

REVIEW ARTICLE

Rethinking Holder

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Rethinking Meter: A New Approach to the Verse Line
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Alan Holder's *Rethinking Meter (RM)* is an incisive, informed critique of work on English metrics/prosody from the beginning to about 1990, with some suggestions for revision and redirection. Over the last fifteen years or so, there have been several similar volumes (e.g. Attridge, 1982; Brogan, 1981; Cureton, 1992; Meschonnic, 1982; Wesling, 1985, forthcoming), but none of these equal *RM* in sheer narrative energy and rhetorical verve. The difficulties that Holder observes have been observed before, and the revisions and redirections he suggests are either slight or problematical themselves. But given that the profession still refuses to listen, the long, sad story of the scholarly tradition in English metrics cannot be told too often. Both experienced prosodists and those who are only occasional visitors to this field will find *RM* a useful and enjoyable guide to what Holder calls 'the muddled kingdom of meter' (Chapter 1), 'the morass that is meter country' (p. 27).

I Summary

In a short introduction, Holder clearly states his purpose. Even though metre is a given in poetics, because of our unproductive modes of scansion, the study of prosody has become a 'backwater' (p. 13): attention to scansion is disappearing in the schools, and prosodists themselves have become self-denigrating and apologetic. 'The concept of meter stands between us and our reading of poetry, displacing or devaluing our perceptions with its precepts' (p. 16). Therefore, we can no longer 'espouse [it] unquestioningly' nor 'sidestep it guiltily'; we must 'confront and demythologize it' (p. 15).

Holder presents his argument in seven chapters that flow smoothly from problems with traditional claims (Chs 1 and 2, pp. 19–63), to recent attempts to revise or do away with these claims (Ch. 3, pp. 64–102), to the implications of these claims for the definition and analysis of free verse (Ch. 4, pp. 103–28), to his own suggestions for revision (Ch 5 and 6, pp. 129–88), to an application and extension of those claims to other considerations (Ch. 7, pp. 189–234). *RM* ends with a short epilogue (pp. 235–40) that relates his claims to current work in critical theory, especially as it has been applied to poetic sound.

In his first two chapters (pp. 19–63), Holder examines the concept of the



metrical foot and its critical consequences in a large collection of the classic texts of the pedagogical and scholarly tradition in English metrics. In these texts, Holder finds the claims for the foot unfounded and the critical consequences of using the foot intolerable. In case after case, he finds 'foot-bound readings . . . manifestly at variance with . . . commonsense, expressive processing' (p. 26). In the scansions, stress contours, he demonstrates, are repeatedly misrepresented in order to make a line metrically 'regular', and larger claims for the sources and effects of the foot are strained and unsupported. For example, he rejects as false the famous claim by Thompson (1961) that the pentameter simply reflects the rhythmic ordering in the language, and he dismisses as empty the common claim that the foot represents how poetry blends unity and variety, repetition and change.

The major motivation for these forced hearings and unsupported claims, Holder maintains, has been an uncontrolled rage for order. Prosodists have been 'system-mongers' (p. 47) engaged in 'system-maintenance' (p. 48). 'Instead of deriving principles from what the mouth articulates or the ear hears,' he declares, 'conventional prosody teaches us to articulate and/or 'hear' principles' (p. 48). Holder is particularly hard on the common claim that metrical verse involves a 'double audition' (p. 56), the hearing of both a spoken line by the physical ear and an ideal line by 'the mind's ear' (p. 49). This 'sonic Platonism' (p. 49), he claims, can have two outcomes, both bad – either an auditory 'apartheid' (p. 54) that separates speech from metre (while mystifying the latter) or an auditory 'despotism' (p. 54) that 'nips and tucks' speech into regular motion by 'nudges and fudge factors' (p. 48). Both of these outcomes, he claims, require a 'fussy interventionism' that results in 'enormously strained, self-monitored renderings' (p. 54). The 'despotic' outcome is especially incoherent, he points out, in that any reading that regularizes speech contours in the interest of metricality *resolves* the very 'tension' between metrical norm and speech instance that the method seeks to reveal. 'This contempt for mere linguistic facts has been the curse of prosody from the Greeks onward; it is a most dubious instance of mind over matter . . . What we say is what we get, and *all* that we get' (pp. 44, 52). This 'foot fetishism and indiscriminate variation- fondling' (p. 63), he argues, has had its day; it should be abandoned.

