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New Prosodies in 20th Century American Free Verse*

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1.1. *Imagism on free verse*

Vers libre as a radical programme — yet as only one of the many modes of poetry[1] — was first introduced in the Imagist Credo: "We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms." In justification of this form F. S. Flint thus wrote in 1917: "much poetic emotion is lost in the attempt to thrust it into the strait jacket of regular metre and rhyme, and there is no intrinsic merit in metre."[2] The most important part of this statement lies modestly in the footnote: "Much so-called poetry is merely a more or less clever and successful fitting of this jacket, i.e. the jacket often makes the poem." T. E. Hulme wrote in the same vein already in 1914: "my objection to metre [is] that it enables people to write verse with no poetic inspiration, and whose mind is not stored with new images."[3]

We may see that Imagism attempted to distinguish between metrical verse, the realization of a formal principle, and nonmetrical, yet still: poetic, rhythms. Poets were proving what is for us already a commonplace, viz. that the technique of metre alone could not make poetry, that metrics was not an inherent feature of verse, but only a conventional use to which language might be put.

1.2. *Free verse as organic poetry*

Free verse thus denied the basic importance of metre in poetry. No one rhythm, no consistent metrical scheme was accepted as a basic pattern for any given poem. The Imagists rejected what Coleridge called "shape superinduced" and elevated the opposing conception that had pre-figured avant-garde writing: "form as proceeding". In modern art there must be no formal conception anterior to the work. Accordingly, T. S. Eliot wrote in 1942, in retrospect: free

* I owe a debt of gratitude to Gyula Kodolányi. He has discussed with me practically every point in the paper (and also in the doctoral thesis whose part the present paper is) and considerably improved it.

verse "was an insistence upon the inner unity which is unique to every poem against the outer unity which is typical. The poem comes before the form, in the sense that a form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something."[4] Free verse thus elevated the inner organic unity — as opposed to the typical outer unity of metre — to a position of central importance.

The norm of regular metre, the Imagists claimed, proved to be a potential hindrance for the expression of the poet's personality. Accordingly, in a free verse poem, there was no "fixed metre or rhyme — but a rhythm organic to the image itself . . . and no form but the poem itself. It . . . [was] not forced to take upon itself a fixed shape."[5] Similarly, in the projective verse of the 1950s[6] "form is never more than the extension of content" or "the revelation of content".[7] This kind of poetry refuses metre and "the monotonous rapture of persistent regular stresses and waves of lines breaking rhyme after rhyme".[8] It is built upon what Pound called the absolute rhythm[9] which is in relation to its content ("the emotion or shade of emotion expressed") organic: "a man's rhythms must be interpretative", Pound claimed.[10] Thus, *vers libre* represents the organic principle at its purest. Herbert Read refers to the Imagists as the final completors of the Wordsworthian tradition of the organic theory: "It was with the school which . . . Pound established that the revolution begun by Wordsworth was finally completed."[11] Free verse could thus become the fit medium for organic poetry: a flexible form capable, in the creative process, of the constant changes demanded by the content (or "emotion").

1.2. *Free verse as context-sensitive absolute rhythm vs. metrical verse as context-free language*

Ezra Pound spoke of another characteristic of absolute rhythm: how, within a larger context, the original features of the linguistic units are modified. He thus wrote: " . . . syllables have differing weights and durations —

A. original weights and durations

B. weights and durations that seem naturally imposed on them by the other syllable groups around them."[12]

Pound's statement refers, primarily, to phonological units, but we can generalize this observation: linguistically speaking, absolute rhythm is a context-sensitive language, while rhythm in metrical verse is context-free.

We have adopted the terms 'context-free' and 'context-sensitive' from general linguistics because they best describe the opposition emphasized by Pound and other theorists of organic *vers libre*. Thus, in context-sensitive language (any natural language and, above all, literary language) the semantic, syntactic and phonological features individual words originally possessed in the lexicon of the language become altered when entering a larger linguistic (and

poetic) context, while they remain unaltered in context-free (artificial) languages.

Organic poetry and free verse claim to be context-sensitive language because here "form is the total interactive functioning of content and language, including every contributing element", and "the peculiar rhythms of the parts are in some degree modified in order to discover the rhythm of the whole."[13]

T. S. Eliot claims this rhythmic and semantic allusiveness to be the peculiarity of what he calls the musical poem: "The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association."[14] Thus, on the whole, the context-sensitive poem must be made to insinuate the whole structure of language and the whole history of a nation's literature.

We must naturally accept that in general this context-sensitive musical poem corresponds to all good verse, while our notion of context-free poetry refers to bad verse. Yet if we consider the bulk of late 19th century poetry, we shall understand that context-free poetry has the special meaning of metrical verse in the early years of our century.

Imagist free verse, as is generally assumed, was born as a reaction against the stultified form of late Victorian versification, which bore all the marks of context-free languages. Here the metrical scheme superimposed upon the linguistic structure was a mechanical framework, which ignored the interaction of words in the context, and thus created an artificially regulated context-free language. It became too mechanical in that it lost its connections with ordinary language without yet producing a high artifice in the field of metrics. It was not surprising, then, that the reaction against the late Victorian modes of poetry meant primarily a reaction against the mechanics of versification: metre. According to this line of thought, context-free late Victorian verse minus metre had to give context-sensitive poetry: free verse.

