterbury wend,
The holy blessed martyr there to seek
Who help ed them when they lay so ill and weal

It should be noted that sometimes the rhyme is a little forced and depends, to an extent on pronunciation. An example of this is the second couplet rhyme of ‘licour’ and ‘flour’ (and the translator changed the word order to avoid this, which they have done in a few places).

Chaucer used other beats as well as the five-footed when working with couplets. In *The Book of the Duchess* he uses tetrameter or four-footed stanza. So you can see that there is no law saying that there is a fixed number of beats to any line.

Couplets were used in many ways. The morality play or liturgical drama, *The Somonyng of Everyman*, usually just referred to as *Everyman*, written in the late fifteenth century still employs the device as a familiar way to bring the story to its listeners. It should be noted that it also mixes this with quatrains and cinquains. At lines 64-71 the Devil says:

‘Almyghty God, I am here at your wyll.
Your commaundement to fulfyll.’

And God replies:

‘Go thou to euery man,
And shewe him, in my name,
A pilgrimage he must on hym take,
Which he in no wyse may escape,

And that he brynge with him a sure rekenynge
Without delay or ony taryenge.'

Many other examples of this form exist. I have to admit that I have never employed this form to write poetry as it seems to me too easy. I really should correct this. It was good enough for Chaucer after all.

Triplets, Tercets or Terza Rima

These are stanzas, or part stanzas, that employ a series of three lines. They are not a very common form in the SCA period. The rhymes may work in any pattern, some examples of rhyme schemes being AAA BBB, AAB CCB, AAB BBC and so on.

This seemingly simple form can be used to produce some elaborate and extended verse structures. An example of this goes in the pattern ABA BCB CDC DED, and so on, that is called a Terza Rima. It is a pattern that was first used by Dante Alighieri and it is suggested that he picked up this lyric form from the troubadours of Provençal who commonly employed triplets. Both Boccaccio and Petrarch also used terza rima in long narrative poems, but it is rare outside Italy until the Romantic poets took it up in England.

Quatrains

Simply put, a quatrain is a stanza or even a whole poem of four lines. This is probably the most common form of verse after couplets. It is often written in ballad metre (seven-footed rhymed couplets) and used in ballads (see *The Wife of Usher's Well* noted below). It was also used to produce other sorts of works that were not meant to be read purely as poetry. For example, Nostradamus' *Prophecies* were written in the quatrain format.

The number of possible rhyme schemes is huge when considered over a long work (a simple one being ABAB) and may include unrhymed lines (ABAD) and even the form called a Rustavelian Quatrain (AAAA, BBBB) used by the 12th century Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli. They come from almost all poetic traditions. One of the masters of the form was the Iranian poet Omar Khayyam who, in the 12th century wrote his Rubaiyat (which translates as quatrain). When it was translated by Fitzgerald there was a superb attempt to preserve the form (AABA) and style:

'The Moving Finger writes: and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.'

Quatrains are, like the couplets that make them up, a basic building block of poetry.

Cinquains & Sestets

You can extend the number of lines as often as you want, making up rhyme schemes that fit around the chosen number. Cinquains are stanzas of five lines and sestets have six.

One famous English user of the cinquain was by the 16th century poet Sir Phillip Sydney. This is his poem *The Bargain,* which is often used in weddings to express the bride's sentiments It uses the rhyme scheme ABABX, CDCDX where X is a refrain line.

'My true love hath my heart, and I have his,
By just exchange one for another given:
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,
There never was a better bargain driven:
My true love hath my heart, and I have his.

His heart in me keeps him and me in one,
My heart in him his thoughts and senses guides:
He loves my heart, for once it was his own,
I cherish his because in me it bides:
My true love hath my heart, and I have his.'

Rhyme Royal

This verse form achieved its name due to its adoption and use by James I of Scotland in The Kingis Quair (The King's Book), in which you can see him presaging Robbie Burns in how he uses his words in developing dialect ('gude' being a good example). This excerpt uses lines 204-210.