In his third chapter (pp. 64–102), Holder also dismisses as slight or conflicted recent attempts to renovate and/or revise traditional foot-substitution scansion. For instance, he finds the claims of Attridge (1982) to be largely 'terminological' and 'typographical' (p. 65) rather than substantive, a series of 'gimmicks' (p. 65) designed to guarantee metricality rather than represent verse movement. In fact, he claims that Attridge's book is mistitled. Given the way that it *imposes* regularity, rather than *represents* movement, it should be titled *The Regular Rhythms of English Poetry* (p. 67). Holder finds similar problems with Woods (1984), with Kiparsky and Youmans (1989), and with Wright (1988). 'The generative engine', he argues, 'labor[s] mightily to produce a small result' (p. 77), while the tortuous contradictions and equivocations in Woods's and

Wright's volumes mark them as 'near-last hurrah[s]' (p. 81) for traditional foot-substitution metrics. In the final pages in this chapter (pp. 96–102), Holder also finds many unresolved contradictions in my early talks and articles on the role of phrasing in verse rhythm (Cureton, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, 1987), especially the place of abstraction, timing, music, and metre in phrasal representation. On these issues, he finds my positions 'old games' (p. 99), rather than new formulations.

In his fourth chapter (pp. 103–28), Holder reviews the history of comment on free verse and finds similar difficulties. The dominant theme of this chapter is a critique of T.S. Eliot's famous claim that free verse is also metrical in some way – variably, partially, intermittently, covertly, etc. This metrical 'haunting' of free verse, Holder argues, is unjustified, if not slanderous. It is just an extension of the 'sonal totalitarianism' (p. 127) that characterizes prosodists' similar regularization of the rhythms of metrical verse. With its overvaluation of metricality, it inevitably misrepresents, and therefore devalues, the qualitatively distinct rhythms of unversified forms. Holder does not deny that free verse poets are aware of the metrical tradition, but he is eager to qualify and reposition this claim. This 'sense of belatedness,' he argues, is more a product of prosodic theory than poetic practice. 'We need to examine specimens of free verse in terms of what they explicitly present, and stop insisting that they be heard only after placing them in a metrical-echo detection chamber. We need in fact to revise our notions of meter itself' (p. 127).

In his fifth chapter (pp. 129–55), Holder lays the foundation for his revisionary gestures. The foci of these gestures are to re-value (1) the actual sound of verse and (2) the auditory and semantic integrity of the poetic line. Lines of verse, Holder maintains, should not be read for covert, 'ghostly' entities, either metrical or versificational. They should be declaimed straightforwardly according to 'the rules of English phonology' (p. 129), and in a way that gives some vocal evidence of line breaks. With these two revisionary gestures, verse lines can then be evaluated, not for their 'regularity', but for their expressive possibilities. These expressive possibilities, Holder suggests, are several. Lines create new auditory and semantic units. Line breaks multiply line-final pauses. The limited domain of the line foregrounds words and other linguistic structures that would be less prominent in a prose setting. The line interacts with other structures that violate its integrity (e.g. syntax), creating ambiguities and tensions. And all of these effects heighten a general perception of processive motion, of language groping its way toward significant expression.

