Toward an Augustan Poetic: Edmund Waller's "Reform" of English Poetry

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of English Poetry

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TO

ERICH WALTER

potens sui laetusque degit
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I OWE A DEBT, too general to be acknowledged elsewhere, to Geoffrey Tillotson's *On the Poetry of Pope* and F. W. Bateson's *English Poetry and the English Language* for suggesting to me some historically significant features of Waller's style. A further debt is owed to Professor Kenneth Pike of the University of Michigan for enlightening conversations on the verse conventions to which the English language is theoretically amenable. I am most grateful, finally, to Professor Philip R. Wikelund of Indiana University, who has brought all quotations from Waller of a line's length or longer into agreement with his forthcoming authoritative edition—a longtime desideratum of seventeenth-century scholarship.

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HE WAS, said the *Biographia Britannica* in 1766, “the most celebrated Lyric Poet that ever England produced.” And if this seems a curious statement to have been made about Edmund Waller, a still greater curiosity is that it was probably true.

The sources of his celebrity were not solely literary. He was esteemed for the charm of his address and the wit and good sense of his conversation—for a cluster of personal and social gifts not unlike those which Richard Brinsley Sheridan exhibited in a more robust form a century later. And to these he added the virtue of surpassing wealth. He was nevertheless also greatly admired as a literary artist. Thomas Rymer wrote of his early work that “his Poetry then distinguish’d him from all his contemporaries, both in *England* and in other Nations; And from all before him upwards to *Horace* and *Virgil.*” And Lord Buckhurst believed, or is represented as having believed, that even Greece and Rome could produce “nothing so even, sweet, and flowing, as Mr. Waller.” The more general eulogies dwelt on his smoothness and sweetness. The more specific singled out his diction.
and metric for praise: he "refined our language" and he "reformed our numbers." During the last twenty-five years of his life, it was agreed that he was a poet of the first rank. And for as long as the heroic couplet was considered an ideal verse form, he enjoyed a primary place in literary history.

There is some color of reason to even the most extravagant of these judgments. If we examine Waller's couplet verse in the context of Jacobean and early Caroline poetry, we perceive that it clearly distinguished him from his predecessors and immediate contemporaries. If we examine it in the context of Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry, we perceive that it foreshadowed the qualities and prepossessions of the succeeding age. His matter, his manner, and his metric all recommended him as a model and example to poets who followed him.

The question whether he was a good example or a bad inevitably arises. Since this is one form of the eternally vexed question whether we should chiefly value neoclassical reforms or chiefly deplore them, I propose no final decision. But a prefatory caveat is perhaps necessary. To the ideals of smoothness and sweetness Waller sacrificed certain more generous virtues. And we are still sufficiently under the sway of romantic ideas so that I might (for example) complain that he surrendered the immediacy which had distinguished John Donne's *Songs and Sonets* and condemn him out of hand. It seems desirable, therefore, to reaffirm a principle to which lip service is paid even by many celebrants of immediacy: that the poet's duty and function is precisely to interpose a style, a manner and a cadence between ourselves and raw experience. The uses which Pope in especial was to make of the polish and regularity which Waller helped to codify give this reminder cogency, even if Waller's own carefully modulated pleasantry do not.
A further plea should be made on his behalf: namely, that his reform of English poetry was single in nature and intent. He neither suffered from nor forecast that dissociation of mind or temper which is said to have become visible in the course of the Seventeenth Century. Inasmuch as his work predicted the immediate future of English poetry, it gives evidence that the elements of the poetic imagination were not then scattered or divided but were drawn together into a new synthesis.
THE BODY of poems on which Waller's reputation rested consisted very largely of occasional and complimentary verse—a type increasingly important in English literary history after 1600. To establish his contribution to neoclassical poetics, then, one might well begin by defining the changes he wrought in such poetry.

The genre of occasional and complimentary verse, if it can be called that, was given currency by the poets who exerted a commanding influence on the early decades of the Seventeenth Century, Ben Jonson and John Donne. And like most of the genres in which these poets wrote, it had classical precedents. Jonson's brief complimentary verses were epigrams, as he said, in the manner of Martial,¹ and his longer complimentary epistles participated in an Hor-
atian tradition of informal poetic discourse. These prece-
dents he embraced in lieu of the elaborate forms and for-
malities which (for example) Spenser had employed in
“Prothalamion” and “Astrophel”; he found it appropriate
to confront almost any occasion in a straightforward address
written in rhymed couplets. Such addresses he broadcast
among his friends and benefactors and, in his semi-official
capacity as laureate, among great personages of the realm.
John Donne wrote a smaller number of occasional poems
for a more limited circle of friends and patrons, but his more
ambitious ventures, especially, were extremely influential.
His celebrations of Elizabeth Drury’s death aroused as much
emulation as have any English occasional poems.

Among the second generation of seventeenth-century
poets, occasional verse attained not only increased currency
but a kind of vogue. The atmosphere of the Caroline court
conduced to poetic amenity. According to a later, nostalgic
memory of Andrew Marvell’s,

That candid Age no other way could tell
To be ingenious, but by speaking well.
Who best could praye, had then the greatest praye,
Twas more esteemd to give, then weare the Bayes. ²

And the work of many courtly poets of the first Caroline
period indeed consisted very largely of gratulatory or con-
solatory addresses speaking well of particular persons on
particular occasions.

Concerning the entire body of verse in question, it is
hazardous to generalize—least hazardous, perhaps, if we at-
tend primarily to characteristics which other poetry of the
period is acknowledged to share.

The decades prior to 1620 saw an unexampled outpouring
of English poetic genius. The makers of verses then possessed
in preeminent degree the power of calling fictions into being. As Shakespeare’s genius is attested by the persons who throng into existence in his plays, each acting as if from motives of his own and speaking as if with his own voice, so the genius of early seventeenth-century lyric and occasional poets is attested by the voices as of men speaking which instantly are manifest in their poems. We need not read beyond John Donne’s celebrated opening lines to know that the lyrics which they usher in belong to these years. No more do we naturally relate to any other period complimentary poems beginning,

Were they that nam’d you, prophets? Did they see,  
Euen in the dew of grace, what you would bee?  
Or did our times require it, to behold  
A new SVSANNA, equall to that old?3

Went you to conquer? and have so much lost  
Yourself, that what in you was best and most,  
Respective friendship, should so quickly dye?4

The first generalization which I want to make concerning the occasional and complimentary poems of the period is that they are in eminent degree dramatic fictions.

The fiction may attract attention to itself by its fanciful character. Jonson’s epigram to the Countess of Bedford, “This morning timely rapt with holy fire,” recounts a supposed conversation with his muse. His poem celebrating Penshurst, the estate of the Sidneys, is addressed to the manor itself. Donne’s “Second Anniversary” is an expostulation with his own soul. Most occasional and complimentary poems, however, are addressed to the persons whom they praise. And the token that they are dramatic fictions is the materializing in them of the poet as a man speaking and of the subject of the poem as the man spoken to.
WALLER'S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

When the fiction of direct address is dispensed with, the poems retain the dramatic character of soliloquys. Even when any explicit sign of fiction is omitted and the poems move frankly toward the status of verse essays or verse epistles, the sense that they exist as utterance rather than as written symbols on the page is usually strong. This last and quintessential fiction is supported by the medium which the poets selected—a mother English, preserving the precise accent and cadence of speech.

The generation of poets beginning to write after about 1620 modified the style and manner of Jacobean occasional verse somewhat, but preserved its kind. The typical occasional poet of this generation was Thomas Carew, who, as the following opening lines indicate, was emulous of his predecessors in that he wanted a dramatic voice to burst instantly forth:

Sir, I arest you at your Countreyes suit,  
Who as a debt to her, requires the fruit  
Of that rich stock; which she by Natures hand  
Gave you in trust, to th'use of this whole Land.⁵

Can we not force from widdowed Poetry,  
Now thou art dead (Great DONNE) one Elegie  
To crowne thy Hearse?⁶

In general, Caroline poets tended to lengthen and smooth their phrasing and to elevate their diction somewhat; certain modifications of style and manner were in the direction of afterthought. But the accent of speech remained; direct questions and apostrophes remained; Caroline occasional verse still aspired to be, and usually was, an immediate and dramatic poetry.

Having decided that this body of verse is dramatic in manner, we naturally inquire into the character of its matter.
And the second generalization I would venture concerning it is that it imitates explicitly rational discourse. The poets justified their function logically, approached their subjects analytically, and employed every resource of dialectic in complimenting or consoling the persons they addressed.

This commitment of the rational mind determined, in good part, the tenor of the poems themselves. When the fiction of direct address was most convincing, the poems fell into the tone of expostulation: we have the sense of one man directly admonishing another. When they imitated soliloquy rather than direct address, we have the phenomenon which has been called passionate thinking: poems or parts of poems so close to the process of the reasoning mind that one might define them as streams of rational consciousness. When they receded from the fiction of immediate utterance, we have still the structure of logical exposition. Almost all Jacobean and Caroline occasional poems are conscious and explicit exercises of reason.

Since it is a commonplace that John Donne's poems seem to be the immediate effluence of his thought, we might recall how Jonson proceeds in his best known literary panegyric:

To draw no enuy (Shakespeare) on thy name,
    Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and Fame:
While I confesse thy writings to be such,
    As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.
'Tis true, and all mens suffrage. But these wavys
    Were not the paths I meant vnto thy praise:
For seeliest Ignorance on these may light,
    Which, when it sounds at best, but eccho's right;
Or blinde Affection, which doth ne're advance
    The truth, but gropes, and vrgeth all by chance;
Or crafty Malice, might pretend this praise,
    And thinke to ruine, where it seem'd to raise.
These are, as some infamous Baud, or Whore,
WALLER'S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

Should praise a Matron. What could hurt her more?
But thou art proofe against them, and indeed
Above th'ill fortune of them, or the need.
I, therefore will begin...? 

The turnings of the thought are in part impromptu, as we perceive from the sudden reflection "and indeed / Above th'ill fortune of them, or the need." Jonson clearly believed it desirable to record the process of his thought as well as the conclusions upon which he finally settled.

