Modern Sonneteers,
Hilary Mantel,
and Critical Letters
Modern Sonneteers, Hilary Mantel, and Critical Letters: A Triptych

by Ethan Lewis
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For those no longer with us,
who could (and should) have been with us
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Foreword

“Our talking about poetry,” T. S. Eliot remarked, “is a part of, an extension of our experience of it; and as a good deal of thinking has gone to the making of poetry, so a good deal may well go to the study of it.”¹ W. H. Auden similarly likened literary criticism to enlightening, and enlivening, conversation.² And Robert Frost identified “the figure a poem makes” in our hearts and souls as “the figure for love.”³

This book would appeal to discrete lovers, viz.: those stirred by the sonnet, which itself has been the lyric genre par excellence for conveying amor. Of course contemporary sonneteers—among them Auden, Borges, Cummings, Larkin, and the little known though comparably masterful Frank Stokes—ply the sonnet to romantic ends, but for myriad other purposes as well. In any case, the twentieth century yielded a second Sonnet Golden Age reminiscent of the first at the apex of the English Renaissance. The aforementioned modern artists are explored in the first section of this text.

Judging from her immense popularity, Hilary Mantel is well-loved indeed. Good readers harbor a passion for excellence, and Ms. Mantel delivers, over and again. Best known for her Thomas Cromwell Trilogy, she excels likewise in short fiction. In counterpoint to her historical investigations, writing about her work is, of necessity, new. The six essays herein, five about the trilogy, and a piece on the extraordinary stories in “The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher,” are intended (à la Eliot’s dictum) to augment appreciation and joy.

When beset by crises, particularly those which take unprecedented shapes, we have recourse to what we love as, at least potentially, a well-spring. Frost, who equated the poem with love, also observed that we’ve forms “to go on with”⁴ (—he did not write fall back upon). The “Critical Letters” that conclude this
text—concerning Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Borges, Nabokov, Poetry and Ethics, the Sublime, and other issues and authors—while not about what we are enduring, were predicated during these “Critical Times,” and as such, constitute a testament to going on.

To the formative chorus comprising Eliot, Auden, Frost, I include, in retrospect (his title of a seminal essay), Ezra Pound—having, over and again the page proofs revealed, invoked Pound’s premium on interpretative language “there with purpose…to convey a definite meaning,” vis-à-vis definitively decorative verbal “ornament.” My own words I have chosen with that dictum in mind, to do critical justice to works that meet the criterion, likewise set down by Pound, for “great literature: language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.” —E.L.

Notes


Important Prefatory Materials

That what follows foreworded Millions of Strange Shadows, and mentions the modus operandi of two other books of mine, underscores an essential contentual facet of all my texts.

Nota Bene

…this note on “The Notes”—placed purposefully in near proximity to their primary texts, vis-à-vis compiled en masse at book’s close, which might intimate (mere) afterthoughts. Nor (save for an exception here and there) set in bottom margins, where they might at times appear to wage a page war with the matter above. Always I have plied annotations as a venue for pensées. The blurb for The Shakespeare Project over-generously advertised “mini master-essays on minutiae.” Though accurately in the preface to that text, I credited their corpus as “the third part of a three part book.” And in Reflexive Poetics, I limn their purpose in terms of “verbal off-ramps toward productively harnessing energies”—citing for precedent the practices of Stephen Booth (his edition of Shakespeare’s Sonnets) and F. O. Mathiessen (The Achievement of T. S. Eliot), respectively.

The Notes are intended to constitute an edifying, entertaining supplement—divagations that insertion of which within the main material had plausibly interrupted the flow. Though often enough, to peruse in the process of reading “the above” (really, the before) oughtn’t deter, and much may be garnered from the detours. As Hamlet noted of the recorders, “there is much music in th[ese] little organ[s]” (Ham. III.ii.368).

