I think, because it outwardly manifests what so much post-Modern experimentation with poetic technique does not avow—the internalization of other prior models, that they may be incorporated into the new poetic being. The dialectic of innovation is always a subtle one, and the very concept of originality has shifted its ground since the founding of the formal conventions of poetry in English, from being at the source of a stream of tradition to drilling one's own Helicon, wherever one may be standing in time or place. But to be ignorant of the underground stream that is bursting forth at the time is, after all, not to know the ground upon which one is standing.

Ut pictura poesis: a poem is like a picture, says Horace in his Art of Poetry, raising the question of a problematic correspondence that has become increasingly interesting now that the phrase has ceased being a tag line as it was in the eighteenth century. A poem is like a picture, and of course Horace meant, and went on to mean, in that one sort may demand a close-up, intimate scrutiny, while another looks best from far away; he goes on to parallel those lines about various modes of scale and scope with another about haec amat obscurum, volet haec sub luce videri—this one loves the dark, that one wants to be seen in the light—and fears not, he goes on to say, the critical gaze of judgment. But here the simile abandons its fidelity to painting, and the moralizing thrust outgrows the comparison. The other resemblance between the two arts in Horace is in the opening image of the insane painter putting parts of a picture together the wrong way, where the basis of the comparison is one of a mimetic structure assembled from significant parts. Throughout the rest of his poem, Horace uses conventional musical images in analogies—different instruments for modalities and styles, strings being plucked, etc.—without explanation and far oftener than his allusions to painting. It is significant that subsequent literary history, particularly in the baroque and rococo, applied Horace's phrase as a far more general tag.
As we have seen, criticism has always been interested in the ways in which poetry is more or less like and more or less about music, and, in particular, with some of the characteristics of poetic language that make any reading of a poem, even a silent one, something very like a performance intoned aloud. Reading, in other words, becomes a matter for the inner ear, eliciting songs sung in poetry's private, purely linguistic kind of music. But here I shall be concerned with reading in another sense. That sense is more like one of scanning, in the non-prosodic usage (one I have almost borrowed back from art historians and architects, when they talk of “reading” a picture, or an elevation, or some architectural detail). The poem in the eye is a kind of picture, and one of the things we do when we read a poem is to discern visual structures, to make out parts, wholes, relationships, to see patterns in sub- and total contexts, and so forth. Our ability to do this will depend, in the use of pictures, upon the way in which prior associations, previously understood graphic conventions, are engaged by the particular versions of those conventions in the individual style of the picture. All pictures look more like other pictures than what they are pictures of.

So, probably, with poems. Our reading of a poem involves not only matters, on a high linguistic level, of primary discernment, in the sense of being able to “read” someone's handwriting, say. There are other levels of this scanning, making out, all the way up to those of, for example, genre recognition; one reads poems in the way in which one reads English, reads sentences, reads rapidly or incomprehendingly, rather than just in the sense of reading something in English. There is a parallel ambiguity with visual representation; consider these exchanges: “What are you drawing?”—“A house” and “What are you drawing?”—“A picture. Of a house.” In the first case, the colloquial ellipsis is more than that: the word is being used in the sense of mimesis, representation—its proper paraphrase is “What are you depicting?” In the second case, the word means to make, to construct a new sort of thing, on a plane, to make a designed surface. And yet the position I mentioned before essentially maintained that these senses must always be somehow combined, in that one is always depicting not a house, but some depiction of a house—one draws a picture by depicting some picture, by drawing not from life but, in a sense, by tracing a kind of picture that he already sees. So, too, with poems. They are more like each other than they are like reality, and it may even be true that they are more about each other in this way as well. A full reading of a poem will depend upon recognition of its genre, and of its version of that genre. It is significant that, as far as all contemporary art—music, poetry, painting—is concerned, when someone says “I don’t understand it,” he usually means “I don’t recognize its genre or type; what sort of picture or poem or whatever is it?” But this is patently less true in the case of music, whose tones have, until recently, been available for no other purpose than for musical art (as Paul Valéry remarked longingly to a composer—whereas he, on the other hand, needed to employ the same language with which he communicated with the grocer). Picture genre and poem genre are in this way quite alike.

In moving from the ear’s domain to that of the eye, I should like in the following remarks to do several things with the various kinds of likeness between poem and picture. One of these is to investigate the ways in which the poem on the written or printed page is read in some of the senses outlined above. Another is to go into the ways in which poems deal with picturing, with the visual world. Finally, I should like to discuss a few parallels between these two matters in the history of English and American poetry, and in modern poetry in particular. Strangely enough, entering the realm of the eye would lead us into history more than did traveling about in the ear’s country—I say strangely enough, because we ordinarily think of music as being purely (or at any rate, primarily) temporal, and of pictures as being spatial. And yet as far as language is concerned, an utterance is a thing of the moment, and an inscription can endure, and be consulted, read, reconstructed, misunderstood, or whatever, later on. Even the memory’s system of storage and retrieval was thought of, until very recently, as a kind of visual model, from the Lockeian language of slates and impressions and so forth on up. And even the first disc recordings were so obviously

1. This point arose in conversations with Stanley Cavell.
the vocalization of visible inscriptions that the phonographic reproducer was, imaginatively speaking, very much like a person reading aloud or a code he alone knew.

So that if one were to diagram the way in which the two senses cut through poetic language, the ear and the eye would be axes at right angles to each other, and would suggest the perpendicular axes along which Yeats, in A Vision, suggested that the peculiar identity of poems might be graphed. Not literally, of course: in a far more grandiose way he was purporting to talk about human history and its greater cycles, but when he set up his polarities, he was saying something important about the way in which the personal, immediate, occasional status of a poetic utterance meshes with the conventional and historical. We may view this in the contracted perspective of stylistics (where the problem becomes the famous one of “Tradition and the Individual Talent”), or in a more expanded view like that of the picture analogy (where the axes are representation, about-ness, on the one hand, and generic identity, representation of the genre or type, on the other). Yeats puts past and future as contraries on one axis (not, you will notice, past and present); the other pair couples and contrasts now and eternity. It is on the second of these axes that I would pose the ear, the individual talent, the voice, the parole; on the first are ranged the eye, the tradition, the mask through which that voice sounds, and the langue. The ear responds to the dimension of natural experience, the eye to that of convention.

I have drawn a similar distinction elsewhere between the concepts of meter and rhythm in the formal analysis of poetic language. The poem’s aural dimension engages the concept of rhythm, but here I shall be concerned with apparent form and meter. Certainly any poem exists in both of these dimensions, but just as poetry’s sense of itself, its fiction about its own nature, remains a musical, an auditory one throughout a good deal of its history, a visual concern just as surely begins to emerge after a while. This concern, like the musical one, is a matter of the likeness of poetic language to essential utterance on the one hand, and to inscription on the other.

So it is that a metrical line is beautiful in its own kind although two syllables of that line cannot be pronounced simultaneously. The second is pronounced only after the first has passed, and such is the order of procedure to the end of the line, so that when the last syllable sounds, alone, unaccompanied by the sound of the previous syllables, it yet, as being part of the whole metrical fabric, perfects the form and metrical beauty of the whole. But the versifier’s art itself is not dependent on time in the same way; its beauty is not portioned out in temporally measured units. It is simultaneously possessed of all those virtues which enable it to produce a line—a line which is not simultaneously possessed of all its virtues but which produces them in order. For the beautiful thing shows the last footprints of that beauty which art itself constantly and immutably watches over.