Nor was he here merely exhibiting the self-consciousness which a great dramatist must naturally have felt when called upon to praise a greater. In the early Seventeenth Century, a casual poetic amateur, writing verses of gratitude to a lady for an unnamed service, can proceed in much the same manner. To avoid multiplying lengthy examples, I paraphrase:

Since she is herself the repository of all value, there is nothing he can add to her: any expression of gratitude is mere presumption. Yet if he does not express his thanks, he incurs an even greater blame. So why don't I venture it? he asks himself, and fling myself and all that I have at her feet? Logic again corrects him and brings him back to his starting point:

Fond Thought in this thou teachest me to give
What first was hers, since by her breath I live;
And hast but show'd me how I may resign
Possession of those things are none of mine.ª

This is the sort of poem which I would define as a stream of rational consciousness. It imitates such discourse as might pass directly through the mind and issue immediately from the lips. And its manner of proceeding is one of the conventions of occasional and complimentary verse in its period.

The poet's rational faculty and his ethical were assumed
to be intimately related; they were aspects of the same power of morally responsible decision. The examples given of the rational quality of early seventeenth-century occasional verse are also, and not accidentally, examples of its ethical preoccupation. A third generalization concerning this poetry is that it is profoundly immersed in ethical concerns.

There is a practical reason why the occasional poet should support his assertions with what the rhetoricians called ethical proofs. His topic is normally human virtue. And whoever would celebrate virtue must know what it is and must himself possess it in sufficient measure to give his words authority. In the opening lines of "The Second Anniversary," Donne says that a man knows he possesses the necessary ethical faculty or rational soul because he can perceive the good and pay it homage by himself performing righteous deeds. Anyone possessed of such a soul, he continues, will sense that virtue has fled from the earth with the spirit of Elizabeth Drury and will want to celebrate the anniversary of her death. He himself—having given earnest of his competence to do so—proceeds to celebrate it in six hundred and seventy-four pentameter lines. And many occasional poems of the time supply almost as explicit demonstrations as this of the validity of their praise.

The ethical pronouncements of Jonson, Donne, and their disciples have a further identifying sign. These poets tended to dwell at equal length upon the excellence which they praised and an evil or folly against which they pitted it. In the following passages from poems of feminine compliment, the italics indicate how full and explicit their discriminations of good from evil often were:

Faire, great, and good, since seeing you, wee see
What Heaven can doe, and what any Earth can be:
WALLER'S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

Since now your beauty shines, now when the Sunne
Growne stale, is to so low a value runne,
That his dishevel'd beames and scattered fires
Serve but for Ladies Periwigs and Tyres
In lovers Sonnets: you come to repaire
Gods booke of creatures, teaching what is faire.⁹

And though all praise bring nothing to your name,
Who (herein studying conscience, and not fame)
Are in your selfe rewarded; yet 'twill be
A cheerefull worke to all good eyes, to see
Among the daily Ruines that fall foule,
Of State, of fame, of body, and of soule,
So great a Vertue stand upright to view,
As makes Penelopes old fable true.¹⁰

Early seventeenth-century occasional verse was deeply in­
volved in ethical concerns; often, indeed, it was in grim and
somber earnest.

It is against this background, in which the daily ruins of
body and soul are as conspicuous as beauty, virtue and truth,
that Edmund Waller's early work appears. And from the
beginning of his career he waged a mild but direct campaign
against the poetic habits of his predecessors.

I would not flatter. May that dyet feed
Deform'd and vicious soules: they onely need
Such physick, who grown sick of their decayes,
Are onely cur'd with surfets of false praise;
Like those, who fall'n from Youth or Beauties grace,
Lay colours on which more bely the face.

Be You still what You are; a glorious Theme
For Truth to crown. So when that Diademe
Which circles Your fair brow drops off, and time
Shall lift You to that pitch our prayers climbe;
Posterity will plat a nobler wreath,
To crown Your fame and memory in death.¹¹
TOWARD AN AUGUSTAN POETIC

There is a Character in John Earle's *Microcosmographie* which was once thought to allude to Waller directly and which does in fact indicate the direction of his departure from the Jacobean norm. For Earle describes therein a poetaster whose works are not commendatory addresses but versions of the broadside pamphlet: "His poems are but briefs in rhyme." Waller tends to desert dramatic fictions for the versification of contemporary news.

The earliest of his poems which can be dated and numbers of poems from every period of his career are given over to the description of current events or to honorific comments upon them. These are characteristic beginnings:

Now had his Highness bid farewell to Spain,
And reacht the sphere of his own power, the main;
With British bounty in his ship he feasts,
Th' Hesperian Princes, his amazed guests
To finde that watry wilderness exceed
The entertainment of their great Madrid.¹³

Now for some Ages had the pride of Spain
Made the Sun shine on half the world in vain;
While she bid warr to all that durst supply
The place of those her cruelty made dye. (II.23.1-4)

Since JAMES the Second grac'd the British Throne,
Truce well observ'd has been infring'd by none.
Christians to him their present Union ow,
And late Success against the Common Foe. (II.103.1-4)

The first passage begins a poem which is in part a versification of a contemporary pamphlet, "The Joyfull Returne of the Most Illustrious Prince Charles . . . from the Court of Spaine. . . ."¹⁴ The second begins a poem which was itself issued in broadside form, "A Lamentable Narration of the sad Disaster of a great / part of the Spanish Plate-Fleet. . . ."¹⁵
WALLER'S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

There are signs, moreover, that he is forsaking the fiction of drama even in those poems which are ostensibly commendatory addresses. Sometimes, for example, he shifts from direct address to third-person commentary in midpassage. "Mighty Queen," he writes to Henrietta,

In whom th' extremes of power and beauty move,
The Queen of Britain, and the Queen of Love.

What may hereafter her Meridian do,
Whose dawning beauty warm'd [Charles'] bosome so?

Nor is he sure whether he himself is speaking in propria persona. Hesitating between "I" and "we," he favors the latter pronoun. And though this usage might claim the prestige of Latin precedent and the fashion of French, its accustomed and, I think, calculated effect was to expel the image of a single person speaking. What Waller wants to see materialize is not the fiction of the poet addressing the person praised but the fact or supposed fact of a flattering consensus concerning that person.

As he partly forsakes dramatic conventions, so also, and by natural consequence, he ceases to conform his poems to the immediate processes of the rational mind. His poems are not so much sequences of thought as aggregations of pleasantries.

In the last twenty-two lines of his poem on the repair of St. Paul's, for example, he says successively that Charles's desire to build is like Solomon's; that the heavens, acknowledging the importance of the work, have withheld their rain; that the sun in its daily path may survey the length and breadth of the structure; that Laomedon had built nothing of comparable magnitude for Troy; and that our "glad
but amazed" neighbors are happy to see King Charles spending his energies on works of peace rather than of war. In his poem "Of His Majesty's receiving the news of the Duke of Buckingham's death," he finds the same monarch as devout as Jacob, better disciplined than Achilles, Agamemnon, and Apollo, and more beneficent than King David.

In such poems he necessarily abandons a logical structure or texture. The sequences of reasoning which had formed the sinews of Jonson's and Donne's and Carew's poems will no longer serve him. In a panegyric on Queen Henrietta, he proceeds from the subject of her beauty to that of her bounty by means of the following associations: you are desirable but inaccessible; we long for you as children long for the stars; the stars shed a benign influence; even so the Queen is beneficent (I.78.29-40). This is pure association of ideas. The thought begets a simile, and the simile begets another thought.

There are or may be positive merits to this manner of proceeding, as another example, possessing a certain independent interest, will show. In his panegyric to Cromwell, he acknowledges that the Lord Protector is encountering envy; but such, he adds, is the fate of great men during their lives. "This Caesar found," he says, and an ungrateful Rome paid the penalty therefor and "fell back to blood and rage." He then returns to his topic by an upside-down simile, comparing not England to Rome but Rome to England:

If Romes great Senate could not weild that Sword,
Which of the Conquer'd world had made them Lord,
What hope had ours, while yet their power was new,
To rule victorious Armies but by you? (II.16.157-60)

When the Roman senate is clearly likened to the English Parliament, it appears that Caesar, though he was introduced
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to support a generalization concerning Cromwell, is equivalent rather to Charles I. Cromwell is later to be brought into this little allegory as Augustus. Waller has disposed of Charles, we notice, without either excusing his execution or openly attacking the regicides, and there are virtues in a confusion so politic. It is nevertheless clear that he is more interested in an agreeable modulation of sentiments than in the logical texture of his verse.

Implicit in his relaxation of the logic of early seventeenth-century occasional verse was his remission of its ethical severity. He was blander than most of his contemporaries and less earnest. Though he freely attributed virtue to the persons he celebrated, he did not represent that virtue as set over against a prevailing vice. Ethical discriminations, being at least potentially invidious, were not allowed to disturb the even tenor of his praise.

When he writes versions or counterparts of poems by his predecessors or conservative contemporaries, we perceive how fully an immediate social aim has displaced the ethical aim of the original. He is probably indebted to an epigram of Jonson's on the death of the infant son of Charles I and Henrietta. Jonson had written:

Who dares deny, that all first-fruits are due
To God, denies the God-head to be true:
Who doubts, those fruits God can with gaine restore,
Doth by his doubt, distrust his promise more.
Hee can, he will, and with large int'rest pay,
What (at his liking) he will take away.
Then Royall CHARLES, and MARY, doe not grutch
That the Almightyes will to you is such:
But thanke his greatnesse, and his goodnesse too;
And thinke all still the best, that he will doe.
This thought shall make, he will this losse supply
With a long, large, and blest posteritie!

