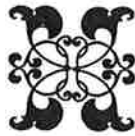


Poetic Meter
and
Poetic Form



REVISED EDITION

PAUL FUSSELL
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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The Nature of Meter

"Rhythm *must* have meaning," Ezra Pound insisted in 1915. And he is right. The empirical study of poetry will convince us that meter is a prime physical and emotional constituent of poetic meaning. The great monuments of perception in English poetry—*Paradise Lost*, "The Rape of the Lock," *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Mauderley," "The Waste Land"—have constituted moments of metrical discovery: they all reveal an excitement with meter almost as an object of fundamental meaning in itself. Two modern poets have testified that to write poems is sometimes less to arrange ideas and assertions than to manipulate meters. W. H. Auden has said: "Every poet has his dream reader: mine keeps a look out for curious prosodic fauna like bacchics and choriambes." Asked by the editor of an anthology to choose two of his favorite poems and to give his reasons for choosing them, Auden wrote: "The first, 'In Due Season,' I choose because it is the only English poem since Campion written in accentual asclepiads; the second, 'Prologue at Sixty,' because I think the alliterative meter not badly handled." Themes and subjects for poems, Auden maintains, are less interesting to the real poet than technique, and "all my life," he says, "I have been more interested in poetic technique than anything else." And a comment of T. S. Eliot's can serve as a caution against the assumption that a poet's metrical decisions, because presumably instinc-

tive and automatic, are somehow immune to criticism and even to analysis. Writing to Cleanth Brooks about an explication which Brooks had undertaken of one of his poems, Eliot observed: "Reading your essay made me feel . . . that I had been a great deal more ingenious than I had been aware of, because the conscious problems with which one is concerned in the actual writing are more those of a quasi musical nature, in the arrangement of metric and pattern, than of a conscious exposition of ideas." Which is to say that regardless of the amount and quality of intellectual and emotional analysis that precedes poetic composition, in the moment of composition itself the poet is most conspicuously performing as metrist. And the same principle holds for the reader: at the moment of his first apprehension of the poem he functions less as semanticist than as a more or less unwitting prosodist. It is the purpose of this book to help the reader to become, as prosodist, less unwitting.

When Boswell asked Johnson, "What is poetry?" Johnson answered: "Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all *know* what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is." In the same way, everyone knows what meter is, but it is not easy to *tell* what it is. The first thing to say is that we know almost nothing about it, especially about how much of it is "in" the pattern of written words before us and how much "in" the reader's mind and musculature. We can say, however, that meter inheres in more or less regular linguistic rhythm; or we can say that talk about meter is a way of describing our awareness of those rhythmical patterns in poetic language which can be measured and formulated. Perhaps when we speak of meter we mean the "ideal" pattern which poetic rhythms approximate. That is, if meter is regarded as an ideal and thus invariable formal pattern, then rhythm moves toward meter the closer it approaches regularity and predictability.

Civilization is an impulse toward order; but high civilizations are those which operate from a base of order without at the same time denying the claims of the unpredictable and even the irrational. The impulse toward the metrical organization of assertions seems to partake of the more inclusive human impulse toward order. Meter is what results when the natural rhythmical movements of colloquial speech are heightened, organized, and regulated so that pattern—which means repetition—emerges from

the relative phonetic haphazard of ordinary utterance. Because it inhabits the physical form of the words themselves, meter is the most fundamental technique of order available to the poet. The other poetic techniques of order—rhyme, line division, stanzaic form, and over-all structure—are all projections and magnifications of the kind of formalizing repetition which meter embodies. They are meter writ large.

Everyone knows that poetic meter, even when unskillfully managed, tends to produce a pleasant effect, but metrical theorists disagree vigorously about the reason for the universal popularity of metered compositions. According to some theorists (mostly rationalists), meter is pleasant because it focuses the reader's attention and refines his awareness. Thus to Coleridge meter tends "to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. . . . As a medicated atmosphere, or as a wine during animated conversation, [the expectations aroused by meter] act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed." According to other theorists (mostly romanticists), meter operates by inducing in the reader a state resembling hypnosis. Some argue that, since the beat in most accentual poetry is slightly faster than the normal heart beat, the apprehension of metered language physically exhilarates the hearer or reader: the heart beat, it is said, actually speeds up in an effort to "match" the slightly faster poetic rhythm. According to I. A. Richards, the effect of poetic rhythm is distinctly physiological and perhaps sexual. As he says, "Its effect is not due to our perceiving a pattern in something outside us, but to our becoming patterned ourselves. With every beat of the metre a tide of anticipation in us turns and swings. . . ." And he goes on to say: "We shall never understand metre so long as we ask, 'Why does temporal pattern so excite us?' and fail to realize that the pattern itself is a vast cyclic agitation spreading all over the body, a tide of excitement pouring through the channels of the mind." Coleridge may have meant something similar when he asserted that "The poet . . . brings the whole soul of man into activity."

The pleasure which universally results from foot tapping and musical time-beating does suggest that the pleasures of meter are essentially physical and as intimately connected with the rhythmic quality of our total experience as the similarly alternating and recurring phenomena of breathing, walking, or love-

making. But the quality of the apprehender of meter determines the kinds of pleasure available from it: children and the unsophisticated receive from meter almost wholly physical pleasure, manifesting itself in foot tapping and head nodding. On the other hand, more experienced and sensitive readers probably derive much of their metrical pleasure from the high degree of rhetorical attention which meter demands ("Meter keeps the mind on the stretch," one critic has said), or from the intellectual and humanistic delight of witnessing order and containment being born out of chaos and flux. Medieval theories of meter, in fact, frequently assume that the pleasure man takes in meter is a simulacrum of the pleasure he takes in the principle of order and recurrence in a universe which itself would seem to be will and order incarnate.

When a poem is read aloud, its metrical effects are broadcast in the familiar currency of auditory impulses: the sounds and the pauses strike the ear in the normal way of sounds and silences, and the results lend themselves to notation by physicists and acoustic prosodists. But what happens when we, as we usually do, encounter a poem through silent, solitary reading? What is the nature of the rhythmical phenomena when our eyes rather than our lips or ears are doing the primary work? Everyone will consult his own experience to answer such questions accurately, but perhaps we can suggest that what happens is this: what we "hear" is a silent voice—our own—enunciating the words for the benefit of our listening muscular system. The "body swayed to music" of Yeats's "Among School Children" is a sort of emblem of the reader responding to silent metrical effects. A kind of motionless, silent dancing is what the reader does when he is responding metrically—as he must—to his own silent reading of a poem.

The word *meter* derives from the Greek term for "measure," and a good way to distinguish various metrical systems is to consider what is being "measured" or counted in each. Four metrical systems are generally distinguishable: the syllabic, the accentual (sometimes called "stress meter" or "strong stress meter"), the accentual-syllabic (sometimes called "syllable-stress"), and the quantitative.

Syllabic prosody measures only the number of syllables per line without regard to the stress of the syllables relative to each

other. Poets and critics working in syllabic contexts sometimes use the term "numbers" as a synonym for "versification." Although stress does appear in lines of verse composed syllabically, it functions as a device of embellishment or rhetorical emphasis rather than as a criterion of the metrical skeleton of the line. Poetry in the Romance languages and in Japanese tends to be syllabic in construction because of the minor role which accent plays in those languages. From the period of the Restoration until about 1740, most English poetry tended to turn syllabic—perhaps influenced by French practice—but since that time syllabism has seldom been revived in English poetry except as a novelty. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Robert Bridges experimented with syllabic meter, and more recently W. H. Auden, Marianne Moore, Yvor Winters, Alan Stephens, Thom Gunn, and Donald Hall have composed on occasion syllabically. But despite sporadic successes, even these poets would probably agree that syllabism is not a natural measuring system in a language so Germanic and thus so accented as English.

Indeed, when syllabic meter does produce engaging effects, they will often be found the result of a lurking system of stresses which the poet has not been able to wish away. In Bridges's "Cheddar Pinks," for example, the poet's design of writing alternating five- and six-syllable lines with stress used nonstructurally has been frustrated by the English language itself and by our own Anglo-Saxon instinct to hear stress, which prompts us to perceive a basis of two stresses per line:

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.

In a syllabic poem like Marianne Moore's "In Distrust of Merits" the quatrain which concludes the stanzas generally remains decently syllabic with the stresses falling apparently whimsically. For example:

his ground in patience
 patience, that is action or
 beauty', the soldier's defence
 and hardest armor for

Here the pattern for the syllable count is seven, seven, seven, six. All goes well within this syllabic system until the climactic ending of the poem, where a major personal assertion rather than gentle comment is called for. It is interesting to watch the accents rising now from underground to take over the stanza and to shatter the syllabic surface as the passion and the commitment also rise:

I inwardly did nothing,
 O Iscariotlike crime!
 Beauty is everlasting
 and dust is for a time.

It would seem that quiet description of Cheddar pinks or gently sardonic commentary on military ironies can contain itself sufficiently within syllabic versification. But in English, accent, like passion and murder, will out, and it will out the moment the poet, arrived at a climax, seizes all the techniques of prosodic reinforcement offered him by the conventions of the English language.

Another difficulty with syllabic meter in English is that in order to sense the shape of the poem the reader must halt unnaturally at line endings. The reader, who has naturally learned to measure language by stresses rather than by syllables, will find it all but impossible to grasp the metrical conformations of the syllabic poem without executing an elaborately unnatural pause at the end of each line.

Writing syllabic poems is difficult and reading them is fun, in a theoretical kind of way. But it is really stress that makes English poetry, and before examining accentual meter in English we should pause to consider just what stress or accent is. Here again we must proceed without much more certainty than saying that stress is the vocal emphasis with which a syllable is spoken—either aloud or silently—relative to the emphasis received by contiguous syllables. But to call stress "emphasis" is not to define it, and disagreement about the nature of stress is tradi-

tional in prosodic discussion. A spoken syllable manifests at least four phonetic qualities: pitch (highness or lowness on the musical scale), loudness, length (length of time consumed by the utterance of the syllable), and timbre or quality (that is, fuzziness, hoarseness, sharpness). Clearly when some of these phonetic qualities are emphasized we say that the syllable is accented, but we really do not know the answers to questions like these: Does an accented syllable have a higher pitch than an unaccented one? Is it louder? Has it a longer duration? Has it a unique timbre? Or is its emphatic characteristic the result of some sort of mysterious energy or "impulsion" which is not entirely accounted for by either pitch, loudness, length, or quality? There is little solid agreement on these questions among authorities, though even a very coarse sensibility can perceive that the line

To me the meanest flower that blows can give

consists of alternating "accented" and "unaccented" syllables.

