VISION AND RESONANCE
TWO SENSES OF POETIC FORM

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In the world of the ear, poetry is a kind of music, as it is a mode of picturing in the context of the eye. Ordinarily, to discuss this musical dimension would be to talk about poetic language in its aspect of intonation—to concentrate upon meter, upon rhythm; to discuss the effects of sound that the urgencies of meaning produce when knotted into the fabric of tradition that conventionalized uses of poetic language always weave. It is always wise, when considering the so-called "music of poetry," to avoid, by evasion or scrupulous analysis, many of the metaphors and formal analogies by which literary poetry has been linked to, and has continually proclaimed its connection with, musical art. Discussions of English prosody, for example, have kept getting bogged down for hundreds of years in swamps of irrelevancy because of an archaic identity, in Greek times, of musical and poetic rhythm. And yet it is obviously the aspects of poetic language that are most like the resources of speech, rather than those of song, which come to the aid of poetic resonance.

Even as profound and usually unerring a critic as Northrop Frye, for example, can expose, tersely and devastatingly, the sloppy thinking behind the notion that Tennyson is a more essentially musical poet than Browning, and then go on rather disappointingly to suggest that, in truth, it is the other way around. What we might have expected
from him was a discussion of the historical background of the concepts of "song," the "lyrical" and the musical in language that would identify Tennyson's primarily vocalic sound texturing with musicality, and not Browning's interplay of spoken intonation and rhythmic phrase structure with some of the most unbending of canonical meters. To put it crudely, it is felt that poetry which makes English seem more French or Italianate is musical; that which makes it seem more German is not. And yet what Professor Frye does, in an otherwise keen discussion of opsis and melos, is to reverse the arbitrariness and opt in effect for the Germans. He has in fact provided an insight that reflects, rather than casts light upon, what is sometimes called the Sprachgefühl of English—the sense of its structure and that of other languages relative to it to which a native knowledge of English comforts its speakers. One should perhaps more properly ask: what has the history of English poetry and of European music generally had to do with this concept of the musical in speech? Why was it part of English poetic language's mythology about itself that vowels were more musical than consonants, for example?

In arguing for a hard look at the linguistic facts of sounded, spoken language in discussing the "life" of poetry in the ear, one is always attempting to demythologize. For example, a student, responding first to the fairly schematic movement of a standard set piece like Andrew Marvell's "Coy Mistress" poem, may exclaim appreciatively over the speeding up of the rhythmic pace of "But at my back I always hear / Time's winged chariot hurrying near" with its dactylic rush, and observe the continuation of the falling rhythm in "And yonder all before us lie / Deserts of vast eternity." Our demythologizing, here using a mode of exorcism no more arcane than historical grammar, would have to dampen his appreciative ardor with the observation that the last of these lines—the original form, "desarts," accented on the second syllable—was still for Marvell quite regularly iambic. Or, arguing at a kind of procedural extreme: one might wish to discourage analysts of poetic meter from using musical notation to simulate metrical patterns by appealing to facts about the structural function of either schematic


"length" or actual clocked durations in English speech, prose, verse, and song. Or perhaps, one might take the example of a gifted, innovating, and envisioning poet like William Carlos Williams—triumphant in his ability to see humane magnificence in the ordinary, and to make us hear the most exciting rhythms of conscious life in the flattened cadences of the un rhetorical. Such a subtle practitioner can nevertheless, outside his poems, in his analytic and critical remarks about prosody in general, and his own metrical practice in particular, descend, in the rhetorical uneasiness and crankiness of the autodidact, to obfuscation at best and nonsense at worst.

Or even, there is the instance of the remarkable relation between Gerard Manley Hopkins's technical vocabulary for describing and naming some of his prosodic concepts, and the character of the imagery in his own poems. Surely the field of the latter yields up the former, and surely the expressive force of that vocabulary far exceeds its strictly conceptual utility. No real harm is done to prosodic theory by his use of terms like hanger, outride, slack, sprung, running, rode over; but, just as surely, Hopkins's brilliant and unique use of the words "pitch" and "stress," both in the language of his poetry and in his prosodic meta-language about it, takes us far away from the linguistic realities which either acoustic or articulatory phonetics might define. Indeed, his word "counterpoint" presents an extremely attractive scheme for dealing with actual instances of our English accentual-syllabic meter, that elusive dual citizen of the ear's kingdom and the eye's. But that attractiveness has led to adoption of the term as if it were a schematically fruitful analogy, instead of a startling metaphor, so that even today prosodists tend to follow its seductive song into dangerous waters.

For example, in using the term "counterpointing" to designate the relation between an iambic norm and a rhythmic actuality, prosodists follow Hopkins's more limited use of the word; he simply meant systematic reversal of iambic stress patterns and, as he says, "If however the reversal is repeated in two feet running, especially so as to include the sensitive second foot, it must be due either to great want of ear, or else is a calculated effect, the superinducing or mounting of a new
rhythm upon the old; and since the new or mounted rhythm is actually heard and at the same time the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget what the rhythm is that by rights we should be hearing, two rhythms are in some manner running at once and we have something answerable to counterpoint in music, which is two or more strains of tune going on together, and this is Counterpoint Rhythm." And, we may add, this is the canonical use of "counterpoint" in prosody—notice how Hopkins's own metaphors of "superinducing or mounting a new rhythm on the old" lead him to an actually inaccurate musical analogy. The correct one would be rather one of syncopation. The problems of what Roman Jakobson has called verse instance as opposed to verse design respond to such a formulation. Just as, for example, any musician will understand how a string of syncopations in 3/4 time will yield an apparent sequence of 2/4 measures while yet not calling for actual rebarreling, so the substitutions of Shakespeare's "Never, never, never, never, never" demand no description of the line as transcending the iambic convention of King Lear, momentarily trochaic as it may be.

Hopkins's image of counterpoint, as a matter of fact, results from musical sophistication rather than the lack of it—it is, conceptually speaking, most valid as a visual, rather than an auditory analogy. For Hopkins, counterpoint is generated by two musical lines, commensurate in category; but the two kinds of rhythm, the potential or schematic and the actual, are hardly so. What may have influenced him was some visual sense of the actual line of verse with two alternative strings of scansion marks above and below it, say, one of them marking the schematic iambic, the other the reversed or otherwise distorted actual rhythm. Together, these two strings of syllable markers might have seemed to Hopkins like a staff of musical notation, like two musical lines being simultaneously generated. The more independent they were, the more divergence there was between them, the more "contrapuntal" these analytic annotations might seem to be, and the more the text in question might be thought of as embodying them. (This seems certainly to be the case, for example, in T. S. Eliot's remark based on Hopkins's term: "I cannot help suspecting that to the cultivated audience of the age of Virgil, part of the pleasure in the poetry arose from the presence in it of two metrical schemes in a kind of counterpoint: even though the audience may not necessarily have been able to analyse the experience."

But what Eliot points out in his last clause is often as true for poets and critics as it is for audiences. A good clarifier of the talk of prosodists—for English, arcane, contorted, and unduly quarrelsome as it so often is—would try to illuminate the ways in which linguistic and conceptual habit produced garbled descriptions of prosodic events nevertheless clearly and effortlessly being perceived and understood. But it must be confessed that, in another light, some of the mistakes and confusions that abound in so many studies of poetic form and its consequences for imaginative actuality are of a certain value. They are like the mistakes that poetry is always making about itself, and yet which we do not call mistakes but rather acknowledge as fictions.

