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Variation Within Uniformity: The English Romantic Sonnet

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VARIATION WITHIN UNIFORMITY: THE ENGLISH ROMANTIC SONNET

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the English Department
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English Literature

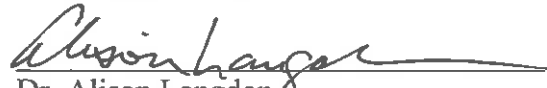
By
Thomas Cherry

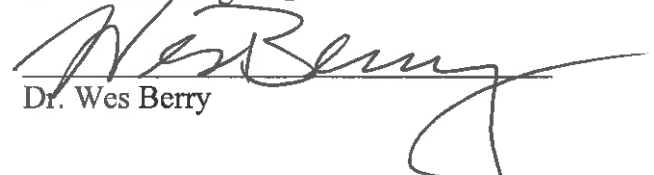
August 2014

VARIATION WITHIN UNIFORMITY: THE ENGLISH ROMANTIC SONNET

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Thomas Cherry

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Directed by: Dr. Lloyd Davies, Dr. Alison Langdon, and Dr. Wes Berry

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The English Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century wrote numerous poems from genres and styles all across the poetic spectrum. From the epics of ancient origin concerning kings and fanciful settings to the political odes on fallen leaders and even the anthropological histories of what it meant to live in their time, these poets stretched their stylistic legs in many ways. One of the most interesting is their use of the short and rule-bound sonnet form that enjoyed a reemergence during their time. Though stylized throughout its existence, the sonnet most often falls into a specific form with guidelines and rule. What makes the Romantic interest in this form noteworthy is that like the other forms, they found new ways to use the sonnet as a means of poetic experimentation and creative expression.

Exploring the various internal and external variations, those changes that took place within the lines and phrases of the sonnet and those that form the organizing and rhyming portions of the poem, this study seeks to establish the ways the Romantics took the uniform techniques of the sonnet and stretched its bounds to find new means of creativity. Close reading of the poems of William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley reveals the variant use of caesura, creative dissonance, as well as original organization and rhyme scheme to accomplish purely Romantic goals within the uniformity of the sonnet form.

Introduction

The English Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, all produced a large canon of poetry diverse in style and format as well as subject matter. Their poems included long epics in heroic couplets, blank verse discussions of modern politics, elegies for friends and monarchs alike, musings on nature of both large and small scale, and nearly every genre in between. Of all these forms, the sonnet is of particular interest because of its reemergence in popularity after having lost favor among poets of the previous era. Milton had denounced sonnets as unsuitable, and few respectable poets after him were writing them, yet for the Romantics the form became a popular means of poetic expression. How did these poets of such great imagination and ambition become reignited with a desire to write such a restricted and short poetic form? While the “how” of the form’s reemergence is worth explanation, what the poets did after they discovered the form is especially remarkable.

Stuart Curran traces two main influences that spurred the sonnet into Romantic minds. The first is Thomas Gray and his “Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West.” This sonnet is in the tradition of the love sonnets of old, but instead of enshrining a current lover, Gray seeks to immortalize someone lost from the world. Curran calls this elegiac sonnet the motive force underlying the entire Romantic revival of the sonnet, noting that it was “a model for hundreds of poets who, whether or not they had a secret life of their own, brought invention to the rescue” (30); for “where the Renaissance had played its variations on the ecstasies of love and religion, the later eighteenth century reared its monument to unavailing sorrow” (30). Gray acted as a launching board for a

new way of seeing the sonnet. From this poem then came the work of Charlotte Smith, whose formal achievement, Michael O'Neill says, "is most pronounced when we recognize her for having revived the sonnet tradition in English" (9). O'Neill also quotes Wordsworth as having said that Smith is a poet "to whom English verse is under great obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered" (9). Smith's nine editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* is seen as the reignition of the sonnet tradition, moving the form into a more self-aware and introspective style of poem, something that was once unpopular in the tradition. Smith was driven into poverty by a debtor husband and forced to support her large family with literary work; this difficult situation led her to write poems of the self and the internal struggles she dealt with, thus shaping the new Romantic style. Curran says that Smith's achievement is "to free established poetic discourse from its reliance on polished couplets, formal diction, and public utterances, and through centering on internal states of mind to realize an expressive and conversational intensity" (31). Smith's new style of sonnet writing also embodied the Romantic attitude toward interaction with past literature, an important aspect of the reemergence of the sonnet tradition. O'Neill says that Smith illustrates how "poets of the period refused to be imprisoned with the poetic of self-expression"; in her poems there was an intimation of other poets but not direct reference, something the Romantics accomplished by keeping "the doors and the windows of their poetic houses open: past literature enters, often to undergo change; posterity is frequently evoked" (xxvi).

This idea of allowing influences to come into one's literary house and then exit as something new is where, in the progression of the sonnet, William Wordsworth enters, setting up the sonnet tradition that would eventually become Keats's and Shelley's.

Jennifer Wagner focuses her extensive study of the Romantic sonnet on Wordsworth, a study that she says “locates the rise and popularity of a particular *mode* of sonnet with the entry of Wordsworth into the sonnet-writing arena that already existed at the opening of the nineteenth century” (12). Wordsworth gains such importance in the reemergence of the sonnet because “the awareness of nineteenth-century writers that something new had happened in Wordsworth’s sonnets created an unusually self-conscious attitude toward the form” (Wagner 12). With the work of Thomas Gray, Charlotte Smith, and William Wordsworth, the sonnet was set on a yet another new trajectory, one created by poets more willing to write about matters of the inner-self, allowing the sentimental to influence their writing. These poets adopted more conversational and expressive tones that came from their imagination and emotional creativity, influences that previous generations of sonnet writers did not allow for. This subtle change in poetic expression coincided with a evolution in the formal understanding of the sonnet itself. By changing the acceptable subject matter for the sonnet, these poets also questioned the standard formal elements of the sonnet, opening it to experimentation and the formal variations that are the main focus of this study.

Freedom from the constraints of formal poetry is not an obscure or new idea in the life and work of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, or any of their Romantic contemporaries. The tendency is articulated clearly in Keats’s meditation on poetic form, “If by dull rhymes our English must be chain’d.” This sonnet is a call to the kind of experimentation and freedom from rules that his other work exhibits. It offers a solution to the problem of restriction: if rules become too abrasive, “Let us find out, if we must be constrain’d, / Sandals more interwoven and complete / To fit the naked foot of Poesy” (4-

6). Keats wants to forge new paths and seek new solutions to the problems of constrictive rules. This is not a call for the abandonment of all form, but rather a pledge that “if we may not let the Muse be free, / She will be bound with garlands of her own” (13-14). This sonnet argues that the solution to feelings of entrenchment or constraint is to find new ways of existing in the old forms, not to disregard them as a whole, but to adapt and change them to fit the desires of the Muse—a technique the Romantic poets used throughout their sonnet writing careers.

The Romantic experimentation in sonnet writing falls into the two broad categories of internal and external variations. The “internal” variations are those that take place within the lines of the poem and break from common sonnet practice or expectations. These can be changes in rhythm, emphasis through word selection and sound, unusual use of punctuation, or any other variation from the standard iambic pentameter line internal to the sonnet’s form. The “external” variations deal less with the phrasing or rhythm of the poem and instead focus on the structure of the lines as a whole or changes made to the sonnet’s rhyme scheme, both of which are considered the casing in which the internal meaning of a poem is placed.

The “internal” variations are dealt with here first because these changes often manifest in the way the poem is read, changing the sound or rhythm of the reading; however, they can also affect the larger message or significance of the poem’s structural elements and ideas. Internal changes and variations may call attention to, or deflect attention away from, other words or ideas in the poem and thus manipulate the meaning of the poem simply by determining the way it is read. An example of this is the caesura in Keats’s “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” where the halting and overflowing of

the poem's final lines force a reinterpretation of its conclusion. The caesura creates a slowing at key moments and quickening in others, forcing a second look at the ideas in these portion simply by affecting the way the poem is read. This occurs again, but in a slightly different way, in Wordsworth's "Surprised by joy," where the internal variation of caesura causes a disjointed feeling of fragmentation that echoes the feeling of losing a loved one. Again, internal reworking through caesura adds an element of meaning to the poem.

Internal variations may seem simpler than the external variations because on first reading they are stronger and more obvious in their direct relationship to the sound of the poem, but they also embody significant variations in style and meaning that extend outside the poem's form. Such is the case when sonnets create dissonance between their formal elements and their subjects. Sonnets like Wordsworth's "Nuns fret not" and "Composed on Westminster Bridge, 1802" juxtapose their subjects—celebration of restriction and the quiet of a London skyline—with opposite formal elements such as enjambment, choppy lists of words that speed up reading, and excited punctuation. The dissonance created by these coexisting but entirely opposite elements forces new examination of the poem and what the poet seeks to accomplish. Even as Wordsworth experimented with these internal variations, Shelley used the same techniques to admonish Wordsworth in his sonnet "To Wordsworth." Here the dissonance comes in the use of exalting language to set up an indictment of whom Shelley sees as the once-great poet. In each instance, internal techniques stray from established norms to affect the way the poem is read or understood, thus forging new poetic territory.

Though the internal variations make up much of this study, the external variations are not without their own importance. The use of variant organization and rhyme scheme was a very popular means of poetic originality in the Romantics. By taking forms long established and changing them, either slightly or radically, the poets were able to create new forms, often times with very specific goals in mind. Shelley's "England in 1819" inverts the Petrarchan organization, putting a list of the old kings' ills above the subjects who take the brunt of that evil before finishing on a couplet describing the possible future for such corrupt leaders. This inversion and inclusion of two styles pulls together the fate of the kings and the subjects, a connection that would not be accomplished without the variance of organization. In "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again" Keats combines what is normally understood as conventional Petrarchan and Shakespearian forms into a single sonnet to create homage to the Shakespeare works it is celebrating, but also to rebel against the couplet practice he so despised. By changing the form of the poem, using elements considered "external" or outside of the aural elements, he accomplishes both of these goals. Examination of these types of organizational and rhyming variations, like understanding the rhythmic and dissonant elements of other poems, allows new levels of understanding and interpretation. By creating these new forms, the Romantics pushed the sonnet's bounds and continued to make it their own.

This study examines internal and external variations through close readings of the poems that establish the Romantic sonnet form. Extensive study has been done on why the sonnet reemerged and the creative climates these poets were entering when creating these poems, particularly by Jennifer Wagner and Stuart Curran, two critics to whom this study owes a great deal, but less has been done to appreciate the truly masterful

techniques used to manipulate reading, to underscore theme, or to encapsulate ideas within this small form. Close reading provides a focus on poetic technique in the sonnet, looking at *how* these larger artistic goals were achieved rather than simply why they existed. By grounding the study in line-by-line examination, this study focuses on the things that may get passed over when trying only to understand holistic meaning or to connect the poems to the greater political or biographical climate of their creation. The craft of creating poetry is one of literature's most beautiful arts, and by studying how these great works accomplish the greatness they do on the minutest level, the masterful nature of the sonnet is revealed.

The Unexpected Halt: Variation Through Caesura

The tradition of the sonnet has been in constant evolution since its creation, but there are expectations of how the form is read and where elements are placed. Much of this has to do with the English and Italian styles seen as basic standards for the sonnet; however, not every sonnet follows these rhythmic expectations. Often the sonnet is forced into an unusual reading through the placement of internal variation that slows or quickens the pace of the poem, often disrupting steady reading and drawing attention to portions. These internal variations are stronger than their external counterparts for this very reason, often they are abrupt or unsettling and thus more noticeable. Inserting internal variation is an important part of how the Romantics created their sonnets, freeing the sound of the poem to move beyond the understood standards and into a more imaginative and creative plane. The first of these internal disruptions is the forced and unexpected halting of a poem's rhythm, often to make some thematic change or shift. The caesura is a popular variation in the Romantic sonnet, often forcing attention into easily overlooked portions of the poem.

