

## Hegel: The time of rhythm, the time of rhyme

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[A] boy throws stones into the river and now marvels at the circles drawn in the water as an effect in which he gains an intuition of something that is his own doing. This need runs through the most diversiform phenomena up to that mode of self-production in external things which is present in the work of art.<sup>1</sup>

In this brief reference to a boy throwing stones into water the whole of Hegel's theory of art is present. In the motion of concentric rings radiating in water and materially altering its surface, in the broken reflections of the sky and trees, both the boy's imagination and body exist. The exact pitch and angle of the body in the act of throwing, the energy of the throw, his exhilaration, his joy, ripple in the water. Watery circles, energy, joy, return to him, understood as kinaesthetic and imaginative life. This is a state experienced by the artist as 'the proper essence of his existence'. It is something 'he does not imagine for himself but which he *is*', Hegel stated, in the summation that ends his account of the forms of art (p. 603). The work of art registers the drive of desire in the maker to 'bring himself into his own consciousness', to 'represent himself to himself' and 'recognize himself alone alike in what is summoned out of himself and in what is accepted from without'. The artist is simultaneously driven by a 'practical need' to understand the same

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<sup>1</sup> 'Introduction', *Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, *Hegel's Aesthetics*, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 603.

experience in sensuous reality. 'Even a child's first impulse involves this practical alteration of external things' (Introduction, p. 31). The theoretical need of self-production grounds all acts of thought. What distinguishes art is the essential co-presence with it of this sensuous alteration of the world. This work on the world is nothing so limited as projection or even self duplication: it is an awareness of a physical world in which we live, suffer, and desire, a world marked by that desire and suffering, altered by body and mind, and reflexively altering them. And because sensuous material and spirit are inimical and pull apart, the form of this recognition, a constituent part of recognition itself, will be one of contradiction. There is always something restless about the making of a work of art for Hegel.

In his essay, 'Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody', Simon Jarvis has brilliantly analysed the way this profound movement of consciousness finds patterns of recurrent 'excursion and return' (p. 64) in rhyme, whose structure parallels the recursive outgoing and coming back of mind.<sup>2</sup> His own passionate 'musical thinking' has transformed debates on prosody. This outgoing and coming back, he argues, is a phenomenological experience, not one that can be reduced simply to a movement of *mind* alone, and one that alters the phenomenological experience itself. Since this movement is expressed in language, the linguistic form of rhyme creates a 'making explicit' of experience that is cognitive. The cognition lies not in the move to a concept or any necessary form of semantic or signifying reference but in the structural act of outgoing and return itself, in which the subject knows and *feels* that it knows: form and structure think and feel; through this externalisation they become modes of thinking and feeling. Knowing that we feel, and feeling that we know, means that knowing and feeling are indivisible. More than this, the music of rhyme as the 'sound of interiority' is grounded in the 'primordial fact of affectivity', the 'feeling which *I—am*' (p. 69). Not the abstract cogito alone but the feeling of being grounds the 'I am'.

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<sup>2</sup> Simon Jarvis, 'Musical thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody', *Paragraph*, 28.2 (2005), pp. 57-71.

Jarvis, following Henri Meschonnic's insistence on the radical historicity of prosody, turns to rhyme and to Hegel's account of the historical moment of rhyme's advent, in order to explore how consciousness, or ego, both shapes and is shaped by forms of versification that arise from vast cultural shifts and metamorphoses of thought in western Europe.<sup>3</sup> For Hegel, rhyme is directly related to the ontology of the 'Romantic' era and breaks with classical prosody, which is based on metre, or rhythm, not rhyme. Rhyme emerges with Christianity and, to coin a term, 'post-Christian' culture. We are still living in this modern Romantic era, though its conflicts are increasingly extreme. Consciousness is now founded, not on a joyful and plastic corporeality that lives with the sensuous interplay of body and mind, but on a split between spirit and sensuous world. It comes into being in and through the will to idealisation and the repudiation of the corporeal. This sets the world aside, marking what Jarvis terms the 'opening up of an unprecedented kind of interiority' (p. 62). Since it is the goal of this new interiority to un-tether the material world from spirit or intellect, rhyme and accent serve intellect by enabling the ictus to fall on the roots of words that release semantic meaning. True, the stress of rhyme thus more sharply exposes the recursive movement of consciousness to and from itself, knowing and feeling. Rhyme instantiates and *is* this new interiority. But the free play of rhythmic elements is sacrificed.

