

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - The Argumentative And Legalistic Analysis Of Versification



## 1. Introduction

There have been many argumentative studies of poetry, especially Renaissance poetry, for which Latin and Greek rhetoric and dialectics have been considered particularly relevant. However, one can put forward at least two arguments against the claim, here argued, that argumentative analysis can and should be extended to versification and by implication to verbal rhythm in general, which versification norms regulate.

In rhetorical Latin or Greek terms, research on argumentation concentrates on *inventio*, and in particular *logos*, the discovery and evaluation of true or apparently true verbal statements. Words have rhythm and one can describe rhythms verbally, but one cannot translate their meaning, if meaning they have, into verbal statements and so assess them as true or apparently true. Secondly, ancient rhetoric did study rhythm under *actio*, but *actio* explored means of heightening the persuasive effect of *logos*, not of adding arguments. In that, it is arguably similar to *pathos* and *ethos*, the other two subdivisions of *inventio*, although *actio* concerned, not the composition, but the delivery of a speech. For those two reasons, it appears paradoxical to claim that an argumentative study of versification is possible.

The purpose of research is to question opinion. It is to argue a “thesis”, in Aristotle’s definition of the term (*Topics*, 104b18-28). Through argumentation, research makes paradoxical claims endoxical or the reverse. Paradoxical claims, however, are often not paradoxical absolutely. They are paradoxical relatively to communities, for instance the communities of argumentation theorists and literary theorists. They are also more or less paradoxical, because communities or their members may be more or less for or against the claim or indifferent. In respect of versification, there is such a division of opinion within the literary community. Many consider versification more or less extraneous to poetry, explicitly like the poet Philip Sidney, in his statement that verse is “but an

ornament and no cause to poetry” (Gavin Alexander, p. 12), or implicitly, perhaps like Aristotle, in the brevity of his metric observations in *Poetics*. Yet, for others, versification matters and, during several centuries, almost all poets writing in English observed the same collective norms of versification, accepting thereby to limit their individual writing freedom. One may inquire why.

Combining formalistic and argumentative, legalistic analysis, the answer argued here is that versification, at least during that period, was not a mere “ornament”: the normative form and the practice of versification with its departures from the norm were argumentatively meaningful. To the extent that its normative format allows (6000 words) and taking account of the three reviewers’ and an editor’s comments, this paper, relating literature, law and argumentation, elucidates the meaning of what it calls the “ideal model” of English versification (section 2), outlines its norms (section 3) and describes departures from those norms in terms of defences (section 4).

There have been other models to account for verse (see T.V. F. Brogan and, for a recent example, Derek Attridge). Unlike the ideal model, too powerful a model dissolves the contrast between norms and departures, by providing for the latter within the normative model. Here, the main sources for the ideal model are essays written under the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. In the chronological order of publication, not composition, those essays are:

Roger Ascham (1570), *The Scholemaster*

George Gascoigne (1575), *Certain Notes of Instruction*

George Puttenham (1589), *The Arte of Poesy*

Philip Sidney (1595), *The Defence of Poetry*

Thomas Campion (1602), *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*

Samuel Daniel (1603), *A Defence of Rhyme*

Alexander includes them all, except the first, in Sidney’s ‘The Defence of Poetry’ and selected Renaissance Literary Criticism. This paper also mentions Francis Meres’ *Palladia Tamia*, Ben Jonson’s *Conversations with William Drummond* and Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Criticism*. They do not appear in the “References” neither do the relevant works of Plato or Aristotle, retrieved from the Perseus Digital Library website in canonically lineated form, nor the lines of verse from William Shakespeare, John Donne, and John Beaumont. Editorial differences are not material here.

## *2. The Ideal Model: Meaning*

The prevailing opinion, which Sidney did not share, was that versification was meaningful. Firstly, it was a necessary condition for poetry. The argument was this: if writing is poetry, then it is in verse; if it is not in verse, it is not poetry. The observance of the ideal model, however, did not only participate in characterizing writing as poetry, and so target the public. For its early upholders, the formal norms of the ideal model had extra-poetical meaning. It was not only a form. It was a code, which converted formal properties into beliefs and values: if verse did not observe the ideal model, then it did not adhere to those beliefs and values.

