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Stanza and Meaning in Wordsworth's "On the Power of Sound"

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The Wordsworthian equation, as Beckett said of the Proustian, is never simple.[1] His metrical theory, a articulated in the Prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*, has attracted considerable attention in recent years, yet the poetry itself—particularly the lyric poetry—seldom receives any correspondingly detailed, accurate or sustained metrical analysis.[2] His art of stanzaic composition is, if anything, accorded even less attention. Over the course of a long poetic career, Wordsworth used nearly 90 different kinds of stanza and 22 irregular verse forms in addition to sonnets and blank verse.[3] This is a staggering number of stanza forms even for so long a career. A comparison with the strophic practice of Goethe, another long-lived and highly inventive poet, is instructive. Although Goethe used more than twice the number of stanzaic schemata as Wordsworth, he wrote no stanzas over 12 lines.[4] Wordsworth, by contrast, crafted very intricate regular stanzas up to 26 lines in length.[5] One would like to think that this widespread indifference to his skill in stanzaic composition is a tribute to the creative torture endured in achieving an art, as Horace says, that conceals art: "ludentis speciem dabit et torquebitur, ut qui/nunc Satyrum, nunc agrestem Cyclopa movetur."[6] Wordsworth was, after all, a meticulous craftsman who got in the habit, even so early as *An Evening Walk*, of tirelessly revising completed poems in pursuit of some elusive ghost of perfection.[7] Unfortunately, the kind of strophic blindness we find here is the result of a general critical failure to appreciate how the stanza itself, as a form shaped by the interplay of rhyme and meter, in turn shapes a poem's structure and meaning. Ernst Häublein makes substantially the same point in the conclusion to his deceptively short but important book *The Stanza*.[8] There he notes that prosodic analysis and critical analysis both tend to neglect the stanza, the former by pursuing the skeleton of metrical patterns to the exclusion of virtually everything else and the latter by analyzing form—or more typically these days “text,” “discourse” or “narrative”—without regard for the stanza as an aspect of meaning. Regular stanzaic composition, however, “inevitably poses problems of meaning” we can only solve by closing this artificial gap between prosody and structural poetics.

Häublein’s pioneering work demonstrates the role of the stanza as a container for various logical, emotional and semantic stimuli (as he likes to call them) that collectively determine the type of stanzaic progression we find in a given poem and therefore its overall poetic structure. I should like to extend his analysis beyond the fairly simple and brief examples he gives from Donne, Herbert, Blake, Tennyson and Moore to a major work by Wordsworth, who is unrivaled at his technical best in the skill with which he exploits the interaction of meter and rhyme to reinforce, or even create, a cascade of stimuli that produce a nearly seamless stanzaic progression. Despite the cautionary words at the end of *The Stanza*, Häublein focuses on logical and semantic stimuli to the virtual exclusion of the contribution meter and rhyme make to stanza dynamics. I would like to rectify this. My test case will be “On the Power of Sound,” an ode written in 1828–1829 during the poet’s so-called period of decline and first published in 1835. I have selected it for three reasons. First, it employs a complex sixteen-line stanza that is unique among Wordsworth’s long poems in not being created on the model of a cento by combining shorter, identifiable stanza forms.[9] The implication is that he developed this stanza for a unique purpose. Can we in fact demonstrate that? Second, Wordsworth ranked the poem quite high in his corpus.[10] Modern critics have not, however, accepted his ranking and have evaded

Wordsworth's estimation by largely ignoring the poem.[11] A reassessment seems to be in order. Third, the poem is outside the canon of current romantic studies. That has kept familiarity from corroding freshness of critical perception. Familiarity with a text, as critics insufficiently realize, is a very dangerous impression. Mere linguistic "familiarity" can easily mislead us into thinking we possess aesthetic "familiarity"; or a distaste for some familiar genre, say paraenetic literature, can induce us to look right through a great meditation like the "Ode to Duty," which Stephen Gill asserts "is no one's favorite poem,"[12] and see nothing but an austere cliché on the other side. Something like this has, it seems to me, been the fate of "On the Power of Sound."

In the following discussion, I undertake to do three things. First I present a detailed analysis of the stanza's interlocking scheme of rhyme and meter based on its origin in an earlier uncompleted poem. Then I turn to the more difficult task of showing how the logical relations between the stanzas determine the poem's structure. Finally I conclude with a closer look at Wordsworth's metrical practice in the ode, emphasizing the contribution of rhythm to the architectonics of the stanza. In a coda, I consider some problems of poetic form and familiarity suggested by Heidegger's *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*.

If all this sounds like pure poetic formalism, it is—and unapologetically is. We need more formalism, not less, as the critical blindness to Wordsworth's stanzaic art makes all too clear. In a recent essay, Peter Brooks stressed the priority of poetics to exegesis, and its crucial importance to the critic, in language with a strong religious coloration:

> The critic needs the self-imposition of the formalist askesis because this alone can assure the critic that the act of interpretation has been submitted to an otherness, that is not simply an assimilation of the object of study. The realm of the aesthetic needs to be respected, by an imperative that is nearly ethical. It's not that the

> aesthetic is the realm of a secular scripture, that poetry has taken the place of a failed theodicy, or that critics are celebrants at the high altar of a cult of beauty isolated from history and politics. It is rather that personality must be tempered by the discipline of the impersonal that comes in the creation of form.[13]

This precisely summarizes the situation: created form is, always and inescapably, the aesthetic Other. And just as we must temper steel to make it hold an edge, so we must temper personality, with all its vagaries of personal imagination, on impersonal form to make it hold a critical edge. Poetics is not only prior to exegetics, it is the only secure way to exegetics.

1

The stanza that Wordsworth created for "On the Power of Sound" is a marvel of internal balance and harmony: balance of proportions that prevents it from ever seeming heavy or inert, and harmony that restrains complex, often conflicting and jarring, rhetorical thrusts from shattering the hard-won form. Let's examine the process by which he drew this intricate form from simpler and cruder materials lacking any potential for development.

Brennan O'Donnell notes that the stanza grew out of Wordsworth's work on "The Triad" in 1828, but doesn't trace its evolution in any detail.[14] The 16-line stanza form as we have it now emerged from a reworking of 16 lines in one of two passages originally written for "The Triad" and then rejected.[15] "The Triad" itself, with the exception of these ultimately rejected lines, is a tissue of the language never spoken by real men in any state of vivid excitement and, as Sara Coleridge (herself one of the three girls, along with Edith May Southey and Dora Wordsworth, who are its subjects) wrote, contains no truth as a whole, but only "bits of truth, glazed and magnified."[16] And yet Wordsworth, the indefatigable reviser, saw in these lines the germ of something that, once impressed with a unique form, had the power to unfold his thought with an almost living thematic momentum.

Despite the absence of the Cornell Wordsworth volume covering this period, we can reconstruct the development process with reasonable accuracy. Here are the 16 lines whose rough material were the starting point for the "Power of Sound" stanza:

> The Heavens, whose aspect makes our mind as still a_5
> As they themselves appear to be, b_4
> Innumerable voices fill a_4
> With everlasting harmony; b_4
> The towering headlands crowned with mist, c_4
> Their feet among the billows, know d_4
> That Ocean is a might harmonist. c_5
> Thy pinions universal Air, e_4
> For ever sweeping to and fro d_4
> Are delegates of harmony and bear e_5
> Accents that cheer the seasons in their round— f_5
> Even winter loves a dirgelike sound; f_4
> There is a world of spirit $g\underline{\ }_4$
> Whose motions by fit music are controlled, h_5
> And glorious is their privilege who merit $g\underline{\ }_5$
> Initiation in that mystery old.[17] h_5

Wordsworth had originally intended to insert them at what is now line 80 of the poem. His attention may have been drawn back to this passage by the magnificent description of the towering headlands, a description whose severe and haunting music reminds me of the cuckoo's song "Breaking the silence of the seas/Among the farthest Hebrides" in "The Solitary Reaper." Certainly the lines of the other rejected passage, like virtually all of "The Triad," are an exercise in the artificial poetic diction that Wordsworth had attacked so strongly in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* nearly 30 years earlier.[18] These 16 lines, and these alone, contain the only poetic ore in the whole venture. Whatever first attracted him to the passage, he reshaped it by three relatively simple changes that produced a completely new stanza.

(1) He probably started by moving the last four lines, which form a regular heroic stanza except for the first tetrameter ($g_{\_4}h_{5}g_{\_5}h_{5}$)[19], to the head of the passage. His initial motive may have been to shift the quatrain, containing the core of his Pythagorean number theory, to the start where it could lead more naturally into the description of the innumerable voices of nature. Left at the end of the stanza it would have proven highly anticlimactic—dangling there in search of context or illustration. A further motive for the change may have been to provide the embryonic stanza with a more distinct closure by ending it with a couplet ($f_{5}f_{4}$). That, at any rate, is the exact effect of moving the quatrain from the end to the beginning.

(2) Whether he revised the quatrain before or after repositioning it, Wordsworth introduced two subtle new changes we shall discuss in more detail later: he shortened the new first line to a trimeter and decided to continue the feminine rhymes of the first and third lines (the original $g_{\_4}$ and $g_{\_5}$) all the way through the poem. That is, he took an accident of the original passage and made it a set feature of the stanza. What, in brief, are the reasons for these two modifications? The answer is, I think, lies in the tetrameter line that now ends all but the last stanza. (a) The opening trimeter glides lightly and gracefully into each succeeding stanza out of the preceding tetrameter, the lightness of its opening enhanced by feminine rhyme. That this is its

function is shown by the rarity of initial metrical variations: they occur only in IV:1 (trochaic inversion) and III.1 (initial beat, sometimes called a "spondaic substitution"). (b) The tetrameter at the end of stanzas I - XIII, on the other hand, slightly mitigates the closure effected by the couplet. Throughout the history of English accentual-syllabic verse, couplets have provided a distinct method for closing or rounding off the stanza. Shortening the second line of the couplet by two syllables just perceptibly softens the closure, providing a more fluid transition to the next stanza. That this is its function is shown by the expansion of the last line of the poem (XIV:16) into a pentameter to provide a full rhythmic stop.

(3) The final alteration in the original passage is, in some respects, the most refined and interesting of the set. Wordsworth transformed line 9 from an iambic tetrameter to a headless tetrameter or, in more technical parlance, a trochaic tetrameter catalectic, by canceling the "For" in "For ever sweeping to and fro." He then incorporated the new meter, without any variation, as a set feature of the stanza.[20] The intrusion of a single line of falling rhythm into the second half of each stanza is quite unexpected. It can easily go unnoticed unless one reads the poems with attention to rhythm. Now why did he do this? If you compare the stanza structures of the original passage and its final modification below, the answer should become partially clear.

"The Triad" Passage	"On the Power of Sound" Stanza
a_5	$a\_{}_3$
b_4	b_5
a_4	$a\_{}_5$
b_4	b_5
	c_5
c_4	d_4
d_4	c_4
c_5	d_4
e_4	

d_5
e_5
f_5
f_4

$g\_{}_4$
h_5
$g\_{}_5$
h_5

e_4
f_4
e_5
g_4
f_4 (BoBoBoB)

g_5
h_5 (Triplet)
h_4

The interlocking rhymes on “f” and “g” help bind the last eight lines together into a unit, but the final couplet, like all final couplets in repeating stanzaic structures, has a tendency to become the repository of flat summaries, padded repetitions or dull gnomic caps unless handled very carefully. Exactly how difficult it is to handle a final couplet can be seen in Shakespeare’s sonnets, where the couplet often sits uselessly at the end of the sonnet wagging its summary tail at the sestet. Wordsworth’s solution, as a greater stanzaic poet than Shakespeare ever attempted to be, or perhaps could have been, is to group the last three lines into a distinct subsection that prevents the couplet from detaching itself as a separate entity from the stanza. He does this by avoiding full stops at the end of line 12, so it often enjambs quite strongly with line 13, and then using line 13 as a trochaic bridge to the triplet.[21] The sudden shift from rising to falling meter in line 13 emphasizes its function as a transition quite effectively, while terminal punctuation further isolates the last three lines. Line 13 ends 10 times with full (“:” and “;”) or partial stops (“,”), stops that bring the falling meter to a clear terminus and thus prepare us for the stanzaic climax to follow.[22] This climax, if that isn’t too strong a word, often consists of an intense image or (more frequently) a series of icon-like symbols charged with the thematic emotions developed in the preceding five lines. I say the preceding five lines and not the preceding 13 lines, because Wordsworth has articulated the stanza into two distinct eight-line sections. The stanza does not function, thus, as a simple 16-line container of meaning that moves linearly, and smoothly, from beginning to end. Let’s now step back and take an overview of the structure Wordsworth created.

By shifting the last quatrain of “The Triad” passage to the start of the stanza, Wordsworth generated a pair of cross-rhymed quatrains. Although the meter varies from the opening trimeter line to tetrameter and pentameter lines, the separate identity of the two quatrains is clearly defined by their rhyme and their punctuation: both the first and second quatrains are end-stopped 12 of 14 times, with the punctuation at the end of line eight particularly strong (eight periods, three semicolons and an exclamation mark). Unlike line four, line eight never ends with lighter commas. The result is to divide the stanza into two eight-line sections, the first comprising two quatrains and the second comprising two assymetrical subsections of five ($e_4f_4e_5\ g_4\ f_4$) and three ($g_5h_5h_4$) lines respectively. Each half nominally contains 35 metrical beats. Wordsworth does introduce hypermetrical lines at several points and deploys an exceptionally wide range of variations, some quite extreme, but the sum of these variations changes the total number of metrical beats only in stanzas VIII and XI.[23]

Rhyme and punctuation may thus segment, but the counterpoint of meter to rhyme, the use of different meters with the same rhymes, significantly blurs the segmentation.[24] Only two pairs of lines rhyme with the same meter in each stanaz: 2:4 and 6:8, pentameter and tetrameter respectively. Both occupy the same relative position in their quatrains. The short trimeter opening leads to a run of four pentameter lines (2–5: $b_5a\_{}_5b_5c_5$) that carry us over into the second quatrain by a kind of rhythmic continuity, thereby helping to integrate the two. In a like way, a run of five tetrameter lines carries us over the strongly end-stopped line eight into the heart of the following five-line subsection (6–10: $d_4c_4d_4e_4f_4$). And, finally, the interlocking rhymes on “f” and “g”connect the two assymetrical subsections. When we read the poem, then, two structural principles are acting together simultaneously: (1) the cross-rhymes and punctuation of the first half partition it into two quatrains and sever it cleanly from the second half, where the same factors also partition it into two asymmetrical subsections, but (2) the two arches of identical meter in counterpoint provide an integrative movement, partial and uncoercive, to unify both halves of the stanza just below the level of our awareness. I use the word “movement” here precisely. Rhythmic correspondence, like rhyme, is only experienced retroactively as we move in time through a poem; the poem only exists as lived experience in time.[25] All other representations of the poem, whether theoretical abstractions or visual schemata employed to clarify structure, are models and must not be confused with the poem itself. We in fact never talk about poems at all, only about static simulacra of our temporal experience.

The division of the stanza into two equal sections doesn’t look accidental, and isn’t. Wordsworth exploits the internal architecture rather like a sonnet.[26] The first eight lines constitute the “octave,” and the second eight lines a kind of expanded “sestet.” There is always, with the exception of stanzas VII and XIII, where enjambment at the end of the second quatrain permits the content to flow into the second half, a turn between the two divisions—a distinct shift in tone, emphasis, content or imagery. The shift is marked by contrastive conjunctions, rhetorical questions (which occur only in the second half of the stanza) and imperatives.[27] As a master of the sonnet form and the creator of 517 sonnets, Wordsworth clearly understood and relished this structural technique. But he risked an obvious danger by using the technique in a bipartite stanza form. The sonnet’s structural identity, as Paul Fussell, Jr. has pointed out, lies in its imbalance, where a weightier octave stands in a dynamic relationship to a lighter sestet.[28] Wordsworth avoids the danger of a stark medial division by means of the two metrical arches (particularly the second) I mentioned above. The dual quatrains feel, with their conspicuously clear and delimited form, like an octave that is preparing us for the traditional turn in a sestet. The turn does come as expected, but the rhythmic movement of those two sequences of metrically identical lines conducts us over, and thus moderates the sharpness of, the shift. We experience something like a turn, and we also experience something like a sestet—a floating sestet. The five-line subsection ($e_4f_4e_5$ g_4 f_4), ending unequivocably with its trochaic tetrameter bridge, has a rhyme scheme that is identical to one Wordsworth occasionally used in the sestet of his sonnets (cdcede) if we include the “g” rhyme from the first line of the triplet ($e_4f_4e_5$ g_4 f_4 g_5).[29] The rhyme scheme in the second half of the stanza, taken by itself, defines (1) a variant sestet and (2) a couplet; syntax and punctuation, however, define (1) a five-line truncated sestet and (2) a triplet. The first rhyme of the triplet completes the sestet with metrical counterpoint (g_4 :g_5), but we only vaguely sense the completion because it occurs in a separate structural element. We equally don’t sense a crudely reductive couplet tacked onto the sestet as an afterthought because it is absored into the triplet.[30] The triplet gives Wordsworth great flexibility. He can use it to concentrate pictorial imagery and symbols, to foreground moments of dramatic intensity or to list generalizations and abstractions without the pressure for aphoristic simplification. The best way to make all of this clear is to look concretely at the internal dynamics of a particular stanza. I would like to use stanza IX for this purpose.

