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Introduction

IN HIS 1668 PREFACE to *Paradise Lost*, John Milton justifies his rejection of rhyme in the same language he had once used to defend beheading kings and founding republics.[1] Rhyme, he insists, is the "Invention of a barbarous Age," a product of "Custom" rather than reason. He therefore describes himself as the leader of a poetic revolution, offering the first example "in *English*, of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of Riming."[2] The phrase has become familiar because it succinctly captures Milton's most fundamental poetic and political allegiances. As he had in his polemic writing of the 1640s, Milton declares himself to be a radical in the root sense of the term: he desires to return to the classical roots of poetry by stripping away gratuitous poetic ornaments tagged to verse by "modern" poets, that is, by centuries of vernacular writers (*CPMP*, 210). To be a "modern" rhymer is to be heedlessly "carried away" by contemporary custom, while to pursue a higher "measure" is to act deliberately and rationally to "recove[r]" a long-lost vision of "ancient liberty" (*CPMP*, 210). In pitting ancient liberty against modern bondage, Milton attributes the widest possible implications to what might seem like an innocuous stylistic decision. The rejection of rhyme is not simply a matter of personal taste or generic necessity, but an act of liberation that will echo across England. It is tempting to read Milton's effort to make prosody a battleground for liberty as the product of a bellicose temperament and a particularly heated historical moment. Eight years after the Restoration, the defeated Republican poet was making a final sally for liberty in one of the few forums still available to him. But *The Fetters of Rhyme* makes it clear that rhyme was a site of contention about liberty and binding long before Milton made his declaration. When Milton announced his opposition to the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming, he knew very well that he was not initiating a new line of thought but entering into a battle that had been raging since at least the sixteenth century. *The Fetters of Rhyme* reveals how Milton's choice of liberty and measure over binding and rhyme draws on longstanding divisions within English poetics about the nature and purpose of formal limitation. By telling the dynamic story of rhyme from Elizabeth's reign—when the couplet, of all things, was a sign of ancient liberty—to the Restoration, this book investigates what it meant for poets to subject themselves to what they so often described as the bands or fetters of rhyme.

The Bands of Rhyme

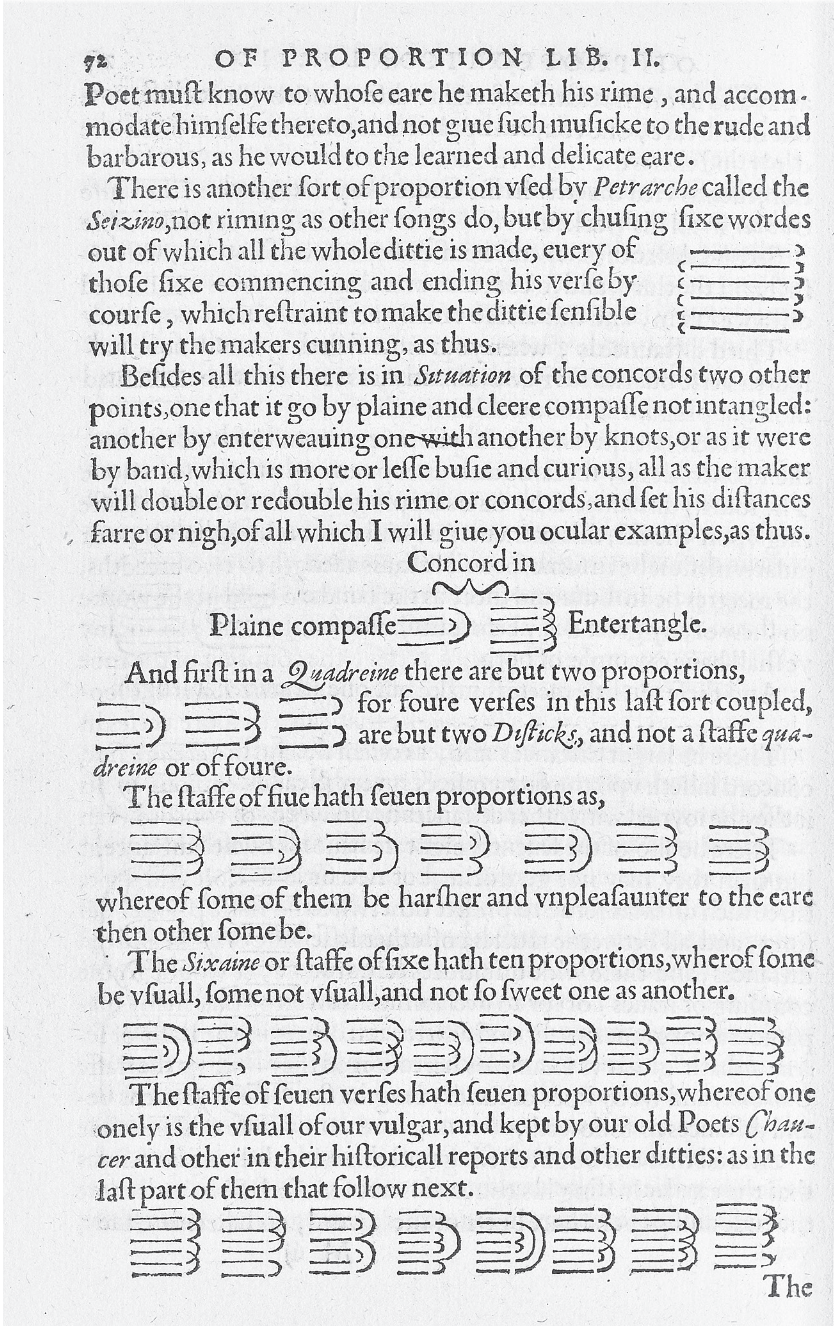
In 1633, Thomas Carew's song "Incommunicabilitie of Love" was performed at Whitehall before Charles I and Henrietta Maria. The two-part song, which consists of a series of questions and answers, begins with an exchange about the origins of monogamy:

> **Quest.** By what power was Love confinde
> To one object? who can binde,
> Or fixe a limit to the free-borne minde?
>
> **An.** Nature.[3]

The question suggests that the "minde" is "free-borne," that in its original state the mind is not bound to any master or mistress; by nature, it is completely in its own power. In the following decade, revolutionary figures like Milton and John Lilburne would speak of "freeborn Englishmen" and "the free-born people of England" as they made radical cases that the English were free citizens rather than subjects and that they could therefore overthrow tyrannical rulers.[4] But for Carew, the fact that the mind is born free does not mean that it can or should remain free. In his song, the "answer" attributes the circumscription of the freeborn mind not to some external binding force like custom or religion or society, but to "Nature" itself. The exchange registers a paradox at the heart of discourse about liberty, in which a confidence that we have "minds that can wander beyond all limit" existed alongside a belief that limitation is nevertheless a natural, necessary, and perhaps even desirable aspect of political, religious, and romantic life.[5] Carew's position on the source of limitation is unambiguous, if also mysterious: he insists that limitation is as natural to the mind as the freedom with which it is born. Love (and also, by implication, politics) is therefore a choice among fetters; maintaining an independent will is either impossible or undesirable because the mind has a natural inclination to form passionate allegiances.[6] Carew builds the mystery of the naturally self-binding mind into the formal structure of his poem by playing with the rhyme between "mind" and "bind." There is no rational account for the likeness between "bind" and "mind." They are not linked by grammar—one is a verb and the other a noun. Nor is there an obvious connection between the meanings of the words; in fact, Carew insists that minds are precisely the sorts of things that abhor binding. And yet, just as a mysterious but natural power binds the freeborn mind, the power of a sonic coincidence binds the unrelated words together in a way that suggests an affinity between them deeper than grammar or logic.