In his sixth chapter (pp. 156–88), Holder details these revisionary proposals. The core of this detail is a promotion of *phrasing* over metricality in verse analysis. For Holder, a rhythmic phrase is 'any one of a series of word combinations that have been thought of by grammarians or linguists as constituting meaningful clusterings in treating the language at large' (p. 176). Included here, he suggests, might be syntactic phrases and clauses, but he goes on in the next chapter to include other things as well, for instance, intonational

is Bolinger (1986), and as the chapter continues, he adopts Bolinger's three-way analysis of nuclear tones (falling/A, rising/B, and fall-rise/C). In the remaining parts of the chapter, Holder applies Bolinger's system to various poems (or parts of poems), both metrical and free. His most extended intonational analysis, of Sylvia Plath's 'Ariel', is especially detailed and revealing. It brings forward the concentration of rising/B contours generated by the short free verse line and its 'scissoring' of the syntax (and what might be considered a more normal intonational rendering). As Holder demonstrates in his analysis, these rising/B contours often form additional patterns, both among themselves and in interaction with other structures (e.g. rhyme), to the extent that they must be recognized as central to both the linguistic texture of the poem and its experiential effect.

In his epilogue, Holder compares his claims with recent work in critical theory – most extensively, Stewart (1990). Holder finds Stewart's treatment of voice local and intermittent to the point of insignificance and preoccupied with meaning to the point of perversely denying what it aims to confront (i.e. voice). Stewart's theory of 'transegmental drift' is so devoted to its 'Francophile . . . critical allegiances' (p. 237), Holder claims, that it converts voice into a manipulation of critical abstractions that, in the end, 'certainly cannot render adequately what is always present in the poem, the movement of the lines' (p. 239). 'A poem is to be voiced,' Holder concludes, 'not subliminally, but out loud.' It demands that 'we attend to what we are doing and hearing – with our actual ears, not the 'mind's ear' (p. 240). In thinking about metre or any other aspect of a poem, 'we should certainly not throttle our voices, not settle for anything less than the full-throated' (p. 240).

2 Evaluation

Holder's review of the prosodic literature is wonderfully detailed and hard-headed, and, in itself, constitutes a major contribution to prosodic study. At this historical moment, the major impediment to prosodic study is not the intractability of poetic experience but our continuing commitment to ancient, outmoded thinking. Over the centuries, the many difficulties with foot-substitution scansion (and its theoretical variants) have been repeatedly detailed, but these critiques have had little effect on our scansional practices and/or theoretical claims. Perhaps the entertaining, engaging rhetoric of Holder's discussion can win a broader audience, and in doing so, influence prosodists to explore new theoretical avenues and scansional practices.

Holder's plea for the inclusion of intonational analysis in prosodic study is also an important contribution. Intonational analysis can be difficult and dubious, but not so difficult and dubious as to preclude its consideration. As Holder points out, a close, extended analysis of the role of intonation in verse is one of the most glaring lacunae in all of prosodic study. While it might be possible to

quibble with some of his claims, most of Holder's intonational analysis is also sensitive and reasonable. Holder has a sharp intonational ear; his analyses provide challenging perceptual exercise.

Holder is also right to stress the importance of intonation in free verse (and other sorts of modern and/or postmodern poetry: the talk poem, the prose poem, jazz poetry, syllabic verse, Frostian blank verse, etc.). In a significant sense, intonation is a type of vocal ideology; it represents that aspect of voice that has acquired conventional semantic/functional value, independent of lexical denotation/connotation and syntactic 'roles'. If contemporary poetry has become more ideological, as many claim that it has, it would make sense to claim that it has also become more centrally intonational. Much contemporary verse is VWA – verse with attitude. Close intonational analysis could help reveal the art of this attitudinal expression.

Holder is also right to stress the importance of rising intonation in free verse (and other sorts of modern and/or postmodern poetry). While Holder himself does not explore these matters in detail, all commentary on the functions of intonation has correlated rising intonation with the incomplete, the fragmentary, the discontinuous, the interrogative, the disjunctive, the qualified, and the ironic. These qualities are major features of modern/postmodern consciousness; therefore much contemporary poetry artfully textures this consciousness through linguistic choice and arrangement. Rising intonation is undoubtedly a major dimension of this artful texturing.