Note

The first book of Hilary Mantel’s Thomas Cromwell Trilogy, Wolf Hall, punctuates recorded spoken discourse according to American convention—i.e., with speech bracketed by double
quotation marks (and discourse within speech, by single marks). Conversely, novels two and three, Bring Up the Bodies and The Mirror & The Light, respectively, conform to British form, the reverse of American (though by chronologic rights, expositors of the British mode can lay claim to it being reversed in the United States. In any case:) Rather than regularize the formatting, we have decided that retaining the inconsistency would actually prove less intrusive, given readers’ familiarity with the style of respective cited passages. —E. L., M. P.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks prove due to many, and proportionately to the doubling on the adjective in the title of this text’s third section. That is, as the critical nature of these inquiries (interpretation, evaluation, and analysis) was accentuated by the crises during which critique was launched, so the measure of my gratitude is enhanced given the circumstances surrounding assistance. To all the students in my seminars suddenly transferred to an online format—though notably, to Stephanie Reynolds, Isabella Marcolini, Alonso Maena Perez, and Andrew Bonner—my keenest appreciation. Likewise, the quartet of poets—Rosina Neginsky, James Bockmier, James Ottery, and Nathaniel Schmidt—and a pair of spokesfolk for them—Sara Cordell and Lee Gurga—please accept my indebtedness. Robert McGregor and Bryan Cadel not only introduced me to material, but counseled. Much obliged, gentlemen.

Were it not for the following four, the contributions of the aforementioned had no local habitation—herein anyway, for this book could not have been constructed without Amanda Millar, Kara McElwrath, Adam Rummens, and especially Mark Pence (responsible also for a third of the content via his gift of introducing me to Hilary Mantel).

Lastly, loving recognition to Corrine Frisch, who always makes possible whatever I accomplish. –E.L.
Modern Sonneteers
“put[ting] space on”: Cummings’ Innovations on Sonnet Form

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless, of its just honours;¹

So warns Wordsworth, thence proceeding in Petrarchan mode to extol its soothing powers in the hands (and souls) of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, et al. And still today, sonnet-form functions as an instrument for poignant self-expression. Yet in the twentieth century, practitioners answered Pound’s call to “make it new”²—i.e., reshape so as to, in Stephen Spender’s formulation of The Struggle of the Modern, “reflect...in form and idiom” “awareness of an unprecedented modern situation.”³

Most sonnet restructuring has involved rhyme and meter. To cite exemplars, Auden (Sonnets from China, The Quest) and Heaney (Glanmore Sonnets, Clearances) cross-pollinate British and Italian schemae, re-string the pentameter to new rhythms, to accommodate fresh statement within tradition. So too, they extend the custom of composing sonnet sequences, though their subject-matter differs from the standard, prolonged, lovers’ entanglement. Lowell’s unrhymed fourteen-liners filling three Notebooks, on world and family history, constitute radical versions in experimenting with (no) rhyme, (no consistent) meter, and with content. Even so, Lowell can be largely cast within the tradition of re-formers, save for one innovation: by posing his sonnets as monadic blocks, Lowell broaches the spatial researches Cummings undertakes.

In re-rendering the sonnet, Cummings, characteristically, breaks from his contemporaries, focusing on spatial vis-à-vis
conventional prosodic (or even contentual—has anyone in his epoch written better love sonnets?) challenges to convention. His experiments with rhyme appear mainly intended to create larger, or more, semantic units. Larger or more. Cummings’ exemplastic powers toward this end are plied in, principally, three ways. A unit of thought may be lengthened; or the number of thought-units within a prescribed border may be increased; or heretofore merely surrounding space may be incorporated, as in sculpture, or according to the postmodern poetic mode of what Olson named “composition by field.”

Cummings, moreover, intersects these means.

A sonneteer works typically in units of two (couplet), four (quatrain), six (sestet), and eight (octave) lines, respectively. He may occasionally counter two lines with a unit of twelve, as does Shakespeare in Sonnet 65, where

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o’ersways their power,
...
Or who his spoil or beauty can forbid?

—sets up the swift volte-face:

O none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

But as the dozen, viewed as a unit, mainly prepare for the couplet, and are themselves divided into self-contained quatrains, this twelve-block we can count as a secondary structure, among the many sub-variants the Bard devises.

By manipulating rhyme scheme, the poet can pare the sestet into tercets—a signature of Milton’s:

Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean, or high,
Toward which time leads me, and the will of Heav’n;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great task-Master’s eye.  

It will be sensed, though, in this instance, that the format foregrounds not threes, but the more common four and two—with the slant rhymes “so / high,” “even / Heav’n” enforcing a quatrain closure to leave just enough room for the pithy, albeit profound moral—and with the line indentation, plus slant rhyme of “so / eye,” underwriting a couplet impress.

Even when the sestet is definitively split—a fission Auden favors:

And his long suffering flesh, that all the time
Had felt the cravings of the stone
And hoped to be rewarded for her climb,

Took it to be a promise when he spoke
That now at last she would be left alone,
And plunged into the college quad, and broke.