This idea of rhyme as a binding force is fundamental to poetic theory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Early modern poets consistently imagined rhyme as a band, fetter, or link that tied the poem together. Indeed, many theorists believed that rhyme's connective function made it essential to the structural integrity of verse. In his 1603 *Defence of Rhyme*, Samuel Daniel argues that rhyme is "as the iointure without which [verse] hangs loose, and cannot subsist."[7] Poetic theorists of the period not only discussed the binding function of rhyme but made its connective power visible on the page by providing diagrams of rhyme schemes in which rhyming lines are connected by curved lines (see figures i.1 and i.2). These diagrams likely derive from the common medieval scribal practice of connecting rhyming lines with brackets. In an article on the elaborate bracketing in some manuscripts of Chaucer's "Tale of Sir Thopas," Judith Tschann suggests that scribes may have added brackets in order "to help the reader see the verse form" and, in the case of "Sir Thopas," to interpret that form and to show that the tale is "a masterful display of incompetence."[8] Though I have not encountered a theoretical description of rhyme as binding prior to the sixteenth century, this bracketing practice suggests that rhyme may have already been imagined as a connective force. Even if the original use of the brackets did not reflect a preexisting theory of rhyme and binding, the conspicuous linking of the brackets may in fact have produced or contributed to the idea that rhyme is a band or jointure. George Puttenham and Michael Drayton certainly draw on manuscript tradition, but they make the binding that is implicit in medieval brackets explicit and systematic in their visual representations of rhyme. In these figures, the words of poems are eliminated so that we can see the links formed by rhyme and the many "proportions" that can be made by "enterweaving" these links.[9] Form emerges as something separable from language itself. Rhyme becomes pure binding, abstracted from language.[10] This understanding of rhyme as a band, fetter, or jointure made it apt to be seen as an analogy for other types of bonds, particularly those that unite friends, lovers, or political communities.[11] Therefore the same questions that fascinated sonneteers and plagued political theorists—What powers can bind the freeborn mind? Are these powers natural or artificial? What is the scope of individual liberty? Can limitation be productive?—also animated debates about rhyme and its place in English verse.

For twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetic theorists, rhyme's binding effect continues to be one of its essential functions, but it is primarily an aural and cognitive phenomenon: as Donald Wesling puts it in *The Chances of Rhyme*, "Rhymed words leap easily from the page to the ear to the memory."[12] Premodern theorists were similarly intrigued by rhyme's ability to "give to the Eare an Echo of delightful report, and to the Memorie a deeper impression of



Poet muſt know to whoſe eare he maketh his rime, and accommodate himſelfe thereto, and not giue ſuch muſicke to the rude and barbarous, as he would to the learned and delicate eare.

There is another ſort of proportion vſed by *Petrarche* called the *Seizino*, not riming as other ſongs do, but by chuſing ſixe wordes out of which all the whole dittie is made, euery of thoſe ſixe commencing and ending his verſe by courſe, which reſtraint to make the dittie ſenſible will try the makers cunning, as thus.

Beſides all this there is in *Situation* of the concords two other points, one that it go by plaine and cleere compaſſe not intangled: another by enterweauing one ~~with~~ another by knots, or as it were by band, which is more or leſſe buſie and curious, all as the maker will double or redouble his rime or concords, and ſet his diſtances farre or nigh, of all which I will giue you ocular examples, as thus.

Concord in

Plaine compaſſe Entertangle.

And firſt in a *Quadreine* there are but two proportions, for foure verſes in this laſt ſort coupled, are but two *Diſticks*, and not a ſtaffe *quadreine* or of foure.

The ſtaffe of fiue hath ſeuen proportions as,

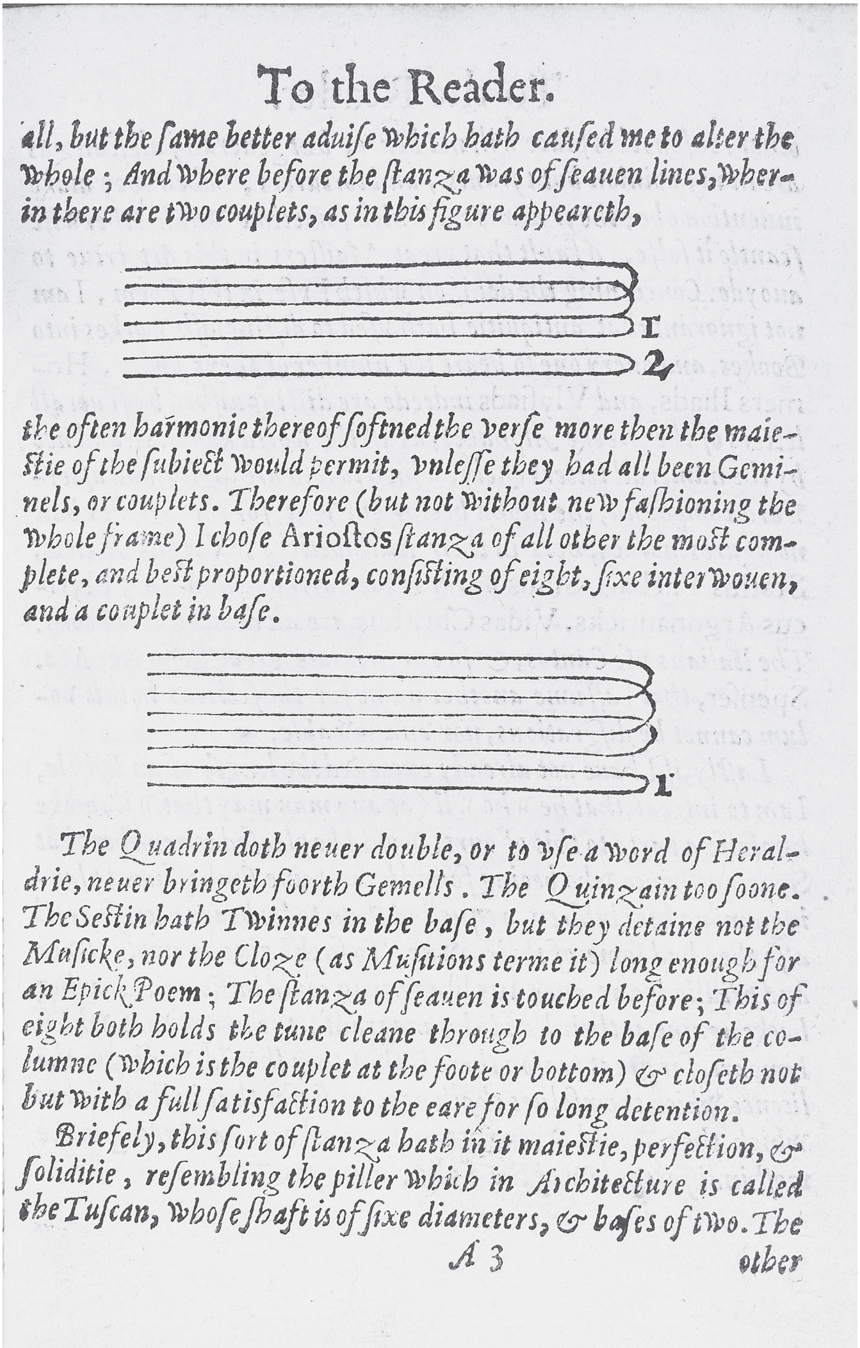
whereof ſome of them be harſher and vnpleaſaunter to the eare then other ſome be.

The *Sixaine* or ſtaffe of ſixe hath ten proportions, wherof ſome be vſuall, ſome not vſuall, and not ſo ſweet one as another.

The ſtaffe of ſeuen verſes hath ſeuen proportions, whereof one onely is the vſuall of our vulgar, and kept by our old Poets *Chaucer* and other in their hiſtoricall reports and other ditties: as in the laſt part of them that follow next.

The

FIGURE I.1. Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie*. London: Richard Field, 1589. Pforz 12 PFZ. Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.