One could say much the same of other social practices, for instance the formation of contracts. If an agreement is a contract (that is, legally enforceable), then it must satisfy conditions A, B, C, D etc. By complying with the conditions, one removes the agreement from the private to the social sphere and targets a public, the courts of law, and their acknowledgment that this is indeed a contract. Furthermore, compliance implies beliefs and values, for instance the belief that English courts' objective analysis of intention is preferable to the parties' subjective accounts.

The ideal model, as section 3 will show, was uncertain, which legal norms often are also. Nevertheless, according to its early advocates, it imitated or represented (the distinction cannot be discussed here) and participated in both the divine cosmological order and the ideal domestic political and ethical order, by which England, combining its several traditions, would attain unity and superiority over its neighbours and rivals. The ultimate authority for the model remains unknown, and some relativistic writers submitted to the model, with scepticism, in deference to authority.

### *2.1. Cosmological meaning*

Puttenham begins book II, entitled 'Of Proportion Poetical', with a statement relating the Universe, music and poetry. Under the express authority of mathematicians (probably the Pythagoreans), he declares "all things [in the Universe] stand by proportion". Campion opens his essay with a similar statement. Section 3 will show that the ideal model indeed stood by proportion.

The argument was this: if and only if the norms of the ideal model were implemented, then verse, observing proportion, would become part of the universal harmony, from which man, in the religious context of the times, could

depart, with a resultant reiteration of the Fall. The argument had political and ethical implications.

## 2.2. *The argument of authority*

Coincidentally, a discussion on the educational merits of corporal punishment was the occasional cause of *The Scholemaster*, which includes the earliest extant guidelines as to the ideal model of English versification. The discussion, as reported by the author, Ascham, the Queen's classics tutor, who attended it, took place in 1563 at Windsor Castle and concerned Eton College nearby. It involved members of the government, among whom Sir William Cecil, the Queen's Principal Secretary.

There are several other arguments to associate the ideal model with political authority. However, there is no evidence as to who actually declared, if anyone, that henceforth the ideal model would rule. Ascham and Puttenham claim that in some respects it is natural. Gascoigne does not. He regrets the former freedom of poets, saying "I can lament that we are fallen into such a plain and simple manner of writing" (Alexander, p. 240). (The model was indeed simple, as section 3 will show.)

## 2.3. *Political meaning*

Implications about the political order before Elizabeth I can be read into *The Scholemaster's* statements on the state of poetry before and still at the very beginning of the reign. There was the England before, the political chaos of the War of the Roses, still manifest in the poetry handed down from that period, and the England as from her accession to the throne, in which she would establish order and prosperity.

Half a century after Ascham wrote *The Scholemaster*, Beaumont stated the political significance of the ideal model expressly. In "To the Glorious Memory of our late Sovereign Lord, King James", lines 121-124, he says, with reference to the latter monarch's own essay on poetry:

He leads the lawless poets of our times  
To smoother cadence, to exacter rhymes:  
He knew it was the proper work of kings  
To keep proportion, eu'n in smallest things.

(The very versification of those lines illustrates the political function of the ideal

model, as the analysis proposed at the end of section 3 will show.)

#### 2.4. *Ethos (the ethical meaning)*

One can relate the ideal model of versification to Plato's major political work, *Republic*, and its discussion on the kinds of poetry to be censured and permitted in the ideal city, in respect of the ethical training of its guardians.

In *Republic*, book III, Plato has Socrates set down the virtues that the guardians of the ideal city should have and the education they should receive to that end (388a-389d). Foremost among the virtues is self-control (389c-d). Poets, Socrates goes on to say, should write accordingly (391a-392b).

Having set up criteria for the censorship of poetical content, Socrates proposes criteria for the censorship of genres and meters (393c ff), with several arguments against imitation as achieved in drama (tragedy and comedy). Poetry, if it is to be allowed in the ideal city at all, must avoid imitation, except the imitation of men who are "brave, sober, pious, free and all things of that kind" (395c).

Therefore, the ideal city must allow only narrative and on condition that the narrator manifests those virtues, *including through his meter*. "The right speaker, Socrates then says, speaks (...) [all through his text] in a rhythm of nearly the same kind" (397b), which follows from the requirement that he should not imitate anything except the virtues required from the guardians of the ideal city.

The next issue is which rhythm(s). Here, Socrates refers to Damon, a musician friend of his who had studied the ethos of rhythms. Socrates declares that poets should observe "the rhythms of a life that is orderly and brave".