Stanzas VII - X constitute a unified mythical sequence concerning the origin of music and its effects. Stanza VII deals with the psychological power of music as evidence of its divine origin, stanza VIII with Orpheus, stanza IX with Arion and the first half of stanza X with the triumphal procession of Dionysius. Myth is suddenly shattered in the second half of stanza X by the strange intrusion of the poet, who addresses the reader in his own voice and commands those who are weary of truth-telling myth, as no doubt many modern readers are weary, to hear another and altogether different sort of truth, that “The little sprinkling of cold earth that fell/Echoed from the coffin-lid.” Here is stanza IX in its entirety:

> The Gift to king Amphion
> that walled a city with its melody
> Was for belief no dream:—thy skill, Arion!
> Could humanise the creatures of the sea,
> Where men were monsters. A last grace he craves,
> Leave for one chant;—the dulcet sound
> Steals from the deck o’er willing waves,
> And listening dolphins gather round.
> Self-cast, as with a desperate course,
> Mid that strange audience, he bestrides
> A proud One docile as a managed horse;
> And singing, while the accordant hand
> Sweeps his harp, the Master rides;
> So shall he touch at length a friendly strand,
> And he, with his preserver, shine starbright
> In memory, through silent night. (129–44)

The brief allusion to Amphion, son of Zeus and Antiope, whose lyre charmed masonry into the walls of Thebes, serves as a priamel or foil for the power of Arion’s lyre to achieve the more remarkable feat of charming creatures of the sea into humanity.[31] Wordsworth omits all background narration, and presents only two notational, almost nonpictorial moments from the myth: Arion’s last wish to sing before leaping into the sea (lines 133–36) and his rescue by one of the enchanted dolphin audience (lines 137–41). He uses the triplet (lines 142–44) to fashion a kind of Ovidian conclusion with the apotheosis of Arion and his preserver. The first moment springs with an abrupt asyndeton from the very syntax of Amphion's melody, which "Was for belief no dream," at the end of line 131. We are, Wordsworth says directly, in the belief system of myth.[32] He pulls the illustrative scene before us as if he stood there in person, rather like the puppet master in Bunraku, who stands in full view behind the puppet he manipulates and yet is not there by dramatic convention. The exclamation point after "Arion" is a false stop, serving more like Italics to emphasize the name. But the slight impediment it gives the meter seems to release the following antithesis between humanized creatures and bestialized men with even greater point. The syntax that starts with Amphion, pauses briefly on the name Arion and then runs on without break to the middle of line 133 tends to mask the bare bones of the quatrain skeleton. The actual narrative begins near the middle of line 133 with an implied offbeat, whose effect is to isolate the narrative from the preceding moral.[33] This metrical variation, one of the strongest available in accentual-syllabic verse, heightens the syntactical break and makes us feel the first eight lines less as a double quatrain than as a five-line unit and a three-line unit that overlap in line 133. The initial inversions in the next two lines (134–35), both involving verb phrases, occur in tetrameter lines where their effect is more pronounced and, consequently, more distracting from the quatrain structure:

Thy skill, Arion!
o B o B o
Could humanise the creatures of the sea,
o B o B o B o ~B o B
Where men were monsters. A last grace he craves,
o B o B " ^ o B

Leave for one chant;—the dulcet sound
B “ B o B o B
Steals from the deck o’er willing waves,
B “ B o B o B
And listening dolphins gather round. (131–136)
o B o B o B o B

The rhetorical reinforcement of these inversions extends half way through the lines, leaving their second halves markedly subdued though not detached. The effect of the strong medial pauses and the metrical variations in lines 133–35 is almost cinematic: three short half-line “cuts” (133–34) introduce the sound of Arion’s lyre as it steals furtively from the deck over one last inversion and out into a full unstopped line (135). The second movement, Arion’s rescue, is embedded in the complex second half of the stanza. Lines 137–44 form one long sentence articulated by the trochaic line (141) into two unequal parts. The semicolon at the end of line 139 is barely noticed, and the following conjunction resumes the narrative impetus with only a slight halt. Moderate enjambment at the end of line 140 between subject (“while the accordant hand”) and predicate (“Sweeps his harp”) gathers this brief, kinetic sketch to a stop in the falling rhythm of line141. I called this line a bridge earlier, and now its function can be more easily appreciated. It guides our attention by the sudden metrical shift from thematic exposition to stanzaic closure. The closure is effected by (1) concentrating the exposition into a climactic image (as here, III, V, VIII and XII) or by (2) introducing two-item symbols or icons (I, II and X), contrastive images (IV and VI), epigrammatic summaries (VII, XI and XIII) or an unqualified assertion implying a sense of complete finality (*Letztenendlichkiet*) beyond which the poem simply cannot go (XIV). This last, of course, is the traditional poetic closure. The bridge here directs us from a lively but pictorially schematic—even dull—description of Arion on the dolphin’s back, singing his way to safety, to their resurrection in motionless, starbright memory:

> So shall he touch at length a friendly strand,
> o B o B o B o B o B
> And he, with his preserver, shine starbright
> o B o B oB o B o B
> In memory, through silent night.
> o B oB o Bo B

The luminous calm of a starlit night is made almost palpable by the unusual stress on the second syllable of “starbright” and by the unexpected elision of “the” before “silent night.” In the first case, Wordsworth has apparently remembered Milton’s description of Satan on his return to Pandaemonium (*PL* X.450), where the stress is also on the second syllable: “And shape Starr-bright appeerd, or brighter, clad.”[34] In the second case, elimination of the definite article throws redoubled stress on “silent.” The elision seems even more pronounced due to the secondary stress on “memory,” a word often contracted to maintain syllable count but here used as a trisyllable with a full metrical beat on the last syllable. That unexpected beat, isolated by the ensuing pause, forces the rhythmic flow to start anew with the light offbeat on “through” that delivers the emphatic beat on “silent.” And it hardly needs saying that the alliteration on “s” and the assonance on “i” in “shine” and “silent” both contribute to the same impression of starlight flooding silent memory.

The thematic shift in stanza XI, signalled by the demotion on “Self” in “Self-cast,” is admittedly not very sharp. It separates Arion’s song to the listening dolphins from his rescure by “a proud One.” But we need only turn back to stanza VIII or forward to stanza X to see strong examples of it. In stanza VIII, the first eight lines summon up an abstract meditation on Orphean music that ends by characterizing it as a “tutored passion” that induces pathos: “And voice and shell drew forth a tear/Softer than Nature’s self could mould” (VIII.119–20). The second eight lines immediately amend the characterization by loading the musical imagination of that early age with some very heavy luggage and launching it on a rugged flight through all the extremes of sorrow and joy:

> Yet *strenuous* was the infant Age:
> o   B   o   ~B   o B o   B
> Art, daring because souls could feel,
> *   B   “   ^   o   B
> Stirred nowhere but an urgent equipage
>   *   B   o ~B o B o B o B
> Of rapt imagination sped her march
> o B o B o B o   B   o   B
> Through the realms of woe and weal. (121–25)
>   B   o B   o   B o   B

In case we might miss the point, Wordsworth Italicizes the word “strenuous.” But he also makes his point by distorting the normal rhythmic movement with some of his harshest variations. Line 122 begins with a demoted beat, in itself not particularly jarring, but then proceeds to an implied offbeat with stress final pairing. Positioned near the demotion in a tetrameter line, however, the implied offbeat is exceptionally disruptive. The next line also begins with a demotion, followed by a promotion on “but” and ends with an uncomfortably strong beat on the third, and rhyming, syllable of “equipage.” Shakespeare used the same word in rhyme position in one of his sonnets (xxxii.12), where it stands out less prominently in a longer line without any metrical variations. In stanza X, by contrast, we not only have a distinct turn but the most powerful example of a *Stimmungsbruch*, a rupture of mood, in all of Wordsworth’s poetry.[35] At the end of the first half, Silenus is swaying tipsily this way and that in Dionysius' raucous procession. Suddenly the mythical backdrop falls and death, in a rattle of cold earth echoing on the coffin lid, looms over us in lines of unsparing asperity:

> To life, to *life* give back thine ear:
> Ye who are longing to be rid
> Of fable, though to truth subservient, hear
> The little sprinkling of cold earth that fell
> Echoed from the coffin-lid;
> The convict's summons in the steeple's knell;
> "The vain distress-gun", from a leeward shore,
> Repeated—heard, and heard no more! (153–60).

If it weren't anachronistic, one could call this quintessentially postmodern in its sudden devolution from low to high style, from mythic narrative to authorial voice, from crude comedy to Sophoclean tragedy. Across the bridge in line 157 we pass to stark and unrelieved images: the criminal's summons to execution and the useless report of the distress gun from the sinking ship, both of which seem to fill all space with endless repetition. Once again Wordsworth uses metrical variations to heighten emotion. The initial inversion in line 154 underscores the rough treatment the poet intends to give those impatient with myth and perhaps longing for a modern myth of sentimental comfort, while the implied offbeat in line 156 invests "sprinkling" with a referent and a feeling quite different from those we normally associate with it:

(1) Ye who are longing to be rid (154)
B “ B

(2) The little sprinkling of cold earth that fell. (156)
o B o B “ *

The sounds of the steeple bell and the distress gun in the triplet expand by a kind of metrical amplification from the "little sprinkling" of earth, whose echo sounds at first so transient in the tight falling meter of the bridge, like a brief fall of cold rain, into finality.

It would be very difficult to find, in all English stanzaic poetry, a structure of such intricacy and expressive possibilities. It provides a perfect mesh of rhyme-shaped substructures and heterometrical counterpoint. Each stanza offers a dynamic, sonnet-like contrast between its two halves that never becomes symmetrically rigid due to (1) the metrical continuity between each half and (2) the asymmetry in the second half created by the engrafted trochee. Stanzaic closure rounds off each structure in a formally satisfying way without letting the poem, as I shall show next, break into disconnected and mobile units. Given the unpromising material he drew it from by modifications of great elegance and simplicity, the accomplishment is all the more amazing.[36]

2

We experience the structure of a regular stanzaic poem as a dual rhythm that unfolds in reading time. The first rhythm is intrastanzaic. (a) It is a composite movement of meter and inner strophic form. Unlike stichic or distichic poetry, we progress through a stanza by reading lines that impose a certain tempo on us depending on their meter, length, rhyme and syntactical organization. The rhyme scheme in particular can, as we have seen, segment the stanza into substructures that sometimes resemble the metrical periods of classical Greek poetry.[37] Because end rhyme has such a powerful capacity to shape relationships between sections of the stanza, it has been called a "vertical metaphor" by analogy with the "horizontal metaphor" of meter.[38] We not only perceive intrastanzaic movement as a counterpoint of "horizontal" meter playing against "vertical" rhyme, we also perceive it as a dynamic variation of opening and closing devices (apostrophes, initial or final questions, variations in tone, repetitions, catalogues and rhetorical tropes) designed to impart a unified impetus to each new stanza. The sum of all these aesthetic stimuli is our sense of each stanza as a *repetitive* unit of meaning that yet possesses its own specific *inertia*.[39] The second rhythm is interstanzaic. (b) It is a progression of stanzas that trace out the poem's contour as they follow a unique evolutionary course and finally coalesce into an achieved form that never quite seems to stop developing no matter how strongly closure may terminate the movement. Like Goethe's Dämon in "Urworte. Orphisch," the stanza is "Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt" and seems to continue moving with a sort of ghostly momentum in the mind.

Häublein has identified two types of interstanzaic progression: *ex posteriori* or light stimulus progression and *a priori* or strong stimulus progression.[40] The difference between the two types depends on the logical relationships that obtain between the stanzas. Light stimulus progression occurs when one stanza contains no clues as to the logical direction of the next one, forcing us to discover the connection retrospectively. The logical stages fall into separate stanzaic units, and we realize each stage *ex posteriori*. The evolutionary stimulus driving each stanza forward is therefore light. (It makes no difference, of course, whether the stanzas are syntactically closed or linked so long as they are *logically* closed.) Strong stimulus progression occurs when one stanza points directly ahead and determines the logical direction of the next, permitting us to predict the connection in advance. The logical stages extend over more than one stanza, and we realize each stage *a priori*. The evolutionary stimulus driving each stanza forward is therefore strong.

Clearly, then, the experience of reading a stanzaic poem is extremely complex, as intra- and-interstanzaic rhythms overlap in a fluctuating cycle from one stanza to the next. I shall return again to the issue of rhythmic time in my conclusion. For now we need only focus on the general distinction between light and strong stimulus progression as it applies to "On the Power of Sound."

Even a cursory look at the poem would suggest that it exhibits light stimulus or *ex posteriori* stanzaic progression. Stanzas I - XIII all end with full syntactical stops. There are thus no run-on stanzas to provide a strong stimulus connection. In addition, Wordsworth avoids any use of the other common techniques to create *a priori* links.[41] The reason for this should be selfevident from the internal structure of the stanza. That structure is expressly designed to apportion the thematic content of each stanza into regular subsections that are demarked by rhyme, line length, meter and punctuation. Any technique that opened up the stanza, so logic or syntax could spill over from one to the other, would vitiate the whole purpose of its organization. The inner dynamic of contrasts and transitions that Wordsworth took such trouble to create by recasting "The Triad" passage would be lost, or at best severely attenuated, if the logical flow swept the reader across stanza boundaries. The avoidance of light stimulus progression is also important due to the sheer length of the stanza. Long stanzas have less of an easily perceived shape than short ones. We need the full sense pause at the end of a long stanza to give us a resting point before the next one begins to evolve. The meaning of "stanza," after all, is "room," "house" or "resting place." So great a stanzaic poet as Horace took care to put a sense pause after the majority of his four-line Alcaics (58 exceptions out of 280) and Sapphics (8 exceptions out of 179) to prevent loss of strophic integrity even in such short forms.[42] Twentieth century poets have largely abandoned stanzaic poetry with their abandonment of accentual-syllabic verse, Yeats being the most notable exception, but when they do use the form they tend to show a disregard for stanzaic unity by excessive *a priori* linkage. This is a tendency that has been underway since about 1800, and we are now so accustomed to it that a taste for clearly defined stanzaic contours has almost atrophied. The refusal of most critics to second Wordsworth's judgment about the poem may in fact stem from the atrophy of their sensitivity to intricate, carefully wrought and delimited stanza forms.

The key to Wordsworth's handling of light stimulus progression lies in the structure of the stanza itself. He uses logical suggestions, trains of thought and imagery developed in the second eight-line section of the stanza—most frequently in the final three-line triplet—to generate a continuous retrospective evolution in the poem's subject. The connections are so subtle, in fact, that some stanzas almost seem mobile, that is, they seem to lack any stimulus to indicate sequence and could easily be shuffled about without loss of effect. Before we examine the connective links in detail, I want to lay out the thematic plan of "On the Power of Sound." This is important because both the title and the headnotes raise false expectations about its focus.

The general structure of the poem is fairly clear. It falls into three parts of six, four and four stanzas respectively.

The first part (stanzas I-VI) exhibits a simple ring composition. It begins with an apostrophe to the ear as a spiritual organ in communion with sound and closes with another apostophe to the ear, now called the "Regent of sound" (VI.82), as a portal for psychologically and socially restorative music that will heal neurosis, soothe suffering virtue, stop suicide and harmonize all thought "Ere martyr burns, or patriot bleeds" (VI.89–96). How did we get from sound to musical hygiene? Very simply. Wordsworth's real interest was not in sound but in sound organized: music. Although his headnote says that the first six stanzas detail the "Sources and effects of those sounds" the ear perceives, they mostly describe music. Only stanza II, with its rushing streams, roaring lion and shouting cuckoo is about sound per se. The first eight lines of stanza III shift to artificial echoes—echoes of hound and horn, bell and bridal music (III.36–40)—before making the decisive break with sound as a theme in the second half. Suddenly Wordsworth intrudes as expositor (which he will do even more violently in X.153–160) and with the poetic equivalent of a cinematic zoom sweeps us high over a cove filled with singing milkmaids:

> Then, or far earlier, let us rove
> Where mists are breaking up or gone,
> And from aloft look down into a cove
> Besprinkled with a careless quire,
> Happy milk-maids, one by one
> Scattering a ditty each to her desire,
> A liquid concert matchless by nice Art,
> A stream as if from one full heart. (III.41–48)

Wordsworth is not merely sharing his response to a charming scene with us. He has enjoined it on us. Even the short aside in line 41, that we ought to have turned from echoes to song *far earlier,* adds greater urgency to his coercion. We have perforce become the audience, he the expositor and the singing from a distant cove below the subject of a reflexive drama that the poet makes us experience.[43] In this drama, the depth of our imagined experience is a measure of his own response. What touches his ear touches our ear and we, therefore, universalize the singing from our high prospect almost as if we are the eye of a camera transforming sound to sight by some poetic synaesthesia. From line 41 to the end of the poem music, not sound, is the center of

Wordsworth’s attention. Stanza IV deals with the ability of song to solace suffering or toil, stanza V with the emotional effects of martial and amatory music and stanza VI with the hope that the ear will be a passageway not for “the cozenage of sense” (VI.85) but for iatric melody.[44] Ring composition and the extensive use of imperatives in the second half of stanza VI (“But lead,” “Soothe,” “stay” and “Knit”) mark the end of the first part.

