marking out a range of closeness and distance which corresponds to a scale of purely rhetorical strength, of the power to compel notice, to attune and even orchestrate, as it were, the attention of the scanning and listening reader as it moves over the totality of the text, sometimes displaying its inner linguistic workings on its surface, sometimes submerging them, echoing in the memory, or lighting up expectation and hope.

This, if any, is a sophisticated basis for ascribing a musicality to rhyme in major poetry, and, as has been observed in an earlier essay, it can at least be appreciated by critics for whom music itself possesses structure and even dialectic, rather than that baneful British cliché of tunefulness. Indeed, the "tinkling" of the rhyme despised by Emerson, the jingle of Ben Jonson "spoiling senses of their treasure, / Cozening judgment with a measure, / But false weight," resides only in the bad poetry for which, until Milton and in the shorter lyric thereafter, rhyme was a necessary but sadly insufficient condition. Perhaps, too, its tinkle was merely an echo of the brass and cymbals of inept critical praise of its function.


VII

THE METRICAL FRAME

Fifty years ago, I. A. Richards distinguished between two functions of poetic meter. After acknowledging its primary domain of interest for poets from Wordsworth and Coleridge on ("The fact that we appropriately use such words as 'hulling,' 'stirring,' 'solemn,' 'pensive,,' 'gay,' in describing metres is an indication of their power more directly to control emotion.") he turned away from this formulation of the "music" of verse to "more general effects," as he called them. "Through its very appearance of artificiality metre produces in the highest degree the 'frame' effect, isolating the poetic experience from the accidents and irrelevancies of everyday existence." The relation between the music, as it were, and the frame, as it were: the way the second affects us both independently and by the ways in which the first of them is contingent upon it--this is the subject of the study of form that has proved most tantalizing in recent decades.

Aside from their use in Classical and Modern musical theory, the words "meter" and "rhythm" might be conveniently applied along the line of demarcation drawn by Richards so long ago. The word of flow, "rhythm," characterizes the series of actual effects upon our consciousness of a line or passage of verse: it is the road along which we read. The meter, then would apply to whatever it was that might constitute

the framing, the isolating; its presence we infer from our scanning. The distinction is rather useful because so many other sets of opposed linguistic and literary dimensions seem to be comprehended by it: design and particular; norm and instance; spatial, or at least schematic and temporal; singing or speaking and writing; and ultimately, in the matter of the angles of vision of linguistic theory itself, synchronic and diachronic, phenomenal and historical.

These distinctions have come to be disregarded in recent work on prosody not because the terms “meter” and “rhythm” continue to be used interchangeably, but largely because of the primarily synchronic orientation of most linguists who have turned their attention to problems of poetic structure. Whether concerned with the phonemic actualities of the poem as an act of speech, or, more recently, with the idea of a metrical scheme as a set of rules for generating lines of verse (each, be it said, with its unique set of characteristics which might be called rhythmic), most linguistic models of the production or the reading of English verse seem to have propounded a maker or a reader with no memory and no range of reading, a world of poetic language sacred to motherless Muses. Nevertheless, their contributions have been of great use and interest, both in sweeping away useless and inoperative critical apparatus, and in lighting up some dusty corners.

Meaning,” “significance,” “function,” “relevance,” on the one hand, then; on the other, “meter,” “prosody,” “music,” “form.” To connect the terms of the first group with those of the second; to distinguish between the terms in each group and to account for and prevent their frequent confusion; and, finally, to justify the lines along which these distinctions are drawn, have come more and more in recent years to engage the fullest concerns of poetics. The more specifically instrumental roles played by structural linguistics in this engagement were considerable. Many of its basic principles were brought to bear by Richards upon the clichés and mystiques that, accumulating over two centuries of poetic theory, had blurred the boundaries and overlappings of these analytic concepts. In addressing itself to the problem of sound, pattern, and sense, recent inquiry has been particularly successful in clearing away a compost heap of conflicting, often self-inconsistent traditional prosodical theory, increased in the past hundred years by ritually sustained errors and, even more, by an inability to confront what it actually was that contemporary poets were doing. Thomas Hardy was possibly the last major poet to write in a long tradition of English versifying whose founding we might assign to Ben Jonson on the grounds that he confessed to writing all his verses “first in prose.”

And yet one of Hardy’s chief difficulties as a poet resided in his latent uneasiness with a tradition for which he invokes the authority of Wordsworth: “It is supposed that by the act of writing in verse an author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association.” It is possible, that is, to speak of Hardy’s choice of meter in a way that we would be reluctant to do in the case of Hopkins, Eliot, Pound, or Yeats, and, even more, to pass judgment on that choice by designating it an arbitrary one. For it is the poet’s own sense of the function of the verse itself which changes from one literary epoch to another, and recent critical methods which treat poems like objects, like artifacts such as vases or sculptures, or even like organisms with souls, all answer in some measure the requests of modern poets to be treated as just that.

Traditional prosodical analysis, whether carried on for polemical or avowedly speculative reasons, was still a little too much like cataloguing styles in clothing to be able to deal effectively with a body of new poetry with the form of cloth puppets or sea animals whose garments were their bodies or shells themselves. In such a world of organicist, post-symbolist poetry and criticism it was the particular utility of structural linguistics to take us back to taxonomy, to encourage us in the use of biological categories that help us to classify, sort, dissect, and anatomize the natural history of verse. English poetry since Hardy has cried out for such murder, if murder it be. The study of literary history itself may be seen to have profited from it, if only because it revealed the long record of prosodical inquiry itself as a history of ideology and of taste in analytic methods.

The uses of linguistics as a tool have actually extended beyond the
clearing away of traditional confusions, and the resolving of questions like that of quantitative verse in English by undermining the bases of traditional arguments about them. A general program of making more public, of verifying, the private insights of the ear of a sensitive reader, for example, has proved a hopeful one. Particularly in the case of those poets, such as Wyatt, Shakespeare, the Jacobean tragedians, Donne, Yeats, and Frost, whose formal diction is always informed by the syntactic and emphatic stress patterns of colloquial speech, have the suppositions, if not the methods, of modern linguistics been helpful.