The discussion in *Republic* on the appropriate rhythm(s) is difficult to follow, perhaps purposefully, since modern psychologists are still debating the question (Paul Shorey's note to 400a, in the Perseus website edition).

However, Socrates at this point mentions the basic foot of the ideal English model, the iamb and an alternative foot of that model, the trochee. The ethical value Socrates actually attaches to those feet appears unclear, but the words etymologically mean respectively to "assail" and "run", which are surely activities that a soldier must engage in (except in the retreating sense of the second word).

#### 2.5. *The cultural policy meaning*

Although he called Plato "divine", Ascham, in book II, adumbrates the ideal model within a humanist essay on textual imitation as a pedagogical technique, that is to

say on what the modern French critic Gérard Genette has called “hypertextual” practices.

In respect of versification, he calls for an importation of Greek and Latin versification, with the typically Renaissance policy of drawing English culture out of alleged prior barbarity or bestiality (see the question below).

Meres’ *Palladia Tamia: Wit’s Treasury*, published a few decades later, in 1598, can be read as a statement that Ascham’s cultural project had been successfully implemented, as the subtitle makes clear: *A Comparative Discourse of our English Poets with the Greek, Latin, and Italian Poets*.

Ascham does not use the terms “Middle Ages” and “Renaissance”. However, he presents the Middle Ages as a barbarous era bracketed off from Antiquity, on one side, and, on the other, from the Renaissance.

One of distinctive features of “true versifying”, Ascham says, as practised by the Latin and Greek poets, in contrast with the allegedly barbarous Goths and Huns, is the absence of rhyme.

Accordingly, he proposes (as Campion does also, but contrary to his actual practice) that English versification should free itself of rhyme. “Surely, he says, to follow rather the Goths in rhyming, than the Greeks in true versifying, were even to eat acorns with *swine* [italics here added], when we may freely eat wheat bread among men” [modernized spelling].

The majority of dramatic poetry was to be written in blank verse (unrhymed pentameters, as defined in section 3), thereby emulating Latin and Greek poetry. However, lyrical poetry and some dramatic poetry continued to rhyme.

The two facts suggest a point that section 3 will develop: that, as the Elizabethan Settlement purposed to do, but also as the English language was doing, the ideal model of versification reconciled different traditions.

## 2.6. *Relativism and skeptical submission*

Puttenham, while acknowledging the tripartite division of cultural history, does not, contrary to Ascham, disparage rhyming. In book I, arguing that rhyming is not specific to the barbarians, he does not deny, unlike Ascham, the worth of poets other than Greek or Latin.

Moreover, Puttenham (book II, chapter 11) proposes a noteworthy typology of stanzas, which he calls ‘stuffs’, with different rhyme patterns and line lengths, as

later found in John Donne's *Songs and Sonets*, first published posthumously in 1633.

Daniel goes further than Puttenham, in declaring, contrary to the tripartite historical schema, that all periods manifest nature's possibilities. Consequently, contrary to Ascham, one should not categorize some as worthy and others as gross.

Puttenham and Daniel, then, do not condemn all poetry except Latin and Greek, especially, as Ascham does, for the use of rhyme nor do they present the ideal model as not allowing rhyme. Rhyme, for them, is a device that poets, have resorted to, both before and after the great Latin and Greek poets and not only in Europe.

In fact, Puttenham (book II, chapter 3, Alexander, p. 113), reversing Ascham's judgement on Latin and Greek unrhymed verse as opposed to barbaric rhymed verse, says that should one take away its meter, Latin and Greek verse would be of no more interest than English verse.

Furthermore, Gascoigne describes and prescribes the ideal model, but as noted previously, with regret for the loss of English poets' former metrical freedom. He does so submissively, saying "since it is so, let us take the ford as we find it" (Alexander, pp. 240-241). Most poets were to observe the model during more or less three centuries.

### *3. The Ideal Model: Norms*

Puttenham and Campion explicitly intended the ideal model of versification to extend the harmony of the Universe to actual versification, which the former like Ascham deemed had become chaotic. Under Plato's utopic political doctrine, verse, written according to ideal model, should also have the ethical effect of portraying the poet as a disciplined individual whom emotions cannot affect, especially fear and pity, which a soldier-citizen in Plato's ideal city should never allow himself to experience.