The famous passage in the *Confessions* (XI, xxvi-xxvii)—in which the reading, acoustical, and mental scanning of a line of verse, and the remembering of its passing moments and sections, is used as a great example of phenomenological clocking—seems to lie behind this magnificent appreciation of the dual nature of the line of verse. We may take the historical view that oral (and, of course, simultaneously musical) poetry came to be preserved in inscription (or, conversely, died and was entombed in it); or we may, again following Augustine, maintain that the vocal pronouncing of signs, words, “is occasioned by the deep of this world, and the blindness of the flesh, which cannot see thoughts; so that there is need to speak aloud into the ears.” In either event, the inscription and the utterance are locked in a dialectical relation of prior-secondary, of primary and antithetical. The field in which that dialectic operates is the domain of language itself; at least the rich, fruitful ground showing forth what the hidden deep structures have caused to blossom.

Whatever position the historian may take, the poet himself feels his metaphorical “singing” of a poem, his actual “writing” of it, and his potential ability, once it is finished, to “speak” or “recite” it all to co-exist at once in some strange way. Historically, there is nothing to say save that all poetry is originally oral, and the earliest inscriptions of it were clearly ways of preserving material after the tradition of recitation had changed or been lost. But from earliest times on, these inscriptions were primarily encodings of the spoken poem, and even long after actual sung texts were not the only lyric poems, conventions and genres were maintained through the written conventions of inscribing poems, and the text was by no means to be thought of as a thing in itself. Greek poetic meter, as we have seen, is a patterning both of the sounds of the language in ways perfectly acceptable to that language’s sense of itself (i.e., long and short syllables are viable entities, etc.) and of the *ictus*, the upbeat-downbeat contrast, the tonic stress of musical rhythm that the language itself, with its pitch accent, did not supply. It was only when Latin poetry adapted this Greek meter for its own uses, when conflict arose between the penultimate stress of the Latin language and the Greek meter’s canonical *ictus* patterns (having nothing to do with speech stress, but with applied downbeat), that anything like an abstract, like a visual meter, developed. A metrical loan from the poetry of another language always tends to show up, in the borrowing tongue, as an inscriptive coding: consider pure syllabics from the French, of the kind first used by Marianne Moore and W. H. Auden in very different ways—one cannot scan them by ear, but only by counting on one’s fingers, for the rules that define syllabification are purely graphical ones. An archetypal instance for English poetry, then, of the rhythmic aural pattern being accommodated to a visual, in this case, graphic one, is that of Latin poetry. Post-Saturnian Latin verse calls for the suppression of certain sound features prominent in Latin, just as does pure syllabic verse in English; but there is always a tendency for the banished sounds to return like ghosts, haunting the visual regions from which they were exiled. The aural stress pattern *bum-petty bum-bum*, keeps appearing at the end of Virgilian hexameters. On the other hand, all the lost sounds, the original pronunciation of Greek and Latin, the dying cadences of an earlier language or moment of history become constellations on our pages, even as old and discarded scientific models, for example, become translated, on their deaths, into available poetic mythology.

In one sense, then, all Classical tradition comes through the eye. When the gap is so great, there is no real loss to a subsequent language in a subsequent age; Classical influence on English poetry, insofar as it involves patterning of language, goes on perfectly well in the visual domain, given the syntactical rigidities of English as opposed to Latin. Where the gap is narrower, however, peculiar things can happen, as in the case of the Elizabethan poets’ sense of Chaucer’s meter. Because they did not understand the use of syllabic “e” in Chaucer’s elegantly strict accentual-syllabism, because, indeed, the sixteenth century was inventing Chaucer’s iambic pentameter all over again through not being able to read his notation of it correctly, they assumed that Chaucer wrote in “riding rhyme,” a rough accentual, nursery-rhyme sort of tetrameter (as witnessed by Spenser’s imitation in *The Shepheardes Calender* of what he thought Chaucerian verse was).
This aspect of poetry’s visual dimension, the graphic conventions of meter and the way in which abstract schemata, metrical and grammatical, are to be located along that dimension, constitutes the eye’s gaze out over time. In order to approach this area, I should like to start out with some extreme cases of poetry’s picture-like properties, and then move on to some more significant but less obvious ones. In calligraphic traditions of various Eastern languages, the decorative, and occasionally the pictorial element of a written text can be extremely important. There is insufficient room here to go into some of the oriental traditions of decorative inscription: the fantastically complex patterned poems of some Persian grammarians, for example, or the abstract shaping of manuscript texts. In Islamic aniconic tradition, calligraphy, interlace, abstract patterning are all involved. The putting of texts into figures, as George Puttenham was able to remind his English readers in his Arte of English Poesye (1589) has an oriental cast to it; not only do Westerners tend to associate ornament of surface to Eastern impulses, but to consider the role of schematic patterns such as acrostics in Semitic tradition, the integrity of the written texts of the Hebrew bible, and so forth. In view of the fact, for example, that representational images were not permitted to contaminate, in orthodox Jewish tradition, the scriptural text, and that even the scribal variation of the relative scale of a single letter of the text of the Pentateuch was forbidden, there are no illustrated Hebrew bibles as such. But in some medieval European Hebrew bibles probably made for rich and rather less scholarly owners, the masoretic textual notes are shaped in a bewildering and inventive array of animal and bird and plant forms, sometimes with a direct or oblique reference to something in the text the notes deal with or neighbor on, sometimes not.

4. There are also quasi-posters—mappings of liturgical texts in the shape of the menorah or seven-branched candelabrum. One cabalistic tradition so shapes the 67th Psalm, as part of a secret reading of it (in this case, the format is more than decorative.) An excellent collection of oriental patterned texts is in Berjouli Bowler, The Word as Image (London, 1970). An analogous Western tradition of the architectonic patterning of inscriptions has interesting implications for contemporary verse; it has been studied by John Sparrow in Line Upon Line (Cambridge, 1967) and, more fully, in his Visible Words (Cambridge, 1968). For reproductions of patterned poems from the Greek technopaisma on, see Charles Boltenhouse, "Poems in the Shapes of Things," Art News Annual, XXVIII (1959). It might be noted here that throughout this chapter, I shall not be discussing so-called "concrete poetry" which is, properly speaking, a branch of graphic art; see above, p. 100, note 16, and my article on "Concrete Poetry" in Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, and ed. Princeton, 1975.


6. I have used the texts, readings, and, in some instances, the translations of J. M. Edmonds, in his Loeb edition of The Greek Bucolic Poets (London, 1912), pp. 483-511. W. R. Paton gives different readings in his version of them in the Loeb edition of The Greek Anthology, q.v. from which the "Egg" and "Altar" poems are reproduced below.
lengthening lines by the addition or loss of extra feet, and by centering or shifting the lines. Simmias’ “Axe” was written to be inscribed on a bladed axe, a votive copy of the one traditionally thought to have been used in making the Trojan horse. It is really a fancy inscription, in the familiar reversed-lozenge shape that Puttenham in his discussion of shapes for poems called the Tricquet (or triangle) Displayed:

An additional peculiarity was that its lines were arranged: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4—thus formed couplets of equal lines. Printed Renaissance texts added another, final line, inserted as the handle of the axe between the two blades, as in this edition of Theocritus, Paris, 1561, reproduced on the page opposite.

Simmias’ “Wings,” however, are another matter. Similar in meter to the previous poem, but centered differently to give the shape of wings hinged at the top, it is also to be read in normal linear order. They are the wings of Eros: the poem opens with familiar inscription-rhetoric: “Behold the lord of the deep-bosomed earth, capsizer of heaven” and so forth. Eros goes on to explain that he was born under the reign of Necessity, when all beings were kept apart by her grim power, were the creatures either of (and here the gap between the wings occurs) air or Chaos. The effect in English is something like this at the central point:

7. Paton, and some of the Renaissance texts, give a different reading here.

Two presentations of the “Wings” (reproduced on p. 256) show the vertical format in which they were printed in early editions. The more elaborate version, in woodcut borders, is from a Venice Theocritus of 1543, the other, from the Paris, 1561 text.