By an examination of contemporary poetry in which a purely graphic scheme of line arrangement can operate in open conflict with equally prominent phonemic ones, almost any reader can come to understand how aural and visual entities merge in status when they operate as metrical segments. And here a more general application of linguistic theory to poetics presents itself. For just as the conceptual distinction between the phonetic and the phonemic is crucial if one is to talk about the elements of a particular language, so is a clear distinction between the phonetic and the metric basic to a consideration of the role of sound in the game of poetic sense. In short, it is as a heuristic model that phonemics might have been most useful to poetic theory, rather than merely as an implement for the treatment of a poem as a spoken utterance.

There is good reason, I think, in the light of recent work and old warnings both, for drawing this distinction. In the first place, although poems are neither purely spoken utterances nor inscriptions, their peculiar status, straddling the two, seems to lose itself under certain kinds of analysis that start out with putting the poem into phonemic transcription. The poem becomes the phonetic parts of its texture, really, while metrical conventions, the whole substance of traditional prosodic theory, are ignored or treated at best as an unexamined donnée, a given condition rather like the fact that the poem is in English, but in no way as binding on the interpretation of discrete signals. It may be that the influence of recent statistical approaches has generated the view that signals with a low probability of occurrence must necessarily have an increased importance. Within the framework of information theory, it is certainly true that the more surprising event is the more significant one, for the only kind of significance is defined as a function of the reciprocal of the probability of occurrence. But to equate "information" with "significance" in a non-rigorous sense may not be possible. In many cases, something like the opposite would appear to be true. The extremely high redundancy of capital letters at the beginning of lines of printed verse, for example, renders their informative value, in the above sense, trivial. But their actual role is of considerable importance, being one of definition, or of labeling the utterance in question as a poem. Its significance for the statistical analyst lies in the fact that it sets up prior expectation that will itself affect the relationship between the "surprise value" (for the reader) and the probability of occurrence (for the post-mortem analyst). Information theory must necessarily take the highly probable event more or less for granted. But in the analysis of a poem as a work of literature, these conventional events are of major importance.2

It has been rather to the structure of self-contained poetic texts, than to the metrical conventions governing many such texts, that linguistic analysis has been devoted. But the literary critic, or even the well-informed reader, tends to think in terms of both what he is reading and how what he is reading resembles other things that he has read, of the poem as a thing in itself, and as an example of a literary form. The reader of any subtlety at all will often talk about a poem as if he felt that there were two sequences of events going on at once. The literary critic (who may have helped train the reader to talk in this way) will distinguish "meter" from "rhythm," assumed norm from actual instance, and perhaps resort to Gerard Manley Hopkins's rich, but misleading notion of "counterpoint" to describe their relation. The greatest temptation to employ this notion arises when one occurrence

2. When this essay was originally conceived, information theory appeared to be of some interest for formalist poetics; see the statements by Roné Wellek and myself in Style and Language, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 396-419. The relation between critical and linguistic approaches to problems of form has been rather complex, even during the past two decades. For a sophisticated and most useful account of this with an excellent selected bibliography, see Seymour Chatman and Samuel R. Levin, "Linguistics and Literature," in Current Trends in Linguistics, 10 (The Hague, 1973), 289-94.
in a poem seems to be part of two different schemes simultaneously. We have already considered the nature of enjambment in a previous chapter. It will serve here again as an excellent case in point.

In the most general sense, an enjambment is any lack of alignment between syntax and line structure, but it is usually considered in the cases where a normal correspondence between the two is violated. Textural analysis treats enjambments not only in terms of their effects upon the poem’s “flow of movement,” but for their direct semantic operation. The most obvious cases of this occur when a compound is broken up between two lines, suddenly revealing, in a startling way, that the whole, rather than the separable part, is to be employed:

And one can have a savory or a sweet Potato after dinner, if he chooses.

Another example might be that of the covert allusion for which only a line division seems to provide optimum syntactic ambiguity:

Under a soppy tree
Mopes Daphnis, joined by all
The brown, surrounding landscape:

Even in Arcady
Ego must needs spoil
Such a beautiful friendship!

Here the rhymes and the sense (depending on a modern colloquial use of “ego” or “amour propre”) as well as the line structure force a separation of the two words which, when juxtaposed, recall the famous *memento mori* in the paintings of Guercino and Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, with the exception here that vanity, rather than death as the speaker, is made the ubiquitous subject. T. S. Eliot’s notorious

Princess Volupine extends
A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand
To climb the waterstair: Lights, lights,
She entertains Sir Ferdinand

Klein. Who clipped the lion’s wings
And she’d his rump and pared his paws?

makes the name straddle two stanzas as well as two lines, but the abruptly turned-to question nevertheless claims, by its alliterating “clipped,” a line kinship with what is nastily being treated as the offending patronymic particle.

It is to a case which may have actually influenced Eliot in this poem which I should now like to turn. Ben Jonson’s ode *To the Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison* is, from the point of view of metrical conventions, not only an extremely programmatic poem, but a didactic one as well. It is the second purport but first actually imitative “Pindaric” ode in English, written in couplets of varying line length to suggest Pindaric irregularity, pedantically labeling each triad strophe, antistrophe, and epode as “The Turne,” “The Counter-Turne,” and “The Stand,” respectively. The poem mourns and moralizes upon, in an appropriately public way, the separation of a pair of close friends brought about by the death of the younger of them. Cary and Morison were both public men as well as members of Jonson’s coterie. Jonson’s stanzaic form keeps to the pattern of the Pindaric ode, *aab*, with two stanzas identical in structure, the third slightly different in its pattern of line length and rhyme. Although the stanza headings serve more as glosses than as discrete titles, the stanzas are self-contained and end-stopped. When an occasional enjambment does occur, it is of the common type that reallocs itself in the very next line, creating no effect of surprise. But in Jonson’s eighth stanza an enjambment even more startling in some ways than Eliot’s occurs:

The Counter-Turne
Call, noble Lucius, then for wine,
And let thy lookes with gladnesse shine:

3. Carol Madison, *Apollo and the Nine* (Baltimore, 1960), p. 301, suggests that Jonson may have borrowed the terms from Antonio Sebastiano Minturno’s *colla ricotta*, and *stanzas* in two odes published in 1535.

4. The less dramatic and more subtle modulations of enjambment are discussed on pages 91-116. There the context is explicitly syntactical, and concerns the kinds of effect not treated here, as at, for example, “Of which we Priests and Poets say/ Such truths . . .” and “Or taste a part of that full joy he meant/To have ex-
Vision and Resonance

Accept this garland, plant it on thy head,
And thinke, now know, thy Morison's not dead.
Hee leap'd the present age,
Possess't with holy rage,
To see that bright eternall Day:
Of which we Priests and Poets say
Such truths, as we expect for happy men,
And there he lives with memories; and Ben

The Stand

Jonson, who sung this of him, e're he went
Himselfe to rest.