Given these significant accomplishments, Holder's narrow treatment of both metre and phrasing is unfortunate, and the reader should beware. Historically, almost all prosodic 'phrasalists' have viewed phrasal analysis as an *alternative* to metrical analysis, rather than just its *complement* – and Holder is no exception. In some ways, these 'phrasalists' have been more consistent than most metrists. To most metrists, metre is primarily a matter of voicing, and Holder is right to point out that this position is untenable. If one is interested in voicing, the proper focus of concern is with phrasing (and, as Holder goes on to explore, with intonation). Rhythmically, verse phrasing represents our primary cognitive response to linguistic prosody – syllables, stresses, intonational units, etc. Metre also responds to linguistic prosody, but more indirectly and arbitrarily. Like other 'phrasalists', Holder points out some of this indirection and arbitrariness – and is right to do so.

Holder's decision to reduce metre to versification (i.e. syllable counting, etc.) is a mistake, however. Over the centuries, the tradition of comment on English prosody has built up an enormous testimony to the presence of a 'regular', non-phrasal 'beating' in our experience of metrical verse; so many could not have been so wrong for so long. The dilemma for both Holder and his 'opponents', however, is how to reconcile this metrical perception with the obvious fact of the non-metrical, vocal variability of the poem. As Holder points out, metrists usually just ignore this vocal variability (or reduce it to some bare minimum). Phrasalists such as Holder deny the metrical beating (or reduce it to

some sort of weak versification expectation). Both gestures are misrepresentations. Poetic rhythms have both phrases and measures, both stresses and beats, and any adequate prosodic analysis must recognize this. The question is: how?

The major fact that English prosodists have missed is that metre is essentially *gestural*, not vocal. A metrical beat is not a mouthing (or even the direct product of a mouthing), but a bodily pulsation. In gesturing metrically, we respond strongly to voicings, and aspects of metrical gesturing follow voicing very closely. But as most metrists have underlined, metrical gesturing can both oppose phrasal voicing and occur without vocal support. In fact, as I argue in Cureton (1992), when viewed as a whole, contours of metrical prominence run pervasively *against* contours of phrasal prominence.¹

Metrical contours as a whole pervasively *decline*. The first beat in a measure is mandatorily stronger than the other beats in the measure, and then contours of prominence alternate in a similarly declining pattern:

1-2-3-4

Or as I like to represent these things:²

•
• •
• • • •

These declining contours of metrical gesturing are not voiced, and to the extent that they depart from the most perceptible level of gesturing (what musicians call the metrical tactus), they become significantly fainter; therefore, they have largely escaped the notice of the prosodic tradition. In verse that is strongly metrical, however, these contours are clearly perceptible, and when they are, meter and phrasing are not just occasionally and locally distinct; they are pervasively and globally so.

For instance, the opening two lines of 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' can each be said as one intonational unit, with the intonational nucleus on the final syllable:

Mary had a little **lamb**.
Its fleece was white as **snow**.

This climactic motion is (part of) the *voicing* of the poem. It can be heard. This is (part of) the prosodic phrasing.

But if you attend to your bodily gesturing, you will also perceive a declining pattern of alternating, metrical beating that places a major prominence on the first stressed word in each line (i.e. **Mary** and **fleece**), with the prominence on

Mary stronger than the prominence on fleece.

Mary had a little lamb.

.						part ³
.						line
.			.			lobe
.	.		.	.		tactus
.	.	.	.	.	.	pulse

Its fleece was white as snow.

.						line
.				.		lobe
.	.		.	.	.	tactus
.	.	.	.	.	.	pulse

The problem with bringing these perceptions to consciousness is that they occur simultaneously and in different experiential modes. This simultaneous experience is not a 'double audition' but a 'double cognition' – a simultaneous voicing (of phrasing) and gesturing (of meter). Notice that this pattern of metrical beating also adds a seventh pulse and fourth tactical beat at the end of the second line, even though these metrical gestures occur without vocal support.

