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solemn lyrics as well as for shorter amatory and longer narrative poems: it is particularly common for *complaints and epyllia (see EPYLLION). Shakespeare used it again in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and other plays. Many 18-line poems of the 16th c. contain three Venus and Adonis stanzas; some of them (many of the 100 sonnet-related poems in Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia*; Sidney's *Old Arcadia* 46, *Certain Sonnets* 19; Lodge's *Scillaes Metamorphoses*) seem to be larger structural imitations of the stanza form itself: two corresponding or analogous stanzas are followed by a third departing from the analogy and concluding the poem succinctly. This AA/B pattern is descended from the **canzone* and *canso*. The Shakespearean sonnet clearly resembles such poems in that it ends with a couplet having the same closural function. The Venus and Adonis stanza has been one of the most popular and superbly handled forms in Eng. and Am. poetry up to our time (seven poems by William Wordsworth; John Wain, "Time Was"; Theodore Roethke, "Four for John Davies"; Thom Gunn, "Mirror for Poets"; Robert Lowell, "April Birthday at Sea").

E. HAÜBLEIN; T.V.F. BROGAN

VERISIMILITUDE. *See* MIMESIS.

VERS. (1) In Occitan, a term used by the early *troubadours to designate any song, incl. the love song, later called **canso* or *chanso*. The term derives from med. Lat. *versus*. Distinctions between canso and *vers* were discussed by some troubadours ca. 1200, when it was becoming an outmoded term. During the 13th c., it was revived to denote songs on moral, political, or satirical subjects (see SIRVENTES) rather than amatory ones. The vers is apt to have short and uncomplicated stanzas. (2) In mod. Fr., the principal term for both the discrete line of verse and verse taken generically, as a form or mode of expression.

■ Jeanroy, v. 2; J. Chailley, "Les Premiers Troubadours et le versus de l'école d'Aquitaine," *Romania* 76 (1955); J. H. Marshall, "Le Vers au XIIe siècle: Genre poétique?" *Revue de langue et littérature d'Oc* 12–13 (1965); Chambers; E. Köhler, "'Vers' und Kanzone," *GRLMA* 2.1.3 (1987); and "Zum Verhaltnis von vers und canso bei den Trobadors," *Etudes de philologie romane et d'histoire litteraire offerts a Jules Horrent,* ed. J. M. D'Heur et al. (1980).

F. M. CHAMBERS; J. H. MARSHALL; C. SCOTT

VERSE AND PROSE

I. Definitions and Background
II. History of Verse and Prose
III. Collaborations between Verse and Prose
IV. Transformations by Paraphrase or Translation
V. Free Verse and Prose Poetry
VI. Conclusions

I. Definitions and Background. The term *verse* derives from the Lat. *versus*, which originally denotes "a turning" of a plough at the end of a furrow or the furrow itself. By analogy, the word means "a row" or "a line of writing," esp. a line a poet composes in making a poem. Etymologically, *versus* may recall the *boustrophedon or "turning-ox" style of writing we find in some Etruscan and early Roman inscriptions, in which the lines travel, like an ox drawing a plough back and forth on a field, alternately from right to left and left to right. The Gr. equivalent of *versus* is *metron*, "meter" or "measure," which conveys the same suggestions of length and regularity.

The ancients lack a specific noun for *prose*, a circumstance to which we will return below. Their nearest equivalents, the Gr. *logos* and the Lat. *oratio*, carry a wide range of denotations, incl. "word," "language," "speech," "story," "conversation," "oration," "discourse," "argument," "opinion," and "account." To indicate "prose," particularly in terms of its literary practice, Roman writers often attach an adjective to *oratio*. The most common of the resulting phrases is *oratio soluta*, "speech loosened [from meter]," but we also encounter (e.g., Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.5.18) *prosa oratio*, "straightforward speech." *Versus* is related to *vertere*, "to turn," and *prosus* to *provertere*, "to turn forward"; and this morphological connection between *versus* and *prosus* and their sharply contrastive characters—the first word signifying recurrence to a previously established course or pattern, the second indicating continuous movement in one direction—could explain why, in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, *prosa oratio*, in the ultimately contracted form of *prosa*, establishes itself as our noun.