The second part (stanzas VII-X) contains a series of mythic illustrations on the theme of music as a divine power. That power is introduced in stanza VII with a simile: as conscience strikes the guilty, so music insinuates itself into “the dull idiot’s brain” and unleashes reason “By concords winding with a sway/Terrible for sense and soul!” (VII. 105–06). Surely then it is an art, as the bridge in line 109 claims, “Lodged above the starry pole.” And the triplet draws the expected conclusion with a train of abstractions in which wisdom, beauty, truth, order and endless youth parade in gnomic order. That divine art is then illustrated by the myths of Orpheus, Arion and Dionysius in stanzas VIII-X.152 respectively. The imperious command to hear the little sprinkling of cold earth that rattles off the coffin brings the second part to an end with the shattering of myth as ultimately insufficient. Myth may offer a an enticing suggestion of vague meaning, an opulence of antique sentiment, but that is ultimately a deception: it only serves to conceal “the heavy and weary weight/Of all this unintelligible world” behind a charming facade of trivial narrative and imagery. It no longer has the ability to compact collective experience into a timeless form that can release that experience back into society at an unconscious level. That’s why modern writers use myth merely as an internal scaffolding for an external narrative, a narrative that virtually absorbs and digests it. If we now look back to the start of “On the Power of Sound” from this point, the first six stanzas present music as a social force and the next four stanzas then instantiate it as a divine art by myth. But myth suddenly collapses into reality.

The last part (stanzas XI-XIV) leaps into the domain of faith where myth would never want to tread. It treats all earthly sound and music as reflections of a pervading spirit of tones and numbers that fill the heavens “With everlasting harmony” (XII.183). That harmony itself is commanded in stanza XIII, by imperatives directed completely away from the listener, to praise God. Wordsworth then draws the poem to an end with a great apocalyptic vision of an empty universe filled only with the Word that created harmony. Ironically enough, it is only in this last part[45] that Wordworth gives us magnificent aural panoramas: the voice of a great city rolling far into the countryside where it blends with the nightingale’s song (XI.163–66), the waves crashing against high mist-crowned headlands (XII.185–87), the universal winds that rise to a dirge in winter (XII.188–92) and the eagle’s hungry barkings high in the sky (XIII.200–02). But of course there is nothing surprising in this. Only because all sound has become harmony, the everlasting harmony that fills existence, can it now become natural music.

If we step back and review the thematic shape of the three divisions of the poem, we see that the first is social, the second mythic and the third religious. The first deals with music as performance, the second with music as divine art and the third with music as world-controlling logos that is itself subsumed by the Word.

Within this broad tripartite framework, Wordsworth dovetails his stanzas in a progression of intricate and almost hidden light stimulus links. To clarify how these *ex posteriori* connections function, I have summarized the thematic structure of the first six stanzas. Their organization is perhaps the least obvious of the poem, and this paraphrase should help to highlight the thematic silhouette. The sonnet-like division of the stanza into two equal subsections will also stand out more clearly. The structural elements of the stanza are numbered 1-4: 1 and 2 for the two quatrains of the first half, 3 and 4 for the asymmetrical segments of the second half. A vertical line | indicates full sense pause, and a carriage return ↵ indicates enjambment between (1) the two eight-line subsections or (2) the bridge-triplet segments. Phrases that mark the turn in the second half are quoted in bold face.

Stanza I

1. The functions of the ear are ethereal
2. The ear is an intricate labyrinth for sighs and whispers |
3. **And** shrieks, healing melody or smiles enticed into the ambush of despair |
4. Hosannas in church and requiems at death.

Stanza II

1. The streams and fountains serve Thee, invisible Spirit
2. Roar of lion and bleat of dam |
3. **Shout, cuckoo!** Carry spring to the frozen zone, toll to mercy ↵
4. Listening to nun's devotions, sailor's prayer and widow's lullaby.

Stanza III

1. Voices and their echoes flung back to hound and horn
2. Church bells and bridal symphony |
3. **Then, or far earlier**, let us rove high over a cove of milkmaids↵
4. Singing severally in concert.

Stanza IV

1. Blest be the song that lightens sorrow and toil
2. Song helps the tired galley slave lift his oar |
3. **Yon pilgrims see**—their choral *Ave Marie* beguiles time and enhances hope |
4. Nor friendless is the prisoner of the mine, who sings his griefs to rest.

Stanza V

1. Revolutionary inspiration mounts on a tune whose passage through the land
2. Awakens the sluggard to freedom |
3. **Who, from a martial pageant** incites battle? Even those Lydian airs that inspire↵
4. Amatory play.

Stanza VI

1. How often, Regent of sound, dangerous passions tread your mazes
2. Do not betray your votaries to the cozenage of sense |
3. **But lead sick Fancy** to healing melody, soothe the virtuous and stop the suicide |
4. Let music harmonize thought before martyrs burn or patriots bleed.

The connection between the first two stanzas looks especially tenuous. How to we get from hosannas and requiems to cheery streams and fountains? We get their via two techniques: one rhetorical and one iconic. The first is the repetition of the apostrophe that opens stanza I. I mentioned this above in the general structural analysis of the poem. The ear is directly addressed by a logical synaesthesia as an “Organ of vision” in stanza I and as an “invisible Spirit” in stanza II; it is not so addressed again until stanza VI, where it becomes the “Regent of sound” This provides a kind of rhetorical continuity. The second is the link we make retrospectively when we connect the nun’s devotions, sailor’s prayer and widow’s lullaby in II.30–33 with the devotional music of I.14–16. The two catalogs of icons (they are too notational to be called images) establish an *ex posteriori* stimulus. The remaining connections are fairly obvious. The three individual voices at the end of stanza II are a prelude to the collective voices and echoes that open stanza III and then swell into the concert of individual songs, “A stream as if from one full heart” (III.48), that closes it. Song as emotional analgesic occupies all of stanza IV, whose triplet depicts a “prisoner of the mine” singing himself to sleep (IV.62–64). The image of the prisoner stands in stark contrast to the spontaneous song of the milkmaids in the prior stanza. Wordsworth purposely heightened the contrast by confining the prisoner’s song to three lines in the triplet—an analog to his dark mine—while permitting us to gaze down from the unbounded sky on the milkmaids in one long continuous passage formed by enjambment of the bridge (III.41–48). Stanza V shifts from song to revolutionary, martial and amatory music. The first of these, the melodic “voice of Freedom,” refers directly back to the injustice suffered by the prisoner who, after all, sings from “the well-spring of his own clear breast” (V.63). Stanza VI terminates the sequence with a meditation on the dangerous passions the “Regent of sound” can stimulate and a prayer for healing melody. Sound as a cozener of sense points straight to the music of battle and love in the second half of stanza V. Writing in the postNapoleonic era, Wordsworth knew perfectly well how powerful a song like the “Marseilles” could be in “thrilling the unweaponed crowd” to follow Ares, the money changer of bodies, as Aeschylus calls war in the first stasimon of the *Agamemnon*.[46] And as a great deal of his poetic output shows, he knew equally well how “the plausive wings of Love” could betray the heart of those “wooingly resigned/To a voluptuous influence.” “Plausive” is one of the most ironic, and dangerously ambiguous, epithets ever applied to the little Anacreontic cupid who has been flitting about western amatory verse since Hellenistic times. Wordsworth discretely leaves out wine, Dionysius and Aphrodite from his list, although they bulk large in the *Anacreonta*, but does reveal a crack in the *trompe l’oeil* Rococo ceiling with his “plausive.”

None of these retrospective links employs the usual techniques of light stimulus progression between stanzas: general statement and concrete example, statement and alternative, logical influence and conclusion or stanzaic contrast. Instead Wordsworth provides hints or implications, normally in the triplet, which generate light stimulus links. The bifurcation of the stanza into two thematically contrastive halves militates against the type of simple *whole stanza* to *whole stanza* connection that is more common with retrospective chaining. Is this also true, we might ask, of those instances where the internal contrast is eliminated? In two cases enjambment overrides the partition (VII and XIII), and in two cases the mythic narrative continues across the partition(VIII and IX). Let's consider the four exceptions within the two larger wholes of which they are elements: stanzas VII-IX occur in the second part, and stanza XIII in the last.

(1) Stanza VII begins the second part of the ode with a slight disjunction. There is no distinct stanza-wide stimulus joining it to stanza VI. All we see is a rough parallel between melody that heals or saves in VI.89–96 and music that transforms an idiot to a noetic in VII.97–107. In both stanzas, music thus possesses a certain mental *dynamis* in addition to its aesthetic pleasure. Otherwise they are about quite different things. Stanza VIII on Orpheus *must* come next because the gnomic generalization that provides such a strong closure in VII.110–12 resonates thematically in its first half:

> Oblivion may not cover
> All treasures hoarded by the miser, Time.
> Orphean Insight! truth's undaunted lover,
> To the first leagues of tutored passion climb,
> When Music deigned within this grosser sphere
> Her subtle essence to enfold,
> And voice and shell drew forth a tear
> Softer than Natures's self could mould. (VIII.113–20)

Music originates above the starry pole (VII), but is practiced within this grosser sphere (VIII); Orphean insight is the undaunted lover of truth, but climbs only the first leagues of tutored passion (VIII) and not all the way to the home of Truth in divine Love (VII). Stanza IX depicting the historical kithara-singer Arion of Corinth *should* follow stanza VIII depicting the archetypal musician Orpheus, but *cannot* itself follow stanza X due to the rupture of mood in X.153–60. That is, stanzas VIII - X are not mobile; we could not reshuffle their positions with logical impunity. What connects them is myth. Framing the myths on one side is a terrifying transformation (VII) and on the other a shattering breach (X), the former justifying the myths and the latter expunging them as almost worthless in face of death. The two stanzas on Orpheus and Arion come the closest to standard light stimulus linkage. Each one contains a single coherent narrative (highly generalized in the case of Orpheus) that illustrates the mystery of an art "Lodged above the starry pole." Nevertheless, stanzas VIII and IX could detach themselves from the progression *if* the reader failed to note the retrospective link of VIII with the triplet of VII and proceeded to view Orpheus and Arion not as archetype and simulacrum but simply as equal iconographic myths. Then their two stanzas would indeed start to look mobile. The seeming-mobility would be further aided by the brief three-line reference to Amphion in IX.129–31, which inclines the reader to mythologize Arion completely. Relatively little disruption would result if the two were transposed, however, since mobile stanzas often serve as exchangeable units in a catalog or series of variations, and that would be their function here should the reader take them to be mobile.

But stanzas VIII and IX do not in fact become mobile because the enjambment in stanza VII actually foregrounds the triplet, with its link-generating reference to truth, by carrying the idiot's shattering illumination through line 107 right up to the lodging where the mysteries of art dwell. Rhythm supports the rhetorical emphasis directed on the triplet. Line 106 is headless (accenting the idiot's terror), line107 contains an implied offbeat with stress initial pairing (accenting his agonized struggles) and 108 opens with an inversion (accenting the direction we should look). I shall return to these lines in more prosodic detail later. For now it is enough to see that syntax and meter force the words at the end of lines 111 and 112, "Truth" and "youth," into prominence where they will be echoed by Orphean song as "truth's undaunted lover" in "the infant Age" of the next stanza.

(2) Stanza XIII, in the third part of the ode, has enjambment on line 201 and also on line 204 preceding the bridge. Both tend to soften the internal divisions of the stanza so that*, as a whole*, it becomes a psalm of praise that builds to a climax in the triplet:

As Deep to Deep
Shouting through one valley calls,
All worlds, all natures, mood and measure keep
For praise and ceaseless gratulation, poured
Into the ear of God, their Lord! (XIII.204–08)

The name of God leads directly, and almost predictably, in stanza XIV to the voice of *Genesis* that created the universe. This connection is the closest thing to a strong stimulus, or *a priori* link, in the whole poem. It is close to but not quite a strong stimulus; we can only anticipate a general meditation on the divine, not the apocalypse to follow. I called this stanza a psalm of praise above, and a very close analogy with stanza XIII, including some suggestive verbal parallels, would be *Psalm* 19.1–4:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
 and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

> Day to day pours forth speech,
>   and night to night declares knowledge.
> There is no speech, nor are there words;
>   their voice is not heard;
> yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
>   and their words to the end of the world.[47]

The poet has “The six-day’s Work” (XIII. 203) transmit a hymn of joy to heaven, the psalmist has the firmament proclaim God’s handiwork; the poet has all creation pour praise like a wave of eulogistic din rolling through some deep valley into the divine ear, the psalmist (more modestly) has the revolution of time pour forth speech not speech to the end of the world. The position of this stanza in the sequence of the last four is firmly anchored by the triplets. The steeple bell and vain distress gun in stanza X, both of which sound with the echoing coffin lid, provide an appropriate link to the “terror, joy, or pity” (XI.161) supposed to lie in the vast swell of notes represented by XI.163–68 (cry of baby, murmur of regal city and song of nightingale). Two of these are human productions, and one is natural, although the nightingale’s song is perilously close to absorption by the city’s rumble. As a matter of fact, however, there is nothing to evoke terror, joy or pity in these descriptions. The tag in line 161 has only one purpose: to provide a retrospective stimulus with stanza X. Having done that, Wordsworth gets on with the evocation of erratic, wandering sound. There may be a tenuous connection with the triplet of stanza X by the implied contrast between a small village steeple and a great metropolis or between the sharp reports of the distress gun and the “solemn sea-like bass” of the city. But the main purpose of XI.163–68 is to provide a foil for the strange wish, one of the strangest indeed in all of modern poetry, that sound might be captured in a kind of musical notation and played as it were for moral improvement or intellectual contemplation of the Unsubstantial:

> Ye wandering Utterances, has earth no scheme,
> No scale of moral music—to unite
> Powers that survive but in the faintest dream
> Of memory?—O that ye might stoop to bear
> Chains, such precious chains of sight
> As laboured minstrelsies through ages wear!
> O for a balance fit the truth to tell
> Of the Unsubstantial, pondered well! (XI.169–76)

The hope that sound might submit to visual symbology on the model of music is a hope that the inherently transient might permit itself to suffer enslavement by aesthetic law. And transience is the key note of the aural imagery in the first half of the stanza. The cry of the baby is one of innumerable chance voices in the regal city, whose collective voice drifts out to the woodlands where it blends with the fugitive song of the nightingale. Here is a cascade of chance waiting for the mathematical imprisonment that will render it moral. Impassioned hope arises with a slight dash-marked asyndeton after the question in line 172 and rushes through the strong enjambment at its end to the bridge. The bridge, whose falling meter twice places emphatic beats on the imprisoning "chains" and whose light enjambment carries the thematic momentum into the triplet, drives the wish home with as much passion as hopelessness. We can now record sound, something Wordsworth could not have imagined, but our recordings have "No scale of moral music" to them; they do not tell the truth of the Unsubstantial, only the truth of acoustic waves, whose "truth" vanishes into the background noise of modern industrial society where it becomes literally insubstantial because psychologically unperceived. The triplet of stanza XI leaves us with an unsatisfiable desire for this aesthetic law. Stanza XII gives us law in the different form of a Pythagorian system of numbers and music. Wordsworth distances himself from the veracity of the doctrine in the first quatrain by attributing it to sages who taught when “faith was found to merit/Initiation in that mystery old” (XII.179–80). But out of this uncertain doctrine emerges sound that is anything but erratic, transient or meaningless:

> The heavens, whose aspect makes our minds as still
> As they themselves appear to be,
> Innumerable voices fill
> With everlasting harmony;
> The towering headlands, crowned with mist,
> Their feet among the billows, know
> That ocean is a mighty harmonist. (XII.181–87)

The assertive, driving rhythm—free of all major variations[48] and with the two key verbs “fill” and and “know” in rhetorically emphatic terminal position—makes these lines immediately memorizable. They have the mnemonic insistence of the cuckoo’s song in “The Solitary Reaper,” which has always been one of my personal touchstones for rhythmic inevitability. The Pythagorian framework, however uncommitted Wordsworth may be to the notion, has one particular advantage: it cancels any need for a system of notation to capture sound. Now all sound partakes of a mathematical order implicit in the universe. That order gives all the innumerable voices of existence, despite their seeming evanescence, some role to play in the great harmony. The last voice of stanza XII was the dirge-like wind beloved of winter, a wind that is merely one among the many pinions of “universal Air.” This provides the link to the "banded instruments of wind and chords" in the opening apostrophe of stanza XIII. "Wind and chords" precisely ingeminate the "universal Air" and its seasonal "delegates of harmony" in the preceding triplet. We return once again to the sustained hymn of praise that mounts through stanza XIII to culminate in the name of God.

Stanza XIII *as a whole*, we can now see, stands at a critical position in the last part of the poem. It faces two ways, toward the diverse sounds of the previous stanza, which are merely reflections of a cosmic harmony, and toward the two sounds of the following stanza, which created and will uncreate the cosmic harmony. If there is a Pythagorian order in stanza XII, it's an order that seems to speak only to itself. The winds of the air are delegates of harmony that "support the Seasons in the their round"; the stern winter loves "a dirge-like sound." Nowhere do we find a human listener. Nature is listening to herself, she is *natura naturans* in the old medieval formula. Our minds, stilled by the heavens in XII.181–83, seem filled with voices outside conscious perception. A sudden explosion of all-too mundane and unexpected noises in stanza XIII (winds, chords, words, lowing mead, forest hum and "barking" eagle) becomes a hymn of thanksgiving enforced by imperatives in line initial (193 and 195), medial (199) and final (200) positions. Then with equal suddenness the creating voice of God makes and the last trump unmakes the cosmos in stanza XIV. Between unconscious harmony and divinely conscious gesture stands a passage of Biblical and quite unRilkean praise.[49]

The importance of the triplet should now be evident. Wordsworth makes particular use of it (1) to unify each stanza with a full closure and (2) to maintain the forward progression of the poem by generating light stimulus links with each succeeding stanza. Even where enjambment overrides the mid-stanza division or narrative continues across the division, the triplet continues as we have seen to interlink the stanzas. The danger of too strong an intrastanzaic closure, which might cause stanzas to disassociate or grow mobile, is countered by the retrospective connections that bind stanzas into a concatenation. The subtlety of this technique prevents us from predicting the thematic progression with any precision. To see just how difficult prediction is, you might try a brief thought experiment. Position yourself at the moment in stanza X when the narrator has smashed the mythical drop-scene and left you with the fall of earth on coffin. The raucous Bacchic procession has been swept away by a little resounding noise. The commanding voice of the poet presents you with an apparently unanswerable fact. The poem could end here. It would lack a closure, of course, but it would have your ear in the way a satisfyingly rounded closure might not. Where now, do you think, could Wordsworth possibly go?   How could he resume his topic, or impart a new forward momentum to the poem?