15
For God, whose essence is so infinite,
Cannot but heape that grace, he will requite. 16

Waller echoes Jonson’s opening metaphor and expresses the same general thought in a later poem on a topic nearly identical. He perhaps fashioned his own poem by deliberately “correcting” Jonson’s emphasis. Upon the death of the infant Duke of Cambridge, son of James, Duke of York, and Mary of Modena, he wrote:

The failing Blossoms which a young Plant bears,
Ingage our hope for the succeeding years:
And hope is all which Art or nature brings
At the first Tryal to accomplish things.
Mankind was first Created an Essay;
That ruder Draft the Deludge washt away:
How many Ages past, what blood and toyle
Before we made one Kingdom of this Isle?
How long in vain had Nature strivd to frame
A Perfect Princess e’re her Highness came?
For Joys so great we must with patience wait,
Tis the set price of happyness compleat.
As a First-fruit, Heaven claim’d that Lovely Boy,
The next shall live and be the Nations Joy. (II.79)

Jonson’s epigram, in which a moral earnestness spills over into direct expostulation, admirably illustrates the norm from which Waller departs. The line,

Then Royall Charles, and Mary, doe not grutch,

is the quintessence of that element which Waller purged from English occasional verse. Waller’s own poem, of course, is not an expostulation or preaching of any sort. In lines like

How long in vain had Nature strivd to frame
A Perfect Princess e’re her Highness came?
WALLER'S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

an ostensive didacticism is wholly swallowed up in amenity.

The contrast between Waller’s occasional poetry and Thomas Carew’s is less extreme than that between Waller’s and Jonson’s. Carew, more polished than his Jacobean master, would never have admonished his sovereign not to grutch. Nevertheless the ethical emphasis of his occasional verse remains decisive.

A poem of Carew’s having a later counterpart in Waller was a verse letter written to—though perhaps not essentially for—the recently widowed Countess of Anglesey, dissuading her from further lamentation:

Madam, men say you keepe with dropping eyes
Your sorrowes fresh, wat’ring the Rose that lyes
Fall’n from your cheeks upon your deare Lords Hearse.
Alas! those odors now no more can pierce
His cold pale nosthrill, nor the crymson dye
Present a graceful blush to his darke eye.
Thinke you that flood of pearly moisture hath
The vertue fabled of old Æsoms bath?
You may your beauties, and your youth consume
Over his Vrne, and with your sighes perfume
The solitarie Vault, which as you grone
In hollow Ecchoes shall repeate your moane;
There you may wither, and an Autumnne bring
Vpon your selfe, but not call back his spring.17

Six years later, Waller sought in very different fashion to dissuade the recently widowed Countess of Carlisle from mourning:

When from black Clouds no part of Sky is clear,
But just so much as lets the Sun appear
Heaven then would seem thy Image, and reflect
Those Sable Vestments, and that Bright Aspect.
A spark of Virtue by the deepest shade
Of Sad adversity is Fairer made;
TOWARD AN AUGUSTAN POETIC

Nor less advantage doth thy beauty get
A Venus rising from a sea of jet.

Then mourn no more lest thou admit encrease
Of glory by thy noble Lords decease.

Those eyes were made to banish grief; as well
Bright Phæbus might affect in shades to dwell,
As they to put on sorrow; nothing stands
But power to grieve, exempt from thy commands.

(1.22.1-8, 11-12, 19-22)

Carew’s poem is an expostulation, darkly colored; he sees an element of sham in excessive grief. Waller’s poem is chiefly honorific description. The putative expostulation into which he presently falls is only a vehicle for further flattery; one does not seriously argue that a woman should put off her mourning because she looks too pretty in black to communicate her sorrowful mood.

A contrast decisive enough to make any comment upon it superfluous exists between Carew’s and Waller’s commendatory verses on George Sandys’ version of the Psalms. Carew wrote:

I presse not to the Quire, nor dare I greet
The holy place with my unhallowed feet;
My unwasht Muse, polutes not things Divine,
Nor mingles her prophaner notes with thine;
Here, humbly at the porch she listning stayes,
And with glad eares sucks in thy sacred layes.18

Waller wrote, in one of his few stanzaic occasional poems:

How bold a work attempts that pen,
Which would inrich our vulgar tongue
With the high raptures of those men,
Who here with the same spirit sung,
WALLER’S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

Wherewith they now asist the Quire
Of Angels, who their Songs admire? (I.28.1-6)

In the examples from the more conservative poetry, the dramatic, the rational, and the ethical qualities both clearly exist and are clearly interdependent. Whichever one of them our attention first seizes upon seems to occasion the others. We may conclude that a single spirit informed the occasional verse of the early Seventeenth Century—an admirable spirit, all in all, lifting this body of verse above the poetaster’s mere rhyming on particular persons and events and conferring on it a measure of seriousness and the status of poetic art. We may further conclude that Waller’s purpose was very different, though not therefore less single-minded. His verses were real social instruments, “written only to please himself, and such particular persons to whom they were directed.”

Much of his reputation was due to his having prospered in this precise purpose. His poems succeeded preeminently well in pleasing the persons for whom they were written. He further profited from a reaction against the political animosities of the last decades of the Stuart tenure. His somewhat vapid verses on the death of the infant Duke of Cambridge, for example, constituted an answer to Protestant extremists, who saw in the little boy a future Catholic monarch and were glad to have him out of the way. In 1680, he stated his general position in lines commending Roscommon’s translation of the Ars Poetica:

The Muse’s friend unto himself severe,
With silent pity looks on all that Err;
But where a brave, a publick Action shines
That he rewards with his Immortal Lines. (II.87.29-32)

At about the same time, perhaps with Waller in mind, Bishop Tillotson said of the poetic faculty, “Wit is a keen
instrument, and every one can cut and gash with it: but, to
carve a beautiful image, and polish it, requires great art and
dexterity." Waller was a man of genuinely peaceable in­
stincts. And while the body politic was convulsed with
hatred and fear, it was easy to forgive him his labile principles
and to attach an excessive value to the streams of praise
issuing from him.

From the position of importance which he continued to
hold in literary history, however, we know that he did more
than please the persons whom he addressed and affirm the
advantage of panegyric over satire at a time when satire had
become debased. To pursue my earlier conclusions rigor­
ously, it appears to have been thought desirable for the poet
to move away from the fiction of impromptu utterance and
toward afterthought on matters of fact; for him to reduce
discourse of reason from a determinant of the process of
poetry to a vehicle of attitude or sentiment; and for him to
replace a somewhat abstract ethical concern with attention
to immediate social and political circumstance.

These precise tendencies are in fact observable in thought
and letters after the Restoration. Waller was harbinger of
an age in which the most distinguished poetry had a literal
and particular occasion for being. It clearly told in his favor
that he concerned himself with historical persons and events
and that, even when he represented these otherwise than
they were, he was moved less by a vision of some abstract
ideal than by the requirements of tact. No one could com­
plain of him, as Dr. Johnson later complained of Cowley,
that he was "the poet of an 'airy nothing.' "

Accepting his general poetic disposition, neoclassical critics
appear also to have accepted the manner in which he or­
ganized his poems. He ceased, I have argued, to approxi­
mate the process of his poetry to processes akin to those of
formal logic. But the generation which preferred Waller's occasional poems to those of a Jonson or a Carew was losing confidence in such uses of reason. Neoclassical philosophers and critics were ceasing to identify the apprehension of truth with series of steps of which the syllogism supplied an ideal example and were demanding instead evidence which "strikes with immediate conviction."22 In accordance with this new spirit, an agreeable modulation of the poet's sentiments might aptly replace a rational coherence; smooth transitions seemed more important than logical connections. The Earl of Mulgrave praised Waller's Panegyric to Cromwell, wherein I have shown him proceeding by a tactful but not necessarily rational association of ideas, for exemplifying "a just coherence between each thought."23

I have noticed, finally, Waller's break with a traditionally rationalistic ethic and have said or implied that a relaxation of intellectual rigor diminished the force of his ethical judgments. Restoration and Augustan readers would have noticed less the absolute diminution of seriousness or ethical quality in his verse than the subsumption of whatever ethos remained into a newly fashionable complex in which taste and politesse played a predominant part.

The beginning of his career was as if consciously timed to coincide with an access of elegance in the English court. His first ambitious poem celebrated Charles's first meeting with Henrietta; his second (probably) was a panegyric upon Henrietta as Queen. His talent flowered in the precise year when the charms of France were first profoundly felt, and,

Britain to soft refinements less a foe,
Wit grew polite, and Numbers learn'd to flow.24

Of these last developments he was himself a principal agent. Increasingly thereafter, a derivation of ethical judgments
from rational determinations alone seemed to smack of the
schools and of the gothic past. In typical Augustan poems
of compliment, a favorable evaluation of persons and actions
was sanctioned not—or at least not only—by prior analysis,
but by simultaneous congeniality of mood or tone; not only
by "truth" but by "sentiment."

One recalls how Pope, the friend to virtue, became one
with Pope, the man of feeling, in his celebrations of worthy
persons:

Statesman, yet friend to Truth! of soul sincere,
In action faithful, and in honour clear;
Who broke no promise, serv'd no private end,
Who gain'd no title, and who lost no friend,
Ennobled by himself, by all approv'd,
And prais'd, unenvy'd, by the Muse he lov'd.\textsuperscript{25}

It was this accent, at once genial and urbane, which Waller's
reform had made possible. It was Waller who had taught
English poets to pronounce on a man in a language and
manner appropriate to general civilized discourse rather than
to the moralizing of the pulpit or the musty tome.

I remain uncomfortably aware, finally, of a conclusion
which I am not drawing. Waller's poetry as I have described
it suggests the dissolution of an older philosophic synthesis
and might well reveal that dissociation of sensibility which
scholars and critics have found to occur midway of the Seven-
teenth Century.\textsuperscript{26} In point of fact, one is impressed rather
by the homogeneity of his work than by divisions within it.
A single spirit of amenity seems to swallow up all disparities.
There seems, all in all, to be less separation of faculties once
conjoined than conjoining of faculties which were once, if
not precisely separate, at least more clearly differentiated
than Waller allowed them to remain.
WALLER'S DEPARTURES FROM JACOBEAN PRACTICE

Let me propose more specifically that he was anticipating a novel synthesis of faculties—as opposed to dissociation of faculties—which was inherent in the epistemology of the Restoration and became thereafter a major presumption of philosophical discourse. The mind as Locke conceived it was forever conscious of its debt to sense data; all of its apprehensions, including those of value, were implicitly likened to apprehensions by the senses. Locke was already tending to reduce discourse of reason to the mind's seizing on series of ideas immediately congenial to it. And in that body of philosophic literature which culminated in Hume's essays, a faculty of taste or sentiment, combining all rational and ethical faculties into a single quasi-aesthetic power, was invoked with increasing confidence and explicitness.