The particular set of fictions identifying music and poetry are venerable and pervasive ones. The master figure, that of the music of poetry, has been in operation ever since Pseudo-Longinus (end of the first century a.d.?)

We hold, then, that composition, which is a kind of melody in words—words which are part of man's nature and reach not his ears only but his very soul—stirring as it does myriad ideas of words, thoughts, things, beauty, musical charm, all of which are born and bred in us; while, moreover, by the blending of its own manifold tones it brings into the hearts of the bystanders the speaker's actual emotion so that all who hear him share in it, and by piling phrase on phrase builds up one majestic whole—we hold, I say, that by these very means it casts a spell on us and always turns our thoughts towards what is majestic and dignified and sublime and all else that it embraces, winning a complete mastery over our minds.4


The perfect identification of music and poetry in antiquity that has always been prized by Neoclassicisms of various sorts has already, by the time of the writing of this passage, been sundered. The bridge of an analogy has already been built.

Yet if that analogy covers a loss of actual music for poetry itself, signals the identification of poem with text, whether sacred to priest, teacher, or scholiast, we now find that we have gone a step further. We have lost total possession of the simile. Wallace Stevens, calls the notion of the music of poetry “old hat” and “anachronistic,” and then goes on:

... It is simply that there has been a change in the nature of what we mean by music. It is like the change from Haydn to a voice intoning. It is like the voice of an actor reciting or declaiming or of some other figure concealed, so that we cannot identify him, who speaks with a measured voice which is often disturbed by his feeling for what he says. There is no accompaniment. If occasionally the poet touches the triangle or one of the cymbals, he does it only because he feels like doing it. Instead of a musician we have an orator whose speech sometimes resembles music. We have an eloquence and it is that eloquence that we call music every day, without having much cause to think about it.5

The only way in which we might, indeed, save the analogy is by incorporating Stevens’s evolution from song to speech, the music of poetry is one not of musical sounds, nor of the repertory of sounds that a particular language succeeds in segregating from the clamor of possibles. We are able today to think of music as structure, then, not feeling; and thus it is that what one reads, there on a page arranged in verse, hearing and vision joined in words, is music. Ut pictura musicaque poesis: the poem is song and picture at once, and the relation of scanning and hearing lies at the heart of all textual (rather than purely oral) poetry. But the musical analogy has been so compelling during its life, and has shaped so many poets’ fictions about their own and others’ practice, that we might turn back to it for a while, reviewing some of its history and confronting its outworn presence.

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By “the music of poetry” we generally mean all of the nonsemantic properties of the language of a poem including not only its rationalized prosody, but its actual sound on being read, and certain characteristics of its syntax and imagery as well. This poetic “music” has been assigned varied purposes in our literary history, from those of adornment, by the Neoclassicists, to those of intrinsic necessity, by the symbolistes. No matter what our commitment may be, we would probably agree that because of this “music,” the effects of a poem operate on the reader in ways in which the words of a telegram do not.

Most of us would also agree that the elements of instrumental music do not carry meanings as do certain elements of language. We should also have to concede, however, that other units of language are akin to, and in some cases identical with, these musical building blocks. Aside from the phonemes, or ultimate significant sounds of a particular language, there are those properties of relative stress, pitch, and duration that can be perceived only as members of a series. These last have no existence individually: one cannot produce a single rhyming syllable, for example, just as he cannot clap one hand. All of these elements eventually become combined into meaning units of a language, but their organization, at a more primitive level, distinguishes that which is poetry from that which is not. As in the case of music, the more we realize the “meaninglessness” of these building blocks, the more we struggle to deal rationally with the ways in which they affect us.

Since antiquity, however, literary history has been continually confronted with various analogical couplings of music and poetry. A medieval Latin conductus, a troubadour vers, or a virelai of Machaut actually united forms and conventions, almost as in Greek music. The high Renaissance, after diversifying development of the two arts, sought to achieve its own version of the Greek unification of music and poetry. The baroque treated them as “Sphere-born, harmonious sisters,” functioning as embellishment and instruction, almost like

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from music, and the origins of Greek prosody lay in purely musical principles. Proper music was almost exclusively vocal, and hence the intended effect of any composition lay unambiguously exposed in its text. The notation of Greek vocal music is of great prosodic interest. It indicated pitches only, one or two for each syllable of text. A singer, then, could simply fit these pitches to the duration patterns indicated by the poetic meter and produce musical periods, corresponding to lines of verse, marked out in what we would call bars or measures, corresponding to feet.

But sequences of long and short durations cannot arrange themselves into musical patterns without the introduction of stresses, just as successively flashing red and green lights would require an accompanying click on every fourth red flash, for example, to produce perceptible groupings of an otherwise endless and unbroken continuum. Greek music employed the thesis, or stressed downbeat, and arsis, or unstressed upbeat, to mark off its feet or measures, even though Attic Greek, like modern French, possessed no phonemic stress itself. Stress patterns in Greek prosody may thus be seen to have served a musical purpose. The same sort of phenomenon can be seen, almost in reverse, in the development of bar-lines in baroque music. They became a necessity as instrumental music replaced vocal polyphony in predominance, since stress and syntactic patterns in the text could no longer give order to unbroken successions of notes.

Greek prosody, then, originated in systems of vocal music. It was when the speakers of an originally stressed Latin poetry took over Greek conventions that our traditional prosodic problems began to arise. The superimposition of schemata for the poetry of one language upon the hostile realities of another engender grave complexities; they may be seen in the effects of Romance prosodic conventions upon Old English, for example. But it was with the adaptation of Greek meters to Latin that poetry, originally inseparable from music, began to grow away from it. And it was then that poetry began to develop, in its meter, a seeming music of its own. The kinds of textual traditions that Curtius mapped so magnificently in his European Literature and the
Latin Middle Ages operated with a kind of internalized or figurative music. Inscriptions, in such a mode of tradition, were truly echoes of voices.

Aside from clarifying some of the historic confusions of stress and duration, however, too many musical prosodists have either swollen our lexicon or prosodical terms, or, without knowing it, needlessly proliferated marginal entities. Notating a poem for vocal reading is one thing; reifying prosodic elements whose existence is suggested by the notational symbols, and then employing these entities in a purported description of the poem, is quite another. Now it is description, adequate to various purposes of criticism, to which prosodical study has most frequently been committed. Historically, it has been continually stricken with inconclusive debate over ontology: “Does the foot exist?“ “Is there quantity in English verse?“ “Does a hovering accent exist, and if so, where does it hover?“ Usually quite wisely, one’s instinct leads him to avoid such questions. It must nevertheless be remembered that, as a famous logician has remarked, “What there is does not in general depend upon one’s use of language, but what one says there is does.”

In attempting to keep this in mind in the following discussion of prosody and music, we should not attempt to offer a new method of scansion, decked out with new terms and symbols drawn from music, and selective redefinitions of older ones. Neither should we be concerned with stylistic similarities between the chromaticism of Gesualdo’s madrigals, the texture of Crashaw’s verse, and the chiaroscuro of Caravaggio. Rather, let us examine something of the history of music’s identification with prosody in verse and attempt to describe the limits of usefulness of any further comparisons between the two that we might choose to make.