To the Reader.

all, but the ſame better aduiſe which hath cauſed me to alter the whole; And where before the ſtanza was of ſeauen lines, wherin there are two couplets, as in this figure appeareth,

the often harmonie thereof ſoftned the verſe more then the maieſtie of the ſubiect would permit, vnleſſe they had all been Geminels, or couplets. Therefore (but not without new faſhioning the whole frame) I choſe Arioſtos ſtanza of all other the moſt complete, and beſt proportioned, conſiſting of eight, ſixe interwouen, and a couplet in baſe.

The Quadrin doth neuer double, or to vſe a word of Heraldrie, neuer bringeth foorth Gemells. The Quinzain too ſoone. The Seſtin hath Twinnes in the baſe, but they detaine not the Muſicke, nor the Cloze (as Muſitions terme it) long enough for an Epick Poem; The ſtanza of ſeauen is touched before; This of eight both holds the tune cleane through to the baſe of the columne (which is the couplet at the foote or bottom) & cloſeth not but with a full ſatisfaction to the eare for ſo long detention.

Briefely, this ſort of ſtanza hath in it maieſtie, perfection, & ſoliditie, reſembling the piller which in Architecture is called the Tuſcan, whoſe ſhaft is of ſixe diameters, & baſes of two. The

A 3 other

FIGURE I.2. Drayton, Michael. *The Barrons Wars in the raigne of Edward the second. With Englands heroicall epistles*. London: Nicholas Ling, 1603. Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

what is deliuered therein."[13] Yet they also had a sense that rhyme's mysterious binding force might amount to more than a physical or psychological effect of repeated sound. The bands of rhyme form patterns within verse, and these patterns had far-ranging significance because, as Lawrence Manley has argued, premodern writers tended not only to understand "human life to be governed by fundamental human laws or ends" but to "think of these same norms as isomorphic, applicable and operative in all spheres of human activity."[14] If poets could demonstrate that limitation and binding are essential in one sphere—whether in poetic composition or in love—then perhaps the same logic could be applied to theological or political questions.

This tendency to think about the world in isomorphic, or what I will call analogical, ways is a prominent feature of the formal readings offered in treatises of poetry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Drawing on Pythagorean and Augustinian understandings of music that remained deeply influential throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period, poets and theorists frequently argued that the purpose of poetry was to reflect the symmetry of the divine mind or of the product of that mind, the cosmos, which, according to an oft-quoted verse from the Wisdom of Solomon, God "ordered . . . in measure and number and weight."[15] Polydore Vergil, an Italian humanist and priest who was sent to England in 1502, captures this mode of thinking in a passage on the origin of meter in his book *De Inventoribus Rerum* (1499): "The beginner of meter [metrum] was God, whiche proporcioned the world, with all the contentes of the same, with a certain order, as it were a meter, for there is noone (as Pithagoras taught) that douteth, but that there is in thynges heauenly and yearthly a kynd of armonye, and oneles it were gouerned with a fourmal concorde and discribed nombre, howe could it long continue?"[16] George Puttenham likewise grounds his own account of "Proportion Poetical" on the idea that "God made the world by number, measure and weight" and that "all things stand by proportion, and that without it nothing could stand to be good or beautiful" (*Arte*, K1r). Both critics insist that proportion is the framework that allows the world and everything in it to "stand" and to endure. Poets should imitate the order God inscribed in nature not only because this is a devout task, but because "those numbers wherwith heau'n & earth are mou'd" represent a formal ideal that will make human fabrications as rational, beautiful, enduring, and structurally sound as the divine originals.[17] Rhyme did not simply forge sonic resonances between words but formed part of a deeper poetic structure that had larger cosmic and social resonances even when it went undetected by the reader.[18]

Rhyme's binding power was not the only feature that made it particularly charged for early modern poets. Rhyme is also insistent. As frequent comparisons of rhyme to "tinkling," "jingling," and "chiming" bells suggest, rhyme calls attention to itself and demands that poets and readers reckon with it.[19] Donald

Wesling argues that while "all poetic devices . . . are likenings," rhyme is more "clearly marked by the ear as an equivalence" than any other device; rhyme, therefore, "more boldly than meter is at once sign and symbol."[20] This symbolic boldness makes rhyme a stand-in for every manner of question about the purposes and functions of poetic form. Rhyme, as Wesling points out, is also "suspect" because its pleasure seems so irrational, because the idea that "two words with separate meanings should be similar in sound is a transgression of our deepest language habits."[21] Unease about rhyme's potential to detach itself from reason is visible in definitions of rhyme offered by both its detractors and its champions. Early modern rhyme skeptics tend to define rhyme in ways that depict likeness of sound as entirely accidental, as a mere "falling out of verses together in one like sounde."[22] Defenders of rhyme, in contrast, tend to use words that imply that rhyme is a kind of agreement or harmony rather than a mere sonic coincidence. William Scott calls it an "answerableness at the ends of our verses in likeness of sound."[23] George Puttenham consistently uses the word "concord" to refer to rhyme and describes rhymes as the "tunable consentes in the latter end of our verses" (*Arte*, L2r, L2v). And for Samuel Daniel, rhyme is "number and harmonie of words, consisting of an agreeing sound in the last sillables of seuerall verses."[24] Words like "answerableness," "concord," "consent," "harmony," and "agreeing" all have social as well as musical meanings, as if the words at the ends of lines are forming social bonds with one another or building little commonwealths within the poem. And theorists who described rhyme in this way tended to see it not only as an emblem, but as an instrument, of social connections. Rhyme's opponents, in contrast, tended to see its irrational binding as a form of "tyranny" or "bondage" or even as a Procrustean torture device.[25]

Rhyme also came under attack in the sixteenth century because classically trained English poets were wary of its conspicuous absence from Greek and Roman verse. Throughout the sixteenth century, writers like Ascham, Sidney, Spenser, Harvey, and Campion railed against the barbarism of rhyme and attempted to reform English verse to fit a classical model of quantitative poetry.[26] Yet they never succeeded in supplanting rhyme or even in producing a workable model of English quantitative meter.[27] They did succeed, however, in prompting their contemporaries to develop a theoretical language for talking about rhyme. As Samuel Daniel puts it in his 1603 *Defence of Ryme*, in the face of attacks from advocates of quantitative meter, "The Generall Custome and vse of Ryme in this kingdome" could no longer be "held vnquestionable."[28] The threat posed by the quantitative alternative, though it never proved viable, prompted writers of the period to approach rhyme with heightened attention and deliberation. As theorists like Puttenham and Daniel endeavored to defend rhyme against its detractors, they developed new ways of conceiving of its peculiar function in English verse.

A short excursion into the sixteenth-century debate about quantitative meter will reveal how contentions over rhyme were wrapped up with conversations about primitive life and the origins of society. In these debates, advocates of rhyme held it up as an exemplar of the possibility of reconciling natural energy with disciplined order. Humanist and one-time tutor to Queen Elizabeth Roger Ascham began the English attack on rhyme in *The Scholemaster* (published posthumously in 1570), where he beseeches English poets not to be "caryed by tyme and custome to content themselues with that barbarous and rude Ryming" but to follow the "*Greeks* in trew versifiying."[29] His account of rhyme as a barbarous custom "brought first into Italie by *Gothes* and *Hunnes*" contains all the seeds of later criticisms of like endings, including Milton's preface to *Paradise Lost*.[30] In his *Observations in the Art of English Poesy* (1602), Thomas Campion elaborates on Ascham's unflattering genealogy of rhyme, telling a tale of the decline "of the *Romaine* Empire and the pollution of their language through the conquest of the *Barbarians*," which left learning "most pitifully deformed till the time of *Erasmus*, *Rewcline*, Sir *Thomas More*, and other learned men of that age, who brought the Latine toong again to light, redeeming it with much labour out of the hands of the illiterate Monks and Friers."[31] The "vulgar and easie" rhymed verse "now in use throughout most parts of Cristendome" is the product of these "lack-learning times."[32] Both Ascham and Campion (and Milton after them) model their prosodic histories on the familiar humanist and Reformation arc of history: a pure age is followed by a descent into darkness that is at long last dispelled by the torchbearers of the early sixteenth century. Richard Helgerson has highlighted the ways in which this story of rhyme "presents an active model of self-fashioning" in which individuals and the English nation may choose to reject the passive acceptance of custom in favor of deliberately remaking themselves on an ancient model.[33] There is an irony in the fact that humanist poetics enjoined poets to shake off the familiar bonds of English poetic custom only to bind themselves as apprentices to ancient masters. Indeed, the prayer-book declaration that "service is perfect freedom" captures a central paradox of the humanist program as well as Reformation theology.[34] In humanist and Reformation arguments for a return *ad fontes*, there is a conviction that the most strenuous and serious liberty involves shaking off arbitrary, human bonds in order to submit oneself willingly to more divine, rational, or ancient restraints.