One of the more radical uses of caesura takes place in a pivotal line in Keats's "When I have fears that I may cease to be," where it becomes the focus of a new reading of the poem's closing. Here the poem breaks from the conventional closing of the Shakespearean sonnet, which calls for a self-contained rhymed couplet, with an unconventional caesura in line 12:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;

When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

The poem appears to be a conventional Shakespearean sonnet: it has three complete quatrains; each contains one thought within the poem's larger overall message; each is rhymed in the conventional alternating rhyme scheme; and each has the parallel construction typical of English quatrains, such as in Shakespeare's "That time of year thou mayst in me behold," a sonnet that voices similar concerns with death. The first two quatrains of "When I have fears" come neatly to their completion with semi-colons at the end of lines four and eight; however, the final quatrain is different in that it reaches the semi-colon early, in the middle of line twelve, rather than the end, and is followed by a dash, thus ending the rhythm of the line early and forming a caesura; "Never have relish in the faery power / Of unreflected love;—then on the shore / Of the wide world I stand alone, and think" (11-13). This pause in the middle of the twelfth line causes a complete and unexpected stop in the rhythm of the poem before moving into the final thought, a thought that would normally be limited, in the Shakespearean construction of sonnets, to the couplet. The tendency to use caesura and enjambment to join lines or end thoughts before the rhymed end stop is not an entirely revolutionary one; what is unique about this instance is the emphatic nature of the stop. The caesura is not a light or flowing stop that

connects two similar ideas; it is a strong and immediate break between two completely separate ideas.

On a purely vocal and auditory level, the punctuation alone is enough to cause a surprise or stumble in the poem's sound. The poem juxtaposes two marks that on their own would serve as significant hard stops in a poem's rhythm: the semi-colon separates the two ideas in the same fashion as a period, and the dash forces a delay in the reading as if to encourage contemplation or further examination. These two strong punctuation marks, one following the other, fully halt the forward motion without possibility of smooth transition, a distinction that becomes more significant given the location of this caesura midway through the line. This semi-colon and long dash halt the progress of the reading and force a breath out of the reading of the poem. This is a moment that, were the sonnet a completely formulaic Shakespearean sonnet, as the rest of the construction appears to be, would not occur until the end of the line. Normally there is only expectation of change in the final couplet. The caesura acts as a turn or change of subject as would normally begin at the ninth line of the Petrarchan sonnet and the thirteenth in the Shakespearean; here it takes place just before it is expected, thus adding early attention to the change it is signaling.

This unexpected pause followed by a shift in focus demonstrates a typical feature which Stuart Sperry finds in Keats's poetry: "the sudden start of surprise or recognition, moments when the diverse strands of sensation and association mysteriously coalesce to yield a kind of intimation that Keats himself can consider only by analogy with thought" (76-77). Caesuras, and indeed the other irregular and unexpected pauses seen in other

poems, are sudden moments of new thought. They then slow the process and call attention to this new situation.

By stopping the poem's movement mid-line, the caesura cuts short the ideas preceding it, not allowing them the fullness of thought that could be achieved by extending to the end of the line. However, the mid-line break not only shortens the line and disrupts the regular rhythm, it also creates an auditory momentum by beginning the final thought earlier than expected, a momentum which dives unexpectedly into the couplet from halfway through the twelfth line. This momentum gives the final couplet more space and, coming after such an abrupt stop in the poem's rhythm and sound, emphasizes its new ideas. This emphasis separates the final thought from the previous three—a separation essential to the couplet's answer to all of the three quatrains' questions.

The lines preceding the full stop of line twelve build in pace and speed, contemplating the poet's possible end and giving voice to the fears that come with that impending possibility. Each of the fears deals with temporality and death: the fear of death “before high-piled books, in charactery, / hold like rich garnerers the full ripened grain” (3); before the emotions of “high romance” (6) and the beauty of “the night's starred face” (5) can be translated with “the magic hand of chance” (8); and fear that the “unrequited love” (12) of the “fair creature of an hour” (9) may never be experienced again. Each of these fears has a sense of expiration to it, a temporal restriction. However, the full stop that occurs unexpectedly amid these fears of time removes the poem from its restraints. This stop is a moment of quiet before the poem continues, allowing Keats to become what M.A. Goldberg calls “a self-willing individual, active rather than passive,

relieved of his fears, and outside the space-time dimensions” (127). This full pause in the rhythm of the poem prepares for the solace of the final lines by relieving Keats of his time-constrained fears. The pause is a moment of refocusing, when fears can be slowed and the new perspective properly understood. Ultimately it describes *what* will happen when these times of uncertainty occur. Everything before is a fearful time; the caesura is the crest of the poem’s wave and is followed by a speedy descent that changes description into action. These are two very separate yet interconnected messages; forcing them to also be two distinctly separate units through the intensity of the poem’s caesura, Keats draws their connection and interdependent nature into a much higher relief than if the poem had continued in customary fashion.

The hard stop and thoughtful silent pause of the closing image are important in unpacking the sonnet’s meaning and worth, but what is also unusual is that the image of the final line begins immediately after the caesura. This new thought transitions away from the silence of the caesura, expands beyond the normally self-contained couplet, and picks up the momentum of its early beginning. Rather than being limited to the couplet, the image is formed by the final three lines:

; —then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink. (12-14)

This couplet’s expansion to two and a half lines, with the information contained in the extra words, stretches the thought beyond what would normally be possible.

These extra words and increased length give an increased prominence to the image of Keats standing alone on the shore of the wide world and thinking of love and fame; it is the culmination of the poem as it slows down and reflects on the fears of a

previous time. The new sound of the lines gives new life to standing on the shore alone. Because it does not emerge from a standard end-stopped line, this new image has life and speed, it flies from the pause and dives into the final couplet with exceeding vitality. Even the ordering of the now longer sentence increases the auditory momentum. Instead of the standard construction, which would place the subject and action at the beginning of the sentence, this inversion changes the way the line is read, forcing the enjambment to move quickly through the line break and join “the shore” (12) with its modifier, which clarifies that it is the shore “of the wide world” (13). Bruce Hayman works through this kind of sentence inversion in Keats’ “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” noticing that “when the modifiers are placed up front, the reader may tend to inhale at those modifiers before reaching the subject-verb core of the sentence” (24). The same phenomenon takes place here: by imbedding the subject in the body of the sentence and using enjambment to begin the sentence early, the poem forces a breath at the beginning of the sentence and hurries to the second portion of the line.

Significantly, the hurried connection occurs just before the comma, which sets off the reason for standing alone—the quiet process of thinking and again slowing the rhythm. In this enjambed final couplet the rhythm of the poem ebbs and flows with the experiences it is describing. The momentum created by the line’s extension brings life to the moment of standing alone at the world’s edge, a moment full of possibility and excitement. It is then slowed by the need to think in that moment and consider life and love fully, a process that brings the line to a quieter close.

This change of rhythm and a longer than normal sentence length gives extra attention to the final image, but it also, as Francis O’Gorman notes, “imitates the

unfolding nature of organic growth: its syntax expands through devices that prolong sense and move towards, but do not reach, conclusion” (378). It connects the two parts of the poem, but it elongates that connection through the round shape provided by the increased momentum of the additional half line and the enjambment that follows.

This overflowing of the final image is not only the product of the poem’s hard stop forcing a reflection and reconsideration of the circumstance, but also the unusual construction of the sentence, which gives it life and increased movement. Breaking the limiting rule of the sonnet form, Keats infuses this somber and melancholy image with new spirit, which invigorates the fearful nature of the preceding portions. Goldberg points to the problem of a melancholy interpretation of the word “Nothingness,” which “can imply a physical reduction to zero, or it can imply a reduction to insignificance. To assume...that Keats is talking about death here...is indeed a temptation—though perhaps a facile solution to a rather complex and important problem for Keats” (126). Indeed, to call this death is to ignore the reflective and freeing caesura of line twelve as well as the life-filled momentum of the sentence. Calling nothingness “death” incorrectly attaches it to the mortal protagonist of the poem and not to the immortal ideas of “love and fame.” However, the poem’s departure from standard form and style is at the same time a departure from the previous way of thinking. The caesura and the spilling over and elongated lines, have separated the final thinking from the previous fears completely so that the liminal fears of losing love and possible fame sink away from the shore where the protagonist now stands.

While “When I have fears” uses an emphatic mid-line caesura to signal two separate portions of the poem, Keats is not the only Romantic to use the caesura. William Wordsworth’s sonnet “Surprised by joy” illustrates a more numerous use of this same internal variation that accomplishes entirely different goals:

Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find?
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
But how could I forget thee? Through what power,
Even for the least division of an hour,
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
To my most grievous loss! —That thought’s return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
Knowing my heart’s best treasure was no more;
That neither present time, nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

The intensity and surprise of the caesura is lessened in “Surprised by joy” in two ways: first, the technique is used multiple times within the sonnet, beginning in the opening line of the poem, and thus the surprise element of an unusual stopping point is reduced; second, the caesura at the turn in line nine allows the previous sentiment of the octave to spill over into the sestet rather than having the closing idea begin early so that it is brought to the forefront, as Keats’s caesura does. This change does not minimize the variation in Wordsworth’s use of the caesura, but provides a counter-example to illuminate the strength and verbosity of the same variation in Keats’s sonnet.

From the first line “Surprised by joy” is a sonnet of interruption and fragmentation, registering scattered emotional responses created by a sudden return to the memories of a lost loved one. These poetic characteristics coincide well with the emotional experience of surprise, as if the techniques Wordsworth chose were an immediate replication of his experiences. Christopher R. Miller notes that in this parallelism “the poem moves between these senses: it begins with a shock and proceeds to elaborate that moment—to pursue the question of how one could have come to that moment in the first place” (425). This movement between the articulation and explanation of an emotion is again similar to the division in Keats’s sonnet where questions find their answer; however, rather than the separating caesura creating a chasm of meaning between the two parts, Wordsworth’s caesura elaborates and extends an idea that may not be fully understood initially. The unusual breaks echo the unusual experience, even within the standard sonnet format.