This is again a kind of pun by discovery. Just as “Sir Ferdinand” is a perfectly proper appellation, abruptly qualified by the enjambed remainder, the contre-rejet, so the line

And there he lives with memories; and Ben

is complete in itself, ending its stanza like the others on a full stop (the seventeenth-century punctuation often uses colons and semicolons where we would employ commas). Just “Ben” may appear over-familiar; but for the living Cary and the late Morison, as well as the close-knit coterie of friends who called themselves “The Tribe of Ben,” “Ben” alone was as frequently employed in dedicatory poems as in conversation. The line ending “Ben,” then, is for a coterie reader; with the addition of the contre-rejet, it becomes more properly public. But Jonson continues his ninth stanza through an even more grotesque example:

Or taste a part of that full joy he meant
To have exprest,
In this bright Asterisme:
Where it were friendships schisme,
(Were not his Lucius long with us to tarry)
To separate these twi-
Lights, the Dioscuri;
And keepe the one halfe from his Harry.

The Metrical Frame

Even more grotesque, perhaps, although some readers might rush through the hyphenation unperturbed, and with some reason to which I shall turn in a moment. But those readers who do dwell over the hyphenation will be following Jonson’s conceit of the Greek twins Castor and Pollux being separated by death (this grows into the splitting of the constellation Gemini); they will read the “twi-” of “twi-lights” as both root and prefix. “To separate these two (or twin) lights” is itself “separated” quite literally; the name, in an almost schematic logical trick, is treated qua object in the same way that its metaphorical bearer (the pair of Cary and Morison) is thereby reported to be treated. An effective device, this is not an unusual sort of thing in the Renaissance, being commonly used in polyphonic songs (cf. John Wilbye’s madrigal “Sweet Honey-Sucking Bees”: “For if one flaming dart come from her eye,/Was never dart so sharp, ah, then you die!,” where on the last line, the upper soprano part moves to an f# on the word “sharp”).

But the impulse of many readers to carry along through the break, to treat this as the common kind of flowing, non-ironic enjambment, is also of interest. The hyphenated enjambment is rare, but not in the least capricious, in the poetry of Jonson’s age; it was used in English verse that was consciously attempting to model itself on certain Greek meters. Thomas Campion’s polemical Observations in the Art of English Poetie (1602), a metrical study that urges the abandonment of all rhyme and stressed scansion by English verse in favor of an adopted quantitative system making even less phonemic sense than it may have for Latin, contains an example of hyphenation in one of the model poems therein set forth, and quoted (above, p. 80) in its entirety:

Like cleare springs renued by flowing,
Ever perfeft, ever in them-
selves eternall.

5. There is a further complication with the Dioscuri, though; Jonson knows well the etymology of the word from δίος + κοῦνα ("two boys"), but because of his pun on the "twi-lights," he seems to pretend that the etymology is Italianate (di or duo + oscuro)—the twin darks, the setting suns, stars, or Sons, of a world made less perfect by their setting. See also below, pp. 176-78.
The locus classicus for this is in Greek choric meters, in Pindar, and in Sappho; Catullus and Horace (I think only once) so hyphenate in their Latin Sapphics. Its justification in Jonson’s ode must be ascribed to a purpose akin in some ways to Campion’s, and although he eschewed the latter’s prosodic theories, his commitment to Classical models was very strong. Any reader in any way aware of the models, either through direct knowledge or through other adaptations, will to some degree recognize the device. Like Campion’s and others’ quantitative experiments it is a purely graphic convention (it was on the basis of letters, rather than phonemes, that syllables were assigned their weight); but in the case of both of Jonson’s enjamments the separation engages the phonemic junctures of English.

I should like to cite a final case in which a less startling but equally effective enjambment produces the quasi-metaphorical kind of effect which we saw in Pope’s careful use of rhythm. The second stanza of Keats’s ode To Autumn invokes the personified season in an idle moment, after the images of harvest in the first stanza, and proceeds through indolent play, winnowing, and reaping. Keats says of her

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;

F. R. Leavis remarks of these lines that “As we pass the line-division from ‘keep’ to ‘steady’ we are made to enact, analogically, the upright steadying carriage from one stone to the next. And such an enactment seems to me properly brought under the head of ‘image.’” I dislike intensely this way of putting it. Such a notion of analogical enactment is being used in a kind of magical way; this is really nothing more than a little poem of Dr. Leavis’s about what is going on in Keats’s lines. Actually, all we are being made to enact here is all that lines of poetry ever make us enact: an act of speech. But to say this is not so trivial as one might think. Certainly the enjambment is an effective one, especially in a poem whose norm is more in the direction of being end-stopped. And certainly we do have a feeling of a heavy bale of grain

balanced on Autumn’s head as she picks her way through the waters of a stream or across stepping stones.

But there need be no mystery in explaining the way that Keats’s metrical device works. In ordinary speech the English phrase “keep steady” is accented [keep steady]. That is, the first monosyllable abandoning principle stress to the first syllable of the second word. But here, the word “keep” is in a stressed position in the first line, as if it were to be followed by something like

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
A bale of grain against the winter’s blast . . .

Here there is no surprise at the enjambment, for “keep” is both transitive and primary, and the line break follows a subject-predicate boundary. But Keats’s “keep” is tinged with an auxiliary quality—it is almost as if it were a Greek middle, say; the verb is “keep steady,” and the cut between the words points this up. Again,

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Thy laden head steady across a brook

would remove the effect, while setting up a more Miltonic ambiguity of reference of the “steady.” The Keatsian arrangement forces us to read a stress pattern of “/ /,” which in ordinary speech would be given to the phrase used in a musical way to assist verbally someone who was indeed balancing something and nervous about it. In short, it is quasi-imperative, something uttered by an onlooker who tries to assist with verbal magic, with incantatory body English.

