PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

In the second edition of this handbook, I added a considerable bit of new material; this included some non-Western verse forms influential to poets writing in English; a discussion of what the late W. K. Wimsatt called "verbal mimesis"; and some examples, self-descriptive in various ways—such as sonnets on the sonnet—of verse forms by other poets from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries. This considerably augmented third edition allows the schemes and patterns illustrated self-descriptively additional room to speak for themselves, as it were, through instances of their actual use in poetry. These are collected in the section Patterns in Practice at the end of this volume and will additionally exemplify the ways in which different historical styles of diction and syntax, and changing conceptions of genre, have subtly recast older formal patterns and devices.

I should like to head off any possible misleading characterization of this book as a guide to "formal poetry." The very term itself seems a misnomer: it implies that accentual-syllabic verse is the only
"form," and that the many different kinds of free-verse, of twentieth-century syllabics, of pure accen-
tualism, etc., are formless. This is nonsense. There is a
great difference between coherent writing and inco-
herent or dysfunctional writing in verse of any sort.
And surely poetic "form" is a very deep matter that
covers much more than phonological or typographic
pattern. I have discussed such matters in some detail
elsewhere; but a reader who considers closely the ar-
ray of examples now included will probably be able
to see into some of these depths.

Since the original edition of this manual twenty
years ago, I have noticed that a considerable number
of good younger poets are now writing accentual-
syllabic (rhymed or blank) or syllabic verse with
deep skill, or various modes of free verse that gener-
ate their own conventions and rules with the same
kind of power that measured verse deploys. This is
perhaps because a century-long tradition of great po-
etry written in free verse can supply models, not for
imitation, but—and this is true of all poetic verbal
patterns—for creative revision. And yet the pre-
ponderance of very bad verse is still the same weak *vers
libre* that has all of the inanity of the rhymed greeting-
card jingle that was the analogous default-mode of
badly written verse in the first half of the twentieth
century. Good verse of any sort is nevertheless only
half the story of good poetry, whose essential charac-
ter is what Wallace Stevens called "fictive," and
Robert Frost "ulterior," or "saying one thing and
meaning another," or what we could simply call not
being literal. Having in the past year spent time re-
covering from an injury, I came to realize that "When you see someone with a cane / That person's probably in pain."

These lines are clearly verse, and the proposition they assert is true. But they are not in the least *poetry*, for they are totally literal: there is nothing of fiction in them. Even the one possible trace of the nonliteral that might lurk therein—that *pain* and *cane* appropriately rhyme because feeling the first might lead one to use the second—is totally glossed into triviality by the simple literal truth of the statement. *Rhyme's Reason* is thus subtitled *A Guide to English Verse* and not "—to Poetry." I trust that its readers will understand that verse (or in certain modern instances, prose treated and used as verse) is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for poetry. All the rest is metaphor.

I hope that immediate reminders of the actual poetic use of the patterns and schemes will inform readers' subsequent experience of the whole of poetry in our language.

I have corrected a few minor errors and added to the main body of the text some material on conventions of typographical indentation in verse. In addition I should like to add the following to the "Suggestions for Further Reading" section on page 137–138: Paul Fry's *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (New Haven, 1980); Jennifer Wagner's *Moment's Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century Sonnet* (Madison, N.J., 1996); John Fuller's *The Sonnet* (London, 1972); Stephen Cushman's *Fictions of Form in Modern Poetry* (Princeton, 1993); Richard Brad-

I wish to thank Donald Hall and Alan Ansen for permission to include their splendidly self-regarding sestinas.