The first break, in the opening line of the poem, is a very early pause in the poem’s rhythm that demands that the poem’s main emotion be considered before anything else is introduced. Set apart from the rest of the poem, “Surprised by joy” becomes a surprise of its own, an unexpected halt in a line which would normally extend much further. This irregular halt forces the attention of the poem back onto the phrase that caused the rhythm to be halted so early—the surprise. It suggests the need to properly consider such a weighty phrase before the poem continues, even if the impetus of that surprise is yet unknown. This caesura could divide the poem into two parts, in the same way that Keats’s caesura does; instead it works only to set up the theme of surprise that is to follow. That theme follows almost immediately in line two when the rhythm and

thought process of the poem are again interrupted, this time by a vocal interjection rather than the pause of caesura alone. Here the long dash of the pause is followed by the exclamation “Oh!” to suggest yet another instance of surprise:

—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
But Thee,

With this second indication of surprise coming so quickly, the intent of the irregular pause is strengthened, making it clear that this is a poem of interruption, not just using pause to signal a shift in attention or style. The opening lines become more fragmented by this second caesura, and the rhythm of the poem grows increasingly difficult. F.R. Leavis describes the movement of the poem as one that

demands a constant and most sensitive vigilance in the reader, and even if he knows the poem well he is unlikely to satisfy himself at the first attempt, such and so many are the shifts of tone, emphasis, modulation, tempo, and so on, that the voice is required to register (“movement” here, it will be seen, is the way the voice is made to move, or feel that it is moving, in a sensitive reading-out). (126)

The vocal nature of this second interruption amplifies it beyond the first, creating the uneasy movement that Leavis describes, especially since it comes, not at the end of a complete thought, but in the middle of one spurred on by the initial idea of surprise. Whereas the pause in the first line halts the rhythm of the poem and forces focus on what precedes it, this interruption suggests an increase in emotion and does little to slow or break the poem’s rhythm. It functions more as an expression of increased awareness, as if the true severity of the emotional fallout is only realized midway through the

remembrance of a love lost. Alan Richardson takes this pause further and defines it as an apostrophe, saying, “the speaker turns to his daughter, not to address her but to share an attitude...but the poet’s daughter has died, and his habitual gesture, his turning to her, becomes the ‘turning away’ that etymologically defines apostrophe” (374). He further defines the daughter’s emotional role in the sonnet: “The pain arrives with the knowledge that the daughter is left with *only* the position of ‘hero’ or addressee in any apostrophic relation. Wordsworth’s apostrophe becomes a moving comment on the communicative structure of apostrophe” (375). Certainly, apostrophe would play directly into the emotion of the moment, but apostrophe or not, this is an amplifying interruption after which the subject of the poem can be addressed and the reason for such surprise explained. The fragmented opening of the poem sets a tone reflecting on the possibility of memory. The disjointed sound created by these first mid-line interruptions is embodied throughout the octave as the poem reflects on a returning memory of loss brought back in this moment of surprise.

Setting this tone of disconnection and interruption caused by surprise is the main function of the first two caesuras of the poem, but the third functions more like Keats’s tone-changing caesura. Regular Petrarchan sonnet form has the final thought of the octave end at the close of the eighth line, but Wordsworth’s sonnet has lines eight and nine enjambed to lead into the final question of the octave:

Through what power,
Even for the least division of an hour,
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
To my most grievous loss!— (6-9)

This question—expressed now as an exclamation—is the crux of an ever-increasing tone of excitement begun by the initial caesura and continuing as the poem moves through the memory. New interruption and amplifying clarification are part of this increasing eagerness; as the octave builds, love is not just love, but “faithful love,” and the poem points out that it is this love which calls “thee” to mind, only to immediately interject the rhetorical question, “But how could I forget thee?” (6), as if the very suggestion of forgetting were a clear impossibility or even an insult. Line seven is also an interruption and intensification of line six, setting the smallest of time limits on the use of any power toward the loss of memory, “Even for the least division of an hour” (7). This is an internal battle that may not seem relevant to the experience of remembrance, but Jerome Mazzaro explains that “the negation (self-reproach) of the middle section contributes to the sense of sincerity that emerges” (349). It is this internal struggle and its repeated interruptions that lead to the more realistic experience with memory and loss in the sestet.

This entire struggle builds until the close of the octave, when the final thought overflows beyond its normal place at the end of line eight, coming to a close in the middle of line nine. The caesura here functions typically, slowing the rhythm to create a turn in subject, but what makes it unusual is the placement one line after the octave’s typical close. This overflowing line breaks with the traditional organization in the same way that Keats’s early ending does, creating an extended momentum which adds power to the line. However, rather than the turn coming early, allowing extra space for the line to dive into its rightful place as Keats’ caesura does, Wordsworth pushes beyond the expected boundary of line eight with the octave’s final question, putting the extra space at the end of the phrase. This division suggests the building of a thematic momentum in

wrestling with the surprise of joy. The octave builds on and interrupts its own ideas to such an extent that the expression of emotions will not fit into the constraints of the poetic divisions. The idea again is the crest of a breaking wave; however, in contrast to Keats's wave, Wordsworth's breaks over and beyond the bounds set for it.

Extending the octave into the ninth line creates an orphan phrase out of the delayed beginning of the sestet, with "That thought's return" (9) momentarily hanging on its own at the end of the line before it is enjambed into the following sestet. The opening of the sestet seems to have been overpowered by the movement of the previous thought, but by leaving this specific phrase on its own, a sentence fractured by caesura, the poem gives an added momentum to the idea of return crucial to the reflection process taking place. This is a poem about thought's return and the mind's recall, about memory and its power to surprise, and to leave that specific phrase on its own only brings it to the forefront of the closing thought. In the same way that Keats's final couplet has a diving momentum, this closing sestet is forced to dive from a fragmented line into the more standard lines below, again creating a much longer line than standard practice would have allowed for.

Considering its placement, this final caesura causes overflow before and after line nine: first, it allows for the expansion of line eight into the space normally reserved for the sestet, extending the preceding thought; the lone words after the caesura lengthens the line that follows it, beginning the sestet early and thus forming a longer phrase than in the stanzas of a sonnet. The caesura allows the octave to build its tonal and stylistic momentum and burst out of its constraining space, reinforcing the idea that this poem's sentiment is one of surprise and newly understood emotion. Thought's return is fore-

fronted as well as extended and elongated, allowing for the reconciliation of that out-of-control emotion.

Keats's "When I have fears that I may cease to be" and Wordsworth's "Surprised by joy" show that caesura is an important feature of the Romantic sonnet. Keats creates a chasm of meaning through the emphatic interruption of a drastic rhythmic change. The poem finds an answer to its questions by granting the final thought an extended place of importance. Wordsworth uses this same technique to interrupt and fragment his sonnet, causing a surging movement that coincides perfectly with the surprise theme of the poem's subject matter. Wordsworth's use of caesura is more frequent than Keats's, but not any less powerful or essential in its variation of the sonnet form.

Sometimes, however, the caesura does not contribute effectively to the sonnet form, nor work together with the other poetic elements to enhance the sonnet. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "To Lord Stanhope" from his *Sonnets on Eminent Characters* collection is an example of a poem in which the caesura has a less calculated purpose and becomes more of a hindrance to the sonnet than a benefit, even as it attempts to move away from the rigidity of end-stopped iambic pentameter lines. Rather than the elegant rhythmic interruptions that come from a well-executed caesura, Coleridge's employment of the technique here makes for a more difficult rhythm:

STANHOPE! I hail, with ardent Hymn, thy name!
Thou shalt be bless'd and lov'd, when in the dust
Thy corse shall moulder—Patriot pure and just!
And o'er thy tomb the grateful hand of FAME

Shall grave:—'Here sleeps the Friend of Humankind!'

For thou, untainted by CORRUPTION'S bowl,
Or foul AMBITION, with undaunted soul
Hast spoke the language of a Free-born mind

Pleading the cause of Nature! Still pursue
Thy path of Honour! —To thy Country true,

Still watch th' expiring flame of Liberty!
O Patriot! still pursue thy virtuous way,
As holds his course the splendid Orb of Day,
Or thro' the stormy or the tranquil sky!

There is an ongoing debate as to the actual authorship of this and other sonnets in the collection, and Lucyle Werkmeister and P. M. Zall claim the sonnets “were hastily written, and Coleridge had no reason to be proud of any one of them” (127).

Nevertheless, the poem is a good example of an experiment with the conventions of the accepted sonnet form in which a method that was so beneficial to other sonnets of the time is a detriment to this one.

The irregularity of this poem’s organization is clear. Rather than being divided neatly into octave and sestet, or three quatrains followed by an ending couplet, the poem contains two quatrains, a couplet, and a final quatrain. This slant of the Shakespearean arrangement would not be exceedingly unusual if the caesuras in the poem did not call the quality of the couplet into question. Indeed, the organization would be justified if the internal techniques of the poem matched up closely with the organization that the structure suggests.

There are several medial caesuras in this poem, and most of them are marked with the most obvious punctuation of the technique, the dash. The dashes here indicate easily

where caesura takes place, but they do not always function in the same way as similar punctuation in Keats and Wordsworth. These medial pauses indicate an extension or amendment to thought. Line three's caesura adds an additional accolade to the glowing description of Lord Stanhope that opens the poem. This caesura creates a short declarative description that would function perfectly to close out an opening address: "Thy corse shall moulder—Patriot pure and just!" (3); however, since it comes a line before the close of the quatrain the enjambed line that follows it undermines its encapsulating power. Ending the description with such a firm caesura only to continue the quatrain with one more line must then be seen as a way of connecting the two into one larger discussion of the subject's character, and indeed the subject of the second stanza would suggest this, though the use of caesura to add the punch of final description seems ill-conceived in this kind of bridging organization. The caesura in line five is another use of pause to clarify and extend: "And o'er thy tomb the grateful hand of FAME / Shall grave: —'Here sleeps the Friend of Humankind!" (4-5). What follows the caesura is not a change or shift, but rather the phrase to be graved by "the grateful hand of fame," making it an extension of and link to the previous stanza's theme of a hero's celebration. The stanzas are again connected by this caesura, but instead of forming a cohesive octave through that connection, the pause creates another emphatic ending that is out of place in the first line of the second stanza. These first two caesuras suggest endings one line too early and one line too late, making the opening stanza less cohesive than the standard end-stopped quatrain would.

The truest difficulty with caesura, however, comes in the couplet at lines nine and ten, where both lines are broken in the middle, the first by an exclamation point, which

ends a full sentence, and the second by a dash that functions the same as the extending dash in the first stanza. The problem here is that though this is rhymed and set apart like a couplet should be, it does not function with the typical completeness of thought in a couplet. The couplet is fragmented by the caesuras it contains rather than being augmented or enlivened by them.

The two caesuras create a couplet made up of a single short thought surrounded by disconnected portions of the rest of the poem.

Pleading the cause of Nature! Still pursue
Thy path of Honour!—To thy Country true, (9-10).

The rhythm of the poem continues the thought of the second stanza from the closing of the eighth line into the ninth, minimizing the only complete phrase in the couplet, which is cut short by an early beginning of the final stanza's theme. The effect is a fragmented and unconvincing couplet. The lines preceding the couplet are not clearly enjambed and the stop mid-line does not come with the preparation of a slowing rhythm; thus, when it is followed by such a short phrase and a second caesura the effect is stilted and abrupt, not the flow of transition that is achieved elsewhere. There is not enough space in a couplet for the two caesuras that this sonnet attempts, and so instead of creating a shift in focus or change in rhythm, they cause rhythmic difficulty and a displeasing sound. The couplet forces the rhyme rather than encapsulating one thought, as a couplet should.

While Coleridge's sonnet explores formal variations in the same way that Keats's and Wordsworth's sonnets do, the effect is not as great because the technique for achieving the variation is not as skilled, with the poem having a choppy and unappealing sound. The sonnet's transitions between stanzas are not fluid in the way enjambed lines should be; they cause hesitations in the rhythm, and are not decisively enjambed or end-

stopped. No doubt this poem meets the requirements of the sonnet form, and includes a good deal of variation, but in the end it only proves that this kind of variation does not always achieve the heights of poetic skill.

The caesura as a means of variation in the sonnet is not a guarantee of skill or achievement; it also cannot guarantee a connection of structural elements of the poem. The sonnets previously considered all connect closely in matter of structure and form, but the usefulness of the caesura is not limited to this element of sonnet writing. The same kind of introspection and refocus takes place with full stop and quiet pause in another of Keats's sonnets, "Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art!" Here the poet's concern is not with a possible death, as in "When I have fears," but rather the qualities of the stars and how they may be applied and embraced in a lover:

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
 Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
 Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

Medial pause again enacts a thematic shift in the poem, but this time it is placed in a more understandable and expected position; it becomes a variant when seen in relation to the content of the poem rather than the structure. Susan Wolfson notices that “Bright star” defies constraint in form because it “recovers both the pattern of the Shakespearean sonnet, and the method of the Petrarchan, with a powerful turn at line 9” (61). By this she means that the rhyme scheme and metrical pattern match up with the English style, but the theme forms into an octave and sestet, following the Italian formula. A turn occurs just as it should at line nine, but it is the moment of pause following the turn that refocuses the content of the poem.