Phrasalists such as Holder dismiss these claims on both logical and perceptual grounds, but both of these dismissals are unjustified. Logically, Holder would claim that this beating is contradictory – a 'silent voicing'. But if this beating is not a voicing at all, it cannot be a 'silent voicing'. Therefore, there is no logical contradiction. Beats are silent because (non-vocal) gesturing is silent. By limiting verse experience to the voice (and things that are underpinned by voice: syntax and semantics), Holder truncates both human experience and linguistic expression by dismissing linguistic gesture (i.e. paralanguage). Holder would claim that these beats are imperceptible 'ghosts' because they are not vocal. But this claim also follows from Holder's narrow presuppositions, not from perception/experience itself. Not all perception/experience is auditory. The strong initial beats in meter are like the large initial steps in many dances. We 'make/take/perform' them; we don't say them.

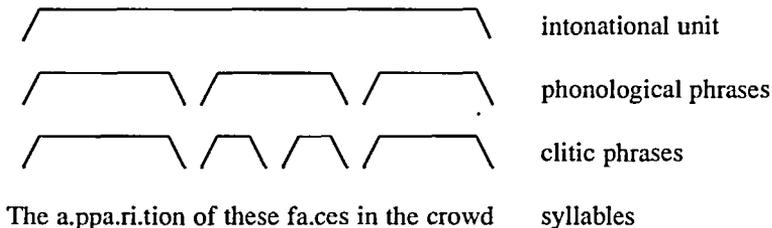
Holder's treatment of phrasing in *RM* is also limited by his vocal bias (and, in this case, his limited knowledge of the literature in linguistic prosody). As Holder himself reviews (pp. 160–72), there is also a long testimony in the 'phrasalist' tradition that supports the positing of a *hierarchy* of prosodic phrases – not just the intonational unit. For instance, he cites George Stewart's claim that the opening line of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' is experienced in five sub-intonational prosodic phrases (what linguists call *clitic phrases*): 'The curfew---tolls--the knell--of parting--day' (Stewart, 1930: 33).

Because of his vocal bias, however, Holder equates phrasal boundaries with pausing; therefore, he dismisses these phrases as 'truncated' entities influenced

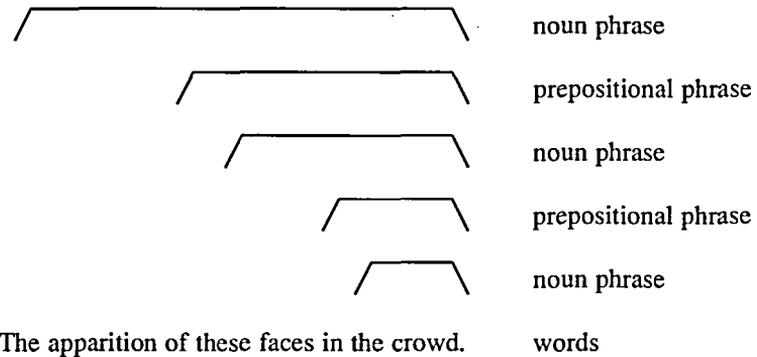
by a 'ghostly' metricality. But nothing (besides his narrow presuppositions) demands such a dismissal. Prosodic phrases below the level of the intonational unit establish themselves by means other than pause, but Holder does not recognize these means as 'legitimate'. Holder accuses the metrical tradition of arbitrarily hearing principles. Holder arbitrarily limits his prosodic principles to hearing.

