Formalism and the Spenserian Stanza

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Formalism and aestheticism, so long anathema to the *avant garde* in literary—or, rather, cultural—studies, have recently started making a comeback. Susan J. Wolfson, leading the charge in her appropriately named *Formal Charges* (1997) and in numerous essays, argues that the current prejudice against formalism is misplaced because formalism is not the tool of reaction for which many late-twentieth-century theorists have taken it (227-232). In fact she demonstrates, as Shklovsky suggested before her, that formalist criticism can make radical, disquieting discoveries (20). Substantial essay collections such as *Aesthetics and Ideology* (1994), edited by George Levine, and *Revenge of the Aesthetic* (2000), edited by Michael P. Clark, as well as a special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* (March, 2000) entitled *Reading for Form*, show that Wolfson's voice is not a lone cry from the wilderness. Even a group of contemporary poets have joined the fray, dubbing themselves "New Formalists" and, as a deliberately self-defining act, writing in regular verse forms. Some of these poets have also theorized about their poetic practices in collections such as Annie Finch's *After New Formalism* (1999). Thus, when such a pivotal figure in cultural studies as Edward Said turns his attention in a recent book (*Musical Elaborations*) to the meanings of music, that form of forms, we should perhaps not be too surprised. We should similarly take in our stride Said's enthusiasm ('Scholarship and Commitment', 7-8) for the work of Elaine Scarry, who claims that the duty of literary scholars is to pay attention to the form of the 'beautiful object', for in this act of attention lies one of the sources of human morality ('Beauty and the Scholar's Duty to Justice' 25; *On Beauty and Being Just* 90-93).

There exist, of course, many formalisms, and the variety (versification) to be pursued in this paper is not one that ever died out entirely. However, the prestige enjoyed by linguistics in the middle years of the twentieth century allowed a subtle takeover to occur, with the result that many literary critics began to feel that prosody was not an area in which they, as relative amateurs, could trespass with ease. Professional linguists, such as Morris Halle, Samuel Jay Keyser and even Noam Chomsky made pronouncements about the metres of English canonical verse that seemed sanctified by scientific theory and mathematical

precision. Though a few die-hards such as John Hollander continued to write about the rhythms and forms of English verse from a critical rather than a phonological perspective, theirs was not a majority concern. As literary theory and criticism became more and more thematically focussed and as literature itself became merged into culture for many commentators, detailed questions about the shape and sound of poems seemed more and more irrelevant or elitist. Derek Attridge's influential *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, appearing as early as 1982, was exceptional, for it reclaimed prosody from the linguists while offering an innovative scheme of its own. But it did not really set a trend strong enough to counter the general tendency of literary and cultural studies—at least, not for the next decade or so. Since the 1990s, however, prosodic analysis has made a comeback with the other formalisms. General works include David Baker's collection, *Meter in English*, and Donald Wesling's *The Scissors of Meter*. More specific works, some of them published slightly earlier, include Brennan O'Donnell's *The Passion of Meter*, Timothy Steele's *Missing Measures*, Susanne Woods's *Natural Emphasis* and O.B. Hardison's *Prosody and Purpose in the English Renaissance*.

The latter two books both deal with the Early Modern period and, consequently, they include short sections on Spenser's *Faerie Queene* stanza, the topic of this paper. These inclusions, with that of Humphrey Tonkin in his *The Faerie Queene* (38-42), are another sign of the present change in attitude towards formalism, for the Spenserian stanza had not elicited much critical interest before them since the early twentieth century. Up to that time and throughout the nineteenth century, however, in commentaries on the *Faerie Queene*, on English prosody and on epic, it was a central focus of attention. This was due to the formalist assumption that form has meaning—that, as John Creaser (1) puts it, 'verse form is embodied meaning, not just an envelope'. The Spenserian stanza, being the longest and most elaborate of all the English narrative stanzas, was seen as demanding critical attention in itself—not always, unfortunately, as an integral part of the poem's meaning systems, but sometimes quite separately.