The opening octave deals with the qualities of this steadfast and bright star. The poem appears to exalt these qualities of the star so much that it spends the majority of its space describing it: “so attractively, in fact, does Keats evolve this image, and so filled with longing does his one long sentence about it seem, that the framing negations (‘Not’; ‘No—’) are scarcely heard” (Wolfson 80). Wolfson is correct in asserting that the octave so elegantly describes the quality of the star that the fact that the poet is not like this star becomes lost; this initial negation slips into the normal flow of the poem, demands no extra attention, and is thus lost to the following description. The negation in line nine, however, comes at a point of attention—the expected turn—and includes the long dash of caesura that halts the movement to refocus the attention of the poem onto the idea that the qualities of the star are all qualities the poet disavows. By abruptly halting the star’s description in the line “No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable” (9), the poem forces a reexamination of all the qualities that have preceded this second negation. Progress built up by the speed and eloquence of description and cohesive image is stopped by this

intentional medial pause, redirecting attention to the negation of similarity where it was initially focused.

The final line is one last moment of unconventional rest and quiet in the poem. The couplet of this English-styled sonnet should contain one specific thought; however, the turn that occurs in the ninth line has already negated the holistic adherence to English standards, and therefore the poem breaks again in the final line by including conflicting images into one rhymed thought. The line “Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,” would imply a continued life as the ultimate desire of the steadfast lover. Likely the final line would confirm this idea, and initially it does, but the caesura in the middle adds an unexpected twist to the poem’s resolution. Francis O’Gorman notes this conflicting desire as the speaker “yearns for the steadfastness, apparently of the North Star; but the future life is not here to be *with* the stars, but in the world of the ‘tender-taken breath’” (374), and yet the pause and shift in the middle of the line “invited reflection about where human life ends and what might await it in the untraveled serene of the heavens” (375). Because the poem first stops and then shifts the direction of its structurally expected resolution, a new consideration is forced out of the speaker's desire to remain with the lover: the opposite possibility of a “swoon to death” (14). Both of these stops in the expectation and rhythm of the poem disrupt and change the perception and attention within the poem in the same way that the caesura does in many of these sonnets. They break the rules of expected form within the lines of the sonnet and create new ones for their own rhetorical needs.

Expression and Meaning: Creating Poetic Dissonance

The Romantic caesura was a clear departure from the established form of the sonnet, breaking the rules in order to achieve a higher artistic goal. However, this definite kind of variation was not the only way the Romantics moved outside the sonnet's rules. In much of their work there is a poetic playfulness: instances where there may not be clear breaking of the rules, but a stretching of convention. Many of the poems use the confines of the sonnet in interesting or unusual ways to make their message more pressing or noticeable; the variation is just enough to be noticeable but not enough to be jarring. Where the poems in the first chapter were moving outside of techniques considered standard, here the poems are closer to an idea of variation or experimentation within the confines of the sonnet form as established.

A prime example of this is Wordsworth's "Nuns fret not," where the confines of the sonnet form are brought to the forefront through explicit discussion, yet the experimentation that takes place within exemplifies a dissonance between the words of the poem, the ideas they seek to convey about what it means to compose sonnets, and the structure of their construction:

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, into which we doom

Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

The first half of the poem is a list of confined places and the people that occupy them, yet none of the members of the list are distraught at their confinement: “Nuns fret not” (1), “Hermits are contented” (2), and students, maids and weavers all “sit blithe and happy” (5). Even the bee, able to reach the highest of heights, will eventually find the contentment of a “murmur in the Foxgrove bells” (8). The mood of the opening's characters and the neatness of the lines' obedience to sonnet standards suggests this poem celebrates the limitations, the “scanty plot of ground,” allowed by the sonnet's rules; however, the turn at line eight breaks free of those same rules through thoughtfully placed enjambment and organization of phrase and rhyme.

Line eight turns the attention from examples of confinement towards the writing of sonnets; here the sonnet considers its own creation, and yet this shift also begins a single thought that spans four enjambed lines:

In truth, the prison, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground; (8-11).

It is significant that the first reference to the containment of sonnet writing is also the line to break from the convention of keeping a sonnet's phrases contained within end-stopped lines. Line eight, if end-stopped, would seem to suggest that the sonnet is not unlike the things that come before it, that it is a confinement on par with prison, yet the enjambment

that flows into the next lines suggests a different idea about the sonnet form, both in the breaking away from the confinement of standard end-stopping and the revelation that our prison actually “no prison is” (9). This rhythmic dive moves past the end of the line and into the next, expanding the possibilities and revealing a second interpretation; therefore, both the placement and the meanings of the words reveal that sonnet writing truly contains no confinement at all.

Jonathan M. Hess applies his understanding of the formally successful sonnet to Wordsworth’s poem by noting that, “when confronted with a formally successful sonnet, one does not notice first and foremost the external constraint, the walls of the narrow room, but only that which is internal to the sonnet, the harmonious music which pervades the room so thoroughly” (17). For Hess the ideas contained in the poem’s words are the most beautiful and significant portions of the poem. Borrowing a term that Wordsworth uses to describe the sonnets he idolized in Milton, Hess asserts that “a ‘manly’ sonnet calls attention not to its external form, to its acoustical preconditions, but only to what is put into this form, to the harmony and effects this form makes possible” (17). Clearly, the attention of the sonnet’s harmonious music is focused internally, onto what a sonnet is and what it can be for its writer, and not on the external form made up of enjambment or irregular phrase construction; however, when taken together, especially in a sonnet so upfront and frank about its disregard for the weariness that comes from the constraints of form, the internal and external form a dissonance that is far from coincidental.

Dissonance certainly exists in the words that form the enjambed lines. Line eight ends with “doom” before overflowing into the next and line ten uses “bound” to connect to line eleven. These are negative words of dread and restriction, yet they are crucial parts

of the technique that negates the emotions they imply. For the writer feeling doomed and bound, freedom from standard rules is the answer, and these words accomplish that freedom by connecting lines which should not be connected. While the words contained here would suggest that there is no reason to celebrate restriction and rules, the fact that the phrases containing that idea are ignoring the restriction of line and flowing into one another runs completely opposite.

There is playfulness about the word placement in such a pivotal spot. The contradiction between words of containment and enjambment embodied in these specific phrases draws attention to the greater contradiction between word and structure in the poem at large. The poem seems to be pointing in two directions at once, creating a dissonance between what the words suggest and what the structure of the lines themselves reveal. The intentional placement of these words and the enjambed lines they create is an important fact ignored by critics such as Peter Egri, who would suggest, because “emotionally charged images...stream freely from the first section to the second” (457), that enjambments are “only the streambeds which channel emotions” (457). Instead, they intentionally disregard the restrictions of the sonnet form, thus drawing attention to the dissonance between surface meaning and poetic structure. By calling into question the use of such negative words to create a freeing technique, finding joy in the smallness of the sonnet is more than a desire for simplicity; it reveals, rather, the satisfaction that comes from moving past the standardization of sonnet rules and into experimental creation.

Hess detracts from his discussion of the sonnet by saying that “Wordsworth does not write a formally successful sonnet here, but a paradoxical sonnet that is not a sonnet,

a sonnet that in the absence of the sonnet is, at best, a mere metaphor of a sonnet, an instance of reflection on the sonnet and its loss” (18). While it may indeed be a metaphor for the sonnet, it is equally likely to be an embodiment of this failed ability to be contained in a narrow room or scanty plot of ground. It celebrates the practice of self-discipline while also showing the inability to restrict the full expression of creativity. The relationship between the internal meaning of the words themselves and the external form they fall into is the basis for Richard Cronin’s understanding that the poem “asks that the form be understood as in itself embodying the paradox that freedom is won not by the release from imprisonment, but by freely choosing to be imprisoned” (36). Regardless of whether the sonnet functions as a metaphor for the failed state of the sonnet and its strict requirements or as an embracing of the freedom to choose imprisonment, it is wholly appropriate to relieve the sonnet from its constraints and allow for the use of enjambment, questionable organization, and a speculative turn.

The irreconcilable difference between the surface meaning of the words and their structural placement in “Nuns fret not” adds much to the understanding of the sonnet as variant. The dissonance illuminates the higher-level playfulness that Wordsworth employed in what seems to be such a frank and forthright poem. However, he did not limit his use of this dissonance to his sonnet on the sonnet; it can be seen again in “Composed on Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802,” a sonnet from the same collection, *Poems, In Two Volumes*:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

In this poem the dissonance is not focused on the sonnet form itself, yet the relationship between words and their placement again illustrates how a poem can say one thing on the surface while implying something quite the opposite in the more subtle portions, adding meaning and playful depth to a poem.

Deconstructionist critic J. Hillis Miller breaks down the form and linguistic style of several Wordsworth sonnets, focusing especially on “Composed on Westminster Bridge” as a means of looking into what he calls “the still mind” of the poet. He notes how this sonnet on such a simple subject uses words to say more than what appears on the surface: “they put a straightforward literal meaning of the poem ‘beside itself.’ Such language says two things at once and in this double saying establishes vibrations of implication which resonate outward in diffusive circles of meaning” (303). Certainly this is true of many of Wordsworth’s sonnets, or perhaps poetry in general; the language of this sonnet is meant to invoke emotional response, memorialize the sacred moment on the bridge, perhaps even to transcend this specific instance with a general discussion of natural calm and beauty.

However, the end to which Miller brings these claims of literal language turned figurative is one of greater contention. He draws two possible interpretations of the sonnet: first, that “inner calm matches outer calm. The poet ‘feels’ the deep calm within the city as if it were a calm deep within himself, and in this sympathy subject and object are reconciled, made one” (307). Second, and more adequately in his opinion, “the implications of the negatives and figurative language in ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge’ leads the interpreter away from the mimetic reading toward the recognition that the poem expresses an oscillation between consciousness and nature, life and death, presence and absence, motion and stillness” (307). The second of his conclusions is not entirely without merit, though the means to achieving it ignore much of the poem; the first, however, seems like a complete misunderstanding of what the poem’s form suggests about the ideas contained within. The problem with these two possible outcomes, and more specifically the way these conclusions are reached, is that they focus largely on the words that make up the poem and less on the more comprehensive view of the words as part of the sound and rhythm within. As is often a danger with the deconstructive style of literary criticism, Miller spends so much time dissecting the words and their multiple figurative and literal meanings that he loses the way the words work together as a whole poem, leading to a misguided interpretation and missing out on the overall sound and the dissonance it creates, an obvious reinforcement to his more logical conclusion.

On the other side of the interpretative coin is Geoffrey H. Hartman, who says that “contrast in Wordsworth points beyond the activity of pointing,” and that vocabulary “signals, as it were, the absence of signal, and comes close to subtly thematizing Wordsworth’s wish not to violate—by ‘poetic diction’ or some other artifice—nature’s

own mode of expression” (208-9). For Hartman, Wordsworth’s Westminster Bridge experience “was a moment...and does not need the heightening of rhetoric” (209). While this may be a less invasive perspective, it also misses the subtle techniques of emphasis in the poem. The poem does certainly move between two planes, but it does not do so equally, no matter how even the number of words or lines may be, and these planes may not be as polar opposite as Miller suggests. Instead, the sound and rhythm of the poem suggest that the emotional experience of the quiet London morning takes much higher precedence over the images and their tangible components. The dissonance between the images and the way they are expressed focuses the poem onto the feelings of the observer upon the bridge, not on the visual beauty of the scene. The scene is a quiet one, yet the emotions attached are loud and important.