While in syllabic meter only the syllables are counted, in accentual meter only the accents are. Syllables may vary in number per line, it being assumed that three or four short syllables can be uttered in the same time that one or two long ones can. If syllabic meter seems naturally appropriate to Romance poetry, it is accentual meter which is the basis of most Germanic poetries—including Old English—and of most poems in Modern English in which the number of syllables varies from line to line. In the following lines by Yeats, for example, we find four stresses per line, although the number of syllables varies from seven to nine:

Why should not old men be mad?
 Some have known a likely lad
 That had a sound fly-fisher's wrist
 Turn to a drunken journalist;
 A girl that knew all Dante once
 Live to bear children to a dunce;
 A Helen of social welfare dream,
 Climb on a wagonette to scream.

And in these lines of Auden's we find generally three stresses, with the number of syllables varying from six to eight:

I sit in one of the dives
 On Fifty-second Street
 Uncertain and afraid
 As the clever hopes expire
 Of a low dishonest decade;
 Waves of anger and fear
 Circulate over the bright
 And darkened lands of the earth
 Obsessing our private lives.

Robert Frost has maintained that the contemporary poet has available only two meters, strict iambic and loose iambic. If accentual meters like Yeats's and Auden's are regarded as "loose iambic," we can begin to invoke the term "strict iambic" as the number of both accents and syllables becomes regularized—that is, as the accentual moves toward the accentual-syllabic.

In this third metrical system, both the accents and the syllables are measured and numbered, and the mensuration is often conceived of in terms of *feet*, that is, conventional patterns or units of stressed and unstressed syllables. In accentual-syllabic meter, variations in accent position, addition, or omission are more readily accepted than variations in the number of syllables per line. The result of this strictness is a metrical medium of some rigidity and inflexibility, but at the same time of considerable compressive power. The accentual-syllabic system is the general mode of versification employed by conservative prosodic practitioners in English: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Johnson are examples. Accentual-syllabic meter seems to be fashionable during ages interested in classical rhetoric and committed to a sense of human limitation and order. Of all metrical systems in English, the accentual-syllabic is the most hostile by nature to impulse, irregularity, and unrestrained grandiosity. It seems all but impossible to transmit impressions of hysteria or the frantic within a strict accentual-syllabic versification: a weighty judiciousness is the tone most commonly associated with accentual-syllabism. The following example from Swift's "The Beasts' Confession to the Priest" exemplifies both the accentual and the syllabic limitations. The accents per line are four, the syllables eight:

Creatures of ev'ry Kind but ours
 Well comprehend their nat'ral Powers;
 While We, whom Reason ought to sway,
 Mistake our Talents ev'ry Day.

As in this example, the presence of syncope (the conventional omission of presumably supernumerary syllables: *ev'ry*; *nat'ral*) is generally a sign that a strict accentual-syllabism is being regarded as the prosodic vehicle. Another example, this time from Gray's "Elegy." Here the accents are five per line, the syllables ten. The stanza closes rigidly around its materials, containing them with as much formality as the storied urn itself holds its inert contents:

Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
 Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull, cold ear of death?

Quantitative meter, finally, measures durational rather than accentual feet; each foot, that is, consists of "long" and "short" rather than "accented" and "unaccented" syllables. Most Sanskrit, Greek, and Roman poems tend to be written quantitatively, and there have been many attempts (especially during the Renaissance) to compose English verse according to principles of duration rather than accent. Edmund Spenser, for example, in his "*Iambicum Trimeter*," imitates the iambic trimeter (i.e., hexameter) of classical poetry:

Unhappy verse, the witness of my unhappy state,
 Make thyself flutt'ring wings of thy fast flying
 Thought, and fly forth unto my love, wheresoever she be:

Whether lying restless in heavy bed, or else
 Sitting so cheerless at the cheerful board, or else
 Playing alone careless on her heavenly virginals.

Inspired by the theorizing of one William J. Stone, author of *On the Use of Classical Metres in English* (1898), Robert Bridges also experimented with quantitative English verse. Here, in "Wintry Delights," addressed to Lionel Johnson, he imitates the classical heroic hexameter:

Now in wintry delights, and long fireside meditation,
 "Twixt studies and routine paying due court to the Muses,
 My solace in solitude, when broken roads barricade me
 Mudbound, unvisited for months with my merry children,
 Grateful t'ward Providence, and heeding a slander against me
 Less than a rheum, think of me today, Dear Lionel, and take
 This letter as some account of Will Stone's versification.

But just as a syllabic poet's ambitions seem always to invite defeat from the force of English accent, so attempts to organize English lines according to quantitative feet risk awkwardness and self-consciousness. The English language is so heavily accented that no other of its characteristics but accent seems to furnish a basis for meter. Bridges himself has testified to the strenuous difficulty of thinking and feeling in quantities instead of in accents, and his experience suggests that a meter customary in a given language has become customary precisely because it measures the most conspicuous phonetic characteristic of that language.

Meter, one of the primary correlatives of meaning in a poem, can "mean" in at least three ways. First, all meter, by distinguishing rhythmic from ordinary statement, objectifies that statement and impels it toward a significant formality and even ritualism. This ritual "frame" in which meter encloses experience is like the artificial border of a painting: like a picture frame, meter reminds the apprehender unremittingly that he is not experiencing the real object of the "imitation" (in the Aristotelian sense) but is experiencing instead that object transmuted into symbolic form. Meter is thus a primary convention of artifice in poetry, like similar indispensable conventions (the palpably artificial stone flesh of statues, for example) in the other arts. The second way a meter can "mean" is by varying from itself: as we shall see, departures from metrical norms powerfully reinforce emotional effects. And third, meters can mean by association and convention. Because of its associations with certain kinds of statements and feelings, a given meter tends to maintain a portion of its meaning, whether symbolic sounds are attached to it or not. In the limerick, for example, the very pattern of short anapestic lines is so firmly associated with light impudence or indecency that a poet can hardly write in anything resembling this measure without evoking smiles. To "translate" a limerick into, say, iambic tetrameter, is to drain off the comedy: we

must conclude that a great deal of the comedy inheres by now in the meter alone.

Similarly, triple meters (based on anapestic or dactylic feet) seem inevitably to have something vaguely joyous, comical, light, or superficial about them. In "Retaliation," Oliver Goldsmith makes the whimsical associations of triple meter work for him:

To make out the dinner full certain I am
 That Ridge is anchovy, and Reynolds is lamb;
 That Hickey's a capon, and by the same rule,
 Magnanimous Goldsmith a gooseberry fool.

In "The Poplar-Field," on the other hand, William Cowper, like Longfellow in "Evangeline," unwittingly allows the whimsical associations of triple meter to work against him:

My fugitive years are all hastening away,
 And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,
 With a turf on my breast, and a stone at my head,
 Ere another such grove shall arrive in its stead.

On the other hand, William Carlos Williams happily exploits the associations of triple meter in "The Dance":

In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess,
 the dancers go round, they go round and
 around, the squeal and the blare and the
 tweedle of bagpipes. . . .

So, with an impressive delicacy and fineness, does Henry Reed in "Naming of Parts," where a fatuous military instructor delivers his lesson in rifle nomenclature:

To-day we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
 We had daily cleaning. And to-morrow morning,
 We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day,
 To-day we have naming of parts. . . .

Since ordinary people, and least of all noncommissioned officers, do not speak metrically, to present them speaking metrically is to transform them from creatures of nature into creatures of art. And when it is the poet's voice that we hear speak-

ing metrically, the meter announces or implies his vatic role, just as meter tends to invest with a mysterious air of authority and permanence the words that assume its patterns. The strange power of meter to burnish the commonplace has tempted some people to regard metrical patterns as Platonic forms, themselves inherently and permanently beautiful, forms which the poet perceives as if by special illumination and toward which he constantly urges the rhythms of his own utterance.

If, like some Platonists, one regards regular meter as a kind of ideal, then one becomes extraordinarily sensitive to those places in the poem where the "sense" pattern of the language rhythm lies at some distance from the normal or "base" abstract rhythm of the metrical scheme. Prosodists and critics who have attended closely to this frequent distance between a poem's ideal and real meter have promulgated a theory of prosodic "tension": these theorists hold that one of the important sources of metrical power and pleasure is this perpetual tension between perfect and imperfect, or between general and particular, metrical patterns. The perpetual tension between the theoretical meter and the actual rhythms in a poem constitutes a sort of play or suspension between opposites, which may remind us of the aesthetics of Coleridge.

One complication to be kept in mind when we are dealing with meter is this: different kinds of poems use meter in different ways. Except for some of its most obvious offices, for example, it is apparent that meter does not do the same things in lyric that it does in poetic drama, where it helps actors memorize lines; nor does it do the same things in narrative poetry that it does in satiric. In "Thirty Days Hath September" and in the metered genealogies of epic, the function of meter is largely mnemonic; in a poem like "Kubla Khan" its function is musical and hypnotic; in something like the "Essay on Man" it is oratorical and analytically pedagogic. Different metrical values attach not only to the several modes of poetry (lyric, narrative, dramatic, satiric) but also to the several kinds (elegy, song, sonnet, ode). Thus what is merit in a limerick is a disaster in a sonnet. The kind of meter which sustains a long performance like "The Prelude" is likely to be too diffuse for a short one like "The World Is Too Much with Us." There is one perfect meter for "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and another for "Mauderley": they

should not be the same. We could do worse than agree with Pound when he says, "I believe in an absolute rhythm, a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly with the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."

John Hollander has spoken of "the metrical contract" which every poet undertakes with his reader from the first few words of a poem. Given the nature of each metrical contract, the reader tends to do certain things and not others as he reads. I. A. Richards has emphasized likewise the way the reader's response is determined and governed by the first lines of any poem. He says: "Just as the eye reading print unconsciously expects the spelling to be as usual, and the fount of type to remain the same, so the mind after reading a line or two of verse . . . prepares itself ahead for any one of a number of possible sequences, at the same time negatively incapacitating itself for others." And emphasizing that meter is illusion, and often illusion created more by the mind of the reader than by the pen of the writer, Richards concludes: "The effect produced by what actually follows [in the poem] depends very closely upon this unconscious preparation and consists largely of the further twist which it gives to expectancy."

What Richards is implying is that the reader's experience of meter is a phenomenon of which only the hints and promptings are provided by the actual rhythm of the poetic words. That is, the apprehender's mind and psyche and even physique tend to read meter into language in order to achieve their own organizational satisfactions. It is easy to test this premise by our own experience. The ticking of a clock constitutes an unvaried succession of regular sounds: when no one is listening, the clock goes *tick, tick, tick*, *tick* all day long. But let a human ear approach, and the clock goes *tick, tock, tick, tock*, and the ticking now "becomes" rhythmical because the listening ear wants it to be.

Consider now the following lines from the beginning of William Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" (*Songs of Innocence*):

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry, "'weep! 'weep! 'weep!'