Admiration was generally heaped upon it, from William Hazlitt to Paul Fussell, Jr., and a characteristic wave metaphor used to describe its movement (Hazlitt 43-44; Lowell 158-59; Saintsbury 1.367; Fussell 158-59). But the stanza has also come in for rebuke from such anti-Spenserians as Thomas Warton (1.114-17) and Yvor Winters (43-45), who find in its expansions a sign of the diffuseness and moral laxity of its author. Hardison, one of the recent commentators, complains that it 'tend[s] to segment the narrative into arbitrary chunks' (217). In perhaps the most resonant of all commentaries, William Empson discovers in its arrangement of rhymes a fecund ambiguity, its extraordinary ability to 'be broken up into a variety of metrical forms' allowing it to hold 'whole civilizations' suspended in the 'enormous patterns' that it traces (33-34). To George Saintsbury its essential quality is a 'langorous (not languid)

grace' (1.367), while both J. W. Mackail (122) and Egerton Smith (253) admire its 'quality of boundlessness'. In another of the more recent works, Tonkin seems to correct these earlier commentators when he claims that, contrary to general belief, the stanzas of the *Faerie Queene* are 'anything but expansive and their tight turns require our lively attention' (41). But some earlier writers had in fact noticed these 'turns': Mackail, for example (126), describes the poem's movement as 'not progressive', but 'like . . . spreading and interlacing circles' (126) and Smith praises not its narrative facility but its 'presentment of striking picture-effects' (255).

It seems clear that the complexities of movement so admired or derided in the *Faerie Queene* stanza are consequent on its dual construction out of alternating and couplet rhymes: an alternating structure moves swiftly onward while a couplet circles and reflects. Formalism may surely underpin more thematic studies of the poem, as narrative and discourse appear 'naturally' counterpointed in these contrasting structures. The fact that each of the Spenserian's couplets echoes one of the alternating rhymes in the preceding structure further complicates the situation. It creates an effect of 'interlacing' in addition to counterpoint, offering the extraordinary opportunities for ambiguity (a duality of meaning created by a juxtaposition of forms) extolled by Empson.

But Empson, like so many of the more perceptive formalist commentators, does not pursue his theories with any detailed survey of the unfolding discourse of the actual poem. No concerted empirical attempt has apparently ever been made to go beyond the abstract formalism of stanza pattern and connect it with any particular grammatical, thematic or narrative tendency in the *Faerie Queene*. 'Boundlessness' and 'langorousness', like 'presentment of . . . picture-effects' are merely general impressions. Even Woods, who in her recent book does attempt to relate the stanza's medial couplet and alexandrine to some thematic tendencies, gives only a handful of examples to demonstrate her point (148-52). We need a more specific link between stanza form and hermeneutics, starting perhaps with the relationship between prosody and grammar. This, at least, is the relationship we are exhorted to study in Wesling's *The Scissors of Meter*, which solves the problem of prosody's apparently pointless (or autotelic) formalism by cutting it across grammar, which Wesling claims to include semantics (74-79). Wesling's book is somewhat inconsistent in style and motivation, but its stated aim of recuperating prosody as a critical tool is invigorating. For, on the one hand, to study a poem , as historicists often do, as a cultural artefact determined by the ideologies of its writer and contemporary audience, without examining it in detail as a specific phenomenon, leads to inaccuracy and tendentiousness. On the other hand, to stop at the phenomenon and not relate its features to more abstract thematic issues is an evasion of the world and its responsibilities, which historicists have often pointed out (see, for example, Eagleton 368). In this paper, I do not intend to proceed very far down the road of hermeneutics, certainly not

far enough to find out what ideology this road may lead to. Since prosody is an element of structure, its study is simply, as Paul Ricoeur claims of all structural analysis, 'a stage—and a necessary one—between a naïve interpretation and a critical interpretation' (148). This stage, and a step or two of those that follow it in the progression towards critical interpretation, will define the paper's limits.