Hegel explores the repercussions of the Romantic split in both the sections on rhythm and rhyme that make up his account of versification. Jarvis directs his discussion of the cognitive force of musical thinking to the structure of rhyme, where it comes into being with particular clarity. In this discussion I take up Hegel's account of metre in order to think about the temporality of both rhythm and rhyme and what was at stake in it. Why was it so important to Hegel to set the

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du Rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* (Lagrasse: Editions Verdier, 1982), p. 51, p. 50. For Meschonnic there is a continuum from gesture to rhythm, as rhythm is of the body. Metre for him is culturally made, whereas rhythm belongs indivisibly to the individual word. The reader will see that I have not maintained a strict distinction between metre and rhythm. This distinction is germane to some arguments but not to mine.

time of Classical rhythm against the time of Romantic (or modern) rhyme? His distinction is confusing because despite their inimical aspects, Hegel makes recursive movement and the caesura systemic to the artifices of both rhythm and rhyme. The differences of emphasis are significant and require some investigation. So does the working of the caesura and its different forms of mediation.

The differentiating qualities arising in ‘Classical’ metre and ‘Romantic’ rhyme have to be seen not in technical terms, or even in terms of the aesthetics of versification, but under the rubric of a great epistemological myth. This is a myth similar in nature, but different, to that of the *Phenomenology* of 1807, with its figuring of half-states, and half-personae—the unhappy consciousness, stoicism and scepticism, the beautiful soul. Myth imagines in a way that prevents us from literalising reality’s forms and structures by reading these forms as figure. Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics take us to the late 1820s. The culture verging on the 1830s prompts from him a myth for these later times, times that are barely more than a decade away from the early Marx, and which prompted Marx’s analysis of a new modernity of alienated work and commodity culture. The ‘time’ of rhythm and of metre is both the historical time of its coming into being and the internal time of its structure.

In poetry words take on ‘living form’, living because they take the temporal form of life itself.<sup>4</sup> Metre is supreme in ‘announcing’ the tone of a whole poem: sometimes Hegel calls this a ‘fragrance’ (Knox, p. 1011), a curiously paradoxical sensible ideality that penetrates the whole work. (Olfactory experience is both highly physical and invisible.) Elsewhere, speaking of music, he stresses the crucial fact about ‘the time of sound’: it is that of *the real time of the subject itself*. It thus ‘penetrates the self, grips it in its simplest being, and by means of the temporal movement and its rhythm sets the self in motion’ (Knox, p. 908). Jarvis, with his

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<sup>4</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, Vol. 2, ‘Versification’, pp. 1011-1034, p. 1013. I have used two translations of the aesthetics. The Knox translation is henceforth referred to in the text as ‘Knox’. The second translation is *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans F.B.P. Osmaston, 4 vols., London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd, 1920, Vol.

