

PATTERNS OF POETRY



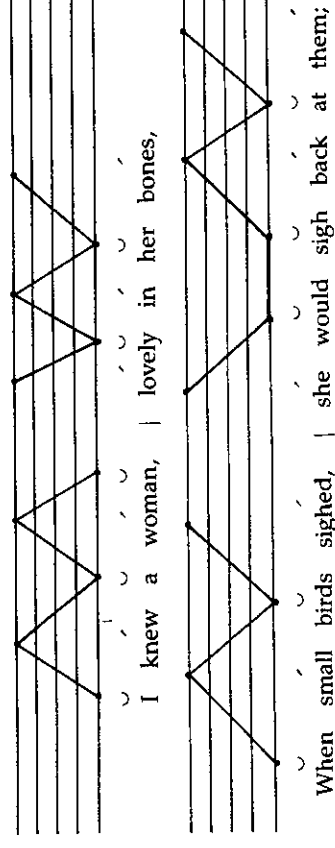
An Encyclopedia of Forms

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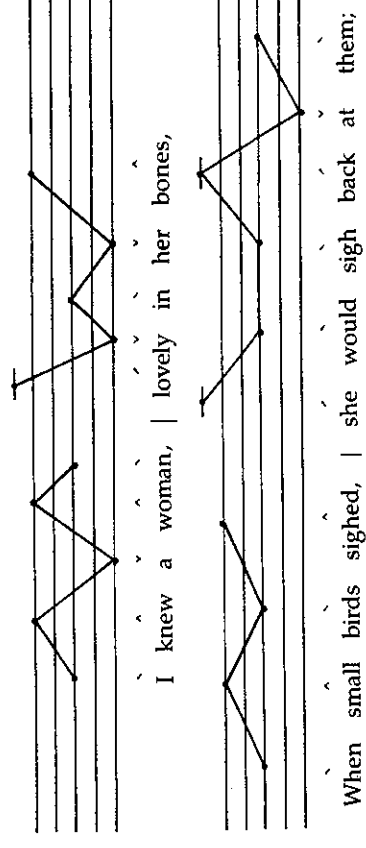
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no longer seems awkward. While its accent is clearly not equal to that on "knew" or "bones," it is greater than the accents on adjacent syllables. This is what determines that a syllable's accent is counted as one of the stresses of a line. With the marks of conventional scansion, there was no way to show this. In the same way we understand the counting of the accent on "them" ending line 2 as a stress, because it is stronger than the only adjacent accent. For another thing, we see that the movement of the lines is not jerky, as the conventional marks, translated to an oscilloscope, would suggest:



but is much more subtle:



We can see the nuances more clearly now and in a way that might encourage young readers of poetry to drop the metronomic, foot-patting voice and read as if poetry were a human activity.

So much for stress; now the caesura. The structural linguist recog-

Appendix B: Some Applications of Certain Devices of Structural Linguistics to Prosody

Using the techniques of traditional scansion, we analyze the rhythms of a line of poetry by identifying and counting the metrical feet and noting imperfect and reversed feet as well as caesuras and the effect of all these on the placement and strength of accents. For instance, the first two lines of Roethke's "I Knew a Woman" might be scanned like this, with feet divided by single vertical lines and the caesura by a double line:

I knew | a wom|an, || lovely in | her bones,
When small | birds sighed, || she would | sigh back | at them;

This indicates only roughly what the ear knows about the movement of these lines. All the accents are shown as equal, though of course they are not equal, and for that matter some of the unaccented syllables are weaker than others. Even the two caesuras are not the same. The limited choice of accent marks forces us to place an embarrassing weight on a preposition—the "in" of the first line—as if the line were being read in a grade-school, sing-song fashion. We're not comfortable putting it there, but we know that "in" accounts for one of the five stresses in the line.