This arbitrary limitation of phrasing to the 'pause-unit' gets Holder into various sorts of trouble in both his theoretical claims and his analyses. For instance, throughout the later part of his discussion he struggles with his early claim that prosodic phrases can be equated with syntactic phrases. In fact, at one point, he even claims that 'for all practical purposes we can consider that syntactic units and tone-group units *are* congruent' (p. 209). Such a claim cannot be supported, and the argument Holder supplies is faulty. Citing Crystal's demonstration that most intonational units can be defined syntactically (Crystal, 1975), Holder claims that syntactic units and tone-group units are congruent. But this misrepresents Crystal's claim. Crystal only claims that we can specify fairly closely which syntactic structures tend to form intonational units. He doesn't claim that syntactic units and tone-group units are congruent. In fact, Holder's own analysis belies this claim. For instance, in his parsing of the first line of Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro', cited above, Holder isolates *The apparition, of these faces, and in the crowd* as prosodic phrases, even though, in this context, the first two of these are not syntactic phrases. In this context, the largest syntactic phrase is the noun phrase *The apparition of these faces in the crowd*. Within this noun phrase, there is a prepositional phrase: *of these faces in the crowd*. Within this prepositional phrase there is a noun phrase: *these faces in the crowd*. Within this noun phrase there is another prepositional phrase: *in the crowd*. And within this prepositional phrase there is another noun phrase: *the crowd*.

Evident here as well is the radically different *vertical/hierarchical* ordering of syntactic and prosodic constituents. While Holder doesn't give us a hierarchy of prosodic phrasing, if he had, this hierarchical structuring would be something like the following:



The syntactic phrasing has the following hierarchical organization:



Needless to say, these two phrasings are wildly *non-congruent* – in the number of phrases, in the spans of phrases, and in the depth and organization of their hierarchical embedding. A further worry for Holder here might be that few readers, I think, would split the line into three intonational units. That is, the phrases that Holder isolates are just the sub-intonational prosodic phrases that he dismisses (in this case, what linguists call *phonological phrases*).

The largest limitation with Holder's argument, however, is his progressive loss of contact with the primary motivation for the prosodic analysis of poetry historically – the connection between poetic experience and rhythmic cognition, human temporality, and 'musical' expression. (This is the primary focus of Cureton (1992), which, it seems, appeared after Holder submitted his manuscript for publication.) This larger difficulty has been the major bane of prosodic study and should be closely considered by anyone who works on these issues. For most prosodists, the major focus of concern has been to explain how poetry establishes a tight, complex structure of interacting, dynamic equivalences/parallels, equivalences that (despite our paucity of precise terminology) we have been wont to call 'rhythm'. Prose is certainly 'rhythmic', too, but it has been the testimony of generations of readers of poetry that the poem is especially 'rhythmic' in this way. It has also been a common claim that this rhythmicity transforms both the structural organization of poetic language and its expressive 'dominant'. With its complex rhythmicity, the expressive focus of a poem becomes more like music than like painting. It becomes more concerned with time, the non-referential, and human inwardness than with space, reference, and human outwardness. This non-referential, temporal texture of the poem is supported by all of the other structural features of poetic expression (sounds schemas, syntactic choice and arrangement, trope, etc.) and, when considered most broadly, becomes the outstanding generic feature of poetic expression.⁴ Poetry uses space to figure time. Prose uses time to figure space. Poetry is a sighted singing; prose, a sounding vision. It is this desire to maintain

contact with human temporality that motivates our continuing preoccupation with metre in verse analysis. Metre is our most basic rhythmic ability; it underpins all of our other rhythmic abilities.

In considering the structure and effect of prosodic organization in poetry, it is fine – indeed necessary – to consider the role of voicing in determining this organization. But from a larger perspective, any consideration of voicing is self-defeating if it loses contact with the defining generic quality of poetic expression – and this is just what happens as Holder's argument in *RM* proceeds. Like most 'phrasalists', Holder does not just 'rethink' metre; in essence, he does away with it. Metre is reduced to a loose organization of versificational constraints that frame and encourage phrasal ordering. This jettisoning of metrical experience jettisons the foundation of rhythmic experience, the foundations of human temporality, and therefore the foundations of poetic expression. This loss is too severe. Without a strong theory of metre, poetics becomes a building built on air.