Here the poet has so contracted that the reader refuses to consider the four *'weep's* as a series of sounds equally stressed (contrast the reader's very different treatment of King Lear's "Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill"); instead, the reader shapes the four *'weep's* into two iambic groups and pauses between the two groups. But if the *'weep's* were removed from their context, the metrical contract would be abrogated, and the reader would give them equal stress as he does Lear's *kill's*. Such is the authority of the reader's lust for rhythm, once the poet who is in charge has indicated that it is time for it to be unleashed and satisfied.

According to John Crowe Ransom, a poem is an organism like a person, and, like a coherent person, the poem approaches to merit and even to virtue when its head, its heart, and its feet are all cooperating economically. The emphasis that we are going to bring to the feet ought not to seduce us into an overemphasis. It is true that great poems are great metrical achievements. But great metrical achievement alone does not make great poetry. A poet like Robert Bridges is an example of how little mere technical skill in versification—and his is a large and admirable skill—will in the long run serve to redeem and make permanent a poetry without any compelling intellectual or emotional impulse.

2



The Technique of Scansion

Scansion, which can be defined as any system of representing more or less conventional poetic rhythms by visual symbols for purposes of metrical analysis and criticism, does not make rhythm: it reveals and simplifies it by translating it from a temporal into a spatial dimension. By giving a critic a clear visual representation of the metrical situation in a poem, scansion becomes an elementary tool of criticism. If the tool is used clumsily and unimaginatively, the criticism will be primitive; but if the tool is used with devotion and sensitivity, the criticism has a good chance of coming to grips with matters of fundamental poetic value.

The practice of scansion derives, unfortunately, from the techniques of scholarship in the classical languages. This derivation has tended to invest the act of scansion with an air of the doctrinaire, the prescriptive, and the pedantic; for when a classical scholar scans some Greek or Latin verse, he *knows* what pattern the poet is following—or ought to be following—and keeps his eye peeled for "false quantities" or other blemishes indicating that the poet has neglected his metrical business. Our practice in scanning English poetry must be very different, partly because we shall be attending largely to an accentual or an accentual-syllabic rather than a quantitative poetry, and partly because English poetry employs quite different artistic principles from those of classical verse: it engages in much bolder and much more expres-

sive variations from metrical norms than classical poetry. Indeed, it is to locate and interpret and finally to value these variations, rather than to reprehend them, that we scan at all.

Prosodists use one of three systems of signs for scanning English verse: the graphic, the musical, and the acoustic. In graphic scansion, which is the kind we shall be using, the reader affixes the symbol ~ to syllables which, in their context, are unstressed; he uses the symbol / to indicate syllables which, in context, are stressed. A division between poetic feet is indicated by /. A caesura, or metrical pause, is indicated by ||. In musical scansion, on the other hand, eighth notes may be used to represent unstressed syllables, and quarter or half notes to represent stressed syllables of varying weights. Caesuras are sometimes indicated by musical rests of various lengths. Musical scansion does have the advantage of representing more accurately than graphic certain delicate differences in degree of stress: it is obvious that an English line has more than two prosodic kinds of syllables in it, and yet graphic scansion, preferring convenience to absolute accuracy, seems to give the impression that any syllable in a line is either clearly stressed or clearly unstressed. But musical scansion has perhaps a greater disadvantage than this kind of oversimplification: it is not only complex, but even worse tends to imply that poetry follows musical principles closer than it does, an assumption that can lead to all sorts of misapprehensions not only of rhythmical patterns but of total poetic meanings. The third method of scansion, the acoustic, translates poetic sounds into the marks on graph paper produced by such machines as the kymograph and the oscillograph. Like musical scansion, this system has the advantage of accuracy, especially in its representations of many of the empirical phenomena of verse when it is actually spoken aloud; its disadvantages are its complexity, its novelty, and its incapacity to deal with rhythms which no speaker may enunciate but which every silent reader feels. Musical scansion may do no harm to those already learned in music and musical theory; acoustic scansion may be useful to the linguist and the scientist of language; but graphic scansion is best for those who aspire to become not merely accurate readers but also intelligent critics of English poetry.

In learning to perform graphic scansion of a line or group of lines, the reader first marks stressed and unstressed syllables, *not*

according to any preconceived pattern, but according to the degree of rhetorical emphasis residing in the syllables. A good way to begin is to mark a prose sentence, thus: Thě öny úseřü ěřpěctátion thăt ä řeáděr cän bring tő ä póém is thăt it will bė in cěrtáin wáys úníque, ä thíng in íťsělf. Having marked a prose sentence with regard only to the relative force of its various syllables in projecting its meaning and emphasis, we proceed to a stanza of poetry (here, from Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*) and do the same:

I sómétímes thínk thăt névěř blóws ső réđ

Thě Róse äš whére sómé búriéd Cáésär bléd;

Thăt évěřý Hýácínth thě Gárděn wéárs

Drópt in hěr láp fróm sómé ónce lóvelý héád.

Notice that in scanning we mark according to the sound of words, not according to their appearance on the page: thus in the third line here, we mark *every* rather than *ev'ery*, for that, whether correct or incorrect, is the way we actually say the word. The syllabic regularity in Fitzgerald's lines—each line has ten syllables—as well as the more or less regular placement of stresses suggests that the stanza is written in accentual-syllabic meter, and that hence it is appropriate to invoke the concept of poetic feet.

A poetic foot is a measurable, patterned, conventional unit of poetic rhythm. Because the idea of the foot has been imported into modern accentual-syllabic scansion from classical quantitative practice, quarrels about its nature and even its existence have been loud and long since the Renaissance. Most authorities would agree that if we are going to use the concept of the foot to describe the rhythmic norm of poetic lines, then the foot consists of one stressed syllable and one or two unstressed syllables. The poetic line in a more or less regular composition, traditionalists would maintain, consists of a number of feet from one to eight. By convention, the feet are conceived of as roughly of the same kind, although variations, produced by the "substitution" of different feet, are not only permissible but desirable so long as these substitutions do not efface for long the repeated pattern of the prevailing or dominant kind of foot, which establishes a

"grid"—like the steady rhythmic beat in jazz—against which departures are audible as "syncopation."

The following are the most common "base" feet in English:

iamb (iambus); iambic, as in	děstróy
anapest (anapaest); anapestic	intěrvéne
trochee; trochaic	tópsý
dactyl; dactylic	měrrily

And the following, although obviously not encountered as base feet, are frequently used for substitution:

spondee; spondaic	húm-drúm
pyrrhic	the sea/sön öf/mists

Iambic and anapestic feet are called—misleadingly—ascending or rising feet; trochaic and dactylic are known as descending or falling. A poem written prevalingly in iambic or anapestic feet is said to be in ascending or rising rhythm: the rhythm is so called because the reader is presumed to feel, in each foot, an "ascent" from a relatively unstressed syllable to a relatively stressed one. The term is useful only if we keep in mind that it has no metaphorical or symbolic value: ascending rhythm does not, in itself, transmit a feeling of aspiration, levity, or cheer, nor does descending rhythm—generated by prevailing trochees or dactyls—necessarily transmit illusions of falling nor emotions of depression or gloom.

In addition to classifying feet as ascending or descending, we can classify them as duple or triple: two-syllable feet like iambs and trochees are duple feet; three-syllable, like anapests and dactyls, triple. To exemplify poetic feet by single words, as above, is of course to distort their nature: foot divisions do not necessarily correspond to word divisions. Actually, the foot is rather like a musical bar in that both foot and bar are arbitrary abstract units of measure which do not necessarily coincide with the phrasal units on which they are superimposed. The difference between foot and bar is that the bar always begins with a stress.

Because the concept of the foot is an abstraction, we will never encounter a pure example of any of the standard feet. "For that matter," as Hugh Kenner says, "you will never encounter a round face, though the term is helpful; and if the idea of a circle had never been defined for you, you might not be clearly aware of how a round face differs from a long one, even though the existence of some sort of difference is evident to the eye. The term 'iambic foot' has the same sort of status as the term 'round face.'" Although we will probably never meet a really pure spondee or pyrrhic, in which the two syllables are of exactly the same weight, there would seem to be no need for such overscrupulous formulations as the terms "pseudo-spondee" or "false spondee," which suggest that our work as scansionists and critics ought to be more objective and accurate than of course it ever can be. The goal of what we are doing is enjoyment: an excessive refinement of terms and categories may impress others but it will probably not help us very much to appreciate English poetic rhythms.

The terminology of the poetic feet derives from classical quantitative prosody, and this too has been a source of misunderstanding and even hostility among readers of English, for in ancient poetry rhythmical usages are generally much more regular and predictable than in English poetry, where "substitutions" are governed by instinct, whim, or taste rather than by rule. Although it is not often necessary to invoke any more than the six feet indicated above in describing the rhythm of an English line, it does no harm to be acquainted with the following feet, all of which are to be found in Greek or Latin poetry (where, of course, duration of syllables rather than stress determines the pattern):

amphibrach	˘ ˘ ˘
antispast	˘ ˘ ˘
bacchic	˘ ˘ ˘
choriamb	˘ ˘ ˘ ˘
cretic	˘ ˘ ˘
epitrite	˘ ˘ ˘

(called first, second, third, or fourth epitrite according to the position of the short syllable)

ionic a majore / ˘ ˘ ˘

ionic a minore ˘ ˘ ˘ /

pacon / ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘

(called first, second, third, or fourth paeon according to the position of the long syllable)

mollossus / / / /

tribrach ˘ ˘ ˘

Returning now to our *Rubaiyat* stanza: after ascertaining whether the rhythm in general is ascending or descending, we mark the feet, making certain that the end of each line corresponds with the end of a foot:

Y sóme/times think/thát név/ér blóws/só réd/

Thé Róse/ás whére/sóme búr/led Cae/sár bléd:/

Thát év/erý Hý/ácinth/thé Gár/dén wéars/

Drópt In/hér láp/fróm sóme/ónce lóve/lý héad./

Although only the first line consists wholly of iambic feet, it is not hard to see that the prevailing or dominant foot of the stanza is iambic, and that the lines are based on a recurrent pattern of five feet. We thus designate the meter as iambic pentameter. Terms for other line lengths are:

one foot	monometer
two feet	dimeter
three feet	trimeter
four feet	tetrameter
six feet	hexameter
seven feet	heptameter
eight feet	octameter

A fuller description of the *Rubaiyat* stanza would indicate the rhyme scheme: *a a b a*. A handy way to notate both the rhyme scheme and the length of the line in feet is: *a b a⁵*.