> Bewailing in my chamber thus allone,
> Despeired of all joye and remedye,
> For-tirit of my thoght, and wo begone,
> Unto the wyndow gan I walk in hye,
> To se the warld and folk that went forby;
> As for the tyme, though I of mirthis fude
> Myght have no more, to luke it did me gude.

The form was used extensively by Chaucer, and in fact copied from him by the King and many others, in poems varying from single stanzas to some of his longer works including four of the Canterbury Tales. The rhyme scheme is ABABBCC. Sometimes, for dramatic effect, the stanza is broken into a terza rima and two couplets (ABA, BB & CC) or a quatrain and a tercet (ABAB & BCC).

While Rhyme Royals are usually five footed, the lines can be of any length. It is a usual rule in poetry that the shorter the line, the less serious the topic or at least the tone. Here is a short one of mine.

> Skirling piper playing bright.
> Lilting voice resounds through.
> Juggled fire illumes the night.
> Tales are told of derring-do
> With moment our deeds imbue
> Entertainers all set the scene,
> Absent them and a feast is lean.

The Elizabethan poet, Spencer modified the Rhyme Royal (by then going out of fashion) into his own form (the nine-line Spencerian Stanza of ABABBCBCC). Spencer also employed the Ottavo Rima, an Italian form of poem. Italian poets employ their heroic metre (eleven syllables to the line) in it while the English use their more normal iambic pentameter. The stanza of Ottavo Rima consists of a sestet and a couplet and the rhyme scheme runs ABABABCC.

Ballads

As a sung poem (the traditional ballad collected by Child), the ballad stanza often employs a quatrain with lines one and three (unrhymed) having four beats and lines two and four (rhymed) having three. Thus the form goes ABDB. Sometimes the lines will be written together as seven-beat couplets, but when originally written they would have four lines. While not compulsory, these then often have a refrain after each stanza which may be a repeated line that ties them together or they may only employ scat. A good example of these is in Child Ballad 79, usually called the Wife of Usher's Well.

> 'There lived a wife in Ushers Well,
> A wealthy wife was she
> She had three stout and stalwart sons
> And sent them o'er the sea.'

Another, with a different beat scheme, is Child Ballad 12, called *Lord Randal*, which references an event dating from 1232. This song is usually regarded as being referenced in Piers Plowman, written around 1370 (and also by Bob Dylan in 1962).

> "O where ha you been, Lord Randal, my son!
> And where ha you been, my handsome young man!"
> "I ha been at the greenwood; mother, mak my bed soon,
> For I'm wearied wi hunting, and fain wad lie down."

Ballades

Distinguished from the 'ballad' is the 'ballade', although the French form preceded the English. It was originally a French lyric poetic form that was exceedingly common between the 13th and 15th centuries, but

Chaucer also used it. Almost always a ballade will be polemic, a teaching or preaching poem or one asking a question and it should be addressed to someone. Most commonly this was to a Prince or whoever would be most likely to act upon it.

Whoever it is addressed to, we usually find three stanzas (rarely more), with usually seven lines, and then the envoi of four lines. There is flexibility in the rhyme scheme of the three main stanzas (in the example below the Rhyme Royal scheme of ABABBCC is used), but the envoi will almost always be ABAB. This is one I wrote which is a ballade in the French lyric mode (and should be set to music)

'When we are young the world is before us.
Challenges a-plenty as all things are new.
Vitality helps overcome challenges onerous,
As we seek out dragons for us to subdue
Most of us care little for what will ensue
So do not sit down and plot your requiem
But live, and enjoy, and gladly carpe diem

In our middle age we have of life the best
Our strength is by age, but little sapped,
And experience passes as wisdom in jest
At all before us should be we most apt.
And to our challenges most able to adapt.
But we must learn from what we do,
Not be a recluse or experience eschew.

