

## SIX-LINE RETEP VERSE

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Rhymed, end-to-end palindromic (RETEP) verse, as I conceive of it, has only one obligatory rule which is not self-explanatory, and that is that to qualify as RETEP, a verse must possess at least two mutually exclusive pairs of rhyming lines. Although arbitrary, this rule is needed to exclude from RETEP status one-rhyme verses, which usually lack the cachet of multirhyme verses.

To date, nine or ten palindromists have submitted specimens of RETEP verse to *Word Ways* since J. A. Lindon and Howard Bergerson pioneered the form in the late sixties, including five who have contributed original palimericks. The most active RETEP-versifier in recent times is doubtless Tim Heath, who within the past year has published two collections of new letter-unit RETEP poems in *Word Ways*. The first one, presented in his article “Return of the Magnificent Seven — as Palimericks” in the August 2018 (51, 3) *Word Ways*, consisted of seven new original palimericks of good quality—a notable accomplishment, considering how few good palimericks have *ever* been published. The second set, contained in his article “A Collection of Rhyming Palindromes” in the February 2019 (52, 1) *Word Ways*, consists of eight original RETEP poems, seven of them six lines long. This is remarkable, as I can recall no previous publication of *any* six-line RETEP verse. These were evidently not constructed according to any fixed formula, as between the seven of them they exhibit no fewer than six different rhyme patterns. (There is also one five-liner in which four of the lines end with the *same* rhyme-sound. Regarding this verse, I see no reason why it *shouldn't* be permissible for a RETEP verse's only two rhyming line pairs to share the same rhyme-sound; note, however, that had this verse possessed just *three* lines ending in the same rhyme-sound, those lines could have comprised at most just one *mutually exclusive* line pair—not two or three—and so it would not have been a RETEP verse.)

The balance of this article will discuss features of two of Tim's six-line RETEP poems which may be of interest to *Word Ways* readers. In addition, there will be a Bonus Features page.

### 1. Behold the Transformer Poem

Because each line (except for the central line, if there is one) of a multiline rhymed palindromic verse is apt to be the reversal or near-reversal of another line elsewhere in the verse, it is often possible to symmetrically shuffle such line pairs about within the verse without disrupting either the verse's rhyme count or its end-to-end palindromicity. I first discussed this somewhat counterintuitive phenomenon in my article “Palindromy's Unseen Virtual Verse” in the August 2005 (38, 3) *Word Ways* and reverted to the topic in my article “Howard Bergerson's Surprise Symphony” in the August 2017 (50, 3) *Word Ways*. By exploiting line-order transposability (when it is available), palindromists can often generate a number of different versions of a RETEP verse with little effort beyond the making of a few minor textual revisions at the ends of lines. What's more, given that lines of RETEP verse are often semantically self-contained, making at most only local sense, we should not be surprised if occasionally one or more of a verse's line-transposed permutations happen to be actually superior—semantically, poetically or in some other

way—to the verse as it was first composed. So never assume that a RETEP verse’s initial line order is necessarily its optimal one; you might have composed a better poem than you thought.

Among Tim’s seven six-line RETEP poems, his “Banker Almighty” looks to be a good candidate to yield interesting line-order transpositions, so let us see what happens when its reversal line pairs are symmetrically repositioned in a “Transformers”-like convolution. Imagine a strained conversation between a supercilious banker and one of his customers, a worried and skeptical ferryman, on the first day of the 1929 stock market collapse. At left below is “Banker Almighty” as it appears in Tim’s article, and on the right is one of its line-order permutations to which I have freely added punctuation, line indentations and italicizations, and deleted a *d*:

### **Banker Almighty**

Dogma I say at sod  
Don’t panic it’s a crash  
Sack rower, it is odd  
Do sit, I rework cash,  
Sarcastic, inapt nod  
Do stay, as I am God.

### **The Banker and the Ferryman, 1929 (1)**

“Dogma,” I say at sod.  
“*Do sit* — I rework cash.”  
*Sarcastic, inapt nod:*  
““Don’t panic”?? It’s a *crash!*...  
*Sack rower?? It is odd!*”  
“O stay, as *I am God*...”