1.4. *'The prose tradition in verse'*

The dissatisfaction with language that gave rise to poetic experiments in the first decades of the century criticized the language of poetry from the ground of everyday language.

The relationship of poetry to ordinary language has ever been a changing one. In ages of poetic invention, everyday speech was subjected to a maximal alteration and poetic language deviated from its accepted norms. Free verse was literally, to use the definition of the Russian formalists, "organized vio-

lence" committed on everyday language. At other times the tendency in poetry was exactly the opposite: its language was again that of common speech. Yet here, too, poetry remained organized violence in the sense that it consciously deviated from the accepted norms of the 'poetical language' which had been constructed by earlier generations. For all that, language in poetry is always more organized than ordinary language, although it can draw on the resources of everyday speech for its own revitalization.[15]

This century has witnessed a growing preoccupation with ordinary language both in linguistics and in poetry. Two of the most important trends in the philosophy of language — the Oxford and the Cambridge schools — were philosophies of ordinary language. This philosophical interest in ordinary language coincided with the poetic interest: "Every revolution in poetry is apt to be a return to common speech", T. S. Eliot wrote.[16] Thus, ordinary language was not only accepted as correct language, but also as the basis of all languages of which poetic language was only an adjunct. As such, ordinary language was considered the paragon of any other use of language.

For the Imagists, too, to revitalize the language of poetry meant not only organic poetry and absolute rhythm, but also to draw on the resources of contemporary language. "As a critical 'movement', the Imagism of 1912 to '14 set out 'to bring poetry up to the level of prose'."[17] — Robert Duncan, in his *H. D. Book*, says: "the main drive of the Imagists [was] away from the specially 'poetic' diction of the nineteenth century toward the syntax and rhythms of common daily speech."[18]

In his 1914 essay 'The Prose Tradition in Verse', Ezra Pound demanded of the poet a basic prose training, because the first step to build poetry out of prose was to bring verse up to the level of prose. "Poetry should be at least as well written as prose," Pound claimed.[19] Yet the poet cannot stop here. The Imagists accepted a departure from speech by a heightened intensity which again led to *vers libre*.[20]

After demanding in the "first manifesto" (the Imagist principles Pound had announced to Aldington and H. D.) to "use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation", Pound in his essay 'The Serious Artist', elaborated the Imagist belief that concentration, the very essence of poetfy, produced a maximum efficiency of expression. "The touchstone of an art is precision. . . . Good writing is perfect control. . . . Good writing is writing that is perfectly controlled, the writer says what he means. He says it with complete clarity and simplicity. He uses the smallest possible number of words."[21] Thus, free verse differs from prose in that its cadence is more marked, more definite and closer knit than that of prose, but more clear-cut than regular verse (for: DICHTEN = CONDENSARE[22]). In metrical verse, words of purely prosodic function — ornamental words filling the metrical pattern and completing the rhyme scheme — prevented that a concentrated diction should develop. And

the simplest test of an author is, Pound claims, words that do not function: "Incompetence will show in the use of too many words."[23] — "There can be no part [in a poem] that is redundant."[24]

It is through this alteration of prose toward concentration that the occasional rhythms of normal speech can be made persistent in the cadences of Imagist free verse. This verse stands somewhere on the borderline between prose and verse. Wallace Rice in a 1913 article in the *Dial* suggested that the Imagists were "aiding in the fixation of a third form of literary expression, prose in form, poetic in content."[25] Yet we cannot accept this too 'pacific' position: free verse is not prose in form, but, rather, it takes on some characteristics from prose and some from verse.

We should say that free verse is *persistently rhythmical without being metrical*. And this is the crux of the question. It resembles prose in its rhythm, approaches verse in its consistency, but unlike verse it does not insist on any single rhythm — it is nonmetrical. Free verse is not metrical but it is certainly rhythmical; it establishes a pattern distinct from that of metre, but one which is still a rhythmic pattern. For 'all metre is rhythm but not all rhythm is metre', goes St. Augustine's witty remark.[26] The new rhythmic pattern in free verse may be, as we shall see, strong prose rhythm, grammatical rhythm, visual rhythm, rhythm of images and tropes, or some combination of these rhythms.

Thus the triple demand for

(i) organic poetry,
(ii) a context-sensitive absolute rhythm, and
(iii) clarity and precision

has led away from metrical regularity and has given rise to such a vogue of nonmetrical rhythms that free verse has become an acknowledged alternative mode of writing during the century.

2. *Polyphonic prose*

Imagism made use of various 'voices' of poetic expression — rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, refrain, itto punctuate the rhythms of free verse, and called it polyphonic prose.

"Polyphonic prose is a kind of free verse, except that it is still freer. . . . According to its inventor [Amy Lowell], polyphonic prose is the most elastic of all poetic forms. It makes full use of all the 'voices' . . . — cadence, rime, alliteration, assonance, return, and so on — hence the name 'polyphonic', which means 'many-voiced'."[27] — The new form Amy Lowell introduced was, thus, an extension of *vers libre*. Fletcher and Lowell were not satisfied with the neutral prose style or the ideogrammatic method: " . . . the ear instinctively demands that this bare skeleton be clothed fittingly with all the beautiful and subtle orchestral qualities of assonance, alliteration, rhyme, and return."[28]

John Lotz in his 'Metric Typology' qualls these orchestral qualities, *additive-variative* factors as opposed to *basic-constitutive* factors, which create metre in themselves.[29] Additive-variative factors have no metric relevancy: as added phonological and grammatical features, they underline and emphasize the linguistic structure and may function independently as well.