One thing is constant, we all grow older
But by two different ways can we do this
We can sit aside and from life grow colder
Or take our years as a blessed benefice.
Like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis,
With strength aplenty for challenges renewed.
Not wallowing in untimely decrepitude

O reader listen to this moral tale
Take it to your heart and heed it.
Whate'er your age you will not fail,
If you seize on those chances infinite.'

Sonnets

Sonnets, thanks to Shakespeare, are one of the most famous forms of 'old style' poetry to a modern person. That is, they have heard of them, even if they do not know the rules of putting them together. Shakespeare, however, is a latecomer to this form of verse as they were invented in the 13th century by Pier delle Vigne, secretary to Frederick of Sicily. They use fourteen lines. The Italian form uses the rhyme scheme ABBAABBACDECDE and the 'Shakespearian' form is ABABCDCDEFEFGG. As can be seen the Shakespearian sonnet is really just a series of couplets and so very easy to construct. The Italian (often referred to as Petrarchian) is two quatrains ending in a pair of tercets. In the classic form of the Italian mode the quatrains propose a problem and the tercets give the resolution. Even if this is not done they will mark a change in the tone of the stanza.

Poets in other languages used sonnets as well and the rhymes schemes were adapted in these languages[2]. The key of the sonnet is merely the use of fourteen lines. Even within a language there is some variation. Although Dante used the Petrarchian form extensively he sometimes used his own forms and made these changes even within the same work (for example in *The Divine Comedy*).

This is one of my sonnets written in the basic Petrarchian form (although I have used tercets of CDC). Here I have broken it at the ninth line to emphasise the change in tone.

Is then hopeful change so much to be feared and dreaded?
Are the boundaries we once set ourselves, now inviolate?
Do we cleave to the old until our strength does dissipate?
Must we to outdated paradigms be hopelessly adhered?
If this is so, then our best destiny we well may abdicate.
Ignoring those who, from outside, at our course have jeered,
We should set firm new courses, as on our way we've steered,
And boldly set forth, not in weak indecision prevaricate.

So let us then abandon old ideas with little worth or virtue
And chose to take our destiny firmly in our own two hands.
Now let us proceed onward and further wavering eschew
And this brave new vision will, with hope our dreams imbue.
Let us join together Baronies and create for ourselves new lands
Lest all our past works fall on down, then will we truly rue.

Triolets

This is a French verse form that appeared towards the end of the 13th century. Originally they had ten syllables to a line and were a form of serious verse. Later they dropped two syllables and grew lighter. Triolets have eight lines and use repeating lines to gain their effect. They have a form of A(R)B(R)AA(R)A, BA(R)B(R) where A(R) and B(R) are repeated lines. It is a verse form that was not used in English until out of the SCA period, but this should not stop you using it today.

This is an example of a freely translated triolet by Jean Froissart that was written in the late 14th century.

Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine?
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee!
I do not know thee,–nor what deeds are thine:
Love, love, what will though with this heart of mine?
Shall I be mute, or vows with prayers combine?

[2] One of the earliest sonnets that we have, dated to 1284, is in Occitan and uses the scheme ABAB ABAB CDCDCD

Valenz Senher, rei dels Aragones	Valiant Lord, king of the Aragonese
a qi prez es honors tut iorn enansa,	to whom honour grows every day closer,
remembre vus, Senher, del Rei franzes	remember, Lord, the French king
qe vus venc a vezer e laiset Fransa	that has come to find you and has left France
Ab dos sos fillz es ab aqel d'Artes;	With his two sons and that one of Artois;
hanc no fes colp d'espaza ni de lansa	but they have not dealt a blow with sword or lance
e mainz baros menet de lur paes:	and many barons have left their country:
jorn de lur vida said n'auran menbransa.	but a day will come when they will have some to remember.
Nostre Senhier faccia a vus compagna	Our Lord make yourself a company
per qe en ren no vus qal[la] duptar;	in order that you might fear nothing;
tals quida hom qe perda qe gazaingna.	that one who would appear to lose might win.
Seigner es de la terra e de la mar,	Lord of the land and the sea,
per qe lo Rei Engles e sel d'Espangna	as whom the king of England and that of Spain
ne varran mais, si.ls vorres aiudar.	are not worth as much, if you wish to help them.