This study of Spenser's versification did not start with Spenser. It began with the Romantic poets, in an investigation into their use stanza forms. I was looking for evidence in support of differences that I perceived—or thought that I perceived—among Shelley's, Byron's and Keats's characteristic uses of the Spenserian stanza. Merely throwing in some Spenser as well for good measure, I was counting the different parts of speech used as rhyme-words, expecting Spenser's verse to feature as a kind of ground-state from which the revolutionary later poets managed to deviate in inventive ways. My belief was that Keats resembled Spenser more than Shelley or Byron did, because 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is generally regarded as more Spenserian in spirit and style than 'Adonais', *The Revolt of Islam* or *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.* Having done this kind of analysis of Byron before, I already had an admiring knowledge of his ability to rhyme different parts of speech with one another. This ability is closely linked to the fundamental skill of rhyming well, as W.K. Wimsatt implies in his famous essay, 'One Relation of Rhyme to Reason' (157). Consequently, I guessed (and probably hoped) that Byron would beat the other poets in versatility and variety.

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What I discovered was unexpected. I had imagined that my counting would yield a subtlety of differences, perhaps requiring some ingenuity to interpret. But although the differences among the Romantics did prove fairly subtle, the distinction between Spenser and all the rest was immediately evident and radical. A close examination of the following table will demonstrate this difference:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Poet	**Work**	**Stanzas**	**%Adj**	**%Adv**	**%N**	**%V**	**%Other**
Spenser	*Faerie Queene:* Book 2	7.50-80	9	5	35	50	
Spenser	*Faerie Queene*: Mutabilitie	6.1-30	7	5	40	48	
Keats	'The Eve of St Agnes'	12-42	8	6	56	29	
Shelley	*The Revolt of Islam*	7:1-30	9	6	50	34	
Shelley	'Adonais'	25-55	6	13	53	27	
Byron	*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*	2.1-30	7	7	47	38	
Byron	*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*	4.115-145	8	9	49	34	1

Columns 4-8 of this table represent rough percentages of adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs used as rhyme-words in samples of the Spenserian stanzas of the four poets listed in column 1. The samples consist of 30-odd stanzas of verse, identified in columns 2 and 3. Observing column 6, we are surely not surprised to find that, in general, the commonest part of speech for rhyming on is the noun. It offers itself as the universal crutch for amateur poets from women at a wedding-shower to rap artists.

Here is a sample of early Keats, in which all but one of the rhyme-words are nouns. It is not great poetry—not, at least, as far as its rhymes are concerned:

Oh hearkener to the loud-clapping shears
While ever and anon to his shorn peers   280

> A ram goes bleating; winder of the horn,
> When snouted wild-boars routing tender corn
> Anger our huntsmen; breather round our farms,
> To keep off mildews and all weather harms;
> Strange ministrant of undescribed sounds,   285
> That come a-swooning over hollow grounds
> And wither drearily on barren moors;
> Dread openers of the mysterious doors
> Leading to universal knowledge—see,
> Great son of Dryope,   290
> The many that are come to pay their vows
> With leaves about their brows! (*Endymion* 279-292)

This kind of scrutiny is perhaps a little unfair on Keats. If we took any poet at random in any anthology and analysed her or his rhyme-words in this way, we would be likely to find nouns preponderant—often overwhelmingly so. And not all noun-rhymes are as thumping as these. Keats himself—at a later stage of his development—could produce the following, apparently very Spenserian, Spenserian stanza:

> She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
> For there were sleeping dragons all around,
> At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears;
> Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.
> In all the house was heard no human sound;   5
> A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door;
> The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound
> Fluttered in the besieging wind's uproar,
>   And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.   ('The Eve of St Agnes', 40)

Here seven out of nine rhyme-words are nouns. Although this stanza is not, as we shall see, really Spenserian, it is highly effective verse, with its use of dark consonants and low vowels (Wimsatt 164), and its suggestive visual imagery. And it does not entirely violate Wimsatt's principle that differences in meaning make rhymes more effective (157). If we compare the two Keats passages, we can see that the noun-rhymes are not here as rhyming-dictionary predictable as in the first example—in which five out of seven are monosyllabic, concrete and plural.