In addition to its primary meaning, the term *verse* serves, esp. in the U.K., as a synonym for "stanza." *Verses* also refer to those numbered divisions of the chapters of the Bible that became standard after the scholar and printer Robert Estienne introduced them into his ed. of the Gr. NT of 1551. Of the secondary meanings of *prose*, the most notable may be that which applies to the texts of the *melismas*, or "sequences," of the med. mass. Since the *melismas* required performers to chant complicated musical phrases to a single syllable, young singers esp. had difficulty remembering them. To make the melodies easier to recall, writers started, in the 9th c., to set words to them. Because these texts were initially in prose, they took that name, though *prosae* were gradually elaborated and, by the 11th c., were composed in rhymed accentual verse.

Writers and readers commonly regard verse and prose as distinct from or even opposite to one another. Verse involves *measure—it organizes speech into units of a specific length and rhythmical character—whereas prose flows more freely at the discretion of the writer or speaker employing it. Verse is, as the *OED* puts it, "metrical composition, form, or structure; language or literary work written or spoken in metre; poetry, esp. with reference to metrical form. Opposed to *prose*." Prose is, in contrast, "the ordinary form of written or spoken language, without metrical structure: esp. as a species or division of literature. Opposed to *poetry*, *verse*, *rime*, *or metre*."

In one respect, we exhaust the subject by noting the difference between verse with its rhythmical organization and prose with its rhythmical freedom; yet in

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other respects, many factors complicate the relationship of the two media and blur the boundary between them. Throughout lit. hist., verse writers and prose writers share stylistic concerns and rhetorical strategies, and their methods of composition overlap in fascinating ways. Further, the relative status of verse and of prose shifts over time. Whereas from antiquity through the Ren., verse is preeminently the vehicle for imaginative lit., thereafter prose genres like the novel enjoy increasing prominence. Moreover, the expressive theories of lit. that arise during the romantic period call into question the efficacy of artifice, and many writers come to believe that verse, with its regulated rhythm, is unduly mechanical and that prose, with its freer rhythms, possesses greater organic authenticity. Such convictions contribute, in the 20th c., to the devel. and widespread adoption of *free verse, many of whose modes blend into verse elements of composition formerly associated with prose. And despite what dicts. say, some might argue that the opposition between the media has ceased to obtain and that, as W. C. Williams urges in a letter in 1948 to Horace Gregory, "there's an *identity* between prose and verse, not an antithesis."

II. History of Verse and Prose. As a literary medium, verse develops earlier than prose. Archaeological evidence indicates that music, dance, and *song played critical roles in the lives of our prehistoric ancestors. Our earliest surviving poetic texts, which date from 19th and 18th c. BCE and which appear on clay tablets from Sumer and papyri in Egypt, already employ such devices as syllabic and grammatical *parallelism, *antithesis, and *refrains. By the middle of the first millennium BCE, poets have worked out sophisticated prosodies and have produced verse of the highest order in, to cite three notable instances, China, India, and Greece. Ancient peoples also practice prose, using it to document commercial transactions, to record legal statutes and religious customs, and, as in the Heb. Bible and in Herodotus's *Histories*, to chronicle legends and events that have shaped their world. Yet most of the central early texts—e.g., the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, the Vedic poems, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the *Shih Ching*—are in verse. And this pattern repeats in later communities. Verse writers such as Abolqasem Ferdowsi, Dante and Chaucer are the first to explore and demonstrate the literary resources of their langs.

The mnemonic appeal of verse is the chief reason for its primacy. Because verse is rhythmically organized, we remember it more readily than prose. For much of our hist., literacy is rare and book production laborious, and the survival of texts depends to a great extent on oral transmission. People naturally favor verse as a means of articulating and preserving those stories and experiences that most deeply express their humanity. By the same token, insofar as people share an instinct for rhythm, verse suits public ritual and ceremony, as the folk songs and hymns of many cultures testify. The repetitive harmonies of verse give the body in general, and the ear in particular, a purchase on meaning and significance. So, too, when a lang. is young or in a state of transition, metrical constraints help writers focus its grammar and explore its idioms and vocabulary, with the result that poets and their verse forms exercise a permanent influence on subsequent linguistic evolution. Mod. Eng., for example, would not have developed quite in the way it has, nor would we speak and think in quite the ways we do, if the iambic pentameter and William Shakespeare had never existed.