The stanza from the *Rubaiyat* presents a very uncomplicated metrical situation. Some complexity begins to enter when we encounter lines like these, from Pope's "The Rape of the Lock":

Fávóurs/tó nóne, || tó all/shě smíles/éxténds:/

Óft shě/réjéct, || bút név/ér ónce/óffénds./

Here we come upon a strong, rhetorically meaningful caesura, or extrametrical pause, within the lines. The caesura here, positioned after the fourth syllable, near the middle of the line, is called a medial caesura. If it should occur near the beginning of the line, it is called an initial caesura; if near the end of the line, terminal. Caesuras, which are often marked by punctuation, can be said to correspond to breath pauses between musical phrases; in verse, their slight interruption of the propulsive metrical pattern can provide a kind of expressive counterpoint or opposition as well as enforcing the rhetorical sense, as, in the Pope example, the caesura provides a metrical fulcrum for the rhetorical antitheses. Some lines have more than one caesura; some have none. Unless the slight unpunctuated pause after *lap* in the last line of the *Rubaiyat* stanza be considered a caesura, those four lines have none.

To become sensitive to the presence of caesuras in English poems is to move toward both a heightened awareness of literary history and a new receptiveness to the art of texture in all the poems one encounters. In classical, Romance, and Old English verse the caesura is used in a fairly predictable way. It is only with the development in English of the staple iambic pentameter line—that ubiquitous and apparently permanent vehicle—that varied and expressive caesura placement (as in Chaucer) begins to become a subtle prosodic device. While in Old English verse the invariable medial caesura had been used to separate each line into two half-lines and thus to assert the regularity of the structure, in Modern English the caesura is more often used as a device of variety which helps mitigate metrical rigors as it shifts from position to position in successive lines. In formal verse, whether classical, Romance, or Old English, the medial position of the caesura is generally predictable; in verse aspiring to a greater flexibility and informality, we cannot anticipate the position of the pauses, and here they serve quite a different function.

The predictable medial caesura occurs with great regularity in the accentual, alliterative poetry of Old English:

Hige sceal þe heardra, || heorte þe cenre,
 Mod sceal þe mare, || þe ure maegen lytlaþ.
 ("The Battle of Maldon")

It is also extremely regular in the staple line of French epic and dramatic verse, the syllabic alexandrine:

Trois fois cinquante jours || le général naufrage
 Dégasta l'univers; || et fin d'un tel ravage
 (Du Bartas, "La Première Semaine")

It appears as a formalizing device in English blank verse of the early Renaissance as the verse seems to strain to break away from memories of its Old English ancestry:

O knights, O squires, || O gentle blouds yborne,
 You were not borne, || al onely for your selves:
 (Gascoigne, "The Steel Glass")

Likewise much English Augustan poetry exploits the medial caesura, but for quite special effects of antithetical wit and irony:

See Sin in State, || majestically drunk;
 Proud as a Peeress, || prouder as a Punk;
 Chaste to her Husband, || frank to all beside,
 A teeming Mistress, || but a barren Bride.
 (Pope, "Moral Essay II")

In seventeenth-century blank verse, on the other hand, and especially in Milton's, the placement of the caesura is often extremely flexible and surprising:

Thus with the Year
 Seasons return, but not to me returns
 Day, || or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn.

* * *
 And Bush with frizl'd hair implicit: || last
 Rose as in dance the stately Trees. . . .
 (*Paradise Lost*)

It is also deployed with flexibility in much modern iambic pentameter verse:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
 A tattered coat upon a stick, || unless
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
 For every tatter in its mortal dress. . . .
 (Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium")

From these examples it is clear that the caesura can be used in two quite antithetical ways: (1) as a device for emphasizing the formality of the poetic construction and for insisting on its distance from colloquial utterance; and (2) as a device for investing fairly strict meters with something of the informal movement—the unpredictable pauses and hesitations—of ordinary speech. If the caesura occurs regularly in the medial position, we are dealing with a different kind of verse from that in which caesura placement is varied and unpredictable: which is to say that the whole metrical contract between poet and reader becomes a different one. Consider, for example, Frost's "Out, Out—"; here the caesuras are prevailingly medial and astonishingly unvaried:

No one believed. || They listened at his heart.
 Little—less—nothing! || —and that ended it.
 No more to build on there. || And they, since they
 Were not the one dead, || turned to their affairs.

What Frost suggests by this reminiscence of formal caesura practice is that a domestic rural disaster is being raised to the elevation of extremely formal art. We can contrast, on the other hand, the practice of T. S. Eliot in "Journey of the Magi." Here the caesuras are unexpectedly varied:

There were times we regretted
 The summer palaces on slopes, || the terraces
 * * *
 All this was a long time ago, || I remember,
 And I would do it again, || but set down
 This set down
 This: || were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death? . . .

Eliot, proceeding in an opposite direction from Frost, is lending a colloquial air to a rhetoric which otherwise might seem excessively chill, distant, and unbelievable. Such are the expressive potentialities for either formality or informality in the use of caesuras either medially or with greater variation.

There is another complication to be aware of in scanning English lines. We must exercise a historical consciousness in pronouncing sounds if we are to recover and relive the original schemes of versification. And if we are concerned with accurate and critically meaningful scansion, we must become skeptical of "modernized" texts; otherwise we run the risk of modernizing—and thus distorting—the original versification. For example: in accentual-syllabic poetry with strong ambitions toward the formal and the oratorical, poetic contractions or elisions are used to keep contiguous lines equal in number of syllables. Although the technical terms for various kinds of contractions are not essential, it is useful to know them. We distinguish two basic kinds of contractions, synaeresis (sometimes called synaloepha) and syncope. When contracting a word by synaeresis, the poet joins two vowels to create a single syllable, a sort of nonce diphthong:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
(*Paradise Lost*)

Here the *ie* in *disobedience* changes to what is called a *y*-glide, and the word becomes *disobed-yence*. Its normal five syllables are reduced to four to keep the line decasyllabic. Syncope, on the other hand, is what we call either the omission of a consonant (as in "ne'er") or the dropping of an unstressed vowel which is flanked by consonants:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey
(Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village")

In this line *hastening*, normally trisyllabic, is reduced by syncope to a dissyllable, and the line is thus kept within its decasyllabic confines.

Poetic contractions like these are found most often in English verse composed from the Restoration to the end of the eighteenth century. In poetry of this period the contractions are often indi-

cated typographically by apostrophes: e.g., *hast'ning*. But in scanning we must observe the contractions whether indicated typographically or not, for the aesthetic of Augustan poetry assumes that each line will be regular in number of syllables, and this regularity is an indispensable part of what the lines are transmitting. Because the neglect or modernizing of such contractions distorts what these poems "say," the contractions must be heeded by the modern reader who wants to recreate for his own ear the genuine tone of a historical versification.

So far we have been considering mostly the rhythmic patterns manifested by the "prose sense" of the words in poetic lines, and until we master the art of understanding and marking the rhetorical emphasis of the words *as if they were prose* we are unprepared to venture upon the next step in scansion, a step fraught with the danger of *a priori* proceedings. This step involves allowing our scansions to reveal, *where appropriate*, the force of the abstract metrical pattern which presumably lies behind the actual rhythms of the words. As Joseph Malof has said, "One kind of energy in poetic language comes from the wrestling of abstract patterns with actual prose rhythms. The result is a compromise recorded in the scansion, which must therefore be sensitive to both opposing forces. Scansion should indicate, as far as possible, both the degree to which the natural prose rhythms are modified by the metrical law, and the degree to which the metrical law is forced to become amended by those elements in the prose rhythm that will not yield." What Mr. Malof is saying is that, once the metrical contract has been agreed to by both parties, an underlying "silent" metrical continuum proceeds through the poem, and that this abstract pattern, which the actual words are continuously either reinforcing or departing from, has the power now and then to force a metrical rather than a natural pronunciation of a word or phrase.

Consider what happens in these two lines of the old ballad of "Sir Patrick Spens"; the rising rhythm is so powerfully enforced in the early part of the first line that we are naturally invited to mispronounce the word *master* in order to let the purely metrical element have its way:

And I fear, I fear, my dear master,
That we will come to harm.

Another example: unless we are in the army, we generally pronounce the word *detail* with the accent on the second syllable. That, at least, is the pronunciation prescribed in most dictionaries. Now if poetic rhythm were always supplied entirely by the rhetorical emphasis of the actual words in their prose sense, and never by the silent, continuing metrical background, the word *detail* in the opening lines of Frost's "Directive" would invite its normal prose pronunciation. But we find that it does not:

Back out of all this now too much for us,

Back in a time made simple by the loss

Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off . . .

Here it is the meter itself that, regardless of the way we normally pronounce the word, forces us on this occasion to pronounce it as the poem demands we should.

At least two kinds of temptation toward mis-scansion offer themselves when we permit a scansion to register the metrical as well as the actual rhythm: there is first the general difficulty of knowing what the dominant meter of a line is and the temptation to simplify matters by mechanically reading some presumed meter into the words before us; and secondly there is the difficulty of mastering historical pronunciation and thus recovering the rhythm actually implicit in the line regarded as a historical artifact. It is safe to say that only very infrequently will a metrical pattern predominate so powerfully over the actual rhythm of the language in a line that it will force the pronunciation to bend to its will. If we must give a preference to either the metrical or the actual, it is probably safest to err in scansion on behalf of the actual rhythm. Proceeding *a priori* is as dangerous in prosody as elsewhere.

What, finally, is scansion for? To scan only to conclude that a poem is "written in iambic pentameter" is to do nothing significant. It is only as a basis for critical perception and ultimately for critical judgment that scansion can justify itself. The sort of perception that scansion makes possible by translating sound into visual terms can be illustrated in the *Rubaiyat* stanza with which we began. Consider what happens in the last two lines of that stanza:

Thát év/erÿ Hÿ/ácínth/thé Gár/dén wéars/

Drópt in/hér láp/fróm sóme/ónce lóve/lÿ héad./

By giving us a clear visual representation of the metrical status of the words, the scansion of these two lines makes apparent the substitution of a trochee for the expected iamb at the beginning of the last line. This variation, which reinforces the shocking suddenness and rapidity of the fall of the drops of blood, constitutes a moment of high, although perhaps not the highest, technical accomplishment. It is to learn to appraise such accomplishments accurately that we scan at all.

I lay down and slept after the burial;—
 I had started to school, I dreamed,
 But had left my books at home,
 Pa brought them it seemed.

I saw him coming stepping high,
 Which was of his walk the way;
 I had stopped at a house near by—
 His face was pale as clay.

When he lay under a white sheet
 On the morning after his decease,
 I kissed his sad and sunken cheek,
 And hoped his spirit had found peace.

When he was having convulsions
 He feared he would hurt me;
 Therefore told me to go away.
 He had dug artichokes for me.

Pa dug artichokes on that day,
 He never will dig anymore;
 He has only paid the debt we owe.
 We should try to reach the shining shore.

Here so much effort is going into finding rhymes that little energy is left over for the meter.