The “Egg” poem, possibly, like the “axe” to be inscribed, is most complex and allusive. It also has the top-and-bottom-line numbering system. It starts out by describing itself (a speaking egg, like so many
of the objects in emblematic poetry of all kinds that is either addressed in the text, or addresses the reader in it), as the egg of the “Dorian nightingale” (the poet? the poem itself?). It goes on to tell how the loud-voiced herald of the gods “took it up from beneath its dear mother’s wings and cast it among the tribes of men, bidding it increase its number onward more and more—keeping always the due order of rhythms—from a one-footed measure up to a full decameter. . . .” The poem is about poetry, about creation and tradition (there is a long parenthetical bucolic simile), and about its own shape (one that “grows” as one reads it—from top and bottom “out” toward center). It is also about what the shape represents, the egg of generation. As an emblematic text it reads the meaning of its own device, but it also alludes to the abstract shape that the reduced convention of representation (here, by parallel longer and shorter lines) must needs assume: egg, and expanding shape.

Aside from Simias’ three poems, the so-called technopaignia (or tricks—Ausonius’ word for them) officially included a “syrinx” by Theocritus. The shape was simply made of shortening couplets; an interesting point is brought up in scholarly debate about whether the array of unequal lines is intended to represent the now-canonical organ-pipe outline of the pampipes, or whether the representation is either an abstract picture of pitch variation, or the length of the stopped pipes—in Theocritus’ time, it is argued, the actual shepherd’s pipe was boxlike, with reeds of equal length being stopped by wax plugs. Whether the shape is pictorial or abstracted, however, the poem’s language is complex and allusive, invoking Pan as the offspring of her who slept with nobody (i.e. Odysseus as “Noman,” alluding to a myth of Pan as the son of Hermes and Penelope). Pan’s pursuit of such
nymphae as Echo, Pitys and, finally, Syrinx herself are all mentioned—the latter, of course, concretized in the actual instrument. The poet himself is referred to in the poem as "Paris, son of Simmias"—Paris, because he was a judge among gods (Theo-kritos, or Theocritus), and Simmias as inventor of the shaped poems. The syrinx poem concludes with an injunction to play sweetly to Echo (in the poem's arch language, to the mute maiden who is the invisible Calliope—mute because she can only reflect another sound, even as the moon might be called "invisible" or "silent"). The poem is a highly complex emblem of poetry itself.

The version reproduced below is from an edition of bucolic poets published in Heidelberg in 1604:

ΣΥΡΙΓξ.

Σύριγξ ἔως ἡμῖν ἔρχεται, ἀλλ ἐν σε μένα έρίχθης. 
Οὐδόκει έκκαλείς, μακελειόλαιμος ζε μόθης. 
Μάλλισ αὐτάκαρτο τοῦ τίχες ἑστῶτις, 
Οὐρα Κεραυνός ἐν ποτὶ δρέατας τευχητόν. 
Α'λλ' ἀπέστειλε ἔκεισανθοι φίλοι τέρμα (κανὰ). 
Οὖ μὴ όλοι δίκανιν, ὡς τὰς μέσης πάλιν 
Κάρποις γραμματίς ἀλλ' τάς φυλλάδες. 
Ο' μέσος λεγ' πάξθοι ἀδηπώτη 
Εἰς ἡγαλμα πάξθοι ποιτείοι Σίφάτης, 
Ο' στάντα στρατάς ικανὸν 
Παππαρίκας, θύεσά τε ἢρμαζο. 
Ο' τότε πυρολόγοι ἵπποι 
Πάμα Πάμε Αἰθεόσιμης 
Ψυχής ὁ βεβαίως, 
Στήκοι οὐραί δίπλα, 
Κλαπάτων, ὅποτες. 
Αρνυκαμίς, κεφάς, 
Αὖί μελώσιοι 
Εὔκοποι καρέ, 
Καλλίστοι 
Νηλεώτροι.

The group known in the Renaissance includes two altar-shaped poems, one by Dosiadas, who appears to have known the "Syrinx," the other by Besantinus (perhaps L. Julius Vestinus, one of Hadrian's secretaries):

The initial letters reading down form an acrostic dedication to that Emperor: "O Olympian, may you sacrifice for many years"). Both altars speak to the reader; the second one reads itself as an emblem: the dark blood of sacrifice does not stain me, it says, going on to point out that it is no material sacrificial altar built of gold or silver, but built by children of heaven aiding the earth-born Nine (Heliconian muses), etc. Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, says the altar, but this powerful rhyme. . . . It looks forward to the most famous English pattern poems of the seventeenth century.

The first English figured or shaped poems were possibly influenced by French texts, themselves modeled on the technopaigua (Rabelais's bottle ode in the fifth book of Pantagruel may be remembered; there are also some wings by Mellin de Saint-Gelais). Stephen Hawes, in
The Convercyon of Swerers (1509), has a pair of wings, in black letter; actually there are two pairs of wings, separated by brackets, and the poem can be read in three versions—down the main wing shape (first slowly widening then contracting Skeltonic lines), down the outer wings, or across at the lines on which they meet. There are also many learned exercises in Latin from the period (Richard Willis’s Poematum Liber of 1573, etc.). But it is really George Puttenham, in the treatise mentioned earlier, who gives a systematic treatment to the patterning of the printed poem as part of the lore of poetic structure.

Puttenham’s chapter on the subject is included in the part of his treatise dedicated to “Proportion,” which includes prosody and versification. He discusses “Proportion by Situation,” by which he means rhyme scheme and stanza pattern, and addsuce diagrams, rather than the more modern abab, etc., notation, to describe the former. In his treatment of improvisatory, ode-, or madrigal-like strophes, he indicates that there is an almost limitless variety possible: “there are as manie or more proportions of them which I referre to the makers phantasie and choise, contented with two or three oculer examples and no more”—he then reproduces a few patterns like the following:

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(It will be noticed that these are line-length schemata.)

Puttenham’s next section is “Of Proportion in Figure.” He himself is aware only of what he calls “Anacreous egge” among the technopaugnia, but he introduces a whole array of abstract geometrical forms “whereby the maker is restrayned to keepe him within his bounds, and sheweth not onlye more art, but serveth also much better for briefnesse


The Poem in the Eye

and subtletie of device.” Circles, lozenges, triangles, squares, all normal or halved and rejoined, provide him with the shapes to be made up by varying lines of verse. Only the pyramid and the pillar are in any way obvious emblematic shapes (save for the rondel, the circle of perfection, allegorized in two poems as the cosmos and the monarch). A columnar poem to Queen Elizabeth is made to be read up from bottom ("By this noble poe(try)/Tall stately and stray/Is plainely exprest/And seene afferre/The sounde Pillar/Of Albion’s rest . . .") to top, ending up with

Is blisse with immortality.  
Her trymest top of all ye see  
Garnish the crowne  
Her just renowne

The extra syllables form the capital, as they do, at the beginning, the base.

