John Hollander, "The Music of Poetry," in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 15.2 (1956), 232-44.

particularly treacherous study right now. Unlike the metrists of antiquity and later ages, faced with the relatively simple task of describing canonical styles, "rules how to compose," in short, today we must understand conflicting rationales of the varied styles of an intricate tradition, and of a patchwork present descending from many areas of it simultaneously. Ever since Sidney Lanier hailed music and poetry as "the two species of the genus art of sound," prosodists, following his example, have felt free to turn to musical notation and terminology to help them unravel the problems they have inherited.

Aside from clarifying some of the historic confusions of stress and duration, however, too many musical prosodists have either swollen our lexicon of prosodical terms, or, without knowing it, needlessly proliferated marginal entities. Notating a poem for vocal reading is one thing; reifying prosodic elements whose existence is suggested by the notational symbols, and then employing these entities in a purported description of the poem, is quite another. Now it is description, adequate to various purposes of criticism, to which prosodical study has most frequently been committed. Historically, it has been continually stricken with inconclusive debate over ontology: "Does the foot exist?" "Is there quantity in English verse?" "Does 'hovering accent' exist, and if so, where does it hover?" Usually quite wisely, one's instinct leads him to avoid such questions. It must nevertheless be remembered that, as a famous logician has remarked, "What there is does not in general depend upon one's use of language, but what one says there is does."[1]

In attempting to keep this in mind in the following discussion of prosody and music, I shall not attempt to offer a new method of scansion, decked out with new terms and symbols drawn from music, and selective redefinitions of older ones. Neither will it be my intention to demonstrate stylistic similarities between the chromaticism of Gesualdo's madrigals, the texture of Crashaw's verse, and the *chiaroscuro* of Caravaggio. Rather, I shall critically examine something of the history of music's identification with prosody in verse, and attempt to describe the limits of usefulness of any further comparisons between the two that we might choose to make.

The first problem we shall have to face concerns the idea of the nature of music itself. Classical antiquity bequeaths us no single line of doctrine on the subject. Actually, the Pythagorean view of music as a mathematical model of universal order, and what might be called the Platonic view of music as a branch of rhetoric, have polarized and interacted throughout our history. The first of these, called by Boethius *musica mundana*, concentrates primarily on the organizations of musical structure, taking little interest in effects on a hearer, but making of them a *donnée*, like the apparent motions of the heavens. The second view, Boethius' *musica humana*, involves the effects of musical forms and conventions upon the hearer; in it, formal considerations are subordinated to ethical and psychological ones. At various times in the past, one or another of these views has predominated, with various admixtures of a third, or Plotinian strand of tradition that makes of music an utter mystery.

[1] W. V. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 103.

The conflict between these two views is an important one for aesthetics generally, for it represents a traditional choice between concentrating on the structure of any work of art, or upon its effect. It marks the gap between the word, sound or image, and the feeling that it may purport to invoke in the hearer. A grave confusion on this score is built, as it were, into the English language. For in the coalescence, shortly after Chaucer's time, of Latin *modus* (relating to structure) and Anglo-Saxon *mōd* (relating to feeling), a complicated redistribution of meanings between "mode" and "mood" arose to terrify lexicographers and betray all but professional aestheticians.[2] Most important of all, however, is the fact that such confusions create a shaky bridge over the chasm between structure and effect. It is precisely this chasm which modern criticism has committed itself to filling in.

It was Leibnitz who first grasped the real nature of this difficulty when he declared music to be a kind of "*unconscious* exercise in arithmetic,"[3] thus implying in one phrase the ultimately determinative character of music's structure, as well as the compulsiveness of our tendency, on hearing it, to minimize all but its sensuous effects. For the Greeks, however, no such problem existed. Poetry was inseparable from music, and the origins of Greek prosody lay in purely musical principles. Proper music was almost exclusively vocal, and hence the intended effect of any composition lay unambiguously exposed in its text. The notation of Greek vocal music is of great prosodic interest. It indicated pitches only, one or two for each syllable of text. A singer, then, could simply fit these pitches to the duration-patterns indicated by the poetic meter and produce musical periods, corresponding to *lines* of verse, marked out in what we would call *bars* or *measures*, corresponding to *feet*.

But sequences of long and short durations cannot arrange themselves into musical patterns without the introduction of stresses, just as successively flashing red and green lights would require an accompanying click on every fourth red flash, for example, to produce perceptible groupings of an otherwise endless and unbroken continuum. Greek music employed the *thesis*, or stressed downbeat, and *arsis*, or unstressed downbeat, to mark off its feet or measures, even though Attic Greek, like modern French, possessed no phonemic stress itself. Stress patterns in Greek prosody may thus be seen to have served a musical purpose. The same sort of phenomenon can be seen, almost in reverse, in the development of bar-lines in baroque music. They became a necessity as instrumental music replaced vocal polyphony in predominance, since stress and syntactic patterns in the text could no longer give order to unbroken successions of notes.

Greek prosody, then, originated in systems of vocal music. It was when the speakers of an originally stressed Latin poetry took over Greek conventions that our traditional prosodic problems began to arise. The superimposition of schemata

[2] See my "Moedes or Prolaciouns in Chaucer's 'Boece'," *Modern Language Notes*, LXXI (1956), 397–399.