But, mostly, the felicities of Keats's poetry are dependent on features other than rhyme. In contrast, Byron is regarded as an excellent rhymer, cited by Wimsatt almost equally with Pope as a virtuoso in this art. Even when he is not using comic, broken or feminine rhyme, Byron's rhymes are resonant and memorable, creating a sense of order in stanzas whose metre is often backgrounded by conversational or passionate irregularities of rhythm and tone. As mentioned, Byron is noticeable among the Romantics for the variety of parts of speech he uses as rhyme-words. In the following *ottava rima* stanza on Castlereagh, he uses four nouns, three verbs and an adjective:

> An orator of such set trash of phrase
> Ineffably—legitimately vile,
> That even its grossest flatterers dare not praise,
> Nor foes—all nations—condescend to smile;
> Not even a sprightly blunder's spark can blaze   5
> From that Ixion grindstone's ceaseless toil,
> That turns and turns to give the world a notion
> Of endless torments and perpetual motion. (*Don Juan*, Dedication 13)

This stanza moves on relentlessly through its changes, in the sestet avoiding monotony by means of virtuouso variations in consonance, vowel quality and phrase length, as well as of rhyme word class. These variations paradoxically underpin a refusal to shift in tone from a savage invective which doggedly continues to dredge its topic until the cup of bitterness is emptied. And, in the couplet, variations are strikingly curtailed, for here the utter tediousness of oppression   is   represented   not only by actual repetition ('turns and turns') but also by the extreme similarity of between   the   two   rhyming   nouns,   'notion'   and   'motion'.

Observing that, in this stanza as in general, the next most common rhyme words after nouns are verbs brings us back to the table. The big anomaly here is in verbs: it may be seen in columns 6 and 7 in relation to Spenser. The samples from the *Faerie Queene* contain significantly more verbs than nouns as rhyme-words, an extremely unusual phenomenon in English. Clearly, on this criterion, Spenser leaves Byron quite out of the running for sheer virtuosity, though some of his stanzas contain so many verb-rhymes that Wimsatt would be unimpressed with their variations:

> After long stormes and tempests ouerblowne,
> The sunne at length his ioyous face doth cleare:

So when as fortune all her spight hath showne,
Some blisfull houres at last must needes appeare;
Else should afflicted wights oftimes despeire.   5
So comes it now to *Florimell* by tourne,
After long sorrowes suffered whyleare,

> In which captiu'd she many moneths did mourne,
> To tast of ioy, and to wont pleasures to retourne. (*Faerie Queene* 5.3.1)

Here, if we count all verb participles and infinitives as verbs, an amazing seven out of nine rhymes are on verbs. This is not uncommon among the stanzas of the *Faerie Queene,* though of course it is a fairly extreme example, a stanza of transition at the beginning of a canto in which all appears dynamically in a state of flux, from the weather to Florimell's feelings. But, though an extreme example, it is not, to repeat, uncommon; and this fact makes Spenser's rhyming style quite exceptional if my figures are, as I believe, representative of the whole. Alone among all these poets, and for ought I know, among all the English poets, Spenser in the *Faerie Queene* uses more verbs than nouns as rhyme-words.

In the first sample representing Spenser on the table, from Book II, verbs are overwhelmingly represented: they constitute 50% of all rhymes, whereas nouns comprise only 35%. In the second sample, from the first Mutabilitie canto, the difference is slighter—with verbs at 48% and nouns at 40%—but it is still a remarkable phenomenon. Only Byron among all the other poets has less than half his rhyme-words nouns, but these still enjoy a significant majority over his verbs. Keats, of course, uses more nouns than the other poets represented. If he does resemble Spenser stylistically, it is probably in his end-stopping of lines, but he clearly achieves this by different strategies from Spenser, because he does not use much syntactic inversion in 'The Eve of St Agnes'.