It is significant, incidentally, that Puttenham proceeds almost immediately after giving these examples to a discussion of emblems and devices; rather than treating them under his next category, “Ornament” (which is all rhetorical), he associates his own exemplary column and rondel poems with emblem verse, in that they presented a picture and then glossed it, in typical fashion. Puttenham, in fact, allegorizes all his abstract shapes (square: earth; sphere: heavens; spire: fire (through the old Greek false-etymology from pyr—); triangle: air; lozenge: water. The square for him is also an emblem of constancy (as it is for us, still, in the colloquial pejorative adaptation of “foursquare”). In connection with it, he introduces rather casually a most important notion. He declines to give an example of a square-shaped poem, he says, because “in goode arte all your ditties, Odes and Epigrannes should keep and not exceede the number of twelve verses. . . .” He sees the essential rectangularity on the page of those verse forms whose shapes, even today, we overlook as being a trivial consequence of typographical necessities. Indeed, a freshman textbook today which defined verse forms in the following way would be thought insane:
Here is Herrick's "Pillar of Fame" at the conclusion of *Hesperides*:

*The pillar of Fame.*

**F**amen's pillar here, at last, we set,
Out-during *Marble, Brass, or Jet,*
Charm'd and enchanted so,
As to withstand the blow
Of overthrow:
Nor shall the seas,
Or outrages
Of storms o'erbear,
What we uprear,
The Kingdoms fail,
This pillar never shall
Decline or waste at all;
But stand for ever by his owne
Firme and well fixt foundation.

Herrick's poem connects the shaft to the lower part of the abacus, and to the base, by means of interlocking rhyme. The pillar is monumental, not sacramental; the vicar Herrick's verses are not those of the priest Herbert, nor could they do more than commemorate themselves, and the whole vision of poetry they celebrated, other than elegantly.

George Herbert's altar poem, as might be expected, is another matter. The altar is broken because the voice of the supplicant is; it is also, perhaps, the ruin of a classical one (as far as its architectural shape is concerned), broken like a heart, perhaps also, more covertly, broken because it violates some of the traditional shaping of the familiar *technopaenia.* The poem is a farrago of biblical allusion, but the central figure of stony-heartedness, and the theme of the building of altars.

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9. Critics of Herbert since Joseph L. Sumners—see his *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (London, 1954), pp. 140-45—have generally seen that "The Altar" and "Easter Wings" were no trivial typographical jokes. The first of these, incidentally, is the opening poem of the section of *The Temple* called "The Church," containing all the short poems. Sumners is enlightening on later misreadings of the altar shape, including treating it as a communion table. The altar shape was more ubiquitous in seventeenth-century verse than has been perceived. A glance at the ms. poems of Joseph Beaumont in the Wellesley College Library reveals what the misleadingly set up printed edition (ed. E. Robinson, 1914) does not—a mass of altars, lozenges, and "trioquets displayed."
altars (Exodus 20:25) intertwine inevitably. Unlike Besantinus’ original Greek poem, the altar does not speak (the first person in Herbert’s lyrics must refer to himself), but it does claim more authenticity for the poem-prayer-altar than for a stone one, and makes ruefully witty play with the possibility that the heart doing stony work risks turning stony.

The Altar.

A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant reares,
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman’s tool hath touch’d the same.
A H E A R T alone
is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow’r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart,
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy Name:
That, if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
O let thy blessed S A C R I F I C E be mine,
And sanctifie this A L T A R to be thine.

( Herbert’s self-conscious format here can be considered as an extreme instance of what pervades The Temple: a quest for authenticity of form, as befitting textual, rhetorical, and spiritual occasion. And as always, the quester is ever wary of the traps set by novelty and ingenuity, to which he must nonetheless turn in full knowledge of their dangers. )

But perhaps the most remarkable instance of shaping in the seventeenth century is Herbert’s “Easter Wings.” This Easter poem celebrates the theme of descent that there may be ascent, of diminution in order that the augmentation may follow. The relation between “down so that up” and “less so that more” is strangely metaleptic, and it is in fact the poem’s own figure of “in so that out,” realized both in the shape on the page and in the reader’s scanning of the text, that forms the connecting and generalizing link. But this is only half the image. The down-up and the poor-rich are celebrated in both stanzas, but the over-all figure is that of wings—angelic, poetic “as larks, harmoniously,” and ultimately spiritual: all the wings of ascension. In the 1633 edition of The Temple, the wing emblem, a Christian transformation of the wings of Eros by Simmias, is made obvious by the way the text is printed, with the lines running vertically, like the Greek ones.

When the page is turned to allow a lateral reading of the lines, the poem emerges as an instance of one of Puttenham’s standard types, the “Tricquet Displayed,” in fact, with an off-centering to the left to point up the wing shape:

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Each stanza then figures the “in so that out,” with the peripeteia (in this case, one almost wants to say pterypeteia) turning on the juncture of the two short lines “Most poore: with thee . . .” and “Most thime. With thee.” The juncture is a very powerful “but.” Ultimately, the
poem even prays for the effectiveness of the prayer itself, and fulfills its figural realization of the Alexandrian type of the poem about poetry. Much more than the epigrammatic altar poem, the “Easter Wings” seems to create the pattern of its picture, as we read it, rather than being forced into it. And as such, it is a rather blatant, didactic example of the way in which Herbert is always using form. Here, it is emblem and format as well, together and separately. The grace by which these are all managed is a matter of Herbert’s being so at home in the kind of meter that the form demands (paired, reciprocating stanzas with short and long lines locked in by flexible rhyming pattern) that the rhetoric of this poem is not strange to his voice.

The twentieth century saw a renewed interest in his kind of patterned poetry. Perhaps influenced by some of the experiments of the futurists, Guillaume Apollinaire wrote many calligrammes, as he called them, calling for all sorts of typographical collage and montage, as well as shaping. Dylan Thomas used the lozenge and reversed lozenge in his “Vision and Prayer,” following Herbert in the way he allowed his reversed lozenge (looking very much like centered Easter wings) to contract into the word “I” in the short central line, etc. More recently, we have had Gregory Corso’s huge, fold-out “Bomb” in the shape of a thermonuclear mushroom and shaped poems by May Swenson and other poets including myself. These are by no means to be lumped together with “concrete poems”—for this discussion, concrete poetry is a purely graphic art; since a true concrete poem cannot be read aloud, it has no full linguistic dimension, no existence in the ear’s kingdom. A concrete poem remains, in the often-quoted terms which Plutarch ascribed to Simonides, “mute poetry,” and therefore, picture.11

In all of these cases, the shaping of the text into an emblem (or, in the case of Herbert’s “Easter Wings,” a book abstract paradigm as well) has been part of a special genre or type. That genre came under great abuse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Montaigne on: thus the Elizabethan scholar Gabriel Harvey attacked Simnion of Rhodes as “a foolish idler, phantastical poet,” and the convention as a whole he calls “mere fooleries, vices taken up for virtues aspish devices, frivolous boysishe grammar schoole tricks.” But this dispraise was probably a stock device itself, for Harvey’s pamphleteering enemy, Nashe, accused Harvey himself of having “writ verses in all kinds as in a form of a pair of gloves, a dozen of points, a paires of spectacles, a two-hand sword, a poynado, a colousus, a pyramid, a painter’s easel, a market-cross, an anchor, a pair of pothooks.” Not very likely.

Bep Jonson, too, sneered at shaped poems, as did Samuel Butler: attacking

11. Obviously, some of e. e. cummings’s typographical effects seem, particularly within individual poems, to straddle the border. But such devices as his use of unexpected lineation and unexpected cutting—not of syntax on even morphology, but graphic members of words (like the digraphs t/h, s/h, etc.) are all an extension of the extreme left-hand edge of the enjambment spectrum proposed earlier. Two poems of Christian Morgenstern, however, might perhaps be adduced to make the contrast between concrete poem (or graphic art—in most cases, it will be admitted, a cartoon with a punch line, rather than what is loosely called a “graphic”) and shaped poem. First, the famous “Fische Nachtsong” (“Night Song of the Fish”), which is a poem schema made up of the “O--O--O” marks of Classical sonation, contextualized by the title so that we think of slowly gaping and closing fish mouths, under water, making their silent music. The second, a poem about funnels, is not concrete, albeit funnel-shaped:

Zwei Trichter wandeln durch die Nacht.
Durch ihres Rumpfes verengten Schlacht
fleischt weisses Mondlicht
still und heiter
auf ihren
Waldweg
U. S. W. w.