Ye who are blessed in loving, tell it me:
Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine?
Naught see I permanent or sure in thee!

Rondel or Rondeu

Rondels derive from triolets, emerging in northern France in the late 14th century. Like the triolet they rely on repetition. Originally of fourteen lines they use the rhyme scheme A(R)B(R)BA, ABA(R)B(R), ABBA, A(R)B(R). Nowadays a modern rondel is written in thirteen lines, but that need not concern us here.

Lai and Virelai

A lai (or in English 'Lay') is a lyrical poem designed to be sung that dates from the 12th century in France and reaching a heyday in the 13th and 14th centuries. Most typically, at their height, they have eight syllables on each line with a lot of variation in regarded to the metre (where the stresses lie). There are anywhere between six to sixteen lines in each stanza with an even number of lines. The rhyme scheme will usually be using rhyming couplets (AABBCC etc). Most lays are now regarded as songs rather than poems.

An early (and as far as I can tell exclusively French) variant on the lai uses three sets of five-syllable couplets with two-syllable single lines in the form AAB, CCB, DDB which combine to express a thought or make a brief comment. This illustrates the usage in English.

Nuts and dry fruit
Combined in rice
Pilaf

Baklava drips
Sticky from syrup
Sweet

Sweet and black
Waking the dead
Coffee.

The virelai is a development of the lai in which we usually see four quatrains with a structure of ABBA, ACCA, ACCA, ABBA and in which the last lines of the first and last stanzas are identical. Guillame de Machaut and Guillame Dufay were both exponents of this form. They stopped being sung within period and became just poetic forms. A longer and earlier form of a virelai (contemporaneous with the early version of the lai) might take the rhyme scheme AABAABAABAAB, BBCBBCBBCBBC and so until the last verse is nnAnnAnnAnnA.

Sestinas

A verse form that was invented by an Occitan troubadour called Arnaut Daniel[3] at the end of the 13th century. They do not employ any rhyme at all and rely on a fixed use of six end words used in a specific sequence. This form of poetry has actually given rise to a whole area of mathematics within group theory (combining math and poetry – now that is pure geek)[4]. In many ways the ability to write a sestina is regarded as being the pinnacle of poetical mastery and they have been written well into the modern period.

The words rotate in a fixed fashion: ABCDEF, FAEBDC, CFDABE, ECBFAD, DEACFB and BFDECA. After that there is an envoi of three lines which contains all six end words in the original order of ABCDEF, but the A, C and E occur in the middle of the lines and are followed by the other three in order. Each line has the same length. In period the six terminating words may not rhyme.

Having said all of that, here is one I wrote. It has now been, as far as I am aware, reprinted in every Kingdom of the Knowne Worlde. It is called *When We Fight*. I break the rules a trifle with it as, most strictly, the final words should all be two syllable nouns and we can only make 'pure' have two syllables by changing its pronunciation.

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[3] One of his sestinas and its translation. I presume that the sentiments make more sense in Occitan culture.

Lo ferm voler q'el cor m'intra
no'm pot ies becs escoissendre ni ongla
de lausengier, qui pert per mal dir s'arma
e car non l'aus batr'ab ram ni ab verga
si vals a frau lai o non aurai oncle
jauzirai joi, en vergier o dinz cambra

Qan mi soven de la cambra
on a mon dan sai que nuills hom non intra
anz me son tuich plus que fraire ni oncle
non ai membre no'm fremisca, neis l'ongla
aissi cum fai l'enfas denant la verga
tal paor ai no'l sia trop de l'arma

Del core li fos non de l'arma
e cossentis m'a celat deniz sa cambra
que plus mi nafra'l cor que colps de verga
car lo sieus sers lai on ill es non intra
totz temps serai ab lieis cum carns et ongla
e non creirai chastic d'amic ni d'oncle