Polyphonic prose finds its organizing principle in the additive-variative factors, which, without creating metre, introduce extra regularities into the linguistic structure. The many voices make the text cohere through what Lotz calls *response*, the relation among comparable elements in the poetic structure; the voices make it 'context-sensitive'.

(i) *Assonance, alliteration and rhyme* function as indicators of cohesion on the level of *phonology*.

We have observed that in the opening paragraph of Fletcher's *Clipper Ships* the phonological correspondences are concealed in an interesting manner: their effect is reduced by the *counterpointing syntax*. It is thus prevented from being too 'poetical'.

> Beautiful as a tiered cloud, skysails set and
> shrouds twanging, she emerges from the surges
> that keep running away before day on the low
> Pacific shore. With the roar of the wind blowing
> half a gale after, she heels and lunges and
> buries her bows in the smother, lifting them swiftly.

It is important to note that the corresponding words belong to different grammatical categories each. Thus here phonological likeness is contrasted not only to semantic difference (which is a usual practice), but also to syntactic unlikeness. In the only instance where the rhyming units are both nouns, *shore* and *roar* are separated by the sentence boundary.

We found *concealed* poetic devices within a prose text: assonance, alliteration, rhyme were concealed in the sense that they did not occur, as in poetry composed according to traditional principles, at *syntactically relevant points*. This peculiarity of polyphonic prose again refers to its transitory nature. Where, to our view, rhyming poetry ceases and rhyming prose begins is of course difficult to mark out; yet the occurrence of additive-variative factors within prose texts is a clear sign of the conscious transition between poetry and prose.

(ii) *Parallelism* shows correspondences in the syntactic structure of the responsive lines. In Amy Lowell's *Spring Day*, for example, each elliptical sentence consists of, or at least starts with, a genitive noun phrase.

> Swirls of crowded streets. — Shock and recoil of
> traffic. — The stock-still brick facade of an old
> church . . . Flare of sunshine down side-streets. —
> Eddies of light in the windows of chemists' shops . . .

> whirling of machine belts, blurring of horses and
> motors. — A quick spin and shudder of breaks on an
> electric car, and the jar of a church bell knocking
> against the metal blue of the sky.

Amy Lowell, master of this "many-voiced form" indicates a higher (hypersyntactic) order of construction through refrain (return) in the opening movement of *In a Castle*.

> Over the yawning chimney hangs the fog. Drip — hiss —
> drip — hiss — fall the raindrops on the oaken log
> which burns, and steams, and smokes the ceiling
> beams. Drip — hiss — the rain never stops.
>
> . . .
>
> He enters on a sob of wind, which gutters the candles
> almost to swaling. The fire flutters and drops.
> Drip — hiss — the rain never stops.

Thus, polyphonic prose adopts the devices of partial correspondence (phonological and syntactic parallelism) and free repetition (refrain) to create through rhythmic coherence a more structured text in free verse.

3. *Grammatical rhythm: parallelism as a principle of organization*

As the parallelistic composition of polyphonic prose suggests, free verse may be constructed according to sets of rules provided by the grammatical structure. By elaborating the technique of parallelism, free versifiers could achieve a prosodic norm whose rules correspond to those of the language: grammar itself became the principle of organization. Since it operates with linguistic rules, this technique can be analysed in purely linguistic terms.

It is a technique specific to modern poetry, yet the epithet 'modern' has no chronological implication. In American versification it began with the prosodic revolution of Walt Whitman, which consisted in "the substitution of syntax for meter as the controlling prosodic element",[30] as Harvey Gross rightly observes. The structural units of his prosody, viz. the various syntactic parallelisms, were later identified by Gerald Manley Hopkins as "the Figure of Grammar" to which he assigned verse-making significance (verse = "speech wholly or partially repeating the same figure of sound"). The artifice of poetry, he wrote, "reduces itself to the principle of parallelism".[31] French *vers libre* theorists before World War I, Duhamel and Vildrac, examined how the various figures of grammar — the *constante rythmique*, the *équilibre rythmique*, and the *symétrie rythmique* —, when functioning as prosody, created an organized rhythmic structure.

With many refinements and even alterations on the original Whitmanic technique, Whitman has, in fact, fathered the nonmetrical prosodies of the

century. Ezra Pound made a "pact" with Walt Whitman; the poetry of the Black Mountain College and of San Francisco equally descend prosodically from Whitman. We can observe that collections anthologizing this new poetry all start with Whitman as the poet of the new America. Theirs is an acknowledged debt.

Parallelism, the opposite of deviation yet also a type of foregrounding, consists in the introduction of extra regularities into the verbal material. In deviation and parallelism alike, there must be an element of identity and an element of contrast, but while it is the latter that creates deviation, in parallelism the invariant part is important.

The types of parallelisms have, since the Vedic texts, been distinguished on semantic grounds. Bishop Lowth's and later Steinitz' classification of the Old Testament thought rhythms have all been based on the meaning of the thought expressed.

In our examination of parallelisms appearing in modern American free verse, we did not work with *a priori* concepts, but rather with those which we have developed in the course of the analysis.