3

On 24 September 1827, a little over a year before he completed the first draft of "On the Power of Sound," Wordsworth wrote to William Rowan Hamilton with his response to one of Hamilton's poems, expressing confidence that Hamilton would discover on his own "without conference with me or any benefit drawn from my practice in metrical composition" the main conclusions about poetry:

> You will be brought to acknowledge that the logical faculty has infinitely more to do with Poetry than the Young and the inexperienced, whether writer or critic, ever dreams of. Indeed, the materials upon which that faculty is exercised in Poetry are so subtle, so plastic, so complex, the application of it requires an adroitness which can proceed from nothing but practice, a discernment, which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it.[50]

The truth of these expansively unromantic sentiments is borne out, as we have seen, by the craftsmanship lavished on ode's stanza structure. This is in fact a Horatian position about poetic skill advanced in the very century that was to witness the snapping of the Horatian tradition for good. Wordsworth is in complete agreement with the extraordinary importance Horace places on technique, an emphasis that has no precedent in Aristotle's *Poetics* or *Rhetoric*.[51] Throughout the *Ars poetica*, a text of paramount importance for the Western notion of poetic craftsmanship, the topic of *studium* works itself unceasingly into the poetic discourse. Horace balances the need for artistry against other claims and always finds it to be the essential requirement of all great poetry. Wordsworth if anything outdoes Horace by stressing the sheer mental effort needed to organize such subtle, plastic and complex materials into an aesthetic unity. Only long practice can win the necessary skill to overcome the impediment of uncontained emotion.

Nowhere is Wordsworth's attention to sheer craftsmanship more evident than in his metrical practice. The notion of poetic craftsmanship has become virtually extinct in this age of free verse, so a few prefatory remarks are in order. Whatever virtues *vers libre* may have, it suffers from one serious vice: the temptation to careless craftsmanship. There is a widely-held view, especially in the United States, that poetry should discard both scientific and literary prosody as constraints on freedom of creation. Proponents of this attribute to the poet a nearly god-given creative ability to make an original prosody, even an original language, which his worshippers are supposed to master with an equally god-given sensitivity. Free verse thus springs from "the doctrine of autonomous art and its circular theory that rules for art are unnecessary because art is like nothing else and that art is like nothing else because it needs no rule."[52] Meter, however, is like law in its regularity and uniformity as Wordsworth stressed in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: ". . . meter obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion but such as the concurring testimony of ages has shewn to heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with it."[53] These laws are easily picked up, as Shakespeare picked them up, by reading and listening. They are fairly easy to apply at a low level of craftsmanship and their effects, at a high level of craftsmanship, are fairly easy to understand. No one ever thought understanding metrical art was particularly difficult or problematic before its four-hundred year tradition broke under the onslaught of free verse dogma at the end of the last century. Today it's approached as an arcane discipline whose intricacies require explication worthy of a Russian formalist. The one rule of *vers libre*, by contrast, requires the poet virtually to invent a new "prosody" for each poem. Whether the prosodies are crude anisosyllabic variations on medieval accentual verse or simple breath groupings, they cannot be judged by any formal standards and must therefore be accepted at face value as the poet's free selfexpression. This gives the poet aesthetic *carte blanche* to call anything art but leaves the reader without any tools of judgment. A judgment of failure on grounds of rhythmic incompetence can be countered by the claim that selfexpression generates its own laws which only fail when judged by a false aesthetic consciousness.

Our best approach is to start inductively without recourse to the theory of meter in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. That theory, which Coleridge (for all his disagreements on matters of diction) said "is highly ingenious and touches at all points on truth,"[54] really consists of scattered comments on the aesthetic effects of meter and is quite irrelevant to his actual practice. As I shall point out shortly, Wordworth provided the best description of his actual practice in a letter whose import has to this day not been properly appreciated.

The two tables of the appendix, one for each half of the stanza, summarize all metrical variations in the ode except elisions and contractions. The starting position of each variation is indicated by a superscript number; the absence of a superscript number indicates that the variation begins the line. Punctuation inside the variations and at the end of stanzaic subsections is enclosed in square brackets. Departures from the nominal meter at any position are noted in parentheses.

The first impression we take from this tabulation is one of metrical balance between the two halves of the stanza. Initial inversions occur 19 times in the first and 18 times in the second half. Initial demotions, sometimes called spondaic openings or substitutions, occur 9 times in each half, although line internal demotions are somewhat less symmetrical with a ratio of 9:14 respectively. Implied offbeats, rather surprisingly, are distributed very evenly between the two halves in a ratio of 9:10. The pairing conditions of the implied offbeats are also balanced: the ratio of stress final to stress initial pairings is 8:1 in the first and 8:2 in the second half. This distribution of implied offbeats is unexpected. They are the most disruptive of regular duple meter and we would not, *prima facie,* expect to find them so evenly disposed in the stanza but clustered at moments of intense emotion or thematic concentration.

The impression of even dispersal is, however, somewhat misleading. Wordsworth allocates his metrical resources, his variations above all, with great care and purpose to reinforce the internal organization of the stanza by rhyme, line length and punctuation . We shall consider the two halves of the stanza independently to see how he deploys *rhythm as an adjunct to stanzaic architectonics*. This is an important distinction. Poets handle meter differently in stichic and in stanzaic poetry. Classical prosodists have long recognized this, but their English counterparts have been slow to grasp its implications. All poetry is not simply stichic poetry for the purposes of metrical analysis. Wordsworth's metrical practice varies considerably between his blank verse and his stanzaic verse, whether regular or irregular. The "Intimations Ode," for example, is an irregular Pindaric in which he uses rhythm with great subtlety to shape the emotions and structure the theme as it unfolds through stanzas of startling—and potentially destabilizing—variety. That is, he uses rhythm architectonically as a key structural element in constructing the poem and not merely as a tool to achieve localized effects within individual lines.[55] Failure to grasp this fact contributes to the depreciation of his craftsmanship. Before examining the metrical architecture in detail, however,we must first be clear about his general rhythmic habits in handling the decasyllabic line.

Wordsworth's normal rhythmic practice was to treat the first two positions of the iambic pentameter line indifferently, unless "the Passion of the sense" demanded a certain pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, and then adhere generally to the iambic pattern. But he reserved the right to dislocate the verse without limid if he thought the emotion justified it. Writing in 1804 to John Thelwall, he sketched out his metrical system in a short, but revealing, passage:

> As to my own system of metre it is very simple, 1st and 2nd syllables long or short indifferently except where the Passion of the sense cries out for one in preference 3d 5th 7th 9th short according to the regular laws of the Iambic. This the general rule. But I can scarcely say that I admit any limits to the dislocation of the verse, that is I know none that may not be justified by some passion or other. I speak in general terms. The most dislocated line I know in my writing is this in the Cumberland Beggar. "Impressed on the white road in the same line" which taken by itself has not the sound of a verse . . . The words to which the passion is att[ached?] are white road same line and the verse dislocates [for the] sake of

> these. This will please or displ[ease by th]e quantity of feeling excited by the image, to those in whom it excites [such? much?] feeling, as in one it will be musical to others not.[56]

He uses the words “long” and “short” above for stressed and unstressed styllables respectively. It was common in his time to misuse terms for phonological duration, which we now know is just one component of stress along with pitch and amplitude, for stress proper. This practice originated in education. The only formal prosody studied in secondary school and university was quantitative Greek and Latin prosody, where “long” and “short” referred accurately to the rules governing long and short syllables. It became habitual, therefore, for poets and critics to employ the vocabulary of quantitative metrics to describe the very different accentual-syllabic meter. This is merely a terminological confusion, and does not indicate any misunderstanding of basic versification by Wordsworth.

Out of 102 decasyllabic lines in the ode, 55 begin with initial inversions or spondees, and a majority of these fall on strong verbs or participles, with rhetorically emphatic nouns, pronouns and conjunctions trailing well behind. This tallies with the poet’s statement above that “the Passion of the sense” determines the stress sequence of the first two syllables and not the metrical paradigm. Wordsworth avoids nearly all variations in the opening trimeter, however, to prevent disrupting its integrity as the rhythmic upbeat to each stanza. But once into the stanza’s main body, he concentrates initial and internal variations in the pentameters that occupy the second and fourth lines of the first quatrain almost as if he were defining it by a rhythmic outline (the quatrain is perceived as a quatrain by the rhymes on its second and fourth lines). Four double offbeats in particular occur in the fourth line, two of them at the start of the line, where their dislocating power is greatest. The second quatrain begins with a pentameter which, as I said earlier, provides a sense of metrical continuity with the first quatrain. This may explain the continuation of forceful initial variations in 7 of 14 stanzas. The variations then taper off sharply in the following three tetrameters. The majority of all metrical variations in the first half of the stanza are concentrated, thus, in the pentameters of the second, fourth and fifth lines. Tetrameters are admittedly somewhat less tolerant of metrical variations than pentameters,[57] but is there any other explanation for their relatively sudden cessation? These three tetrameters, which bring the first hemistanza to closure, contain a syntactically continuous and coherent phrase group in 10 of 14 stanzas. Strong syntactical stops occur only in I.6, II.22 and XIII.198, all on the first tetrameter, with the punctuation serving merely to introduce a different but related sound sketch in the next two lines.[58] Wordsworth treats the pentameter in fact as the thematic initiator for a description embodied in the following three relatively strict tetrameters. The tetrameters need to be strict because they not only close out the first half of the stanza but also provide the solid hinge for the turn—the thematic shift or rhetorical contrast—that regularly occurs in the next line (9). This line is also a tetrameter but, as Table 2 shows, it contains a high incidence of initial variations including one hypermetrical line (XI.9) that help signal the shift. A good illustration of how the second quatrain functions in concert with the turn occurs in stanza IV.53–61:

For the tired slave, Song lifts the languid oar,
“ ^ * B o B o B
And bids it aptly fall, with chime
o B o B o B o B
That beautifies the fairest shore,
o B o B o B o B
And mitigates the harshest clime.
o B o B o B o B
Yon Pilgrims see—in lagging file

* B o B o B o B
They move. But soon the appointed way [Elison gives “th’ appointed”]
o B o B o B o B
A choral *Ave Marie* shall beguile,
o B o B o B o B o B
And to their hope the distant shine
o ~B o B o B o B
Glisten with a livelier ray.
B o ~B o B o B

As the metrical pattern shows, the pentameter introduces the image of a personified Song lifting the galley slave’s oar with an implied offbeat-demotion pair that is precisely located to throw heavy, perhaps even sentimentally heavey-handed, emphasis on the words “tired slave” and “Song.” The remaining lines of the quatrain, however, are perfect tetrameters whose clean movement reflects, or is supposed to reflect, the transmuted suffering they convey. Like so much of Wordsworth’s best poetry, the implications often vanish behind the facade of simple language and deceptive metrical art. The quatrain doesn’t merely claim that song lightens the slave’s burden; it asserts that song enhances the beauty of a shore seen from the dark prison of the galley and (chiastically) moderates the effects of climatic extremes on those penned inside. Whether or not this is literally true, the quatrain makes it seem plausible by a forceful pair of variations that uncoil their energy into the following three lines with such clarity that we hardly notice the import of the words. The sudden intrusion of the poet, speaking in his proper voice and commanding a change of scene, is marked by a demotion on “Yon” that is as unexpected, and rhetorically disconcerting, as the similar technique in stanza III.41–44, which captures “Then” in an initial inversion heightened by punctuation that isolates it from the offbeat:

Then, or far earlier, let us rove

B “ B
Where mists are breaking up or gone,
And from aloft look down into a cove
Where mists are breaking up or gone.

In both cases the rupture of mood foregrounds the current thematic scene and leaves the impact of the preceding words almost unregarded in a kind of rhetorical darkness. Although the three tetrameters of stanza IV are free of major variations, elsewhere Wordsworth introduces a total of five initial inversions, nine demotions and one implied offbeat in the same three-line. Four of the inversions fall on descriptive verbs and serve as iconic strengthens with minimal disruption of the meter. The majority of demotions are concentrated in the second tetrameter (line B) and intensify tone or imagery, with no effect on rhythmic integrity (particularly in the important final tetrameter). The one implied offbeat in XI.166 is not so benign. It is combined with a demotion on “shy” to evoke the song of the nightingale under assault by the rumbling voice of a regal city,

that floats
Far as the woodlands—with the trill to blend
B “ B o ~B o B o B
Of that shy songstress, whose love-tale
o B * B “ ^
Might tempt an angel to descend,
While hovering o’er the moonlight vale. (XI.164–68)

The placement of a stress-final pairing at the end of the line, where its double stresses can provide emphatic strength to a concluding image or summary, is a fairly common technique in accentual-syllabic verse.[59] Here, however, we have a jarring inversion of syntax after the dash in line 165 that seems to cooperate perversely with the variations in line 166 to create a sense of disjunction between rhythm and imagery. The imagery is wonderfully, and typically, romantic:

the city’s “solemn sea-like bass” floating far into the woodlands, the nightingale’s trill of passion and the hovering angel that might be tempted by her song into a moonlight vale. But the image doesn’t work its magic simply, as anyone can find out by reading the lines aloud. The twisted syntax, redoubling the force of the variations, plays against the evoked scene and subverts our expectations for a lyrical largo cantabile rhythm to carry the imagery. The confused noise of the regal city seems to contaminate the nightingale’s song and with it the power that might, but does not, tempt an angel to descend quite literally into earthly noise and passion.

The second half of the stanza, whose metrical variations are summarized in Table 2, presents a somewhat different metrical picture. It consists, you will recall, of two subsections: a five-line unit ending with a strongly endstopped trochaic bridge and a three-line summative triplet. But despite its segmentation into two asymmetrical units by meter and rhyme, Wordsworth treats these eight lines as one sustained syntactical train. There are *full* syntactical stops inside this train only in stanzas VII (107), XI (172) and XIV (218 and 222). One has the feeling of a continuous thematic stream channeled by the formal structure, particularly the trochaic bridge, yet moving irresistibly forward to the strong closure in the triplet. Indeed, the shaping forces in the meter and rhyme almost seem to increase the forward drive by a kind of compression. When the thematic movement is arrested by a full syntactical stop the effect is felt very strongly.[60] In stanza VII, for example, the jarring effect of reason let suddenly into the idiot’s mind is suggested by the rhetorical pause of the exclamation mark at the end of line 106 followed by the sudden full stop in line 107 after a short, tentative resumption of syntax:

> As Conscience, to the centre
> Of being, smites with irresistible pain,
> So shall a solemn cadence, if it enter

the mouldy vaults of the dull idiot’s brain,
Transmute him to a wretch from quiet hurled—
Convulsed as by a jarring din;
And then aghast, as at the world
Of reason partially let in
By concords winding with a sway
Terrible for sense and soul!
B o B o B o B
Or, awed he weeps struggling to quell dismay.
* B o ^ “ B o B
Point not these mysteries to an Art
B “ B
Lodged above the starry pole. (VII.99–109)

The enjambment in line 104, one of two at the end of the first hemistanza (the other is at XIII.200), makes the sudden stop in the *contre-rejet* all the more prominent. The stoppage is also supported by powerful variations in line 106 (headless) and line 107 (initial demotion and implied offbeat with stress initial pairing). Rhythm and syntax perfectly model the terror of a suddenly invasive rationality. Wordsworth then extracts a conclusion, perhaps with rather too much glib abstraction, from the terror and sharpens his moral with an initial inversion in line 108. Of the three other cases of full syntactical stoppage, two are rhetorical questions (XI.172 and XIV.218) and one is a powerful interjection (XIV.222). They clearly function as rhetorical intensifiers designed to set up, in the first instance, the notion of a sound score (XI.172–76) and, in the second two, the survival of sound in the eternal logos (XIV.222–24). These four exceptions aside, the second hemistanza contains a single long period that forms either a separate sentence or a continuation of a sentence from the first hemistanza (as in I, VII, XII and XIII).

Within this complex syntactical container, Wordsworth arrays his metrical forces in an almost predictable way. The five-line subsection, as the dynamic, contrastive and energetic heart of the stanza, contains a wealth of initial and internal variations. Those in the first line, for which the three tetrametes of the preceding quatrain serve as foil, we have already discussed: they mark the thematic turn. The lone pentameter, sandwiched between two pairs of four-beat lines, again holds a particularly rich load of inversions and demotions. The variations then taper off in the next line and virtually cease in the bridge, which only has three almost invisible promotions. The bridge is the rhythmic pressure point of the stanza, and Wordsworth maintains its pure trochaic movement free of metrical flux. The internal movement comes to a maximum constriction at the bridge and then, once freed, sweeps out through the triplet to a closure of such decisiveness that each one seems to signal the end of the poem. It seems in fact to masquerade as poetic closure, a masquerade that the retrospective stanza structure must always counter right up to the true end. This is probably the explanation for the pentameter in XIV.224, which serves as a reminder to the reader that the poem has, in fact, ended. After 13 incarnations of the stanza, we feel something of its ghostly paradigm even with the dissolution of the universe in the last stanza, and can easily imagine the poem continuing on stanza after stanza. The pentameter may have been intended to prevent that feeling, but it fails I think because the stanza is instinct with such formal life. It persists in memory like an obsessive shape or rhythm.