Anc la seror de mon oncle
non amei plus ni tant per aqest'arma
c'aitant vezis cum es lo detz de l'ongla
s'a liei plagues volgr'esser de sa cambra
de mi pot far l'amors q'inz el cor m'intra
mieills a son vol c'om fortz de frevol verga

Pois flori la seca verga
Ni d'en Adam mogron nebot ni oncle
tant fin'amors cum cella q'el cor m'intra
non cuig fos anc en cors ni eis en arma
on q'ill estei fors on plaz' o dins cambra
mos cors no' is part de lieis tant cum ten l'ongla

C'aissi s'enpren e s'enongla
mos cors e lei cum l'escorss'en la verga
q'ill m'es de joi tors e palaitz e cambra
e non am tant fraire paren ni oncle
q'en paradis n'aura doble joi m'arma
si ja nuills hom per ben amar lai intra

Arnautz tramet sa chanson d'ongl'e d'oncle
a grat de lieis que de sa verg'a l'arma
son Desirat cuit pretz en cambra intra

The firm desire that enters
my heart no beak can tear out, no nail
of the slanderer, who speaks his dirt and loses his soul.
And since I dare not beat him with branch or rod,
then in some secret place, at least, where I'll have no uncle
I'll have my joy of joy, in a garden or a chamber.

When I am reminded of the chamber
where I know, and this hurts me, no man enters
no, they're all more on guard than brother or uncle
there's no part of my body that does not tremble, even my nail,
as the child shakes before the rod,
I am that afraid I won't be hers enough, with all my soul.

Let me be hers with my body, not my soul,
let her hide me in her chamber,
for it wounds my heart more than blows from a rod
that where she dwells her servant never enters;
I will always be as close to her as flesh and nail,
and never believe the reproaches of brother and uncle.

Not even the sister of my uncle
did I love more, or as much, by my soul,
for as familiar as finger with nail
I would, if it pleased her, be with her chamber.
It can do more as it wills with me, this love that enters
my heart, than a strong man with a tender rod.

Since the flower was brought forth on the dry rod,
and from En Adam descended nephews and uncles,
a love so pure as that which enters
my heart never dwelt in body, nor yet in soul.
Wherever she stands, outside in the town or inside her chamber,
my heart is not further away than the length of a nail.

For my heart takes root in her and grips with its nail,
hold on like bark on the rod,
to me she is joy's tower and palace chamber,
and I do not love brother as much, or father, or uncle;
and there'll be double joy in Paradise for my soul,
if a man is blessed for loving well there and enters.

Arnaut sends his song of the nail and the uncle,
to please her who rules his soul with her rod,
to his Desired, whose glory in every chamber enters.

[4] See Saclolo.

When we fight we come to homage honour
For it is its own reward most pure
Being best is not the only winning
Courtesy and chivalry are what we most adore
We do fight for the honour of our fair consort
The Lord or Lady whom we do most admire

We choose to copy that which we admire
To our victors we give very great honour.
With those who have no honour we do not consort.
Our own ideals we seek to keep so pure,
But if these ideas are what we so adore
Then why is so much emphasis placed on winning?

Each list has only one who can be winning
But many more than this we can admire.
If all are true then all we can adore,
For each list must have enough to do it honour,
Not just alone in skill of fighting pure.
All now can give victory to their consort.

Thus it does fall upon each chosen consort,
Rather than praise only the title winning,
To emphasise the ideals both high and pure
To voice their thought on what they do admire
Ne'er placing mere victory before honour
Showing that 'tis the Dream they do adore.

When thus we have a ideal that we adore
When we choose those with whom to consort
When we place nothing else beyond honour
When we believe chivalry is better than winning
When our heroes truly we can admire
When their deeds in battle are so pure

Then we will know that what we have is pure
Then any chosen leader we can adore
Then we will all fighters so admire
Then we truly will honour our own consort
Then will no-one need to know who's winning
Then our tourneys will be steeped in honour

So hold your honour and your record pure
Forget 'tis winning that you do adore
Salute your consort give them plenty to admire.