Because advocates of quantitative measure saw this act of uprooting native custom and replacing it with an extrinsic measure as central to the purpose of poetry, they use "artificial" as a term of praise in their writings.[35] During his own flirtation with quantitative meter, Spenser sent a sample of his experiments to Gabriel Harvey with this preface: "Loe, here I let you see my olde vse of toying in Rymes turned into your artificial straightnesse of Verse by this Tetrasticon."[36] While rhyming was a native and infantile habit, an "olde vse of toying" idly with language, versifying according to the rules of quantity requires the strenuous labor of hammering language into an artificial straightness. For its sixteenth-century opponents, to choose rhyme is not only to side with barbarous Goths and illiterate monks but to regress to poetic infancy, to surrender to the easy and irrational pleasures of what Campion calls a "childish titillation."[37]

Instead of contending against rhyme's detractors by insisting that rhyme is in fact artificial and sophisticated, advocates of rhyme often translated the charge of childishness and rudeness into a virtue. If you wanted to champion something in the Renaissance, it was always shrewd to claim that it was both old and universal. Defenders of rhyme therefore tried to outvie quantitative advocates in their claim to be returning to the most ancient models. Sidney takes precisely this tack in *Apology for Poetry*, contending that "Poetrie is of all humane learning the most auncient and of most fatherly antiquitie, as from whence other learnings haue taken theyr beginnings" and that "it is so vniuersall that no learned Nation dooth despise it, nor no barbarous Nation is without it."[38] In their poetic treatises, George Puttenham and Samuel Daniel convert Sidney's general argument about the antiquity of poetry into a defense of rhyme in particular. Building on the idea that there was rhyme in biblical Hebrew, Puttenham argues that the biblical precedent takes priority over the classical precedent described by Ascham:

> But the Hebrues & Chaldees who were more ancient then the Greekes, did not only use a metrical Poesie, but also with the same maner of rime, as hath been of late obserued by learned men. Wherby it appeareth that our vulgar running Poesie was common to all the nations of the world besides, whom the Latines and Greekes in speciall called barbarous. So as it was notwithstanding the first and most ancient Poesie, and the most vniuersall; which two points do otherwise giue to all humane inuentions and affaires no small credit. (*Arte*, C4r)[39]

Indeed, one of Puttenham's fundamental arguments is that poetry is primitive, that it is "most ancient from the beginning, and not as manie erroniously suppose, after, but before, any ciuil society was among men" (*Arte*, C2r). He can therefore make the case that "Poesie was th'originall cause and occasion" of political life; its sweetness enticed the "rude and savage" and "by that meanes made them tame" (*Arte*, C2r, C2v, C2v).[40] The fact that rhyme, too, is ancient and primitive is evidence that it plays this dual role of enticing and ordering.

Samuel Daniel likewise answers the charge that "all Ryming is grosse, vulgare, barbarous" by contending that "The vniuersalitie argues the generall power of it: for if the Barbarian vse it, then it shewes that it swais th' affection of the Barbarian: if ciuil nations practise it, it proues that it works vpon the harts of ciuil nations: if all, then that it hath a power in nature on all."[41] The "olde vse of toying" with rhymes should not be left behind because it is precisely rhyme's "childish titillation," its ability to sway the affections and work on the hearts of all human beings, that gives rhyme its power.[42] Daniel offers a more robust account of rhyme's "power in nature" than Puttenham, deriving its primitive influence from the fact that it is a force of energy and motion.[43] He argues that quantitative numbers will only take hold if the "world" finds that it can "feele" the "pulse, life, and enargie" in them that it now feels in rhyme.[44] Daniel's phrase expands on Philip Sidney's contention that rhyme is the "chiefe life" of "modern" versifying.[45] While we might see rhyme as an inert scheme or lifeless repetition, Daniel sees repetition as a sign of energy and argues that it is the pulsations of rhyme that enable it to perform "those offices of motion for which it is imployed; delighting the eare, stirring the heart, and satisfying the iudgement."[46] Daniel's account of rhyme's power is remarkably physical. The purpose of poetry is to "swa[y]," "work on," and "stir" an audience, and rhyme is the perpetual motion machine that makes these "offices of motion" possible by imparting its own energy to the ear, the heart, and the judgment.[47]

And yet in the same sentence in which Daniel attributes the "pulse, life, and enargie" of verse to "our Rymes," he adds a clause that makes rhyme the moderator as well as the fountain of motion: "whose knowne frame hath those due staies for the minde, those incounters of touch, as makes the motion certaine, though the varietie be infinite."[48] Daniel offers a fascinating series of metaphors to explain the role of rhyme: it is a "known frame," that is, a structure, framework, or lattice that acts as a "stay" or prop for a poetic mind that might otherwise run wild or collapse under its own weight.[49] Yet the idea that rhymes provide periodic "incounters of touch" for the mind is even more loaded and intriguing. The word "touch" could mean physical contact as it does today, but it could also mean an encounter with a touchstone that tests the purity of a precious metal (as in the phrase "put to the touch").[50] The sounds of rhyme might keep the poetic mind in touch with the physical senses of the body, or they might be a recurring test that keeps the poet honest. I would argue that the two senses of "touch" are both in play in this passage since the only true touchstone of verse for Daniel is whether we can "feel" life and energy within it. By returning to make contact with rhyme's energy at the end of every single verse, the poet also gives his poem regularity and certainty. Rhyme is like the regular push given to a child in a swing; the push imparts energy and motion, but it also makes the swing's motion regular.

In a rich and thought-provoking 2016 essay, Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld takes seriously Sidney's idea that rhyme could be the "chief life" of a poem, demonstrating in a reading of Spenser's Maleger episode that rhyme can be both artificial and generative. She also draws on this peculiar passage from Daniel, contending that here "rhyme's model of life might assert its mechanical existence onto the listeners of verse, remaking their rhythms . . . in the image of mechanical life. Under this model, the iterations of rhyme do not fold into the beating heart so much as act as defibrillator and pacemaker in one: rhyme 'makes the motion certain' rather than erratic."[51] Though I think that Spenser does in fact use rhyme as an artificial restraint that remakes erratic nature (I will return to this idea in the first chapter), it is not clear to me that this captures the tensions at the heart of Daniel's account of rhyme. Instead, I would argue that Daniel sees the assertion of certain motion as a return to rather than a departure from nature.[52]

Daniel makes the case that certainty is natural later in his treatise by taking on an extreme example of poetic limitation: the sonnet. He argues that the "certaine limit obserued in Sonnets" is not a "tyrannical bounding of the conceit, but rather a reducing it in *girum*, and a iust forme."[53] He goes on to compare the form of the sonnet with the form of the world after the divine act of creation:

> For the body of our imagination, being as an vnformed *Chaos* without fashion, without day, if by the diuine power of the spirit it be wrought into an Orbe of order and forme, is it not more pleasing to Nature, that desires a certaintie, and comports not with that which is infinite, to haue these clozes, rather than, not to know where to end, or how farre to goe, especially seeing our passions are often without measure.[54]

The "certaine limit" of the sonnet's rhyme scheme and the "clozes" of the end rhymes do not tyrannically impose an artificial order on nature. Just as Carew argues that nature is the origin of the freeborn mind's limitations, Daniel contends that the desire for "certaintie" is built into "Nature" itself. While the imagination and the passions are often "vnformed" and "without measure," there is something in "Nature" that is "pleas[ed]" with "order and forme." The poet's task is to "reduc[e]" the conceit "in *girum*," that is, to lead it back (*reducere*) into its own proper gyre or circuit. The metaphor of the gyre allows Daniel to reconcile the idea of rhyme as measure with the sense that rhyme is energy: an object moving in a gyre retains its motion even as it follows a set path. This dual capacity of rhyme is precisely what makes it a perpetual source of fascination and debate in early modern poetics. Each of the poets in this book has a different understanding of whether movement or measure predominates and whether each aspect is a boon or a hindrance to composition.

Daniel's idea that form is a natural and pleasing limitation of the imagination rather than a tyrannical bounding has much in common with Caroline Levine's recent efforts to overcome a lingering resistance in literary studies to "the containing power of form."[55] She argues that "containers do not afford only imprisonment, exclusion, and the quelling of difference"; rather, "bounded wholes" are necessary to political action and to scholarship itself since "*concepts* continue to do the work for us of imposing order on disparate materials: including and excluding, gathering specific examples while separating these from other categories of particulars."[56] Levine's invitation to reconsider the many "affordances" of poetic containment is fruitful, but the concept of "measure," a concept that runs through every chapter of this book because it was at the center of the poetics of this period, might offer a way of thinking about form that both includes and pushes beyond the idea of containment.[57] The word "measure" was used to translate the Latin words "metrum" and "modus." It had mathematical, musical, legal, and ethical meanings. It could mean limit, moderation, capacity (as in "full measure"), proportion, rhythm, and meter, among many other things. This complex of ideas brought together by the word "measure" was at the heart of what it meant to write in verse, for, as Samuel Daniel put it, "All verse is but a frame of wordes confined within certaine measure."[58] But in spite of consensus that measure was central to any understanding of verse, there was little agreement about which kind of measure ought to be pursued and how best to pursue it. While striving to tell a coherent story of rhyme's development from the 1590s to the 1670s, *The Fetters of Rhyme* aims to do full justice to the multiplicity and intricacy of concepts of measure in the period and to revel in the peculiar and colorful metaphors that poets used to represent their understandings of measure and form. Forms are compared not only to the familiar little rooms and well-wrought urns but also to orbs, gyres, frames, gowns, brick walls, soldiers, footsteps, and kisses. Each of these "fictions of form" carries with it a distinctive poetic theory.[59] By lingering with these metaphors and drawing out these theories over the course of this book, I hope not only to offer fresh insights into the complexities of early modern verse but to expand our notions of the ways form can be read.

Form and Analogical Reading

One of the aims of this book is to develop modes of formal reading that respond to the peculiarities of premodern verse making. *The Fetters of Rhyme* therefore builds on recent efforts by practitioners of "historical poetics" or "historical formalism" to historicize poetry, to peer around institutionalized twentieth-century understandings of "lyric" and "lyric reading" that often veil diverse and unfamiliar historical practices of reading and writing verse.[60] Critics like Virginia Jackson and Ardis Butterfield have made it clear just how much is lost by assuming that the deracinated lyrics printed in twentieth-century volumes tell the whole story. Butterfield begins a seminal article on medieval lyric with an invitation to "look at this page," to look closely at a legal roll and a sermon manuscript that contain texts we might want to call lyrics, deeply embedded in a multilingual, polygeneric context that is inevitably stripped away by the twenty-first-century editor.[61] Butterfield is building on Virginia Jackson's earlier invitation to look anew. In *Dickinson's Misery*, Jackson enlivens our understanding of the occasionality and materiality of Dickinson's poetry by recounting how the poet circulated and recirculated her poems and letters, sometimes even with a dead cricket or a pressed leaf attached.[62] But I am also wary of historical formalism's claim to offer a new understanding of poetry by clearing away modern prejudices and returning to the historical roots of poetry.[63] After all, that assertion sounds suspiciously similar to the dueling claims made by Renaissance prosodists from Ascham to Milton about the ancient roots of their theories. Practitioners of historical poetics are as subject to institutional predilections as new critics or new historicists were: Virginia Jackson's subtle examination of the cricket and the leaf in *Dickinson's Misery* and Yopie Prins's fine-tuned appreciation for the mediation of voice in "What Is Historical Poetics?" do not simply translate unadulterated the poetic realities of the past but reflect the unique and compelling passions of Jackson and Prins for materiality and mediation.[64] The presence of these unique interests, which are as much a product of the twentieth-century academy as the idea of lyric is, do not undermine their readings, only their claims to liberate us from troublesome and modern bondage. *The Fetters of Rhyme* endeavors to take up the historical formalists' call to think harder about bygone ways of engaging with form without making the claim that prior critics were uniquely estranged from Renaissance verse by their modern biases. "Historical" critics have been thinking deeply about form, and "formal" critics have been thinking deeply about history for much longer than historical formalists usually acknowledge.

Moreover, the work produced in the wake of calls for a reunification of history and form reveals what a wide range of methodologies can comfortably fit under the capacious umbrella of historical poetics. In the last two decades, a wave of edited volumes with variants of the words "form" and "Renaissance" in their titles has indicated that a lively and diverse group of scholars is dedicated to exploring the place of form in the early modern period.[65] Building on recent work in media theory and reception studies, Stephen Cohen invites readers to imagine form as a kind of "mediation" between "text and social context as well as author and audience."[66] Danielle Clarke and Marie-Louise Coolahan consider what it would mean to think about form as "a key element in reception, the interface between text and reader."[67] Joshua Scodel and Douglas Bruster consider how familiar concepts from historical scholarship such as source, intertextuality, and allusion can be used to illuminate the ways in which forms import ideologies from other texts.[68] And Raphael Lyne takes a "cognitive approach" to his analysis of Shakespeare's stanzaic poetry, describing "how form is shaped by the characteristics of human thinking."[69] Each of these methods expands our understanding of form by showing how it is in conversation with social, historical, and mental realms. But, as illuminating as these readings may be, they do not make it clear how far-reaching and, often, how strange premodern understandings of form and its correspondences with the wider world really were.

Premodern poetic theorists often interpret verse in ways that are familiar and immediately legible to modern critics. They dedicate considerable time to the intricacies of poetic craft, describing the architecture of stanza forms and meters and explaining how poets achieve particular sonic and verbal effects. Trained in humanist methods of classical philology, they also read form in historical or genealogical ways, tracing how particular meters, rhyme schemes, and genres derive from ancient or Middle English sources and how they import associations from their historical contexts.[70] But analogical reading, which was central to ancient, medieval, and early modern theories of music and poetry, has become less common since the Romantics and therefore often seems alien and backward. Premodern poets did not shrink from drawing analogies between forms and ideas and often maintained that the visual and verbal patterns inscribed in verse could be mapped onto social, moral, or cosmic structures.[71] Indeed, the numerological work of critics like A. Kent Hieatt and Alastair Fowler has revealed the mind-boggling lengths to which poets could take this idea that verse should reproduce the intricate structural patterns of the cosmos.[72] John Hollander has traced the gradual "untuning of the sky," that is, growing skepticism about the "physical and metaphysical reality" of the music of the spheres, from 1500 to 1700, but his study also testifies to the remarkable appeal of this account late into the seventeenth century, when poets went to great lengths to reshape ideas of heavenly harmony in the face of skepticism.[73] Though many complicated the correlation of cosmological and poetical proportion, every poet of the period had to reckon with this influential idea that the measure, number, and weight built into the form of verse made it a privileged mode for reflecting and perhaps even enforcing divine order.