From the start the poem places the quality of the viewer’s soul at the center of attention: “Dull would he be of soul who could pass by / a sight so touching in its majesty” (2-3). Here the exceeding beauty is placed in the implied portion of the lines while the experiential quality becomes the forefront—this image is all about the quality of the viewer’s soul. This elevating of the experiential may seem obvious, but the variation of dissonance comes in when line five uses placement and speed to put emotions above objects:

This City doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie. (4-6)

The enjambment of lines four and five create the flowing effect of a long line to coincide with the idea of a city cloaked in beauty before moving into the choppy list of nouns

that follows. The juxtaposition of these two techniques draws attention to the relationship between the city's quiet garment-like beauty and the objects that make it up—things that are themselves not inherently beautiful. Additionally, “Silent” and “bare” are both items included in the list that follows on line six, yet they are not objects like the rest, but rather adjectives that continue the discussion of beauty. They are given the more prominent placement at the end of the line where the poem slows as it approaches the rhyme, putting these two words into focus as if to echo their meaning before beginning the hurried list of various objects in view. The adjectives that are meant to invoke the emotion of the scene, to give it discernable beauty, are slowed and the objects that make up the scene, which give it physical presence, are rushed through in a list without pause. If this were simply a poem about the visual scene before him, why would the objects that make up the scene be jammed into one list that the reader naturally moves through more quickly? Instead Wordsworth grants them a minimal inclusion before moving again to the more important description of emotional experience.

The preceding of an object list by a more ethereal enjambment occurs again at the turn: “Never did sun more beautifully steep / In his first splendor, valley, rock, or hill” (9-10). Once again, the line about the beautiful qualities and how they are achieved is elongated and enjambed while the objects that make up that scene, or in this case a negating example of scenes, are rushed through in list form.

Yet another form of dissonance occurs at the turn between the subject of the poem and the rhythm and syntax used to express it. The octave creates the scene of a most quiet and serene London cityscape that must be marveled at for its beauty. It is the quietness of it all that drives the emotional connection. However, the sestet expresses the specialness

of this scene through sensational negation and amplification of sentiment. The specialness is paramount because the scene is unlike anything else that has ever happened. Yet, rather than focusing on the scene itself and distinguishing it from all others, the poem's sensational negation claims that nothing has done the things that this scene currently does. We are detached from the particulars of the scene at Westminster and taken to a more emotional place through the comparison to every other beautiful scene of the world. Alan Liu notes, "with sweeping indirectness, he summons up comparisons to a universality of previous experience serving to veil the view behind negation" (463). The poem uses the word "never" to establish the incomparable nature of every other scene of beauty, with each of the three uses of the word an amplification of the previous. Line nine iterates a particular time and place that can never compare; the sun has never shined on any landscape more beautifully. It is a frank statement of comparison without much added emotion other than the surface feeling of excellence. Yet in the second and third reference to "never," "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!" (11), the scope is widened further to the entirety of experience. From a frank comparison the negation is then amplified to any calm that has been seen, a comparison without the restrictions of specifics. Immediately following this the statement is taken yet larger and the entirety of human emotions is said to be without compare to the calm seen and felt on the bridge that morning. Jennifer Ann Wagner notes how this phrase moves the poem into a new territory by saying that the line is "a shift from eye to heart, essentially, that signals a momentary blacking out of what phenomenal vision there is in the octave" (55). Placing these two references to "never" so close to one another forces the amplification of pure excitement, as if the first idea were not grand enough and it

must immediately be corrected with something more encompassing than all sight. It is an emotional outpouring of comparison so intense that it must be ended with an exclamation point. As Liu notes, “the poem then depends on an expressive technique very like pure brushwork: an impasto of punctuation. Pointing beyond the actual sense of the words, it *exclaims* upon quiet” (463). The shouting tone of the amplification moves that much further away from the calm of the visual scene.

The removal of the action from the scene at hand through the comparison to things which will never measure up, and the amplification of that comparison through the repetition of the word “never,” would not be variant poetic techniques if not for the fact that these increasing emotional appeals are used to describe “a calm so deep” (11). Such emotionally excited words and rhythm describing the beautiful stillness and silence of the scene viewed from Westminster Bridge creates a dissonance of ideas in the poem. Neither a quiet poem focused on quiet beauty nor a bombastic poem celebrating a boisterous scene, the sonnet’s tone contrasts with the scene because the emotions contrast with the scene as well. The initial statement is exemplified in the rest of the poem: if one were to pass by and not be touched in a deep way, he would have a dull soul, and so the poet who stops and enjoys cannot make a dull and quiet poem.

With Percy Bysshe Shelley there is yet another instance of the variation that comes from dissonance, and again the focus moves further toward the content and language of the poem conflicting with the larger message of the poem as a whole. In “To Wordsworth” Shelley laments the passing of a once great poet into what he considers the twilight of his career:

Poet of Nature, thou hast wept to know
That things depart which never may return:
Childhood and youth, friendship and love's first glow,
Have fled like sweet dreams, leaving thee to mourn.
These common woes I feel. One loss is mine
Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore.
Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude:
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,—
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.

In no way a celebration or flattery of Wordsworth, Shelley's sonnet wishes to condemn him for something that "I alone deplore" (6). However, the impression given by the majority of the lines, from 1-12, is that the poem celebrates the accomplishments of Wordsworth and speaks of him in high regard, with only a hint of possible ills.

Much in the same way that Wordsworth himself used excited and boisterous words to describe the beauty of a quiet London and thus focused the attention of the poem onto experience rather than objects, Shelley uses the flattery of kind words and exaltation to embody his disappointment with Wordsworth and to frame this praise not as admiration but as the precursor to utter disappointment at lost possibilities. The sentiment of most of the poem's words do not match the sentiment of the poem as a whole, captured in the final two lines: "Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve, / Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be." (13-14). Wordsworth may have been all the things that Shelley described in the previous lines; however, ultimately Shelley feels that these

qualities have been deserted and the poem becomes one of disappointment and sadness rather than celebration. The intensity and loftiness of the preceding description only make this reversal all the more disappointing by giving the poet a greater height from which to fall. The dissonance comes when the flattering words are ultimately a condemnation.

There are two structural elements that add to this disappointment and may hint at the abandonment that Shelley feels from Wordsworth. As noted by Jennifer Wagner, the slanted rhyming couplet in lines nine and ten marks a possible metaphor: “the presence of this closure device in the middle of the poem may parallel Shelley’s perception of the imaginative life of his precursor; that is, the closure device, appearing prematurely, may formally mirror Wordsworth’s premature imaginative death” (70). This couplet, so far from the end of the poem, suggests a closing that comes at the height of the action, which the unflattering final lines suggest is also what happened to Wordsworth. Additionally, it should be noted that the turn or revelation point that would normally come at the ninth line, and refocus or add insight to the question portion of the Italian sonnet, is delayed until the final lines. If the premature closing signals premature death, then the delayed revelation represents Wordsworth’s discovery of his own demise having come much too late for it to be of any good. The understanding of his downfall is saved for the last line of the poem just as it is saved for the last moments of Wordsworth’s imaginative and creative life.

Shelley’s poem of disappointment with Wordsworth uses the same technique of contrasting surface understanding and true meaning found in both Wordsworth and Keats’s sonnets. The pain is amplified by using words that would not normally be connected to feelings of disappointment and disillusion. The dissonance here is simpler

and less tied to form and structure than the other poems, yet it exemplifies well the playfulness within the established rules of the sonnet that each of the other poems use. Shelley's poem is stretching the understanding of how a sonnet is to be interpreted; it is pushing against the standards and allowing for a greater poetic creativity.

While dissonance between structure and meaning creates variance in many sonnets, the less used and subtler technique of alliteration is another way these Romantic poets stretched the possibilities of the sonnet. In the same vein of variance within the established rules, this technique is another means of refocusing and changing meaning without the jarring effects of distinct rule breaking.

Alliteration may not seem like a means of variation or strategic skill. In fact, it occurs so naturally in the English language that it may not seem intentional at all; however, Benjamin Hrushovski shows how it can be a strong determiner of meaning and emotional response in a poem. He uses the alliteration of Shakespeare's sonnet thirty to demonstrate how sound patterns can affect and be affected by the meaning of the words included in them. He points to sibilant sounds that are repeated around the phrase "sweet silent thought" and how "it is the meaning of the words that make the sounds carriers of some expressive meaning, or the shades of meaning" because "the reader transfers a quality, a tone, a connotation, etc. from the domain of the meaning to the sound pattern" (Hrushovski 42). Without the inclusion of "sweet silent thought" the repetition of similar sounds would not be seen as creating a quieting or hushed mood in the poem's opening. However, using alliterative sound patterns not only contribute to tone and meaning, but also bring together seemingly unrelated words through "coloring" that takes place when

meaning is attached to sound: “this coloring seems to suffuse the lines dominated by the given sound pattern. So much so, that even the word ‘sessions’ is perceived by the reader as contributing to the expression of ‘sweet silent thought’” (Hrushovski 42). Because the sound pattern is given a mood of quiet and calm, the unrelated words in the following line continue this tone. Therefore, using alliteration and sound patterns causes “a two-directional process: first certain meanings are transferred to a sound pattern, and then the tone of this sound pattern, colored by such meanings, is transferred back to the level of meaning” (Hrushovski 42). This discussion of how pattern and alliteration can create tone as well as connect portions of a poem shows that it can be used as a form of variation within the poem to manipulate understanding, creating specifically designed connections and responses.

An example of this kind of contextualizing of words and sound occurs in Wordsworth’s sonnet “It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,” from his visit to Calais in the summer of 1802.

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly.
Dear child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;

And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

Scholars have unearthed many details of this visit where Wordsworth first met his estranged daughter Caroline, but the emotional and logistical specifics are hardly known. Peter Spratley is among the scholars seeking to understand exactly what happened in the small French coastal town, and he points to the sonnet as a window into Wordsworth's emotional state. While historic emotional records are not the aim of this study of the sonnet, the conclusion Spratley comes to illuminate the techniques Wordsworth used to create the emotional sonnet.

Spratley cites Judith Page and others charging the sonnet with disconnection and an avoidance of responsibility, where Wordsworth seeks to release himself of parental duties and rather place Caroline in the hands of God. Instead, Spratley characterizes the sonnet as “a private reflection on peace and tranquility that reaches an epiphany, and then sympathetically opens outward to *include* Caroline to share in the experience” (299-300). This interpretation comes from close attention to the formal elements at the break between the octave and sestet:

The first eight lines articulate an archetypal Wordsworthian moment. The visual sense is dulled, meaning the aural, and subsequently, imaginative faculties, are awoken. The octave closes with a moment of epiphany as the “mighty Being” makes “a sound like thunder—everlastingly.” This is the epiphanic apogee of the sonnet: with the experience at its most powerful, the octave ends, validating and conforming the intensity of the personal, imaginative moment. (300)

Because the octave comes to such a powerful and personal ending, the introduction of Caroline at the commencement of the sestet “signals a shift in outlook, reaching beyond the narrator” (Spratley 300). Certainly, the powerful turn makes the sonnet a more personal and emotionally available one from Wordsworth’s perspective, but what is more interesting is the connection that this same passage makes to Hrushovski’s idea of grouped sounds and alliteration carrying and creating meaning; putting the two theories together can show *how* Wordsworth’s turn at the octave’s close becomes powerful and thus changes the connotation of the sonnet.