Waller himself would have been pleased to have attributed to him "a Manner, a grace, an ease, a gentleness, an I-know-not-what... which is very different from external beauty and comeliness, and which, however, catches our affection almost as suddenly and powerfully." And he would hardly have repined at the corollary that "this class of accomplishments... must be trusted entirely to the blind, but sure testimony of taste and sentiment."28

He reveals, in a manner, the deliquescence of the early seventeenth-century sensibility, hardly its dissociation. In anticipating the tone-quality of compliment in an age of "taste," he forecast a single total reordering of the subtle complex which makes us man.
There is general consent, now as in 1700, that the language of English poetry should simultaneously fulfill our expectations of our tongue as it is spoken and be set apart from the most ordinary discourse. But there also existed then a rather general consensus that felicitous combinations of familiar words alone could not sustain the style of serious poetry. Neoclassical poets might rejoice in lines and phrases which were at once natural and noble. Dryden was pleased that for "Open the door," there existed the alternative "Set wide the palace gates."¹ But most poets and critics of the period also advocated the avoidance of low words in nobler or politer ventures and the cultivation of a distinctively poetic idiom.

The poet before Waller who had contributed most toward such an idiom was Edmund Spenser, and Spenser had purchased his style at the expense of eccentricity. Shakespeare
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was thought to have been sometimes mean and sometimes tumid; one could not say of him even at his best that he had raised his diction consistently above the commonplace. The language of Ben Jonson and John Donne, finally, had represented a regression rather than an advance. Though both men had employed a current English—avoiding Spenser’s error—they had adopted the idiom of an unpolished, or at least of an insufficiently polished, conversation. It had remained for Waller at once to elevate the language of poetry and to confine it to the best current usage; which is to say, if one chooses to look at literary history in that light, to recreate Spenser’s achievement without incurring Spenser’s faults. And the fusion of elements in his vocabulary associates him quite properly with Spenser in certain ways.

Waller’s diction is spruce and single-minded, and the tenor of his style is at best quite elegant and at worst inoffensive. When the choice confronts him, he is precious rather than mean. Describing the Countess of Carlisle in mourning, he writes not of her black dress and bright face but of her “sable vestments” and “bright aspect.” (I.22.4) When he would say that a brilliant dawn forecasts the heat of the day to follow, he writes that its “refulgent Ray / Foretells the fervour of ensuing day.” (I.5.121-22) And when an ailing courtier is (putatively) brought back to health by the sympathy of court ladies, Waller asks,

Who would not languish by so fair a train,
To be lamented and restor’d again? (I.34.39-40)

A certain elegance here resides in the phrase “so fair a train” and in the verbs of foreign etymology.

He further increases the formality of his verse by frequent periphrasis. When he might have written that a lady’s admirers had nothing else to hope for, he wrote instead that
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they had no other occasion to "employ their hope." (I.26.10) Instead of the same lady's becoming more glorious, she "admits increase / Of glory." (I.22.11-12) A favor greater than he dares think of becomes a favor greater than his "awful thought / Durst entertain." (I.51.10-11) Hardly before in English poetry had the arts of paraphrase been devoted to ends so purely polite.

He is at his best in the Panegyric to Cromwell, in which, since he rarely reaches for a sheerly rococo elegance, we may not notice that the language is lifted above the commonplace until we consider what it might have been. We can regard the couplets:

Oft have we wonder'd how you hid in Peace  
A minde proportion'd to such things as these? (II.15.129-30)

For whom we stay'd, as did the Grecian State,  
Till Alexander came to urge their Fate. (II.13.71-72)

He might have written:

We often wonder how you could have hid  
Your powers of mind as fully as you did.

We waited like the Greeks, who had to wait  
Till Alexander came to hurry fate.

And if these alternatives seem to sink below anything which a recognized poet might have written even in an earlier and wholly gothic age, we can recall Ben Jonson's lapses into bathos:

Shee was the Lady Jane, and Marchionisse  
Of Winchester; the Heralds can tell this.3

Then Royall Charles, and Mary, doe not grutch. . . .4
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It is from such a graceless and tuneless blurring out of the sense that Waller saved English poetry.

Two components of his diction may, I think, be singled out and allowed to stand for the rest. Latin verbs used in, or with awareness of, etymological senses lend it polish and precision. Conventional epithets amplify and sweeten it; tending to be "pathetic" even when applied to inanimate objects, these diffuse throughout his verse a genial quality wherein much of his politeness consists.

He had a livelier sense than we of the etymologies of loan words, for he was writing during a period when many of these were still being domesticated in English. When in a reference to the Earl of Warwick and the Lady Bona of Savoy, he writes that the Earl, "himself deluded, mocks the Princely dame," (I.2.22) the English word has the force of a gloss upon the Latin. When he writes of "a heart large in magnanimity," (I.18.45-46) he is resolving the Latin compound into its elements. In his classical allusions, especially, etymologically Latin diction sometimes has a specific literary source. Aeneas, "repeats the danger of the burning Town" (urbem repeto), and Juno pursues "the hated relics of confounded Troy" (reliquias Troiae). Elsewhere he writes of heaven confused (I.51.1) with earth in primeval chaos and of a woman compressed (I.12.37) by mighty Jove. When Sacharissa's admirers are compelled together with her in a crowd of people, the god of Love insults (I.51.11,13), which is to say frisks or exults. Voicing a complaint to the same lady, Waller finds that his song conspires (I.65.28) with the nymph herself to do the singer wrong.

In all these instances, he appeals to meanings which, having long ago petrified, are wholly constant and which, since our acquaintance with them is chiefly academic, are further associated with lexical purity. Words which convey
such meanings stand for language shorn of irrelevance and releasing a simple denotative "sense." Being free of commonplace associations as well as of irrelevancy, they are also poetically proper. A few such words in each poem, together with many, more fully assimilated Latin words possessing the same characteristics in diminished degree, help him to realize the Augustan ideal of "correctness" in its twin senses of precision and politesse.

When we have isolated a principle of precision in neoclassical poetry, we often become aware of a softer principle complementing it. Despite the somewhat neutral quality of these etymologically Latin verbs, many of them also suggested some form of humane agency, and, when used in contexts from which such agency was absent, they lent an air of civility to the action described. When Waller writes that a football is urged this way and that by the players, the verb imparts the semblance of courtesy to an activity which would otherwise seem mean. When he writes that wind salutes (II.38.88) the field, the action seems gracious. And when, upon the Royal Navy's coming into sight, the French and Spaniard

Forget their Hatred, and consent to Fear,

the consent implies obeisance as well as agreement. In the last example, which is altogether characteristic of Waller and of neoclassical poetry generally, the tidy and somewhat precious Latinism serves not only to express a feeling but to civilize the same feeling; the lexical order which it imposes stands for a complex of aesthetic and social restraints. Such are the ideal uses of the Latinate verb.

The functions of setting his language apart from the commonplace and of giving it a civil and humane quality
devolved also upon attributive adjectives, which abound in his work as hardly elsewhere in seventeenth-century poetry except in Milton and the little family of Spenserians. Stock epithets sweeten and diffuse his style. Testifying also that he is minding his literary manners, they sort well with his other polite locutions. They are often “pathetic,” finally, and serve the interest of civility by calling sentiment to its aid. Upon this last function I want to dwell, for it aptly represents the general drift of his style.

Since several of his poems celebrate naval engagements, we may conveniently consider the manner in which he has described the ocean. Having applied attributive adjectives to the sea on thirty-eight occasions in all, he has twenty-five times given it attributes belonging to humanity or at least to sensate life. It is usually unfriendly: “angry” or “rude” or “raging.” Less often it is sympathetic: “obsequious” or “injured” or “troubled.” Sometimes it is wittily suspended between life and lifelessness, depending on the connotation of an epithet like “silent” or “yielding.” Sometimes it is referred to in periphrases indicating its utility or want of utility to man: it is a “watery field” for a battle, a “watery wilderness,” “the world’s great waste.” Once it is merely the “liquid main.”

One could hardly find an assortment of epithets and phrases more conventional than these. Virgil’s ocean had been variously saevus, inimicus, placatus, tacitus, vastus, a campus liquens, and liquidae undae; Spenser’s had been “angry,” “raging,” “yielding,” a “watery wilderness,” a “watery plain,” and “liquid waves.” To this assortment Edward Fairfax contributed “buxom,” which Waller modernized into “yielding,” and the specific epithets “troubled” and “silent.” Shakespeare, incidentally, has “rude,” “raging,” and “ruthless” seas, permits Cleopatra’s barge to ride on
"amorous" water, and translates the concept vastus into "vasty" and "wilderness of sea"; he has also a merely "watery" main.