The poet's self-mastery is manifest in his ability to abide by the ideal model in all contexts. Possibly echoing Plato, Puttenham says poetry requires "law", "restraint", "rules" (book II, chapter 6, Alexander, p. 118-119). Setting aside rhyme and syllabic limitation, the English model required the observance of two norms: the regular distribution of pauses and the regular alternation of two types of syllables.

Gasgoigne characterized the English model as “plain and simple” (Alexander, p. 240) and indeed it was. However, interestingly for the extension of argumentative analysis from law to versification, the norms were uncertain and debated (opposing for instance Campion and Daniel), but the uncertainty did not lessen the force of the obligation to observe them.

In respect of Puttenham’s and Campion’s references to universal proportion, the following is worth noting. There was the same proportion in the pentameter, the most usual line in English poetry under the ideal model, between a line’s number of feet and its number of syllables (5/10) as between the two categories of syllables (1/2), since one category of syllable had twice the value of the other. Puttenham’s rule for the pause in an even numbered line also results in producing the same proportion.

### *3.1. Pauses*

Lineation was and is still considered a distinctive feature of verse: unlike prose, verse divides into lines, irrespectively of the right-hand margin. Furthermore, unlike prose lines, verse lines, it is thought, begin with a capital letter.

Shakespeare’s only extent (but hypothetical) holograph shows that, although composing under the ideal model, the poet, according to Brooke (p. 216) and Parker (p. 140), did not always write in that way graphically, not because he did not acknowledge the ideal model, but because he did not need those visual markers.

Lineation, if correct, merely exhibits the model’s requirement for the distribution of pauses. Before the ideal model was established, poets, says Puttenham, failed to restrain their discourse with pauses, which should be observed “if it were but to serve as a law to correct the licentiousness of rhymers” (book II, chapter 5, Alexander, p. 118).

According to the ideal model, there are two pauses in each line: the first, at the end of the line, which justifies lineation; the second, sometimes called a ‘caesura’, within each line, which divides it into two sub-units.

The requirement may appear rather easy to observe. In fact, Puttenham says that the pauses should correspond to more or less dissociable syntactical units, allowing graphic punctuation. The effect of that rule is that, if the editors had required this text to be in decasyllabic lines, the most common form under the



ideal model, this sentence would need rewriting, as the following lineation shows:  
The effect of that rule is that, if the  
Editors had required this text to be  
In decasyllabic lines, the most com-

### *3.2. Feet*

The ideal model required, not only that the poet should be self-disciplined enough to divide his discourse into end-stopped lines with an additional internal pause in each line, but that the words of each line should fit naturally, not only into the format of a set number of syllables, but into binary syllabic units.

Indeed, just as the Elizabethan settlement purposed to go beyond the clash between Catholics and Puritans or the English language was fusing its French and English sources, so the ideal model of versification, made explicit in the early part of her reign, brought together several models.

The ideal model was to combine the syllabic model of French versification (at least, as interpreted at the time), the ancient Latin and Greek quantitative model, and the accentual system of the English language, if not directly the Old English accentual model of versification.

All the writers agree that ideal model of versification should be syllabic. Verse should be written in homo-syllabic lines (with the same number of syllables per line all through) or in (homo-strophic) stanzas repeating an identifiable pattern of syllabic variations per line (although hetero-strophic verse does exist).

Furthermore, establishing the ideal model of versification, the authors all require that, as in Ancient Latin and Greek verse, lines should divide into feet. However, they also agree that, unlike the Latin and Greek feet, the English foot should be binary.

### *3.3. Uncertainty*

The authors agreed that there should be a medial pause or caesura in each line, but disagreed as to its position. There was also agreement that lines should divide into feet and, more specifically, binary feet, but disagreement about the units of those binary feet. (Syllabic division is uncertain also, but the focus here will be on the binary syllabic contrast.)

Both Puttenham (book II, chapter 5, Alexander, p. 118) and Gascoigne (Alexander, p. 244) agree that there must be an internal pause. The two authors,

however, disagree on its standard position: if the number of syllables is even, Puttenham says the caesura must fall in the middle, so in a decasyllabic line after the 5th syllable, but Gascoigne says that, in such a line, it should do so either after the 4th or 6th.

Ascham praises Henry Howard as the first, in his translation of Virgil, to have written in blank verse (that is, without rhymes). However, he reproaches him for not adopting the quantitative meter of his source. What Ascham wishes to impose, like Campion later, is the foot in quantitative terms, following the Latin and Greek model: in other words, each line should divide into an alternation of relatively short or light and long or heavy syllables.