In the middle range of metrical competence we find poems which establish in the first line a rigorously regular metric and then adhere religiously to it with little or no variation. Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1565), composed in an excessively regular blank verse, is such a work. Swinburne said of it: "Verse assuredly it is not; there can be no verse, where there is no modulation." The works of folk-poets like Edgar Guest and Henry Van Dyke belong to this second category. Their metrical regularity makes them remarkably easy to memorize and recite, and perhaps public recitation is what they are designed for:

I know that Europe's wonderful, yet something seems to lack:
 The Past is too much with her, and the people looking back.
 But the glory of the Present is to make the Future free—
 We love our land for what she is and what she is to be.
 (Henry Van Dyke, "America for Me")

3



Metrical Variations

Meter probably began as a mere mnemonic device, a way of helping bards and scholars memorize their epics and annals and genealogies, their medical prescriptions, legal codes, and recipes, before the days of printed books. When meter is used mnemonically it is essential that it be as regular as possible. The principle of expressive variation from a metrical norm is thus a relatively late metrical development. It is certainly the primary source of metrical pleasure for the modern critical reader. As Robert Frost puts it, "We enjoy the straight crookedness of a good walking stick."

We can discriminate three degrees of metrical competence in poets. In the lowest degree, exemplified by the effusions which appear in rural newspapers, we feel a metrical imperative either not at all or only very rarely:

I KISSED PA TWICE AFTER HIS DEATH

By *Mattie J. Peterson*

I kissed dear Pa at the grave,
 Then soon he was buried away;
 Wreaths were put on his tomb,
 Whose beauty soon decay.

The very regularity of the meter, indeed, is conceived to constitute a large part of the merit of such compositions.

In poems of the third and most sophisticated metrical kind, the entire function of meter is very different from what it is in poems of the second sort. Emerson's remark helps suggest the all-important difference: "It is not meters, but a meter-making argument that makes a poem." Or as Pound puts it, "[Meter] can't be merely a careless dash off, with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense." In this kind of poem the poet establishes regularity only to depart from it expressively. When he does compose a metrically regular line it is not because the metrical scheme tells him to, but because something in the matter he is embodying impels him toward a momentary regularity. It is only with poems of this third metrical level that we shall be concerned: here we shall see meter used less as a mere ordering element than as an expressive one.

"Most arts," writes Pound, "attain their effect by using a fixed element and a variable." The fixed element in poetry is the received or contrived grid or framework of metrical regularity; the variable is the action of the rhythm of the language as it departs from this framework. This opposition between the "silent" or abstract metrical pattern and the actual language rhythm has been described by many terms which mean roughly the same thing: counterpoint, modulation, tension, syncopation, interplay, variation. It is probably true, as W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley suggest, that "there is no line so regular (so evenly alternating weak and strong) that it does not show some tension. It is practically impossible to write an English line that will not in some way buck against the meter. Insofar as the line does approximate the condition of complete submission, it is most likely a tame line, a weak line." Tameless and weakness, for all the fraudulent pretence of vigor and manliness, are the metrical curse, ultimately, of lines like Van Dyke's, lines that are too regular or are regular for only extrinsic or mechanical reasons.

It almost goes without saying that the most expressive metrical variations are possible only in verse conceived in a tradition of more or less regular base rhythm. Variations of the kind we shall be considering are the province of a very specific and limited kind of poetry—namely, accentual-syllabic verse (or accentual verse with a high degree of syllabic regularity) written since the

stabilization of Modern English early in the Renaissance. If English prosodic history has one great tradition, this is where we must go to find it.

If we are more or less traditional graphic scansionists, we will probably use the term *substitution* as the readiest way to describe metrical variations. Once a metrical pattern has been implied in a poem, we can say that variations in the rhythm occur through the introduction of substitute feet which here and there replace certain of the base feet. Such a way of talking is not likely to lead us astray so long as we remember that we are speaking in metaphors. In Yeats's lines that follow, for example, we can say that each contains a substitution for one of the expected iambic feet:

Án ág/éd mán/ís büt/á páł/trý thing./

Á tát/teřed cóat/űpön/á stíck./űmlés/

Sóul cláp/íts hánds/ánd sing./ánd lóud/ěr sing/

För év/erý tát/těr ín/íts mór/tál dréss/. . . .

Line 1 has a pyrrhic in the third position; line 2 a pyrrhic in the third; line 3 a spondaic (or perhaps trochaic) substitution in the first position; and line 4 a pyrrhic in the third. Here the substitutions serve both to relieve the metrical monotony of the long-continued, unvaried iambic pentameter and to allow the rhetorical structure to "give" and shape itself according to the rhetorical pressures of the statement. And the rhetorical shaping is noticeable only because it takes place against the background of the "silent" metrical continuum.

In the following lines from Arnold's "Dover Beach" we find substitutions used very specifically on behalf of the physical and emotional reinforcement of the sense:

Lístēn!/yöu héar/thě grá/ting róar/

Ōf péb/blěs whích/thě wáves/dráw bák./ánd flíng./

Át thěr/rěturn./űp thě/high stránd./

Bėgin./ánd céase./ánd thén/ágain/bėgin/. . . .

Against the established iambic background which precedes, the initial trochaic substitution in line 1 constitutes an unexpected

reversal of rhetorical movement which emphasizes the new intensification in the speaker's address to his listener. To replace the trochee *Listen!* with an iamb like *But hark!* is to appreciate the power of the reversed initial foot to grab the reader. In line 2 the spondaic substitution in the fourth position implies and enacts the slowness of the seawave as it withdraws back upon itself, gathering force by accumulation like a coil spring to shoot itself up the beach. The pyrrhic substitution in the first position in line 3 is the rhetorical equivalent of the speed with which the wave flings itself up the sloping sands. And in line 4 the return to the regularity of unvaried iambic meter after these suggestive variations emphasizes rhythmically in this context the infinite, monotonous continuance of the waves' old kinetic process.

In addition to the strictly dissyllabic substitutions we have been considering, lines can also be varied by the addition or subtraction of unaccented syllables: these variations are accomplished, we can say, by trisyllabic or monosyllabic substitution. In duple measures the substitution of a trisyllabic foot for a dissyllabic one is a bolder practice than any we have seen so far, for it increases the syllabic length of the line and thus effaces one of the norms of predictability. Consider Yeats's variations here:

Ónce óut/óf ná/túre Y/ sháll né/věr táke/

Mý bó/dřijř fórm/fróm á/nř ná/tůřál thřing,/ . . .
("Sailing to Byzantium")

In the second and fifth positions of line 2 we find anapests replacing iambs, and the two trisyllabic substitutions swell the line to twelve instead of ten syllables, a weighty equivalent of the climactic revelation the line embodies. Even more venturesome is Frost's metrical practice at the beginning of his lyric "Come In," where, after establishing an initial rhythm very like anapestic trimeter in a poem which will prove to be prevailing iambic, Frost reverses completely to a dactylic movement, and then presents a caesura and a monosyllable as the equivalent of a complete foot:

Ás I cáme/tó thě édge/óf thě wóods,/

Thřush mřšic || —hářk!/

As we can deduce from these examples, the principles of expression through metrical variation are the following:

1. A succession of stressed syllables without the expected intervening unstressed syllables can reinforce effects of slowness, weight, or difficulty;
2. A succession of unstressed syllables without the expected intervening stressed syllables can reinforce effects of rapidity, lightness, or ease;
3. An unanticipated reversal in the rhythm (as in line 1 of the Arnold passage, or line 2 of the Frost) implies a sudden movement, often of discovery or illumination; or a new direction of thought, a new tone of voice, or a change or intensification of poetic address.

Before we consider some triumphant moments in English poetry of each of these principles, it might be well to make a cautionary point. We should understand clearly that although metrical variations can be displayed by scansion and analyzed dispassionately, when the poet performs them they are largely instinctual, a technique of his art so unconsciously mastered that he seldom pauses formally to debate a metrical alternative. Indeed, many poets whose work can be analyzed metrically according to the traditional foot system would undoubtedly be astonished to hear that they have indulged in anything like "substitution." The poet often composes according to the rhythms which his utterance supplies, and although these rhythms frequently turn out to consist of "base" and "substitute" feet, they do not necessarily begin that way.

At the same time, we may suspect that Alexander Pope, a highly self-conscious metrist, is one poet who is quite deliberately weighing and measuring feet in his famous passage from "An Essay on Criticism" designed to illustrate the first of our principles, the reinforcement of effects of weight or difficulty by the device of spondaic substitution:

Whěn Á/jăx strives/sóme rók s/vást wéight/tó thřów,/

Thě lřne/tóo lá/bóurs, änd/thě wórd/s/móve slów;/

Although a large part of the reinforcement is rhetorical here—the result of the spondaic substitution in the fourth position of

line 1 and in the second and fifth positions of line 2—we should notice too the contribution of cacophony (that is, the effect of strain or difficulty resulting from the collocation of consonants difficult to pronounce rapidly). The conjunction of *s* sounds which prevents a normal, smooth transition from the pronunciation of one word to another and which enforces distinct and uncomfortable pauses (Ajax strives some) adds its own illusion of labor and difficulty. Whatever the exact contributions we assign to the metrical variations and the cacophony, there is no doubt that we feel as if physically exhausted when we have read this couplet. It makes us one with Ajax.

Throughout his career Pope seemed to treasure the device of spondaic substitution as one of the most effective techniques in his rhythmic repertory. In "Eloisa to Abelard" the intolerable tedium of the emasculated Abelard's future sexless years is implied by a crucial spondaic substitution. As Eloisa tells him:

For thee the fates, severely kind, ordain
A cool suspense from pleasure and from pain;
Thy life/á lóng/déad cálm/óf fixed/répose:/
No pulse that riots, and no blood that glows.

In "The Rape of the Lock" the "vast weight" of Lord Petre's favorite inert books—the mock-epic corollary of Ajax's vast rock—is suggested by a spondee:

. . . ere Phoebus rose, he had implored
Propitious heaven, and every power adored,
But chiefly Love—to Love an Altar built
Of twelve/vást Frénch/Romances, neatly gilt.

And later in the same poem the wise Clarissa is made to imply the weight and interminable weariness of old age by a judicious spondee:

O! if to dance all night, and dress all day
Charmed the small-pox, or chased/óld-áge/away;
Who would not scorn what housewife's cares produce,
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?

In the "Essay on Man" a similar substitution—of two spondees this time—emphasizes rhythmically the apparent slowness of death's approach in old age:

To each unthinking being, Heaven, a friend,
Gives not the useless knowledge of its end:
To Man imparts it; but with such a view
As, while he dreads it, makes him hope it too:
The hour concealed, and so remote the fear,
Death still/dráws néar/eř, né/věr séem/ing néar./

The recovery of iambic regularity in the final three feet of this last line constitutes an exquisite return to the optimistic normalities after a short sojourn, which proves to be largely a metrical one, among hints of the cheerless and the irrevocable. Pope's practice suggests that metrical variations exert their most memorable effects in very serious contexts—places where the most interesting mysteries of life and death are being plumbed. It is the very tiniest variation from the norm in these places that has power to wrench the heart, to persuade us that we are in the presence of superb physical as well as intellectual and moral wisdom.