As conventional as Waller's epithets and phrases are, however, we perhaps notice that some altogether traditional attributes of the sea are not named among them. The entire class of words of which "winedark" is the type is missing. In the works which I have used as a basis of comparison and which, excepting Shakespeare's, are among Waller's principal models, concretely descriptive epithets and periphrases make up from one-third to two-thirds of all those referring to the sea. In Waller, they make up fewer than one-eighth. He has no equivalents to "torquent spumas et caerula verrunt,"10 or "draw the huge bottoms through the furrowed sea."11 The attributes he grants the sea which seem most nearly devoid of pathos are the very general ones "smooth" and "swelling." In his Aeneid fragment, he translates Virgil's caerula as "yielding."12 The sharply visual image of a ship's ploughing the water he converts into wit: "We plough the Deep, and reap what others Sowe." (II.12.64)

In sum, he confines himself almost wholly to expressions which endow the sea with human emotions or otherwise assimilate it to mankind. And the language called attention to is representative of his diction generally. Whenever a suitable occasion offers, the pathos riots. The following passage—a relief from seascapes—describes the picture of a young man painted after he was dead:

As gather'd Flowers, whilst their wounds are new,
Look gay and fresh, as on the stalke they grew,
Torn from the root that nourisht them, a while,
Not taking notice of their fate, they smile,
And in the hand, which rudely pluckt them, show
Fairer than those that to their Autumn grow;
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So Love and Beauty, still that visage grace,
Death cannot fright them from their wonted place.\textsuperscript{13}

In most contexts the pathetic words work together with a standard honorific vocabulary—with “sweet” and “fair” in poems of feminine compliment and “good” and “great” in his graver ventures. In a poem on the Duchess of Orleans’ departure from England, he unites pathos with praise:

But we must see our Glory snatcht away,
And with warm tears increase the guilty Sea:
No wind can favour us; howe’er it blowes,
We must be wreckt, and our dear Treasure loose:
Sighs will not let us half our sorrows tell;
Fair, Lovely, Great and best of Nymphs, Farewell.
(II.72.11-16)

The same elements are combined in a poem on the Lord Admiral:

This we observ’d, delighting to obey
One who did never from his great self stray:
Whose mild example seemed to engage
Th’ obsequious Seas, and teach them not to rage.
(I.31.13-16)

The summary facts are that the language of general qualification tends to displace all concretely descriptive words in his poetry and that an element of pathos or sentiment is always present and often primary.

His diction and tenor stand, I conclude, for a somewhat novel synthesis of traditional elements. He took from his predecessors whatever was sufficiently tame and general for his purposes and pruned away those details which displayed an unmanageable independence or a barbarous resistance to civility. Everything in his verse is accommodated to man;
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it is accommodated to him, furthermore, as a creature of quite exquisite sensibility. When Augustan critics found Waller an initial civilizing influence on English poetry, they knew whereof they spoke.

It remains only to insist that his diction was more closely akin to Spenser's than to that of any other major English predecessor. A stanza of Spenserian panegyric reads,

Thenceforth eternall vnion shall be made
   Betweene the nations different afore,
   And sacred Peace shall louingly perswade
   The warlike minds, to learne her goodly lore,
   And ciuile armes to exercise no more:
   Then shall a royall virgin raine, which shall
   Stretch her white rod ouer the Belgicke shore,
   And the great Castle smite so sore with all,
   That it shall make him shake, and shortly learne to fall.14

Spenser here freely endows abstractions and inanimate objects with human attributes and freights his lines with sentimental and honorific appeal. When he writes that sacred Peace shall lovingly persuade men of her lore and that the Castle shall learn to fall, the tenor is that of Waller's lines:

   Whose mild example seemed to engage
   Th' obsequious Seas, (I.31.15-16)

and

   Well chosen love is never taught to die. (I.40.79)

Again, in the spruce and Latin line,

   And ciuile armes to exercise no more,

Spenser elevates his language by the means which Waller was to employ in lines like
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We had occasion to resume our Arms, (I.76.36)

and

From Civill Broyles he did us disingage,
Found nobler objects for our Martiall rage. (II.35.23-24)

Waller is kept from being a more complete Spenserian than he is chiefly by virtue of what he does not do. In Spenser, the sentimental and honorific words compete with eccentricities of archaic and dialectal vernacular and with an element of vigorous description ("smite the Castle so sore that it shall shake"); in Waller, they face no competition from eccentricity and very little from lively concretion. In Spenser, again, the Latinisms appear upon a groundwork of pure and simple English; in Waller, the groundwork itself is considerably elevated. The points of difference are as forcible as the points of similarity. Nevertheless Spenser anticipates Waller in that he uniformly tames and qualifies his subject matter and in that he uses Latinisms to dignify his style.

The chief intermediary between Spenser and Waller was Edward Fairfax, the translator of Tasso. Though working in a generally Spenserian tradition, Fairfax affected less archaism than his master and reduced also the amplitude of Spenser's syntax and phrasing. He thereby made available to the heroic couplet a style which, in its pristine state, was too "incorrect" to admit of neoclassical imitation and too leisurely and diffuse to be contained in any verse form other than a concatenated stanza. The line of descent from Spenser to Fairfax to Waller contains, as the Jonsonian inheritance does not, those features of diction which lift the consciously polite couplets of the Augustan age above ordinary discourse.

But before pronouncing on this diction further and measuring, as it were, its degree of elevation, one must consider
the order in which Waller arranged his words as well as the words themselves.

Of the verbal patterns which distinguish poetic language from prosaic, a poet will normally rely upon those which have been held up to him as examples. And if his formal tutelage has been chiefly in Latin, he will rely on those devices which have a local habitation and a name in Latin grammars and appear frequently in Augustan Latin literature. Such devices had long served the convenience of English poets. Thomas Carew referred to them slightly as

\[
\text{the subtle cheat}
\]

\[
\text{Of slie Exchanges, and the jugling feat}
\]

\[
\text{Of two-edg'd words, or whatsoever wrong}
\]

\[
\text{By ours was done the Greeke, or Latine tongue.}^{15}
\]

Carew claimed, with partial justice, that John Donne had purged English poetry of these and substituted a wholly native idiom; but he prophesied, perhaps with a cold eye on his young contemporary Waller, that later poets would introduce them again.

Among these devices were the use of nouns as grammatical coordinates when the logical relationship between them does not admit such a parallel or the illogical use of any words in grammatical pairs—in a word, the figures of hendiadys and zeugma. So, for example, the sense “buried in alcoholic sleep” may be expressed by coordinate nouns “buried in wine and sleep,” and the sense “whether waging war or keeping the peace” may be shortened into the logically dubious but current expression “whether waging war or peace.”

Verbal manipulation of this sort was useful to all poets—perhaps especially to verse translators, who might reproduce it or not when they found it in their originals and might
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add it expletively as the spirit urged or as meter and rhyme required. In general, the need to accommodate an irreducible body of matter to a fixed metrical form gave verse translators a lively appreciation of all available rhetorical and syntactical aids. And Waller was as strongly influenced by English translations of foreign works as by native English poetry.

George Chapman, whose *Iliad* he professed himself unable to read without transport, had sought to capture by analysis the rich content of Homer’s compound epithets and to make up whatever deficiency remained by adding ornamental expressions of his own. “Phthia, the rich-soiled nurse-of-men,” he rendered most happily, “Phthia, whose bosome flowes / With corne and people.” George Sandys had found a rhyme-word by converting Ovid’s “honored with temples” into “with praire / And Temples dignifi’d.” Spenser had found one by converting the sense “because they loved her” into “for her sake /And love.” Fairfax, the most potent single influence upon Waller, had written “storms and seas” for “stormy seas,” and had made, as he thought, a virtue of loosely aggregating series of nouns under the same regimen: his Turks, on one occasion, fill the crusaders’ tents “with ruin, slaughter, death, and blood.”

Waller, who remembered the phrase “buried in wine and sleep,” from Virgil or Ovid, writes of persons whom “wine and sleep betray / To frantic dreams.” Of a woman whose thoughts rise to heaven he writes that “Heaven and her transcendent thoughts” (1.80.5) have placed her above mortal ills. His best-known zeugma, illustrating the tendency of the figure to involve pun or what Carew called the juggling feat of two-edged words, is from “Go, lovely rose,”
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Tell her that wasts her time and me. (I.128.2)

Elsewhere he writes "Charles and his virtue" (I.3.54) for "the virtuous Charles," "his conduct and his sword" (II.76.16) for "his military prowess," and "storms and winter" (II.8.2) for "stormy winter." He often loosely aggregates words under the same regimen in Fairfax's manner, as in the line, "Night, horror, slaughter, with confusion meets" [sic]. (II.24.45)

In addition to rhetorical figures like hendiadys and zeugma, some features of classical syntax served English poets for convenience and ornament. These included uses of the participle in absolute constructions and of the gerundial participle in phrases of which "from the city founded," meaning "from the founding of the city," is a type. These constructions may actively recall the classical languages, as when Spenser writes that Britomart "heard tell / Of Troian warres and Priams Citie sackt,"24 or as when Waller, commending a recent translation of Lucretius, writes,

Ovid translated, Virgil too
Shew'd long since what our tongue could do. (II.22.29-30)

When Waller made the phrase "for Patroclus slain" (I.11.10) sustain the meaning "for the death of Patroclus," or when he wrote

Troy wall'd so high,
Th' Atrides might as well have forc'd the sky, (I. 18.59-60)

he may still have felt that the syntax was especially appropriate to the matter. Elsewhere he writes "his lost sons" (I.31.19) for "the loss of his sons" and "towns stormed" (II.17.177) for "the storming of towns." Once he relies wholly on the Latin idiom for intelligibility: in the couplet,
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The worlds Restorer never could endure
That finish'd Babel should those men secure, (I.16.27-28)

the words "secure finished Babel" must be construed to mean "secure the completion of Babel" before the sense is yielded up.

Such constructions had the merit of economy, the Latin idiom being briefer, as a general rule, by two syllables or more. They supplied phrases, moreover, which were easily transposed and were useful for piecing out lines and couplets. The construction upon which Waller settles in the following passage is susceptible of indefinite extension:

'Tis all accomplisht by his Royal Word,
Without unsheathing the destructive Sword;
Without a Tax upon his Subjects laid,
Their Peace disturb'd, their Plenty or their Trade. (II.102.59-62)

He here anticipates Pope's capability of piling up partly autonomous phrases until he has series of couplets suspended in a kind of grammatical continuum.

More properly poetic than these idioms are uses of the participle which were inherently artificial, even in the inflectional languages. When Ovid writes "strike the shaken oaks"25 for "strike the oaks and shake them," he is in pursuit of a neater and more attractive locution. And when George Sandys, translating a passage of which a more literal rendering would be "struck the rock, and from the cleft a fountain broke,"26 writes "strake / The cleaving rock, from whence a fountaine brake," he is improving upon Ovid. Embracing this principle, Waller writes of "that shipwrackt vessel which the Apostle bore," (I.16.1) of a sword "which of the conquer'd world had made them Lord," (II.16.158) of fruit which "loads the bending boughs" (I.94.3) of a tree, and of
"calling descending Cynthia from her seat." (I.23-48) Such participles can combine with etymologically Latin words to give an air of spruce Latinity:

Romes conquering hand
More vanquish'd Nations under her command,
Never reduc'd. (I.35.11-13)

None of the devices named, however, or even all of them together, were sufficient to give his style the remoteness from common speech which he apparently desired. Contributing further to that end was a word order which rather consistently differed from that of prose and was usually more schematic.