Spratley’s paraphrase of line eight ignores the way the words contained in the octave’s closing cohere to form a sound pattern that gives the closing the epiphanic qualities he celebrates:

Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder--everlastingly.

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here, (6-9).

By viewing the final thought together and in order, “mighty,” “motion,” and “make” are all brought together by the repetition of the beginning “m” consonant, especially when “motion” and “make” are placed together into the end-stopped verb that moves the sentence. Because “mighty” comes in the preceding line and modifies the subject of the sentence, the connotation that comes along with it is transferred onto the repeated sound pattern that follows it, and thus the motion made by the second instance of the sound pattern is seen as having the same qualities as the “mighty Being.” Therefore, line seven is not only sped up by the inherent quickening that comes with repeated consonant

sounds, but that quickening is given the residual meaning of being mighty, a quality that is reinforced by the simile that follows, “a sound like thunder” (8).

The closing of the octave oozes power and strength, but it does so in very calculated and directing ways. It not only invokes emotion, but provokes thought by the same dissonance between concepts discussed in previous Wordsworth poems. The octave ends with these alliterative closing lines all describing a mighty sound like thunder, an image that flies in the face of the previous lines which celebrated tranquility and calm above all else. What Spratley calls the “intensity of the personal, imaginative moment” is reinforced by this idea that is in itself paradoxical, for how can thunder, a violent and very sudden phenomenon, be everlasting? Just as emotional content and formal presentation have been in conflict, here the object and its modifier do not agree. The dissonance created within the image, the image’s relation to the previous lines, and the tone carried over by the alliteration all act as the variation that point to this closing as evidence of an intensely personal sonnet that brings Caroline, the subject of the sestet, into the experience.

Without this carefully selected alliteration of words, the poem can be interpreted in any number of ways, but when the technique of variance is taken into consideration, a more likely interpretation is apparent. The alliteration here is a means of creating dissonance that then points to meaning; it is not a breaking of rules but rather a creative style that forces a new understanding of the poem’s meaning. Just as with the other sonnets, the moves here suggest an intentional playfulness with a definite goal to push the form beyond what it was once understood to accomplish.

A More Creative Packaging: Variation in External Elements

Much of the variation in Romantic sonnets discussed here has taken place within the lines and phrases of the poems themselves and has thus been referred to as internal variation. These instances of experimentation include the placement of punctuation, the manipulation of the poem's rhythm, the dissonance created between the common meanings of words, and their placement within the internal structure of the poem through techniques such as enjambment or fragmentation. However, variation is not limited to the sonnet's interior. If the words and punctuation that make up the sound and meaning of the poem are referred to as the internal portion of a poem, then its external aspects, those unconnected to sound or meaning, would be the structure and organization of the poem: its rhyme scheme and divisions into octaves, sestet, quatrains, and couplets. These aspects of the poem can be analyzed without connection to the content of the poem, but in order to reach full impact, external elements must be seen as working together with the content they encapsulate. For this framing quality they are referred to as "external," yet they are not unimportant in demonstrating the variation and experimentation that takes place alongside the internal portions. When seen together with the internal portions already discussed, these techniques create fullness in the picture of variation that exemplifies the Romantic era sonnet.

One of the most predominant and obvious of the external variations in the Romantic sonnet is the unusual grouping of lines. The traditional organizations are either the octave-sestet Petrarchan style or the series of three quatrains followed by an ending couplet of the Shakespearian style. Instead of abiding by these, many of the Romantic

poets use groupings of their own invention to accomplish artistic goals that traditional forms would not allow. By calling attention to certain portions of the poem and directing the poem's subject in a certain direction, these structural variations help the sonnets achieve those goals.

External variation is not limited to the organization of a sonnet's lines into stanzas. While these are important in a close reading of elements both internal and external, they are not the only way the Romantic poets experimented with external elements. Creative experimentation within the confines of the sonnet form also occurs in the rhyme schemes and their many combinations. In a form with established standards, the rhyme is one of the easiest to regulate. In defining a sonnet, the standard patterns of rhyme are among the first things to point out; deviation from these established patterns certainly deviates from one of the qualities of the sonnet that most makes it a sonnet. As John Creaser asserts, "rhyme, the most distinctive aural element in verse, invites and almost requires the sounds to be registered," and it "consequently turns attention to the medium, and through its usual position at the line-turn, to what most distinguishes verse from prose" (450). If it is the element that most makes a poem a poem, especially when read aloud, then standardizing its placement in the sonnet must be an important mark of distinction. If not for the rules of line-end rhyming, the distinguishing aural factor of rhyme would be diminished, if not eliminated. William Harmon notes, "One can observe that the norm is for rhyme, of whatever variety, to fall at the end of the lines and for rhyming lines to be of equal length" (373). Furthermore, the rules that apply to rhyme within poems as a whole also apply to the standards of the sonnet rhyme scheme; if a poem were not to adhere at least loosely to the established norms of the sonnet, then it

would become less recognizable as a sonnet. However, Harmon also points out that “as with other phenomena in which a poem can be perceived, departure from the norm may seem unusual, striking, ironic, or unsettling” (373). This unsettling or striking nature of rhyme deviates from the norm and establishes variation within the sonnet rhyme scheme as well as in the sonnet organization. These variations in the poem’s external portions draw the reader’s attention and bring an elevated importance to each of the poem’s lines.

For Wordsworth, the form and organization of the poem played an important role in the content of the poems in a unique way. He did not make a show of the variation, but rather sought to have it work so fluidly within the poem that it was indistinguishable from the overall content. As Jonathan Hess points out, Wordsworth’s formal experimentation “is also a question of concealing form, of making obscure the external constraint which serves as the first condition of the sonnet” (17). This kind of directing and concealing is apparent in Wordsworth’s sonnet, “Inside of King’s College Chapel, Cambridge”:

Tax not the royal Saint with vain expense,
With ill-matched aims the Architect who planned—
Albeit labouring for a scanty band
Of white-robed Scholars only—this immense
And glorious Work of fine intelligence!
Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more;
So deemed the man who fashioned for the sense
These lofty pillars, spread that branching roof
Self-poised, and scooped into ten thousand cells,
Where light and shade repose, and music dwells
Lingering—and wandering on as loth to die;

Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality.

In some instances of external variation it is important to initially establish the rhyme scheme of the poem. This reveals the logical groupings that go along with the change of rhyme and thus make the division of the groupings clearer. This poem is unusual in that sense because here the poem is rhymed in an ABBAACCADEEFDF pattern that would suggest a Petrarchan division at line nine with an only slightly varied scheme in the sestet. However, with this particular Wordsworth sonnet the punctuation of the phrases and the perspective of the poem's voice are the most important organizing factor because they force the poem into a slightly different set of groupings. Like many of his sonnets, the internal portions of the poem illuminate what takes place in the external organization and why it is important.

As a collection of phrases that all belong together, the poem is divided into a set of five lines at the opening, followed by a rhymed couplet and a final seven lines. Even among variant kinds of organization, the more symmetrical seven and seven organization is not highly unusual; however, here Wordsworth takes it further, setting a couplet apart from the first five lines, and thus introducing a subjective pause or aside into the very middle of the poem. This division into a five, two, and seven line organization allows the poem to move through three phases rather than the two that take place in the Petrarchan organization. The shifts in tone and subject that occur during these three phases are simply not available in the more standard form.

The opening five lines are a call to restrain from criticism of the person who created the beautiful building that the poet finds himself in. The poem opens: "Tax not the royal Saint with vain expense" (1), as if to anticipate the argument that would come

from someone entering the chapel for the very first time. For a place of learning to have such an ornate building may seem folly, as the line anticipates; however, the opening lines do not explain why this should not be seen as foolish even as they come to a conclusion with line five's exclamation point. The answer is given its own space, the couplet rhyme of "Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore / Of nicely-calculated less or more" (6-7). Having the answer contained in its own phrase would not seem unusual if it were not placed right before the turn in subject and speaker that comes at line seven. As the poem immediately departs into a description and celebration of the man who designed such a building, it leaves the couplet feeling disjointed. It stands alone in the long connected portions that immediately precede and immediately follow it. The couplet is self-contained much like those that come at the end of the typical Shakespearian sonnet, yet it is directly in the middle of the poem. This island-like quality of the phrase makes it the first shift in tone, pulling the focus away from the description of the chapel or the architect and becoming a summation of the poem as a whole. Peter Egri argues, "in Wordsworth's poetry the structure of the Petrarchan sonnet is palpable, but it becomes flooded with and partly washed away by the Romantic stream of overflowing emotions" (465). This sonnet is a perfect example of that idea; the form is suggested but emotion takes precedence. The question must be answered, and the constraints of the form are not enough to hold that answer until their expected place.

Following the self-contained couplet formed by lines six and seven there is another shift, a turn one would normally expect to happen after the final rhyme of the eighth line but that instead is marked by the transition word "so" in the phrase "So deemed the man who fashioned for the sense / These lofty pillars, spread that branching

roof" (7-8). This phrase moves the action in yet another direction; no longer with the directive on how to feel or the whim of emotion that explains why one should feel this way, the poem is now moved into a new direction. The previous couplet's phrase is now given the context of a specific speaker, destroying the removed nature of the couplet by identifying it as the words, not of the poet, but of the building's architect. The poet who began the poem with a warning and then made way momentarily for the thoughts of the architect, has now returned to sing the praise of that same architect. The poem closes with seven lines on the architect as well as the chapel, easing into a final thought on the immortality of thought, as if the ideas of the architect have been immortalized, not only in the chapel, but also in the very lines of the poem.

All of this shifting of perspective is made possible by the unusual organization of the sonnet. If not for the completeness of the first five lines and the self-contained couplet that immediately follows, this poem could not accomplish the fluidity of thought that allows an architect to interject his immortal thoughts into a poem exalting his building. The voices of both are heard and each is given its own space simply because it needed to be heard. Hess comments on Wordsworth's use of language and form in this fluid manner by pointing out that what Wordsworth so admired in Milton's sonnets was "the way in which their pure, simple, and unified form works so fully to accommodate the object and aim of their author" (16). The same can be said about "Inside of King's College Chapel, Cambridge": the form works to accommodate the presence of multiple speakers and points of view, setting each apart from the others and granting the truly profound its own unique space.

While Wordsworth makes changes to an already unusual organization to fit the needs of his aims, Shelley often takes the standard organizations and turns them into something of his own without making them exceedingly different. The changes are more straightforward, but like the variation within uniformity by which so many of the poems create dissonance or illustrate the inability of the muses to be contained, these organizational variations are important in establishing a new form of sonnet writing. An example of this is Shelley's sonnet bemoaning the state of his home country, "England in 1819":

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
But leechlike to their fainting country cling
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.
A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;
An army, whom liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed—
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

Here the ABABABCDCDCDD rhyme scheme establishes an organization rooted in the Petrarchan style. In a poem with only four rhymes, the divisions in the poem becomes predominant: the place where the rhyme changes is also the place where the subject of the poem changes and thus is the dividing point between sections of the poem. What is unusual though is that rather than adhering to Petrarchan standards and having the sestet

follow the octave, creating a typical question-and-answer or problem-and-solution format, the poem leads with the sestet and finishes with the octave, with only the slightest indication of subject or content shift at the turn. The sonnet looks mostly like a catalogue of national ills; a list that builds in intensity as it names the things that will eventually be the downfall of England.