I have chosen to describe this mode of reading as "analogical" because the term involves more than a simple arithmetical equality of two things.[74] "Analogy" comes from the Greek mathematical term for a ratio. As James Moxon defines it in his 1679 *Mathematical Dictionary*, it is "a double comparison, or proportion of Numbers or Magnitudes one to another: As when we say, as 4 is to 2, so 8 to 4."[75] Premodern interpreters rarely offer what I would call arithmetical readings, in which the sounds of the words in a line are equated with its local meaning.[76] Instead, they tend to make double comparisons: they carefully consider the patterns formed by rhyme, meter, line length, and so on and consider how these formal patterns correspond with other patterns inside and outside the poem. George Puttenham's account of "*Analogie*" shows just how difficult it was to detect and size up these correspondences (*Arte*, Ff4r). Though he defines analogy rather simply as the "louely conformitie, or proportion, or conueniencie, betweene the sence and the sensible," he reveals how many elements are involved in this proportion when he says that it "resteth in the good conformitie of many things and their sundry circumstances, with respect one to another, so as there be found a iust correspondencie betweene them by this or that relation" (*Arte*, Ff4r).[77] In fact, sorting out all the manifold relations between many things and their sundry circumstances seems like such a knotty task that Puttenham wonders who is even capable of performing it. He concludes that only the "discreetest man" who is "of much observation and greatest experience" can judge the correspondences of things, and even he only with the aid of "example" and "particular discussions" (*Arte*, Ff4v).[78] Although analogical thinkers posit a web of correspondences that should link poetic form to natural order, this idea does not make poetic composition a simple task of copying out conspicuous patterns. The patterns and correspondences are so difficult to discern and then to body forth in language that even the rule-loving Puttenham dictates few laws to govern analogy or decorum, instead leaving it to the discretion of particularly learned and experienced individuals.

The analogical manner of interpreting form not only is unfamiliar to contemporary critics practiced in the art of reading historically and for craft but also runs athwart two assumptions that underlie much post-Romantic poetic criticism: that mimetic theories of literature are rigid and reductive, and that the poet can do justice to melody or form only when he is liberated from the burden of representing anything beyond his own thoughts and feelings.[79] Both of these evaluative principles are on display, for example, in one of Simon Jarvis's seminal articles on "verse thinking."[80] In order to clear the way for much-needed attention to the manifold ways in which poets think in verse, Jarvis has attempted to banish "the doctrine of verbal mimesis" from poetic criticism, even as he acknowledges that two foundational figures in English poetics, Dryden and Pope, espoused this doctrine.[81] In "The Melodics of Long Poems," Jarvis maintains that Pope's most compelling verse indeed works against Pope's own mimetic theory. In a reading of "An Essay on Man," Jarvis argues that the poem's "continuous explosions of wit . . . think back against, detonate, those inert cosmological and moral schemas which they should, according to Pope's own poetics, meekly exemplify."[82] This reading presents a Manichaean vision of the struggle between the individual artist and communal norms.[83] The individual is complex, energetic, and free, while understandings of the cosmos and morality (which are always imposed by society) are dull, monolithic, and repressive. Since the melody of the poem is intricate and full of life, it must perforce be on the side of the individual and not the schemas. One need only read John Davies's 1596 poem *Orchestra, or A Poeme of Dauncing*, in which every aspect of the cosmos from the planets to the plants engages in its own lively dance, to see that the patterns detected within the cosmos were far from "inert."[84] And Spenser is somehow at his most melodious in *Epithalamion*, at the exact moment when he is most dedicated to versifying cosmological and moral patterns. Just as poets can think in and through rhyme, meter, and melody, Spenser is capable of thinking in and through the patterns of time and ceremony. Indeed, poetic theorists repeatedly argue that imposing strictures on the fancy enables rather than hampers composition. Poets, they insist, need not detonate "schemas" in order to be harmonious, witty, or free.

In fact, one of the pleasures of studying poetics is discovering the manifold ways poets of the period endeavor to build bridges between mind and world, verse and universe. Each of the poets considered in this book is building such bridges; that is, each is thinking about form in analogical ways. But, as much as I hope to draw out the resemblances and interconnections among these poets, I also hope to do full justice to the distinctiveness of each poet's account of form's correspondences. For Spenser, the bands of interwoven rhyme schemes are analogous to the coercive social bonds he believed were required to rein in the unruly passions of isolated individuals. Donne and the couplet poets of the 1590s in some ways anticipate the recent emphasis on "verse thinking" as they reshape poetry into an analogy for the struggle of discursive thought. In Ben Jonson's poetics of character, form is a "pattern" of ethical living: its order both reflects the inner character of the poet and provides readers with a model of the good life. And in the royalist theories I discuss in chapter 4, analogical thinking begins to border on magical thinking. Like Spenser, the Royalists were interested in the connection between rhyme and social bonds, but they go beyond Spenser in their belief that the orderly chime of rhyme might actually be a transrational force that can instill political order rather than simply reflecting it. Milton did not contest the royalist idea that rhyme can charm us into obedience, but he saw the royalist effort to use rhyme to manipulate the passions as a violation of poetry's rational purpose. His poetic theory therefore returns to the Donnean and Jonsonian correlations of form with individual thought and character. Though these poets do not share a politics or a world picture and in fact fundamentally disagree about the practices and the purposes of verse making, there is a remarkable consensus among them that verse patterns are in conversation with other patterns, whether the workings of the mind or the dance of the cosmos.

As I trace the history of rhyme in this project, I endeavor to read analogically as well as historically and for craft. My goal, like that of Susanne Woods in her essential study of early modern versification, is not to "reconstruc[t] and presen[t] what is archaic and irrelevant," but rather to "provide a context and a perspective for hearing . . . the art of Renaissance poetry."[85] I recognize that there are risks inherent in the enterprise of analogical reading. After all, if this brief survey of analogical approaches shows anything, it is that analogical thinking is flexible and that analogies are open to interpretation. Even when poets advertise their poetic theories explicitly, how can critics determine how these analogies play out within any given poem and when they are disrupted or displaced? But this risk is common to all poetic interpretation and to literary studies more generally. Interpretation always requires extrapolating from what we know (or think we know) about a poet or period. The precariousness of the critical enterprise and the slipperiness of poems are precisely what allow us to return to reinterpret "Satyre 3" and *Paradise Lost* again and again. I hope that other critics will correct the excesses and infelicities of my analogical extrapolations, just as they have done with previous readings that employ other interpretive methods. But I also hope to make it evident that analogical reading was a lively, demanding, and contested methodology that premodern thinkers believed had the utmost stakes for social and political life.

Though Jarvis's intimation that the poet's melody is directly opposed to moral and cosmological patterns betrays his reliance on a Romantic understanding of artistry that is inconsonant with the analogical thinking of earlier periods, his more fundamental objection to "verbal mimesis" still needs to be tackled.[86] His opposition to "word-painting" springs from a desire to revivify attention to the melody of a poem and from a very real fear—shared by most poetic scholars—of making form subservient to content.[87] Any teacher of poetry knows firsthand that the effort to make a poem's rhyme scheme or metrical patterns fit neatly with its message can produce remarkably far-fetched interpretations.[88] Students are liable to assert that they can actually hear the pigeons sinking into the abyss in the alliteration of Wallace Stevens's "Downward to darkness, on extended wings."[89] As teachers who know the delights of poetry's sounds, we should indeed encourage students to slow down and linger with the form of a poem, to attune their ears to the more subtle music of rhyme and meter rather than precipitately fixing their meaning. But I have found that analogical thinking can actually help students and teachers push beyond simple equations of local sound with local sense. By seeing Puttenham's figures of the bands formed by rhymes or hearing Jonson's ideas about the correspondence of language patterns and individual character, students develop a more expansive sense of the complex patterns that can be uncovered within verse. I am not contending that critics should themselves adhere to the view that form is in conversation with cosmic and social forces. But attending to and even temporarily immersing ourselves in analogical reading can not only open up new understandings of the historical resonances of particular poems but amplify our sense of what forms can do.