But Pope is not so solemn a poet that he cannot enlist the same technique for merrier purposes. Here he is satirizing "heroes"—of the sort accepted as such in the context of "greatness" promulgated by Sir Robert Walpole—by exhibiting them to us in slow, spondaic motion:

No less alike the Politic and Wise,
All sly/slów things,/with circumspective eyes:
("Essay on Man")

And the agony of effort in the following is almost physically unendurable: Timon, the *nouveau riche* who has built a grandiloquent villa, welcomes us to his heavy pile:

My Lord advances with majestic mien,
Smit with the mighty pleasure, to be seen:
But soft,—with regular approach,—not yet,—
First through the length of yon/hót tér/race sweat;

And when up ten/stéep slópes/you've dragged your thighs,
Just at his Study-door he'll bless your eyes.

In a similar way Ambrose Philips's literary constipation is rendered in the "Epistle to Arbuthnot" through double spondaic substitution:

Just writes to make his barrenness appear,
And strains from hard-/bóund bráins,/éight línes/a year.

And the assonance which links *strains*, *brains*, and *eight* associates the three words rhetorically as well as prosodically. Philips becomes the satiric victim of metrical variations again in the *Dunciad*, where, together with Nahum Tate, he is taxed by spondees with torpor. The Goddess of Dulness, we are told,

... saw/slów Phil/ips creep like Tate's/póor páge.

And it is largely through spondaic substitution that boredom, the prevailing atmosphere of the *Dunciad* world, is projected:

Then mount the Clerks, and in one lazy tone
Through the/lóng, héa/vy, painful page/dráwl ón./

Likewise the famous Universal Yawn demands a spondaic rendering:

Lost was the Nation's Sense, nor could be found,
While the/lóng, sól/emn Unison went round.

But brilliant as he is at managing the spondaic variation in iambic contexts, Pope is not unique: he takes his place in a long line of conventional metrists who have exploited this device to reinforce effects of weight or difficulty or slowness. The only thing mysterious about the device, actually, is the way it seldom fails to delight the reader. To trace some of its uses from the mid-sixteenth century to our own time is to develop a conviction of the essential technical unity of post-Renaissance English verse.

In 1559 Thomas Sackville, in the "Induction" to the *Mirror*

for *Magistrates*, deploys the spondee to reinforce effects of size: the domain of Pluto is described as

The wide/wáste plác/es and the hugy plain.

The technique of Pope's literary yawns and *longueurs* is foreshadowed by Edmund, in *King Lear*, who describes with the aid of spondees the tedium which may attend the marriage bed of the respectable; bastards, he says,

... in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth, within a/dáll, stále,/tired béd,/ /
Go to th'creating a whole tribe of fops. . . .

Time can be stretched by spondees, as both Ben Jonson and Andrew Marvell are aware. Condemning empty wits and fools in "An Epistle Answering to One that Asked To Be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben," Jonson declares:

I have no portion of them, nor their deal
Of news they get to strew out the/lóng méal./

And Marvell arranges spondees for a similar end in "To His Coy Mistress":

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long/lóve's dáy./

In *Paradise Lost* the rebel angels who explore the infernal regions are put through a round of spondaic exercises which imply as much strength as Pope's Ajax is going to need a few years later:

... through many a dark and dreary Vale
They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,
O'er many a Frozen, many a Fiery Alp,
Rócks, Cávés,/Lákes, Féns,/Bógs, Déns,/and shades of death.

And it seems typical of Milton's practice in spondaic substitution to return to a very pronounced iambic regularity to re-establish the metrical norm after these excursions into spondaic difficulty and strain. For example:

So eagerly the Fiend
O'er bog or steep, through strait, / rough, / dense, / or rare,
With head, / hánds, wings, / or feet pursues his way,
And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies.

The technique of expressive spondaic substitution is handed on to Thomas Gray, who uses spondees to reinforce a feeling of the inert and the inorganic in the "Elegy":

Can storied Urn or animated Bust
Back to its Mansion call the fleeting Breath?
Can Honour's Voice provoke the silent Dust,
Or Flatt'ry sooth the dull / cold Éár / of Death?

And in the same poem spondaic substitution is enlisted to lengthen the lingering backward look which the dying cast on the "warm precincts" of their lives:

For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious Being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm Precincts of the cheerful Day,
Nor cast / óne long / ing, ling'ring Look behind?

George Crabbe, as if mindful of the use of spondees by Ben Jonson and Pope for purposes of satire, exposure, and correction, exploits the tradition in "The Village" to embody the weariness of the country laborers' day:

Or will you deem them amply paid in health,
Labour's fair child, that languishes with wealth?
Go then! and see them rising with the sun,
Through a / long course / of daily toil to run.

And suggestions of the inert and the laborious attach to the famous spondee in Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit

Seal." Here Wordsworth, like Milton, seems careful to return to the strictest kind of iambic regularity after the substitution, as if to throw the spondee into even bolder relief:

No motion has she now, no force,
She neither hears nor sees;
Rólléd róund / in earth's diurnal course,
With rócks, / and stónes, / and trées. /

While most poets like to introduce spondaic substitutions initially or medially, Keats seems fond of introducing them at the ends of lines; indeed, terminal substitution is a hallmark of the Keatsian style. Here he addresses the Grecian urn, which, like Gray's "storied urn," lives in a world where time is slowed to eternity:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and / slów time. /

The end of the line attracts the Keatsian spondee also in "Ode to a Nightingale," where the crucial line is slowed almost to a total stop by the spondee which rounds off the image of cessation:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with / nó pain. /

And the plethora of terminal spondees in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" seems to fix the situation of that poem in a world where time has quite stopped:

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloom
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold / hill side. /
And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no / birds sing. /

One of Wilfred Owen's favorite predecessors was Keats, as we might infer from the way Owen revises a line in his sonnet "Anthem for Doomed Youth," written in 1917 to memorialize the passive young victims of the Great War. Their deaths will be noted, Owen writes, not by conventional religious exequies but by

The shrill demented choirs of wailing shells,
And bugles calling sad across the shires.

But the regularity of that last line seems too "normal" if not jaunty for an occasion redolent of cessation and arrested time, and Owen revises it to read:

And bugles calling for them from/sád shires./

Compared with Keats, and even with Owen, Tennyson uses spondaic substitution in "Ulysses" in a more facile and obvious way:

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long/day wanes;/ the slow/moon climbs;/ thè déép/
Móans róund/ with many voices. . . .

This is showy but easy. We get the feeling that one substitution in line 2 would be quite enough: two is too many, and the third, which calls excessive attention to the speaker's technical powers, almost negates the skill of the first. Tennyson has more success in "In Memoriam," where he is content to leave well enough alone:

Yet in these ears, till hearing dies,
One set/slow béll/will seem to toll
The passing of the sweetest soul
That ever look'd with human eyes.

The fullness and heaviness of excessively saddened or of excessively joyous hearts is one constant in English poetry which seems to invite a spondaic rendering. Here is Tennyson in "The Princess":

I would you had her, Prince, with all my heart,
With my/full héart:/

And then there is Hardy's "Darkling Thrush," a bird which can be regarded both as a thematic and a prosodic ancestor of Frost's thrush in "Come In." Like Frost's thrush, Hardy's makes its appearance in the midst of a startling trochaic reversal in line 2; and the heart's fullness naturally takes a spondaic rhythm in line 3:

At once a voice arose among
Thè bléak/twigs óv/éirhéad/
In á/full-héart/éd év/énsóng/
Of joy illimited.

But lest we forget that spondaic substitution is as rich an effect in comic as in serious contexts, we should recall the vast dimensions of Fra Lippo Lippi's belly: what he appreciates in monastic life, he tells us, is

the good bellyful,
The warm serge and/thè rópe/thát góes/áll róund./
And day-long blessed idleness beside!

And a different kind of spondaic comedy, the result of a focus on heaviness rather than on sheer size, attends the remark of the speaker in Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady":

Mý smfle/fáils héav/íly/among the bric-à-brac.

Ever since the Renaissance, English poets have delighted to suggest the presumably slowed circulation of chilled, thickened, or perhaps even "tired" blood by recourse to spondaic substitution. Thus Juliet in the fourth act, suspecting trouble ahead, says:

I háve/á fáint/cóld féar/thrills thróugh/mý véins./

And the Ghost addressing Hamlet reverses his rhythm entirely with a trochee before invoking the customary "chilled blood" spondee:

I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
 Would harrow up thy soul,/ fréze thý/ yóung blóod,/ /
 Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" Coleridge executes a virtuoso performance in the same effect:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
 Her locks were yellow as gold:
 Her skin was white as leprosy,
 The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
 Whó thicks/ mán's blóod/ with cól./

Tennyson does the same in "In Memoriam," even though he conceives of human anatomy more in terms of industrial machinery than perhaps his total imagery warrants:

Be near me when my light is low,
 Whén thē/ blóod créeps./ and the nerves prick
 And tingle; and the heart is sick,
 And all the wheels of Being slow.

Although almost any unexpected substitution can be used to signal surprise, to illuminate a sudden alteration in idea or emotion, or to mark a hiatus or interruption, the spondee is a favorite foot for this purpose. Frequently it is used in juxtaposition with a pyrrhic, which serves to prepare for the spondee as if by depriving us of a stress and thus making us desire two in succession all the more. Gavin Ewart, in a poem about listening to phonograph records titled "78's," does it this way:

The house is now pulled down.
 I know exactly where the scratches come
 In jazz that moves me like the poetry
 Of Pasolini (I have 'grown up' too) .
 And later, in my teens, I knew (and know)
 Whère thē/ únnát/ úrál/ breáks cáme/ in thē sým/ phóníes.
 Beginning with Beethoven I worked my way up
 At 78 (and 80) revolutions per minute.

One way of describing the metrical situation of line 6 here would be to call the line an iambic-based hexameter with only one iambic foot (the second), and with bold pyrrhic substitution in the first, third, and sixth positions. Whichever way we decide to mark or count the feet, however, we can hardly miss the significant adaptation of rhythm to meaning, in which the clause "the unnatural breaks came," with its pyrrhic and spondee, interrupts the rhythmic continuum of the line just as the breaks themselves once interrupted the continuum of the recorded symphonies.

One of Pope's wittiest metrical exhibitions occurs in the "Essay on Criticism" where the joint force of the two equally stressed syllables of a spondee is made to underlie and support the "joint force" of the elements of physical beauty:

'Tis not a lip or eye we beauty call,
 Bût thē/ joint fóce./ and full result of all.