The triplet, in its capacity as a capping or summative structure, is charged with a visual imagery of exceptional clarity and precision. Virtually every line contains a strong descriptive verb, and collectively they evoke a sense of active, pictorial concentration. Several of the verbs are accentuated with prominent metrical variations. In some cases this is so obvious as to constitute a metrical flourish in the face of the perceptive reader. In stanzas II and III, for example, both triplets (II.30 and III.46) open with a present participle stressed by initial inversion, while in stanza V two syntactically parallel past participles (V.B9–80), again stressed by inversions, hammer home the power of amatory music with a very unerotic plosiveness:

(1) Listening to nun’s faint throb of holy fear (II.30)
B “ B * B o B o B
Scattering a ditty each to her desire (III.46)
B “ B o B o B o B

(2) Shot from the dancing Graces, as they move
B “ B o B o ~B o B
Fanned by the plausive wings of Love. (V.79–80)
B “ B o B o B

The true effectiveness of the triplet does not, however, lie in the variations, rich as they are in the second pentameter (to which I shall return later), but in the subtle orchestration of syntax within the metrical frame. It is unusual in English verse to move directly from a tetrameter in falling meter (such as the bridge) to a pentameter in rising meter. The effect in a regular stanzaic poem is potentially jarring.[61] But most lines of the bridge end with a strong stop that moderates the sense of rhythmic shift and even increases the pent-up rhythmic energy that streams into the triplet. In the four cases where the bridge is enjambed (II.29, III.45, V.77 and XI.173), creating the potential for metrical confusion, Wordworth softens the transition either by beginning the first line of the triplet with an inversion (II.30 and III.46), which seems for a moment to continue the falling meter, or by letting it run on in unvaried rising meter (V.78 and XI.174), which gives the illusion that the falling meter continues directly across the enjambment.

If one reads the latter two passages from bridge through triplet out loud, one will instantly notice how the falling meter appears to persist into the *contre-rejet*. There is, then, a perfectly smooth metrical transition from the bridge to the triplet. Rhyme on the first line of the triplet binds it formally to the preceding subsection while the rising meter, loosed from the bridge, starts forward as if it were the beginning of a run of pentameter lines. This sense of a new beginning is quite natural: the previous lone pentameter was isolated between two tetrameters, and one must go back six lines from there to find another. This sense of a run is immediately checked, however, because the following pentameter rhymes with the tetrameter that terminates all but the last stanza. The abrupt channeling of five-beat rhythm into four-beat rhythm imparts a particularly emphatic force to the final tetrameter. It becomes the perfect envelope for a recapitulation, gnome or pictorial flourish. And Wordsworth makes sure you notice the effect by a simple trick: he binds the second pentameter all the more firmly to the tetrameter by avoiding full stops at line end (the only one is in XII.191)[62] and frequently enjambing it with the tetrameter. Almost any triplet would serve to illustrate the combined effect of these refinements. My own favorites are in stanza IX, with its apotheosis of Arion, and in stanza X, with its almost minimalist evocation of death. We have already considered both in some detail. But stanza XIII also provides a powerful example:

As Deep to Deep
Shouting through one valley calls,
All worlds, all natures, mood and measure keep
For praise and ceaseless gratulation, poured
Into the ear of God, their Lord. (XIII.204–08)

Here the rhythm starts midline, comes to a tentative rest at the end of the bridge, picks up speed in line 206 (where the slight anacoluthon in “All worlds, all natures” seems to accelerate the two syntactically inverted objects of “keep”), surges over the line boundary, comes again to a brief halt after the Latinate “gratulation” and then rebounds off the pause through another enjambment into the tetrameter conclusion. This is an effect that Milton, the master at dovetailing syntax and meter, could applaud. Three successive lines end with verbs: first (205) the main verb of a subordinate clause depicting untamed natural praise, second (207) the main verb of the whole sentence depicting the rationally organized praise of the universe and third (208) the past participle depicting the stream that actively carries gratulation to God. All three verbs are monosyllables and receive strong stresses due to their line-end position, but the second and third are accorded special prominence by enjambment. There are no metrical variations in the entire passage (the preposition “Into” in line 208 is a fudge word that can be scanned as iamb or trochee at need). The almost Handelian jubilation of the passage is achieved *solely* by the articulation of syntax within its metrical frame.

In most triplets, however, we find (as Table 2 indicates) a convergence of variations in the second pentameter that is exceeded only by the lone pentameter of the preceding five-line subsection. This position contains such a large proportion because it provides the setup for the final tetrameter, whose clarity of movement is nearly untouched by variations, particularly initial variations, that might mar its almost ceremonial conclusiveness. As always in Wordsworth’s stanzaic poetry, a pronounced reduction of metrical variations at a given position signals that it serves an important structural purpose. That purpose is directly aided by the contrast we experience when moving from the convolutions of the pentameter to the clear, transparent tetrameter.

I should like to conclude this discussion of meter by scanning an entire stanza to illustrate in a more general way how deftly Wordsworth integrates meter into an architectural structure defined by rhyme, line length and regular syntactical pause. The relatively fixed placement of pauses *cued* by punctuation and occasionally *overridden* by enjambment is rarely studied in stanzaic poetry. I have drawn repeated attention to the technique above because the ode cannot be understood without taking it fully into account. Stanza II provides a superb example of Wordsworthian architectonics, notably his handling of pause, but it also demonstrates how quite traditional materials, much of it recycled from other poems and poets, can be elevated almost solely by a rhythmic drive that is the poetic analogue to the energy of accent and concision of dramatic expression found in the music of Beethoven's high-Classical style:

The headlong streams and fountains	
o B o B o B o	
Serve Thee, invisible Spirit, with untired powers	(Contraction of "invisible")
* B o B o B o " ^	(Demotion + implied offbeat)
Cheering the wakeful tent on Syrian mountains,	(Contraction of "Syrian")
B " B o B o B o B o	(Inversion)
They lull perchance ten thousand thousand flowers.	
o B o B o B o B o B	
That roar, the prowling lion's *Here I am*,	
* B o B o B o B o B	(Demotion)
How fearful to the desert wide!	
o B o ~B o B o B	(Promotion)
That bleat, how tender! of the dam	
o B o B o ~B o B	(Promotion)
Calling a straggler to her side.	
B " B o ~B o B	(Inversion+promotion)

Shout, cuckoo!—let the vernal soul
 *   B o   B o B o B (Demotion)
Go with thee to the frozen zone;
B o   B “   B o   B (Inversion + post. comp.)
Toll from thy loftiest perch, lone bell-bird, toll (Contraction of “loftiest”)
B   “   B o   B   *   B   o   B (Inversion + demotion)
At the still hour to Mercy dear,
“   ^   o   B o   B (Implied offbeat)
Mercy from her twilight throne
B o ~B   o   B o   B
Listening to nun’s faint throb of holy fear, (Contraction of “listening”)
B   “   B   *   B   o B o B (Inversion + demotion)
To sailor’s prayer breathed from a darkening sea (Contraction of “darkening”)
o B o   ^   “   B o   B (Implied offbeat)
Or widow’s cottage-lullaby.
o B o   B o B o B

I’ve noted the contraction of “invisible” in the second line but not that of “Spirit,” whose extra syllable is best understood as a kind of grace note absorbed (as is common in accentual-syllabic verse) by the pause. The stanzaic punctuation, that is, the regular punctuation marking structural pauses in the stanza, follows the pattern I have already described. Full stops in lines 20 and 24 help contour the two quatrains of the first hemistanza. The exclamation point at the end of line 22 is strictly rhetorical and is intended to work in tandem with the internal exclamation point in line 23, both of which fall after parallel adverbial phrases (“How fearful” and “how tender!”). The placement of rhetorical punctuation at two different syntactical points produces a kind of syncopation in pause. The only strong stop in the second hemistanza occurs at line 26, where it sets off the imperative to the cuckoo. This pause releases the two imperatives that frame line 27, the first emphasized by initial inversion and the second by final stress position. The descriptive drive put in motion by the imperatives is suddenly diverted, through the marvelously tranquil implied offbeat at the start of line 28, *from* the cuckoo shouting on its lofty perch *to* the incorporeal throne of mercy in the bridge. Stanza II has one of four bridges that are not end-stopped. Here the enjambment furnishes a transition *from* the personification of mercy passively sitting on her throne *to* mercy actively listening, against the rocking shout of the cuckoo, to the nun's devotions, the sailor's prayer and the widow's lullaby.

This is surely one of the strangest, and most daring, images in all English poetry. With a kind of double imagistic movement the cuckoo's vernal cry, which in "The Solitary Reaper" we hear "Breaking the silence of the seas/Among the farthest Hebrides," carries spring to the frozen north and simultaneously tolls to mercy's throne at the exact moment that hazy abstraction is herself attending to the whispered devotions of the small and insignificant of the world as they face fear, impending storm and uncertain future. A stanza that opens with the sound of streams and fountains, lion and sheep, shifts unexpectedly at line 25 to the cuckoo with a powerful demotion and dash-marked pause to accent the shift. The progress of the cuckoo's song, if we can call a shout a song, surges through the inversions in lines 26 (with postponed compensation) and 27 until it blends into the prayers of the triplet as an unheard voice in the still night. Wordsworth creates an aural layering of exceptional complexity here. The raucus cry of the bird breaks the calm night hour without seeming to break its spell and then vanishes without seeming to vanish into faint human words.

In stanza XI, Wordsworth has the "voice of regal city" float out to the countryside and blend with the nightingale's trill in a moonlit vale that might tempt an angel to descend. His purpose there was simply to create a vast sonic landscape that would justify his hope for a notational system to record the full emotional range of sound. But why does he specifically command the cuckoo to toll, bell-like, *to* mercy in stanza II? It might be tempting to say that the lone bell-bird provides a contrast to the convict's death knell in X.158 by tolling to mercy before another bell tolls to strict law, but this still does not explain the explicit linkage between cuckoo and mercy in the context of human prayer. Wordsworth certainly loved the song in itself, and many years before "On the Power of Sound" depicted it with very similar imagery. In line 6 of "To the Cuckoo" (composed 1802) the poet hears its "restless shout" while lying on the grass, and in lines 2–3 of "Yes! full surely 'twas the Echo" (composed 1806) he hears the echo "Solitary, clear, profound,/Answering to Thee, shouting Cuckoo!"[63] In neither case does he relate the cuckoo's song to mercy.[64] He does, however, relate it to those visionary moments when another reality, numinous and undefinable, transforms this world. The third stanza of "To the Cuckoo," as revised for the 1827 edition of his collected poems, and thus just a year before composition of the ode,[65] gives us a cuckoo very different from the one in the original version. Here are lines 9–16 with the original 1802 version of stanza three printed next to the 1827 revision for comparison:

1827 Revision	1802 Version
Though babbling only, to the Vale,	To me, no Babbler with a tale
Of sunshine and of flowers	Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale	Thou tellest, Cuckoo! in the vale
Of visionary hours.	Of visionary hours.

Thrice welcome, Darling of the Spring!
Even yet thou art to me
No Bird: but an invisible Thing,
A voice, a mystery. (9–16)

The revisions of 1827 shift the tale from one of sunshine and flowers to one of visionary hours and, at the same time, point a contrast between the cuckoo's inane babble and the poet's privileged access to a deeper experience. The cuckoo that was "no Babbler" in 1802 is by 1827 (and all subsequent editions) *only* a babbler to the vale. The cuckoo that told of "visionary hours" in 1802 can by 1827 only bring or evoke them from nature as part of nature. The "invisible Thing," rarified to pure voice, helps the poet "beget/That golden time again" (lines 27–28) when, as a youth, he would rove over field and wood in pursuit of the ever elusive bird who made the ubiquitous voice, "a hope, a love;/Still long'd for, never seen" (23–24). But that voice, which he originally called a "restless shout" (line 6) and by 1827 a "twofold shout" to eliminate any false humanization of the bird, means more than the mere overcoming of time through some quasi-Proustian memory.[66] The "hours" of "visionary hours" is a synechdoche for time and not merely for historical boyhood hours. It is a time more like the midwinter spring in the first movement of "Little Gidding," which, Eliot says, "is in the spring time/But not in time's covenant." The visionary hours are not in time's covenant. In the last two stanzas, the emphasis is on the present experience as a fresh instance that parallels but does not simply resume the past experience. The poet can hear the song "yet" (25), he begets the golden time "again" (28), the earth appears a fairy place "again" (30). The visionary experience has not been dispossessed of the present and relocated to the past from which it can only be recovered in memory by the cuckoo. This is fully consonant with the 1806 poem, which we shall examine next, where there is no question of reproducing a fact of childhood. It is also consonant with "The Cuckoo at Laverna," a superb blank verse poem of 183B in which the sudden cry of the cuckoo has the power to summon up the true meaning of St. Francis.[67] The "vagrant Voice" (27) not only stimulates a train of thought on St. Francis but makes Wordsworth, and perhaps even other monks who hear it, think of the prophet Isaiah—makes them even name the bird a prophet before it carries its glad spring tidings across the mountains toward the Pole (82–102).[68]

The cuckoo that only babbles to the vale, indifferent nature babbling to indifferent nature, conveys a numinous vision to the poet who even now, in this present moment as once in the past, can see into the inner life of its shout. This is one part of the key to understanding why Wordsworth uses the cuckoo the way he does in the ode. The other part is in the poem of 1806.

In that poem the shouting cuckoo hears its own echo, which is like her ordinary cry yet very different. The image immediately suggests a parallel with humanity, unthinking creatures who also hear two different voices:

> Hears not also mortal Life?
> Hear not we, unthinking Creatures!
> Slaves of Folly, Love, or Strife,
> Voices of two different Natures?
>
> Have not We too?—yes, we have
> Answers, and we know not whence;
> Echoes from beyond the grave,
> Recognized intelligence?
>
> Such within ourselves we hear
> Oft-times, ours though sent from far;
> Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
> For of God, of God they are! (13–24)

Wordsworth tinkered with punctuation and capitalization in later years, most importantly changing the question mark after "intelligence" to an exclamation mark, thereby guaranteeing that the echoes from the grave are an intelligence and not an ambiguity, but only made substantial modifications to the last stanza, which by 1836 read as follows:

> Such rebounds our inward ear
> Catches sometimes from afar—
> Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
> For of God,—of God they are![69]

In a moment we'll see the bearing of these late changes. First, we must settle the question of what the "Voices of two different Natures" really mean. The cuckoo hears two voices: her ordinary cry *and* its subtly transformed echo. Extending the comparison to mortal life, we hear our own ordinarily corrupt voice *and* its echo, as recognized intelligence, from beyond the grave. The echo also conveys some sort of answer, though we don't know its origin until Wordsworth tells us at the end of the poem. The revisions of the last stanza force an interpretive narrowing of the image: the echo is strictly internal, to be caught rather unsurely by an inward spiritual ear and then only sometimes. The verb "Catches," which is an inspired 1827 improvement over the lame original, suggests our uncertain or even precarious hold on the echo. The mundane voice we employ for every corrupt end—summarized by folly, love and strife—is really just an imperfect reflection of a divine voice we don't grasp very often and, even when we do, not very securely. The intelligence is in that rare other voice, not the one unthinking creatures commonly use to fabricate reality.

When we combine these two images of the cuckoo from the revised 1802 and 1806 lyrics, we have the bird in stanza II. The cuckoo's shout is numinous, it opens up a vast insubstantial perspective on another reality quite different from the one before us that looks so solid, permanent and intractable. By using the word “toll” twice in line 27, Wordsworth ritualizes the visionary moment at a specific place and time, midnight perhaps, when fear looms up gigantically in the shadows. The nun, sailor and widow all use mundane language in their search for peace. Mercy comes, as recognized intelligence, from the hand of God beyond the grave—an echo to their voices. It is, however, not clear and unequivocal. Mercy sits on a “twilight throne,” which at first looks as though it were an error for “twilit throne.” But it isn’t a throne lit by twilight, it *is* twilight: vague, undefined and ambiguous. The half-light defeats our expectation of a simple, clearly-defined spiritual comfort. Mercy may listen, but she doesn’t act. There is no promised action that will free the galley slave and the prisoner of the mine (IV), secure religious passions from the cozenage of sense (VI), release the idiot from the agony of sudden reason (VII) or avert the convict’s summons and the vain distress gun (X). Oppression, injustice, intolerance, mental torment, execution and accidental death are constant; mercy is inconstant. She only seems to listen. All we can hope to do is occasionally catch in our mortal twilight the understanding that mercy, by its existence beyond this life, is also a guarantee that we live in a providential universe where Hamlet may fall but the sparrow will live, a universe where there’s providence in the fall of a Halmlet. Mercy listening is God listening. Whether, or when, she will act is not an answer we are ever going to get this side of the grave.

4.

In recent years criticism has developed a strong distaste for literary evaluation. The attempt to rank works qualitatively is treated by theory as an outerance, an attempt to externalize or objectify hopelessly subjective criteria that are themselves a collection of largely unrecognized social and sexual forces. Valuation is only another phrase regime. Postmodernist-textualist metaphysics reduces all literary works, at whatever level of "seriousness," to an endless stream of text characterized at all points by the same rhetorical strategies of evasion. But in the case of "On the Power of Sound," the issue of evaluation must be faced squarely and honestly.