4, ‘Versification’, pp. 70-98. This translation is henceforth referred to as ‘Osmaston’ in the text.

usual insight, quotes this passage to demonstrate the negativity of music for Hegel, since every ‘now’ of sound supersedes the previous ‘now’ (Jarvis p. 66). Nevertheless, though music differs from poetic rhythm, as we shall see, both music and metre ‘set the self in motion’. From this setting of the self in motion we can extrapolate something about rhythm. It brings subjectivity to life. It is a somatic pressure brought into being by the poem’s play with the sound system and stress pattern of its language (Greek, Latin, German as may be) as it is experienced in real time. Abstracted by the mind as sound pattern, and, in a double movement returned to both language and the body, it sets the self in motion by being both cause and effect of movement. This is why rhythm is so fundamental to poetry: it necessitates a response of the total being, at once somatic and intellectual. In Coleridge’s words, it brings the whole soul of man into activity. If we go back to the boy and the stone, rhythm *alters* both language and time, and returns that alteration to consciousness. To see metre as an extrinsic element or ‘fetter’ is therefore to misunderstand its nature.

What are the essential qualities of classical metre? Hegel makes the obvious but often unnoticed point that one cannot *see* sound—as one sees a painting—just as language itself has no ‘inner connection’ with ‘the syllables used as purely arbitrary signs of a communication’ (Knox, p. 1012). (Osmaston translates this as ‘capricious symbols’.) Thus the interplay of *internal* relations and their complexity is at a premium. But the beauty of this interplay is ‘a matter of great difficulty for our modern ear’ and is even ‘no longer available’ to us in the intensity it achieved in antiquity (Knox, p. 1019).

Modernity has lost its understanding of classical metre. The classical ear could distinguish the independent interplay of multiple elements—of long and short syllables, of accent falling differentially on long and short syllables, of the counterthrust of the *language’s* stress pattern against the artificially imposed pattern of metrical accent, of verbal and verse accent, of the pausal variety of the caesura. ‘[T]he ear must follow equally the value of each single syllable and the law

regulating the rhythmic progress of the ensemble' (Knox, p. 1026). Consonants and vowels, for instance, foregrounded by 'manifold ways of figured conjunction' (p. 1014) are in the same kind of play subject to 'the rule of symmetrical interchange' in 'the uniform repetition of the same or similar sound' (p. 1014). It might seem on some occasions that we are simply being taken through the rules of scansion, as is indeed the case (see Knox, pp. 1015-6): but there are two overarching intellectual and historical intentions at work here. The first is that the interplay of multiple rhythmic elements is inherently dialectical. Versification 'makes re-echo in itself that dim, yet specific, direction of the course and character of the ideas in question' (p. 1013). Osmaston translates the same sentence as 'a kind of music ... [which] is capable of essentially re-echoing the mysterious course and character of the ideas'. Poetry makes *visible* (Osmaston, p. 62) a meaning through structure and not semantics. Metre requires law, the labour of the negative and not 'unregulated chance' precisely in order that the 'manifold differences' of linguistic form can come into relationship with one another (Knox, p. 1016) discovering free play in the act of restraint. The characteristic dialectical play of metrical systems *is* the 're-echo' or the 're-echoing' of the ideas. Stress, or perhaps we should take over Hopkins's term, 'instress', not only sets the self in motion but sets ideas in motion. Metre means through the interplay of relationships it makes, not through any meaning intrinsic to it.

Hegel's second intention is to show that these manifold differences can only come into free play through temporal movement. He constantly emphasises the movement of rhythm in real time. Its 'temporal progress', its 'purely temporal feature of duration and forward movement': 'The chief thing in rhythm is not sound picked out and isolated as such but temporal duration and movement' (Knox, p. 1014). That is why it is founded on the length and shortness of syllables (p. 1015). But 'The mind [Das Ich] requires self-concentration, a return to self out