The same kind of sudden physical force is given a spondaic embodiment when Pope speaks of critics who admire bright ideas and clever images in poems at the expense of all other elements:

Some to *Conceit* alone their taste confine,
 And glitt/ ring thóughts/ strúck óút/ át év/ ery líne./

This resembles Chatterton's reliance on spondaic and trochaic substitution to introduce action suddenly in his song of the "Thyde Mynstrelle" from *Aella*; even Chatterton's pseudo-medieval diction and spelling cannot disguise his happy participation in a postmedieval metrical tradition:

Whanne Autumpne blake and sonne-brente doe appere,
 With hýs/ góulde hónde/ gúyltýnge/ thē fáll/ éyngé léfe./
 [When Autumn naked and sunburnt does appear,
 With his gold hand guiding the falling leaf]

And Swift is also a master of the spondee as a corollary of sudden physical action. In "Baucis and Philemon," after relating the metamorphosis of the two elderly lovers into yew trees, Swift

introduces a crucial spondaic substitution which not only emphasizes the sudden physical vigor of the action but also serves to signal one of the poem's most conspicuous antiheroic deflections:

Old Good-man *Dobson* of the Green
Remembers he the Trees has seen;
He'll talk of them from Noon till Night,
And goes with Folks to shew the Sight: . . .
Points out the Place of either *Yew*;
Here *Baucis*, there *Philemon* grew.
Till once, a Parson of our Town,
Tó ménd/his Bárn./cút *Báru/cis* dónn./

This use of the spondee to reinforce the suddenness and force of a vigorous action is a treasured traditional effect in English poetry, as we can appreciate when we juxtapose, say, Marlowe's erotic stallion image in "Hero and Leander,"

. . . nothing more than counsel lovers hate;
For as a hot proud horse highly disdains
To have his head controlled, but breaks the reins,
Spits fórh/the ringled bit, and with his hooves
Checks the submissive ground, so that he loves,
The more he is restrained, the worse he fares. . . .

with something like Pope's portrait of Lord Hervey in the "Epistle to Arbuthnot," where the wicked peer, envisaged very like Satan "Squat like/á toad,/clóse át/thě éar/óf Éve.," spits out elements of harness but the nastier elements of himself:

Whether in florid impotence he speaks,
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppet squeaks;
Or at the ear of *Eve*, familiar Toad,
Hálf fróth./hálf vé/nõm, spíts/hímself/ábróad./

The technique assists William Cowper:

Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,

When such a destined wretch as I
Washed head/long from on board.
("The Castaway")

For all his radical suspicion of traditional poetic devices, Blake has recourse to the same technique:

And every sand becomes a gem
Reflected in the beams divine;
Blówn báck/they blind the mocking eye,
But still in Israel's paths they shine.
("Mock On, Mock On, Voltaire, Rousseau")

Yeats uses it in "The Statues" as he describes the wonderful physical appeal of the anatomical proportions enunciated by Pythagoras:

But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
Of solitary beds, knew what they were, . . .
And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips/upon a plummet-measured face.

And something of the same effect of instinctive impulsiveness attaches to Frost's similar spondee in "Dust of Snow":

The way a crow
Shóok dónn/on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Less abundantly encountered is what can be regarded as the opposite effect—depending on the second of our general principles—namely, the reinforcement of illusions of rapidity, lightness, or ease by the use of the pyrrhic foot in substitution, or by any unexpected juxtaposition of unstressed syllables. The classic example is provided by Pope in the "Essay on Criticism"; the

couplet follows directly the one in which Ajax is depicted striving to throw his rock's vast weight:

Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies ö'er/th-übénd/ing cörn./ änd skíms/älöng/thé máin./

In his *Life of Pope*, Samuel Johnson, always skeptical of the claims of "representative meter," exulted to point out that the last line—a so-called alexandrine—is "by one time [i.e., foot] longer" than the line depicting Ajax's labors, and that it therefore must be incapable of transmitting prosodically an effect of lightness or speed. But Johnson seems to have missed the point. By making his "fast" pyrrhic-substitution line one foot longer than his "slow" spondaic-substitution line, Pope is showing off: he is deliberately making his job as hard as possible; he is performing the metrical equivalent of shouting, "Look! No hands!" The point, after all, is not what the line looks like metrically but rather what its effects on the reader actually are. The transmission of expressive rhythm to the reader is always the result of artistic illusion, and the effect that works, no matter how "impossible" or "illogical," is the only one to be valued. As I. A. Richards wisely says, "The notion that there is any virtue in regularity or variety, or in any other formal feature, apart from its effects upon us, must be discarded before any metrical problem can be understood." Thus the number of feet in Pope's alexandrine, together with the actual time consumed in its reading or recitation, is irrelevant: the important thing is the effect that—no matter how irrationally or illogically—the line transmits.

Pyrrhic substitution is used with great skill by Pope also in "Moral Essay IV" to produce an effect not only of levity but even of the fast triple-time of a jig. Timon's vulgar private chapel with its inappropriate devotional music is under inspection:

And now the Chapel's silver bell you hear,
That summons you to all the Pride of Prayer:
Light quirks of Music, broken and uneven,
Make thé/sóul dánce/üpön/ä jig/tó héa/vén./

The expansion of these last two lines from ten to eleven syllables

is caused by the feminine rhyme, and we must scan the lines as if each contained, at the end, a supernumerary syllable. Such a scansion is appropriate for reasons of historical accuracy: in the eighteenth century the substitution of trisyllabic for dissyllabic feet is not good form, and our scansion of such poems should reflect as nearly as it can the metrical conceptions of the authors.

On the other hand, in scanning a similar passage in Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi," written over a century later, it is appropriate for our scansion to indicate the substitutions as trisyllabic feet, for by the nineteenth century trisyllabic substitution had become a metrical convention. But no matter how we scan, no one can fail to delight in the following, where Browning exploits the principle that, in the context of alternating stressed and unstressed which constitutes the abstract framework of blank verse, the presentation of a sequence of unstressed syllables (even the sequence of two that comprises the first part of an anapestic foot) can convey an illusion of speed or lightness. Here Lippi is alluding to some young girls and indicating their effect on him:

Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like thé skip/ping öf ráb/bits by móon/light—three slim shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
That's all I'm made of.

Finally, trochaic substitution in iambic contexts is the customary metrical technique for producing the third of our general effects—the effect of sudden movement or of a surprising emphasis or of a change in direction or tone—although, as we have seen, any foot (even the spondee) which constitutes a distinct reversal of the prevailing metrical pattern will tend to convey the same effect. There are three general positions in the line where trochaic substitution occurs: in the first position, in the middle, and at the end. In the first position trochaic substitution is extremely common—indeed, this one variation is the most common in all English poetry. It is less common in medial positions. And it is very uncommon in the terminal position. Substitution in each position tends to transmit its own unique kind of effects.

In the first position trochaic substitution most often supports the force of active verbs whose effect is to surprise, to enlighten

suddenly, or even to horrify. The great classic repository of this effect is *Paradise Lost*, whose initial trochees seem to have colored the practice of all subsequent poets working in anything like accentual-syllabic meter. Here in Book VI, Christ's forces are depicted overcoming Satan's:

Dróve thém/before him Thunder-struck, pursu'd
 With terrors and with furies to the bounds
 And Crystal wall of Heav'n, which op'ning wide,
 Róll'd ín/ward, and a spacious Gap disclos'd
 Into the wasteful Deep: the monstrous sight
 Stróok thém/with horror backward, but far worse
 Úrg'd thém/behind; headlong themselves they threw
 Dówn fróm/the verge of Heav'n, Eternal wrath
 Búrnt áf/ter them to the bottomless pit.

Although the passage exhibits other expressive variations (consider the force of the reversal in *headlong*, line 7), the trochees underlying the active verbs at the beginnings of lines are especially vigorous just because they occur initially: even in lines so boldly run-on as these, an initial substitution has the effect of occurring after a pause—the pause which the eye makes in moving from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. Like a sudden drum beat after silence, the trochaic syllable, when it occurs initially, has the power almost to stun.

The effect is more tender but no less powerful here, in Book IX, where, encouraged by Eve's bad example, Adam

. . . scrupl'd not to eat
 Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd,
 But fondly overcome with Female charm,
 Earth trembl'd from her entrails, as again
 In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
 Sky low'r'd, and muttering Thunder, some sad drops
 Wépt át/completing of the mortal Sin
 Original.

The spondee of *sad drops* is heavy and heart-rending enough, but after the slight pause occasioned by the end of the preceding

line, *Wept at* projects itself toward us with almost unbearable power. The initial trochee here is enlisted on behalf of horror complicated by overtones of tenderness and sympathy.

An illusion of sheer physical power, on the other hand, is the effect of the initial trochee which reinforces the active verbs in Adam's speculations in Book X about the operations of lightning:

Or by collision of two bodies grind
 The Air attrite to Fire, as late the Clouds
 Justling/or pusht with Winds rude in thir shock
 Tine thē/slant Lightning, whose thwart flame driv'n down
 Kíndlēs/the gummy bark of Fir or Pine.

And in "Lycidas," Milton deploys the same device to reinforce an illusion of sudden and even awkward motion:

I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
 And with forc'd fingers rude,
 Shättër/your leaves before the mellowing year.

At the end of the same poem an illusion of a sudden and surprising glory is the fruit of this device:

So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
 And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore
 Flámes ín/the forehead of the morning sky.

As if tutored by Milton, the poets of succeeding centuries have treasured the device of initial trochaic substitution with active verbs for effects of sudden force or violence. Here is Pope in the "Epistle to Fortescue" lashing about him at folly and crime:

What? arm'd for virtue when I point the pen,
 Bránd thē/bold front of shameless guilty men;
 Dásh thē/proud gamester in his gilded car;
 Báre thē/mean heart that lurks beneath a Star.

Edward Fitzgerald, in the *Rubaiyat*, suddenly pulls down a tent:

"Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest
A Sultan to the Realm of Death address;
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash
Strikes, and/ prepares it for another Guest.

Matthew Arnold injects sudden horror into the threat of military alarms in "Dover Beach," even though his verb is passive:

And we are here as on a darkling plain,
Swépt with/ confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Housman, in "Eight O'Clock," suddenly animates the clock in the town hall which is striking the signal for the hanging of the "lad":

He stood, and heard the steeple
Sprinkle/ the quarters on the morning town.

And in "The Chestnut Casts His Flambeaux" Housman enacts the merciless violence of an insensate nature:

The chestnut casts his flambeaux, and the flowers
Stréam fróm/ the hawthorn on the wind away,
The doors clap to, the pane is blind with showers.
Pass me the can, lad; there's an end of May.

The initial stress assists Emily Dickinson to project the precision and decisiveness with which the railway train stops in "I Like To See It Lap the Miles":

. . . then a quarry pare
To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill
And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,

Stóp—docile and omnipotent—
At its own stable door.

Yeats, in "A Prayer for My Son," emphasizes the violent suddenness of the act of philistine reprisal he fears:

. . . they know
Of some most haughty deed or thought
That waits upon his future days,
And would through hatred of the bays
Bring thát/ to nought.