—the parallel bracketing of the cross-connective rhyme may be construed to yoke the duad into unity: here, plausibly miming the collision remarked; or/and in hypostatic tension against the severance “promise[d].” This example points up, further, our preconditioned perception of even units, when reading sonnets. We needn’t Eliot to tell us that Tradition influences.

Notwithstanding exceptions, and certainly subject to elaboration, the primary sonnet-compositional units nevertheless amount to four—which of course the author of is 5 would reject as too repressive.

Let us acknowledge first that Cummings still expertly wields conventions, after all established naturally as forms of thought.

This late piece mines all that the Shakespearean (aka British) structure offers:
faithfully tining at twilight voice
of deathless earth’s innumerable doom:
againing (yes by microscopic yes)
acceptance of irrevocable time

particular pure truth of patience heard
above the everywhereing fact of fear;
and under any silence of each bird
who dares to not forsake a falling year

—now, before quite your whisper’s whisper is
subtracted from my hope’s own hope, receive
(undaunted guest of dark most downwardness
and marvellously self diminutive

whose universe a single leaf may be)
the more than thanks of always merest me (821)⁸

All structurally semantic potentialities are actualized. The first two quatrains demarcate statement that crescendos, yet also instance some repetition with a difference. The quatrain serves a sonnet as the paragraph an essay. But the third four-line series not merely continues, also subtly refines the progress, from description to invocation. The poem thus compasses a volta, or turn, characteristic of Petrarchan structure, usually executed, as here, around the ninth line.⁹ Most well-wrought Shakespearean sonnets harbor a Petrarchan ‘ghost’¹⁰: an octave typically presenting matter and a sestet in some manner responding to the presentation. So above, the third quatrain blends into the couplet to constitute a larger unit—even as the couplet, by virtue of the rhyme and semantic opposition/balance (“universe” to “merest me,” “single leaf” to “merest me”) retains its identity as conclusive utterance.

As conventionally exemplary as the British form discussed, this study in Petrarchan (or Italian) style, published forty years before:
it may not always be so; and I say
that if your lips, which I have loved, should touch
another’s, and your dear strong fingers clutch
his heart, as mine in time not far away;
if on another’s face your sweet hair lay
in such silence as I know, or such
great writhing words as, uttering overmuch
stand helplessly before the spirit at bay;

if this should be, I say if this should be—
you of my heart, send me a little word;
that I may go unto him, and take his hands,
saying, Accept all happiness from me.
Then shall I turn my face, and hear one bird
sing terribly afar in the lost lands. (146)

Cummings has even refrained from a rhyme-change in the
octave’s second half, permitted uninflected idioms. No—when
in Italian mode,... the abba abba schema draws attention to the
subsisting quatrains, each of which fills out a semantic unit; as
the first four lines in the sestet also do. Most well-wrought Pe-
trarchan sonnets harbor a Shakespearean ‘ghost’ (albeit neither
Caesar’s, Banquo’s, nor King Hamlet’s): three quatrains present-
ing matter in an escalating vein with some incremental repeti-
tion, followed by a consummating couplet. Here, that last unit
manifests itself grammatically, as the “Then” retort to three “If”
clauses (albeit that logic complicated by the deictic predicated
on an implicit then in the third quatrain, and referencing time as
well as consequence—all of which contributes to the effect next
remarked). And yet the octave-sestet pattern with pronounced
volta is foregrounded, for the response to “if this should be”
compasses lines 10–14.

Clearly, Cummings could play by the rules, and play well. Yet
by opening his rhyme scheme to admit more space, he could—to
poach from Spender’s Modernist criterion remarked above—
produce effects “unprecedented.” He had not in fact to rupture
the schema to create new spatial modules. “a wind has blown the rain away and blown,” eighteenth of the Sonnets—Unrealities in Tulips & Chimneys (1922 [153]) unwinds in proper British fashion. But the crevice at line 4 protracts the sense of an “autumn too long”—and the lengthy silent blank implicitly insists on a tentative, parenthetical new start (emphasized semantically: “(and what have you to say,...”). The enactive character of line 13:

trees stand:  
the trees stand. The trees,

instances perfectly (—though ironically, in that “the kinetics” of the verse underscores stasis—) the concept of “FIELD COMPOSITION.” First theorized by Charles Olson, the practice proved so central to Olson’s immediate precursors that Williams included the younger’s “Projective Verse” essay in Williams’ Autobiography.11 Such lineation, as Olson enjoins, “ke[eps] the space-tensions of the poem immediate, contemporary to the acting-on-you of the poem”(614, 617).