But it is to Ben Jonson’s enjamments, and particularly to his second one, that I should like to return. There seem to be two different sorts of significance at work here. The first is semantic; the second, more purely formal, in this case, graphic or what we might call literal. We have already observed that Jonson’s intention throughout the ode seems to be referential; it might be suggested that the overhangs, and particularly the hyphenated one, were consonant, if not actually cooperative, with the strophic titles. It is the fact of their appearance, however, and their role once they have appeared in the texture of the
poem, that I wish to contrast here. The significance of the elements of Neoclassic "form" in Jonson's ode is quite simply a historical significance; while the ironic and quasi-self-descriptive effects of the two might more properly be considered as showing up under the application of some poetic analogue of a synchronic analysis. (Of course, our knowledge about the "tribe of Ben," the frequent use of the Christian name alone in verse, etc., are historical facts themselves. But in invoking them, one is simply giving the meaning of the word "Ben" in Jacobean and Caroline poems.)

Now even if we want to reject the notion that either or both of these effects of the enjambments are, properly speaking, significances; and especially if we wish to follow a by now proverbial philosopher's guide, "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use," we may observe that their functions are clearly different, the uses to which they are put are as divergent as any verbal acts, such as admonishing, deceiving or requesting, can be. The workings of the formal, metrical effect are somehow prior to those of rhythmic (and since English has phonemic stress, hence semantic) processes; the former set up contingencies affecting the latter. The problem of accounting for and charting these contingencies actually underlies some of the most dubious enterprises of traditional prosody, placing much weight on graphic conventions or choices of form, perhaps (as if there were several possible outfits for the same poem, albeit one proper one) without really knowing why they might be important.

3

Let us look at some of the operations of poetic rhythm as it works within the contingencies established by the poet's chosen, normative meter. I say "chosen" not because I wish to imply that the actual effects of linguistic sound which occur within the poem itself are forced upon the poet; or necessarily unconsciously selected; or revealed to him by an incontrovertible muse. Even in the case of the most complicated and apparently "free" rhythmic schemes, the actual composition of lines within the pattern seems to result from a different order of decision-making than does the selection of the scheme to begin with. Whether willing or not, poets are capable of discussing their choice of meter, while rarely would we trust their analyses of their rhythmic invention. It seems possible to show that in some cases the over-all poetic form, metrical scheme, etc., may result from a bit of "donnée," given, material, whether a phrase, an image, a word, a rhythmic effect of some kind. In this case, the metrical choice will depend on finding the meter in which a rhythmic event will be utilized, as well as on the possibilities afforded by convention. The famous so-called vers donné from Racine's Phèdre, for example, has for generations been held out to French schoolboys as the triumph of pure poetry over the absence of rhythmic effect, imagery, and poetic diction. Bloch, in Swann's Way, introduces it to Marcel, with an air of hermetic confidence, as a line which "says absolutely nothing": "La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë." The line was praised because only a great poet could have characterized his heroine in so bare a way, the truest poetry, according to this doctrine at least, being the least feigning. It appears that Racine may have taken the line from a handbook of mythology; here we have a case of the poetic act consisting not of writing the line, but of seeing it (1) as an Alexandrine, (2) as the conclusion of the couplet, and (3) as being able to carry the weight of a meaning of monstrity, born by historical reference alone. A similar example in English is Yeats's great line in "A Long-Legged Fly":

There on that scaffolding reclines
Michael Angelo.

Here it is a matter, again, of seeing the name as one of the three-beat lines of the poem; of the name carrying great weight after the subject of the first stanza of the poem (Caesar) has been mentioned in epithet ("Our master Caesar"), of the second only by "she"; and finally of the fragmentation of the name into what looks like a name and an epithet again.

The choices governing rhythmic execution are as complex and elusive of analysis as are the elements of our response to rhythmic events. There exists a celebrated pyrotechnical display of such execution that
is all the more of a triumph because it sets out to brandish its machinery, and must stand or fall by how well it really works. It is even more interesting for our purposes because, as a rhythmic display, it is set off within the confines of a meter so formal and confining that Matthew Arnold could think of it only as a kind of mechanical jingle which was overlaid on prose. In Book II of Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism*, he puts forth the thoroughly Hobbesian notion that “Imagination is the dress of thought”; that the relation of poetic invention to poetic *sentence* or meaning is like the relation of clothes to a body, a mechanistic version of the Platonic relation of body to soul. The passage I wish to discuss starts out with an attack on those bad critics who reject the true notion that *le style*, so to speak, *c’est l’homme*, in favor of the fashionable error that, figuratively speaking, clothes make the man:

> But most by Numbers judge a Poet’s song;  
> And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;  
> In the bright Muse tho’ thousand charms conspire,  
> Her Voice is all these tuneful fools admire;  
> Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,  
> Not mend their minds; as some to Church repair,  
> Not for the doctrine, but the music there.  
> These equal syllables alone require,  
> Tho’ oft the ear the open vowels tire;  
> While expletives their feeble aid do join;  
> And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:  
> While they ring round the same unvary’d chimes,  
> With sure returns of still expected rhymes.  
> Where-e’er you find “the cooling western breeze,”  
> In the next line, it “whispers thro’ the trees”;  
> If crystal streams “with pleasing murmurs creep,”  
> The reader’s threaten’d (not in vain) with “sleep.”  
> Then, at the last and only couplet fraught  
> With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,  
> A needless Alexandrine ends the song,  
> That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

*(An Essay on Criticism* II, 337-57)

The denunciation here is of what Empson once called the “cult of pure sound,” which, he remarked, always struck him as being rather like Darwin playing the trombone to his French beans. Dryden had voiced the basic sentiment earlier, when he wrote of John Oldham, “But satire needs not these and wit will shine / Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line” but he was helping to initiate the metrical form in which Pope was to succeed so brilliantly, and he could not go so far with it as could his successor, particularly in playing tricks with it. The eighteenth-century metricians who demanded that accentual weight be equalized were ruling out the possibility of effective rhythmic writing by loving unwisely and too well what they thought to be a basis of musical rhythm itself. Yet Pope puts them down by a stroke of syntactic genius: the line about the open syllables would not work so well if the word order were “Though oft the open vowels tire the ear”—it depends on the triad of “Tho’ oft,” “the ear” “the open,” and, of course, on neglecting the elision rules which Pope himself normally uses but which, if employed here, would give a tetrameter line “Tho’ oft th’ ear th’ open vowels tire.” Again, the line with all the monosyllables in it is a dull one because (1) he tells us it is and (2) he makes it dull by repeating the rhythmic pattern “ten low words”— “one dull line”: the two phrases have the identical stress contour in speech. In addition, he makes things harder by following up “And ten low words” with a great density of prominent syllables. Were he to have written “And ten low words are all a man can bear,” there would have been a dip in prominence of the following syllables: a stickler for *phonetic* rather than metrical stress here would say that in Pope’s line there were eight stresses rather than five, whereas in my revision there were at any rate only five, although grouped [·······].