Moreover, a fine-grained reading of metaphors for form demonstrates just how premodern poetic dualism differs from the twentieth-century division between form and content questioned by Jarvis and, before him, by the New Critics. Cleanth Brooks in particular challenged the view that the poet has something to communicate and that form is just a "transparent pane of glass through which the stuff of poetry is reflected, directly and immediately" or "a kind of box, neat or capacious, chastely engraved or gaudily decorated, into which the valuable and essentially poetic 'content' of the poem is packed."[90] Premodern theorists do often speak of form in ways that make it secondary to the "stuff" of poetry. As David Scott Wilson-Okamura has emphasized, the preferred metaphor for form in this period is not a pane of glass or container, but clothing: they frequently describe verse as the "clothing," "rayment," "habit or livery," "Garb and dress" of poetry.[91] Even Samuel Daniel, dedicated as he is to the idea that rhyme is the life and pulse of verse, also calls rhyme "our kind and natural attire."[92] Though the metaphor of clothing undoubtedly makes the attire of rhyme secondary to the body of poetry, it is telling that Daniel nonetheless describes this apparel as "kind" and "natural." The premodern use of the word "habit," which could refer to clothing as well as a settled disposition or practice, suggests that attire can almost become an extension of person, a habit or second nature. In this view, verse may be secondary but it is not superfluous. Unlike the "pane of glass" in the Brooks passage, clothing is not simply a "transparent" medium through which the "stuff of poetry is reflected"; clothing translates or re-presents the person who dons it to the outside world.

The distinction between these two kinds of dualism is even more apparent if we look closely at the terms that theorists use to describe the parts of poetry. The common premodern division is not between the "form" and "content" of a poem but between the "verse" or "style" on the one hand and the "imitation," "invention," or "conceit" on the other.[93] In this division, heavily influenced by the classical rhetorical distinction between *inventio* and *dispositio*, it is clear that what Philip Sidney calls the "*Idea* or fore-conceite" is prior to the verse.[94] As William Scott puts it, "apt conceits, and fairly-shaped images" exist first in the "mind of the poet" and then are "shadowed in the style."[95] This model of composition is built on the analogy between the act of poetic making and the divine act of creation.[96] For premodern writers, the analogy glorifies rather than denigrates verse making. The poet's conceit, like God's conception of the world, might be prior to verse, but versification is itself a divine act in which the conceit comes into being for the first time. As David Scott Wilson-Okamura has argued, the belief that "it is possible to have thoughts without language" sounds peculiar and perhaps even "naïve" to the post-Derridean critic.[97] Yet, as he points out, this view does not make language or verse gratuitous: though the conceit may exist without language, it will remain trapped in the mind of the individual poet until he or she gives it a linguistic form.[98] As William Scott put it, "words have their necessary use, without which the conceits want their light, are as it were unborn."[99] Conceits have no existence or life in the world without being figured forth into measured language. Writing in verse requires transforming a mental image into an entirely new medium.

This model is much less likely to trivialize rhyme and meter than the twentieth-century metaphor of form and content. A container can be discarded or refilled with something else entirely once its contents have been consumed. In fact, Cleanth Brooks himself notes in passing that the idea of the poet as "a maker" was "better and less dangerous" than the twentieth-century view of the poet as "communicator" since this metaphor makes it more evident that the poet "explores, consolidates, and 'forms' the total experience that is the poem."[100] It is no coincidence that Brooks, along with T. S. Eliot and other New Critics, was particularly drawn to Renaissance literature. For the analogical thinking of Renaissance poetics often anticipates the New Critical interest in patterns and structures.[101] Since theorists like William Scott admonished poets to pursue "*proportionableness*" in "the correspondency of the parts among themselves to the framing of the convenient whole," it is not surprising that Renaissance poems tend to reward New Critical efforts to trace the "total pattern" or "internal order of the poem itself."[102] Yet the premodern interest in the resemblance between the proportions of poetry and the proportions of political, religious, and mental life also has something in common with new historicism's contention that "the written word is self-consciously embedded in specific communities, life situations, structures of power."[103] In other words, the synthesis of formalism and historicism, inner pattern and outer associations that historical poetics seeks is already built into the poetics of the period. In each chapter of this book, I strive to do justice to both aspects of this synthesis by reading deeply for the patterns within individual poems while attending to the complex web of correspondences poets drew between poems and the wider world.

The Argument of the Book

The Fetters of Rhyme, then, is a study of ways of reading, thinking about, hearing, and making rhyme from the 1590s to the 1670s. These ways of engaging with rhyme did not always go hand in hand. Indeed, as I have suggested, one of the anxieties about rhyme was that readers or listeners could easily respond to its jingling at a visceral or passionate level without ever thinking at all. Many poets of the period, particularly the royalist poets considered in chapter 4, embraced this prerational aspect of rhyming while others worked to contain or soften it. As I consider different approaches to rhyme in this book, I endeavor to do justice to this sonic aspect, to what Angela Leighton has described as "the way poets invite the ear to listen."[104] Leighton offers this attention to listening as a way of supplementing and enriching views of prosody as cognition.[105] While I admit that I am inclined to think of prosody as a way of thinking in verse, in part because I think that many of the poets I study also tend to imagine verse as a kind of thinking (or rather, conceiving), Leighton's invitation to listen opens up aspects of rhyming that it would be foolish and partial to ignore.

Indeed, the sonic aspect of rhyme, its unrelenting invitation to listen, is one of the reasons that I have made it the central focus of this book rather than choosing to write about poetic form or the idea of poetic measure in a more general sense. It is impossible to discuss rhyme without also discussing rhythm and meter since all three together formed the "frame of wordes" that Daniel saw as the defining feature of verse.[106] Debates about rhyme in the period were always tied up with questions of meter and rhythm, and I have therefore been careful to read rhyme within its larger prosodic context. Rhyme, rhythm, and meter were all seen as working on the ears and the heart as well as the mind. But while meter was repeatedly connected with, and often seen as synonymous with, "measure," poets were unsure whether rhyme was an instrument of measurement or a force of pure sound. Because of meter's etymological and theoretical associations with measure—and because it was a feature of classical verse—it was rarely described as a suspiciously prerational threat to sense. Many poets insisted that rhyme was amenable to or even akin to restraint and reason, but it was clear that it was in many ways apart from reason. Much of the prosodic energy of the century was poured into negotiating rhyme's precise place between sound and sense because to decide how one felt about rhyme was to decide how one felt about the proper mixture of the sonic and the rational in poetry itself.