When literary prose does arise, its writers often begin by imitating verse, as can be seen in the Eur. trad. When in the 5th c. BCE, Gorgias establishes oratory as an independent art, his effort involves nothing less than importing into prose devices suggestive of verse, incl., according to Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History* 12.53.2-5), *isocolon (clauses of similar length), *parison* (balanced clauses) and *homoeoteuleton (flectional rhyme). More specifically, Gorgias's revolutionary periodic style (*lexis periodos*) aims to make, as Demetrius remarks (*On Style* 12), "the periods succeed one another with no less regularity than the hexameters in the poetry of Homer" (trans. Loeb Library ed.). Similarly, when Gorgias's student Isocrates starts systematically to cultivate prose rhythm, his motive is to attract to prose the attention people devote to verse. As Cicero later reports (*Orator* 174), "When [Isocrates] observed that people listened to orators with solemn attention, but to poets with pleasure, he is said to have sought for rhythms to use in prose as well" (trans. Loeb Library ed.). From this follows the preoccupation with *prose rhythm that we encounter among writers on rhet. from Aristotle forward (see RHETORIC AND POETRY). Indeed, this preoccupation is one reason that Roman prose writers, in speaking of their medium, characterize it not simply as *oratio* but by an adjective like *solutus*, *prosus*, *numerosus* ("rhythmical, melodius"), or *compositus* ("orderly, well-knit") to suggest its degree of rhythmical arrangement.

In the Middle Ages, the rhythmical basis of Eur. speech changes. The perception of syllabic length declines, and its place is supplied, both in Lat. and the emerging vernaculars, by syllabic accent. Yet the practice of prose rhythm persists, even to the extent that as the use of rhyme increases in med. Lat. verse, so it also increases in med. Lat. prose. (Trads. of rhymed prose also appear in Chinese lit. of the Han period and in cl. Ar. lit.) More to the point, verse remains the primary art, as is illustrated by Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, the earliest sustained study of poetics directed toward a mod. Eur. lang. In the first paragraph of the second book of this treatise, Dante proposes to demonstrate that It. is as "equally fit for use [for literature] in prose (*prosaice*) and in verse (*metrice*)" and then explains why he will treat verse first: "Because prose writers rather get this language from poets, and because poetry seems to remain a pattern to prose writers, and not the converse, which things appear to confer a certain supremacy, let us first disentangle this language as to its use in meter (*metricum*)" (trans. A.G.F. Howell, *Medieval Literary Criticism*, 1974). Further,

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just as most of the great imaginative writers of cl. times employ verse, it is the main instrument of expression for such med. and Ren. authors as Dante, Petrarch, François Villon, Ludovico Ariosto, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and Jean Racine.

During the Ren., however, the relation between verse and prose begins to alter. One factor in this process is Johannes Gutenburg's devel. in the 1450s of the printing press. This facilitates the production and distribution of books and makes memory less essential to textual preservation and transmission. Another factor is the entrance of Aristotle's long-lost *Poetics* into wide circulation in the 16th c. In the wake of this event, the study of poetry focuses increasingly on the nature and theory of the art per se and draws away from its historical associations with rhet. In the rhetorical trad., verse is the essence of poetry, in that verse is what distinguishes poetry from that other art of persuasive speech, oratory. Aristotle himself reflects this view when, in his *Rhetoric* (3.8.3), he identifies prose oratory with *rhythm and poetry with *meter: "Prose (*logon*) must be rhythmical (*rhythmon*), but not metrical (*metron*), otherwise it will be a poem (*poiēma*)" (trans. Loeb Library ed.). However, in his *Poetics*, which considers poetry in comparison not to oratory but to all forms of discourse, Aristotle rejects this identification, arguing instead (*Poetics* 1447b9–12; 1451b1–12) that a poem is first and foremost an imitation (*mimesis*) of human action embodied in a story or plot (*mythos*). Aristotle acknowledges that people customarily identify poets with their meter (*metron*) and treat both Homer and Empedocles as epic poets because they both write in dactylic hexameter; but he insists that only Homer imitates and deserves the name of poet (*poiētēs*), whereas Empedocles should be termed a physics writer (*physiologos*). And this mimesis-centered (or substance-not-style-centered) analysis of poetry gives rise to the view, which will strengthen over time, that verse embellishes rather than defines poetry and that poetry can be written just as well without verse as with it. As Philip Sidney puts it in his *Defence of Poesy* (1595), "Poesie therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *Mimesis* . . . verse being but an ornament and no cause to Poetry, sith there have been many most excellent Poets that never versified [Sidney alludes here to ancient authors of prose romances like Xenophon and Heliodorus], and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of Poets."