Having examined a great bulk of poetry from the point of parallelisms, too, we may say that there exist three basic types to be distinguished on formal-linguistic grounds. We shall call them 'lexical parallelism', 'syntactical parallelism' and 'lexical-syntactical parallelism'. In defining them we shall use the framework of generative-transformational grammar.

In *lexical parallelism* the invariant part is one or more lexical item, while in the more refined, more intricate *syntactical parallelism* an abstract syntactic pattern functions as the constant element. Lexical constants refer to *surface-structure identities*, while syntactical constants imply *deep-structure similarities*. The third, the most common type represents a transition between lexical and syntactical parallelisms: here the lexical constant — as one fulfilling the same syntactic function in each parallelistic pattern — creates syntactic correspondences among the patterns, but only in the restricted area in which the lexical constant may function syntactically. If, for example, the lexical constant is a Wh-question word like *who, where, when*, then syntactically the parallelistic patterns shall be Wh-questions. But since the lexical functional units only defined the type of question, the inner syntactic structure of each question in the parallelistic series is not defined by the lexical constant, thus they show no particular structural resemblances.

3.1. *Lexical parallelism*

Lexical constants, as we have noted, operate in the surface structure of the language. They mark out equivalent pieces of verse without yet determining their inner structure. Certain surface-structure rules direct their placing

within the utterance, but these rules operate independently after the surface structuring of the linguistic unit to which they are finally added.

Address, for example, is independent of the structure of the whole discourse, although its recurrence may delimit stanzaic or other units. With the ironic intensification in the attributive part of his address, using synthetical and analytic comparison, Robert Creeley creates a fine parallelistic pattern in his *Ballad of the Despairing Husband*.

> Oh lovely lady, morning or evening or afternoon.
> Oh lovely lady, eating with or without a spoon.
> Oh most lovely lady, whether dressed or undressed or partly.
> Oh most lovely lady, getting up or going to bed or sitting only.
> Oh loveliest of ladies, than whom none is more fair, more gracious,
> more beautiful.
>
> . . .
> Oh most loveliest of ladies, in rain, in shine, in any wheather.

As verbal repetitions, lexical parallelisms have the function to delimit units of verse and thus to create rhythmic patterns. The repeated pattern of question and answer in the 'Song' of Robert Duncan's *An Owl is an Only Bird of Poetry* marks out each stanza and serves as the constant element of the parallel stanzaic forms.

> What do you see, my little one?
> I see an owl hung in a tree.

The repetition of the adverbial phrase "When I drive cab" divides Lew Welch's *After Anachreon* into units smaller than stanzas without yet determining the inner structure of each unit.

> When I drive cab
> I am moved by strange whistles and wear a hat.
> When I drive cab
> I am the hunter. My prey leaps out from where it hid,
> beguiling me with gestures.
> When I drive cab
> All may command me, yet I am in command of all who do.

The lexical constant "These are the trees" marks the beginning of larger units of enumeration in Vachel Lindsay's *Celestial Trees of Glacier Park* and, with this stanzaic grouping, gives some structuredness to the otherwise monotonous catalogue. The origins of this technique certainly go back to Whitman's *An American Primer*.

> These are the trees: The Stable for the Deer,
> The Bee's Skyscraper, The Angel's Spear,
> The Daisy's Tower, The Storm Wave of the Land,
> The Old Clock's Tower, The Manitou's Hand,
> The Mountain's Giant Flower, The Dreamer from the Seas,
> These are the trees.
> . . .

As we may well observe, this passage is very rhythmical, which can be explained by an intricate inner structure. The sentence "These are the trees" enframes the catalogue symmetric in its grammatical structure: the series of [1 Prepositional Phrase + 3 Inflectional Genitive Noun Phrases] is mirrored on the axis of the central Of-Genitive Noun Phrase as the enumeration proceeds.

"These are the trees" 1 PrepP + 3 InflGen + Of. Gen + 3 Infl Gen + 1 PreP + "These are the trees"

These fine parallelistic constructions already lead us to our second type of parallelism.

3.2. *Lexical-syntactic parallelism*

Our second type of parallelism, marked as 'transitional', consists in the repetition of individual words and the repetition of an overall syntactic structure. We have observed that the lexical constant, which serves as the invariable part of the parallelism, is usually a function word, which marks out the overall structure of the variable part in virtue of its being capable to govern — as a function word — syntactic constructions.

Ezra Pound in the *Lustra* volume often used this technique. In the second stanza of *Commission* only those noun phrases vary that are governed by the prepositions *against* and *to.*

Speak against unconscious oppression,
Speak against the tyranny of the unimaginative,
Speak against bonds.
Go to the bourgeoisie who is dying of her ennuis,
Go to the women in suburbs,
Go to the hideously wedded,
Go to them whose failure is concealed.
Go to the unluckily mated,
Go to the bought wife,
Go to the woman entailed.

Charles Olson, too, was a master of those parallel techniques which give prosodic shape through both lexical and syntactical constants. Already in the first item of his *Maximus Poems* he used a complex — horizontally and vertically equally stratified — parallel structure. Characteristically, the constant elements are grammatical function words — *that, which, where, how, when* —, while the variable parts are those phrases of which the function words are constituents, and whose overall grammatical structures coincide through the governing of these function words.

But that which matters, that which insists, that which will last
where shall you find it, my people, how, where shall you listen
when all is become billboards, when all, even silence is
when even the gulls,
my roofs,
when even you, when sound itself . . .