It is also evident that what Holder provides to replace metrical experience also loses contact with the rhythmic, the temporal. By reducing phrasing to one level – the tone unit – Holder is left with a descriptive system that contains only a highly variable temporal entity. Tone units indeed form one level of structure in linguistic prosody and therefore establish one sort of rhythmic paralleling/equivalencing. However, when tracked in isolation, apart from other levels of prosodic organization, intonation is difficult to connect with rhythmic expression – and this leads Holder in other directions. As Holder moves in these other directions, he rejects any analogies between musical expression and poetic expression. In fact, he rejects any consideration of time in prosodic expression, whether this time is metrically or phrasally determined. To Holder, any consideration of poetic temporality is an 'old game' that we need to 'rethink' if we are to move on to a more useful poetics. This claim is dubious, and Holder presents no extended argument to convince us otherwise. As Holder's argument proceeds, his analytical attention draws closer and closer to voice, but in doing so, draws further and further away from the unifying centre of poetic expression. By his last chapter (on intonation), Holder indeed finds his 'object', but this object floats free of any larger theoretical context.

The relation between poetry and human temporality is a deep and complex one, but it is just such depth and complexity that prosodic study has lacked historically and therefore so desperately needs. As with much else in Western thought, historical comment on poetic language has been preoccupied with the referential, the spatial. Sight is our most powerful sense, and among the senses, it is sight that is connected most strongly with both ideation and linguistic function. When we use language, we use it primarily to refer.

However, it is another question entirely whether *poetry* is predominantly referential. As all recognize, poetry makes exceptional use of linguistic form, even to the point of subordinating linguistic function. In fact, as Aviram (1994) argues, it may be that the best way to talk about poetry is to consider its

referential gestures as complex, allegorical 'tellings' of its formal orderings. In prose, linguistic form serves linguistic function, but in poetry, linguistic function serves linguistic form.

In fact, if poetry is essentially temporal and poetic expression is the art of linguistic form, linguistic form itself might best be viewed as temporal. Recently, linguists have become increasingly aware of the irreconcilable conflicts between our theories of linguistic form and our theories of linguistic function. Theories of linguistic form cannot account for linguistic function, and theories of linguistic function cannot account for linguistic form.⁵ Why do languages have the peculiar array of forms that they do? Why is language both syntactic and prosodic, both semantic and paralinguistic? Why do languages have both syllables and intonational units, both phrases and clauses? Our linguistic theories cannot say. Our theories of linguistic form do not explain the existence of these structures; they just catalogue their occurrence. In truth, we have no deep explanation for linguistic form.

As we begin to work toward such an explanation, those who have concerned themselves closely with poetic expression might have something significant to contribute. As Holder argues, in developing our theories of poetic expression, we indeed need to 'rethink' any theory of metricality that dismisses or distorts the fine modulation (and rhythmic ordering) of the human voice. But in thinking about the human voice, we also need to rethink the larger role of voicing in linguistic form. In fact, as I have just suggested, we need to rethink linguistic form. If the historical comment in verse study has not been wrong, this rethinking will be about language and human time.

Notes

- 1 For summaries of the argument in Cureton (1992), see Cureton (1993, 1994a, 1994b, forthcoming b).
- 2 In this formalism, dot rows indicate beats on the same level of prominence; dot columns represent relative prominence.
- 3 In this scansion, I label levels of metrical beating. The *pulse* is the lowest level of beating; the *tactus* is the most salient level; the *lobe* is a measure of pulses; the *line* is a measure of tactical beats; the *part* is a measure of lobes. All measures have three levels of beating.
- 4 For a detailed discussion of these claims, see Cureton (forthcoming a).
- 5 That is, in both formal grammars and functional grammars, there is no one-to-one matching between form and function. In functional grammars, forms are grouped arbitrarily under functions. In formal grammars, functions are grouped arbitrarily under forms. Stylisticians recognize that this problem has been the Achilles' heel of stylistics historically. Taylor and Toolan (1984) call this difficulty the problem of 'criterial perspective'.
Recently, stylisticians have preferred to use functional theories of language, even though these theories preclude any close consideration of linguistic form. It is no accident that most recent stylistics has focused on prose. A revealing account of poetry demands a strong theory of linguistic form. Our functional theories of grammar provide no such theory.

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