Here is a work which Wordsworth rated near the top of his approximately 400,000-word poetic *oeuvre*,[70] on an aesthetic footing with the Intimations Ode. It is a masterpiece of formal construction that perfectly meshes a wide variety of traditional materials and myths into a nearly seamless unity. Its rhythmic drive and subtlety are equal to his best stanzaic poems of the great period between 1797 and 1807. Indeed, the metrical art alone goes a long way to support Wordsworth's estimation of the ode. The language, though occasionally stiff or even formulaic in places, frequently rises to the kind of daring splendor that the Greeks called *thauma*, a "wonder," one of the strongest words of commendation in Greek. Taken as a whole, the ode achieves the consummate balance that Polykleitos of Argos emphasized in the first sentence of the Canon: "Perfection comes about little by little through many numbers."[71] Polykleitos' aim was to establish a new set of criteria for sculptural art based on unshakable principles of *a priori* mathematical reasoning—principles that found their application in measurement. His Doryphoros, a sculpture "whose impact on Western art is quite incalculable,"[72] epitomizes the aesthetic power of Measure (or *to meson*) just as Wordsworth's ode epitomizes the aesthetic power of temporal *rhythmos* and *symmetria*.

And this, of course, is precisely the problem. Romantic art is not supposed to exhibit calculation, measure, symmetry and composition. All that has been exiled to the Augustans. It is supposed to be an art of passion under the guiding hand, and only the guiding hand, of a sovereign imagination. Even among those critics who exhibit some sympathy for Wordsworth's later career, the ode is almost never listed among the handful of poems that are patronizingly recommended to readers. Typically they will commend lyrics with some vibrancy of feeling. John Purkis, for example, responds to the question "Is the late poetry so bad?" with a slight anthology that includes "Compos'd Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour," "Extemporaneous Effusions upon the Death of James Hogg," *The River Duddon* (particularly sonnet xxxiv) and "Processions."[73] These are all fine poems, especially the Duddon sonnet cycle, but none has the emotional variety, formal perfection, metrical sophistication or breadth of conception we find in the ode. They, like all such lists of good late poetry, are always presented in an ambiguous light that suggests a certain insecure quality: not great, but the best we can find. A recent critic even went so far as to call "The unremitting voice of nightly streams," a 17-line verse paragraph that Dove Cottage Manuscript 89 shows to have a close chronological and verbal relationship with the ode, "arguably the most important and possibly the most beautiful of Wordsworth's lyrics written in the final twenty-five years of his life."[74] This estimation can only stand if the poem rises up from a fairly level plain of mediocrity. Perhaps the most sympathetic treatment ever given the ode came from John Jones. He identified the dominant theme of the later poetry as convention: a convention in style that tries to approach God's artistic manner through the heraldry of nature and the imitation of action determined by accustomed forms, a style that in trying to explain the How of Things tends increasingly toward ceremony.[75] Jones, virtually alone, finds the late convention a positive development and the ode "The finest achievement in this kind . . . , for all the materials of his late poetry are here blended with supreme felicity."[76] But a defense resting on convention and ceremony is very dangerous. Postromantic readers may briefly pause on ceremony and summon up the late poetry of Yeats, saturated with a unique rhetorical ceremony as no other in modern times. Convention, however, is the killing touch. For those who want intensity of feeling and judge not only Wordsworth but lyric poetry in general by that criterion, convention—let alone formal perfection—is an aridity from which nothing can bloom. Out of that soil, they will always insist, only desiccated verse can grow.[77]

One would not, of course, want to claim that intense emotion is unimportant. But arguments that elevate intensity of emotion to a necessary criterion make a category mistake. Poems don't express emotions, they express formal aesthetic structures that evoke secondary responses of various kinds in poetic time. Those responses cover a wide spectrum from intense emotion to sheer, Nabokovian delight in play. Poems expand in time and only exist therefore by oral or mental recitation; their formal structures can only evolve temporally. If you try to grasp a poem without reciting it, you only grasp a summary abstraction: the ghost of an image, an apparition of feeling, a gleam of some rhythmic gesture. Nothing you abstract from the poem as a static text is the poem, though it may help the act of reading. The reading, however it may be performed—linear reading through a complete poem, repeated reading of select passage as part of a complete reading, reading in stages (for a long narrative poem), skim reading of well-known poems—is the only act that actualizes the formal structure. Sometimes critics will say, "I know that poem. It's very familiar." This means that the abstract model of the poem in memory is well stocked with textual artifacts. The critic could pull them out at need for display. The feeling of familiarity that we all have after years of reading or studying a poem is the collective memory of reading experiences, not the experiences themselves.

An excessive preoccupation with emotional intensity can blind us to a poem's formal structures, which are, after all, the only means the poet has to elicit responses from the reader. If the aesthetic forms are all stripped from a poem, we face nothing but plain text. The reverse, unfortunately, is also true. If we are ignorant of aesthetic forms and their historical development, we may hear a poem as little more than plain text and demand, in compensation for our unrecognized ignorance, that it somehow exhibit intense emotion. Absent that emotion, the poem is judged desiccated. This has been fatal to Wordsworth's later poetry which, despite its enormous bulk, varies in quality about as wildly as that of the great period. It has led more precisely to a devaluation of the stanzaic and metrical art in "On the Power of Sound." Not one critic in the English speaking world has correctly explained its (1) stanza structure, (2) technique of stanzaic linkage or (3) metrical art, to say nothing of its tone and imagery. Yet Wordsworth's assessment of his achievement is depreciated and the ode ignored or damned with the faint praise of "convention."[78]

We can answer the critics of emotional desiccation in three more general ways: one psychological, one poetical and one philosophical.

1. Poetry, as Johan Huizinga pointed out long ago in his little-read masterpiece *Homo Ludens*, is a function of play: it proceeds within the intangible playground of the mind, within a dimensionless space which the mind constructs for the *ludus*.[79] Poetry like play casts a spell over us, it enchants and captivates us with order. Play is in fact order of a very special kind—rhythm and harmony. The technical means for compassing rhythm and harmony are in the broadest sense aesthetic forms. These can range widely, with no pretense to completeness, from structural forms (meter, rhyme, stanza, narrative) to linguistic forms (imagery, rhetoric, symbolism). Excessive indulgence in textual metanarratives and metaphysics destroys sensitivity to play, to appreciation of the technical means by which the enchantment is achieved. You cannot read the most technically sophisticated and arguably the most powerful of all western lyric poets, Pindar, without sensitivity to the play of forms. That, in turn, requires an engagement with the dactylo-epitrite meter he so often uses. Only when one has worked one's way through its

intricacies is it possible, as M. L. West illustrates from the Fourth Pythian (70–77), to apprehend *with the ear* and not merely the eye "Pindar's ability to unroll long-breathed sentences over the colon- and period- boundaries to majestic effect. . . ."[80] Horace, who paid Pindar the greatest of all poetic compliments,[81] is a poet almost devoid of passion. Paul Shorey said bluntly of his style, "There is no intensity of feeling."[82] Horace's vitality comes from his play with rhetoric, his metrical craftsmanship in modifying Greek lyric rhythms to the Latin language, his mastery of stanzaic architecture and his inevitability of phrasing. The Horatian phrases on the human situation and its pathos replace all others once we learn them; they have virtually defined us the past two thousand years. But no one, unless perhaps Robert Graves, has dared call him desiccated the past two thousand years! One could make the same case with another poet outside the English tradition: Hölderlin. Knowledge of his Alcaic and Asclepiadic stanza forms is essential for a full response to the poet whom George Steiner ranks along with Rilke and Celan as the most original creators in German verse. Wordsworth stands with these makers in the demands he places on us, especially in the late poetry, to follow the sheer delight of a *paidia* with form. The parallel with Horace is particularly apt, since Wordsworth has an equal skill in capturing experience—sometimes very strange experience like "To the Cukcoo"— with an inevitability of phrasing, an irreducible spontaneity of rhythm, that abide in memory.

2. The poet aims at experience not emotion. Rilke made this point decisively in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, where the 28-year-old Malte, meditating on his shallow accomplishments as art critic and poet, realizes how little value verses have when written young on a slim accumulation of experience:

> Ach, aber mit Versen ist so wenig getan, wehnn man sie früh schreibt.
>
> Man sollte warten damit und Sinn and Süßigkeit sammeln ein ganzes

> Leben lang und ein langes womöglich, und dann, ganz zum Schluß,
> vielleicht könnte man dann zehn Zeilen schreiben, die gut sind.
> Denn Verse sind nicht, wie die Leute meinen, Gefühle (die hat man
> früh genug), — es sind Erfahrungen.[83]

The reason so many poets burn themselves out early in their twenties or early thirties, Coleridge being a notable example, is their failure to understand the distinction between feelings (*Gefühle*) and experiences (*Erfahrungen*). Failing to understand what Rilke early grasped, they attempt to make feeling carry each poem and quickly lose the capacity to pump it up to the requisite pitch as they age. Wordsworth is in fact one of the very few English poets who continued to explore the full range of life and consolidate his experiences into poems virtually to his death. The highly disparaged and seldom read *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, for example, present his defense of the Anglican Church in a sonnet narrative that often sinks to mere chronicle but often rises to magnificence, as in the memorial (II.xxvi) to "saintly Fisher and unbending More"

> unsoftened, undismayed
> By aught that mingled with the tragic scene
> Of pity or fear; and More's gay genius played
> With the inoffensive sword of native wit,
> Than the bare axe more luminous and keen. (PW 3.374)

A critical regime that blacks out the late poetry the way Kipling used to black out great swatches of his first drafts with a brush and India ink pot will never see beyond the supposed absence of *Gefühl* to the *Erfahrung* of Wordsworth's deeply considered generosity, which shows exceptional fairness to Nonconformits and unusual respect for Catholic theology, and will miss in consequence such rare moments of hushed beauty as his hymn (III.xliii) to the architect of Kings College Chapel “who fashioned for the sense”

These lofty pillars, spread that branching roof
Self-poised, and scooped into ten thousand cells,
Where light and shade repose, where music dwells
Lingering—and wandering on as loth to die;
Like thoughts who very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality. (*PW.* 3.405)

3. How do we gain access to a work of art? We might be tempted to answer that we perceive it with ours senses as an *aistheton*, an object of sensation, that emerges from some kind of form imparted to material, whether stone, metal, wood, pigment, tones or words. Clearly we have to perceive a work to experience it. But this is precisely the temptation that Heidegger rejected in “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” (1935–1936) because (a) it rests on the old Western dichotomy of matter and form, which are incapable of explaining the work of art as a thing, and, more seriously, (b) because any attempt to grasp the most immediate reality of a work in some material substructure (“dingliche Unterbau”) misrepresents the relationship of work to thing and requires us to treat the work of art as an instrumental means to accomplish some artistic experience through an aesthetic superstructure: “Sobald wir es am Werk auf solches absehen, haben wir unversehens das Werk als ein Zeug genommen, dem wir außerdem noch einen Oberbau zubilligen, der das Künstlerische enthalten soll. *Aber das Werk ist kein Zeug, das außerdem noch mit einem ästhetischen Wert ausgestattet ist, der daran haftet* [emphasis added].”[84] It is the inveterate failure of Western aesthetics to look not at the work of art itself but half at a simple thing and half at a tool to effect an artistic response. As a result, we fail to see

those characteristics in the work of art that pertain only to the work and those that pertain only to the thing. Throughout the first part of the essay, subtitled “Das Ding und das Werk,”[85] Heidegger wants to correct this confusion by forcing us to recognize that, while the work of art certainly has a material component (“das Dinghaften am Werk”), this material component must be understood by way of the work’s own intrinsic features (“aus dem Werkhaften gedacht sein”), not the reverse. The proper way to determine the material actuality of a work proceeds not from the thing to the work but from the work to the thing. This has a very simple aesthetic consequence: you must first let the work of art unfold itself to you, in all its singularity and truth, before you can understand any of the means by which the experience has been achieved, before you can approach its thing-based actuality and—need one add—engage in qualitative valuation. We gain access to any work of art, thus, by removing from it all relationships to anything other than itself in order to let it rest alone for and in itself. And this, Heidegger says, is the artist’s most particular intention: “Das Werk soll durch ihn zu seinem reinen Insichselbststehen entlassen sein. Gerade in der großen Kunst, und vor hir allein ist hier die Rede, bleibt der Künstler gegenüber dem Werk etwas Gleichgültiges, fast wie ein im Schaffen sich selbst vernichtender Durchgang für den Hervorgang des Werkes.”[86] It is, however, very difficult in practice to remove all extraneous relations from a work of art so it can stand alone in its own pure selfsubsistence (“seinem reinen Insichselbststehen”). Each of us brings a vast invisible superstructure of prejudices, cultural assumptions, critical blindnesses and defective knowledge to every work of art. The best we can perhaps do is treat this as a hermeneutic ideal, and approach each poem as openly and receptively as possible. In Wordsworth’s case, the very notion of “a great decade” helped give birth to the myth of a forty-year poetical afterlife distinguished by robot-like rhythms and a letters-to-the-editor insipidity only occasionally lit by feeble gleams of the old genius.

Many readers, under the influence of the myth, reject the later poetry or only half read it. Half reading is a virtual denial of the poem's *Insichselbststehen*, its selfsubsistence. Our first job as readers is rather to let each poem speak to us fully on its own terms without *any* preconceptions. At the minimum, that requires knowledge of how to read a poem as a piece of verbal craftsmanship. There is no way any poem will come alive in its own selfsubsistence without some basic knowledge of poetic rhythm and structure. That knowledge is not abstruse; it's easily found in the poetic traditions of a given language. Absent the knowledge, we have only an illusion of accessing a poem. Much of what passes for literary criticism, especially since the rise of textual metaphysics, is an attempt to apply very sophisticated analytic techniques to texts that are nothing more than semantic paraphrases of poems. The paraphrase is taken to "contain" all of the essential aesthetic superstructure of the poem, while the material substructure is cast aside, consciously or unconsciously, as excrescence. Such criticism presents a strange perversion of the work conceived—wrongly according to Heidegger—as a kind of tool possessing a material substructure and an aesthetic superstructure. Textual metaphysics, along with many attempts to explain meaning or discover aporias, require such a crude division because, ironically, "Il n'y pas de hors-texte." It is impossible to extract a paraphrase from rhyme, stanza structure, rhythm or verbal music. We only perceive their most intimate actuality by moving as Heidegger recommends from the work, fully experienced without reference to anything outside itself, to the thing. The irreducibility of the aural and structural aspects of a poem make them as nonexistent, therefore, as a referential "outside text" in the unbearable lightness of deconstructionist criticism.[87] The verbal artifact with centuries, sometimes millennia, of tradition behind it is abstracted to a text outside which we can grasp nothing and within which we can only play with semantic, and fluidly paradoxical, meanings. Under such treatment the poem effectively ceases to exist; it serves only as a pretext for another kind of discourse. One might almost say, with a certain malicious *jouissance*, “Il n’y pas de pre-texte!” Even when passages of a poem are cited, the citations themselves usually only serve to support some aspect of the metaphrase that is the real object of scrutiny.

Table 1

	Line 1	**Line 2**	**Line 3**	**Line 4**	**Line 5**	**Line 6**	**Line B**	**Line 8**
	o3Bo$_{a}$	**o5B**$_{b}$	**o5Bo**$_{a}$	**o5B**$_{b}$	**o5B**$_{c}$	**o4B**$_{d}$	**o4B**$_{c}$	**o4B**$_{d}$
1			BooBo[!]**B**	[;]	BooB	**B**^{4}	**5**B, **B**^{4}	**B**^{4} [;]
2		**5**B, ooBB^{B}	BooB	[.]	**5**B	**B**^{4}	**B**^{6}	BooBo**B** [.]
3	**B**^{4}			**5**B, **B**^{4},**5**^{B} [—]	BooBo[!]**B**		**B**^{6}	[.]
4	BooB	**5**^{3}		OoBB^{B} [.]	ooBB, **5**^{5}			[.]
5		BooBo[,]**B**	**5**B	BooB, **B**^{8} ENJ	BooB		**5**B, **B**^{6}	**5**^{5} [!]
6		BooB		[,]	**B**^{4}		**B**^{2}	[;]
B	**B**^{4}		**B**^{8}	OoBB^{5} [,]	**B**^{4}	**B**^{4}	**B**^{6}	ENJ
8		**B**^{6}		OoBB [,]		**B**^{6}	**5**^{5}	BooB [.]
9		**B**^{6}	**B**^{2}	**B**^{8} [,]	o[.]oBB^{5}	BooB	BooB	[.]
10		BooBo**B**	**B**^{8}	OoBB [,]	BooBo**B**		**B**^{4}	**5**B, **5**^{B} [.]
11		BooBo**B**	ooB	BooB ENJ	BooBo**B**	**5**^{3}, o[,]oBB^{5}	**B**^{6}	**B**^{4} [.]
12		BBoo^{6}		**B**^{6} [.]				[;]
13	**5**B			OoBB$^{5 \& 8}$ [!]	**B**^{6}		**5**B, **5**^{5}	ENJ
14				**5**^{5} [;]		BooB		[.]