No less significant is the rise of the mod. physical sciences. These give the mod. world an intellectual triumph comparable to that achieved by the ancients in the arts; and insofar as science is associated with prose—with, as Thomas Sprat puts in his *History of the Royal Society* (1667), "a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can"—prose comes to be seen as more reliable and accurate than verse, which is increasingly connected with *fancy, sentiment, and caprice.

In addition, in the 18th and 19th cs., the prose novel rises to challenge and dislodge verse as the principal vehicle for imaginative writing. The very novelty of the novel attracts gifted authors like Gustave Flaubert, who writes to Louise Colet in 1852, "Prose was born yesterday. . . . Verse is the form par excellence of ancient lits. All possible prosodic variations have been discovered; but that is far from being the case with prose." So fresh and impressive are the achievements of 19th-c. novelists like Jane Austen, Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, Ivan Turgenev, Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, George Eliot, and Henry James that, early in the 20th c., we find Ford Madox Ford repeatedly instructing younger authors like Ezra Pound that, as Ford puts it in *Thus to Revisit*, "Verse must be at least as well written as prose if it is to be poetry." Though Ford's position makes perfect sense in light of the literary conditions of his day, his dictum also reflects that prose has taken over verse's traditional status as the leading form for imaginative lit.

Finally, *romanticism, with its emphasis on spontaneity and naturalness, undermines the traditional idea that prosodic rules assist the poet and sets in its place the belief that the structures of verse hinder self-expression. More specifically, meter becomes associated with mechanical sterility and freer rhythm with organic richness. Martin Tupper terms his *Proverbial Philosophy* (first series, 1837), an early popular work in what we might now call free verse, "Rhythmics"; and in his long scriptural line, and in Walt Whitman's subsequent transformation of it, we see beginnings of what George Saintsbury calls, writing of Tupper in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature*, "the revolt of rhythm against metre." Moreover, many late 19th- and early 20th c. poets come to identify metrical composition itself with the dated idioms and stale subjects of Victorian poetry and, as a result, believe that to get rid of those idioms and subjects, they also need to dismantle the structures of verse. And the second and third decades of the 20th c. witness an explosion of poetic styles that forgo traditional metrical arrangement. If by the end of the 18th c., the prose novel has supplanted the verse epic—and if by the end of the 19th, drama has gone over to prose—by the end of the 20th, the *lyric has largely abandoned verse as historically understood. Whereas an ancient critic like Quintilian worries (9.4.53–57) that students of oratory may, in their concern for rhythm, turn prose into quasi-verse, mod. readers sometimes worry that poets are too little attentive to rhythmical arrangement and that the ascendance of prose has reduced verse to, in Edmund Wilson's famous phrase, "a dying technique."

III. Collaborations between Verse and Prose. Though often distinguished from one another, verse and prose collaborate in several literary genres. Chief among these is the *prosimetrum, an extended work of prose into which, at more or less regular intervals, the author inserts poems or passages of verse. First coined to designate those mixed-mode Eur. med. works, of which Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and Dante's *Vita nuova* are the masterpieces, the term has since been

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expanded to include texts that, from other times and cultures, also feature prose with verse inserts. Within this enlarged category fall such ancient works as the Upanishads and Petronius's *Satyricon*; such med. works as the popular texts from the T'ang dynasty in China that dramatize and illustrate Buddhist teachings (*pien-wen*), Sadi's *Rosegarden* from Persia, and the Fr. folk tale *Aucassin et Nicollette* (which its anonymous author calls a *chantefable*, a "song-story"); and such Ren. and mod. works as François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, the *Arcadias* of Jacopo Sannazaro and Sidney, the *haibun (prose-and-haiku style) writings of Bashō, H. D. Thoreau's *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,* Lewis Carroll's "Alice" books, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Vladimir Nabokov's *The Gift*.