In fact, Howard had indeed not *adopted* the Latin and Greek model, but he had *adapted* it to what was being identified at the time as a characteristic feature of the English language, stress or accent, which had governed Old English verse.

He had, by his practice, redefined the foot in accentual terms. Under that redefinition, an iamb, one of the classical feet, does not combine a short syllable and a long syllable, but an unstressed syllable and a stressed syllable.

The accentual-syllabic model was to prevail, but uncertainty as to the definition of the foot, quantitative or accentual, remained for some time. Thus, Alexander (pp. 371-372) notes that Puttenham's treatment of verse is confusing.

Puttenham acknowledges that two syllables can form a foot and that two feet can be made up of four syllables (book II, chapter 4, Alexander, p. 114); he also considers accent (II, 7-9); but he presents the different measures used by English poets in syllabic terms (II, 4).

Puttenham's confusion, one can add, may account for his statement (II, 5) about the medial position of the internal pause, which has the inevitable effect in even-numbered lines of splitting the two syllables of a foot from one another, often with a graphic punctuation mark.

Gascoigne follows the accentual practice, yet he describes the two syllables both in accentual and quantitative terms: "the first, he says, is depressed or made short and the second is elevate or made long" (Alexander, p. 240).

Today, the general rule concerning stress is said to be that lexical words, like "be" or "exist", have one stress and sometimes more as opposed to grammatical words, like "be" as an auxiliary, which have none.

However, accents other than linguistic stress can interfere, as in "To be or not to be: that is...", where the fourth stress, a rhetorical stress, falls on "that", a

grammatical word, not on “is”, a lexical word, with a resultant trochaic variation. Gascoigne also notes that there are syllables which, contextually, can be either stressed or unstressed (Alexander, p. 240). Puttenham (Alexander, p. 120) says that this polyvalence is characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon monosyllables.

Some modern commentators consider that the Old English model (four stresses per line with a strong medial pause) continued to effect versification. The Elizabethan and Jacobean authors do not refer to that model, but it is a persuasive explanation for cases where grammatical words like “of”, usually unstressed, occur in the slot for a stressed syllable.

Finally, both Puttenham (Alexander pp. 119 and 122), in respect of rhyme, and Gascoigne (Alexander, pp. 239 and 241), for meter and rhythm, insist that stress must be natural. Stresses must not be “wrenched” or “wrested” in pronunciation to force them into the slots of the metric pattern.

In setting down this requirement, Puttenham and Gascoigne may echo Plato’s statement that *rhythm must follow the words* and not the opposite (399e-400a). Plato’s reason is probably that words or concepts are to rhythm what the mind is to the body, but the injunction clashes with his restriction on permissible meters or rhythms.

### 3.4. Example

As with legal norms, the uncertainty of the norms, for instance regarding the internal pause, the foot and stress, did not make them any the less obligatory. However differently they were defined, the norms of the ideal model have in common a promotion of self-control and so constancy.

Now, if one examines Beaumont’s above quoted quatrain, it may seem to comply with the ideal model of versification, as it should, given the poet’s statement in those lines about lawless poets on the one hand and bringing them to order on the other.

Indeed, as indicated below there is nothing wrong with the stanza. Each line is composed of 10 syllables. In each, there is an alternation of unstressed and stressed (here italicized) syllables (taking into account the usual accentual ambivalence of ‘of’ and ‘to’). In other words, each line is composed of 5 iambic feet (here separated by a vertical bar), and each line is unquestionably end-stopped:

He *leads*|the *law*|less *po*|ets of| our *times* (10)

To *smoo*|ther *ca*|dence, to| *exact*|er *rhymes*: (10)

He *knew*| it *was*| the *pro*|per *work*| of *kings* (10)  
To keep| *propor*|tion, *eu'n*| in *small*|est *things*. (10)

Setting aside the elision in line 4, which section 4.1 will comment, the lines do indeed appear perfect, in subsuming under the ideal accentual-syllabic model the words as naturally pronounced.

However, the analysis has omitted one rule of the ideal model: a pause must divide the line into two and, according to Puttenham (but not Gascoigne), a pentameter into two five-syllable units.