Putting aside the issue of inversion until later, the question that arises now concerns the significance of this habit of rhyming on verbs to other aspects of the *Faerie Queene*. We shall first investigate another stylistic feature, one that relates closely to narrative. In contrast to the stanzaic narratives of the Romantics, Spenser's *magnum opus* gives an impression of iambic regularity and line end-stopping. True, the enjambment so celebrated by Saintsbury (1.368) does occur (see also Bennett 255-279), but it is not nearly as common as in the Romantics and—more importantly—it is not usually as strong. Enjambment of course occurs when two closely connected syntactic elements are separated by a line-ending. Its strength is partly dependent on the degree of disruptiveness in the break, and I should state at once that Spenser simply does not end his lines between preposition and object, between article and noun or in the middle of a word, as Byron, for example, does. An enjambment's strength is also partly dependent on a reader's performative choice, but this is itself influenced by another relevant issue: the general style of the verse. If the line-endings usually coincide with important syntactic transitions, and are, as so frequently in Spenser, signalled by punctuation, a reader is as it were programmed to pause at these points even when the utterance would not obviously take a pause in another context.

Enjambment in the *Faerie Queene* moreover serves purposes specific to the

individual stanza. Here is an unusually enjambed example:

> With that they heard a roaring hideous sound
> That all the ayre with terrour filled wide,
> And seemd vneath to shake the stedfast ground.
> Eftsoones that dreadfull Dragon they espide,
> Where stretcht he lay vpon the sunny side   5
> Of a great hill, himselfe like a great hill.
> But all so soone, as he from far descride
> Those glistring armes, that heauen with light did fill,
> He rousd himselfe full blith, and hastned them untill. (*FQ* 1.11.4)

The relation of the beginning of line 6 to the end of line 5 is that of a restrictive modifier to its modified element. A pause gives it a much less restrictive feeling, making it resemble Spenser's more favoured, non-restrictive, type of modifier. This is a common effect among Spenser's enjambed lines and has the narrative consequence of 'spreading out' the features of an object or action, giving time for due attention to each one. Here both the 'sunny side' and the 'great hill' are considered carefully and given more individual value than they would in the whole, hierarchical phrase, 'the sunny side of a great hill'. The break between line 7 and line 8 signals a hiatus between even more crucially connected syntactic elements: a verb and its object. But a pause here, like a little gasp, is a very effective device: it not only emphasizes the 'glistring' of the 'armes' but also imitates the Dragon's slight delay in realizing what he is seeing 'from far'.

   Spenser's narrator, despite the slight enjambments and despite the exciting potentials of his story at this point, does not become carried away by his subject-matter. His attitude of careful attention modified by a kind of judicious detachment becomes much clearer when we compare the above stanza with one from Shelley's 'Adonais':

> That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,
> That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
> Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
> Which through the web of being blindly wove   5

> By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst—now beams on me,
> Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality. ('Adonais' 54)

This narrator is becoming extremely carried away by his subject-matter, as is frequently the case among Romantic poets. And the ecstatic effect is very strongly underpinned by the enjambment of the verse. In this neuvain, only lines 1, 2 and 8 are properly end-stopped by my reading. The stanza hurls itself towards its climactic Alexandrine, with pauses irregularly distributed between midline and line-end *en route*, and with several unbroken phrases greatly exceeding the length of a pentameter line. Syntactically, we find the same effect, in which the subject noun ('Light') and its appositions ('Beauty', 'Benediction' and 'Love') wait breathlessly for their verb ('beams') at the end of the eighth line. Shelley, like Byron, uses the Spenserian stanza as if it were a paragraph of blank verse in the heroic tradition. From the beginning of 'Adonais', the autonomy of the line as a unit has been fragile, with long phrases and strong grammatical pauses at midline. Hence, a reader has been trained by the verse to read—often very swiftly—onward to the conclusion of the stanza (and sometimes even beyond), without yielding too much fealty to the line. In the *Faerie Queene*, however, the reader has been educated by thousands of stanzas of nine self-contained lines each to pause even when the grammar does point onwards beyond the line-ending, and so enjambment is a subtler affair altogether than in Shelley. Similarly, ecstasy in any of its forms is not a state in which the *Faerie Queene* narrator himself indulges, the pauses at his line-endings reminding the reader of his presence and control even during the most dramatic moments in his story.