Yet to liberate the rhyme while retaining at least the semblance of a scheme yields more:

i like my body when it is with your body. It is so quite new a thing.
Muscles better and nerves more.
i like your body. i like what it does,
i like its hows. i like to feel the spine of your body and its bones,and the trembling -firm-smooth ness and which i will again and again and again.
kiss, i like kissing this and that of you.
i like slowly stroking the shocking fuzz of your electric fur,and what-is-it comes over parting flesh….And eyes big love-crumbs,

and possibly i like the thrill of under me you so quite new (218)
The initial quatrain remains open—i.e., resists circumscription by a complete pattern wherein each line partners with another. The Petrarchan possibility (abba) is scuttled by the rhyme of “more” with “your”; but the Shakespearean formula (abab), apparently promised by lines 1–3, is subverted with commencement in line 4 of a c rhyme sound: “does,” later to correlate with “fuzz” (a “shocking” rhyme) in line 10. By that point, however, though the b and d pairs are completed, added e and f sounds (“will,” “you,” ll. 7, 9) that have been introduced before the completion of c have still to be rhymed. Those fulfillments are further postponed until the end (after the erotic “comes”/-“crumbs” couplet, 10–11). Thus, for “i like my body when it is with your” Cummings generates a relatively open-ended schema—abacd-bedfcggef. The continually deferred close turns the sonnet entire into a single thought-unit. Semantic space has been expanded, replicating, linguistically, the “parting flesh” so erotically described—and instancing, in its execution, a phenomenon “I am abnormally fond of” Cummings remarks in his “Foreword” to is 5: “that precision which creates movement” (221).

Yet we can notice, too, the preservation of conventional space, “ghosted” via Cummings’ utilization of traditions lingering in the background. Again from the is 5 “Foreword,” Cummings with characteristic brazenness, declares that “If a poet is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little—somebody who is obsessed by Making” (221). Yet the “Making” is predicated on the made—namely, on quatrains and a couplet.

Where a first quatrain, as we’ve seen, is semantically if not schematically enclosed, a second is imposed by arbitrary punctuation—in Firmage’s corrected edition. Both 100 Selected Poems (Grove, 1954) and A Selection of Poems (Harcourt, Brace, 1965) elide—sensibly enough, yet Cummings’ sense oft contravenes convention—the period between “again” and “kiss.” Yet to (re)instate the mark demarcates the hither boundary of a third
quatrain, bordered, at its close, by the first breach in the sonnet. The second rift segregates two individuated lines, which, by their pronounced similar singularity; and paradoxically, by their jointly compassing a coda, comprise a couplet—that is further foregrounded by these lines’ tetrameter scansion. (Not to mention, by mimesis of ‘positional’ coupling, with the “under me you” line beneath the “i like the thrill,” line and with even “i” and “you” vertically aligned.)

Of course, each of the last lines by itself, islanded by the surrounding space, stands as a semantic unit to be scrutinized singly, as each might not be studied thus otherwise. The potential for individual analysis lay latent, due, variously, to the fairly self-contained syntax in line 13; and to the possible “new configurations” unleashed within line 14 by virtue of the line’s pulling against the syntax. But we are unaccustomed to reading one-line units when engaging a sonnet. Cummings’ space evokes that engagement.

Space is often inserted in sonnets, but to fortify the traditional semantic structures. Consider “Design,” by Robert Frost, a splendid twentieth-century sonneteer, though not an innovator with the genre even in the manner of Auden, Lowell, or Heaney:

Design

I caught a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—  
Assorted characters of death and blight  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches’ broth—  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night”
What but design of darkness to appall?—
If design govern in a thing so small.15

The pronounced break severs octave and sestet—possibly effecting a musical pause like that theorized by Olson, who wrote that “If a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time [as elapsed by the prior phrase]” (618)—possibly, but not yielding this effect principally, or even necessarily. The space leaves room for meditation of indefinite length, prior to the turn from depiction to reflection. Frost designs the piece brilliantly, conventionally prosodically. The limitation to three rhyme sounds underscores the pictured uniformity of whiteness. (As Poirier observes, “appall” activates its literal sense, “to whiten.”16) The schema includes the trenchantly ironic couplet, which refers to scene no more or less than to Frost’s “design govern[ing] a thing so small” as a sonnet.