“Two funnels wander in the night; through the narrowed shaft of their trunks white moonlight flows quiet and gay on their woodpath, etc.”—with the literalization of “und so weiter” augmented by the rhyme, the “forth” of “and so forth” introduced in funnel language (where “forth” is the narrowed “down”) and in the vanishing-point perspective language of walking, especially in moonlit woods.
the minor seventeenth-century poet Edward Benlowes he said that "as for temples and pyramids in poetry, he has outdone all men that way; for he has made a gridiron and a frying-pan in verse, that, besides the likeness in shape, the very tone and sound of the words did perfectly represent the noise made by those utensils!" And Dryden, finally, advised Shadwell to "choose for they command/Some peaceful province in acrostic land,/There thou mayest wings display and altars raise,/And torture one poor word ten thousand ways." The burden of all these denunciations is upon the superficiality, the literary version of taking the letter for the spirit. And yet the fact remains that from the early sixteenth century on, all poems are in some sense shaped.

Most poems are in the shape of poems, not of pictures. This is to say that by the middle of the sixteenth century, the look of the poem on the page had begun to assume a canonical importance, and patterns of versification and typographical arrangement to play a small but definite role in the history of form. Consider, for example, the convention of line indentation in the Classical elegiac couplet, where the second line, the pentameter, is indented. Now, all Elizabethan writers of metrics know that the poulor's measure, that couplet consisting of a line of twelve syllables rhyming with one of fourteen and supposedly invented by Surrey, is really a version of the special 3-3-4-3 ballad stanza (just as fourteenner couplets are a graphic rewriting of the normal one). When poulor's measures appear in pages of sixteenth-century miscellanies, they are set up with the shorter line indented; even though the order, beginning with the short line, is reversed, the general effect of the poem on the page is one of Classical elegiacs. The acutely classically conscious Renaissance critical eye responded to this, and it may have helped account for the growth of the form. Surely the authenticity of an elegiac look on the page was as significant as the anthologist's possible desire to save space in setting up the poems. The ballads in the tradition of the Courtly Makers, then, become newly dignified typographically. And if this seem too far-fetched, we have the case of Ben Jonson's careful distinction, in the setting up of his 1616 folio Works, between two kinds of heroic couplets in English. Ordinarily, where the English couplet is being used for the Classical one, the second line, although the same length, is indented. But there is one instance, in the Epigrams section, where he is using couplets, as in Chapman, Marlowe, and subsequent tradition, to stand for hexameters. This is in the mock-heroic Fabulous Voyage, a parodic odyssey through the sewers of London. With great care, the verses of the couplets are all aligned flush left, making it clear that they are the English equivalent of hexameters. By the Augustan period, these English couplets have, of course, developed an authority all their own, and the odd fact that they do double duty as versions of hexameters and couplets both, as far as Classical poetry is concerned, is completely unnoticed.

This is merely one small but significant instance. If we look again at some of the emblematic shapings of stanza forms in seventeenth-century poetry, we can see that the impulse to pattern the stanza is often submerged beneath a different one, deriving from the Elizabethan and Jacobean lyrical poem of varying line length, such as Drummond of Hawthornden's "madrigals," which were simply an Italianate lyrical form for epigram. So, for example, the patterned stanzas from Francis Quarles's Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man. There is no symbolic picture here, nor any abstract shape of one of the conventional sorts, such as lozenge, reversed lozenge or the like. But the look of such stanzas, which abound in minor seventeenth-century poetry, was clearly a thing in itself, and great care was taken by typographers to preserve the shape in the justification of the lines.

Then, too, Ben Jonson, in the first real attempt to get the Pindaric ode triad into English, labels the strophes in his great Cary and Morison ode "The Turn," "The Counter-Turn," and "The Stand," respectively; he is doing more from a visual point of view than merely dragging marginalia into the middle of the page. The strophic triad was in antiquity a musical strain and a choreographic pattern as well; it becomes in the adapted so-called Pindaric, as it has long before in the Horatian ode, a block of type on a page, framed in white space. And so too with stanzaic patterning in general: as we move on through literary history, stanza breaks, in poems with a major meditative mo-
tion in particular, can become rather complex kinds of linkages rather than merely disruptions of continuity. For what Meyer Abrams has called the Major Romantic ode, in particular, stanzaic form, often extremely ornate, and the far-ranging syntactic and meditative extensions of blank verse, are made to play the same role. When they do, the white space between the stanzas becomes operative and can indeed be glossed (with a far more complex glossing than the marginal note one might use to annotate the stanza break between the second and third strophes of Donne’s “The Flea”—a simple “Whack!” to indicate that the flea had been so treated by the intransigent lady).

This consideration of poetry’s visual aspect may, indeed, seem as superficial as the shaped poems have been charged with being. But as the metrical traditions of English poetry grew more complex in the seventeenth century, the apparent superficiality of graphic arrangement starts to develop consequences which extend further and further down into the depths of language. I am not thinking now only of the ways in which seventeenth-century theorists themselves were sometimes confused in their ascription of a metrical effect to the ear rather than to the eye. All of the attempts, from those of the Sidney-Spenser circle through that of Campion to develop quantitative verse in English, are really based on games played with written codes alone. The rules about syllable length and so forth were based on an adaptation of rules about the letters of written Latin to those of English. Even granted for a moment that a diphthong in English is a long vowel and the others short, doubling of a consonant after a vowel makes it unequivocally short is a rule that has applied from the thirteenth century Ormulum on. Yet the rules of quantitative scansion demand that the doubling of a consonant with another one, even in an adjacent word, lengthen the syllable containing it. All of these attempts at accommodation work out only on the written level, rather like the solution of an acrostic. But given the viability of the English blank-verse line as a thing in itself, a visual matter starts to play an important role.

This is not to say by any means that blank verse is purely visual. But we have already seen (Chapter V) how Dr. Johnson could quote with approval a remark that “blank verse seems to be verse only to the eye.”

T. S. Eliot, deciding that Milton was perhaps not so dreadful after all, could in 1947 remark on the similarity between what he called Dr. Johnson’s specialized ear and that of the early decades of the twentieth century when it came to free verse. The fact remains that the relation between the eye and the ear is by no means as simple as such remarks suggest. Conventions of inscribing are generally conservative, with a scribal and scholastic integrity of their own; and Modernist poetry, in particular, tended always to argue for the poetic primacy and the social vitality of the spoken.

In an earlier examination of enjambment, it was seen that line terminus, in some contracted-for regular meter like iambic pentameter, could function like grammatical diagraming, even as stress positioning itself can frequently operate like emphatic underlining for expression, sarcasm, or contrast. Line and strophe and poem structures which do not take shape from the arrangement of audibly prominent phenomena may nevertheless come to play a role in the organizing of sound patterning; there are kinds of quasi-rhetorical notations which format itself can perform. The kinds of linguistic depth which these arrangements of printed surface stir up are beyond my grasp and my subject. Perhaps there is some correlation here, in a notion of poetic language which lies below both sight and sound, with the recent history of linguistic theory, abandoning neo-grammarians philology, the historical paradigms based on the inscription, for the structural linguistics of the school of Bloomfield, Sapir, and their followers, for whom speech was the essential linguistic event, and for whom mere transcriptions of it in a written system remained a kind of ineptly mediating and confusing accident. The current revision of linguistic theory by a philosopher

13. And so, apparently, thought Dr. Thomas Sprat, writing in praise of Cowley’s "Pindaric" odes, with their improvisatorily varied line lengths: "But that for which I think this inequality of number is chiefly to be prefer’d, is its near affinity with Prose: . . . . . . But now this loose, and unconfin’d measure has all the Grace, and Harmony of the most confin’d." Sprat, a practical man devoted to scientific prose, nevertheless makes the characteristic mistake of Molière’s M. Jourdain in confounding prose and speech; however, claiming that the former “is the style of all business and conversation.” T. Sprat, An Account of the Life of Mr. Abraham Cowley (1668).
with what is almost an unreconstructed seventeenth-century theory of mind, locates language in mental structures and patterns. But as far as these remarks are concerned, we may locate the syntactical, even the paradigmatic, in the visual domain of poetry. The way in which the printed poem directs attention to grammatical elements, for example, the way in which meter can be used to diagram syntax, is like a set of stage directions, working through the eye, rather than on it. Ultimately, it is always with what Wallace Stevens calls “The poem of the act of the mind” that we are concerned.