In departing from a normal English word order, he was again responding, at least in part, to classical example. Perhaps under the influence of George Chapman, who "had failed, where he had not succeeded, by endeavouring to write English as Homer had written Greek," Waller converted the sentence, "Delighted with the sweet sound of this harmonious lay, dolphins play about the keel," into the couplet,

With the sweet sound of this harmonious lay
About the keel delighted Dolphins play. (I.2.33-34)

The sentence, "So, vexed with the news of Sacharissa's wrongs, her servants blame those envious tongues," he converted into

So with the news of Sacharissa's wrongs
Her vexed servants blame those envious tongues. (I.50.5-6)

And for "thy mind diverted with wonders," he wrote, "with wonders thy diverted mind." A more forcible example than Chapman's, perhaps, and
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certainly a more salutary one, was the neat and flexible patterning of the best Augustan Latin poetry, which exerted a general influence on English poets throughout the Renaissance and the neoclassical period. In the *Aeneid* fragment which Waller translated, one may single out a line like

> Fusaque in obscenum se vertere vina cruorem

> Flowing to foul: is turned: wine into blood.

Though an English poet can reproduce only a few such effects, their example will persuade him that he ought to arrange his own lines artificially and he will act upon that conviction in whatever way he finds possible.

A feature of Waller's verse which was favorably noticed in his lifetime was a kind of verbal repetition called the "turn of words," to which diversity of inflectional endings had invited. As in the following examples from Virgil, these are sometimes graces beyond the reach of the English poet's art:

> avi numerantur avorum

> grandsires of grandsires are numbered

> ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes.

> to pass forgotten indeed, if the shades knew how to forget.

Ovid's verbal schemes tend to be more obvious than Virgil's, often dwindling into mere prattle. His seventeenth-century translator George Sandys, who completed his labors at about the time Waller began to write, was sensitive to these and sought to reproduce them, as the subjoined instances show:

> extemplo cum voce deus, cum voce deoque

> somnus abit, somnique fugam lux alma secuta est.
He with the Voice, with him and Voice away
Sleep flew: fled Sleepe persuade by chearefull Day.

heu quantum scelus est in viscera viscera condi
congestoquete avidum pinguecere corpore corpus. 33

How horrible a Sin,
That entrailes bleeding entrailes should intomb!
That greedie flesh, by flesh should fat become!

The major English poet before Waller who had most success­fully employed such turns of words had been Spenser. Spenser had woven into his lines effects characteristic of Arcadian prose:

Withall she laughed, and she blusht withall,
That blushing to her laughter gaue more grace,
And laughter to her blushing, as did fall. 34

There is, finally, an organization of the poetic line, characteristic of Ovid, which involved the paralleling of two clauses with temporary suspension of the verb serving them both. To examples from Ovid, I again subjoin Sandys' translation:

in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescunt. 35
Haire into leaues, her Armes to branches grow.

nam caelo terras et terris abscidit undas. 36
Who Earth from Heaven, the Sea from Earth divides.

Spenser had so organized a few of his lines:

The fields my food, my flocke my rayment breed. 37

Fairfax had followed suit:

With virtue fury, strength with courage strove. 38
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Fairfax, whose influence on Waller was early and strong, had preserved Tasso’s artificial verbal arrangements when he could and had introduced much verbal and phrasal inversion of his own—sometimes for the sake of more even phrasing or for line periodicity and sometimes merely for convenience. Tasso writes, for example,

Svelte notor le Cicladi diresti  
per l’onde, e i monti co i gran monti urtarsi.39

Fairfax translates,

The Cyclades seem’d to swim amid the main,  
And hill ’gainst hill and mount ’gainst mountain smote.

Again, Tasso writes,

Qui con lo scettro e co ’l diadema in testa  
mesto sedeasi il re fra gente mesta.40

Fairfax translates,

Where crown’d with gold, and all in purple clad,  
Sate the sad king among his nobles sad.

He is clearly interested in conserving the schemata of the original and in containing verbal figures neatly within the line. But he also transposes many words and phrases out of carelessness or weariness alone. Waller’s early reading of Fairfax encouraged him to balance his lines as tidily as possible and increased his tolerance of miscellaneous inversions. He acquired from him in particular the habit of transposing verbs and verbals to the ends of lines.

Waller’s own schemes of balance are sometimes exact:

The ship their Coffin, and the sea their Grave. (II.25.50)

The pay of Armys and the pride of Courts. (II.25.68)
He occasionally gains variety by inverting both members of the line:

Lost were her pray'rs, and fruitless were her tears. (II.29.3)

To pardon willing, and to punish loath. (II.15.117)

He very often gains it by inverting one member:

Increast her terrour and her fall foretold. (II.30.30)

They bath in Summer, and in Winter slide. (II.40.24)

His somewhat elementary turns of words, which were once called "those beauties which gave the last perfection to his works," are usually accommodated within balanced lines:

Resolv'd to Conquer, or resolv'd to Die. (II.49.18)

They joy'd so justly, and so justly grieved. (I.34.24)

They are themselves sufficient to lend a schematic balance:

That scarce a Brother can his Brother know. (I.29.10)

In general, Waller's turns are like Fairfax's and Sandys'; they are less musical at least than Virgil's or Spenser's.

Lines in which he parallels two clauses and temporarily suspends the verb serving them both appear not infrequently, and, since they embody pervasive characteristics of his style, balance and periodicity, they seem more frequent than they are:

Their beauty they, and we our loves suspend. (I.34.31)

Makes Clouds above, and Billows fly below. (II.56.224)

Vertue with Rage, Fury with Valour strove.
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He consistently conserves the periodicity which this figure illustrates by transposing verbs and verbals to the ends of lines:

We have you now with ruling wisdom fraught,
Not such as Books, but such as Practice taught. (II.37.45-46)

One squadron of our winged Castles sent
O'r-threw their Fort, and all their Navy rent. (I.14.21-22)

As in old Chaos Heaven with Earth confus'd,
And Stars with rocks, together crush'd and bruis'd,
The Sun his light no further could extend
Than the next hill, which on his shoulders lean'd:
So in this throng bright Sacharissa far'd,
Oppress'd by those who strove to be her guard. (I.51.1-6)

The last lines, however, cannot be said to illustrate figures of words at all. And many of his verbal arrangements not only fail to conform to traditional rhetorical patterns but subserve no evident rhetorical principle. He separates syntactically parallel elements:

Justice to crave, and Succour at your Court. (II.11.30)

The spots return'd or graces of his mind. (I.30.14)

He forces refractory sentences into his metrical scheme by transpositions of every sort. The sentence, "The stem and the sap thus threatened in thee, all the branches of that noble tree droop," becomes

The stem thus threatned, and the sap in thee,
Droop all the branches of that noble Tree. (I.34.29-30)

The sentence, "Where shining pearl, coral, and many a pound of ambergris is found on the rich shore," becomes
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Where shining Pearl, Coral, and many a pound
On the rich shore, of Amber-greece is found. (I.66.9-10)

The sentence, “Had you run this race of glory some ages past, we should read your story with amazement,” becomes

Had you some Ages past, this Race of glory
Run, with amazement, we should read your story.

(II.16.145-46)

One rationale for such inversions will be noted in another chapter: many of them were instruments of metrical balance and line closure. A further rationale is equally good for all departures from a normal word order. When words fall elsewhere than in their accustomed place in the sentence, they resist easy subsumption into syntactical patterns and attract individual attention. Each one stands above the groundwork of its sentence; each seems a little neater and more consequential than it otherwise would. The diction in the line

Their beauty they, and we our loves suspend (I.34.31)

has been elevated above the same diction in the normally ordered sentence, “They suspend their beauty, and we our loves.” A factitious impressiveness rewards even such nearly desperate transpositions as

Where shining Pearl, Coral, and many a pound
On the rich shore, of Amber-greece is found.

The air at once of tidiness and circumstance which stylistic inversion lends to Waller’s language is one source of the “correctness” of which etymological precision is another source.

We have now come to the lowest common denominator of
poetic style: to a style concerning which we might merely say, reasoning like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, that it is not the style of prose and that there is only one other mode of discourse with which to identify it. But we can reason more respectably, with Coleridge, that no poem can be all poetry and that the poet needs some idiom which is in keeping with poetry to use in the meantime. During the late-Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, when much discursive and more or less journalistic poetry was being written—when poets wrote voluminously in the meantime, so to speak—the need for such an idiom was unusually pressing. Augustan poets were indebted to Waller precisely for having supplied them with a common denominator of style.

An influence of this sort is hard to assess, there being few instruments of demonstration general enough to suit the topic, yet specific enough to prove informative. Perhaps it will be appropriate merely to quote two characteristic Augustan couplets and point out that the means by which the style is elevated are those which Waller customarily employs.

Dryden begins his most celebrated character sketch with the couplet,

Of these the false Achitophel was first;  
A name to all succeeding ages curst.  

Pope begins an unusually firm pronouncement,

When Truth or Virtue an Affront endures,  
Th' Affront is mine, my Friend, and should be yours.  

These couplets are not flat and relaxed statements:

The false Achitophel was the first of these—  
A name which will be thought accursed in future times.
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When Truth or Virtue is insulted,
The insult is mine, my friend, and ought to be yours.

Though we should hesitate to call them intrinsically poetic, the locutions “to all succeeding ages” and “an affront endures” are clearly more acceptable than the alternative possibilities. The element of ceremony in the language supports the assurance, the magisterial quality, of the judgments rendered.