As we have seen, “i like my body when it is with your” owns prosodic charms—but the open versification and daring blanks are predicated on, in Williams’ words,

the spaces it opens...new
places
    inhabited by hordes

heretofore unrealized17

Even so, metrical shortenings (plausible catalexes in lines 1–2, tetrameter line 3, trimeter lines 7–8, tetrameter closing couplet) may be construed as means to diminish the distance between the current utterance and—whatever follows. Cummings’ meter here reflects the great discovery of his era, the identification of space with time. A piece alluding to both Einstein and Frost epitomizes what spatial orientation toward the sonnet can produce:
Space being (don’t forget to remember) Curved
(and that reminds me who said o yes Frost
Something there is which isn’t fond of walls)

an electromagnetic (now I’ve lost
the) Einstein expanded Newton’s law preserved
continuum (but we read that before)

of Course life being just a Reflex you
know since Everything is Relative or

to sum it All Up god being Dead (not to
mention interred)

LONG LIVE that Upwardlooking
Serene Illustrious and Beatific
Lord of Creation, MAN:

at a least crooking
of Whose compassionate digit, earth’s most terrific

quadruped swoons into billiard Balls!

This work reinforces Graves and Riding’s remarks on “formal impressionism”: “some such poem as Cummings’ [contains] a complicated recipe [Pound might substitute “equation”18] for a[n] experience, as if for a pudding, not merely a description of what the pudding looked like or how it tasted.”19 Once again, the rhyme scheme (abcbadefgfgc) puts off closure till the very end, to effect here the sense of chaos cast in relief against “MAN”’s boasts to manage the mayhem.20 The several units carved out of the fourteen line frame duly impress, but bleed into, and so obfuscate each other. Cummings begins with a tercet, reasonably self-contained in meaning as well as by spacing. But the fourth line discloses a quatrain, notwithstanding the imperfect rhyme scheme. Line 4, however, also initiates a second tercet, and the pairs of three may be linked to make a sestet as the (oddly, though not unprecedentedly) first ‘half’ of the poem.
(In this piece semantic incongruities only enhance spatial configuring because of the intended presentation of disorder, which irrational enjambments, the at times fortuitous capitalizing, and run-on words further foster.)

But then the next two lines, spatially separated as a couplet, round out, “Relative[ly]” speaking, an octave. To close the eight-block on “or” rings entirely appropriate in the context. But the conventional eight-six division becomes more apparent once we recognize the intactness of the following (the “true”) sestet—clearly a summation, starting with an overt volta: “to sum it All Up…”

By field composition, Cummings virtually ejects the disturbing final line into spatial relief. Above, the silence of a line length “scored” after “MAN” dramatically suspends completion of the logical complementarity but semantic contrast of super specie, “Lord of Creation, MAN” and “least crooking of [his] digit.” The association of “crooking” with “Upwardlooking” is accentuated by vertical blank space, i.e. nothing separating the terms. But the punning sense perhaps receives its greatest charge via a tableaux staged within the sestet. The verse from “LONG LIVE” on stands in the shadow of the iconic crucifix (or gibbet) intimated in the “T” of “inTerred.” ‘Better that Christ remain interred,’ the subtext might well read, ‘in favor of the usurping “Beatific” “crook” (“LONG LIVE...MAN”).

The moral dilemma posed by science-worship is expressed through an aesthetic compromise: a reconciliation of experiment—the formal analogue to a potentially poisonous, but also liberating relativism—within tradition—“law,” the origins of which must at present be “expanded” to “preserve[] conTinuum.” Hence in the first spatial tercet, parenthesizing Frost, “who said o yes” many things, such as “writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down.”21 In a piece censuring man’s presumption of powers (of “ultraomnipotence,” as another sonnet puts it
[554]), as well as his behaviorist and relativist credos—one might well recall Frost’s comment on the dangers of aesthetic anarchy. Yet the good (but also considerably cynical) gray poet feared, as much as chaos, limitations on his freedom. Hence, Cummings’ allusion to Frost’s implicit endorsement of removing barriers underscores man’s arrogance. For beneath the whimsical tone of “‘Something there is that doesn’t love a wall, / That wants it down’”22 lies the recognition that the wall is man-made; nature will not brook our legislation.