The structural linguist recognizes four degrees of stress: *primary* (^), *secondary* (ˇ), *tertiary* (˘), and *weak* (˙). Using these to indicate the degree of accent on each of the syllables of the two lines, we have:

I knew a woman, | lovely in her bones,
When small birds sighed, | she would sigh back at them;

We can see some things now that we couldn't see before. For one, we understand that the assignment of a stress to "in" is correct, and it

nizes three types of breaks between words—*junctures*—that can serve us in the scanning of a poem. There is fading juncture (↓), rising juncture (↑) and sustained juncture (→). *Fading juncture* is what we have when the voice falls at the ends of most indicative sentences; *rising juncture* is what we have at the ends of most questions; *sustained juncture* occurs when a voice breaks into momentary silence without having risen or fallen perceptibly in pitch previous to the silence. For instance:

→
I know a place I'd like to take you to. ↓ Do you want to go? ↑

Obviously, fading juncture creates little if any expectation, sustained pitch creates a moderate degree, and rising juncture creates a great deal. The silences in a poem are an important part of what makes the poem work; they account in large measure for the tensions that give the poem much of its energy. We need to understand these silences if we're to understand the mechanics of poetry, the kind of silence, for instance, that Brooks and Warren call "the hovering effect"—as in the third line of Yeats's "After Long Silence": "Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade." They use the term in *Understanding Poetry* (1950) to describe what happens between "light" and "hid"; the structural linguist describes it as sustained pitch: "light hid." The application of structural linguistics to this line is discussed by Ronald Sutherland in "Structural Linguistics and English Prosody" (*College English*, October, 1958).

Here are the two lines from Roethke's poem, marked for juncture:

→
I knew a woman, lovely in her bones, ↓
When small birds sighed, ↑ she would sigh back at them; ↓

In this way we not only distinguish between the kinds of silences found in the lines, but we recognize that there are important silences at the ends of the lines. The type of juncture at the end of one line helps us to understand the beginning of the next line, since we tend to accent a syllable following rising juncture more than one following falling juncture. This is only a tendency, and not a rule, but it also helps to explain the stress on "she" in line 2, with the reversed foot. For the prosodist who wants to show as much as can be shown

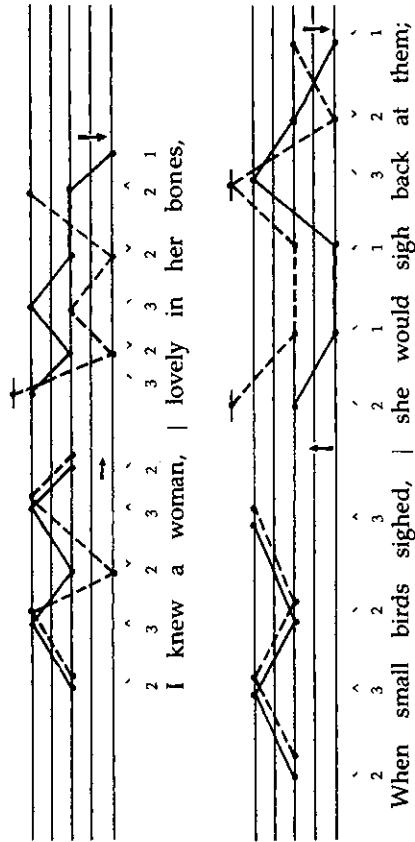
about the movement of a line, the structural linguist also recognizes gradations of pitch. These usually, but not always, vary directly with stress, since our voices generally get higher as we talk louder.

The range of low to high pitch is indicated by the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, in that order. If we now combine the indicators of stress, juncture, and pitch as they are applied to these lines—to my reading of these lines, anyway—we have this:

→
2 3 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 2
I knew a woman, lovely in her bones, ↓

2 3 2 3 2 2 1 1 3 2 1
When small birds sighed, ↑ she would sigh back at them; ↓

The movement of the lines then becomes as complex and subtle to the eye as it is to the ear, and we see what we get with each sound—as Harold Whitehall has said—not so much a note as a chord. Putting it on an oscilloscope again, with a broken line for stress and a solid line for pitch, produces the following result.



Certainly no one would suggest this complex presentation as a substitute for conventional scansion, but for a closer study of a poem's movement, it makes possible a replicable vocal interpretation to a degree hardly approached by the use of standard prosodic signs. Perhaps it is worthwhile to remind ourselves now and then of how much of a poem's voice conventional scansion fails to take into account.