Augustan critics justly identified such a command of style with the abilities fitting a man to converse in a polished society. They also, and quite as justly, identified it with the correctness which Edmund Waller had imparted to English poetry when “his happy genius refined our tongue.” 46 For the rather pedestrian poet whose sense of the polite recommended to him the periphrases “employ our hope” and “admit increase of glory,” and whose instinct for tidiness told him that

We have you now with ruling wisdom fraught

offered at least the appearance of definitive phrasing, was calling into being the poise we admire in later masters of Augustan poetry.
LIKE MOST POETS whose careers began during the Jacobean period, Waller was conscious of witty and "conceited" precedents and often emulous of them. He had, nevertheless, no constant grasp on the traditional uses of conceit. And he anticipated poets of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century in that he was careful to display judgment as well as wit: he was as sensitive to differences as to resemblances between things apparently unlike.

"A simile, to be perfect," wrote Dr. Johnson, summarizing the traditional uses of that poetic instrument, "must both illustrate and ennoble the subject; must shew it to the understanding in a clearer view, and display it to the fancy with greater dignity: but either of these qualities may be sufficient to recommend it. In didactick poetry, of which the great purpose is instruction, a simile may be praised which illustrates, though it does not ennoble; in heroicks, that may be admitted which ennobles, though it does not illustrate."
In the tradition to which Waller explicitly appealed and from which he could hardly have freed himself if he had sought to, the two purposes were as one. Horace had said that "the poet tells of noble deeds and teaches each generation, as it rises, by means of famed examples." Waller paraphrased this commonplace,

Praise of great Acts, he scatters as a seed  
Which may the like, in coming Ages breed. (II.87.35-36)

And the similes and metaphors in his own somewhat curious hybrids of panegyric and poetic journalism represent a coalescence of heroic aims with didactic. They supply complimentary associations if not precisely nobility. At the same time, like most poetic images of the time, they reveal at least the formal influence of the didactic analogy.

Of associations primarily honorific, he is unusually lavish. In one characteristic passage, he supplies three of them in twelve lines. He describes a masked entertainment at which Prince Charles, then meditating a match with the Spanish Infanta, had observed Henrietta, his future queen:

Should he confess his greatness, and his love,  
And the free faith of your great brother prove,  
With his Achates breaking through the cloud  
Of that disguise which did their graces shroud,  
And mixing with those gallants at the ball,  
Dance with the Ladies and out-shine them all,  
Or on his journey o're the mountaines ride;  
So when the fair Leucothe he espy'd  
To check his steeds, impatient Phabus earn'd  
Though all the world was in his course concern'd.  
What may hereafter her Meridian do,  
Whose dawning beauty warm'd his bosome so?  
Not so divine a flame, since deathless gods
Forbore to visit the defil'd abodes  
Of men, in any mortal breast did burn,  
Nor shall till Piety and they return. (1.9.47-62)

The first of these associations he takes from the *Aeneid*:

The mists which had shrouded Aeneas and Achates parted, and Aeneas shone forth in the clear light, godlike in face and shoulders. For his mother had shed on him the ruddy glow of youth and filled his eyes with joyful radiance.3

The second he takes from the *Metamorphoses*:

You, son of Hyperion, who warm all lands with your fires, are now yourself enflamed with a new fire, and fix on Leucothoë alone the gaze which you owe to the universal earth.4

The third he probably takes from Ovid’s *Fasti*:

In the Age of Saturn, the earth was receptive to divinity, and gods frequented the abodes of men. Human sin had not yet put Astraea and her fellow-deities to flight.5

Waller’s purpose is to cast an approving light on Charles and Henrietta. At the same time, he finds Charles resembling Aeneas in that he emerges, or might emerge, from concealment with a single companion. He finds him resembling Apollo in that he interrupts a prescribed journey to gaze upon a beautiful woman. He finds him resembling the mortals of the Golden Age in that he tends the flame of a present divinity. These are exact similitudes. They verge, even, upon being poetic conceits.
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And when, to supply some of the appeal here lent by literary allusion, he amplifies his images further, he renders them even more detailed and explicit. In both respects he makes them more like Elizabethan models:

The Lark that shuns on lofty boughs to build
Her humble Nest, lies silent in the Field;
But if the promise of a cloudless day,
Aurora smiling, bids her rise and play,
Then straight she shews, 'twas not for want of voice,
Or power to climb, she made so low a choice:
Singing she mounts, her airy wings are stretcht
Towards heaven, as if from heaven her note she fetcht.

So we, retiring from the busie throng,
Use to restrain th' ambition of our song;
But since the light which now informs our age
Breaks from the court indulgent to her rage,
Thither my Muse, like bold Prometheus, flyes
To light her torch at Gloriana's eyes. (1.77.1-14)

He addresses a letter to Sacharissa's maid-in-waiting:

Fair Fellow-Servant, may your gentle Ear
Prove more propitious to my slighted care,
Than the bright Dames we serve, for her relief
(Vext with the long expressions of my grief)
Receive these plaints, nor will her high disdain
Forbid my humble Muse to court her Train:

So in those Nations which the Sun adore,
Some modest Persian, or some weak-ey'd More,
No higher dares advance his dazled sight
Than to some gilded cloud, which neer the light
Of their ascending God adorns the East,
And graced with his beams out-shines the rest. (1.55.1-12)

These images derive both form and content from Elizabethan sources. The simile of the lark, a self-contained
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unit of fourteen lines suggesting the structure of the Italian sonnet, perhaps recalls Shakespeare's

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the Lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at Heaven's gate.⁶

The image of the sun-worshiper recalls a simile in Sidney's Arcadia in both content and tone-color:

But even as the Persians were auncyently wonte to Leave no Rysing Sunne unsaluted, (But as his fayre) Beames appeared Cleared unto them woulde the more hartely Rejoyse) laying uppon them a greate fore­token of theyre followinge fortunes: So was there no tyme that Cleophila encountered theyre eyes with her beloved presence, but that yt bredd a kynde of burn­ing Devotyon in them. . . .⁷

Waller was typical of his time in identifying poetic simile and metaphor with detailed analogy. He was conservative in that he reproduced Elizabethan diffusion.

Looking forward rather than back, we seem to notice in his mind a correspondence-seeking faculty which is un­mindful either of ennoblement or of instruction. He not infrequently reveals, and in advance of its description in the epistemology of the Restoration, a partly autonomous wit or fancy which “puts quickly together ideas wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity.”⁸ Sir William Temple praised such a wit as a “true Poetical Fire discovering a thousand little Bodies or Images in the World, and Simil­itudes among them, unseen to common Eyes”⁹—though if it really busies itself with similitudes among a thousand little images, it must be at once hyperactive and trivial.

Some sense that the wit is idly disporting itself is always
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present when simile is recorded as afterthought. Waller so records mythological allusion in particular:

The French and Spaniard when thy flags appear
Forget their Hatred, and consent to Fear.
So Jove from Ida did both hoasts survey,
And when he pleas’d to thunder part the fray. (I.15.3-6)

Lately I saw her sighing, part from thee
(Alas that that the last farewell should be!)
So lookt Astrea, her remove design’d,
On those distressed friends she left behinde. (I.39.67-70)

Princes, that saw You, different passions prove,
For now they dread the Object of their love;
Nor without envy can behold His height,
Whose Conversation was their late delight.
So Semele contented with the rape
Of Jove, disguised in a mortal shape,
When she beheld his eyes with lightning fill’d,
And his bright rayes, was with amazement kill’d.

(II.36.29-36)

Similes so appended have an unintentionally studied and formal quality. If they are incongruous in matter as in the last example, they have an air of solemn fatuousness which was to commend them to poets of the following age as a mock-heroic device.¹⁰

Other formal characteristics of his similes sometimes mark them as rather idly ornamental. He can insist too explicitly on correspondences between the terms, as in the following image of quelling a storm:

Above the Waves as Neptune shew’d his Face,
To chide the Winds, and save the Trojan Race;
So has your Highness rais’d above the rest
Storms of Ambition tossing us represst. (II.10.9-12)
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He can ring partly idle changes on the same metaphoric theme, as in these further images of storms:

Born in the storms of war, this royal fayr,
Produc'd like lightning in tempestuous ayr,
Though now she flyes her native Isle, less kind,
Less safe for her, than either Sea or Wind,
Shall, when the blossom of her Beauty's blown,
See her great Brother on the British Throne. (II.7.41-46)

Many of the correspondences to which he calls attention, however, appear idle not because of the manner of their record, but because of their intrinsic properties. He is sometimes on the verge of losing the distinction between informative analogies and those which irrelevant association suggests. Celebrating the repair of St. Paul’s Church, he laments that the vessel bearing St. Paul to Rome had scarcely suffered more in the sea off Malta than the cathedral commemorating St. Paul in London had suffered in the sea of time. Of the outbuildings removed from that structure he observes that

[These] the glad Saint shakes off at his command,
As once the Viper from his sacred hand. (I.17.23-24)

When the Lord Admiral's wife dies, he finds that

To this great loss a Sea of Tears is due. (I.31.1)

The blood of a naval commander is not only as ancient as the sea, but possesses the same liquid consistency:

There YORK appears, so prodigal is he
Of Royal Blood, as ancient as the Sea,
Which down to Him, so many Ages told,
Has through the Veins of Mighty Monarchs roll'd.

(II.52.123-26)
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Sailors drowned in the same engagement are

Sent from their own to pass in Charon's Boat. (II.57.258)

In such instances, Waller appears to assume that any perception of correspondences possesses poetic value.

Equally idle wit, it is true, had flourished in the literature of the preceding age. But though there is sportive exercise with frankly idle correspondences in even the best Elizabethan poetry, there is not there a final loss of distinction between these and meaningful ones. There then existed a class of correspondence in which the poet reposed absolute confidence, for it had a metaphysical sanction as well as a psychological: it constituted a record of "the same footsteps of nature treading or printing on different subjects and matters." There was another class of correspondence which the poet could, by a mental exercise congenial to himself and the reader, invent and play with. When correspondences of the latter class laid claim to seriousness they became absurd; on this ground the Euphuistic simile exposed itself to derision. Rightly used, they sustained "sugared conceits" and engagingly ingenious quibbles.