The question of how poems are shaped like other poems is a vast one. I have dwelt for a while with enjambment because it is a significant part of the larger matter, and because it leads to a consideration of the uneven right-hand margin as a viable criterion for defining verse as opposed to prose, in twentieth-century poetry, at least. Given Dr. Johnson’s remarks on Milton’s blank verse, it is not surprising that the whole tradition of Miltonic blank verse in the eighteenth century aims only at carrying forward the notion of a long verse paragraph, and not at shaving, let alone going beyond, Milton’s “sense variously drawn out from one verse into another.” Only Blake, in those violently experimental blank verse poems in Poetical Sketches, sought to come to terms with Milton’s virtual invention of blank verse as a dialectical and meditative, as well as a dramatic mode.

But the recent use by contemporary poets of purely syllabic verse does indeed appear to present what is “verse only to the eye”—even to the need for practitioners of it to count on their fingers, or otherwise tap out lines when they would never think of so doing in the case of the accentual-syllabic which they always “hear.” Pure syllabics are the verse system of French and of Japanese, and the accentual weight of syllables which may be occasioned by phrase or clausal terminus (there being no word stress) is never systematized in the verse. In English, of course, the result is something like

These two incommensurably sounding
Lines are both written with ten syllables,
But so is this, which you can plainly hear.

Sophisticated syllabic verse has an added dimension in modulating its cadences: the contrast between lines like the second and the third in the dummy above is not a matter of an accentual-syllabic line having wandered into the syllabic from iambic pentameter,sville, but more a matter of a dynamic range which the open criteria about stress provide. Lines 1 and 2 above are not iambic pentameter: in any passage which had declared that convention to be in operation, they would have to be ruled nonmetrical. (We might then, indeed as in the case of Hart Crane’s more than occasional six-beat lines in a melodious, Shelleyan, five-beat framework, really wonder why they were there, and what went wrong or different.) The allowable displacements in iambic pentameter cannot really be said to constitute too difficult a matter. Whenever we get a line which the iambic pentameter convention cannot dictate to us a proper reading of, then we must assume that the poet is inept, or that he intends to disturb in just that way:

How many bards gild the lapses of time? (Keats)
Read this as “dactyls” and then it will rhyme (reader)

(The reader here could have been Leigh Hunt, who read it as acephalic anapests.) In fact, this opening line of the splendid sonnet about the voices of precursor poets in one’s head being like an evening music, saddened and humanized, in a Wordsworthian way, sounds “That distance of recognizance bereaves”—this opening line, which is indeed quite ambiguous, has a very clear rhetorical function. While we might include it in our stack of pure syllabic lines in the earlier example (as Robert Bridges indeed did), it would stick out as being almost as strongly tightened up in the pitch of patterned accent as line 3 above. No: it is an accentual five-beat and not a four-beat accentual anapestic one because the sonnet says it is, and because the sonnet shows us how it is to be read—slowly, with the rhetorical tone of passionate bemusement: How many bards! God, how many of them there are and have been! And their voices are all in my head; but they yammer not, neither do they shriek; somehow this is choral. But how many there are, coming rushing in when there is a vacuum of silence to fill:
The mere displaced positioning of “the” and “of”?  

In strict syllabic verses, the control of stress placement is as important as in accentual syllabic verse, but not at the same level of effect. In the latter, misplaced stresses can make lines startling, and overly systematic metrists who are not unduly committed to what poetry is about, perplexed. In syllabic verse, a momentary accentual cadence can function like a momentary rhyme in a strictly controlled blank-verse situation (see the example from Wallace Stevens on p. 132). Often, in uncertain hands, it can do the wrong sort of work. Robert Bridges’s experiments with syllabic verse never developed the authority of Marianne Moore’s or W. H. Auden’s, for example—he was always at his best when there was an accentual richness to nourish his verse. Consider, then, the opening of the programmatically syllabic late poem, “Cheddar Pinks” (written in 1921):

Mid the squander’d colour
 idling as I lay . . .

We might be tempted to continue: “Reading moldy Homer / on the first of May.” That is, the trochaic rhythm is so strong, the known associations of the longer (four- or three-beat) first line and the indented, shorter (three or two) second one so long, that we are led even to expect the rhyme as well. Here is the movement, in fact:

Mid the squander’d colour
 idling as I lay
Reading the Odyssey
 in my rock-garden
I espied the cluster’d
tufts of Cheddar pinks
Burgeoning with promise
 of their scented bloom
All the modish motley
 of their bloom-to-be
Thrust up in narrow buds
 on the slender stalks . . .

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The lower-case initial in the alternate lines may provide a clue to an original impulse to make these longer lines; in fact, if we double them, the tendency to lapse into the trochaic in the longer lines submerges its pounding, and we are left with a strangely Lawrentian cadence. Setting the tone with the original strong trochaic movement, Bridges keeps singing to that tune, as it were; at any rate, the reader keeps humming it. In other words, syllabic meter, “verse only to the eye,” can set up all sorts of potentiality for sound effect; it merely frames them and directs attention to them differently.

But there is still the question of form; there are more complex and allusive kinds of visual shaping of form in modern poetry than Puttenham could have ever imagined. Consider, for a moment, the following two dummy stanzas:

A. Open every door: when the resounding wind
 Tries to batter it down, you will be wise to lead
 All that violent weather
 Into the gentle dark within

and B. When the wind howls loudly outside your door, never
 Keep that door shut, but open it instead so that
 You may make a peaceful guest
 Of a violent invader

Depending upon whether we are listening or looking, these stanzas are similar or unrecognizable as siblings. The syllabic scheme is a line of twelve, a line of twelve, a line of seven, and a line of eight. This is the meter, so to speak, and both stanzas are written in it. The shaping, that is, the particular indentation pattern, suggests that these stanzas are to be considered as versions of, as related to, the German analogues of classical lyric meters as used by Klopstock and Hölderlin, for example, in which stress accent is substituted for length. This worked out rather well, as there were no substitutions allowed in these strophes meters in any case; English poets from Southey, Landor, and Coleridge through Tennyson and Swinburne adopted these Germanized meters, although the Sapphic stanza was the only one that had got much previous use in English verse. (Whenever Romantic or Victorian poets
formalist historian might study. The crisis in initial capitalization that seems to have come about with imagist poetry is an interesting matter as well; whether or not there was any influence of Classical texts, which do not of course capitalize initial letters of lines, is a matter for historical study. Suffice it to say that lack of capitalization has become the same kind of convention that the avowedly redundant upper-case letter established. But in general, the poem on the page became the essential mode of its existence during the Modern period. We know of course of Mallarmé’s obsession, in his later years, with poetic format; aside from the typographical experimentation of *Un Coup de Dés*, there was his interest in the structure of the book per se, how pages are scanned, the dynamic of page-turning, and the like, although these matters never involved the deepest sources of his imaginative vision. Mallarmé’s kind of attention to format is surely continued, albeit transformed, in Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*.