The whole stanza is one complex sentence with parallel constituents in the lines split into two or three: it can thus be read in both ways — from left to right and from top to bottom. Later within the same poem we find parallel prepositional phrases whose invariant part is again a function word: the preposition *of.*

Born of yourself, born
of hay and cotton struts
of street-pickings, wharves, wheeds
you carry in, my bird

of a bone of a fish
of a straw or will
of a colour, of a bell
of yourself, torn

The preposition *despite* is the lexical constant in Philip Lamintia's *The Diabolic Condition.*

. . .
despite my body flying away
despite the lizards who crawl into the altars
where the potents are being prepared
despite the intrusion of doctor's maids and
egyptologists
despite the old Doric temple carried in by
the art lovers
despite the nest of mad beggars
the chant is heard
. . .

3.3. *Syntactical parallelism*

Syntactical parallelism operates in the linguistic deep structure by setting up identical logico-semantic patterns. Thus it does not create overt regularities in the surface structure like the phonological correspondences of metre or the lexical identities of verbal parallelism. It organizes the inner structure of language.

Donald Davie in his *Articulate Energy* describes the use of these deep grammatical correspondences as "syntax like music".[32] Here the function of syntax is "to please us by the fidelity with which it follows a 'form of thought' through the poet's mind but without defining that thought." In other words, the corresponding linguistic units have identical abstract deep structures, but differ in their surface-structure representations.

Ezra Pound in his *Religio, or the Child's Guide to Knowledge* follows a form of thought larger than the sentence: the hypersyntactic pattern of a catechism-like sequence of questions and answers.

What is god?
God is an eternal state of mind.
What is a faun?
A faun is an elemental creature.

What is a nymph?
A nymph is an elemental creature.
When is a god manifest?
When the states of mind take form.

The recurrence of the same sentence in Harry Crosby' Vision (subject + transitive verb + object) creates a rhythm of thought characteristic of "syntax like music".

I annihilate museums.
I demolish libraries.
I oblivionize skyscrapers.
. . .

David Antin in his *history* uses the deep-structure pattern of $_S[(Art+Noun)_{NP} + (Verb)_{VP}]_S$ with the optional elements of Adjective before the Subject Noun and the Adverbial Phrase following the Verb. This grammatical regularity, Antin suggests, has some implication to the laws of history.

S → NP (DET [ART, (ADJ)], N) + VP (VB, (ADV P))

ART	(ADJ)	N	VB	(ADV P)
the		seabird	burned	on lake michigan
the	evening	start	foundered	
the	united	kingdom	vanished	
the		stonewall	burned	below cairo
the		oneida	collided	

The use of noun phrases with identical deep structures throughout a long section of Kenneth Rexroth's *Prolegomena to Theodicity* goes certainly back to the Imagist technique of presenting separate images. The poem is a fine example of how the rhythmical recurrence of the same abstract grammatical pattern can give a clear prosody to free verse.

NP → DET (ART, ADJ) + N

ART	ADJ	N
The	climbing	humerus
The	canyon	bark
The	unfolding	leaves
The	rigid	lamp
The	lengthy	stair
The	moving.	cubicle
The	shifting	floor
The	bending	femur
The	rigid	eye
The	revealing	lamp

Olson's line "what you are, // what you must be, // what you can" in *I, Maximus of Gloucester to You* plays an interesting variation on the modality of the constant pattern *what you [BE]* by using the modal auxiliaries *must* and *can*.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti is a master of organizing verse according to grammar. His typography clearly marks the linguistic constituents — noun phrases, verb phrases, adverbial phrases, etc. — as if he composed after modern structural analysis! The visual arrangement in his 'phrasal poetry' ('phrasal' because the phrase is both the grammatical and the prosodic unit in his verse) clearly reflects grammatical relationships. Phrases of equal syntactic value receive equal typographic emphasis, while grammatically subordinated elements are also spatially subordinated to the respective constituents.

S → NP (N: Dada) + VP (VB: would have loved; NP: a day like this)

(Attributive Prepositional Phrase): with its light-bulb sun

(Relative Clause Coordination): which shines so differently for different people / but which still shines the same

(Adverbial Phrase Coordination): on everyone / and on everything

(from: *Pictures of the Gone World*)

This 'stanza' of the poem *A Coney Island of the Mind*

and a masked bird fishing
in a golden stream
and an ibis feeding
'on its own breast'

is constructed on identical deep-structure pattern:

and + $[Art + (Adj) + N]_{NP} + [VB + PrepP]_{RelCL}$

We find identical sentence structures of the pattern $_S[AdvP(S\ embedding) + (NP) + VP]_S$ in the same poem, with the typographical analysis of the inner structure of the grammatical units themselves too.

Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above the sea of faces
paces his way
to the other side of day

Typography has to reflect the grammatical structure of the poem for Denise Levertov, too.

S — [ADV P At the touch
of the sea wind
NP the palms
VP shake OBJ NP — [their green breasts
their rustling fingers]]

S — [NP the sea wind that
REL CL moves like a panther
VP blows the spray inland]

(from: *Tomatlan*)

We have seen that in Ferlinghetti's and Levertov's poems deep grammatical identities are emphasized by visuality: grammatical rhythm and typographical rhythm harmonize in such a way that typography follows the inner rhythms of language.