This litany of ills in an inverted format comes to a close on the rhymed couplet at the end of the poem. This couplet is unusual because, though it is a single contained phrase and though both lines end on the same rhyme, it is not set apart from the poem in organization, only in content. It fits with the list according to the external components of punctuation and rhyme; however, it acts as a lynch pin that brings the entire poem to an explosive close. Stuart Curran notes the weight of this couplet:

Shelley's balancing of his pointillist survey with a heavily constraining scheme of but four rhymes is replicated in the sudden enjambment of the final couplet, with its ambiguous modal auxiliary—"may"—throwing the accumulated weight of the single-sentence catalogue onto the active, explosive verb so long awaited. The melding of form and content appears seamless. (55)

The couplet takes upon itself the action of the entire list, as if both the sestet, with its description of England's terrible kings, and the octave's list of those kings' eventual byproducts, are all asking the same question. The catalogue asks, "if all these do exist in England in the year 1819, then what could possibly happen?"—a question the couplet answers with only a future possibility, not a certainty. The climactic nature of the couplet would be even more highlighted structurally if the couplet were given its own rhyme and

thus set off from the list even more, but Shelley chose to keep the two lines connected within the four rhymes of the whole sonnet. This seems contrary to what the couplet seeks to accomplish, but the connected nature of the catalogue and the outcome that may spring from it is exactly the point of the rhyme scheme. If the couplet were to be set apart, a separation would occur between cause and effect, as if the despised and dying king were not responsible for the people starved, the two edged sword, and eventually the glorious phantom emerging from the grave. The poem's inverted Petrarchan format, with the couplet kept attached in rhyme to the octave, emphasizes the cause-and-effect relationship. Rather than giving an extended question or problem, Shelley begins with the problem everyone in that day would have known, moves into the extended repercussions, and ends with the ultimate consequence directly connected to all that precedes it. In the same way, keeping the couplet's connection to the extended second half of the sonnet denies this emotional sonnet a self-contained and organizationally independent closing—it keeps the poem from ultimate closure. This lack of finality, Jennifer Wagner notes, is a common feature in Shelley's sonnets: "the construction of Shelley's sonnets suggests that the poet recognized closure as form's most tyrannical element, closing off the poem from any possibility of change or development—for these sonnets are characterized by an open-endedness that resists closure" (64). The couplet's "may," connected to the flowing and emotional catalogue of the poem, answers the possible futures of the list, but does not close it off as the only possibility. This resistance to close the couplet and the sonnet's organization as a whole, is the motivation for the inverted form with its indistinguishable couplet, and thus becomes a new variant form accomplishing artistic goals.

The inversion of the Petrarchan form in “England in 1819” kept the parts of the sonnet in their proper form but altered their placement within the poem, a subtle but somewhat jarring change that allowed for a new voice. Yet another instance where Shelley moves away only slightly from the standard yet creates a new organization is “Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte” where the external structure of the Shakespearean sonnet remains basically unchanged except for the first octave. The alteration comes in the relationship between the quatrains that are rhymed together and the phrases contained within those quatrains:

I hated thee, fallen Tyrant! I did groan
To think that a most unambitious slave,
Like thou, should dance and revel on the grave
Of Liberty. Thou mightst have built thy throne
Where it had stood even now: thou didst prefer
A frail and bloody pomp, which Time has swept
In fragments towards oblivion. Massacre,
For this, I prayed, would on thy sleep have crept,
Treason and Slavery, Rapine, Fear, and Lust,
And stifled thee their minister. I know
Too late, since thou and France are in the dust,
That Virtue owns a more eternal foe
Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, legal Crime,
And bloody Faith, and foulest birth of Time.

Here the rhyme and its relationship to the organization is particularly interesting not because the rhyme is unusual or even changed; in fact, aside from the opening four lines, which fit into the Petrarchan ABBA form, the poem is rhymed in perfect Shakespearean style. However, even this seemingly inconsequential change in anticipated rhyme scheme, when connected to the content of the poem, has an immense effect on the artistic

interpretation of the poem. Neil Fraistat writes, “Shelley’s shift to the Shakespearean form after an initial Petrarchan quatrain defeats the reader’s expectation just as Napoleon’s career constantly defied the expectations of Republicans” (172). From the very first lines, the poem is one of subversion and alteration, connecting the poetic form of the sonnet to the historical context it fits into, and echoing Shelley’s disdain for the fallen Napoleon.

Beyond the surprise of the initial shift in style, the resulting scheme divides the poem into three quatrains and a couplet, a seemingly straightforward organization without any variance. The changes come when this external structure is aligned with the internal content of the poem. Rather than holding complete thoughts within each quatrain, like many Shakespearean sonnets, some phrases are cut short from their full four lines and intruded on by the next phrase, while others overflow their four lines and extend into the following quatrains. This is yet another instance of a Romantic sonnet moving beyond the established constraints of the form and its traditions, a similar technique to those seen in previous Wordsworth and Keats poems. What makes this instance noteworthy is the adherence to the rhyme scheme while at the same time deviating from the standards of that scheme’s organization. Why respect one aspect of the tradition of sonnet style while disregarding another?

Shelley here identifies two true foes within the poem: the first and most obvious is the tyrant Napoleon; the second, however, is the subtler enemy of “old Custom, legal Crime, And bloody Faith” (13-14). These two enemies are both dealt with through the creation of the poem. Napoleon is mentioned as evil and then immediately passed over, as if to brush off his existence as a minor mistake in history, “which Time has swept in

fragments towards oblivion” (6-7). According to Michael Ferber, Shelley would rather forget conquerors than to denounce them, for “he foresees revenge and imagines a society where love and forgiveness prevail; to preserve their hateful memory might needlessly keep alive a note of rancor” (167-8). The greatest desire of so many of these tyrants was to be remembered eternally, and to brush them aside is to truly destroy their legacy. The second foe of “old Custom” can be interpreted in many ways; Cian Duffy calls this real foe “what we would call ‘ideology’ or the pressure of cultural conventions, of the intellectual ancient regime, upon individual thought and action, upon the individual imagination” (406). The effort the sonnet makes to take down this foe of tradition and its limiting of human imagination illuminates the connection between a sonnet that embodies tradition on the surface but disregards it underneath.

By disconnecting the rhyme scheme from the construction of the phrases in the poem, this sonnet defies the tradition that it appears to adhere to. The phrases exist within the constraints of the poem’s form, but they do not acknowledge the bounds normally set for them. The first and second phrases end before their full lines: “revel on the grave / Of Liberty” in lines four and five and “which Time has swept / In fragments towards oblivion” in six and seven disregard the need for full and complete thoughts within quatrains and allow the phrases to flow together more freely within the rhymed lines. The third quatrain is also much larger than its allotted four lines and contains a rambling list of ills that come from adherence to the tradition of tyranny, identifying the “eternal foe” as “old Custom.” This desire for freedom and openness with the length of the sonnet’s phrases is another instance of Shelley’s open-endedness in the sonnet form, a practice Jennifer Wagner says resists Wordsworth’s pictorialism “in favor of what are sometimes

no more than the anticipatory intimation of vision, assertions of the possibility of vision for him who resists tyranny” (79). The intimation is not overt, but disregarding tradition and casting custom as the real foe implies that to free oneself from the tyranny of both Napoleon and the custom of form is to realize a vision of true expression.

Unlike Shelley, with his open disregard for constraint or completeness, Keats was not a poet of great experimentation with the structure of his poems. His sonnets generally fall in line with accepted standards of organization and the rhyme scheme seldom deviates from the norm, as Laurence John Zillman points out:

Keats was reasonably conservative in his use of the sonnet form. In an age when quatrain was being revived and extensively written, and when structural experimentation was the rule in lyrical composition, more than 80 percent of his sonnets are in forms both artistically and logistically acceptable. (82-3)

Though the word “acceptable” may be problematic when evaluating Keats’s sonnets, his experiments with the form are most often used to affect the rhythm and sound or to highlight some significant portion of the content. Largely, it was an internal practice rather than an external one. However, there are some sonnets that indicate freedom from this convention, such as “On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again,” where the sonnet structure, though seemingly standard or “acceptable,” contains variation or experimentation:

O golden-tongued Romance with serene lute!
Fair plumed Syren! Queen of far away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,

Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:
Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,
 Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
 Must I burn through; once more humbly assay
The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.
Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,
 Begetters of our deep eternal theme,
When through the old oak forest I am gone,
 Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But when I am consumed in the fire,
 Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

As with the inversion of Shelley's sonnets that take convention and alter it just slightly, here Keats combines what is normally understood as conventional Petrarchan and Shakespearian forms into a single sonnet. The octave takes the ABBAABBA pattern of Petrarch while the sestet employs the alternating CDCD before an EE couplet so typical of the Shakespearian sonnet. Though not an alteration on the forms themselves, both patterns in a single sonnet makes the poem as a whole a new kind of organization. More specifically, if Keats were to have continued the CDCD pattern in the sestet, it would have been included among the numerous possible combinations of sestet rhyme patterns considered normal for the Petrarchan style; it is the final couplet that identifies this sestet as adhering to the Shakespearian tradition. The use of the couplet, especially in unusual ways, is very characteristic of Keats's sonnet style. It was for him a recurring tool of political and stylistic rebellion. Walter Jackson Bate notes Keats's reaction against the standards of couplet writing popular among his contemporary poets, commenting that his influences led "towards a single goal: they furnished both sanction and means for avoiding the practice of those eighteenth century poets who 'sway'd about on a rocking

horse / and thought it Pegasus' and for consequently securing a marked gain in that freedom and heal-absorbed luxury of expression" (20). In a time when the couplet was a standard for many popular poets, Keats sought to break free from this practice and find new forms; he often used couplets in interesting ways to taunt those poets stuck in the convention of couplet writing. Though this sonnet is not commenting directly on the tradition of whole poems written in heroic couplets, still the couplet is what makes this organization a variation on standard forms, allowing it the freedom to be both Petrarchan and Shakespearean. Indeed politics were not Keats's only reason for experimenting with couplets, as William Keach points out: "no one would want to argue that his extravagant experiments in couplet writing are in themselves expressive of political conventions more radical and anarchic than liberals like Hunt;" instead, he suggests, using a quote from Hunt, they "seem to take pleasure in the progress of their own beauty" (190). This idea suggests an alternative view of the variant couplet: it simply worked to a more beautiful degree than the standards.

Whatever the motivation for the mixing of style, there are differing opinions as to what Keats intended to accomplish in this sonnet. Some read in it a disapproval of Romance literature, while others see the poet as contemplating his own poetry, using Shakespeare as a launching board for his own concerns. Theodore Leinward looks to the folio version of the sonnet for possible interpretation: "Keats's draft loses its humility in the folio version of the sonnet; Keats also strikes out 'this' in the phrase 'this eternal theme' in order to substitute 'our.' Shakespeare and Keats, if the latter gets his new wings, will labor (beget) in unison" (112). This interpretation stays close to the idea that Keats was a great lover of Shakespeare's work and sought to reach the same heights in

his own creation; as the two styles of sonnets came together so too would the two writers. H.E. Riggs suggests that Keats was thinking of his own *Endymion* by pointing out that the imagery, such as the oak forest, links more to his own poem than Shakespeare's play: "though the 'old oak forest' was probably intended to be a reference to *Lear*, it is unconsciously a reference to *Endymion*. Thoughts of the two works were mingled on both the conscious and unconscious levels of his mind" (127). By putting more weight on the images and their analogies to Keats's life, this interpretation makes the important omission of ignoring the form the sonnet creates for itself.