The self-containment of lines in the *Faerie Queene* is not merely a negative matter, definable in terms of infrequency of enjambment. It has a strong positive dimension which is in fact directly related to the use of verbs as rhyme words. The verbs with which the lines so often end are not usually auxiliaries (though these do occasionally occur in inversions—see 3.10.3). Instead, Spenser reserves the strong, uninflected lexical stem of the verb for the final position, as in the following examples:

1. He felt his hart for very paine to quake (*FQ* 4.5.44)

2. Looking each houre into deaths mouth to fall (*FQ* 6.11.44)

3. The sunne at length his ioyous face doth cleare (*FQ* 5.3.1)

4. And Peace, that unto parley eare will give (*FQ* 3.10.10)

5. The embroderd quilt she lightly up did lift (*FQ* 3.1.61)

6. Then from her mouth the gobbet she does take (*FQ* 7.12.39)

The point to notice here is that all these verbs—which are overwhelmingly typical of the rhyme-verbs in the *Faerie Queen*—are placed at the end of the line by means of syntactic inversions. Inversion, though common within phrases and over short distances in Spenser, does not take on the dimensions it assumes in Milton. In examples 1 and 2, the inversions cause no great disturbance, since the verbs in question are non-finite and they are shifted to final position simply by rearranging the normal order of modifiers. 'He felt his hart to quake for very paine' is only slightly more 'natural' than example 1 as it stands. But examples 3 to 6 demonstrate a significant wrenching of the word order. English is a language with a strong demand for a Subject-Verb-Object syntax; but in examples 3 and 4, the order, disregarding modifiers, is Subject-Object-Verb and, in examples 5 and 6, the order is Object-Subject-Verb. Clearly, Spenser goes against the grain of the language by rhyming so constantly on verbs, and what he gains is very central to his poetic achievement.

For the effect of all these inversions that press the verb to the final position is to enforce the coherence of the line, working against enjambment and demanding a punctuating pause once the unit is complete. The reader experiences a slight tension or feeling of suspense, which is resolved only when she reaches the end of the line. This is especially noticeable when the verb is finite, because of the Subject-Verb rule, and when it is transitive, because of the Verb-Object rule. It is as if the reader picks her way along the line assembling elements, which can be unscrambled only once the dynamic principle, the verb, is collected, giving the whole its direction. Because this process involves a greater effort than usual, with more postponement and less prediction, the unit—almost always the line—is stronger, not weaker than normal. 'At length the sunne doth cleare his ioyous face' or 'She lightly did lift up the embroderd quilt' have neither the internal coherence of examples 3 and 5 nor the same sense of an unfolding experience.

Example 5 points the way to another grammatical feature of Spenser's usage. As in examples 3 and 6, we find the auxiliary 'do', here inflected into the past tense. 'Did lift' appears instead of the simple past, 'lifted', leaving the bare verb stem, 'lift', in the rhyming position. Spenser clearly had a motivation to avoid inflections such as 's' and 'ed' at the ends of many of his verbs. As Ants Oras noted in 1956: 'Spenser loves to place his consonant clusters at the beginning, as

in *plain*, whereas Milton prefers them at the end, as in *first*' (111). Oras implies that Spenser's avoidance of final consonant clusters—once more against the grain of the language, at least in the case of verb tenses—is in the interests of 'smooth fluency' in the *Faerie Queene* (Oras 109). Oras is very perceptive in this observation, but the tendency he notes is slightly more complex than just 'avoidance of consonant clusters'. 'Lift' ends in a consonant cluster, but not one that hinders fluency. The breath used in the fricative 'f' is a continuation of the vowel's breath: only the 't' has the effect of stopping the flow. 'Lifted' on the other hand ends not with a consonant cluster but with two dental stops separated by a schwa—which is hardly a vowel at all in these inflections—and its pronunciation is very choked. In the very first line of the poem, Spenser avoids such a combination by using 'did maske' instead of 'masked', which in neither Modern nor Mediaeval pronunciation could please his ear:

> Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske (*FQ* 1 proem. 1)

Again, it is 'do-help' that gets around the undesirable sound. This verb form of course had different functions in Elizabethan English from those which it performs in contemporary usage. Although not essential, as nowadays, for negation or for yes-no questions in the simple tenses, 'do' could be used as an auxiliary in declarative sentences without strongly emphatic results:

> Contemporary: I did not write it
> Elizabethan: I wrote it not.
>
> Contemporary: Do you like the new government?
> Elizabethan: Like you the new government?
>
> Contemporary: Yellow leaves hang upon the boughs.
> Elizabethan: Yellow leaves do hang upon the boughs.