On the other hand, “free verse” as a category is so open that when we have so designated a poem, we have said nothing, and it becomes necessary to consider this question of *shape*—of format, rather than of metrical form—where nothing is being regularly counted. Even Whitman follows previous traditions of metrical innovation in English verse (Christopher Smart in *Jubilate Agno*, etc.) by working out of the means that the English Bible generates for translating Hebrew poetry; whatever his rhetorical accretions of cataloguing, listing, stacking parallel constructions under one another, etc., his lines are always his phrases and clauses. When he uses the visually rhythmic metaphor of sea waves and tides to describe the undulations of his line length, he is making an appeal to a sense of the natural that would respond to the correspondence of form with the inner character of his utterance. How various modes of free verse take shape on the page, what occasional sound patterning they may or may not embrace (as in the case of the Auden stanzas, only without, say, either syllabic regularity or stanza shape), are all matters for a theory of graphic prosody.

Just as illuminating, though, is the way in which the increasing importance of format, of shape, manages to engage and control older, aural regularities. The typographic manipulations of e. e. cummings,
what we might call his experiments in expressionistic typography, his
visual tricks with self-illustrating phrases and words (such as the word
"moon" appearing out of parentheses of cloud) are well known. So too
in the little poem in which the one word "loneliness" is made to drop
down the page, containing between the first "I" and the second, third,
and fourth letters, the bracketed, two-letters-to-a-line phrase "a leaf
falls." Then the second "I"—punning visually, as throughout the poem,
on the identity of the twelfth letter of the lower-case roman alphabet
with the first arabic numeral in many typefaces. Then the end. This is
all a haiku-like evaded simile, so arranged that the vehicle is troped
into the tenor. But the vertical drop controls the scanning.

Cummings is capable of another sort of audio-visual subtlety, as in
the first two stanzas of the fifty-first poem of 1x1 (1944):

Sweet spring is your
time is my time is our
time for springtime is lovetime
and viva sweet love
(all the little merry birds are
flying in the floating in the
very spirits singing in
are winging in the blossoming)

is again heightened. Much could be said of the interplay between the
visual and the aural in Ezra Pound's earlier poetry, let alone the col-
lage-like, palimpsestic, scholia-ridden, diary-entered format of The
Cantos. I need only mention his attempts to accommodate modes as
distant as Alexandrian and Latin epigram, on the one hand, and haiku
on the other, in his line patterning in the shorter poems in Personae.
The famous little "Papyrus" is something of a manifesto:

Spring . . .
Too long . . .
Congula . . .

Here the poem is shaped like a relic of Sappho's, not typographically
twisted into something like a jagged edge of torn papyrus, but like the
transcription and decipherment of such a scrap in a scholarly edition.
"Congula" is actually a name that appears among the Sapphic frag-
ments, but we might guess that it was a girl's name, even without
knowing much Greek. The poem is about fragmentariness, and about
the imaginative futility of asking if a broken Hellenistic statue is so
beautiful for us just because its this and that are broken off. We recon-
struct a poem of our own, each one of us as he reads this, more than in
the sense in which this is true of all poetry, of all images. Notice, too,
the careful metric patterning (one line of one syllable, one of two, one
of three), and the assonance and rhyme. But the ellipsis marks are part
of this poem's shape, not its heard rhythm.

In W. C. Williams's little poem about the red wheelbarrow discussed
earlier in this book, so much depends upon a way of seeing, trained
and framed by photography's way of cutting out rectangles of scene,
and upon poetry's way of cutting and framing bits of language. Indeed,
so much has started to depend upon vision, in all of modern poetry.

14. For an inspired guess as to how Pound might have generated the poem from
the actual fragment in question, as well as for the best sympathetic treatment of
Pound's formal practice I have yet read, see Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berke-
ley, 1971), pp. 5-6, 54, 62.
15. See Chapter V.
And this extends even to poetry’s vision of itself. We have come back, in twentieth-century verse, to a new version of *ut pictura poesis*. If eloquence had been musical sound in the imaginative realm of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poetry, there was also another model for it. Actually, it is hard to tell if this model is visual or aural, so complex is the analogy. An early statement of it is about prose rather than poetry, but in the early seventeenth century, prose style is far more idiosyncratic than verse. Here is Burton writing about his writing in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, that amazing book of himself:

I neglect phrases and labour wholly to inform my reader’s understanding, not to please his ear; ’tis not my study or intent to compose neatly, which an Orator requires, but to express myself readily and plainly as it happens. So that as a River runs, sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then winding; now deep, then shallow; now muddy, then clear; now broad, then narrow; doth my style flow; now serious, then light; now comical, then satirical; now more elaborate, then remiss . . . .

Burton glosses his flowing-water language to show how it means flowing language. He need not have done so, for most of those terms were already conventionally applied, in secondary senses, to language as well. “Liquids” for melody, particularly birds’ song, can be found as far back as Lucretius.16 Burton’s apology here reminds us of Whitman’s talking of his lines as “the liquid, billowy waves, ever rising and falling, perhaps wild with storm, always moving, always alike in their nature as rolling waves, but hardly any two exactly alike in size or measure, never having the sense of something finished and fixed, always suggesting something beyond.” Certainly the appeal to the natural, rather than the artificial, is Burton’s point as well. But the language about language from the *Anatomy* leads us almost inevitably to some of the most influential lines of poetry written in the seventeenth century, and that helped to make their author, John Denham, acclaimed in the Augustan

16. Also see St. Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, xxvii, for what may be a central passage about source and stream, eloquence and tradition. Possibly there is an earlier topos which I am not aware of. (A Hebraic one has the Torah as tree of life.)

age as one of its founding fathers. In *Cooper’s Hill*, the poet concludes his description of the Thames with the famous apostrophe to that more-than-river:

> 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 overflowing, full.

Here, poetic language views itself as the totality of the stream, the water which when standing still, has reflecting surfaces and less accessible depths and becomes an inevitable symbol for consciousness, via Narcissus, Milton’s Eve, Tiberine, and Wordsworth. The running water is part a spatial concept, part an aural one, but the two most promising words here are “deep” and “clear.”17 So much, in the future history of poetry, will depend on them.

The ways in which poetry exercises a pictorial function about what is outside it is also relevant to the ways in which it envisions itself. Descriptions of scene and picture and prospect and landscape in eighteenth-century poetry mirror both literary and pictorial conventions; even as actual landscaping tried to rearrange hundreds of acres of southwestern England into what would look like a painting by Claude, eighteenth-century descriptive poetry was often looking at landscape paintings of what it saw. Keats, then Tennyson, then the Pre-Raphaelite poets modeled description more on the illuminated quality of precise detail, unclouded by painterly interventions and atmospheric perspectives. The amazing thing about so much descriptive vision in romantic poetry is the way in which the imagination invents visionary possibilities for which a technology did not then exist, but for which there is now a trivial technical simulation.

In the opening lines of “Tintern Abbey,” for example, there are sev-
eral visual mechanisms working at once. After the five years' interval is announced, and the introductory flourish of sound is heard ("and again I hear / These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs / With a soft inland murmur"), the poet observes that he is once again holding the

steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild, secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion, and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

This is a picture of the comparing and remembering mind as well as one of what that mind is seeing and remembering; while the comparing process is on the brink of becoming an overlay of transparencies, there is no conceptual language for it. Wordsworth must adopt the technical vocabulary of associationist psychology, here used metaphorically, to describe the way in which the observed phenomena are consolidated with the remembered ones, and which, finally abandoning all categorical logic, "connect / the landscape" not with the sky, but with its "quiet"—almost, in a slowly developing modern sense of the word, with its silence. Fifty-odd lines later on, this is reaffirmed:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought
With many resignations, dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again . . .