Note that the original poem’s rhyme pattern and end-to-end palindromicity are unaffected by the rearrangement of its lines. Other RETEP line-order variants of similar ilk can be contrived, such as this one to which I have added the words *ay* and *yah*:

### **The Banker and the Ferryman, 1929 (2)**

““Don’t *panic*”?? It’s a *crash!*”  
“Ay, dogma...” I say at sod;  
“*Do sit* — I rework cash.”  
“Sack *rower?? It is...odd!*”  
“O, *stay!*...As I *am God* — “  
“Yah?” (Sarcastic, inapt nod...)

## **2. “Ere Jesus Wept, Adam Sinned”**

Another notable poem in Tim’s collection is “Down and Outcast,” which ends in the piquant line “Ere Jesus wept, Adam sinned.” This seems a strikingly apt and well-put passage to encounter in palindromic writing of *any* kind; but I wonder, might it not be exhibited to even greater effect in a more compact and semantically focused palindromic setting? The following sentence would approximate what I have in mind, were it not flawed by a coined contraction (“senoritas’d”).

### **Dennis, mad at pews’ use, jeremiads at “iron” Essenes’ *senoritas*’d aim:**

**“Ere *Jesus* wept, *Adam* sinned!...”**

The chief difficulty met with here is that any palindromization of this passage will require a suitable word beginning *jere-* in order to work, and if one discounts the nickname *Jere* (which I disfavor on account of its infrequency), there are only a few such words available, none promising; e.g., *Jeremiah*, *jeremiad*, *jeremian*, *Jeremy* (usable with *-nym* words such as *eponym*) and *Jerez*.

## Bonus Features: *Another Six-Line RETEP Poem; Pan Is Panned; and the Gnat Lady Sings*

It occurs to me that a *Word Ways* author who writes an article entitled “Six-Line RETEP Verses” might reasonably be expected to offer, somewhere within it, at least one specimen of a six-line RETEP verse of his *own* composition. If so, here is one which may serve: it is a revision of an existing RETEP quatrain of mine to which a new couplet has been added (the central one, of course) to make it a sextain. (*Nap* in the sixth line is a “chiefly dialectical” variant of “nape.”)

### The Midges of Madison County

Pan slid off a daffodil’s oozy rim—  
“A *sap*,” assailed Elia, “not to *stifle* gnats—dim!”  
(Gobs flew as Dee ran on a dew-adorned log;  
“Golden Rod” *awed* Anona; Reed *saw* “Elf’s Bog”!...)  
Midst angel fits, Otto *nailed* Elia’s “sap”  
As a “miry zoo” slid off a Daffodil’s nap!

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~ J. P.

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Fading voiceover: “Poor Pan! When his fellow immortals put him in charge of “pest control” for the Society of Supernatural Beings’ biennial ‘Midsummer Magic’ jamboree on bucolic Madison County’s moors, the peace-loving pastoral piper thought that that just meant amiably shooing away the occasional feral ferlie or ferret—*not* being expected to exorcise, somehow, seven gazillion blunt-beaked vampire midges manifesting an insatiable appetite for angels’ blood! (‘Gnats,’ indeed!) Now *everyone*—especially SOSB president Otto Nobetter, it appears—blames ‘sap’ *Pan* for the bug-begotten debacle that threatens to jeopardize future angel participation in the pagans’ one...”

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Eris, goddess of discord, smiled smugly as she lifted her bubbling goblet “Strife” in a gay salute to a kindred spirit, Loki, whom she’d *clearly* outpranked this year. Phlegmatic fellow, *he’d* only burgled a bait shop and booby-trapped the Daffodils’ boring ball, whereas *she’d* mobilized *millions* of *midges*! Not since that banner day when she’d cast a golden apple inscribed with the words “For the fairest” amongst the guests at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis had she managed to engineer such a gloriously inflammatory provocation as *this* one. Oh, it was all so deliciously *disputatious*! Elated by her success, Eris suddenly felt like singing, and so she did: “Eris is ire, Eris is ire,” she crooned palindromically to a doubly dour-faced Janus; “Eris’s ire *her* is, sire!”