of the steady flux of time' (p. 1016).<sup>5</sup> Metre takes place *in* real time but it is not in identity with it. Consciousness wholly drawn into the onward 'and thens' of time loses its sense of itself as other to time and its relationship to time itself. It requires the labour of the negative to pull back from flux. The conditions that mobilise consciousness and enable the outward movement and return of mind are the markers that re-structure time within time—the syncopation of feet, the movement of the accent from long to short feet, the 'noticeable time-interval' opened up by (Knox, p. 1018) shifting the accent to the final syllable of a word running over from one foot to another. It is this that creates poetry's paramount difference from music. Verse works with 'time measure' and not with the inexorable 'time beat' of music. Music can only obey the 'external sphere of sounding and fading' (p. 1017). The note is a 'fading sound without support' which can only sustain itself by subjection to time and to repetition, the continual re-arousal of repeated sonic pattern. The foot is not the equivalent of the bar. Poetry sustains an ever-changing duration, introducing varying measures (for example anapaests, --/, and dactyls, /--) in which there are different forms of time and temporal equivalents. Because poetry is made of language, not notes, it does possess immanent ideas as music does not. Though Hegel does not make conceptual or semantic matter paramount, he sees that what it does do is to provide a way of bridging feet that actually gives *measure* more freedom and variation, because sheer sound is not the only aesthetic material the poet possesses. Meaning bridges the unit of the foot. It is language that by appealing to measure creates *difference* in the way the time beat of music never can. Paradoxically it is the sediment of meaning that releases poetry into temporal freedom that music cannot possess. Hopkins's imagining of metre as a channel through which different water continually pours, gets something of this meaning.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Osmaston translates this as an ego that requires 'a return out of the continuous forward movement of time' (p. 74).

<sup>6</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Rhythm and other Structural Parts', *Journals and papers*, ed. Humphry House. Completed Graham Storey, London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 280.

The myth being evolved here, then, is that the joyous freedom and plasticity of classical poetry comes about because it is, first, constituted by mobility: it is movement. Second, it *re-makes time itself* as music cannot, and third, it *lives in unalienated time*. In the complex and simultaneous interplay of multiple metrical elements consciousness comes into being through the markers of variation and quantity. To return for the last time to the boy who creates radiating circles by throwing a stone in water, making the circles the host of his body and mind, consciousness inhabits the metrical markers of the poem, immanent alike in the physical and ideational patterns of the versification.

Rhymed versification is living in alienated, post-Christian time. It belongs to the time of the incarnation, the humanising of a time that can only be redeemed and given meaning by Christ's spiritual intervention in it. The world eventually falls into the extremity of spiritual and intellectual hunger and the grotesque body. Rhyme exemplifies the split between interiority and the material world on which Christianity is founded, or came to be historically founded. Thus the 'time' of rhyme not only ousts rhythmical time—'the rhythmical side in such a linkage must recede and occupy the attention less' (Knox, p. 1014)—but introduces an entirely new way of structuring the temporality of versification. Now versification is organised round the ictus, or stress, not measure. Accent falls on the roots of words and on short syllables. Accent falls on rhyme words. It falls on the meaning elements of words, coincides with them, and is not independent of them. Accent and rhyme now foreground the ideality of meaning and mind, which are now separated from the corporeality of language, which it 'strips away' (Knox, p. 1023), or which is now 'wholly wiped away' (Osmaston, p. 84).

Rhyme retains that essential and beautiful outgoing and return that affirms and sets the self in motion. The phrases that describe it parallel those that represented the 're-echoing' of ideas in the form of metre: 'The need of the soul [der Seele] to apprehend itself ... the sole function of bringing us back to ourselves through the return of the same words' (Knox, p. 1023): 'the requirement of soul-life to



discover itself again ... conducts the consciousness back to itself' (Osmaston, p. 85). Since Hegel wants to differentiate the eras of rhyme and metre, it may seem strange that he ascribes to both rhyme and metre the same patterns of outgoing and return. Yet he does differentiate them. Significantly, the formulation describing that same excursion and return that governs rhyme is rather more one-sided and transcendental than in the case of rhythm: it is 'soul', 'Seele', not the 'Das Ich', or ego, translated as 'mind' by Knox (see p. 5 above), that is set in motion 'through the return of the same words'.<sup>7</sup> In both 'Das Ich' and 'Seele' there is an inflection of spirituality: our own modernity has separated out these two terms more definitively than the nineteenth century did. However, consciousness does appear more alienated in this movement than in its Classical equivalent. Indeed, the stripping away of language's corporeality appears to make rhyme simultaneously both *more* abstract and *more* material in Romantic versification because the mental and somatic split means that one is over-valued and the other under-valued. But undervaluation occurs with all the intensity invested in its opposite (Knox, p. 1028).