As we go on through the lines, we find that all the effects are accountable for along two axes, the phonetic and the contextually semantic. These lines are aimed at those who prefer sound to sense, and the lines themselves are all self-descriptive. In formal logic, self-descriptiveness leads to pure and empty paradox; here, they lead to a kind of poetic meaninglessness. What they are about is how bad they are. The ways in which they are bad result from the manipulation of phonetic
and morphophonemic material in patterns that are too regular at one level, while they strain and distort the regularity of another kind that constitutes the essence of smoothness for Pope.

The joke about the rhymes, for example, momentarily aligns these two axes. The alliteration in the line centers on the “ring-round” nucleus. After we have been put off by not getting the word “RHYMES” but instead a non-alliterating word that makes us realize our loss by rhyming with the withheld word, the additional /r/ sounds in “un-vary’d,” “sure,” and “returns” make us realize that not only have we not been expecting the word when it does come in the second couplet, but that we have, like Pavlov’s dog, been slavering for it. And finally, we realize that the trouble with rhyming can be that the word which names a unit of it rhymes, itself, with “chimes.” There is, of course, the logical play here with a thing and its name. A full-blown use of the logical trap of confusing use and mention (such as, for example, in the innocent remark that “there’s spaghetti on the menu”) comes in the line about the sleep that crowns the short list of clichés that also rhyme.

In the lines about the Alexandrine, we get a much subtler use of the phonetic-semantic interplay. In the first two lines, the same progression is repeated: [some unmeaning thing thought] and [needless Alexandrine ends]. In each case, the subject (“thing” and “Alexandrine”) is connected to an epithet and a logical predicate by means of some sound association. And the Alexandrine itself, conventional in a closed-couplet style when used at the end of some kind of rhetorical period (although its use in triads was much abused between the stylistic peaks of Dryden and Pope), commits all the faults of a bad one. Its split in the middle into two trimeters is underlined by the unusually sharp syntactic break of the caesura. The second half-line seems even slower than the first, because the consonantal clusters and piled-up stresses of “drags its slow length” end up with a pun on “along,” conditioned by the noun preceding it.

But after this demolition job, Pope goes on to reconstruct, and, like Amphion playing on his lyre and causing the walls of Thebes to build themselves, he sings the elements of a style back into their proper place.

Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know
What’s roundly smooth, or languishingly slow;
And praise the easy vigour of a line,
Where Denham’s strength, and Waller’s sweetness join.
True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learn’d to dance.
’Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an Echo to the sense:
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock’s vast weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scourcs the plain,
Flies o’er th’ unbending corn, and skims along the main.

The sound effects here differ from those in the first part of the passage by reason of the fact that these are “good” lines, rather than examples of “bad” ones, and that they all have a fine, straightforward, pseudo-Classical subject matter. They are all about the great, model subject, rather than, as in the earlier ones, about their own ineptitude.

The couplet about the smoothness, for example, employs not only the device of phonetic linking which connects the core attributive word, “soft,” with “strain” and eventually with “Zephyr gently,” which two words finally give us the /f/ and /t/ phonemes of “soft” in the proper order. In the second line of the couplet, the image which gives the line its weight of content engages a powerful allusion to the canonical emblem of the kind of style which Pope’s age takes for granted. The idea that lines of verse should move like flowing water is embodied in a text that was almost scriptural for the Augustan age. In Denham’s Cooper’s Hill the poet, surveying the beneficent prospect of the Thames from his visionary eminence, concludes a passage of moral-
ized topography with the proto-Augustan hope, couched in full-blown Augustan sincerity, neatness, and aptness of thought:

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o’erflowing, full.\(^7\)

What Pope referred to a few lines earlier as “Denham’s strength” was thought to be expressed here as a program for the Augustan use of the heroic couplet. The “smooth stream” in Pope’s line is, of course, some stream being described in the line, not improbably Skamander; but by a conventional image, it is also the line itself. There is the further implementation of the phonetic linkings of [smooth-stream] and [smoother-numbers]. Then again, there is the final clinching of the implicit argument that art often more obviously conforms to the mechanical rules of created order than does nature (although, with Pope, “to copy nature” was “to copy them”). This is done by the rhythmic contrast between the first half-line [‘· ’· ’] (“And the smooth stream”) and the second, which is absolutely canonical in its distribution of stresses: “in smoother numbers flows” [‘· ’· ’· ’], where the phonetic linkings of the subjects and the smoothness attributed to them are disposed first in a less, then in a more regular way.

“When Ajax strives,” we strive, too, not to produce a string of words like “When Ajax drives”: the enunciation forced upon us by the consonantal cluster, and the realization that it is intentional is forced upon us by the growing realization that his rock is, symbolically, the remainder of the line. In a trivial phonetic sense, the words move slow, despite the tendency in spoken English time units in actual utterances to dispose themselves into syntactic paradigms. Thus, in the following sequence of utterances, the durations of enunciation increase much less rapidly than the increasing amount of linguistic material crowded into the same sentence matrix would lead one to conclude:

\(^7\) See also Dr. Johnson’s comment on these lines, p. 281 n.

Pope must slow up his words by setting up a parallel rhythmic package at the beginning and end of this line, reinforced by the syntax of “the line, too, labours” as well as by the symmetry of the assonance of “too” and “move,” which pins the rhythmic structure together: phonetically, we have a pattern like this

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The line, too, labours} & \quad \text{and the words move slow} \\
\text{syntax forces a juncture} & \quad \text{parallelism dictates one here} \\
\text{rhyme (assonance)} & \quad \text{enforces parallelism}
\end{align*}
\]

Here, as always, it is a sound pattern working with semantic and syntactic ones which gains the desired effect.

So, too, in the case of the quickly moving lines. Notice that swift Camilla flies along in an Alexandrine, but by no means a slow one; this is an added bit of virtuosity, for in the context of the previous section, Pope has almost made us feel that it is the essence of Alexandrines to be too long. Here again, too, it is Camilla who is chosen to be the swift one, because of the linking assonance, and here too, we have the association of [sours the plain] [‘· ’· ’] and (skims along the main) [‘· · ’· ’]: the extra two syllables in the second line become less prominent when we view the phrase in the rhythmic matrix set up by the first, and the Alexandrine seems to contract.

