If Summary Papers Incline to Prosaic Then Try Dactylic or Even Trochaic

The end of the conference approaches and the inevitable early trickle to the airport turns into a flood. A much-diminished and more than a little distracted audience hears out the summary speaker, more from politeness than in expectation of actually learning anything, still less of being entertained. Sounds familiar? Of course it does.

So, when Donald Patterson, of the University of Pennsylvania, was asked to summarize an International Symposium on Animal Models of Inherited Metabolic Disease,* he decided he would break the pattern—he delivered his summary entirely in verse.

Papers at the meeting ranged from "H-Y antigen and intersexuality in animals," through "Mucopolysaccharidoses," to "Some animal models of lysosomal storage diseases." Weighty prose for distillation into poetry, it has to be admitted. "It's really just verse rather than poetry," suggests Patterson. "I write verse for a hobby, mainly to do with medical things."

Only a few close colleagues knew of Patterson's plans. The organizers of the National Institutes of Health meeting were unaware that their conference would take a lyrical turn. Patterson worked on his presentation before the meeting, using submitted abstracts. "I couldn't have done it all during the meeting," he says, "so I had to try to guess what people might say in their papers. I did put some finishing touches here and there, mainly in the evenings but sometimes during the papers themselves." The result of these labors was more than 20 poems with as crisp a distillation of difficult science as could be wished for (of which, some examples follow).

Patterson's favorite? "I like the one on 'Histocompatibility, disease, and aging,' " he says. "I don't know why; it just seems to go nicely." Alas, the paper's author, Edmond Yunis, of the Sidney Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, had left before summary time came around.

In case conference organizers nationwide should already be planning to invite the Pennsylvania poet to add some style to forthcoming gatherings, Patterson points out that this was his "first—and last—venture into the poetic summary."

Gene Structure, Organization and Expression
—A. W. NIENHUIS

Well, we thought that we finally had figured it out!
We knew what the structure of genes was about.
"It's simply a piece of the old DNA,
Transcribed and translated the usual way;
The way that Jacób and Monód always said.
It's simple," we said, "when it gets through your head."
But there's two kinds of Karyotes—there's Eu- and there's Pro-
And what's true for *E. coli* just isn't so,
When it comes to the genes of a mouse or a man.
Mother Nature, it seems, has used more than one plan.
Dr. Nienhuis informs us it's much more exotic
When dealing with animals Eukaryotic.
Their chromosomes aren't just ribbons of genes,
One coming right after the other, it seems.
Eu-genes are in pieces—they're really quite split.
A Eu-gene's got introns in the middle of it.
And this complication just leads us to more:
RNA now needs cutting and splicing before
It can serve as a template, appropriate to
The making of proteins. That's *one* thing we knew.

Hemoglobinopathies—from Phenotype to Genotype
—W. F. ANDERSON

We'd like to explain what pathology means,
In terms of what's wrong with the structure of genes;
Know if a control or a structural locus
Constitutes the exact pathological focus.
Dr. Anderson's talk has made it quite clear
That the answers to some of these questions are near.
At least with respect to the globins, we know
Why some mutant's erythrocyte levels are low.
With the help of the enzymes that slice DNA,
And cloning techniques, we now have a way
To study the actual sequence of bases;
To know when those purines are not in their places.
In humans who have a resistant anemia
That goes by the general name, thalassemia,
Globin genes can be missing, we don't know where they went—
Perhaps an unequal crossover event
Has caused their deletion—whatever—they're gone.
In others they're present, but never turned on.
The latter are viewed with much more expectation
As keys to the problem of gene regulation.
What's needed are animal models of these
So look, animal hematologists, *please!*

Histocompatibility, Disease and Aging—E. YUNIS

"The crown of life, our play's last act,"
Cicero on old age was opining.
What he didn't know, but now is a fact:
It's then your T-cells are declining,
Too many tick-tocks of the old thymic clock;
It runs down like a watch on the shelf.
Then suppressor T-cells aren't sufficient to block
B-cell clones that arise against self.
This theory's supported, Dr. Yunis explained,
By studies in mice and in man.
The data suggest that the program's ingrained;
It's a genetic kind of a plan.
It seems to depend on your HLA type.
If you have a desire to die late,
And your wish is, in time, to become overripe,
It is better not to B-8.

*The meeting, organized by the Registry of Comparative Pathology of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and the Universities Associated for Research and Education in Pathology, Inc., was held at the National Institutes of Health, 19 and 20 October 1981. Poems reprinted from *Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources News*, **25** (No. 2), 6 (winter 1982).

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