The first problem we shall have to face concerns the idea of the nature of music itself.8 Classical antiquity bequeaths us no single line of doctrine on the subject. Actually, the Pythagorean view of music as a mathematical model of universal order, and what might be called the

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8. The following matters are treated in considerable detail, especially with reference to English poetry, in my The Untuning of the Sky (Princeton, 1961).
length. In essence, the latter group were arguing for melodies rhythmically independent of the text. Differences between "meter" and "rhythm" remained those of commitment to the independence of melody.9 Acquired pairs of meanings, such as rational schema vs. actual sound, quantity vs. stress, and, more recently, the printed poem vs. the spoken one, have become pinned onto the terms "meter" and "rhythm" only since the Middle Ages.

Music in post-classical times, confined at first to the uses of the Church, eventually became an independent art with conventions, and eventually a history, of its own. Even the earliest theorists of the polyphonic period, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, were obliged to try to reconcile the respected authorities of Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Augustine, with the actual practice of their own day. The Scholia Enchiriadis, a tenth-century treatise, for example, discusses consonant intervals of the parallel organon that was unknown to classic times; then, to prove that such considerations only reaffirm the Pythagorean status of musica mundana as a branch of mathematics, the author invokes the following passage from Augustine's De Ordine: "Thus reason has perceived that numbers govern and make perfect all that is in rhythm (called 'numbers' in Latin) and in song itself."10

It was just this use of the word "numbers" for prosody in general that the Elizabethan critics employed in trying to revive the prelapsarian marriage of music and poetry. Long after their divorce, and just at the time that their paths were departing from the parallel course to which Renaissance aesthetics had held them, a writer like Thomas Campion could argue from the ideology of harmonia mundi to the necessity of re-establishing classic scansion in English. The first chapter of his Observations in the Art of English Poesie (1602), "intreating of numbers in general," maintains that "the world is made by Symmetry and proportion, and is in that respect compared to Musick, and Musick to Poetry."11 The conclusion follows that numbers (i.e., classic quantities) must replace rhyme and stress. The world had been redeemed from medieval ignorance, adds Campion: "In those lack-learning times and in barbarized Italy, began that vulgar and easy kind of Poesie ... which we abusively call Rime and Meeter,"12 "Meeter" means stressed scansion here; it is even more confusing to note that other theorists like Puttenham use "numbers" to refer to a pure syllable-counting scansion, like that of Japanese verse. But Puttenham adds that "meeter and measure is all one ... and is but the quantity of a verse, either long or short,"13 and then cheerfully assures us that quantity in English consists in the fact that two or more syllables (shorts) make up a foot (long). Puttenham was the first really comprehensive English prosodist, and in his confusions he inaugurated the prosodical tradition of preserving inherited terminology at any cost.

The Elizabethan prosodists also produced some musical analogies which will be mentioned shortly. What must be remembered at this point is that throughout the Middle Ages music still usually depended on a poetic text for its raison d'être. By the fourteenth century, music had attained a stage of development that permitted stylistic controversy to concern itself not only with questions of sacred authority but with those of elegance, subtlety, and utility as well. Composers had been signing their names to compositions for over one hundred years, and instruments were being richly employed in the performance of vocal music. But music was still essentially singing; and although motets, up through the fifteenth century, were written to several texts simultaneously, one for each voice and often in different languages, only rarely could there be music without a text at all.

It was not until after 1500 that instrumental music received the continual attention of being notated, and it was not until the seventeenth century that, aside from lutes and keyboards, particular instruments were specified in score. It was during the sixteenth century, however, with its growth of both amateur and professional musical activity, that

12. Campion, p. 36.
the utter separation of music and poetry was being prepared. Conditions apparently necessary to this final alienation began to emerge. A concentration of interest in instrumental music, and the birth of instrumental virtuosity, gave rise to a change from an emphasis on music as an activity in which one participated as a performer to an activity which one enjoyed as an audience. And finally, music became ideologically transformed from a microcosmic imitation of universal harmony, benefiting the hearer by bringing him into physiological and moral tune with the macrocosm, into a process operating instrumentally upon the emotions, affecting an audience through its senses alone. Renaissance apologists for music’s virtues argued from its cosmological importance and venerable place in antiquity. But before 1620, Descartes could turn off the singing of the spheres as if with a switch when he began his *Compendium Musicæ* by saying: “The object of this art is sound. The end, to delight and move various affections in us.”14 Finally, hundreds of years after poetry had gathered the effects of music into its prosody, baroque music laid unequivocal claim to the powers of diction.

Even before the Renaissance, however, several situations urged further resemblances between music and prosody, in particular. One of these was the thirteenth-century musical system of modal rhythm, which used no time signatures or note values of different durations. Instead, six rhythmic modes, or schemata of duration and stress, called trochaic, iambic, dactylic, anapestic, spondaic, and trisyllabic. The terminology of modal rhythm, as well as its exigencies, carried across to prosody, and influenced both the rationale and composition of troubadour, trouvère, and Minnesinger lyrics. Its effects may have reverberated in England in the beautiful lyrics of the Harleian Ms. 2253 that seem to show troubadour influence in their prosodic ambiguity.

There is not time to discuss the details of the influence of the folk tradition here. It lies at the roots of all vernacular poetry, and within it, music and poetry were so united as to preclude the existence of separate names for them. Throughout Western history, folk music and

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between the intervals of musical pitch and the proportional divisions of lines of verse. For the most part, however, music and poetry were treated as separate disciplines, alike primarily in that a set of symbols capable of describing one of them might possibly be forced into notating certain quantities of the other. Less and less appeal to the unity of the two continued to be contrived by metaphors, anecdotes, and myths, as in the manner of the Elizabethans.

Prosodical interest in music remained confined to attempts to utilize notation throughout the eighteenth century. Its one greatest exponent overshadowed all the others in scope and originality. The Prosodia Rationalis of Joshua Steele, published in 1779, was subtitled: An Essay towards Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech, to be Expressed and Perpetuated by Peculiar Symbols, thus laying claim not only to the study of versification but to more general linguistic theory as well. By Steele's own admission, the work grew out of a controversy between its author and James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, the author of a remarkably perceptive work entitled The Origin and Progress of Language. Like John Horne Tooke in his Epea Pteroenta, Monboddo seems to have foreseen many principles of linguistic theory that were neglected until recent times. Much to Steele's dismay he declared, for example, that pitch, the prized "melody of speech" of so many musical prosodists, was insignificant within syllables and operated only upon word groups. (It would be called today "suprasegmental.")

Steele's book, on the other hand, took great pains to indicate the precise pitch patterns of individual syllables and used signs that resemble those used in teaching Chinese. Duration indicators were then attached to each syllable, below the staff stress symbols were added, and, still below these, dynamic indications that curiously prefigure drawings of the changing amplitudes of sound waves. Steele was compelled, throughout his book, to argue from the ontological commitments that his incredibly intricate notational system forced him to make. But he often put his outlandish system to intricate linguistic uses, such as notating the intonation pattern of both a "ranting actor" and Garrick reading the "To be or not to be" soliloquy. He also carries on an enlightening debate with Monboddo on the nature of phonemic pitch, which he felt existed in English. Perhaps Steele's greatest difficulties as a prosodist, though, are exposed by his indulgence in a private whim. He wanted to re-establish declamation on musical principles; and, declaring the then-current fashions of Italianate recitative to be degraded, inserted a continuous tonic instrumental drone, with the occasional addition of the fifth for emphasis, into his "scores." Something very much like this may have been a standard practice in the performance of many types of medieval secular song.