This is indeed a virtuoso rhythmic performance. It is conducted within the confines of a rigorous metrical scheme, one which allows less displacement of alternation of stressed syllables, on the whole, than Milton’s iambic pentameter, or Keats’s or Wordsworth’s. And yet the effects are profound, and the moral pointed. We cannot, in studying the effects of rhythm or of its associated phenomena, ignore the interaction of the rhythmic groupings and patterns with lexical and syn-
tactic elements. Any general theory of metaphor in poetry must deal with the notion of non-literalness of meaning, with transfer, or distortion or reshaping of reference. But the way in which, as Pope puts it, the sound can “seem an Echo to the sense” is effected only by means of associations between words which rub off, somehow, onto their designata: it is something like the metaphorical process, but it operates somehow at a different level. By and large, the so-called imitative effects of poetic rhythm will be seen to work in two ways: through those devices which associate words or parts of words, and through those which enforce re-groupings of them by more subtle means than simply those of connection. Of the associative or linking devices we have already seen a few: The use in Latin poetry of *intralinear juxtaposition* as allowed by flexible syntax, for example, allows us to discern discrete semantic packets within the line, where the sense of a word is transferred to an adjacent one without being syntactically connected with it at all. Rhyme links not only lines, but words; whether used as end rhymes or as interior ones, rhyming syllables have an increased prominence, no matter what their metrical role, and play an important part in associating the words that contain them. Assonance and alliteration link parts of words, as well as syllables, and their operation is through what a linguist would call a morphophonemic medium, creating momentary fictions about the association of sound and sense in the language. The effects of onomatopoeia in general can all be traced to these devices.

All of these methods may be employed either metrically or rhythmically. They may play only a structural role in defining the schematic form of the poem or its lines. Or they may be used for the kind of expressive effects we have been considering. For example, alliteration occurs prominently in Old Germanic verse, in Spenser, in the Shakespeare *Sonnets*, and in Hopkins. And yet we would want to characterize its roles very differently in the four cases. In the first instance, the alliteration is a necessary feature of the meter, and while it tends to produce a little poetic package in the first half-line consisting of two words linked by the alliteration, its frequency of occurrence tends to depress its significance for expressive purposes. Not so in Spenser, where its relatively high frequency of occurrence in *The Faerie Queene* is nevertheless a matter of rhythmic texture rather than of metrical form. Still, Spenser’s alliterations tend to produce a decorative surface rather than a metaphoric connection. In the opening line of *F.O.* “A gentle knight was pricking on the plain” we have a typical instance of its use to link parts of a predicate, although the noun-adjective pair is even more common. At times, the rate of alliteration per line will go up in passages describing an excited encounter or a lush display, but the higher rate will simply add up to a slightly more ornate linguistic surface. In the Shakespeare sonnets, however, the alliteration functions in several ways. Occasionally it will be in the Elizabethan, Spenserian “decorative manner,” but often it will be used expressively, to echo sense.

For example, sonnet 116:

> Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
> Within his bending sickle’s compass come.

The naïve observation would be that we seem to hear the sound of the blade moving the grass to which the implicitly invoked scriptural text likens all flesh. The effect depends upon several rhythmical events. In the first place, there is, as Empson has observed, the grammatical ambiguity of *bending*: it means both “bent” and “causing to bend,” and these two meanings help to establish a frame within which we recall the lines we have just heard. Then there is the core word for the alliterating sequence, “sickle.” Its first syllable suggests words like “Click,” “pick,” “flick,” “nick,” etc.; we half expect the following sequence “compass,” “come” to finish up with “cut.” The iteration of the hard /k/ sound carries through the core association to “sickle” and suggests the repeating blows that we know a reaping blade to give.

A similar analysis of the associative effects of expressive alliteration might be given for the more famous “When to the sessions of sweet, silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past,” where the two core words are “sessions” and “silent,” both employing initial /s/ and final nasal, but with only the latter containing a /t/. They are further distinguished by the fact that “sessions” manifestly establishes the vehicle of the law court conceit and “silent” the tenor of it, the mood
of moral meditation. Only the final phrase, "things past" contains both nasal and /t/ elements and encompasses both levels of the conceit.

As with alliteration, so with assonance. We can have purely decorative patternings, as in the phonetic chiasmus of Coleridge's "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan." It is more frequently used expressively, often with reinforcing alliteration, as, again from Pope, this time of unrelenting old haridans: "A top their passion, but their prize a sot;/ Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot."

The assimilation of these devices into generalized onomatopoeic musicality is frequent in Spenser, Keats, and Tennyson.8 Onomatopoeia, as I. A. Richards has observed, must be divided into two sorts, which we might differentiate by applying the distinction that Greek philosophers used, illusory as it was, when considering etymology: physis or natural, and nomos or by convention. Certain primary onomatopoeic representations of non-linguistic sounds, such as the characteristic noises of animals, become morphemes of a language quite early in its development; the result is that they seem "natural" to it. Thus, "meeow," "tick-tock," "ding-dong," "haa-haa," "cock-a-doodle-doo" are common English patterns, showing either reduplication or a front-back alternation of vowel. Secondary, or conventional onomatopoeia is the kind we find used in verse, or in jokes like the proverbial "The pig is rightly so-called." In it, words are made to sound not like the noises of nature or of physical processes, but like other words. Some core word, often itself designating something about sound, may be associated with others. Occasionally a word not itself specified may be echoed by other ones: the classic case is the song about fancy in The Merchant of Venice, where the rhymes on "bred," "head," "nourishèd" all call to mind the lead casket which we know must be chosen if all is to end well.

8. One would, for example, analyze the "mimetic" effectiveness of the wonderful line from Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes"—"The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass" in the same manner as Pope's line about Ajax. The common ground is the iambic metrical framework and the role of the consonantal clusters. On the other hand, the celebrated mimetic lines from Tennyson's Idylls of the King (e.g., "First as in fear, step after step she stole/Down the long lower-stairs hesitating"—a kind of syncopa) depend, as one might expect in a more Miltonic poetry, upon syntactical as well as accentual arrangements.