As my survey of the quantitative debate suggests, conversations about what to do with rhyme during this period almost always became conversations about which past or pasts should form the foundations of a new English verse. Because the same question of which past to follow was at the center of debates about the origins of the polity and the sources and limits of individuals' obligations to it, poets often draw more and less explicit correspondences between rhyme and politics. These parallels and explicit connections make it tempting to describe the history of rhyme outlined in this book as a *political* history of rhyme. But the addition of the adjective unnecessarily narrows the implications of freedom and binding. The poetical debates about liberty and bands I discuss in this book are always in touch with but never completely absorbed by the politics of the period. Rhyme was political, but it was never purely political. Indeed, the story of rhyme in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries can often seem as much like a picaresque novel as like an epic: always getting into scrapes and regularly changing its disguises and companions, rhyme is present for the big political events of the period but also pursues many romantic and intellectual side adventures away from the centers of power. I have therefore resolved to follow rhyme's adventures where they lead and to reveal how the bands of rhyme gathered and cast off political, ethical, and social implications over the course of a century. As much as rhyme's interpreters in the period tried to claim that it had a fixed nature and meaning, rhyme's *malleability* is one of the constants of this story; rhyme's status as something between sound and sense, sensuality and reason, made it amenable to repeated reinterpretation over the course of the century. The understanding of the couplet, to take an extreme example, was overturned several times in the course of a century: it was in turn seen as a sign of radical licentiousness, of Stoic evenness, and of charming magic. But taking a long view of rhyme's many repurposings from the end of Elizabeth's reign to the Restoration reveals that there were many patterns within the mutability and that poets were engaged in a common debate about the purposes of measured writing. By telling a new story about the life of rhyme in the period, I hope not only to enrich knowledge of particular poets and poems but to reshape understanding of the aims and stakes of early modern verse making.

Before outlining the argument of *The Fetters of Rhyme* at the level of the chapter, I would like to take a moment to consider an Elizabethan prosodic innovation that represented a departure from the fundamental premises of the sixteenth-century debate over quantitative verse and rhyme. While all the defenders and opponents of rhyme I have discussed in this introduction were keen to claim that their version of poetry was the most deeply rooted in the ancient past, Catherine Nicholson's work has made it clear that Marlowe's blank verse was seen as an upstart Tamburlaine, bursting violently onto the scene without apologizing for its disruptive novelty.[107] Robert Greene sums up the sense of prosodic outrage with characteristic color when he complains of those

> who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbraue better pens with the swelling bumbast of a bragging blanke verse. Indeed it may be the ingrafted ouerflow of some kilcow conceipt, that ouercloieth their imagination with a more than drunken resolution, beeing not extemporall in the inuention of anie other meanes to vent their manhood, commits the disgestion of their cholerick incumbrances, to the spacious volubilitie of a drumming decasillabon.[108]

The novelty of English blank verse was something of a fiction since Surrey's *Aeneid*, Grimald's translations, Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*, and Gascoigne's *Jocasta* and *Steel Glass* all preceded *Tamburlaine*, but the overflow that characterized Marlowe's drama played right into the fiction that blank verse was a swaggering upstart. Kicking loose from classical precedent on the one hand and from what he called the "riming mother wits" of native tradition on the other, Marlowe produced a form well adapted to accommodate the passionate speech of his overreaching protagonists.[109] Marlowe's willingness to embrace the disruptive reputation of his blank verse may partly account for the fact that the innovation remained nearly exclusive to drama for eighty years. His innovation was seen as too arrogantly newfangled, too willing to cut ties with ancient poetry. Not just the sixteenth-century controversialists I have considered, but every poet and theorist I will discuss in this book touted some ancient past—classical, Christian, or English—in justifying decisions about how to shape and reshape rhyme and meter. Dramatists like Kyd, Shakespeare, and Jonson were willing to follow Marlowe in his innovation because they found in blank verse a new and fruitful middle ground between prose and rhymed verse that was too well accommodated to the needs of drama to resist. (Though these poets understood the implications of the form very differently; as early as *Much Ado about Nothing* [c. 1598], Shakespeare's Benedick speaks of the "even road of a blank verse." Hardly Marlovian bombast.)[110] But epics, lyrics, elegies, and odes—even those written by the blank-verse dramatists themselves—continued to be written in some kind of rhyme.[111]

Perhaps even more strikingly, Milton himself confessed to the influence of Marlowe's, Shakespeare's, and Jonson's blank verse with only a brief and vague statement in the middle of his preface to *Paradise Lost* that "our best *English* tragedies" have "long since" rejected rhyme (*CPMP*, 210). This is not, I think, solely because he wanted to focus on his claim to be the first English heroic poet to cast off rhyme, but because he saw that Marlowe's dramatic innovation sprung from a desire for a different kind of prosodic freedom than that of *Paradise Lost*, that is, from a desire to imitate more freely the rhythms of the passions and of speech.[112] Milton saw his own rejection of "riming mother wits" as an effort to imitate not speech but the lofty harmonies of ancient poetry (classical and biblical). Though dramatic and nondramatic verse practice influenced one another in innumerable ways during this period, I have restricted myself to nondramatic verse because, in prosody at least, Marlowe's innovation made the gap between dramatic and nondramatic verse wider in this period than it was before the 1580s or after rhyme returned to the stage in the Restoration. Doing justice to the history of blank verse and rhyme in drama would require another monograph entirely, one that I hope someone will soon write.[113]

In honor of one of the great analogical thinkers of the seventeenth century, Thomas Browne, the five chapters of my book form a sort of quincunx.[114] The first two chapters and the last two chapters analyze contemporaneous poets who contended over the implications of rhyme. Chapters 1 and 2 examine two rival poetic camps that emerged in the final decade of Elizabeth's reign. Their prosodic debate over the merits of stanzas and couplets was entangled with a larger controversy about the proper balance between personal liberty and social constraint. Chapter 1 focuses on Spenser's experiments with interwoven rhyme patterns in *Amoretti*. In his sonnet sequence celebrating his betrothal to Elizabeth Boyle, Spenser depicts the drama of courtship as a small-scale version of the struggle to unite freeborn individuals in communities. Pointing to his interwoven rhyme schemes and the sonnet form itself as emblems of pleasant and beneficial confinement, Spenser argues that social life requires a form of voluntary captivity that is made palatable by its beauty. The second chapter reveals that John Donne played a formative role in a new school of couplet poetry that arose in the 1590s. The youthful poets who belonged to this school rejected the interwoven rhymes favored by many Elizabethans, insisting that elaborate rhyme schemes betrayed a preference for form over reason. Reacting against Italianate stanzaic poetry, these poets took up the Chaucerian pentameter couplet in order to flout imported poetic rules and return English poetry to its original state of rational liberty. They contended that the antiquated form, with its loose rhythm and enjambed lines, allowed them to restore verse to its proper function as a forum for free, argumentative discourse.

In the middle of the quincunx stands Ben Jonson, whom contemporaries viewed as the presiding spirit of seventeenth-century verse. The third chapter endeavors to explain why Jonson's measured couplets were seen as a watershed in the history of English poetry. I argue that the battle between the couplet and the stanzaic poets in the 1590s ended in a sort of stalemate. The young couplet poets eroded the influence of stanzaic poets like Spenser by associating stanzas with a cowardly submission to mistresses, conventions, and continental rules of poetry. Nevertheless, their separation of verse from measure was not particularly congenial to most seventeenth-century poets, who continued to hold to the view that poetic form should reflect divine or social order. By instituting a reform of English verse that reconciled the argumentative freedom of the couplet school with the measure of the stanzaic poets, Ben Jonson made the couplet a fitting vehicle for his ethical poetry, which celebrates a circumscribed, private kind of liberty. In doing so, he developed concepts of lyric freedom and a separate poetic sphere that would be taken up and reinterpreted by the subsequent generation of poets.

The final section of the book again analyzes two competing schools of rhyme: royalist lyric poets, who celebrated the affective power of rhyme's chime, and Milton, who categorically rejected the "jingling sound of like endings" in his preface to *Paradise Lost* (*CPMP*, 210). Focusing on the verse of Robert Herrick, Katherine Philips, and Abraham Cowley, the fourth chapter argues that royalist poets responded to a Civil War crisis of the passions by embracing the prerational charms of rhyme's chime and its connections to the most basic and natural bonds of the heart. In the final chapter, I recontextualize Milton's disavowal of rhyme in *Paradise Lost* by showing how it grew out of a career-long effort to reckon with rhyme's allures and to disentangle his own dedication to poetic sublimity and private liberty from the royalist retreat into the affections.

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