But Steele's use of the practice constitutes an avowed commitment to his use of a performative system of scansion, rather than a truly descriptive one. The second of these would aim at presenting schematically the whole "musical" structure of a poem, whether this consists, in any particular case, of the prosodic features of the language in which it is written, the arrangement of elements completely foreign to that language (syllable counting in English verse, for example), or even the arrangement of type on a page. A performative system of scansion, on the other hand, would present a series of rules governing a locutionary reading of a particular poem, before a real or implied audience.

It would end up by describing not the poem itself, but the unstated canons of taste behind the rules. Performative systems of scansion, disguised as descriptive ones, have composed all but a few of the metrical studies of the past. Their subjectivity is far more treacherous than even that of reading poems into oscilloscopes and claiming that the image produced describes, or even is, the true poem.

Now it may be claimed that prosodical analysis is a form of literature in itself; that it is far more responsive to the pressures of its own history and conventions than to philosophic canons of truth imposed from without; and that it is just this kind of autotelic, subjective quality for which it is to be prized. I shall return to a consideration of this view.

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16. I am indebted to Donald Hall for insights into this in discussion many years ago, and for information about Steele.
shortly, but for the moment I wish to consider the final phases, and perhaps the most confusing ones, in the history of prosodical analysis, particularly in connection with its use of music.

To turn from Steele to the even more ambitious project of Sidney Lanier, published nearly one hundred years later, is to observe a fundamental change in the nature of the analogy we have been pursing. Lanier, in some notes upon which he based The Science of English Verse, asserted that "Music is not a species of Language, but Language is a species of Music," and it is this tie which bound him throughout the work. Now Steele, despite his whimsicalities, was willing to let the almost trivial fact that both speech and music are composed of sound stand well enough alone, without risking the epistemological dangers of such a canonical assertion as Lanier's. Steele, consequently, remained a linguistic prescident throughout his concerns with musical notation. But Lanier's Romantic notions of both poetry and music crippled him utterly, and he was further limited by a primitive phonetics which he attempted to construct from his not over-profund knowledge of musical acoustics. Like Steele, Lanier misplaced the significance of pitch in English but went beyond this to force a muddy identification of speech pitch with melody. His exhaustive rhetorical discussions produce at best a subtly notated individual reading of a particular passage. What appears to be his elaborate mystique about tone and color in speech sounds may originate in the synaesthesia of late Romanticism, or, more directly, in an extension of the rather unfortunate German word for timbre, "Klangfarbe." Perhaps some constructive analogy might be drawn between the quality of musical tones and the compositional characteristics of phonemes, but it is only through the use, by such scholars as Roman Jakobson, of distinctive feature analysis that such a comparison could efficiently be drawn. Lanier's "tone colors" often resort to the crudest impressionism. What may move us strongly in a poem of Rimbaud can only be perplexing in what purports to be "The Science of English Verse."

The interval between the publication of Steele's and Lanier's treatise saw music move from Haydn to Wagner and beyond, and included the poetry of both Chatterton and Swinburne. The aesthetics of musical romanticism that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century have persisted even into our own day. Schopenhauer, in the first quarter of the century, could deny for music the mimetic quality that he allowed, with considerable qualification, for the other arts, holding it to be "the copy of the Will itself," and, by reason of this, more penetrating emotionally. E. T. A. Hoffmann declared that music, "scoring every aid, every admixture of another art (the art of poetry), ... is the most romantic of all the arts—one might say the only genuinely romantic one—for its sole object is the Infinite." Thus the cognitive or symbolic aspects of music were in some sense denied in order that it be understood as being sufficiently transcendental. But it was not long before it became personified to the degree that individual passages could be considered portentous, gay, longing, ambitious, or prostrate before the awesomeness of fate. Rather than evoking emotion, music somehow became transformed into it.

At the same time, however, such purists as Eduard Hanslick in Vienna could insist on a treatment of music, utterly divorced from all emotion, as pure Form manifesting itself in sound. Hanslick's purposes were those of his concern for structure, and a desire to clear the aesthetic air in their favor. The myth of "pure" music that took hold more generally, however, is better represented by Lanier's remark: "In a sense, any predicable is true of music; just as one may say anything of God, because, being infinite, there is nothing which He is not." And finally, those poets who followed Verlaine in proclaiming the absolute priority of music, were invoking an extremely general concept of the Irrational.

By and large, modern prosody's musical heritage has followed the course we have been tracing. Recent accretions have included a few noteworthy confusions, however. Following Hopkins, the analogical use of the word "counterpoint" arose to describe the disparity between the actual sound of a passage of verse, and the rational schema simultaneously inferred behind it. Indeed, the perfectly proper use of the


musical terms "syncopation" and even "hemiola" would avoid the
trivialities and the inaccuracies incumbent upon the traditional misuse
of "counterpoint." Impressionistic descriptions of verse continue to pro-
duce such vague metaphors as "cadence," "orchestration," "melody,"
"dissonance," etc. Often the rate at which new terms are proliferated
seems only a function of the size of the commentator's musical vocab-
ulary.\footnote{"Fugal" seems to be particularly overworked as a general formal term. Perhaps Joyce's misleading remarks to Stuart Gilbert about what is palpably the structure of an operatic overture, full of snatches of melody which are to be fully contextualized only in the opera itself ("Sirens" episode of Ulysses) helped this unfortunate term along.} The prevalent influence of symbolisme and of Pater on all modern poetry has produced many equivocal aesthetic analogies between poetry and music on the grounds of the expository meaninglessness of both.

In general, the stock of musical expressions with which our tradition
described the so-called "music" of poetry testified to an unstated com-
mitment to two beliefs. The first of these is that the sound patternings
in poetry, and even the suggestions of formal patterns which cannot
be heard, affect us as music does. The second entails our assent to the
proposition that these workings of verse must remain, as most of us feel
that music must remain, rather like a kind of magic.

The magic wrought by language which has equal authority when
spoken or written depends, then, on living fictions that survive the
death of the more specific analogies which embodied them. If "the
music of poetry" half embarrasses now, "the sound of poetry" still does
not, nor does "the look of poetry" (printed text which does not fill rec-
angles of page, etc.). An important text for the consideration of the
power of poetry as the efficacy not of music, but more generally of
sound itself, is the first sixteen lines of Wordsworth's remarkable and
quite neglected "Ode on the Power of Sound," begun in 1828 and pub-
ishd in 1835. They address themselves, at the start, to the primary
sense of vision, but quickly shift to the auditory:

\begin{quote}
The relation between the senses is fascinating here, eye and ear stand-
ing as thought and feeling; one is also tempted to dwell on the cave of
Hearing as a Romantic fulfillment of Neoclassic traditions, in which
sound, music herself, or echo inhabits a cave or a so-called "shell" (by
tradition the "chorded shell," testudo, a sphenodoch for "lyre" or even
"inte"); but Wordsworth's musical shell is literally the seashell held to
the ear, an exclusively Romantic invention. In this marvelous image--
the cell of Hearing, dark and blind;
 Intricate labyrinth, more dread for thought
 To enter than oracular cave
---the shell merges with the auricular cave of the cochlea, the inner ear,
whose logarithmic spiral mirrors that of the shell.