As Herbert W. Sugden notes in his account of Spenser's grammar, this latter, neutral, use of 'do' is more common in Spenser than in Shakespeare or any of their contemporaries, its use being in fact 'characteristic of his style' (146). This 'periphrastic tense' occurs commonly in both the present and past, and it has a second function, related to, but distinct from, fluency. The auxiliary takes all the inflections in a verb phrase, leaving the main verb in its uninflected, infinitive form. In English, these infinitive stems are very variable in cast and sound. Without the uniformity of inflective suffixes, which make rhyming in a language such as Italian so easy and potentially so monotonous, they carry a great deal of lexical weight for their size and possess unique shapes. They are likely to make

much better rhymes, according to Wimsatt's criterion, than would inflected words. A reader has only to compare verb stems such as 'cry', 'appease', 'delight', 'swim', 'astonish', 'reare', 'maintayn' and 'unhorse' with the inflected forms, 'cried', 'cries', 'appeased', 'appeases' and so on, to see the advantage, from Spenser's point of view, of avoiding simple aspect tenses. Apart from the monotony of the 's' and 'd' or 't' endings, he would be much more constrained to rhyme the same tense with the same tense—and verbs with verbs—if he rhymed on inflected forms, another form of monotony.

'Do' is thus a keynote in the *Faerie Queene,* but other auxiliaries, including modals, are also unusually frequent. Needless to say, in a poem as long as this one, simple verb tenses also occur and many verbs of all kinds are not positioned at the line-end. However, there is always a strong tendency for the main part of the verb to gravitate to the end of the line and also for the consonants at line-end to be simple:

> Yet note their hungry vew be satisfide,
> But seeing still the more desir'd to see,
> And euer firmly fixed did abide
> In contemplation of diuinitie:
> But most they meruaild at her cheualree,   5
> And noble prowesse, which they had approued,
> That much they faynd to know, who she mote bee;
> Yet none of all them her thereof amoued,
> Yet euery one her likte, and euery one her loved. (*FQ* 3.9.24)

Here, of the seven verb rhyme-words, one is in the passive voice, one is in the infinitive mood, one is in the past tense using 'do-help', one is in the past perfect, one is in the past using the modal 'may', and two are in the simple past. The three C-rhymes, 'approued-amoued-loued', all past participles, have a relatively fluent ending because of the voiced fricative 'v'. Similarly, the past participle 'satisfide' ends in a single consonant. All the other verb-rhymes are on uninflected stems.

This stanza is a good example for the purposes of this paper because although it contains one slightly enjambed line—line 3—it really asks for a pause at the end of every line. The enjambment is only a connection between a verb and a restrictive modifier; as in a previous example, the effect of the line-boundary is to make the modifier seem less restrictive. This in turn has the effect of allowing more consideration to be given to the phrase's elements, stressing the fixity with which the knights 'abide' in their 'contemplation' of Britomart's divine femininity.

What all these self-contained lines do is to allow a listener, even without the visual help of a printed text, to 'hear' the structural pattern of rhymes fairly easily. This is an uncommon achievement in a long and complex stanza. It is unlikely,

for example, that an ordinary listener can 'hear' the following Byronic Spenserian stanza—as a stanza—without careful training:

> Who loves, raves—'tis youth's frenzy—but the cure
> Is bitterer still, as charm by charm unwinds
> Which robed our idols, and we see too sure
> Nor worth nor beauty dwells from out the mind's
> Ideal shape of such; yet still it binds   5
> The fatal spell, and still it draws us on,
> Reaping the whirlwind from the oft-sown winds;
> The stubborn heart, its alchemy begun,
> Seems ever near the prize—wealthiest when most undone. (*CH* 4.123)

The lines here are marked out by rhymes, but these give the lines only the status of a minor counterpoint to the main thrust of the discourse, which moves in quite other patterns. The enjambments are irresistably strong, several phrases are longer than lines and some of the most compelling pauses—such as the one in line 5—occur at midline. There are no inversions to interrupt a perfectly natural dramatic syntax. Where verbs appear at the ends of lines, they are more likely to encourage than to oppose enjambment.