It is difficult to generalize about prosimetra since they run the gamut from the somber moralizing treatises of Boethius and Sadi to the racy Menippean satires of Petronius and Rabelais to the contemplative travelogues of Bashō and Thoreau. Also, while in some instances (e.g., Sadi and Dante) the poetic inserts are entirely by the author of the overarching prose text, in others (e.g., Bashō and Thoreau) authors introduce not only their own verse but also verse by friends or by poets of the past. Nevertheless, one pattern recurs throughout the genre: the prose passages tend to be devoted to narrative or argument, whereas the verse is reserved for moments of lyric intensity or summary reflection. This practice appears to confirm the widely held belief that prose is best suited to discursive modes and moods, whereas verse is better adapted to concentrated expressions of thought and feeling. Further, because prosimetra appear in so many times and places and in such a variety of literary trads., it seems reasonable to infer that the genre expresses an almost universal curiosity, among people who relish lang., about the different tonal qualities of verse and prose and about the ways these qualities can be brought into effective contrast or balance.

Other works that mix verse and prose include certain Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, in which the different media signal the social or political status of the dramatis personae. In his "Renaissance in England," J. V. Cunningham observes, "In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* . . . the heads of state speak a dignified blank verse, the wellborn lovers blank verse and couplets; the rude mechanicals speak rudely in prose; and the extra-human characters have their class distinction: they may use lyric measures." The mixed mode also occurs when a prose commentary is attached to a poem. Since this process usually involves two writers working separately—a poet composing the poem first and a scholar composing the commentary afterward—the result is, as a rule, not truly or uniformly prosimetric. However, in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a single author creates both the verse text and prose commentary and does so in such a way that the two run parallel to each other and tell intertwining stories. An analogous situation transpires when a writer plays the dual role of poet and scholiast, as S. T. Coleridge does in his *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, writing both the verses of his poem and the marginal prose glosses on it. A version of the mixed mode also arises, in an oral context, when poets, in public presentations of their work, pass back and forth between reading poems and supplying anecdotal background about their genesis or meaning.

IV. Transformations by Paraphrase or Translation. If prosimetric forms demonstrate that verse and prose can collaborate, paraphrase and trans. suggest that the border between the two media is open and permits free passage between them.

In mod. parlance, paraphrase means restating, at length and for purposes of clarity, a piece of writing that presents some difficulty of interpretation; but from antiquity through the Ren., *paraphrasis* entails the more challenging exercise of turning verse passages and texts into prose and turning prose passages and texts into verse. Paraphrase is part of the curricula of the Roman schools of rhet., as it is in schools in the Middle Ages; and it contributes to literary practice in a number of ways.

Paraphrase in this sense has two basic forms. One involves a writer's taking a source work from another writer and turning it into verse if the source is in prose or prose if it is in verse. The second involves writers' creating their own prototypes in verse or prose and then rewriting them in the other medium. An instance of the first type of paraphrase occurs when Socrates, awaiting execution in prison and wishing to make poetry (*poiesanta poiemata*) before he dies, versifies (*enteinas*) some of Aesop's prose fables (*Aisopou logous*). Anticipating the theme that Aristotle will develop in the *Poetics*, Socrates explains that he believes that writing poetry entails not only versification but composing stories (*poiein mythous*); and because he is not a maker of stories (*mythologikos*), he avails himself of Aesop's (*Phaedo* 60D–61B). Another example of this type of paraphrase is provided by Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale": this presents, in elegant ME *rhyme royal verse, the tale of Patient Griselda, closely tracking in the process Petrarch's Lat. prose version of the story (which, in turn, is an adaptation of the final novella of Giovanni Boccaccio's It. prose *Decameron*). Shakespeare not only adopts plots from prose sources but on occasion metrifies passages from them. A case in point is Enobarbus's description (*Antony and Cleopatra* 2.2.198ff.) of the sensational appearance Cleopatra makes on her barge when she arrives in Cicilia and first meets Antony: Shakespeare skillfully cuts, pastes, and compresses, into iambic pentameter, much of Thomas North's trans. of Plutarch's account of the scene. Many poems of the Christian church are verse paraphrases of biblical prose. This trad. extends from the late-ancient paraphrases into Lat. hexameters of various OT and NT texts down to hymn collections like the Scottish church's *Translations and Paraphrases in Verse of Several Passages of Sacred Scripture* (1781). Well-known instances in Am. lit. of verse-to-prose paraphrases appear in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wonder Book*, some of the stories of which retell, in prose for young readers, verse tales from antiquity, such as Ovid's account of Midas and the golden touch.