Acrostics

Any form of stanza may be made into an acrostic. An acrostic poem follows the rules of whatever form is chosen with an additional rule, the first letters of the poem spell out a word. Their use dates from ancient Greek times and one of the most famous acrostics, although not a poem, is: ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, ο Υιός του Θεού, ο Σωτήρας or Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour and which spells out ΙΧΘΥΣ or the Greek word for fish and thus explains why the fish is regarded as a Christian symbol. They occur throughout the Bible and are often used, in medieval times, to spell out the names of patrons, or other important things, in poems and other writing. They are very important if you are writing a piece of poetry that will be used in a calligraphic work. If you do this, it should be pointed out as an acrostic to the artist doing the piece so the lead letters might be rubricated or otherwise marked out.

Here is one of mine written out when our children were young to amuse them.

Shorter than boots we are,
Handier than sandals we be.

Opposite but similar,
Easing your adversity,
Shoes for your feet are we.

Conclusion

As can be seen, there are many types of poems in use within our period. Modern forms like 'blank' verse and limericks evolved much later, but there was a wide variety of rhyme schemes available. If you are writing a poem, and wish to use a different rhyme scheme to the ones I have noted, do not fret over much. Except for the old form of lei and a few other examples, if it was good enough for Dante and Chaucer to play with the order of the rhyme, you can follow suite.

I hope that I shown you how to go about the process of writing. Now, get yourself a rhyming dictionary (and Wood, my favourite, is available as PDF online) and go and write.

Rejoice as time, the play of words does now permit,
And poetry again does grace your awakening morn.
Though I would be forever labelled hypocrite,
If at this very prospect I said I was forlorn,
For I do revel in this chance your mornings to adorn.
So let us now contend again in verse against each other,
Let not my recent silence your creative juices smother.

Concise definitions

Acrostic: a poem of any form where the initial letters of the lines spell out a word.

Ballad: a poem usually expressed in song with *stanza* of four (or sometimes six) lines.

Ballade: a poem with one or more three *stanza* groups. These will have eight lines. At the end is an *envoi*.

Couplet: a pair of successive lines that rhyme (AA, BB, CC etc)

Envoi: a *stanza*, with half the lines of the preceding *stanzas*, appearing at the end of a ballade or a sestina.

Heroic couplet: couplets done with five stressed beats (iambic *pentameter*)

Hexameter: Each line uses six beats or stressed syllables.

Kyrielle: a poem of any length consisting of *quatrains* rhymed ABAX, CDCX, where X is an identical refrain line.

Lai or Lay: a short poem often intended to be sung. Two forms (see text for all variants).

Ottavo Rima: a *stanza* of eight lines (ABABABCC).

Pentameter: Each line uses five beats or stressed syllables.

Quatrain: a *stanza* of four lines. There are many rhyme schemes.

Rhyme Royal: a *stanza* of seven lines, usually in *pentameter*, rhymed ABABBCC.

Rondel or rondeu: fourteen lines with some repeating, rhymed A(R)B(R)BA, ABA(R)B(R), ABBA, A(R)B(R).

Sestina: a set of six *stanzas* and an *envoi*. The lines do not rhyme but use the same six words on the end of them in a set pattern, ABCDEF, FAEBDC, CFDABE, ECBFAD, DEACFB and BFDECA. The envoi of three liens uses ABCDEF.

Sonnet: a poem of fourteen lines. The two main types are the Italian (or Petrarchian), using ABBAABBACDECDE, and the Shakespearian (or English) using ABABCDCDEFEFGG.

Spencerian Stanza: a single *stanza* of the form ABABBCBCC

Stanza: a group of lines, a poem may have one stanza or several.

Tercet or triplet: three line *stanzas*.

Terza Rima: tercets line stanzas with an interlocked rhyme scheme (ABA, BCB, CDC etc).

Triolet: eight line *stanza* with repeated lines, denoted with (R) using A(R)B(R)AA(R)A, BA(R)B(R).

Viralei: longer form of the *lai*.

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