But our principal concern now must be with the totality of the sense
of hearing as being made primary in this astonishing poem, a poem
that will put sound, rather than light, in a privileged role in relation
to the creating and prior logos. It is with Romantic poetry that we be-
gin to get a poetic confrontation of the realms of the two reigning
senses. In the Petrarchan centuries, the eye was closest to the mind and
the heart—the eye spoke, shot its shafts, created, and benighted like the
eye of heaven: "Wine comes in at the mouth / And love comes in at the eye," in Yeats’s archaic recapitulation. The Neoclassic enlightenment mistrusted the realm of the unmediated ear, almost echoing the uneasiness of Classical antiquity about textless (and, therefore, "irrational") music. Alexander Pope denounces bad critics who judge by the wretched ear alone, those "tuneful fools" whom he likens to those who "to church repair / Not for the doctrine, but the music there." Melody and meaning have parted company; poems have become primarily inscriptions, and there is no equivalent, in visual terms, for the ancillary quality of "music" in Pope's sense. But in Romanticism's concern with the visual and the visionary, a new attitude toward the realms of sense develops, and we observe, for example, the frequent event of the eye giving way to the ear at a particular kind of heightened moment. Not only in the continuous mistrust of optical vision by William Blake, but in Wordsworth, on the top of Snowdon, where the visionary prospect becomes penetrated by "the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Immemorable, roaring with one voice! / Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour, / For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens."

We notice here that there is no equivalent term, in the ear's domain, for the word "visionary" in that of the eye; we must mix metaphors to characterize this acoustically improbable phenomenon as "visionary sound."

In Keats, too, the darkness falls at the end of the great Autumn ode leaving only the final night sounds of closure, the noises of gathering in; even more spectacular is the pursuit of the dark bird of myth, the nightingale, into the resounding and palpable forests of sound and touch where, "darkling," the poet can listen to more than birdsong. Or in Shelley's Skylark poem, where the imaginative attention soars after the heard but unseen point of eloquence that fills the great open room of English sky with sound as if, we would say today, a wall switch had been flipped on. Even Blake, for whom hearing is a bit more reliable than sight, can give us such fantastic synesthesias as in the London poem from Songs of Experience, where all of the apprehended phenomena are spoken of as "heard," and yet where sound turns into visual concretion:

Here, the particular audibles condense, out of the waves they make in the air and the motions their impingings make on the consciousness, into a cinematic animation, becoming the blackening that is more than sot, and the reddening that bursts into blood on its contact with the surfaces of blame.

The imaginative regions of eye and ear in Romantic poetry are much more responsive to the phenomenology of the senses than were the musical and visual concerns of Renaissance and Augustan literatures. I refer to such matters as those of sweep and discontinuity—the ability of each sense to locate respectively point sources of light and sound in space; what it means that one can shut, or avert, the eyes but not the ears; how hearing outlasts vision as one falls through layers of sleep; and how sound can pierce the dark globe of sleeping consciousness, the planetarium in which are projected our dreams, without shattering it, while light cannot. Unlike the German Romantics, for whom music was the epitome of human imaginative activity, it was natural sound or, at most, music heard out-of-doors, blending with the wind and the sounds of trees and falling waters, which was of the greatest interest. The archetypal music of English Romanticism is not that of the concert hall, nor of the singer, nor of the ravishing modulation abstracted from a performance of it, nor of the demonic fiddling of Romantic fable. Rather is it the aeolian harp, activated by the wind, eventually coming to stand for the poet himself.

The wind harp was indeed so pervasive an image that it could even show up, in the work of a third-generation poet like George Darley, as a figure for poetic form, rather than the person of the poet himself. In the brilliant and sensitive Introduction to an 1840 edition of Beaumont and Fletcher (it anticipates Swinburne's critical sensitivity to Jacobean verse), Darley turns from his extremely detailed and pointed discussion of the accentual force of many particular lines to a more general
meditation. It prefigures Whitman’s figure of the rhythm and protean variety of the sea as a model for his own verse:

I could easily imagine a fine system of versification, founded by some perfect modulator upon a very different principle from the square; upon a series of triangles for example, lengthening and contracting itself in turns like the rhythm of an Eolian lyre, now slowly, now rapidly—a swell now, now a swoon, till every mood of thought found its proper echo in the metre. But such a style of modulation is the last perfection of human language, which none has ever yet reached, perhaps ever will reach. Even to approach it demands much more consummate skill than our two dramatists possessed. Their peculiar rhythm has so little about it Eolian, that it has scarce any music at all except in some petted passages: ease is not music, gracefulness is not music, smoothness—nay suavity, is not music. To ensure music, lines must be full of sound, or soundness, which results from principles in diametrical opposition to those of our authors—from single endings, even pauses, sonorous terminative words, sustained tone, and regular cadence or tread of the numbers. Reverse principles are useful now and then to give this system variety, and introduce apt discords, the resolution of which back again into concord, pleases beyond unbroken concord itself. There is more virtue in rhythm than it has credit for—a virtue productive of secret and remote effects, perhaps seldom thought of. Imagination and passion are beyond doubt the prime constituents of poetry, but to complete its distinct nature, rhythm would seem an attribute, however subordinate, little less useful than either. Thus to specialize man’s nature, clay unites with the Spirit of God and the breath; these nobler adjuncts, reason and life, requiring as their presence-room the harmonical system of parts, called human form, ere they can render themselves apparent, like imagination and passion the rhythmical form of language, called Song, wherein their divine properties might be rendered more manifest. . .


21. Ibid., p. 283.

But the authenticating necessity of the wind, curling through the acolian harpstrings with the rhythms of nature, had not always been requisite. From the middle of the sixteenth century onward, the celebration of music was an important subject for poetry, and evolved from being primarily an emblem of world order into the epitome of emotive rhetoric—the music of the spheres gave way to that of Orpheus, in a sense. But throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the praise of music in poetry became more and more the praise of poetry itself. There are several reasons for this, not the least important being the Neoclassic awareness of the union of music and poetry in antiquity and the programmatic Renaissance attempts to reunite them in their
original unfallen relation. Controversies about the relative role of text and music and how these are best to be served abound in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Like the arguments over prosody in English literary criticism of that time, frequent agreements on principle produce the widest divergencies in mode of realization, so that while the greatest of the polyphonic madrigals were being composed in England by Byrd, Weelkes, Wilbye, and Gibbons, early experiments in monody were leading, in Italy, to thinly accompanied solo recitative and the birth of opera.

Despite these somewhat self-conscious attempts to reunite music with lyric and dramatic poetry, however, their paths diverged, and yet both were directed forward. Henceforth, the music of poetry and the poetry of music would have irreversibly contracted into metaphors, into concepts applying only to certain aspects of each art. There were specific problems shaping English poetry in its break with music; it is the early seventeenth century which hears the speaking voice, the Classical inscription, and the argumentative prose passage emerging, in metaphysical poetry, as the models for what are still called "songs." At the same time, mythologies of the kinship of music and poem proliferate in poetic imagery. By the later eighteenth century, "song" had become firmly established as a trivial poetic mode as opposed to meditation, epistle, and even totally unmusical formal ode. An interest in sound per se, rather than organized music, was developing. This interest finally flourished in what Harold Bloom has called the generally visionary climate of Romantic poetry. This climate marks the renewed commitment with which Blake's Piper and his Bard, and the authors of Lyrical Ballads, adopt the literary modes of song text, popular and folk, and dramatic, as the forms which will release the deepest seriousness. They were the wings on which to fly out of the rhetorical and stylistic labyrinth of the literary and the official into the poetic which lay beyond.