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Of those paraphrasers who work from their own prototypes, Virgil is the best known. Having learned to paraphrase during his studies of law and rhet., he writes the *Aeneid* in prose before turning it into meter (Donatus, *Life of Virgil*, 23). (He uses the prose version chiefly to keep in mind the epic's general structure while pursuing his unusual compositional technique of working, as the mood strikes him, on bk. 3 one day, bk. 7 the next, bk. 2 the day after that, and so on.) Ironically, the *Aeneid* becomes upon publication an instant classic, and generations of students are set the exercise of paraphrasing it back into prose; Augustine informs us (*Confessions* 1.17.27) that he won a prize at school for turning into prose (*solutis verbis*) those verses (*versibus)* in bk. 1 in which Juno rages about her inability to exterminate the small band of Aeneus-led Trojans who escaped the sack of their city.

Other paraphrasers working from their own prototypes include Bede, who writes his *Life of Cuthbert* in verse in 716 and then produces an expanded prose version five years later, and Ben Jonson, who tells William Drummond (*Conversations*, 15) that "he wrote all his [verses] first in prose, for so his master Camden [i.e., William Camden, the great scholar and antiquarian who was Jonson's teacher at Westminster School] had learned him." It is also interesting that E. A. Robinson's "Captain Craig," a poem about a down-and-out philosopher manqué, derives from an earlier prose sketch of its subject, while John Updike first creates and examines, in a poem titled "Ex-Basketball Player," a figure who in time will morph, after a brief stop as a character in the short story "Ace in the Hole," into the protagonist of his *Rabbit* novels.

As different as these examples are, they all suggest that verse and prose can be related interchangeably and that subjects and ideas expressed in one medium can sometimes be usefully transferred to the other. Not for nothing do Cleanth Brooks and the New Critics condemn paraphrase as "heresy." Form and content are always, in fine writing, vitally connected and mutually supportive; but effective paraphrase would seem to dispute the New Critical doctrine that they are inseparable (see NEW CRITICISM).

Like paraphrase, trans. sometimes has the effect of placing verse and prose in interchangeable relation rather than setting them in opposition to one another. This is esp. true of trans., in the Ren. and after, in which a poetic text from cl. Gr. or Lat. appears on one page while the facing page features a trans. version in a vernacular lang. (or sometimes in Lat. if the original is Gr.). Often, the trans. versions are in prose, with the result that the parallel texts and media seem equivalent.

An important and related case involves trans. that do not feature the original text but lay out on the page a literal line-by-line trans. of it, with line numbers given in the margin so that the reader can refer back and forth between it and a copy of the original text with an ease that would not be possible were the trans. written out as prose. Corresponding literally and linearly to the original poem but lacking its meter, such trans. produce an impression of free verse several centuries before its time; and in fact Pound begins his largely free-verse epic *The Cantos,* by rendering into Eng. a passage from just such a trans., Andreas Divus's 1538 Lat. trot of the *Odyssey*. As the poet and trans. Robert Wells once observed in conversation, Divus's stripped-down, lineated Lat. prose version of Homer appears to anticipate Pound's technique—evident in his earlier poems and trans., but esp. striking in *The Cantos*—of breaking up traditional verse rhythm and cutting away poetic ornament to drive directly at his subjects. (Pound, in his essay "Translations of Greek: Early Translators of Homer," praises Divus's Lat. for its "constant suggestions of the poetic motion.")

During the second half of the 20th c., trans. at times not only blurs the boundary between verse and prose but obscures the role verse has played in lit. hist. Fewer and fewer translators have the inclination or training to render earlier foreign-lang. poetry into native meter, and free trans. of metrical poems of the past become very common. Unlike earlier nonmetered trans., which usually present themselves simply as aids to study (or as prose), these later trans. often make claims to independent poetic merit. In many respects, these claims are justified. However, collectively such trans. leave some readers—esp. those who experience foreign lang. and lit. mainly or only through trans.—with a version of lit. hist. in which authors like Homer, Virgil, Horace, and Dante cease to write conventional verse and appear instead as practitioners of the looser rhythmical styles of mod. poetry. Such trans. tend, that is, to diminish the sense that verse is a medium with a long trad. distinguishable from other media and trads.

V. Free Verse and Prose Poetry. In addition to prosimetric forms—and in addition to paraphrastic or trans. works that transpose verse to prose or prose to verse—certain types of composition blend or fuse the two media.