The body of poetry built on the principle of syntactical parallelism proves: free verse has found in poetic syntax a structural principle that gives a high organization to the linguistic material. While giving up metre and strict rhyme patterns, free verse brought with it the rejuvenation of the ancient forms of syntactic patterning, of interest in rhetorical figures.

4. *Visual rhythm*

Modern free verse, as we have seen, attributes verse-making significance to techniques which in the English practice of the last 600 years had only marginal importance in creating the regularity of the poem. They acquire this verse-making significance not because they have not been used earlier, but — quite the contrary — because they are devices that always survived poetic

revolution, and exactly by their survival these devices proved that, as principles organic to the verbal material, they correspond to inherent features of poetry.

Formal patterning, although not organic in this sense to the language itself, seems also to be among the first characteristics of poetry. We have learned to accord some kind of meaning and value to form; we have learned to accept that in printing the rhythmic intention is marked, and that typographical arrangement has the function to indicate rhythms specific to poetry.

Blank verse was 'verse to the eye'; this means that already in the middle of the eighteenth century the distinction between the audible and the graphically metrical was taken for granted. Metrical structure was conditioned and modified by contextual pressures.

With the disappearance of the metrical superstructure, the role of these visual contextual pressures became only more important. Imagist poetry introduced a new prosodic principle, shape: "A rhythm is shape", Pound declared.[33] The division into lines became an organizing nonmetrical principle.

With the prosodic unit, the line, and the grammatical unit, the sentence, taken as *interactive forces* within a poem, there could develop a new 'measure' in free verse: the relationship of sentence to line and its visual, typographic indication.

In *The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter*, for example, Pound's norm is one sentence to a line.

. . .
At forteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.
At fifteen I stopped scowling.
. . .

In *The Song of the Bowmen of Shu* Pound established the norm of not one but two sentences to a line.

. . .
We have no rest. Three battles a month.
By heaven, his horses are tired.
The generals are on them, the soliders are by them
. . .
The enemy is swift, we must be careful.
. . .

The rather limited variation of this newly established measure (whether one or two or three sentences make up a line) could not create too refined a prosody. Yet this was the first step to be taken: "only when the line was isolated as a rhythmical unit did it become possible for the line to be rhythmically dismembered from within."[34] Visuality in interaction with grammar, the dismembered lineation of grammatical segmentation, may thus become a subtly variable prosody.

William Carlos Williams elaborated this technique of rhythmic patterning. In his later works prose rhythm and grammatical rhythm combine with visual rhythm in a fine synthesis. His *American idiom* and *variable foot* were the results of his constant effort to elevate free-verse techniques to the rank of prosody, and, consequently, the structuredness of free verse to the rank of metrical regularity.

Let us approach Williams' new synthesis, the variable foot. How can we define this new unit?

5. *Synthesis: grammatical rhythm in visual interpretation: Williams' variable foot*

"It took me several years to get the concept clear. I had the feeling that there was somewhere an exact way to define it; the task was to find the word to describe it, to give it an epitaph, and I finally hit upon it. The foot not being fixed is only to be described as variable. If the foot itself is variable it allows order in so-called free verse. Thus the verse becomes not free at all but just simply variable."[35] — Except for such an honest description of the act of the precise naming of it, nowhere in his theoretical writings does the poet give an analysis of the concept, which was born to provide "a way of escaping the formlessness of free verse".[36] But if we do not have a theory, we certainly have his life work — his *Asphodel* and other poems like the *Yellow Flower* from which we quote below.

What shall I say, because talk I must?
That I have found a cure
for the sick?
I have found no cure
for the sick
but this crooked flower
which only to look upon
all men
are cured.

5.1. *Variable foot limited by deep- and surface-structure rules*

To start with, the variable foot differs from the corresponding metrical foot in *length*. Metre operates on the phonological level: it counts syllables. The longest metrical foot consists of three, the most common one consists of only two syllables, but the monosyllabic foot is also recognized.

"A pedantic insistence upon detail tends to drive out 'major form'. A firm hold on major form makes for a freedom of detail," Pound wrote.[37] Thus to preserve the sense of the *whole* in free verse, poets abandoned the minor unit of the metrical foot and searched for a new unit on a higher level of language: the morphological, syntactic or semantic.

The superimposed regularity of metre ignores the semantic and syntactic segmentation of the linguistic material and thus creates a regulation only in the surface structure.

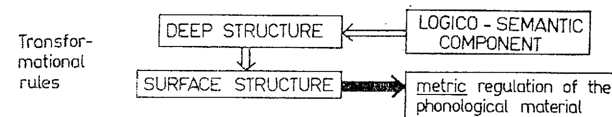

Fig. 1. Metrical verse

Figure 1 illustrates the operation of metrical rules within the system of language transformationally conceived. On the other hand, for the variable foot to express syntactic relations, foot boundary must coincide not only with word boundary, but also with phrase boundary. Thus the variable foot — "variable" because it corresponds to semantic and syntactic units (which in turn correspond to deep- and surface-structure representations) — constitutes a unit *organic to grammar*. When typography serves grammar by interpreting its constituent structure, there develops a grammatical rhythm comparable — in regularity — to metrical rhythms, except that grammatical rhythm creates a higher (or, linguistically, "deeper") structuredness than was possible with the "artificial strait jacket" of metre. As Figure 2 illustrates, in free verse visuality interprets both deep structure and surface structure, while metre could "regulate" only surface structure constituents.