Even so, I think that Cummings also summons “Mending Wall” (hence, Frost, the poet “who [wrote it] o yes”) in order to make a case for structure. Like Frost, he comprehends that total obeisance to relativism constitutes surrender of all dignity. When anything goes (“of Course life being just a Reflex you / know since Everything is Relative or”), everything goes. We require some rule, some mold into which freedom is poured to constitute significant form, a mold in turn influenced by liberal arrangement of content. Cummings’ sonnets exemplify the mutual fulfillment of freedom and form through their partnership.

To conclude on the tranquil yet magisterial sonnet “you shall above all things be glad and young” (484)—harmonically slant-rhymed and compassing a perfect octave-sestet with a closing couplet; yet with units set unorthodoxly, so that symmetry draws attention to the central couplet, flanked on both sides by four-, then two-line stanzas:

whose any mystery makes every man’s
flesh put space on;and his mind take off time

This invocation—especially to “put space on,” and consequently, as the compressed “on;and” demonstrates, to affect (sometimes “take off”) time—partly “flesh’es out the mystery of Cummings’ spatial innovations in the sonnet. Partly I must accent, as I’d earlier stressed mining all that...structure offers. For
the relation between form and freedom remains a “mystery,” in both senses of poetic art, and of that which transcends complete explanation.

Notes
2. Lyrically espoused in the Chinese History *Canto LIII*, and a call pervading Pound’s criticism; demonstrated by the poet over and again.
5. Helen Vendler’s “Introduction” to her edition of *The Sonnets* serves as a brilliant, comprehensive essay detailing the nuances of sonnet form. Her commentaries on each of the Bard’s 154 augment her initial study. At practically the midpoint of these single, and singular, critiques, Vendler remarks that “in spite of the domination of the series by the patterns 4-4-4-2 or 8-4-2, almost every conceivable restructuring possible within fourteen lines is invented by Shakespeare in the course of the sequence”—e.g., 4-6-4 (S75), 1-11-2 (66), 8-4-1-1 (94), 4-10 (98), 7-7 (111), 12-2 (117). (Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997], 341). Even so, rhyme scheme, and the conventional ideational grids of the British (4-4-4-2) and Italian (8-6) manifest over Shakespeare’s counter-structures; whereas in Cummings, the radical divisions vie with, or even wrest dominance from, the conventional models.
9. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, et al. (1993), goes so far to apply the term “to the gap or break at line 9 of any sonnet type” (1367), though acknowledging the volta in Petrarcan form as most pronounced.

10. And the same can be said, as it were, *in verso* (*vide infra*). With Paul Fussell, so consistently adroit on *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form*, I cannot here concur. Fussell decries “the structural schizophrenia” of a sonnet in either primary mode that would—however wittingly—capitalize on the latent possibilities for maximizing meaning that the other model offers. “What” not doing so “means,” to recontextualize Fussell, “is that the poem fails to exploit its ‘sonnetness’...neglect[ing] open possibilities for attaining density.” (Paul Fussell, “Structural Principles: The Example of the Sonnet.” Chapter 7 of his *Poetic Meter & Poetic Form*, rev ed. [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979], 124, 126, *passim*.)

11. In the treatise, Olson defers to his mentors: “It is time we picked the fruits of the experiments of Cummings, Pound, Williams.... It is now only a matter of the recognition of the conventions of composition by field for us to bring into being an open verse as formal as the closed, with all the traditional advantages” (618). Cummings’ innovations with the sonnet apparently step further, “bringing into being an open verse [into] the closed, with all [the latter’s] traditional advantages.”

12. The cryptogrammatic “bedfc” woven into the rhyme scheme one dare not dismiss out of hand.

13. Cf. Marjorie Perloff’s discussion of such effects in “‘To give a design’: Williams and the visualization of poetry,” Chapter 4 of *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the poetry of the Pound tradition* (Cambridge UP, 1985), 88–118. The kernal comment is found on page 95: “when lineation goes against rather than with the syntax—a phenomenon for the eye rather than the ear—a semantic shift takes place. [T]he linear pull can remove words from their natural habitat in the sentence and create new configurations.”

14. Not that Frost did not on occasion, and quite successfully, ply less conventional forms. Cf. e.g., “Mowing” and “The Oven Bird.” Two of his finest deviations are, still, more rooted in Tradition than most sonnet experiments by his peers. “Once by the Pacific” hearkens back to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 126 (“O thou my lovely boy, who in thy power / Dost hold Time’s fickle glass, his sickly hour”); and “Acquainted with the Night” grafts terza rima upon a British sonnet structure. (Auden does something similarly in “Diaspora,” though detaches more from the British chassis.)