Free verse is probably the preeminent form in this category. Because so many kinds of free verse exist, it is impossible to summarize it neatly. But many of its varieties occupy the area that lies, as Ford notes in his defense of *vers libre in *Thus to Revisit*, "between the entrenched lines of Prosaists and Versificators . . . the territory of Neither-Prose-Nor-Verse." In certain esp. impressive free-verse poems, such as Wallace Stevens's gravely cadenced "The Snow Man" and Williams's haunting "Widow's Lament in Springtime," one feels that the poet is exploring rhythms beyond the register of traditional meter, while at the same time retaining—mainly by means of repetitions of phrases and syntactical patterns—a feeling of the structural concentration of verse. In less sensitively organized forms, such as we find in the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg, vers libre appears closer to prose than to verse, though it retains a connection to the latter, thanks to the mod. typographer's configuring its lines on the page in ways that visually suggest metrical or stanzaic arrangement.

If certain sorts of free verse achieve their effects by moving verse in the direction of prose, the mod. *prose poem accomplishes something comparable by moving prose in the direction of verse. The idea of prose poetry

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is ancient. The Elder Seneca describes (*Controversiae* 2.2.8) Ovid's student exercises in declamation as *solutum carmen*, which means "loose song" or "loose poem" but which also echoes the common phrase for prose, *oratio soluta*. (Seneca suggests that Ovid's speeches were, in their stylistic panache, poetry made of prose; and Ovid himself relates, in *Tristia*, 4.10.23–26, that even when, as a young man, he tried to write prose, it came out as verse.) Lucian, too, speaks (*How to Write History* 8) of "prosaic poetry" (*peze poietike*) when he discusses hist. and notes that it has a story-telling affinity to poetry without, however, employing the meters, fictions, and figurative ornaments that poets use. Yet the mod. prose poem, as it emerges in France in the 19th c., has a more specific character and aim than anything the ancients discuss. The mod. prose poem attempts to bring into prose the memorable rhythm and sensitivity of verse. This objective is well articulated by Charles Baudelaire when he writes in the preface to his own *Little Poems in Prose*, "Who among us has not, in his ambitious moments, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, sufficiently subtle and sufficiently abrupt, to adapt to the lyrical movements of the soul, to the waves of reverie, to the tremblings of consciousness?"

Related mod. efforts to create a poetic prose include Amy Lowell's experiments with "polyphonic prose" and some of Gertrude Stein's work. (Wyndham Lewis, in *Time and Western Man*, characterizes Stein's *Three Lives* with a phrase—"prose-song"—very like that which the Elder Seneca applies to Ovid's declamations.) James Joyce also sometimes cultivates a species of prose poetry, as when he begins the Sirens episode in *Ulysses* with a burst of disjointed phrases rich in rhyme and alliteration.

Free verse and prose poetry remind us that, though verse and prose may be distinct, a continuous spectrum of rhythm connects the two. Just as we can slide around a color wheel from red to green by way of shades of orange and yellow and then back to red via shades of blue and violet, so we can pass by degrees from the loosest prose through increasingly organized speech to metrical arrangement and back again to prose. This continuity of rhythm is perhaps most strongly borne home to us when we hear speakers or writers of prose ascend unconsciously, because of strong feeling or pressing circumstances, into highly rhythmical utterance. George Bernard Shaw captures this phenomenon in that early scene in *Pygmalion* when Higgins demands to know why Doolittle has called on him but so bullies the dustman that he cannot get a word of explanation in edgewise until he forcibly asserts, "I'm willing to tell you. I'm wanting to tell you. I'm waiting to tell you." Another instance is supplied by Charles Dickens, who often drifts into blank verse when stirred by thoughts about death or love. Below, for instance, lineated as unrhymed iambic pentameter, is the final paragraph of *David Copperfield*, in which the hero, alone at his writing table late at night, apostrophizes his second wife and speaks of the inspiration she has given him to compose the book he has just finished. The third line breaks awkwardly in the middle of a word—indeed, the enjambment it produces suggests a parody of John Milton's use of that device—but the iambic tread of the passage is unmistakable. (If the passage were an actual poem, we would call its final syllable "a feminine ending.")

> O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face
> be by me when I close my life indeed;
> so may I, when realities are melt-
> ing from me, like the shadows which I now
> dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!