[3] *Monadology and other Philosophical Writings*, tr. R. Latta (Oxford, 1898), p. 422n. Also, cf. *The Principles of Nature and of Grace* (Ibid., p. 422), where Leibnitz insists that "Music charms us, although its beauty consists only in the harmonies (*convenances*) of numbers and in the counting (of which we are unconscious but which nevertheless the soul does make) of the beats or vibrations of sounding bodies . . . "

for the poetry of one language upon the hostile realities of another engender grave complexities; they may be seen in the effects of Romance prosodic conventions upon Old English, for example. But it was with the adaptation of Greek meters to Latin that poetry, originally inseparable from music, began to grow away from it. And it was then that poetry began to develop, in its meter, a music of its own.

Actually, this whole account is complicated by the fact that two schools of thought eventually arose within Greek music itself, and it was their differences, discussed in uncomprehending detail by Roman grammarians, that became responsible for so much terminological confusion. The *metrikoi*, primarily rhetoricians and grammarians, held to traditional principles of Greek verse, maintaining in particular that one long syllable should be made equal to two shorts. The *rhythmikoi*, musicians in our sense of the word, held for finer gradations in relative length. In essence, the latter group were arguing for melodies rhythmically independent of the text. Differences between "meter" and "rhythm" remained those of commitment to the independence of melody.[4] Acquired pairs of meanings, such as rational schema vs. actual sound, quantity vs. stress, and, more recently, the printed poem vs. the spoken one, have become pinned onto the terms "meter" and "rhythm" only since the middle ages.

Music in post-classical times, confined at first to the uses of the Church, eventually became an independent art with conventions, and eventually a history, of its own. Even the earliest theorists of the polyphonic period, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, were obliged to try to reconcile the respected authorities of Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Augustine, with the actual practice of their own day. The *Scholia Enchiriadis*, a tenth-century treatise, for example, discusses consonant intervals of the parallel *organon* that was unknown to classic times; then, to prove that such considerations only reaffirm the Pythagorean status of *musica mundana* as a branch of mathematics, the author invokes the following passage from Augustine's *De Ordine: Thus reason has perceived that numbers govern and make perfect all that is in rhythm (called "numbers" in Latin) and in song itself.*[5]

It was just this use of the word "numbers" for prosody in general that the Elizabethan critics employed in trying to revive the prelapsarian marriage of music and poetry. Long after their divorce, and just at the time that their paths were departing from the parallel course to which Renaissance aesthetics had held them, a writer like Thomas Campion could argue from the ideology of *harmonia mundi* to the necessity of reëstablishing classic scansion in English. The first chapter of this *Observations in the Art of English Poesy* (1602), "intreating of numbers in general," maintains that "the world is made by Simmetry and proportion, and is in that respect compared to Musick, and Musick to Poetry."[6] The conclusion follows that *numbers* (i.e., classic quantitative scansion) must re-

[4] I am indebted to Curt Sachs' discussion of Greek meter in *Rhythm and Tempo* (New York, 1953), pp. 115–146.

[5] See Oliver Strunk (ed.), *Source Readings in Music History* (New York, 1950), pp. 137–138.

[6] Thomas Campion, *Works*, ed. Percival Vivian (Oxford, 1909), p. 35.

place rhyme and stress. The world had been redeemed from Medieval ignorance, adds Campion: "In those lack-learning times and in barbarized Italy, began that vulgar and easie kind of Poesie . . . which we abusively call Rime and Meeter."[7] "Meeter" means stressed scansion here; it is even more confusing to note that other theorists like Puttenham use "numbers" to refer to a pure syllable-counting scansion, like that of Japanese verse. But Puttenham adds that "meeter and measure is all one . . . and is but the quantity of a verse, either long or short,"[8] and then cheerfully assures us that quantity in English consists in the fact that two or more syllables (shorts) make up a foot (long). Puttenham was the first really comprehensive English prosodist, and in his confusions he inaugurated the prosodical tradition of preserving inherited terminology at any cost.

The Elizabethan prosodists also produced some musical analogies which will be discussed shortly. What must be remembered at this point, however, is that throughout the middle ages music still usually depended on a poetic text for its *raison d'être*. By the fourteenth century, music had attained a stage of development that permitted stylistic controversy to concern itself not only with questions of sacred authority, but with those of elegance, subtlety, and utility as well. Composers had been signing their names to compositions for over one hundred years, and instruments were being richly employed in the performance of vocal music. But music was still essentially singing; and although motets, up through the fifteenth century were written to several texts simultaneously, one for each voice and often in different languages, only rarely could there be music without a text at all.

It was not until after 1500 that instrumental music received the continual attention of being notated, and it was not until the seventeenth century that, aside from lutes and keyboards, particular instruments were specified in score. It was during the sixteenth century, however, with its growth of secularism and of both amateur and professional musical activity, that the utter separation of music and poetry was being prepared. Three conditions apparently necessary to this final alienation began to emerge. A concentration of interest in instrumental music and the birth of instrumental virtuosity gave rise to a change from an emphasis on music as an activity in which one participated as a performer to an activity which one enjoyed as an audience. And finally, music became ideologically transformed from a microcosmic imitation of universal harmony, benefiting the hearer by bringing him into physiological and moral tune with the macrocosm, into a process operating instrumentally upon the emotions, affecting an audience through its senses alone. Renaissance apologists for music's virtues argued from its cosmological importance and venerable place in antiquity. But before 1620, Descartes could turn off the singing of the spheres as if with a switch when he began his *Compendium Musices* by saying: "The *object* of this art is sound. The end, to delight and move various affections in us."[9] Finally, hundreds of

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

[8] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). In G. G. Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford, 1904), II, p. 70.

[9] René Descartes, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1824) V, p. 445.