Table 2

	Line 9	**Line 10**	**Line11**	**Line 12**	**Line 13**	**Line 14**	**Line 15**	**Line 16**
	o4B$_{e}$	**o4B**$_{f}$	**o5B**$_{e}$	**o4B**$_{g}$	**4B**$_{f}$	**o5B**$_{g}$	**o5B**$_{h}$	**o4B**$_{h}$
1	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$		(o4B)	(o5B) $\mathbf{B}^{6}$	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$ [;]	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$, $\mathbf{5}^{9}$	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$	ooBB^{3}
2	**5**[,]B	BoBooBoB	BooB, $\mathbf{5}^{B}$	OoBB	$\mathbf{B}^{3}$ ENJ	BooB, $\mathbf{5}^{5}$	BBoo^{5}	
3	B[,]ooBo[,]**B**	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$	$\mathbf{B}^{2}$, $\mathbf{5}^{5}$	$\mathbf{B}^{4}$	ENJ	BooB, $\mathbf{B}^{8}$	ooBB^{B}	$\mathbf{B}^{4}$, $\mathbf{5}^{B}$
4				$\mathbf{B}^{2}$	[:]	$\mathbf{B}^{8}$	BooBo**B, 5**^{9}	
5	B[,]ooB	$\mathbf{B}^{4}$	BooB		ENJ		BooB, $\mathbf{B}^{8}$	BooB
6	$\mathbf{5}^{3}$, $\mathbf{B}^{6}$		B[,]ooB, $\mathbf{5}^{9}$	(4B) ENJ	oBoBoBoB [;]		**5**B	
B	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$	4B	**5** [,]B, BBoo^{4}	BooBo**B**	[;]	**5**B, $\mathbf{B}^{8}$	ooBB	
8	**5**[,]B, $\mathbf{B}^{4}$	**5**[,]B,ooBB^{3},$\mathbf{5}^{B}$	**5**B, $\mathbf{B}^{4}$	o5Bo	[:]	BooB, $\mathbf{5}^{5}$		
9	**5**B, $\mathbf{B}^{4}$	$\mathbf{5}^{3}$, $\mathbf{B}^{6}$	$\mathbf{5}^{3}$, $\mathbf{B}^{6}$		[;]		$\mathbf{5}^{9}$ (or o^{9})	
10		BooBo**B**	$\mathbf{B}^{4}$	ooBB^{5}	[;]	**B**	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$	
11	(o5B)	(o5B)	BooBo**B**	(o5B)	ENJ		BooB	
12			$\mathbf{B}^{4}$		[,]		BooB, $\mathbf{B}^{8}$	**5**B
13	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$	$\mathbf{B}^{4}$	$\mathbf{5}^{3}$		[,]			
14	o[!]oBB^{3}	$\mathbf{B}^{6}$	$\mathbf{5}^{5}$	OoBB	[,]		$\mathbf{B}^{4}$	(o5B) $\mathbf{B}^{2}$

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[1] I borrowed “the Proustian” equation from Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1931) 1.

[2] Judith W. Page, “Wordsworth and the Psychology of Meter,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 21 (1985) 275–294; Susan W. Wolfson, “Romanticism and the Measures of Meter,” in Manners of Reading: Essays in Honor of Thomas R. Edwards, ed. Adam Potkay and Robert Maccubbin, *Eighteenth Century Life* 16 (1992) 221–246; David Perkins, “Wordsworth, Hunt, and Romantic Understanding of Meter,” *JEGP* 93 (1994) 1–17 and Brennan O’Donnell, *The Passion of Meter: A Study of Wordsworth’s Metrical Art* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1995) 21–47. O’Donnell’s book is the first attempt at a general survey of Wordsworth’s metrical art, and in many ways a good one despite certain gaps in treatment. He devotes his longest chapter (115–78) to a study of the stanzaic verse in *Lyrical Ballads* , but provides only brief, scattered observations supported by scansions. No more than four consecutive lines from any single poem are treated in detail. Although many of his observations on the mutual accommodations of meter and diction are quite perceptive, we gain no distinct picture of *how* Wordsworth constructs poems from well-mortised stanzas. It is only in the brief conclusion (238–248) that O’Donnell attempts to mount a sustained critique of “On the Power of Sound,” the only such critique in the whole book, but as I shall show later his analysis is too lapidary, incomplete and general to do anything like full justice to a poem that he calls “magisterial both in statement and design” (238).

[3] Brennan O’Donnell, “Numerous Verse: A Guide to the Stanzas and Metrical Structures of Wordsworth’s Poetry,” *Studies in Philology* 86 (1989): 9.

[4] Fritz Schlawe, *Neudeutsche Metrik*, Sammlung Metzler Band 112 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchlandlung, 1972) 98.

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[5] O’Donnell “Numerous Verse” 102. Not even Pindar, our most adept strophic poet and arguably our greatest lyric poet, ever attempted anything so long in the epinicia. His stanzas, whether monostrophic or triadic, are organized around complex metrical periods that possess less integrative force than rhyme. This naturally limits stanza length. In the long debate over the necessity of rhyme, a debate extending from the attempts of Sidney, Campion and Spenser to write English quantitative meters in the sixteenth century, through Milton’s attack on rhyme as “no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse” in the prefatory remarks about “The Verse” in *Paradise Lost* and down to the virtual death of rhyme this century, it has not been sufficiently appreciated by those who criticize rhyme that classical Greek quantitative meters, even when emphasized by simple musical accompaniment from flute and lyre, have less power to bind the stanza into a perceptual unity than the repeated aural markers of rhyme at line end. For a detailed and balanced discussion of Elizabethan quantitative metrics, see Derek Attridge, *Well-weighted Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Meters* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974).

[6] *Epistles* II.ii. 124 - 25.

[7] See *An Evening Walk, by William Wordsworth,* ed. James Averill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984) 8–18 for a history of textual revisions to the poem extending over a fifty-eight-year period from composition in 1787–1789 to final edition in 1845.

[8] Ernst Häublein, *The Stanza* (London: Methuen, 1978) 116.

[9] O’Donnell “Numerous Verse”12.

[10] *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth,* 2nd ed., ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952–1959) 2:526n (abbreviated *PW* with the appropriate volume number in future citations). Perhaps the most powerful evidence of his

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estimation is the fact the he placed the epigram “Paulo majora canamus” after the title in several manuscripts. This is the same epigram he originally had printed on the verso of a separate title page to introduce the Intimations Ode on its first publication in *Poems in Two Volumes*, although he later dropped it and substituted the now framiliar quotation. For its textual history see *“Poems in Two Volumes,” and Other Poems, 1800–1807, by William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983) 27 and 269.

[11] There exists no major study of the ode, and the very few short notices that mention it are mostly negative. The reasons for this neglect are various, but three stand out prominently. (1) The first is the universal judgment that Wordsworth’s powers declined precipitously after the great decade of 1787–1807. Some critics do extend poetic creativity to 1815, when about two-thirds of his poetry had already been written, but no farther. Little of the later work is therefore read or studied with any firm sympathy. (2) The second is the modern distaste for poetry that employs myth and traditional symbols or ideas in their traditional signification. Homeric myth can be violently displaced to Bloomday in *Ulysses*, or the *Upanishads* stitched into a pastiche of modern references in *The Waste Land*, and we foolishly accept this because we think the writer has proven himself ever so clever by innovative colocation. The myths and symbols cease to have much value except for their structural utility. To take such materials at their traditional value, however, looks aesthetically gauche. But this is precisely what Wordsworth has done in the ode. Virtually the whole poem is a tissue of commonplace citations, images, myths and symbols drawn from western cultural traditions and employed without transformation. As a result, they often seem to modern ears perilously close to clichés. (3) The third is the manifest inability of most teachers and students to read poems rhythmically. Ignorance of the principles underlying

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the English tradition of accentual-syllabic verse is nearly as universal as the belief in Wordsworth's poetic decline. A tin ear leads to a trivial understanding of poetry, flatens form into discourse (or worse, into mere persiflage) and prevents us from even reading the poem at all. One cannot claim the experience of having read a poem unless one has read it with metrical skill.

[12] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) 226.

[13] Peter Brooks, "Aesthetics and Ideology: What Happened to Poetics?," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994) 522.

[14] O'Donnell "Numerous Verse" 99. In his more recent *The Passion of Meter*, O'Donnell has apparently misunderstood the *apparatus criticus* in the De Selincourt edition (2:294). Here is his account of the stanza's genesis: "The lines—beginning "The Heavesn, whose aspect makes our minds as still"—correspond to lines 181–92 of "On the Power of Sound," the fifth to sixteenth lines of stanza 12 in the published poem. Later, Wordsworth added another set of verses rejected from "The Triad" to the head of this group. These lines correspond to lines 177–80, or the first four lines of stanza 12..." (244). Wordsworth did not add "another set of verses rejected from "The Traid" to the head of this group," since the four lines in questions are part of the original passage canceled from the "The Triad." They continue directly from the line "Even winter loves a dirgelike sound," which ends with a semicolon, after the poet had replaced a false start ("With rapturous notes the vernal throng") with "There is a world of spirit."

[15] *PW* 2:525n323.

[16] *PW* 2:522n174–211.

[17] *PW* 2:294.

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[18] Wordsworth argued in the Preface of 1800 that a large portion of any good poem and even the most interesting parts of the best poems—his distinction is not always appreciated—“will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written” (*“Lyrical Ballads,” and Other Poems, 1797–1800, by William Wordsworth*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 748). He went even farther in the Preface of 1802 by asserting “that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition” (749n249–251). He also added an appendix on poetic diction to the 1802 Preface in which he extended his argument against poetic diction by tracing its successively greater distortions of language from ancient poets down to those of his own day: “In process of time metre became a symbol or promise of this unusual language, and whoever took upon him to write in metre, according as he possessed more or less of true poetic genius, introduced less or more of this adulterated phraseology into his compositions, and the true and the false became so inseparably interwoven that the taste of men was gradually perverted; and this language was received as a natural language; and, at length, by the influence of books upon men, did to a certain degree really become so” (762).

[19] The system of notation used here to describe stanza forms is entirely conventional. Lower case letters represent terminal rhymes, and a subscript line following a letter indicates feminine or augmented rhyme. Subscript numbers give the number of metrical beats in the line which, unless otherwise noted, is assumed to be in duple rhythm. Thus, “a_$_4$” indicates a tetrameter or 4-beat line with feminine rhyme. For ease of understanding I use the standard descriptive terminology based on metrical foot analysis, but as I shall make clear in more detail later, I do not analyze meter on a foot basis.

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[20] O’Donnell, *The Passion of Meter* 243 states without citation that “line 13 of each stanza with two exceptions is a catalectic tetrameter. . . .” The only two candidates for variation are I:13 and VI:93. In the first case, “Into the ambush of despair” is a normal trochaic line if we place the stress on the first syllable of “into” and contract “the ambush” to a trochee by Wordsworth’s common practice of eliding “the” before a vowel. “Into” is a fudge word in much accentual-syllabic verse, since it can be either an iamb or a trochee as needed. It is clearly a trochee in VI:92, to which we will turn shortly, but must be an iamb in XIII:193. The structural importance of the trochaic line, the lack of variations found at this position and the ease of reading it as falling meter all suggest it is not a variation from the normal pattern. In the second case, O’Donnell has simply misunderstood Wordsworth’s very subtle rhythmic enjambment. VI:91 occupies the position of an iambic tetrameter, but here it is missing the first offbeat. This gives the line a falling rhythm, and the abrupt enjambment carries the falling rhythm across the line boundary into the next line, forming a kind of syncopated trochaic tetrameter with the simple contraction of “the uplifted” as above:

Soothe it into patience—stay
 B   o B o B o   B
The uplifted arm of Suicide. (VI:92–93)
 o   B o B   o B o B

For the notation used in this scansion, see note 33 below.

[21] Line 12 ends four times with commas and enjambs with the following line 9 times, some of them quite jarring. The high incidence of enjambment is a clear rhythmic signal that the thematic movement continues into the trochaic bridge.

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[22] I shall consider the four instances where line 13 is not end-stopped (stanzas II, III, V and VIII), and the reasons why, in the second section of this paper.

[23] Lee M. Johnson, in *Wordsworth's Metaphysical Verse* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982) 235–36n71, was the first to notice the metrical bisymmetry of the stanza, though he was not quite correct in claiming that each eight-line section "contains precisely thirty-five metrical feet." We find (a) pentameter lines in tetrameter positions (I:12, VIII:12 and XI:9–10, 12), (b) a tetrameter in a pentameter position (I:11), (c) headless lines (VI:12 and VII:10), (d) anapestic substitutions (XI:3 and XIII:4, though a judicious use of elision and contraction can just manage to get the second back into duple verse) and (e) a plethora of initial inversions and implied offbeats. While it's true that these only alter the balance of metrical beats between the two halves in stanzas VIII and XI, the numerous strong variations undermine the utility and meaning of a foot-based analysis. Johnson also notes the striking impression made by "the irregular, presumably rhapsodic, character of line-lengths and literary style." As I shall show, he exaggerates the irregularity in line-length and is simply wrong about the literary style, which, though occasionally "rhapsodic" perhaps, can in no way be considered "irregular."

O'Donnell, *The Passion of Meter* 247 repeats Johnson's claim about the invariant number of metrical beats (although he substitutes "beats" for Johnson's "feet") in each hemistanza, but fails to realize that the eight departures from nominal meter that he lists a few pages earlier (243) refute the strict accuracy of the claim. In a footnote he lists the eight departures (275n9), but one of these (IX:12) is erroneous.

[24] Albert M. Hayes was the first to use the term this way in "Counterpoint in Herbert," *Studies in Philology* 35 (1938): 43–60. Häublein (36–37) has a short discussion on heterometrical stanzas,

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where he distinguishes between formal stanzaic unity achieved by rhyme pattern and line length, but he shows no awareness of the fact that line length can also function to integrate disparate subsections grouped by rhyme.

[25] Lessing attempted to break the false comparison of poetry and art in *Laokoon*. Chapter XVI contains the heart of his argument that the plastic arts employ figures and colors in space, while the poetic arts employ articulate sounds in time. Simonides is the origin of this pernicious dictum. As quoted by Plutarch in *de glor. Ath.* 3, he called painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks. In our post-postmodernist afterlife we might update it by calling theorrhea motionless text and text a theorrhea that flows.

[26] O'Donnell, *The Passion of Meter* 246 drops the brief observation that the rhyme scheme "suggests, but does not quite conform to, sonnet quatrain and couplet divisions," but then fails to provide any explanation for use of the structure other than Wordsworth's preference for the sonnet—and its intense organic unity—during the years when he was drafting "On the Power of Sound" (246–47).

[27] Contrastive conjunctions: "Then" (III:9), "But" (VI:9) and "Yet" (VIII:9); commands: "Shout, cuckoo!" (II:9), "Yon pilgrims see" (IV:9) and "To life, to *life* give back thine ear" (X:9); and rhetorical questions (V:9–11, VII:11–16, XI:9–12, XIV:9–10 and XIV:11–14). The sustained rhetorical question in VII:11–16, filling most of the second half of the stanza, occurs after a two-line enjambment. The enjambment cancels a strictly contrastive structure, but the rhetorical question, capped with the abstractions of VII:14–16, is given even greater emphasis by coiling out unexpectedly from the sharp conclusion of the *contre-reject* in lines 9–10. The result is that we still sense a turn, but one delayed by two tension-enhancing lines. The only other imperatives

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in the poem occur in the first half of stanza XIII, where a long four-line enjambment across the turn yokes the two halves thematically and thus obviates the need for a contrast.

[28] Paul Fussell, Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: Random, 1969) 119–20.

[29] Wordsworth employed this variant sestet (cdcede) over most of his creative life. Here is a short cross section of examples: sonnets I and V from “Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty” Part I (*PW* 3:109 and 111 = sonnets 1 and 5 from “Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty” in *“Poems in Two Volumes,” and Other Poems, 1800–1807* 155 and 158); sonnets XII and XXII from “Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty” Part II (*PW* 3:130 and 134 = *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820, by William Wordsworth,* ed. Carl H. Ketchem (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989) 57 and 55); sonnet XX from “Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837” (*PW* 3:225); sonnets XII and XVII from “The River Duddon” (*PW* 3:251 and 253); and sonnets I.ii, I.iii, I.iv, I.xxix, II.xxiii, II.xxxiii and III.xxiii from “Ecclesiastical Sonnets” (*PW* 3:342–43, 355, 372, 377 and 395).

[30] The fatal aphoristic tendency of pentameter couplets in terminal position is further moderated by meterical counterpoint (h_5h_4) in all but the last stanza of the ode.

[31] John Hollander has suggested (“Wordsworth and the Music of Sound” in Geoffrey Hartman, *New Perspectives on Coleridge and Wordsworth* Selected Papers from the English Institute (New York: Columbia UP, 1972) 70–71) that Wordsworth’s “surprising use of Arion” rather than Amphion derives from Christopher Smart’s “Ode on St. Cecilia’s Day,” which contains an elaborate treatment of the Arion myth. There is nothing surprising, I would argue, in using Amphion as a foil to Arion. Throughout “On the Power of Sound,” Wordsworth dwells on the psychological power of music to heal, comfort or rouse emotions—even its (hoped) potential to

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knit all conflicting thoughts into concord “Ere martyr burns, or patriot bleeds!” (VI:96). Arion is the humanizer of beasts; Amphion is only the founder of a city, although this activity makes him a suitable prologue to Arion. Wordsworth would certainly have been familiar with Horace’s presentation of Amphion as one of the two great mythic civilizers. In the *Ars poetica* (391–396), both Orpheus and Amphion are introduced quasi-allegorically as civilizing forces, the former for halting bloodshed and brutal living (“Silvestris homines . . . caedibus et victu foedo deterruit”) and the latter for founding Thebes (“Thebanae conditor urbis”), reputed to be the oldest city in some mythological accounts. In this ode, however, Wordsworth had no need for a foundation myth. What he did need was a humanization myth that would complement the story of Orpheus as primal musician and conqueror of Hades in stanza VIII. For an account of the allegorized myth of Amphion, see C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry The ‘Ars Poetica’* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1971) 388n394.

[32] The punctuation after “dream” make it clear that the story of Arion is an extended and particularly potent illustration of the power of belief: the narrative is connected syntactically to the previous clause by the colon but distanced from it by the dash. The combination of a strong stop with a dash is one of Wordsworth’s favorite techniques for marking a thematic juncture and then foregrounding the subsequent material. Three very effective examples in this ode are II.25, X.151 and XI.172. Sometimes the stop completely terminates the syntax, as in XI.172, and sometimes it merely indicates a pause of a certain duration, as in II.25 and X.151. The technique is used with effect in the Intimations Ode at line end (6, 49, 113 and 141 with the lineation of *“Poems in Two Volumes,” and Other Poems, 1800–1807* 271–77). Among innumerable examples from his poetry, the “Elegaic Stanzas” contain some of the best in lines 22 (terminal),

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34 (medial), 45 (medial) and 59 (terminal). Only in the case of line 59 does the stop preceding the dash terminate syntax. Indeed, throughout his career Wordsworth showed partiality to the dash, whether alone or in combination with other punctuation, as a device to focus rhetoric or articulate rhythm.