When we consider the relation between text and music in song, we must be aware of three dimensions along which conventions may extend—poetic tradition, musical tradition, and convention of setting or underlaying or associating the two. Thus, for example, the very way in which a text would be treated musically in some fifteenth-century Eng-

lish secular song—no characteristic rhythmic impulse that either followed or substituted for that of the text; long (we would think) irrelevant melismata on unimportant words or syllables, and so forth—would seem to us to be "poor" setting. Or consider the alignment of textual and musical rhythms in a folksong or nursery rhyme and, on the other hand, the way in which another sort of "good" or "apt" setting might utterly distort the textual rhythm—Handel's setting, in Semele, say, of the couplets from Pope's summer pastoral:

Where-e'er you walk, cool Gales shall fan the Glade,
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade,
Where-e'er you tread, the blushing Flow'rs shall rise,
And all things flourish where you turn your eyes.

These two couplets are the text for a ritornellic aria, and the whole rhythmic scheme of heroic iambic is lost in the movement of the setting, which nevertheless very cleverly maintains measure breaks at the syntactic caesuras. It is not that a simple setting is good and an ornate one bad: we implicitly admit a whole array of setting, let alone musical or poetic, conventions.

The polyphonic madrigal and the usually solo, strophic ayre or lute song were the two principal modes of setting texts in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century art songs in England. The second gradually came to supplant the first because of its purportedly greater fidelity to the poetic text; according to the best current French and Italian theories, a solo voice singing expressively modulated vocal lines, free of the entanglements and the obscurings of polyphonic parts, could best express the emotional quality, and thereby the meaning, of a poetic text. It was certainly true that, as a passive listener, it was always possible to hear all the words in a solo ayre. In a madrigal, however, the listened-to texture is very peculiar indeed, with all sorts of episodic sections, fragments of phrase and word now clarified, now blurred, on frequent repetition in different voices; finally, one is reduced, as audience, to waiting hopefully for periods of homophonic, or foursquare harmonization of the kind we know from hymn tunes, where everyone sings the same syllable at the same instant. And yet
those homophonic stretches were alien to the spirit of the true madrigal. In the accompanied ayre, a solo voice would sing a melody to a lute or viol accompaniment which might indeed make imitative counterpoint with the vocal part, but never contribute to the aural blanketing of the latter. The English madrigal was generally more of a household, and less of an esoteric, art than the Italian one, and we tend to find less idiosyncratic chromaticism, for example. But the distinguishing feature of the English art song during the Renaissance is the kind of rhythmic independence that the vocal lines must have in order to set the text well and expressively. For unlike French, in which the lack of syllabic stress accent can allow the same disyllabic word to be set to two totally opposed rhythmic patterns in succession, or Italian, in which the penultimate accent and the generally vocalic, unstressed ultimate syllable tend to allow for certain smoothnesses of alignment of regularized, flowing melodies and the words they are sung to, English verse of the standard, accentual-syllabic sort poses grave problems for the musical setting. Precisely because the minute variations of stress accent in phrase structure account for so much of the rhetorical tone of English speech, precisely because of the ambiguities that accompany the process of getting the actualities of English sentences and phrases into the schemata of iambic verse, there is a kind of rhythmic richness about English poetry that is hard to find even in verse in Russian, which shares with English problems of word stress and concomitant vowel reduction, as well as a high proportion of consonantal clusters.

Now, the English madrigal was particularly good at working out all these ambiguities, at meeting the richnesses of impulse of the text with an appropriately complex array of rhythmic versions. It is just because of the independence of the various parts that it could do so. What sounds to an audience like a jumble can be appreciated by a singer of one of those parts as an extremely subtle variation on the rhythmic intricacies of a line other variations of which will appear in other parts. Necessarily, this makes the appreciation of madrigalian setting a participatory rather than an audience matter. Again, true madrigalian settings are never strophic; frequently, a particular poem will be set in a group of madrigals, so that the setting of a subsequent strophe or stanza, even though metrically equivalent to the first, will yet never depend on the intimate rhythmic interpretation given to that opening one. The ayres, on the other hand, were all strophic; and whatever the expressive attention given to the musical handling of one group of words, the unique exigencies of a subsequent group would make that attention irrelevant. Save in the cases of strophic songs whose rhythms are so mechanical, are so schematically close to the norms provided by the meter that they partake of syntactic woodenness and the rhythmic torpor of the mechanical, none but the first stanza can be set well. And even that setting will be a frozen version of the line’s rhythm; far too often, even a magnificent composer of lute songs like John Dowland would choose the wrong version.

This effect of freezing a text in a setting, incidentally, poses some interesting problems for the prosodist. The legacy of the eighteenth-century “musical” metrists like Joshua Steele has been most unfortunate; prosodists, critics, and even casual (in the realms of linguistic theory, at least) classroom teachers continue to use musical notation to scan lines of verse. What is peculiar about such a practice is not that it cannot be used to specify properly which syllables, in accentual-syllabic verse, are stressed and which unstressed. It certainly can; the difficulty is that it over-specifies. Let me present some examples. The first is in not in English, but I hope that it will be nevertheless familiar—the Schubert setting of Goethe’s “Heidenröslein,” and the older, “folk-song” version of it. The text, it may be remembered, is like English, accentual-syllabic—in this case, trochaic tetrameter and trimeter catalectic: “Sah’ ein Knab’ ein Röslein steh’n, / Röslein auf der Heiden, / War so jung und morgenschön, / Lief er schnell es nah zu sein . . .” etc. The two settings are in three and two, respectively, and they both handle the rhythm, even given strophic shifts in successive stanzas, extremely well:

[Schubert]

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{Sah’ ein Knab’ ein Röslein steh’n . . .} \\
\text{"Folksied"}
\end{array}
\]
The relative durations are irrelevant here: they are, in fact, over-specific as far as the prosody of the text is concerned. What the two settings have in common, is in fact the following:

\[ \text{Sah'} \text{ ein Knab' ein Röslein steh'n} \]

or, to put it in the archaic and misleading terminology we still use, they both show that the text is trochaic, starting with what must be set as a downbeat. The extra length which the 3/4 setting gives to the stresses syllables we might think of as lying implicit in the text, just as the capacity for being equalized (as by Schubert) does. No use of musical notation to scan or analyze a poetic text will do any more than set it to a pitchless music. And as a setting, it cannot be correct or incorrect, save in giving a musical downbeat to a unstressed syllable, and thus distorting an English word. As a setting, it can only be better or worse, richer or thinner, sophisticated or plonking—indeed, like a critical reading of text in toto.22

Let me give an English example, from the period of English music and poetry we have been discussing. Thomas Campion's little poem in two stanzas of iambic pentameter ababcc beginning “Blame not my cheeks though pale with love they be” was set both by the poet-composer himself, and by Robert Jones in a collection published four years afterward. In both settings, the first and third lines are set to the same material which is repeated. Rhythmically, the two treatments go as follows:

\[
\text{[Campion] } \begin{array}{c}
\text{Blame not my cheeks though pale with love they be} \\
\text{To che-rih it that is dis-mayed with thee}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\text{[Jones] } \begin{array}{c}
\text{Blame not my cheeks though pale with love they be} \\
\text{To che-rih it that is dis-mayed with thee}
\end{array}
\]