There are also the famous, lush lines from Tennyson that are always extolled to school children:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmuring of innumerable bees

In cases like this, we must first rule out the operation of those minimal sound clusters which seem to act like ghosts of morphemes: on the surface, it would appear that words like "slide," "slip," "sick," "sink," "slim," "slop," "slope," and others are associated, through their initial cluster, with a general connotation of smoothness. But such cases are too rare to allow us to assume that onomatopoeia operates in any other way than to associate words already given us with others having common sounds. Assonance, alliteration, and even rhyme do some of the work of metaphor by associating words through their sounds alone, and by thus juxtaposing them with some of the same strength as an actual image. Thus, in the lines from Tennyson, the alliterating words are "moan," "immemorial," "elms," "murmuring," and "innumerable" with "bees" being related to the last syllable of "innumerable" and the phrase "of doves" being linked by a rhyme. Clearly the core word for these alliterations is "murmuring," and we associate with it all the connected words. But it is flatly misleading to tell a student that the "m" sounds have any meaning or evocative power, apart from words they connect. I realize that such assertions are frequent, and some appreciators of poetry like Dame Edith Sitwell carried this method to a comical extreme. Clearly Tennyson's lines have a suggestive musical richness. But just as clearly, this is a music of words, not of extrapolated sounds.

"Imitative movement" of words can, of course, really only imitate the sounds of other words or sounds. Some of the finest examples of it occur when a semantic relation is reinforced by a rhythmical parallel between words or phrases, and when we are almost tempted to say that the designatum of the phrase is being represented by that movement rather than the phrase itself. Thus in Florizel's great speech to Perdita in The Winter's Tale (IV, iv):
When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o’ the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that; move still still so . . .

Here the description of the girl’s imitative dance doesn’t “sound like
the sea,” but rather follows the rhythm of the phrase “a wave o’ the
sea.” Also, in Yeats’s *Sailing to Byzantium*, the “Monuments of unaging
intellec” at the end of stanza I are echoed in a later line invoking
singing schools that all study “Monuments of their own magnificance.”
Here, again, the repetition of the word “monuments” is reinforced by
the symmetrical alliterating rhythm of the final word in the line: the
whole line, so to speak, looks into a mirror and gazes at itself.

Something more might be said here about echoic patterns in gen-
eral. There are echoes which operate beyond the boundaries of the
poem itself, and those which work purely within it. Examples of the
first abound, whether in open or hidden form. There is no difficulty
with the relation between (again, from “Sailing to Byzantium”) “Those
dying generations” and Keats’s hungry ones in the Nightingale ode. Sir
Richard Fanshawe’s translation of the famous chorus on the golden age
from Guarini’s *Il Pastor Fido*, which is itself full of material from
Tasso, Ovid, and Horace, works in a specific little Catullan allusion of
his own, by echoing Ben Jonson’s adaptation of “*Vivamus mea Lesbia,
atque amemus*” (“Tis no sin love’s fruit to steal, / But the sweet
theft to reveal”) in his own heroic couplet: “Nor thinkst it any fault love’s
sweets to steal, / So from the world thou canst the theft reveal.” Less
public, avowed, or even, perhaps, conscious are echoes which allude to
words, structures, rhythms, rather than quoting or re-framing, like the
above. Thus, for example, there is the delicate echo of Spenser at the
end of Milton’s *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*: “And all about
the Courtly Stable / Bright heralds Angels sit in order serviceable.” In this
most Spenserian poem, Milton sinks at the end into a cushion of bor-
rrowed music; in Calidore’s vision of the ring of damsels in *FQ*, VIx,
the thirteenth stanza concludes with the setting into heaven of the
constellation Corona: “And is unto the stars an ornament, / Which
round about her move in order excellent.” It is not merely the specific
phrase inverted pattern of “—in order (adjective)” which came to mind
(or should we say, to ear?). It occurs in Spenser in a terminal position
in a stanza, in the propounding of a complex and central image in
what is hardly an obscure region of *The Faerie Queene*, and ends in an
Alexandrine. Milton was echoing a whole movement.

Again, Wallace Stevens can echo Milton in equally subtle ways.
There is the allusive Miltonic movement, transmuted from one kind of
blank verse, through Wordsworth’s, to another in the flight of the
Canon Aspirin in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*: “Descending to
the children’s bed, on which // They lay. Forth then with huge
pathetic force / Straight to the utmost crown of night he flew.” But the
echo of *Il Penserosa*, ll. 73–75, in “Moving across wide water, without
sound” from “Sunday Morning” is more like the Milton-Spenser case
mentioned above. The source goes:

I hear the far-off Curfew sound,
Over some wide-water’d shore . . .

Stevens’s *La Penserosa*, turning away from one sort of conventional
meditation (in church) toward her own questionings, heed’s but rejects the
call not of a curfew, but a Sunday church bell. This this sort of echoing is
not allusive, is not a public signal but rather a kind of private one for
the poet himself.

So, I should think, would be the internal echo, the muted half-refrain
in Keats’s Grecian Urn ode, save that here it sets up an interesting
grammatical ambiguity. The relation is between the second line: “Thou
foster-child of silence and slow time” and the much later one: “Pipe to
the spirit ditties of no tone,” the echo being located in the final spondee.
The problem is that, once heard, the echo tends to make “spirit” in the
second line adjectival, so that instead of meaning “pipe toneless ditties
to the spirit” it suggests “pipe to the tune of those spiritual, silent
ditties.” It is not so much that the second reading is probably correct,
but that Keats's metrical, rhythmical, and grammatical styles do indeed allow for it.

We have been examining a wide range of "musical" or attention-shaping effects of poetic rhythms operating within, in these instances, accessional-syllabic English verse. It is clear that many of them depend upon the very contingencies set up by the metrical choice for their ability to function. But the framing, defining, conventional aspect of the metrical choice with which this essay commenced must not in any sense be thought of as submerged or effaced by the occasionally prominent ways in which they can affect the ear. Let us return for a moment to this title or rubric-like function of metrical form, to the way in which style and genre are intertwined, to the ways in which a verse form may set up referential or allusive ground-rules for the poem and the reader, as well as serving to mark, diagram, underline, or gloss the language organized within it.