In a sonnet on the work of Shakespeare, especially one celebrating the simple act of sitting down to read one of his plays, it would seem logical to write a sonnet in his style. The standard English rhyme scheme and quatrains organization would make a direct imitation, but Keats creates more of an homage, hinting at the influence, but also making use of the Italian organization to set the scene and establish the elongated introduction that comes to fruition at the line nine turn. This turn is important in seeing the poem as an homage, because it is here that the poem turns to those that came before in direct address "Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion, / Begetters of our deep eternal theme," (9-10). Without the cohesion of the first eight lines that comes with the Petrarchan style, this sharp turn in subject would not be as profound. However, as the focus of the poem moves onto the "Chief Poet," the organization changes to the Shakespearean style, as if to leave behind the Italian style and become immersed in the English tradition. Keats here is asserting his independence while simultaneously acknowledging the power of those that came before, mixing the two styles to make its influences known while remaining entirely original.

In his lesser-known sonnet "On Fame II," Keats again experiments with subtle variation by changing the style of the Shakespearian sonnet just enough to make an unusual couplet and thus draw attention to the organization of the poem as a whole:

HOW fever'd is the man, who cannot look
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life's book,
And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,
On the ripe plum finger its misty bloom,
As if a Naiad, like a meddling elf,
Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom:
But the rose leaves herself upon the briar,
For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire,
The undisturbed lake has crystal space;
Why then should man, teasing the world for grace,
Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?

The rhyme and organization of a sonnet are clearly connected. While one cannot easily divorce the two elements which most readily define the sonnet's two main styles without throwing the entire form into confusion, this sonnet illustrates how a poet can change the relationship of the two just slightly and create a great gap between what is assumed by convention and what is intended by a poem. "On Fame II" seems to be a standardly organized Shakespearian sonnet through the first eleven lines, with the poem divided into quatrains in punctuation and division of phrase as well as in the rhyme scheme. But just before the final couplet the scheme is interrupted: instead of an end-rhyme where standard scansion would expect the pattern to continue and the final word of line twelve

to rhyme with “feed” from line ten, a new set of two rhymes begins. The final six lines are thus rhymed EFEGGF, as if the couplet moved from the final two lines to lines twelve and thirteen. To complicate things further, this rhyme does not line up with the content of the phrases or the punctuation of the lines, both of which line up with the standard quatrains followed by a self-contained couplet. Why then did Keats shift the rhyme of the final lines so slightly? This may be yet another instance of manipulating couplets to avoid adherence to what he saw as restrictive standards of writing at the time. Clearly it was a practice he did not limit to his longer poems, but there may be another tendency of Keats’s at play in this unusual couplet.

The sonnet is questioning fame and the tendency man has to seek after it by being one “who vexes all the leaves of his life’s book, / And robs his fair name of its maidenhood” (3-4). That is, one who frets over the image of his life and name and who cares more for appearance than anything. The sonnet seeks to put this habit into a dim light, drawing on the analogies of rose, plum, and Naiad to exalt these things that remain unconcerned about their place of prominence and thus keep their place undisturbed. In the same way, Keats seems unconcerned with the organization or placement of rhyme. The final three lines are unusual in their order, the expected rhyme is delayed, and lines twelve and thirteen, which are seemingly unconnected in content, are rhymed together as if they were the sonnet’s final couplet. William Keach comments on Keats’s tendency toward unusual rhymes: “Keats allows himself to be led (and misled) by the rhyme as it generates a need for connection and development, as it provokes and then gives unexpected shape to figurative elaborations” (191). This poem’s “figurative elaboration” comes from the metaphors used to describe stillness, the last being the undisturbed lake,

and the question of whether man should “spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed” (14). By drawing these final portions together in rhyme, Keats connects the question of man’s role in fame to the ideals of stillness that come before it. He allows his writing to be led by rhyme and thus forms the unusual connection that provides an answer to his poem’s final question.

Because the connection seems so unusual, the unintentional or organic nature of the change makes sense: rather than reaching for fame and greatness in the sonnet, he allows it to connect itself in a new way, or as Laurence John Zillman says, “Keats made the form serve the idea instead of forcing the idea into the limits of the form” (85). This poem is not one of Keats’s most popular or even greatest. Instead it is a minor example of yet another variation, one that demonstrates the malleability of the sonnet form when subjected to the Romantic tendency to be moved more by ideas and artistic goals than the rules of the form itself.

Keats’s allowing the rhyme to dictate the connections that follow is just one way to experiment with rhyme; another understated instance of variation in rhyme is the much more intentional and calculated rhyme scheme in Wordsworth’s second sonnet on the sonnet form, “Scorn not the sonnet”:

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camöens soothed an exile's grief;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf

Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
To struggle through dark ways; and, when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!

In sonnets focused on the writing of sonnets, all of the formal elements of the sonnet have a heightened attention placed on them. It is as if everything about the poem is under a microscope because it has called to the forefront the very idea of the sonnet. Therefore, the unusual rhyme scheme in this poem is even more interesting because of its subject matter. Much in the same way that Keats's "On sitting down..." mixes the Petrarchan and Shakespearian styles in homage to the subject of his poem, so too Wordsworth combines the two most prominent rhyme schemes, though for a different purpose. The poem is rhymed ABBA ACCA DEDE FF: again, like Keats, a mix of octave, quatrain, and couplet. Also, as with Keats, this poem looks back to some significant influences on current sonnet writing and uses form to embody a message about that influence. However, it is the message conveyed in the poem that differentiates Wordsworth from Keats.

Rather than showing special respect to past masters of the form by adopting or paying homage to their style, Wordsworth once again comments on the unimportance of the form's constraints. The poem freely uses both the Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms together in one poem, but it is not constrained by either style. The poem begins with an abruptly short phrase, "scorn not the sonnet," that creates a caesura, immediately breaking up the flow of the lines, and forcing the end of the line to be enjambed into the

second. This pattern of overflowing lines continues through the litany of images the poem provides as examples of the sonnet's power. As the poem treats each of the great sonnet masters, their descriptions flow past the line breaks and into one another: "The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf / Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned / His visionary brow" (7-9). This enjambment of each phrase creates a very flowing poem, which, though the first eight lines rhyme in a loose Petrarchan style, contains very few clear division points and no break at line nine. The entire catalogue of great poets runs together, creating a continual image of the sonnet's power among all of them.

This list of images is not at all random or unimportant, for each builds on the idea that the small form of the sonnet is immensely powerful. J. Hillis Miller points to the images' common theme: "In each case the image is of something small and encased which is nevertheless articulated and structured. Since it has a design it can serve as the means by which inarticulate energies are controlled and released. They are given expression by being circumscribed and modulated" (301). Each of these small things is a means to creative expression and can release in their owners a great ability. The metaphor for the sonnet here is clear, but what is most interesting about this list is that though each item is small the list is long and without organization. This lack of structural standardization, though rhyme scheme is consistent, is a way of saying that either of the rhyme schemes will do, and it doesn't matter what form or order the rhymes come in as long as they achieve their intended creative goal. Wordsworth is again using an accepted form, rhyme scheme, to illustrate the refusal of the sonnet to be constrained into a single organization.

W.H. Sellers uses “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” as an exception to his ideas about Wordsworth’s rhyme conventions, but the description applies nicely to the same elements which occur in “Scorn not the sonnet”:

Its intensely lyrical element is paradoxically freed and controlled by the rhyme. Ordinarily rhyme gives a poem a feeling of control, but the run-on lines, the rich imagery, and pervading intensity seem to overpower this control in such a way that the lyricism is actually heightened. (644)

In this sonnet on the sonnet, the flow of the lines and the intensity of the images, each making the point about what power the sonnet has for those able to use it greatly, move beyond the controlling nature of the sonnet’s external organization. Thus, though the poem looks back onto its many influences and adopts both major rhyme schemes, neither is sufficient to fully contain the creative expression of the sonnet itself. This ability to incorporate both styles, and yet be neither of them at the same time, makes this sonnet truly an expression of creative variance and independence.

A study on the external variations of the Romantic sonnet must consider one of the most striking examples of rhyme variations in all of the sonnets of this time. Shelley’s “Ozymandias” throws out the norms of Petrarchan and Shakespearian schemes and replaces them with the even older and more Dante-influenced interlocking pattern of terza rima. This alteration of the form is extreme compared to the previous examples and the implications that the form has for the poem’s meaning is extensive, even if the poem at first seems like a straightforward piece of irony:

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

The poem lamenting the arrogance of an ancient king is one of the most widely known of Shelley’s career and is often critically discussed, but much of that criticism focuses on the origins of the poet’s description of this sculpture or historical analogues to his traveler’s story. The rhyming of the sonnet comes into connection with the theme, which is the subject of much in-depth formal discussions dealing with perspectives and understanding. The sonnet departs nearly entirely from the standard patterns and instead exists in different times with different retellings of Ozymandias’ story. The perspective of the poem works from the middle outward, as if unpacking from Ozymandias as a man to the foot of the great statue to the traveler telling the tale and finally to the outer reaches of the poem as written by Shelley himself, each time adding a layer of storytelling and thus complication. William Freeman gives this study of perspective a great deal of attention, unlocking the interpretative implications of so many levels of storytelling, but he also notices the importance of technique on the poem, an aspect which is of much relevance here.

The interlocking ABABACDCEDEFEF of the rhymes in the terza rima style comes from the Italian Dante Alighieri and his *Divine Comedy*. There is a clear connection between the ancient king as subject of Shelley's poem and the older epic rhyme he chooses. It is not coincidence that a poem about an ancient lost king would pick up the ancient form that nearly every other sonnet of the time had left behind. There is an external mimicking of the internal depiction of decay and forgetting, but also an element of distraction that adds to this irony of storytelling that the poem embodies. Freeman calls it "part of the system of postponements that steal not initial but delayed and considered attention from the simpler message. Or rather, it shifts the attention from the obvious substance of the moral to the conditions of its realization" (66). Just as the sculptor complicates the image of the king and the traveller complicates the story of the statue, both by removing the audience from the original, so too Shelley adds an element of interpretation that can hinder the true picture of the man Ozymandias. Freeman says, "technique all but overwhelms objective, for we are more involved with unraveling and working through than with the cognitive point of its product" (66). The form of the poem does more for the complication and widening interpretation of the poem than it does for simplifying it. M.K. Bequette echoes this idea by saying that because Shelley's sonnet "attains a solid physical reality and is not merely a vehicle for some moral lesson" (30), that it "invites interpretation rather than imposes one and only one on the strange desert scene" (31).

This complicating of the sonnet's interpretation acts as the ultimate departure from accepted forms. By making a sonnet so radically rhymed and unusually organized as "Ozymandias" Shelley asserts the ultimate will of the poet. He refuses easy

understanding because he defies easy categorization and allows for the artistic imagination of both the writer and the reader to move freely in understanding the poem.

The external structure of the Romantic sonnet, like its internal variations, was a means of freeing the poets from the confines of a form. While the sonnet dictates a set of rules and with it many expectations, the brilliance of these poets allowed them to work inside those rules, altering them slightly or more radically and still achieve the artistic freedom they lived for. Whether they were inverting the parts of the Petrarchan style, shifting the placement and use of the Shakespearean couplet, combining elements of both forms as homage to the past or acknowledgement of the form's ultimate freedom, or leaving all convention behind and defying the limits of easy interpretation, these poems sought always to find the truest form of expression within the uniformity of the sonnet. By acknowledging their influence and respecting the past, they were able to find the perfect amount of variation within the sonnet's formal walls, and this is their highest accomplishment.

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