It is the case at lines 2 and lines 4, which divide exactly in the middle and with a comma. It is not the case at lines 1 and 3: the first has either a caesura after the 2<sup>nd</sup> syllable or none; the third, after the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 4<sup>th</sup> or none.

Now, whereas lines 2 and 4 state the order brought about by the king, those two other lines concern the chaotic situation prior to his actual intervention. The departure from the ideal model therefore appears justified.

#### *4. Defences: Denials and Justifications*

George Orwell argued that humankind's need for contrasts made utopias impossible to establish. The same perhaps is true of all ideal models. As early as the late eighteenth century, a few poets may well have invented individual models, as Gerald Manley Hopkins did at the end of the nineteenth.

However, until the institution of free verse, most observed the ideal model. If they failed to do so, they were criticized or "censured" (the two words were synonymous), as Donne was by Ben Jonson, according to Drummond. Even today, editors can re-edit apparent verse as prose: thus Brooke (p. 216) as opposed to Parker (pp. 141-142).

Few poets, however, observed the norms consistently. Literary critics, teachers, students who comment verse (unlike others who ignore it) focus, not on observant lines, but on departures, and they most frequently do one of two things.

In the manner of counsels for the defence, they argue on behalf of the poets, that the departures are in fact not departures or that the departures, limited in number, are meaningful and therefore justified.

##### *4.1. Graphic and non-graphic denials*

A pentameter, the most current line in traditional English verse, can have more or less than ten syllables, but the departure be denied. Exploiting dieresis, certain

syllables can count as two. A line may also include a silent pause, counting as one syllable. Poets have also allowed themselves one syllable or two more per line, under what appears to have been or become an additional rule or licence that, before the internal pause or before the end of the line, an unstressed or so-called “feminine” ending did not count, as in “To be or not to be: that is the *question*”. Other additional rules enable a pentameter to have more than ten syllables. Syneresis fuses two syllables into one. Likewise, synaloepha merges the end and the beginning of two words, with or without an elision mark.

Writers of verse have often resorted to a graphic denial of departures through elision marks, as seen above in Beaumont’s quatrain, where “even” is reduced to a monosyllabic “e’en”. The word, arguably, may have been pronounced in that manner, but the standard spelling would have disrupted the meter. In eliding to conform, the poet adhered to the ideal model. In her editions of Donne, Helen Gardner, claimed that Donne did observe the model and, accordingly, added elision marks.

Elision marks, which are frequent, amount to a denial that the line does not observe the ideal model. (Under a more subtle analysis, they both acknowledge the metric model and make another rhythm perceptible.) However, critics (for instance, Brooke and Parker) have justified them. The Jacobean poets, they claim, attempted thereby to narrow the gap between poetry and ordinary speech, allowing truth to oral speech to prevail over graphic spelling norms.

According to Brooke (p. 216), the departures of the Jacobeans, of which this oral preference is only an instance, broke down the categorical barrier between prose and verse, making each a matter of degree, enabling the gradual transition from one to the other. The breaking down of the two categories appears significant and justified, at a time when the cosmological and political orders were also breaking down.

#### *4.2. Aristotelian justifications*

However, even before the Jacobeans, undeniable departures from the norms perhaps also became a condition for poetry, but on two conditions: firstly, within limits, beyond which one could not recognize the normative form; secondly, if justifiable as also meaningful.

Certainly, most commentaries by critics, teachers and students for whom verse matters consist in more or less subtle justifications of departures. It is even current to say that, if justified, departures from the ideal model are characteristic

of good verse.

Law can justify defamation or obscenity in consideration of a general interest, for instance respectively truth or literature. Likewise, comments that make departures from the ideal model meaningful justify those departures for their significance or semantic value.

Plato, in *Republic*, book III, considers allowing poetry in the city only if it fulfils several conditions. One of those conditions is that the poet, in his rhythms, constantly imitates virtues that the soldier-guardians of the city must possess, among which self-control. The ideal model of English versification provides the norms for poets to comply with Plato's requirement, at least in respect of self-control.

In book X, Plato develops his metaphysical argument against imitation, broached on in book III. With the implicit exception for the imitation of the accepted virtues, imitation is contrary to philosophy, in its attempt, absurd, because impossible, at copying a mere instance or copy of an Idea whereas the mind should aspire to contemplate the Idea itself, of which its instances are only imperfect copies.