Behind so much Western aesthetics since Classical antiquity lies a nostalgia for what was believed quite naively to have been a perfect, mystical marriage, in Attic times, of musical mode and ethos, of form and the effect upon human behavior proper to that form; a nostalgia for what was thought to have been a perfect music-poetry that made of human sense an instrument whose own sound was human feeling. The myth of such a golden age in which communication was immediate, and guided only by the channel of suitable form, became in the Renaissance a myth of literature itself. Like the musical modality that many Greek writers themselves appear to us to misunderstand, meters and verse schemes have seemed to widely differing ages to possess inherent, psychologically affective qualities, and seemed to be measurable by decorum, in that any breach of this in their use would reveal itself upon comparing the nature and function of a mode, form, or style. This is a little like the way we feel, and have been rightly chastized for thinking, about onomatopoeia, sound symbolism and the like. (It may be worth noting here that the important classic parables of decorum for Neoclassic ages included that of Terpander, who was punished for adding an extra string to his lyre, and of Marsyas, who was flayed for playing the wild, passionate aulos which the goddess of reason had disgustedly cast aside—in both cases, the breach consisted in strengthening or widening the effectiveness of the music.)

This musical metaphor that underlies the history of literary notions about literary form was such a convenient one for poetic theory, and for so long, precisely because it could accommodate both the notions of formal significance under consideration here. In the whole Classical doctrine of form and ethos there lay resolved what later ages came to feel as a dialectic of conventional and instant form, revealed in the struggle for authority of schematic and pathetic accounts of the workings of music and poetry. In antiquity, the only "formal" elements were of the first type, the metrical type (although meter and rhythm had clearly opposed and also several confused sets of meanings in Greek times; any particular work was distinguishable only cognitively ("rationally") from other works in the same convention. The rationalistic treatment of music by Greek theorists made this possible by ignoring all textless music for theoretical purposes; song was always the subject under discussion. A conceptual distinction between "music" and "poetry" of the kind that has been made since the Renaissance was impossible; and there was no need to create musical metaphors to aid in describing the ethos of any particular poetic utterance.

This whole paradise of communication was originally a quasi-mythological account of the power of literature (as opposed to persuasive speech: it was only the later Renaissance that sought metaphorically to identify music and rhetoric). But its power as an ideal account of the less obvious workings of carefully planned utterances held poetic theory in subjection for ages. For an empirical world view that demands much more of its accounts of things, such a myth is hardly even heuristically useful. The ethos of a passage of poetry or of a segment of that passage is to be understood as operating linguistically, that is, in that domain of shared experience of sound that connects a speaker and his hearer. And if there were no such thing as literature, but only poetry; that is, if all poems were utterances whose structure was as
significant as their assertions, making no attempt to share or imitate structures, but only to generate novel ones, then the whole problem of the two kinds of significance would vanish. There would remain only the "rhythm" of poems; there would be no such thing as "meter," for there would be no common scheme, no redundant elements, nothing "given."

But this is not the case. Poets continue to believe in modal myths long after they abandon other creeds. They continue to think in terms of "choosing" a meter even though, in stylistically eclectic ages like our own, they may resurrect, adapt, or newly forge their stylistic patterns. And poems continue to be literary events, which is also to say that it may be misleading to consider them as existing in any but a rather peculiar dialect of the language in which they are written. Their literary status in no way obliterates their linguistic status; it qualifies it only. Neither does the classification of a shouted "Go to the devil!" as a curse prevent it from remaining an utterance nevertheless; it merely specifies a rhetorical context. Now "meter" traditionally considered as arising from the literary classification and analysis of poems, jumps into prominence as a result of the historical mapping of several kinds of utterances in their historical contexts. The "rhythm," the flow of the poem in passage (aural or visual), the stream of effect upon the reader are all just as much the special concern, it is true, of the linguistically oriented poetic analyst as is the "meter" the concern of the historian or of the apologist for a style. To analyze the meter of a poem is not so much to scan it as to show with what other poems its less significant (linguistically speaking) formal elements associate it; to chart out its mode; to trace its family tree by appeal to those resemblances which connect it, in some ways with one, in some ways with another kind of poem that may, historically, precede or follow it.

But we have seen how in one case metrical qualities may coincide, coexist in the same element, with rhythmical ones. This may occur with respect to rhymes, stress patterns, syllabic arrangements, or even larger forms. The sonnet form functions, apparently, in two ways at once. By setting up certain canons of line length, rhyme scheme, etc., and by tending to limit larger syntactical patterns (in the case of a Shake-
and styles; and finally, an eclectic, history-ridden age like the present one in which such stylistic anarchy prevails that one almost feels that a poem need be defined as any utterance that purports to be one. In the first two cases, the badge of meter has the fundamental work of defining the utterance as a literary event (Dr. Johnson could hardly consider Christopher Smart’s rich, mad *Jubilate Agno* as a poem; but an age that includes *The Cantos* among its monuments must surely value highly the fragments that Smart in the eighteenth century “shored against his ruin”). But in the last case, that of the eclectic age in which competing styles war for a lost authority, the meter becomes more than Wordsworth’s “formal engagement”; it becomes almost a stipulation of what a poem ought to be. The frame begins to recommend, so to speak. And the emblem starts to take on a moral.

But the urging of a work of literature, perhaps accomplished by its formal frame, is no less an act of urging than any other kind of exhortation. The analysis of urging and exhorting can no longer be properly linguistic. And, finally, it is as such that it lies outside the realm of poetics.

**VIII**

**BEN JONSON**

**AND THE MODALITY OF VERSE**

Considering that they are the work of a literary genius, Ben Jonson’s poems have had a curious critical fate. The epoch that most intimately responded to their virtues never singled them out for special praise, while our own age, so acutely conscious of history, acknowledges their importance and success and at the same time retains a fundamentally unsympathetic view toward them, seldom praising without apologizing. It is true that the importance of Jonson’s non-dramatic works as a source for the whole current of poetic style during the course of the seventeenth century has only been adequately assessed during the past several decades. But even at the height of the Augustan style whose origins must be traced to Jonson’s influence, the fame of his poems lagged behind that of his plays, and even further behind that of his personality.

There is perhaps some irony in this. In the audaciously entitled *Works* that the poet himself, in 1616, collected in the folio format until then reserved for editions of the great writers of antiquity, it was the lyric and epigrammatic portions that were popularly neglected in favor of the plays that at the time seemed to have even less right to publication under the presumptuous rubric of “dramatic literature.” Jonson was, in every sense, a man of letters. He always devoted great attention and care to the cultivation of an organized oeuvre or corpus of