The wholly different nature of rhythm and rhyme-driven systems, and, for Hegel, their momentous historical and cultural significance, are best suggested by the different functions he allots to the caesura in rhythmical and rhyming patterns. In rhythmic versification the caesura is a unit of time in its own right. It is generated by a unique relationship to accentual variation. It becomes part of an orchestration where the ever-shifting place of the pause creates a living, sensuous variation, creating a 'noticeable time interval' (Knox, p. 1018) or a 'segment of time' (Osmaston, p. 79) that is meaningful because it makes the syllables it emerges from take on a relationship to its gap. Rhyme caesura, on the other hand, becomes an abstract, empty pause. 'Instead of proceeding independently of the word-accent

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Rodney Livingstone for his meticulous reading of the Knox and Osmaston translations against Hegel's German. He notes that 'Das Ich' was subsequently the term Freud adopted: 'I conjecture that Knox was unwilling to use it precisely because it is now inseparable from Freudian associations'.

[it] coincide[s] with it' (Knox, p. 1033). It isn't generated by the threefold accent on long and on short syllables in play with the 'natural' language's stress patterns. It's a cut-off. We are nearing Benjamin's cycles of empty, homogeneous time here, where metrically there is a cleavage between a contingent subjectivity and a contingent reality.<sup>8</sup> The caesura is the marker of a catastrophic break in history.

I will return to the caesura. Its importance is best understood through the critique of modernity lurking in Hegel's epistemological myth of rhyme. (It must be noted in passing that he is extraordinarily responsive to the qualities of rhyme, despite his sense that rhyme belongs to the one-sided unhappy consciousness of modernity. The subjective character of rhyme creates 'a melodic symmetry' (Knox, p. 1031) and euphony that is pleasing and emotionally intense, even though its 'thumping sound' does not require a finely cultivated ear (Knox, p. 1028).) There are several ways in which his analysis of rhyme is prescient. First, the necessity of repetition holds within itself the necessity of *numbers*, the necessity of sheer counting, digital time, the time of capital. It is, secondly, a time in which the individual is foregrounded in his individualism. In rhyme the poet 'is made conscious of himself . . . he recognizes himself as the activity of creation and of apprehension and is satisfied' (Knox, p. 1029).<sup>9</sup> In rhyme the poet's *individual* subjective presence dominates, and that agent's flaunting of its presence presages an individualism that is entirely consonant both with Romantic subjectivity and the subject of capital. Following from this, thirdly, rhyme presages an eroticized culture. Rhyme reveals and conceals: rhymes find one another, fly from one another, 'and yet look for one another, with the result that in this way the ear's attentive expectation is now satisfied without more ado, now teased, now deceived, or kept in suspense' (Knox, p. 1030). Osmaston, emphasising rhyme's foreplay, translates this passage as a 'game of hide and seek' in which the ear is 'coquetted

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 261.

<sup>9</sup> Osmaston has, more sharply, 'the poet is conscious of his own activity, recognizes, and is pleased to recognize, himself therein as both agent and participant' (p. 92).

with' (p. 94). Lastly, following from these features, and from Hegel's understanding that rhyme dissociates the material aspect of language from its spirituality, inherent in rhyme is the culture's readiness for exploitation and consumption. Once materiality is split off, isolated as a separate element, and experienced as an independent entity, it can be separately used and exploited.