VI. Conclusions. Because verse plays such a diminished role, vis-à-vis prose, in imaginative lit. in recent centuries, we might well concur with Wilson's assessment that it is a dying technique. Since human communities most notably embrace verse in their earlier stages and turn increasingly to prose as their technologies and institutions grow more complex, perhaps it is only natural that verse should have declined and perhaps it is inevitable that it will die. In "The Nature of Verse and Its Consequences for the Mixed Form," Kristin Hanson and Paul Kiparsky, discussing the manner in which prose narrative has replaced verse narrative in Eur. lit., comment generally, "Once the shift has taken place [in a tradition of writing], verse is never restored to the function of narrative within that trad., and may even be eventually eclipsed in all its functions by prose."

Nevertheless, even in a technological age, memory remains crucial to our species. It preserves us from the brutal and brutalizing conception of existence as an irreversible succession of moments with no depth beneath them and no dimension beyond them. Verse is an art of memory. More than any other literary form, we can take it into mind and heart. Lines of verse can return to us unbidden in times of grief to illuminate and make them bearable; and it is often with verse that we celebrate the joys of friendship and love and mark the occasion of a marriage or a birth. It is not just the ear or eye that pauses and turns back at the end of the line. The psyche, too, turns back, recovering and renewing a measure of being larger than itself and, at the same time, moving forward into its own mysterious future.

Finally, though the world seems always and confusingly in flux, human evolution occurs slowly, and we mod. peoples differ little, in our genetic and biochemical constitution, from our ancestors who, in Sumer, Egypt, China, Greece, and India, first started composing verse. Just as they responded to lang. and to its rhythms, symmetries, and surprises, so do we. For this reason alone, verse will likely endure in our culture, alongside of prose and among all the other media of imaginative lit. that serve and honor poetry.

See CHANTE-FABLE, RHYME-PROSE, SCANSION, VERSIFICATION.

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T. Steele

VERSE DRAMA. *See* DRAMATIC POETRY.

VERSE EPISTLE (Gr. *epistole*, Lat. *epistula*). A poem addressed to a friend, lover, or patron, written in familiar style and in *hexameters (cl.) or their mod. equivalents. Two types of verse epistles exist: the one on moral and philosophical subjects, which stems from Horace's *Epistles*, and the other on romantic and sentimental subjects, which stems from Ovid's *Heroides*. Though the verse epistle may be found as early as 146 BCE (L. Mummius Achaicus's letters from Corinth and some of the satires of Lucullus), Horace perfected the form, employing common *diction, personal details, and a *plain style to lend familiarity to his philosophical subjects. His letters to the Lucius Calpurnius Piso and his sons (ca. 10 BCE) on the art of poetry, known since Quintilian as the *Ars poetica*, became a standard genre of the Middle Ages and after. Ovid used the same style for his *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* but developed the sentimental epistle in his *Heroides*, which are fictional letters from the legendary women of antiquity—e.g., Helen, Medea, Dido—to their lovers. Throughout the Middle Ages, the latter seems to have been the more popular type, for it had an influence on the poets of *courtly love and subsequently inspired Samuel Daniel to introduce the form into Eng., e.g., his "Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius." Such also was the source for John Donne's large body of memorable verse epistles ("Sir, more than Kisses, letters mingle souls") and Alexander Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard."

But it was the Horatian epistle that had the greater effect on Ren. and mod. poetry. Petrarch, the first humanist to know Horace, wrote his influential *Epistulae metricae* in Lat. Subsequently, Ludovico Ariosto's *Satires* in **terza rima* employed the form in vernacular It. In all these epistles, Christian sentiment made itself felt. In Spain, Garcilaso de la Vega's "Epístola a Boscán" (1543) in *blank verse and the "Epístola moral a Fabio" in terza rima introduced and perfected the form. Fr. writers esp. cultivated it for its "graceful precision and dignified familiarity"; Nicolas Boileau's 12 epistles in couplets (1668–95) are considered the finest examples. Ben Jonson began the Eng. use of the Horatian form (*The Forest*, 1616) and was followed by others, e.g. Henry Vaughan, John Dryden, and William Congreve. But the finest examples in Eng. are Pope's *Moral Essays* and the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" in *heroic couplets. The romantics did not value the verse epistle, though P. B. Shelley, John Keats, and W. S. Landor on occasion wrote them. Examples in the 20th c. incl. W. H. Auden's *New Year Letter* and Auden and Louis MacNeice's *Letters from Iceland*.

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