Although Byron characteristically uses the whole Spenserian stanza as a unit, like Shelley capitalizing upon the climactic potential of the final Alexandrine, he does not use the line as a clearly-enough defined sub-unit for the internal complexities of the stanza to exercise full play. Apart from the Alexandrine, the most crucial defining structure of this stanza form is its middle couplet—linking lines 4 and 5—and in Byron's most memorable examples its effects are often overridden. In the last-quoted stanza, he strongly enjambs this couplet at both ends and punctuates it in the middle of its second line with a dramatic pause, completely fracturing its internal coherence and inhibiting its circling, reflective or epigrammatic potential. The bare impression of the stanza is of blank verse or, when rhyme becomes perceptible, of an alternating structure, a structure that allows the voice to rush onward at breakneck speed, until it is interrupted and concluded by the final couplet, with its extra flourish in the last line. There is little wonder that Byron, soon after composing the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, was to find his true *forte* in *ottava rima*.

We must examine one more example from Spenser to demonstrate how, in contrast to Byron, he manages to bring the whole stanza in all its complexities, into a reader's consciousness. Once again the stanza in question is freighted with verb-rhymes:

> Wherewith enrag'd she fiercely at them flew,

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And with her flaming sword about her layd
That none of them foule mischiefe could eschew,
But with her dreadfull strokes were all dismayd:
Here, there, and euery where about her swayd   5
Her wrathful steele, that none could it abide;
And eke the *Redcrosse* knight gaue her good aid,
Ay ioyning foot to foot, and side to side,
  That in short space their foes they haue quite terrifide. (*FQ* 3.1.66)

Although this is a narrative of violent activity, the lines are all intact and clearly audible to a listener. The only noticeably enjambed line, line 5, is the second line of the middle couplet, and therefore very closely connected with its predecessor. 'Swayd' in line 5 clearly and immediately recalls 'dismayd', in line 4, since the words are so close together—and 'dismay' is in any case the result of this kind of 'sway'. Moreover, 'Here, there and euery where about her swayed' is a more general statement of the sword feints described in the preceding narrative lines. Its effect is appositional, since the plural 'strokes' in line 4 starts the process of generalization. Couplets tend to comment or reflect and, though this one is still embroiled in the action, it is more general than lines 1 to 3. The enjambment of line 5 does not, as in Byron, interfere with the perceived integrity of the line; it merely allows for progress, opening up what could be a closed couplet and linking the first part of the stanza with its conclusion. Line 6, which introduces a new, alien rhyme, has the potential to be very disconnected from the foregoing lines. However, it embodies here the subject ('steele') and modifier ('that none could it abide') of line 5's concluding verb ('swayd') and is thus tightly clasped to line 5. The grammatical pause preceding line 7 is fairly strong, but line 7 signals a return to the oft-repeated B-rhyme and is in little danger of alienation. As one might expect, being a re-establishment of alternating rhyme, line 7 is informatively narrative: 'And eke the *Redcrosse* knight gave her good aid'. The final couplet develops this new information—Redcross's help—but, especially in its last longer line, it does not narrate so much as distance and summarize the action.

This last-quoted example is typical of Spenser in the way it displays and uses so many of the stanza's devices. Narrative progression moves smoothly into reflection and onward again into narration, only to be featly turned and concluded in retrospection with an extra foot to mark the unit's closure. Like a stately dance consisting of stands, turns, and counterturns, every movement is itself perceptible and every movement is itself meaningful, reflected in narrative, tone and theme. Although, as Saintsbury, among others, warns us, Spenser's uses of his stanza show an 'infinite variety' (1.369), it is probably safe to speculate that they develop and reveal rather than inhibit or occlude the structure's potential. And this development and revelation is crucially dependent on the perceptibility of the line,

which in turn relies upon ingenious strategies of inversion that characteristically shift the verb to the final position in order to rhyme upon it.

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