[33] For all metrical analyses, I use the terminology and notation of Derek Attridge's *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, English Language Series Title No. 14 (London: Longman, 1982). This study, despite some very technical material and a certain occasional infelicity of style, stands in the same relation to English metrical studies as M. L. West's unabridged edition of *Greek Metre* (Oxford: Clarendon,1982) stands to Greek metrical studies: if you really want to know how the prosodic system works, how to read poetry rhythmically and how "to save the metrical appearances," it is simply indispensable. Attridge clarifies the assumptions behind his book, gives a précis of his prosodic method and confronts some of his linguistic critics in "Linguishtic Theory and Literary Criticism: *The Rhythms of English Poetry* Revisited" in *Rhythm and Meter*, Phonetics and Phonology vol. 1, ed. Paul Kiparsky and Gilbert Youmans (San Diego: Academic P, 1989) 183–199. For readers unfamiliar with Attridge's system, here is the minimal information needed to follow my discussion of the ode.

The metrical pattern is represented by a sequence of "o" (metrical offbeat), "B" (metrical beat), "(o)" (optional offbeat) and "[o]/[B]" (unrealized offbeat/beat) written beneath the line. The stress contour that realizes the metrical pattern, represented by +s/-s can be written above the line for clarity, but is redundant. Thus, iambic pentameter is o B o B o B o B o B (o) or, in summary form, o5B(o). Three deviation rules permit (1) an unstressed syllable to realize a beat when it occurs between two unstressed syllables or with a line boundary on one side and an

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unstressed syllable on the other (promotion = ~B), (2) a stressed syllable to realize an offbeat when it occurs between two stressed syllables or after a line boundary and before a stressed syllable (demotion = *) an (3) an offbeat to be implied between two stressed syllables due to the phenomenon of stress timing in English (implied offbeat = ^). The third rules gives rise to two very important patterns: stress final pairing, when the implied offbeat occurs after a double offbeat (ooBB or “ ^ in Attridge’s symbology), and stress initial pairing, when the implied offbeat precedings the double offeat (BBoo or ^ “). The variations in order of their increasing disruption to the metrical pattern are (1) promotion, (2) demotion, (3) stress final pairing and (4) stress initial pairing.

[34] *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952) 224.

[35] The most famous practitioner of the rupture of mood, or *Stimmungbruch*, was Heine He would blow a wonderfully opulescent soap bubble of rhetoric or emotion and then, at the end, explode it with reality or with some stark antithesis. Here is an example of the rupture that leaves an acidic taste in the air:

Die Jahre kommen und gehen,
Geschlechter steigen ins Grab,
Doch nimmer vergeht die Liebe,
Die ich im Herzen hab.

Nur einmal noch mőchte ich dich sehen
Und sinken vor dir aufs Knie,
Und sterbend zu dir sprechen:
“Madame, ich liebe Sie!”

[36] Hollander 74 is certainly correct to say that the poem’s fixed stanzaic pattern minimizes the turns and counterturns of rhetoric one would find in an irregular Pindaric, but equally wrong to

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claim that “the structure is both more arbitrary and, nevertheless, more expository than the suggestions of self-generated form in the irregular Pindaric or even in Wordsworthian blank verse.” It should be clear by now that nothing in the structure of the stanza is arbitrary, and a better word to describe much of the poem would be “coercively evocative,” not “expository.”

[37] West 5 defines the period as “the fundamental selfcontained rhythmical unit in metrical composition. It is analogous to the sentence in discourse: the sentence is a segment within which there is syntactical continuity and at the end of which syntactical connection is interrupted, the period in metre is a segment within which there is prosodic continuity and at the end of which prosodic connection is interrupted” The period can be quite large, extending over many lines, and this gives rise to a complexity of internal structure that is extremely difficult to analyze. The Greek strophe was a structure longer than a single verse made up of one or more periods and repeated, sometimes directly and sometimes with intervening forms, to create the poem. For a more recent, and in some ways more sophisticated analysis of the period, see C. M. J. Sicking’s *Griechische Verslehre*. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft: Abt. 2, Teil 4 (München: C. H. Beck, 1993) 22ff and 52. Note: Perhaps I should extend this material with a more fully developed analogy between period of rhyme-defined stanzaic elements.

[38] Schlawe 25–26.

[39] See Yuri Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text,* ed. and trans. D. Barton Johnson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976) 95–102 for a short but highly suggestive discussion of the stanza as a semantic entity with its own rhythmic inertia.

[40] Häublein 100–116.

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[41] These include (1) use of forward-pointing demonstrative pronouns, (2) references to subsequent direct speech, (3) placement of subordinate clauses before their main clauses and—“the most radical method of *a priori* progression” (Häublein 114)—(4) separation of parts of speech by stanza, so that individual stanzaic boundaries dissociate important syntactical and logical elements. In the last method, sentences seem to flow through stanzaic containers almost arbitrarily with little regard for their formal organization. The stanza becomes a mere conveyer without its own proper logical unity or coherence.

[42] R. G. M. Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace “Odes,” Book I* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) xlvi.

[43] See Don H. Bialostosky, *Wordsworth, Dialogics and the Practice of Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 134–151 for an analysis of “The Solitary Reaper” in which very similar imperatives (“Behold her,” “Stop here,” “O listen!”) are interpreted as commands directed at the reader to share the speaker’s appreciation of the song and help explain its meaning. Here also, the speaker’s and the listener’s reactions are selfreflexive. One might almost say that without a listener, the poet could not validate his *remembered* experience. It would simply crumble away into the general detritus of the past.

[44] There was a tradition in the ancient world, which Wordsworth may have known, that the Spartans—lacking a talent for the Muses—would summon foreign musicians to heal sickness, madness or factional disturbances with music. Two historical if shadowy choral poets of the seventh century, Terpander and Thaletas, are both credited with stopping civil strife that had broken out in Sparta. The latter is also reported to have delivered Sparta from a plague that gripped it. For the testimonia see *Greek Lyric Poetry*, ed. D. A. Campbell, vol. 2 (Cambridge:

Harvard UP, 1988) Terpander test. 7 (Spartan resort to iatric music), Terpander test. 9 (restoration of psychological harmony and civic peace), Thaletas test. 4 (restoration of civic peace and stopping of plague) and Thaletas test. 6 (inculcation of unity and social harmony paving the way for Lycourgean reforms).

[45] The only other images of pure natural sound occur in stanza II in the context of an apostrophe to the "invisible Spirit" of the human ear: streams, fountains, roaring lion, bleating dam and shouting cuckoo all *serve* it "with untired powers" as if that were their only purpose *qua* sound. The roar of the lion and the bleat of the dam may have no direct human connection, but the other sounds all fulfill some emotional function.

[46] *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, ed. Eduard Fraenkel , vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962 corr. ed.) 116–18 (ll. 436–55).

[47] This translation is from the Revised Standard Version in *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 668.

[48] The contraction of words like "heavens" and "towering" to monosyllables is a regular feature of accentual-syllabic verse, so regular in fact that it can hardly be called a variation as such. For a full list of words regularly subject to metrical contraction since the sixteen century, see Edward R. Weismiller, "Triple Threats to Duple Rhythm" in *Rhythm and Meter*, ed. Paul Kiparsky and Gilbert Youmans, Phonetics and Phonology, ed. Stephen R. Anderson and Patricia A. Keating, vol 1 (San Diego: Academic P, 1989) 288–89. Aside from contractions, Wordsworth lets a secondary stress realize a beat in "Innumerable" and promotes "is" in line 187. Only the latter is a true variation, and the least disruptive of those common in duple rhythm.

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[49] Rilke’s praise, in both the *Sonnets to Orpheus* and “The Tenth Elegy” from *The Duino Elegies*, is quite unlike Biblical praise. It is directed at the spirit of poetic creation or the Angels. In “The Tenth Elegy,” praise is an attempt to affirm the importance of sorry and suffering in general, to keep the door open to the other side of life: death.

[50] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Later Years, Part I*, 1821–1828, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 545–56.

[51] C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry*. Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1963) 255–56.

[52] Timothy Steele, *Missing Measures. Modern Poetry and the Revolt against Meter* (Fayetteville and London: U of Arkansas P, 1990) 282. In his conclusion (279–194), Steele—who is one of the most accomplished poets now writing in the accentual-syllabic tradition—makes an incisive critique of the fallacious reasoning behind free verse and suggests that “an assessment may now be called for” (292) given the mannered and generally irrational diction it has adopted as an aesthetic signifier to distinguish it from prose.

[53] *“Lyrical Ballads” and Other Poems, 1797–1800 by William Wordsworth*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) Appendix III, 754.

[54] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1962) 51. Coleridge was only unhappy about Wordsworth’s failure to provide a separate and abstract theory that would clearly indicate how meter produced it effects in conjunction with the other elements of poetry.

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[55] Steven J. Willett, “Wordsworth’s Metrical Architectonics: A Study of the ‘Intimations Ode’ (Part I),” *Shizuoka Kenritsudaigaku Tankidaigakubu Kenkyuukiyou* 7 (1993) 45–57. Part II of this study will appeared in March, 1995 and Part III in March, 1996.

[56] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 434–35. Wordsworth employs the common eighteenth century terms “long” and ”short“ for stressed and unstressed syllables respectively.

[57] The literary tetrameter observes stricter restrictions on variation than the pentameter, as Attridge (142) observes, to prevent it falling back into the insistent four-beat verse of the old native English tradition. See also Marina Tarlinskaya, *Englisyh Verse: Theory and History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976) 144 and 151.

[58] The semicolons at the end of III.38 and VII.102 are more like commas. They reflect the greater use of pointing for rhetorical effect in eighteenth and nineteen century-poetry. In both cases, the conjunction “And” in the following line indicates that the syntax continues smoothly across the boundary.

[59] The hyphenation of “love-tale” might suggest that the second syllable is unstressed, but it rhymes with the stressed word “vale” in line 168 and this, along with the preceding double offbeat, points to an approximately equal stress on both elements.

[60] The use of strong stops for rhetorical emphasis is beautifully illustrated in the one completely preserved poem of Sappho (*Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, ed. Edgar Lobel and Denys Page (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) fr. 1). In stanza 6, the climax though not the end of the poem, two continuous stops in lines 21–22 add special force to Aphrodite’s promise that she will make the

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woman who now flees the poet pursue her, a force made all the stronger by the fact that this is the first syntactically contained stanza in the poem. See also *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, Vol I, Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 205.

[61] Milton, “Lycidas” 32–34.

[62] This was the original core of the ode. Some remarks on the changes in revision, particularly the strong isolation of the last line?

[63] *“Poems in Two Volumes,” and Other Poems, 1800–1807, by William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983) 213–15 (n419–20) and 255–56 (n423–24) respectively.

[64] In a sonnet also entitled “To the Cuckoo” (of unknown date but published in 1827), Wordsworth celebrates the cuckoo’s “twin notes inseparably paired” for their power to lighten suffering in a way very reminiscent of the ode:

> The captive ‘mid damp vaults unsunned, unaired,
> Measuring the periods of his lonely doom,
> That cry can reach; and to the sick man’s room
> Sends gladness, by no languid smile declared. (*PW* 3.45:5–8)

But his emphasis in the sonnet is on the cuckoo’s “erratic voice” as harbiner of spring, a voice that may outlast both the eagle and the lion over the ages. He nowhere invests it with any sonic metaphysics.

[65] *“Poems in Two Volumes,” and Other Poems, 1800–1807* 214 *app. crit*. ll. 5–12 and Nonverbal Variants 493.

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[66] Some critics locate the "visonary hours" in childhood and interpret the poet's reaction to the cuckoo as little more than an emotional or memorial echo of the past. The classic case is Geoffrey Hartman. In *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964) 270, he sees the poem as an almost formulaic "renewal of the past in the present" through the influence of an image. His brief mention of the poem occurs within a larger discussion on Wordsworth's use of the after-image which, he claims, "expresses the possibility of the renewal (or at least recurrence) of a certain experience by including that possibility in the very structure of the experience" (269). Unlike Proust, however, Hartman confuses the power to recall with an almost metaphysical recurrence that overcomes time itself since the "past event in not so totally in the past, not so determinate, that it cannot confront the poet in a new way" (269). But this is not how Wordsworth presents his experience. The past doesn't suddenly loom mobilely into the foreground of the present when he hears the cuckoo; rather, the present offers a view into the background of past experiences. Whatever the experience of hearing the "two-fold shout" may have meant to the boy, we only know what it means now—in poetic time—to the mature man. The cuckoo's voice directly recalls other cuckoos heard in youth, it does not evoke youth to release past visionary hours into the present.

David Perkins simply devalues the spiritual depth of the poet's experience. In *Wordworth and the Poetry of Sincerity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1964) 186–87, he maintains that the cuckoo's cry, while it may summon up the "golden time" of childhood with new imaginative energy, represents no spiritual presence behind common appearances: the poet hears little more than a suggestive analogy in the song, which is denied any high seriousness by "the jingling stanzas and tripping verse" (187). They indicate by their lighter tone, he thinks, that

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Wordsworth's response is not communion with an ultimate mystery. One hardly needs to note that stanza structure by itself conveys no set tone. There is nothing inherently jingling in common meter. This is, after all, the same stanza as "A slumber did my spirit seal," the starkest and most desolate of all Wordsworth's lyrics. Perkins has misread the poem's tone (and therefore its meaning) by crudely misreading the formal design.

John Beer is more accurate in *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* (London: Macmillan, 1978) 185 when he argues that the cuckoo "reminds the poet of the 'visionary hours' of his childhood, when it was 'No Bird; but an invisible Thing,/A voice, a mystery. . . .' Listening to the bird does no t simply recall the "golden time" but begets it afresh. In his version an old experience is recreated by a new stimulus, and the former then displaces or engulfs the latter. Wordsworth, however, says nothing about an *old* visionary experience in this poem. The cuckoo, as it babbles "only to the Vale," brings to him "a tale/Of visionary hours." In the next stanza he again uses the present tense to address the bird directly as even yet "an invisible Thing,/A voice, a mystery." The "tale" that the song conveys is not a narrative about the poet's boyhood, when he experienced a certain vision. The tale is the content of the vision educed by the cuckoo's two-fold song, and that content—as the original version of stanza three makes quite a bit more clear—was a transcendent experience that is *not* sharply contrasted with the bird's discourse on sunshine and flowers.

[67] For the historical importance of Wordsworth's discovery, see Edith C. *Batho's The Later Wordsworth* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1933) 296–98. Batho calls him the first modern European to understand St. Francis, and that discovery is poetically triggered by the cuckoo.

[68] *PW* 3:221.

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[69] *"Poems in Two Volumes," and Other Poems, 1800–1807* 256 *app. crit*. ll. 21–23 and Nonverbal Variants 512.

[70] Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words*, ed. John Kerrigan and Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 53.

[71] Philo Mechanicus 4.1 and 49.20. See Andrew Stewart, *Greek Sculpture,* vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 160–63 and 263–66.

[72] Stewart 160.

[73] John Purkis*, A Preface to Wordsworth,* Rev. ed. (London: Longman, 1986) 157.

[74] Jeffry C. Robinson, "The power of Sound; 'The Unremitting Voice of Nightly Streams,'" *The Wordsworth Circle* 23 (1992): 177.

[75] John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964) 186–87.

[76] Jones 187. Jone's comments about the ode are rather vague, though he does single out stanzas IX (Arion) and X (procession of Bacchus and echoing coffin) for particular praise. He nowhere, however, provides any analysis to support his claims.

[77] Thomas McFarland makes one of the harshest cases for poetic decline in *William Wordsworth: Intensity and Achievement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 89–97. Holding a rather crude notion of emotional intensity as the touchstone for poetic worth, he virtually writes off the last four decades of the poet's life: "No great poet equals Wordsworth in the melancholy quantity of desiccated verse nor in the forty-year death-in-poetic-life in which most of that verse was composed" (89). His method of demonstrating desiccation is to set up a straw dog and then smash it with a sonnet. The straw dog is "The Triad" and the sonnet is "Surprized by joy, impatient as the Wind."

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[78] Despite O'Donnell's belief, cited above, that the ode is "magisterial both in statement in design" (*The Passion of Meter* 238), he only partially shows it to be magisterial in design and fails to show it magisterial in statement, in verbal *enargeia*. He spends so much time in the last chapter summarizing content that he is unable to demonstrate the glorious imagery, verbal music and rhythmic drive that rightly led Wordsworth to place it on a par with the Intimations Ode.

[79] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon, 1955) 119.

[80] West 76.

[81] Horace, C.4.2.4-27.

[82] *Horace: Odes and Epodes*, ed. Paul Shorey, Rev. ed. Paul Shorey and Gordon J. Laing (: Chicago: Sanborn, 1910) xvii.

[83] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Bibliothek Suhrkamp Bd. 343 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973) 21.

[84] Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Gesamptausgabe I Abteilung Bd. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977) 24 (pp. 27–28 in the 1960 Reclam edition).

[85] Heidegger 5–25 (10–28 Reclam edition).

[86] Heidegger 26 (29 Reclam edition).

[87] I have borrowed the phrase from Frank G. Verges' witty analysis of deconstructionist follies in "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," *Philosophy* 67 (1992) 386–93.