Whatever greater authority is to be given to Campion's own conception of the triple rhythm in the setting, it will be noticed that both composers are agreed on the contrastive stress pattern of the opening phrase (a reversed opening foot, as the older prosody would call it, or a displaced stress-maximum): “Blame not.” Campion’s setting is more declamatory; Jones’s is slower and gives greater duration to the unstressed syllables “with” and “dis-,” but with the intention of moving upward through a minor third (where Campion descends), on the three notes of “pale with love” and “is dis-mayed.” Campion’s setting is in D minor, Jones’s in G major. Both promote the “it” of the third line willy-nilly, the accentual pattern having been “frozen” on the “cheeks.”23 Both, as with the Goethe settings, have something to say about the rhythmic complexities of the text, which as in all poems, result from various periodicities being overlaid upon each other. Syllable sequence, stress pattern, word boundary, modulations of stress pattern because of phrase grouping, additional prominence to syllables being given by internal rhyme, assonance, or alliteration—and all before we have considered anything semantic at all. It is inevitable that a number of different settings would all “mark up,” scan, point out, diagram some of these overlaid rhythms, and pick them out. It was undoubtedly this phenomenon that Hopkins had in mind when he conceived of the concept of “counterpoint,” as he was observed earlier.

It should be understood, then, that while musical notation will include a perfectly verifiable marking of the accentuation as realized in the metrical scheme, it will provide other, ad hoc information that really constitutes a set of instructions for an oral performance. There are really three nesting sets of contingency patterns here.

\[
\text{METER}
\]

\[
\text{RHYTHM}
\]

\[
\text{SETTING OR PERFORMANCE}
\]

The meter (say, iambic pentameter) sets up certain contingencies, within which a vast array of different lines may be realized; given all

22. What Schubert indeed does here is to point up the ordinarily lost, unstressed diminutive syllable “-lein” in a bit of brilliant vocal pointing.

23. I am not suggesting that comparisons across setting genres be made; the differences might be too radical, although the common ground of word stress would remain. See, for example, the settings by Jones, in plain style, and by Alfonso Ferrabosco in declamatory style, of “Shall I seek to ease my grief?”
the possible compounding of rhythms mentioned before, the array is potentially infinite. To this extent, the conceptual matrix of the iambic pentameter is rather like a generative system, linguistically speaking. Any particular instance of a line, manifesting this design (to use Roman Jakobson’s terminology) will have been derived from the constraints of the metrical system.

The next step is the relation of rhythm to performance or setting (which, for these purposes, are identical—the compounding of the rhythms in the musical setting, the melody, the harmonic rhythm if any, the modulating effects of other parts, rhythmically and harmonically, etc., are analogous to all the linguistic rhythms not specified by the verse design). That relation is usefully analogous: the rhythm of the line allows for, generates (in a grammatical sense) a host of possible settings, all within certain limits of contingency. To give a musical setting (pitchless as “musical scansions” are) to a line of verse, then, is as misleading as calling any particular line of Paradise Lost the poem’s scheme, or meter. One says that the line exemplifies the meter, but then goes on to abstract. Such is the power of the musical mystique we examined earlier, the fiction of the music of verse, that it still flourishes in this pedagogical corner.

Hopkins, musician that he was, perceived an obvious fact about the way in which a musical setting can “freeze” a reading of a line’s rhythm. We have been discussing monodic settings here, songs for voice and lute (or, in the case of the German song, piano). In the polyphonic madrigals of the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, the fully independent contrapuntal vocal parts could (although they did not always) pluck out the rhythmic ambiguities and possibilities in a text.

The virtues of the polyphonic setting of the madrigal can be exemplified by a brief and minor instance, a ballet, or “fa-la;” as they were sometimes called, by Thomas Weelkes, from his 1598 collection. The text is a bit of fluff, perhaps Anacreontic in inspiration, and useful here only because of the rhythm of the last line of the first stanza:

24. See the more detailed discussion of these matters in Chapters II and IV.

Now a ballet differs from a true madrigal in that it is mostly homophonic, note against note, syllable against syllable in the various parts; only a mandatory section of fa-la-la-la-las is set polyphonically. Here, these fa-las come after “remove”; the voices then come back together homophonically on “Do you not see / How they agree;” a neat little procedural pun typical of madrigals, which like to set verbs of rising or augmenting with an ascending melody and words like “sharp” with the appropriate accidental. All this might be barely worth observing, were it not for the ultimate line of the strophe. This is iambic tetrameter like the other longer lines, rhyming with the preceding two short ones but distinguished by the ambiguous stress pattern of its close. As far as iambic stressing is concerned, the line could read:

Then cease, fair ladies, why weep ye?

The phrase “fair ladies,” unless contrastively stressed “fair ladies” (as opposed, say, to the foul ones) enters the iambic pattern in just that way, and terminal “ye” picks up the extra prominence of being rhymed. But the last three syllables pose a rhetorical problem: contrastively accented, they can be “why weep ye?” or “why weep ye?” or “why weep ye!”—that is, “what are you crying for?” or “why are you crying about it?” or “why you, of all people?” It is the last of these that is certainly suggested by the metrical position of the phrase, reinforced by the rhyme. But in the context of the song, it should, if possible, be shown to mean all three. This is just what Weelkes does, by setting the line in a faintly polyphonic texture, with every voice repeating the phrase at least once, and, among the different parts, the various rhythmic patterns generating three different stressings of the text.
Another bout of fa-la-la-la-las closes the setting of the strophe. The point is clear: polyphonic settings can possibly get at the richness of rhythmic texture developed in accentual-syllabic English verse, while a single melodic line can probably not, at best perhaps managing to seize on part of a fruitful ambiguity and resolve it one way or another. But again, we must remember that the polyphonic setting’s virtues can be apparent only to a participant. In a sense, the debased form of this almost coterie quality is the Restoration catch, where the frequent bawdy meaning that emerges when otherwise innocent single parts are sung in canon is apparent to the singers more than to the hearers.

Another example in the history of the separation between poetry and music is Henry Lawes. John Milton, who was his friend, praises him specifically as one who “first taught our English music how to span / Words with just note and accent, not to scan / With Midas’ ears, committing short and long.” In Lawes’s setting of the great song to Echo in Comus, he manages throughout most of the song to prevent the interests of musical structure (the generation of sequences, for example, in the melodic line, the expressive prolongations and melismata that he would have felt requisite) from conflicting totally and cruelly with the structures of the text. These structures involve the delicate modulation of line length and rhyme:

Lawes’s setting of these lines is in the Caroline declamatory style, programmatically monodic, devoted to setting an expressive but faithful recitative version of the text. Of necessity, this demands a subtler relation of musical to textual period than the older ayres provided, with their phrase-for-line patterns, strophic returns, and sub-strophic repeats. What is most interesting here is Lawes’s attempt to handle the delicate, typically Miltonic enjambment at “have / Hid them” (measure 20), where the expected contre-rejet might have been “O if thou have / Seen them, tell me . . .” or the like. Lawes’s prosodically awkward measure may indeed have been a go at rendering the effect of the “have,” with its weak rhyme and its indeterminate active-auxiliary status as a verb. The echo of the attempt, at measure 23, generates too much rhetorical emphasis on “sweet” and displaces the rhyme, eventually, at “sphere.”