The ideal model conforms to Plato's ethical requirements, but comments on departures from the model, although compatible with his injunction that *meter should follow the words* and not the reverse, are usually more immediately compatible with Aristotle's revaluation of imitation or re-presentation as being akin to philosophy

Imitation or re-presentation, says Aristotle (*Poetics* 48b4-19), is similar to philosophy and the learning process in general, because the mind, conceiving the likeness of, for instance, a two-dimensional oil painting of a person on canvas and that three-dimensional flesh-and-blood person himself, conceives their abstract, more general common denominators.

The analysis of Beaumont's quatrain in section 3.4 has done just that: it has shown how, alternately contrary to and in accordance with the model for internal pauses, the pause system of the lines re-presented their verbal meaning, the practice of "lawless poets" and then the submission to the ideal model.

One could quote a great many other examples of how one can comment departures from the ideal model and how literary critics, teachers and students actually do comment them, as being justified for re-presentational reasons. Here, for want of space, one can consider only two: one relates to the pause, the other

to the foot.

### Illicit pauses

The first example is the opening of Donne's "The Flea", quoted here with a double vertical bar to show the internal pauses:

Mark but this flea,|| and mark in this

How little || that which thou deniest me is...

Part of a heterometric stanza, the first, octosyllabic line is divided in accordance with the model, but not the second, decasyllabic line (with a disyllabic pronunciation of "deniest"). In that line, the pause falls arguably just after the 3<sup>rd</sup> syllable, not after the 5<sup>th</sup> nor after the 4<sup>th</sup> (as respectively Puttenham and Gascoigne would have it do).

Why? Surely, the contrast between the alleged littleness of what is denied (defloration) and the allegedly disproportionate immensity of the woman's refusal justifies the departure, which breaks the line up into 3 syllables, on the one hand, and 7 syllables, on the other.

The words justify the rhythmic departure. They say: "Look, I am not observing the model, but the words provide the reason why." Indeed, notwithstanding Plato's statement that words should not follow the rhythm, but the latter, the former, one might say that *the words are merely an argument to justify the formal departure*.

### Illicit feet

Literary critics, teachers and students comment departures from the ideal model's syllabic and accentual norms, like departures from the ideal model's norms on pauses, as being justified semantically.

In the ideal city, poetry, Plato argued, must imitate nothing, except allowed virtues. It should imitate neither characters or passions nor perceptions of the physical world, for instance "neighing horses and lowing bulls, and the noise of rivers and the roar of the sea and the thunder and everything of that kind" (396b, repeated more or less at 397a).

Published long after the essays referred to here, Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism*, prescribed exactly the contrary: "The sound, he declared, must seem an echo to

the sense" (line 365). Here also, notwithstanding Plato's prescription about words and rhythm, one might claim the opposite: *the sense must seem an echo to the sound*.

Apparently alluding to Plato's examples, Pope exemplified his own prescription in the following lines (368-369), where spondaic feet (two stressed syllables) represent the sense together with different categories of phonemes (the analysis of which cannot be undertaken here):

But when *loud Surges* lash the sounding Shore,  
The hoarse, *rough Verse* shou'd like the Torrent roar.

### 5. Conclusion

Contrary to the usual focus of argumentative studies on *logos*, this paper has argued within its limited format for the extension of argumentative analysis to versification, which regulates verbal rhythm. In the case of English versification, it has shown that, originally, the ideal model was not the empty form it may well have become, but was cosmologically, politically, ethically and culturally meaningful. It has also shown that the model functioned like a law, departures from which have resulted in censorship or criticism, denials and justifications.

During several centuries, the majority of poets observed the model and their departures were not such as to jeopardise the recognition of the model. Most poets, by fitting words into the slots of the model, gave the abstract model existence. They implicitly argued, in each of their poems, that observance of that collective model should limit individualistic formal inventions, even when and if the other implications were lost, contrary to those who, as early as the late eighteenth century, developed their own model, putting originality first.

The extent of the adherence to the model and its meaning and of the departures from it is the most significant aspect of a versified poem as such. Whatever else versified poetry has to say, one can find elsewhere: the social sciences, the humanities, prose literature, pop songs, or tabloids. Charged with meaning, the model and the possible departures came first. Poets then found words. Yet, many, perhaps most, literary specialists reverse the order, some ignoring versification completely and leaving one amazed at why poets bothered. Argumentation theorists, also, should perhaps be more attentive to rhythm, were it only to elucidate ethos.



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