These aspects of Hegel's new myth of the late 1820's and early 1830's show him to be aware, as I have remarked, of the very different historical time of the nineteenth century that poetics occupies now, in contradistinction to the early century 'time' of the genesis of the *Phenomenology*. (As I remarked earlier, this late work is not that far away in time from Marx's 1840 manuscripts.) It is part of the capaciousness of his enterprise that his reading of aesthetics suggests so many new cultural applications. But it should not be forgotten that he was experimenting with a myth. It is not wholly clear, for instance, that one could in practice test out his claims in detail. Whether one could in actuality demonstrate that the caesura is fundamentally different in Classical and Romantic scansion is an open question. But this is not the point. The historical meaning that can be theorized from the distinction is the important object of the argument. With this in mind, and with reference to some lines of Shelley's 'Ozymandias', I will end by asking briefly in what ways the caesura is available for modern myth-making.

Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies ...

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Two vast caesurae break apart Shelley's sonnet, just as the two pieces of dismembered stone, shattered visage and trunkless legs, fall apart. Here the caesura is a violent act of separation. It *becomes* the space of catastrophe, an absolute and

irremediable rupture. It is not orchestrated into the pauses and transitions of the poem in an integrated way. The non-*internal* rhymes of ‘remains’ and ‘decay’ reinforce the pause. But it has a mediating force simply because of the violence of its break. Psychoanalysis has taken over the aspect of break or fracture in the caesura to explore the sheer painfulness of mediation. Wilfred Bion, for instance, takes up Freud’s understanding of ‘the caesura of the act of birth’ as a momentous instance of the labour of the negative.<sup>10</sup> The pause does not relate elements but sets up contradictions and questions. He writes of the ‘provisional, or transitive’ aspect of the break: ‘part of a process from one thought or idea or position to another—not a permanency ...’ Building the caesura into his own syntax (‘—not a permanency’), he explores what the pain of the ‘provisional’ might mean in contrast to the pleasure principle of continuity. Benjamin’s insistence on ‘the presence of the now’, the break that makes ‘the continuum of history’ explode as a revolutionary moment (*Illuminations*, p. 261) in which ‘time stands still and has come to a stop’ (p. 262), is another instance of caesural thinking in and about modernity that lifts the break into prominence. The experience of history regains meaning precisely because the break is outside it, alienated time creating a gap that asks for a revolutionary revaluation of the past. The alienated caesura of the poem might do the same thing with the words on either side of it.

‘Nothing beside remains.’ Brutal though it is Shelley’s caesura means that the poem has to turn back on itself and question what has just been said. A triple possibility emerges from the gap: nothing remains in the sand: nothing except for *remains* is left in the sand: nothing except for the *words* on the pedestal remains, words that try to pre-empt their own meaning by forcing ‘despair’ upon the onlooker. The break opens up the meaning of nothing, of negation, and tries out different meanings of devastation and its consequences. It asks for a moment of withdrawal into self and the moment of self-cancellation in despair, of making the

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<sup>10</sup> Wilfred Bion, *Two Papers: the grid and the caesura* (1977; London: Karnac, 1989), p. 43.

self nothing, of seeing the self as negated object, in order to understand what 'nothing' could mean, the caesura of death. But the break does not terminate thought, despite its severity. The ambiguity of the pause asks the reader to interrogate it. Is the 'wreck' of Ozymandias's sculpture 'boundless and bare' or are the sands around it? Do we encounter the wreckage of art and power, a wreckage that has, however remotely, the possibility of being re-made, or are we encountering some terrible and irremediable ecological devastation? The break forces thought, not terminal despair, simply because despair has to be experienced and thought about. We might see the revolutionary moment of the now as Yeats saw making and breaking. Nothing can be sole or whole unless it is riven. The syntax the caesura performatively creates a physical distance between sentences and ideas, performatively creates the temporality of the now. New connections have to be made after it. The blast in the continuum of the poem is a phenomenological occurrence of disconnection and connection. Meaning is made in and by the gap. The empty space is the marker of modernity