Eliot's Prufrock has apparently learned a fully expressive versification from something like Milton's "Shatter your leaves":

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scútling/ across the floors of silent seas.

There is a more delicate but no less startling effect in the depiction in "The Waste Land" of the fate of Phlebas the Phoenician's bones:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his/ bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

We can gauge the amazing force of the initial trochee which is made to coincide with an active verb by comparing one of Eliot's passages with the original to which it alludes. Goldsmith's

When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray

remains within the pleasantly predictable, manageable world of the iambic. But by merely introducing an initial trochee, Eliot introduces hints of the awful, especially when this substitution constitutes the sole appearance of a trochee in the stanza:

When lovely woman stoops to folly, and
Páccs/about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

The effect is like that in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales":

The silent man in mocha brown
Sprawls át/ the window-sill and gapes.

W. H. Auden is a superb metrist, and, we are not surprised that he has fully mastered this device. Here he exploits it twice in succession in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats":

Intellectual disgrace
Stáres fróm/ every human face,
And the seas of pity lie
Lócked änd/ frozen in each eye.

And in "The Fall of Rome" he seems to recall the practice of Housman in "The Chestnut Casts His Flambeaux," where the rainy wind, animated angrily by an initial trochee, betrays as little sympathy with man's fate:

The piers are pummelled by the waves;
In a lonely field the rain
Láshés/ an abandoned train.

Finally, an awareness of the long technical tradition of initial stressing which coincides with an active verb helps us to perceive the technical orthodoxy of a poet sometimes taxed with heterodoxy. Consider the opening of line 2 of Dylan Thomas's "The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives":

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives mý/ green age; . . .

But lines begin with many other things than verbs. When it is a modifier—an adverb or adjective—that is coinciding with an

initial trochee, we often get a strong reinforcement of an effect of sudden quiet, as in Wordsworth's "It Is a Beauteous Evening":

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Bréathlëss/ with adoration;

or in Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer":

. . . like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silënt./ upon a peak in Darien.

Indeed, this last example happily exhibits the different effects produced by the initial trochee when it coincides with different syntactical elements. The initial verbal trochee of line 3 (*Look'd at*) functions, like Milton's, to transmit an effect of sudden vigor; but the initial modifying trochee of the last line works on us inversely by transmitting an effect of sudden calm.

Substantives in an initial trochaic (or spondaic) situation seem to evoke a slightly different response. An illusion of absolute finality is often transmitted by a noun in an initial stressed position. Listen, for example, to Milton's lyric meditation at the beginning of Book III of *Paradise Lost*:

Thus with the Year
Séasóns/ return, but not to me returns
Dáy, ór/ the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn;

or to Marvell's findings in "To His Coy Mistress":

But at my back I always hear
Time's wing/ed chariot hurrying near;

—and as if unsatisfied that he has urged his rhythmic revelation sufficiently, Marvell undertakes it again in the next couplet:

And yonder all before us lie
Désérts/ of vast eternity.

Robert Frost's tiny masterpiece "Nothing Gold Can Stay" uses initial substantive trochees to similar effect. In this poem we find only two initial trochees, and both coincide with nouns, one at the opening of the first line, one at the opening of the last. The two substantive trochees might be said to function as an envelope of certainty, a fixed container suggestive of certainty and finality. If we are sufficiently schooled in the conventions of metrical variations—if we recall what Milton and Marvell have done with this same effect—we are in an advantageous position to determine from its rhythmic usages the exact tone of the poem:

Náture's/first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nóthing/gold can stay.

Even folk and "unsophisticated" compositions do not disdain the device of the startling initial trochee, as in this graffito from a U.S. Army latrine:

Soldiers who wish to be a hero
Are practically zero.
But those who wish to be civilians,
Jésús,/ they run into millions.

In medial positions trochaic substitution is fairly frequent, although not as common as at the beginning of lines. It is often used like the medial spondee to reinforce images of sudden action, as in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, where speaking jointly to their Maker, Adam and Eve comment on the heavy fecundity of Eden:

. . . this delicious place
For us too large, where thy abundance wants
Páirtá/kérs, änd/úncrópt/fáills tó/thé gróund./

A more violent action is the trochaic rearing of the bridled stallion in Marlowe; the horse practically stands up right out of the poem:

For as a hot proud horse/highly/disdáins/
To have his head controlled, but breaks the reins. . . .

In "The Tower" Yeats manipulates the device with his customary metrical brilliance:

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like a sooty finger,/ starts fróm/the earth.

The same device is useful for comic purposes, as Charles Cotton demonstrates in his delightful epigram on the drunkard:

The drunkard now supinely snores,
His load of ale/sweáts through/his pores;
Yet when he wakes, the swine shall find
A crapula remains behind.

If we replace line 2 here with something like

His load of ale comes out his pores

we can sense how much energy that medial trochee alone supplies.

Trochees in the terminal position, on the other hand, are extremely rare. One of the reasons would seem to be the difficulty of reversing a generally rising metrical sequence after, usually, four successive occurrences of it. It is as if the more iambic feet one writes in succession, the greater will be the difficulty of reversing the rhythm except at the beginning or perhaps in the middle of a *new* line. Some of the very few successful terminal trochees we encounter are employed to transmit a sophisticated and slightly weary sardonic effect. Thus Donne in his "Third Satire":

Kind pity chokes my spleen; brave scorn forbids
Those tears to issue which swell my/éyelids./

Thus Pope, in the "Epistle to Arbuthnot," on the annotations of textual editors:

Pretty! in amber to observe the forms
Of hairs, or straws, or dirt, or grubs, or worms!
The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the devil they/gót thère./

And thus Ezra Pound in "Maunderley" on the distinction between admirable and reprehensible poetic careers:

His true Penelope was Flaubert,
He fished by obstinate isles;
Observed the elegance of Circe's hair
Rather than the mottoes on/sún-díals./

A similar tone of the sardonic attaches to Yeats's use of the terminal trochee in "Among School Children":

Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old/scárecrów./

And to Auden's disposition of the same device:

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest/décáde./

All this accretion of irony and derision which attends the terminal trochee when it appears in a generally skeptical context can be exploited by a skillful contemporary metrist like Donald Hall; in "Christmas Eve at Whitneyville, 1955," addressing his father, he does so:

Tonight you lie in Whitneyville again,
Near where you lived, and near the woods or farms
Which Eli Whitney settled with the men
Who worked at mass-producing/fireárms./

But the terminal trochee has another use, and one wholly different from its function as a trigger of irony. In a different context it can be used to reinforce a tone of colloquial "sincerity," to persuade us momentarily that we are in the presence less of a poetic illusionist assembling an artifact than that of a simple, straightforward speaker whose open commitment to what he is saying is so uncomplicated by doubts or irony that it would be a distinct discourtesy not to take his words at face value. There is something in the literary ambitions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century lyric that urges it toward the terminal trochee to reinforce its effects of simplicity and sincerity. We find a suggestion of the "sincere" terminal trochee in Chatterton's "Mynstrelles Song" from *Aella*, where a female speaker, apparently mindful of Ophelia's fate, mourns her lover:

Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys/déath-bédde./
Al under the wyllowe tree.

It is perhaps from Chatterton's work that Keats first learned to manage the device. But wherever he went for his technical lessons, there is little doubt that he is the great English master of the terminal trochee, which he is fond of using in the very first lines of poems as if to establish at the outset of his apostrophic addresses a tone of absolutely breathless, but no less intelligent, ingenuousness. Consider, for example,

Bright star, would I were steadfast as/thóu aŕtl/

or the opening of "To Sleep":

O soft embalmer of the still/mídníght./

The effect is that of a poetic sensibility so fully committed to its convictions that it easily overrides the mere academic and technical tradition of iambic endings in iambic lines. But it is important to perceive that, for all its bold air of departure from the conventional, Keats's practice is disciplined by his rigorous empirical sense: he knows what effect the terminal trochee will have on the reader, and in this way his metrical taste is informed

by his knowledge that he and his reader hold certain metrical conventions in common, certain accustomed ways of responding to certain traditional symbolic stimuli.

Now that we have considered the most common sorts of metrical variations, we should look at the scheme of overstrapping practiced by Gerard Manley Hopkins and termed "sprung rhythm." He distinguishes it from what he calls common or running rhythm, that is, accentual-syllabic or accentual rhythm in which accented syllables tend to alternate with unaccented ones. Hopkins wanted his poetry to be stronger than standard poetry or prose, and he conceived that strength resides in stress. He thus devised sprung rhythm to provide his poems with a majority of stressed syllables. As he says, "Why, if it is forcible in prose to say *lashed rod*, am I obliged to weaken this in verse, which ought to be stronger, not weaker . . . ?" Thus he posits that "even one stressed syllable may make a foot, and consequently two or more stresses may come running [i.e., adjoin each other], which in common rhythm can, regularly speaking, never happen." What he is implying is that the poet working in sprung rhythm composes almost as if the spondee were a base rather than a substitute foot. He can thus project effects of slowness and weight more effectively than in an "alternating" prosodic system where frequent unstressed syllables occur.

Hopkins points out that sprung rhythm is common in nursery rhymes. A good example is

One, two,
Buckle my shoe. . . .

where the first line is in sprung, the second in "running" rhythm. In

March dust, April showers
Bring forth May flowers. . . .

both lines can be considered sprung if *showers* and *flowers* are considered monosyllabic. Sprung rhythm is essentially a system of overstrapping which accords the fullest possible recognition to the accentual character of the English language.

By approximating the movement of emotion-charged natural speech, sprung rhythm's effectiveness lies in projecting a tone of

seriousness, frankness, and intimate emotional involvement. Like Keats's terminal trochees, it transmits an illusion of a total, if one-dimensional, commitment to the seriousness of the subject. Perhaps one weakness of sprung rhythm, however, is that it seems inappropriate to any other—and more complicated—tone. Comedy in it would seem unlikely, and wit all but impossible. Hopkins's "At the Wedding March" suggests the kind of materials and tone to which sprung rhythm seems best adapted (the stress markings are Hopkins's own):

God with honour hang your head,
Groom, and grace you, bride, your bed
With lissome scions, sweet scions,
Out of hallowed bodies bred.
Each be other's comfort kind:
Déep, déeper than divined,
Divine charity, dear charity,
Fast you ever, fast bind.

Then let the march tread our ears:
I to him turn with tears
Who to wedlock, his wonder wedlock,
Déals triumph and eternal years.

Tears and O's and Ah's and ecstatic wonder are Hopkins's staples, and it is in the service of these effects that sprung rhythm justifies itself. But the ultimate limitation of sprung rhythm seems to be indicated in Hopkins's own comment: "Sprung rhythm cannot be counterpointed." The system is a scheme of variations which has an insufficient framework to vary from. And after we have seen the abundant riches embodied in techniques of variation from stated and precise public norms, we may be skeptical of the varied expressive possibility of prosodic systems which cannot be counterpointed.