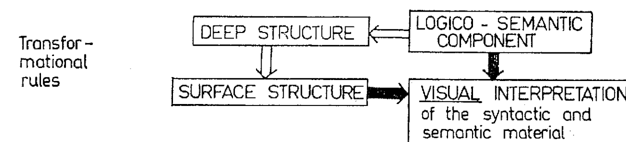

Fig. 2. Nonmetrical verse

It is thus in this way, through its correspondence to syntactical groups, that the nonmetrical rhythmic unit of the variable foot may be isolated. Let us now turn to its internal stress construction through which it coheres.

5.2. *The variable foot defined by the stresses*

The variable foot allows a maximum of four sense stresses: a phrase of more than four stresses cannot be kept as a single unit. The foot consisting of one word gives one sense stress, but here this number is determined by the lexical unit itself and not by syntactical rules. The most common stress distribution

is that of *two* sense stresses per foot (line). This is not surprising if we consider the inherent feature of language that came to light only with structural analysis, viz. the *binary* division of the sentence constituent structure. The sentence divides into the subject noun phrase and the verb phrase; usually some determiner and a noun constitute both the subject and the object noun phrases; the werb phrase falls into the object noun phrase and the verbal, which in turn is made up of the copula or some auxiliary and the verb. This is an extremely simplified illustration of the binary division of the language, but still serves our purpose. Naturally, we can extend this abstract scheme to complex sentences with many embeddings: the overall binary structure remains the same. Thus, if the variable foot is in fact isolated on phrasal grounds and thus contains syntactic units on any level of the constituent structure, there is much probability of its binary structure and, accordingly, of two sense stresses.

Cúrious shápes
awáke
to plágue me
Is dáy néar
shíning gírl?
Yés, dáy!

(from: *Full Moon*)

Líft your flówers
on bítter stéms
chícory!
Líft them úp
out of the scórched gróund!
Béar no fóliage
but gíve yoursélf
whólly to thát!

(from: *Chicory and Daisies*)

Many, many more examples might illustrate the two-stress line variable foot of Williams; they all prove that it developed under the influence of binary syntactic structures.

5.3. *Prosody and grammar*

The prosodic structure of a Williams poem, we may observe, is either grammatical or anti-grammatical, but it is never without grammar: the variable foot is distinguished on syntactic-semantic grounds, which explains its dependence on grammar.

(i) Most of Williams' poetry written in the variable foot is *grammatical*. Being grammatical implies certain typographic arrangement reinforcing or perhaps substituting punctuation.

Oh
the sumanc died
it's

the first time
I
noticed it

(from: *Some Simple Measures in the American Idiom and the Variable Foot)*

Or, the other way round, the unpunctuated poem presupposes a *cohesion* of grammar.

When you shall arrive
as deep
as you will need go
to catch the blackfish
the hook
has been featly baited
by the art you have
and you catch them

(from: *Paul*)

(ii) *Pictures form Brueghel* is the series of poems most conspicuously *anti-grammatical*. Each poem describes a picture; grammar, a prosodic device, underlines this description in an interesting way: the linguistic structure imitates the visual structure. End-stopped lines and one to one correspondence between line and phrase would give the sense of rigid order and would certainly not harmonize with the buoyant pictures of Brueghel. Run-on lines, on the other hand, give the impression of rich teeming and movement. Attributive phrases are split.

In a red winter hat blue
eyes smiling . . .

from(: *Self-Portrait*)

about a young
reaper enjoying his
noonday rest

(from: *The Corn Harvest*)

Articles are separated from the corresponding head nouns even by stanzaic break.

blindman's-buff follow the
leader stilts
. . .
roll the hoop or a
construction

(from: *Children's Games*)

he does not share the
resting
center of
their workday world

(from: *Corn Harvest*)

There is no one phrase or line to receive separate weight: in Brueghel's compositions no central figure claims more attention.

where the picture
and the composition ends back
of which no seeing man

is represented the unshaven
features of the des-
titute with their few

pitiful possessions a basin
to wash in a peasant
cottage is seen
...
there is no detail extraneous
to the composition one
follows the others stick in
hand triumphant to disaster

(from: *The Parable of the Blind*)

Sentences follow without a break or pause: no typography or punctuation marks where a sentence begins or ends. It seems we have to read the whole poem at one breath — one cannot rest his eyes on a single figure or group on Brueghel's pictures either.

before you
the bridge is enthroned her hair
loose at her temples a head
of ripe wheat is on
the wall beside her the
guests seated at long tables
...
there is a hound under
the table the bearded Mayor
is present women in their
starched headgear . . .

(from: *Peasant Wedding*)

Seldom is prosody even in Williams' poetry so consciously anti-grammatical. More usual is the clear grammatical and visual arrangement producing a balanced stress system.

Let us now see the relationship of grammar to stress.

Our analysis has shown that in the variable foot lineation corresponds to phrasal groupings: a line constitutes a noun phrase or verb phrase but seldom a whole sentence. The number of stresses per line, then, is determined by the complexity of grammar.

Poems with short simple sentences are written in lines of one or two stresses. We have observed — and also explained — that the most common sense distribution is that of two sense stresses per line.

The poem
is a discipline
What you need
to sober you
is what you have
...
the poem
laid crudely
delicately
before you.