What is interesting about Milton’s praise of Lawes (for Milton was no musical illiterate himself) is its oblique thrust. He is praising him for being Italianate, for not being an old-fashioned polyphonist perhaps, and for his friendship and collaboration. Lawes does, in fact, “commit short and long,” but he sounds, or perhaps feels, to Milton as if he doesn’t. Nevertheless, the hopelessness of carrying over the deepest rhythmic impulses of the English poem into a musical setting was
as apparent to Milton as to anyone. This misplaced praise of Lawes, incidentally, is echoed in the twentieth century by Ezra Pound’s rather uninformed remarks on seventeenth-century music, particularly his championship of Lawes and Jenkins on grounds rather inconsistent with his other literary-musical views. Pound’s remarks on music and poetry are fascinating in this context because they embody certain literary attitudes toward the separation between the two that have been themselves the subject of poetry, but which, when stated as dogma, look rather shoddy. Thus, in *The ABC of Reading*, he announces portentously:

The author’s conviction on this day of New Year is that music begins to atrophy when it departs too far from the dance; that poetry begins to atrophy when it gets too far from music; but this must not be taken as implying that all good music is dance music or all poetry lyric. Bach and Mozart are never too far from physical movement.\(^{25}\)

This is really either a banal musical truism, or quite false; that is, it either means that music must swing, that Bach’s French suites must not be played as if they were classroom exercises in part-writing, or else, and here falsely, that Palestrina and Wagner on the one hand, and Milton and Wordsworth on the other, are the results of artistic atrophy. Doubtless Pound felt this to be true.

I should rather, at this point, invoke C. S. Lewis’s remark about sixteenth-century lyric poems, although I think that it is far more true of the major seventeenth-century lyric, substituting as it does the authenticity of the spoken voice for the intonations of song. He observes that, “however happily married to their notes in the end, the poems had a rhythmical life of their own before the marriage, and it is their ‘music’

---

\(^{25}\) Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (Norfolk, Conn., n.d.), p. 14. Pound seems to have been unaware, for all of his celebration of Lawes and Jenkins, of the difference between the former’s declamatory settings of texts, in 2, and his dance songs, in 3. This appears to be a Jacobean and Caroline convention, and one of great consequence for the future of English song.
in that sense that the literary critic is concerned with.” Even more important, it is with that “music” that subsequent poets are concerned.

If the seventeenth century is that of the end of nostalgic Renaissance hopes for a re-creation of the original union of music and poetry, it is also the period in which poetry’s own music develops most remarkably. The sounds of speech, instrumentalized within the framework of metrical conventions, become dominant in the organization of verse. The role of speech sound in the development of those unique and problematic English metrical conventions is quite limited, and in analyzing that development we remain, at the beginning particularly, in the realm of the eye rather than the ear. It is interesting, though possibly confusing, to note that, all this while, the linguistic music of poetry is being praised as though it were, in fact, actual vocal or instrumental music, as though, in fact, the separation between music and poetry had never occurred.

But this praise of music in poetry, this courting of its vanished partner, itself begins to be mechanical. In Neoclassic diction, all of the stiff personifications of music in such genres as the musical ode help to create the background of Romantic mistrust of the praise of the institutional music which has replaced the Renaissance notion of the harmony of the world, and for which the instrumental replaces the vocal as the epitome of human music. The Romantics turn to the celebration of natural sound, of human music authenticated by being heard outdoors and by blending with the music of nature. This outdoor music, the blending of the human with the natural, originates in pastoral. A topos is certainly to be found at the beginning of Virgil’s first eclogue: “We have fled our homeland; you, Tityrus, at ease in the shade, teach the woods to echo ‘fair Amaryllis.’”

nos patriam fugimus: tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra
famosam resonare doceas Amaryllida silvas.

The woods learned their lesson well; the auditory mode of the pathetic fallacy came into being, as far as subsequent poetry is concerned. In the Renaissance, it is only pastoral tradition which main-

The point here is not so much that the water might or might not have been that of Helicon, or the authentic source, in both original and applied senses of the word, of true poetry. Rather, it is starting to become legitimized within the pastoral mythology itself—it will be good poetry because it is tuned not to the music of the spheres (which in Renaissance mythology all well-tuned human music is, of necessity) but because it is tuned to the flow of water, the sound of eloquence in an uncorrupted garden. In the following two hundred years it will become cliché. But when Romantic poetry begins to take up the pastoral device, something else happens to it conceptually. A dialectic between the inner and the outer, being subject and object, takes it up, and it starts to involve the actualities of the ear and the way in which consciousness itself makes sense of these. Poetry becomes, for itself, something very like the “mingled measure,” in Collins’s and Coleridge’s phrase, of the human music set against an undersong of wind or water or their resonances.

If a mythical starting point for the pastoral music of outdoor sound might be located in the Virgilian shepherd’s liquid metronome, the more complex Romantic reading of nature demands a different sort of account. One poem by Robert Frost, harking back to Classical pastoral in one way, more directly invoking the biblical garden, may serve to illustrate this:

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning, but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds’ song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

This is an uncharacteristically mythopoetic moment for Frost. The myth is that of the imprinting of consciousness onto nature, not a visual one of, say, double exposure, or overlay of transparency that might fulfill technologically a wholly imagined Romantic device, but an aural one—“Be that as may be, she was in their song,” and surely only because of the heightened power of eloquence in call or laughter, not weeping, the very sounds of which drop, like tears, into the ground. Hereafter, the poem says, nature would exist as a meaningful communicant—this is really a totally Emersonian poem—to be listened to because human meaning would always be in it. The final couplet of the sonnet is a blend of summation and inspired, crafty hedging: “Never again would birds’ song be the same,” says Frost, in the line that gives the poem its title. But then he withdraws, as if the point of the poem couldn’t be the establishment of a major myth; the final line domesticates the story, turning into canny praise of Eve’s beauty—“And to do that to birds was why she came.” But of course the poem is not about Eve as woman at all, but, in an unavowedly Miltonic way, about a part of humanity.

“Her tone of meaning, but without the words”—undoubtedly what Frost had earlier formulated, in attempting to particularize the dimension of the music of speech to which his ear was most highly attuned, as “the sentence sound.” He meant the delicate but crucial modulations of phrase-stress pattern, contrastive stress, the rhetorical suprasegmentals, that not only make oral communication what it is, but which a practitioner of classical accentual-syllabic verse must be aware of. It

is the music of English verse in which syntax plays a necessarily important role. “Just so many sentence sounds belong to man as just so many vocal runs belong to one kind of bird,” he writes to Sidney Cox in 1914. “We come into the world with them and create none of them. What we feel as creation is only selection and grouping. We summon them from Heaven knows where under excitement with the audible imagination.”

The sound of sense: the music of speech, but of speech being watched, in its transcribed form, within a diagraming and punctuating and annotating grid of metrical pattern. To this degree, we all still dwell in the Romantic world of the ear, in which the song of birds is more like poetry than a Beethoven string quartet. Wordsworth’s “Ode on the Power of Sound” is, of course, emphatically not about the power of music, but about the ear’s larger, undomesticated vastnesses, those regions in which real poetry, rather than cultivated verse, is to be found, the realm of all the human and natural utterance, from cries of pain to shouts of discovery: the sounds of language and of the wind in trees.