Thought works in gleams of image, just as, before, the scene is like a mind receiving impressions. The grammatical ambiguity of "The picture of the mind" is quite significant, and even if not present by design, it is controlled by some deeper intention: it is both the mind's picture of the scene and the poem's picture of the mind. Wordsworth never reached the point of deriving a picture of the poem, although, as Geoffrey Hartman has shown, he was extremely interested in the rhetoric, if not the form, of inscriptions, sepulchral epigrams, and the like.

The principle contribution of modern visual technology is photography, still and moving, as far as the poetic imagination is concerned.

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THE POEM IN THE EYE

One of the greatest developments in nineteenth-century poetry is the sophisticated kind of transition between stanzas, sections, parts of poems, transitions that need not be glossed or explained. These correspond to the kinds of transition which two generations now, having grown up with moving pictures, can take for granted, and not even find disturbing in dreams. We find traces of this cinematographic vision in modern, as well as in contemporary poetry: the opening pan shot, trucking through the great house and out to the garden and the pool back of it in the beginning of Burnt Norton, say, or the cinematic opening sequence of the poem to The Bridge, half-consciously brought into a poem which disparages "cinemas, panoramic sleights / With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene / Never disclosed, but hastened to again . . . ." In contemporary verse formats, we frequently find odd sorts of interruption and linkage being developed—extensions of the more archaic white spaces between stanza breaks—in order to handle complex sorts of transition that defy ordinary syntactical punctuation.

Even Wallace Stevens, as secure, later in his career in his blank pentameter couplets and tercets, as could be, tried in the first edition of Parts of a World to put holes in his lines, adopting a strange sort of double-spacing procedure, independent of punctuation, which he later removed for Collected Poems. They were, indeed, quite unnecessary, but it is interesting that he thought once that they might be needed.

I can think of no more startling cinematographic transformation of still picture into motion, even of sound and physical sensation into rushing image, than in a very strange sort of experimental poem, that could only have been written as an informal notebook entry. The format is block, blank-verse paragraph. I quote a whole section of this poem about a journey:

\begin{quote}
Antwerp to Ghent
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
We are upon the Scheldt. We know we move
Because there is a floating at our eyes
Whatso they seek; and because all the things
Which on our outset were distinct and large
Are smaller and much weaker and quite gray,
And at last gone from us. No motion else.
\end{quote}
VISION AND RESONANCE

We are upon the road. The thin swift moon
Runs with the running clouds that are the sky,
And with the running water runs—at whales
Weak 'neath the film and heavy growth of reeds.
The country swims with motion. Time itself
Is consciously beside us, and perceived.
Our speed is such the sparks our engine leaves
Are burning after the whole train has passed.
The darkness is a tumult. We tear on,
The roll behind us and the cry before,
Constantly, in a lull of intense speed
And thunder. Any other sound is known
Merely by sight. The shrubs, the trees your eye
Scans for their growth, are far along in haze.
The sky has lost its clouds, and lies away
Oppressively at calm; the moon has failed;
Our speed has set the wind against us. Now
Our engine's heat is fierceer, and flings up
Great glares alongside. Wind and steam and speed
And clamor and the night. We are in Ghent.

These lines are, astonishingly enough, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti: they were written on a historic occasion for visionary history, by the way, on a trip which he and Holman Hunt took to Flanders to see the fifteenth-century paintings, in 1849. This was the beginning of their historical moment. And yet the poem is not of their sort; it depicts, if anything, a Whistler, but a Whistler in motion. It is, in fact the title of a famous Turner ("Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway"), which he almost quotes. The world whizzing by outside a train window can find no appropriate genre in Victorian poetry, and there is no expansion of format capable of containing this kind of vision. As it stands, this long poem is without results, and remains an amazing experiment. It will not be until such a poem as "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" that this kind of vision will be overlaid, in the Wordsworthian way, with a similar kind of vision about the world of the poem itself; that the look of poems, square and frame-like as they may

invariably remain, open and unendingly page-like as their iambic blocks may be, will serve as lenses for the look of things.

A poem's shape, then, may be a frame for itself as it may be a frame for its picture of the world. Traditional meter always had a framing, a labeling or titling faculty: the meter of a poem, as opposed to its rhythm, was some kind of option for a genre status. A modern visual format will be just that, and more. The role of the typewriter in poetic composition is not to be ignored, I think—even though ms. may be composed in longhand, the immediate print-out of a typewriter is available to refer to for a sense of shape,

and even though the poem has been patterned in some metrical fashion. And yet the purely conventional role of shape, played throughout history by meter, is still there, and there exist contemporary formats which sooner indicate that the poem is a version of a Poundian canto than reveal the operation of the dubious and muddled principles of so-called "projective verse."

In considering just this sort of confusion between what a poem is doing and what its author claims it is doing, one thinks of the disparity between the effects of W. C. Williams's meter and his interpretation of these. For this and other reasons, I should like to conclude these observations with a look at some lines from one of his, and modern America's, finest poems, one whose shape is still being used, or rather the outline of whose shape is still being used, by many poets. It is the first poem of his early sequence called Spring and All, and is a version of the reverie, the traditional spring song which one finds in English verse from the thirteenth century on:

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast—a cold wind. Beyond, the

18. Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era, pp. 90-91, suggests that hitting the space-bar twice on a typewriter can, indeed, be a kind of marking of time; it is certainly true that, if one were to write a theory of format, the unit spacing of the typewriter, the accentual clatter of the sound of the machine itself (for those who write directly on it) may have some significance. See Chapter XI. We might also observe that just as the verb "sing" became a stock metaphor for "compose poetry," so "type" is becoming one for "type."
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish,
dazed spring approaches—

This is a poem of discovery, of the gradual emergence of the sense of spring from what looks otherwise like a disease of winter. The “contagious hospital” is both a colloquial usage, by doctors and patients, for the longer name, and a hospital that is itself contagious, that leaks its presence out onto the road. The cold wind will be revealed as a spring wind, but not before the poem’s complex act of noticing has been completed. The meter here is a typographic strip about 30 ems wide with a general tendency to break syntax at tight points (lines 3 and 4 are normal, rather than exceptional); but notice the traditional use of discovery-entanglement in lines 2 and 3—“under the surge of the blue” because of its audible dactylic melody aims the syntax at a noun version of “blue,” a metonymy for sky. But the next line discovers its mere adjectival use, appositively with “mottled,” and the hopefulness of upward motion, the brief bit of visual and perhaps spiritual ascendancy is undercut by the bleakness of the wintry scene, and the totality of the non-greenness, even the exclusion of available blue. For the buds of spring do indeed look, at first, like tumorous nastinesses of the branch. But the poem moves toward the avowal of the discovery: “Now the grass, tomorrow / the stiff curl of wild carrot leaf.” Its real conclusion, however, is revealed in the final moralization: “One by one objects are defined— / It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf.” The action of the poem is specifically discovered to be one of focusing: as one rotates a knob on the consciousness, the objects are defined, both in the world of the poem and by the poem, by poems in general. In its moralization, the poem is like “The Red Wheelbarrow,” a manifesto about poetry. It is full of light, too, which it does not directly confront, the light that, as a younger poet has put it “wipes each thing to what it is,” the light that takes us past what Stevens called “the evasions of metaphor.” This is as visual a poem in every sense as one could find, a soundless picture of a soundless world, its form shaped rather than incanted, its surface like that of so much Modern poetry, now reflecting, now revealing its depths and, as the conscious wind of attention blows over it, now displaying the wavy texture of its surface. Put together from fragments of assertion, it has virtually no rhetorical sound. But its shape has become a familiar one—particularly for contemporary poetry of the eye—about its possibilities, betrayals and rewards, about rediscoveries of the visionary in the visual.