(From: *The Self*)

Yet, if the grammatical structure of the poem is more complex, three or four sense stresses constitute a variable foot. This is the style of the later poems.

Shadows cast by the street light
    under the stars,
        the head is tilted back,
the long shadows of the legs
    presumes a world
        taken for granted
on which the cricket trills.
...
Ripped from the concept of our lives
    and from all concept
        somehow, and plainly,
the sun will come up
    each morning
        and sink again.

(From: *Shadows*)

The levelling of stress differences and the correlation of syllable distances between the stresses belong to the nature of language. Creating an equal number of stresses in each line, they may become tools of rhythmic expression in free verse, as the above example shows. Semantic and syntactic structure creates a natural rhythm which can be reinforced by such tools.

The smell of heat is boxwood
    when rousing us
        a movement of the air
Stirs our thoughts
    that had no life in them
        to a life, a life in which
two women agonize:
    to live and to breathe is no less.

(From: *To Daphne and Virginia*)

In this poem the reader is forced to project a three-stress pattern to the lines. Thus under the influence of grammar — be it simple or complex, but always *clear* — the distribution of stresses tends to a relative order and regularity.

Summing up our observations of the variable foot:

(i) it is constituted by *grammatical* (logico-semantic and syntactic; deep- and surface-structure) units;

(ii) these units correspond to the *phrase level* of linguistic analysis: noun phrases and verb phrases of varying length constitute them;

(iii) consequently, the stresses through which the new measures cohere shall be *sense stresses*, determined by *syntactic rules*, and not phonological ones as in the case of metrical verse;

(iv) these units, deriving from the inner, organic nature of language, receive *visual interpretation* through typography.

*

"Libertate perit", had once been thought of *vers libre*. Yet already in the first decades of the century there developed, as we have seen, a variety of well-defined techniques to give, instead of metre, prosodic shape to the metrically unstructured linguistic material. Free verse is thus free only in its name. Yet since here no one prosodic rule dominates, free verse well escapes the "artificial strait jacket" — the "typical outer unity" — of the metrical principle too. Thus we may say that free verse denies boundless freedom and artificial limitation at the same time.

NOTES

[1] We have to state it right here that the Imagists did not claim that free verse was the only mode of writing: "I have never claimed that vers libre was the only path of salvation. I felt that it was right and that it had its place with the other modes." — Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, London, Faber, 1974. p. 440.

[2] Letter from F. S. Flint to J. C. Squire, as quoted in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones, London, Penguin Books, 1972. pp. 145—146.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[4] Eliot, T. S., *On Poetry and Poets*, London, Faber, 1969. p. 37.

[5] Jones, P., *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[6] From the point of view of free verse the present paper considers poetry from Anglo-American Imagism to the Black Mountain College as one line of descent: 'Pound's generation' and 'Olson's generation' as one unified movement.

[7] Olson, Ch., 'Projective Verse', in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, ed. Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman, New York, Grove Press, 1973. p. 148; Denise Levertov, 'An Admonition', *ibid.*, p. 310.

[8] Duncan, R., 'Towards an Open Universe', *ibid.*, p. 213.

[9] Ezra Pound, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] As quoted by N. Cristoph de Nagy, *Ezra Pound's Poetics and Literary Tradition*, The Cooper Monographs II, Bern, Francke Verlag, 1966. p. 84.

[12] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, London, Faber, 1973. p. 199.

[13] Levertov, D., *op. cit.*, p. 310.

[14] Eliot, T. S., *op. cit.*, pp. 32—33.

[15] Cf. "No poetry is, of course, ever exactly the same speech that the poet talks and hears, but it has to be in such a relation to the speech of his time that the listener or reader can say 'that is how I should talk if I could talk poetry'." — Eliot, T. S., *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Ezra Pound in *The Fortnightly Review* (London), September 1914, p. 462. As quoted in Peter Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[18] As quoted in Peter Jones, *ibid.*, p. 28.

[19] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 372.

[20] Cf. "Poetry must be as well written as prose. Its language must be a fine language departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity." — Letter from Ezra Pound to Harriet Monroe 1915. As quoted in Peter Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[21] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, pp. 48—49.

[22] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 92.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[24] Williams, W. C., 'Introduction to *The Wedge*', in Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

[25] Wallace Rice, 'Pound and Poetry', *Dial*, May 1913. As quoted by Eric Homberger, *Ezra Pound. The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972. p. 103.

[26] As quoted by John Lotz ,'Metric Typology', in Thomas A. Sebeok, *Style in Language*, Cambridge, Mass., The M. I. T. Press, 1975. p. 373.

[27] Hughes, G., *Imagism and the Imagists. A Study in Modern Poetry*, London, Bowes and Bowes, 1960, p. 145.

[28] Fletcher, J. G., 'Miss Lowell's Discovery', as quoted in Peter Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[29] Lotz, J., *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[30] Gross, H., *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1964. p. 84.

[31] *Gerald Manley Hopkins, The Journals and Papers of*, ed. H. House and G. Storey, London, Penguin Books, 1959. p. 84.

[32] See: Davie, D., *Articulate Energy*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971. pp. 85—91.

[33] Ezra Pound, 'Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony', as quoted in Harvey Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[34] Davie, D., *Ezra Pound. Poet as Sculptur*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965. p. 45.

[35] Villiams, W. C., *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1967. p. 86.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[37] Ezra Pound, as quoted in T. S. Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 171.