John Donne, the most conspicuously witty poet writing at the turn of the century, still distinguished between the two classes of correspondence and was able to use them both. He was also able to control, though not unerringly, a form of metaphoric expression half-serious and half-playful. But with the rise of that temper of which Locke was the philosophic spokesman, these capacities were gradually lost. Preoccupying itself first with modes of mental apprehension and only thereafter with the nature of the thing apprehended, the new temper tended to view all correspondences as associations within the mind. It mistrusted poetic conceits in particular because their matter was often drawn
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from classical myths or from other confessedly fictitious sources. A still more damning circumstance, though one less explicitly remarked on, was that the techniques entering into the conceit were a survival from the gothic past—a period during which analogical reasoning unchecked by any spirit of criticism had contributed much to human error. For these reasons, both general and specific, poets during the second and third quarters of the century repose increasingly less confidence in the power of the wit to apprehend an objective truth and of the conceit to express such truth. The later disciples of Donne, of whom Abraham Cowley was the type, give the impression of remembering that poets should be witty but of having forgotten why. Neither truly playful nor in proper earnest, they devoted themselves to recording as many correspondences as they could, of whatever kind or relevance. It is in this spirit that Waller idly multiplies instances of his wit.

The time having come when true wit could not be distinguished from false, however, all wit had either to fall into disuse or to suffer change. For the poet must always find matter in which he believes and techniques answering to confident exercises of his mind.

He could protect himself in some measure by the manner in which he recorded his analogies. Many of Waller’s similes are expressed as broad comparisons, often in respect of some general quality, and call formal attention not to a point of similarity but to the absence of any great degree of difference. A well placed litotes can lend a soberly considerate air to an analogy which is rationally or rationalistically suspect:

The Graces put not more exactly on
Th’ attire of Venus, when the ball she won,
Than that young Beauty by thy care is dress’d. (l.55.17-19)
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Even the plants acknowledge Sacharissa’s civilizing influence and

her admire,
No less than those of old did Orpheus Lire. (1.46.11-12)

When the Earl of Carlisle escorts Henrietta to England to meet her affianced, the ladies of her train are

No less amaz’d than the amazed starrs,
When the bold Charmer of Thessalia wars
With heaven it self, and numbers does repeat,
Which call descending Cynthia from her Seat. (1.23.45-48)

He is often explicitly solicitous of the factual truth of his images. Dr. Johnson singled out, as a judicious use of mythological allusion, a passage beginning

'Twas want of such a president as this
Made the old heathen frame their gods amiss. 13

He similarly introduces other allusions,

Great Maro could no greater tempest feign (I.4.85)

Bold Homer durst not so great virtue feign
In his best pattern. . . . (I.11.9-10)

He interpolates parenthetical hedges:

The Thracian could (though all those tales were true
The bold Greeks tell) no greater wonders do. (I.26.11-12)

His images are sometimes explicitly suppositional:

Rather since we beheld her not decay,
But that she vanish’d so entire away.
Her wondrous beauty and her goodness merit,
We should suppose that some propitious spirit,
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In that celestial form frequented here,
And is not dead, but ceases to appear. (I.40.83-88)

He resorts to the conditional mood, as in his "very noble" lines on King Charles’s navy:

Should Natures self invade the world again,
And o’re the Center spread the liquid main,
Thy power were safe, and her destructive hand
Would but enlarge the bounds of thy command;
Thy dreadfull fleet would stile thee Lord of all,
And ride in triumph o’re the drowned ball.¹⁴

Still more congenial to the literal mind are his exempla from Greek and Roman history and from Scripture:

Like young Augustus let His Image be,
Triumphing for that Victory at Sea,
Where Ægypts Queen, and Eastern Kings o’rethrown,
Made the Possession of the World His own. (II.59.301-04)

Your private Life did a just pattern give
How Fathers, Husbands, pious Sons, should live,
Born to command, your Princely vertues slept
Like humble David’s, while the Flock he kept. (II.15.133-36)

Feeding upon such solid matter, the faculty which perceives similarities loses its purely fanciful character, and “the Judgment, the severer sister, which gravely registers the differences in things,”¹⁵ comes into simultaneous play:

For a less Prize, with less Concern and Rage,
The Roman fleets at Actium did Engage;
They for the Empire of the World they knew,
These for the Old, Contend, and for the New. (II.52.113-16)

He that with thine shall weigh good Davids deeds,
Shall find his passion, not his love exceeds;
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He curst the mountains where his brave friend dy'd,
But let false Ziba with his heir divide:
Where thy immortal love to thy best Friends,
Like that of heaven upon their seed descends. (I.12.27-32)

In such images the poetic fancy has come wholly to terms with the rationalistic temper. Wit and judgment are together subsumed into a mode of “thought” which the poet can share with men of sense generally.

Such “thought” informs at least some part of almost all of Waller’s poems. Brought to bear on natural phenomena, it supplies observations such as he might have presented to the Royal Society:

Ripe fruits and blossoms on the same Trees live,
At once they promise what at once they give.16

Strange! that extremes should thus preserve the snow,
High on the Alps, or in deep Caves below. (II.42.55-56)

Its most accustomed use is in ethical commentary:

Two distant Virtues in one act we find
The Modesty, and Greatness of his mind. (I.17.29-30)

While to Your Self severe, to others kind,
With power unbounded, and a will confin’d,
Of this vast Empire you possess the care,
The softer part falls to the Peoples share. (II.39.103-06)

There dwelt the scorn of vice, and pity too,
For those who did what she disdain’d to do:
So gentle and severe, that what was bad
At once her hatred and her pardon had. (I.38.35-38)

It can subsume analogy and even conceit:
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As Egypt does not on the Clouds rely
But to her Nyle owes more, than to the Sky,
So what our Earth, and what our Heaven denies,
Our ever constant Friend, the Sea, supplies;

To digg for Wealth we weary not our Limbs,
Gold, though the heavy'st Metall, hither swims;
Ours is the Harvest where the Indians mowe,
We plough the Deep, and reap what others Sowe.

(II.12.53-56,61-64)

It [Westminster Abbey] gives them Crowns, and does their ashes keep;
There made like gods, like mortals there they sleep
Making the circle of their reign compleat,
Those suns of Empire, where they rise they set. (II.43.93-96)

When it is not conceited, it can retain an air of wit by resorting to paradox:

Such guard and comfort the distressed find
From her large power, and from her larger minde,
That whom ill fate would ruine, it prefers,
For all the miserable are made hers. (I.78.45-48)

Preferr'd by Conquest, happily o'rethrowne,
Falling they rise, to be with us made one. (II.14.93-94)

Within the compass of Waller's work, I conclude, we observe the metamorphosis of the Jacobean wit into the neoclassical. And it has seemed appropriate to describe this transformation in the light of a distinction which neoclassical critics themselves drew. The neoclassical wit is like the Jacobean in that it continues to perceive arresting relationships between things apparently unlike, distinguished from it in that it is as sensitive to differences as to similarities.
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An ideal synthesis of wit and judgment, which Waller helped to make possible though without himself fully attaining it, is clearly visible in the couplet at the height of its development. We are accustomed to notice that the heroic couplet is antithetical and that the poet's attention to logical opposites answers to his habit of drawing distinctions. But into it there also enters the perception of likenesses between seemingly disparate things; a strain of paradox and conceit testifies to the survival, in a new combination, of Elizabethan and Jacobean habits of mind.

We may consider the couplet from the Essay on Man,

The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore  
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar. 17

When Pope observes that there are opposite sources of error, "creeping" and "soaring," he is exercising his judgment. But when he observes that the effects arising from these causes, "blindness" and "sightlessness," are virtually identical, he gives his couplet both the air and the substance of wit. A somewhat subtler association of the two faculties is visible in a line from the "Epistle to a Lady" describing the course of life of infatuated women,

A Fop their Passion, but their Prize a Sot. 18

The rhetoric of the line, which opposes a ridiculous and sportive man to a ridiculous and sullen, is formally antithetical. But the antithesis is bridged by the reminder that these women are drawn equally to folly in all their turnings. Finally, in the line from the Dunciad,

Nor human Spark is left, nor Glimpse divine! 19

the antithesis between "human" and "divine" melts wholly, and perhaps even without sufficient resistance, when we per-
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cieve that the sense of a God outside ourselves is at one with that interior image of the deity which identifies us as man. Pope perhaps remembers Milton’s close conjunction,

but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of Ev’n or Morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine.20

The element of wit in this poetry supplies a context of similarities within which alone differences become meaningful; the lines would otherwise flatten into mechanical contrasts. It expresses in essence an awareness of unity inter-fused with diversity—a metaphysical confidence tempered by an access of the critical spirit.

It remains to notice that oppositions of this kind sustain not only the sense of neoclassical discursive poetry but its rhythms. They form the accustomed meter-making argument of the couplet. And to the meter which they characteristically made let us now turn.
Augustan poets attributed an inevitable rightness to the pentameter couplet as they themselves wrote it. They were confident that the reforms initiated by Edmund Waller had brought English prosody at once to its highest pitch of refinement and into a final accord with Nature. And they believed that these reforms had introduced a genuine novelty: that no proper harmonies had existed in English poetry before Waller began to essay.

These beliefs were all based on facts, though less securely than was then supposed. Poets of the neoclassical period were careful of the major verse conventions, meter and rhyme. And they simultaneously reduced the arbitrary quality of these conventions by wedding them to some free and natural schemes of balance, restoring to the couplet line some of the characteristics of a native prosody.

To begin at the beginning, both logically and historically, we may observe that the poetic line containing a fixed number of syllables was first introduced into England from the
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Continent, and that it answers to phonetic properties of the Romance languages rather than to those of English. For, in so far as the Romance languages are collectively distinguishable from English, they tend toward uniformity of syllabication. I remember in particular a sentence uttered by a Latin American who had grown fluent in the vocabulary and idiom of English but was guileless of English sentence-phonetics:

I-told-him-that-in-that-e-vent-he-should-go.

In his speech all syllables were created equal, so to speak. An appropriately calibrated metronome would have counted them one by one. It was easy to see that in his native tongue a fixed number of syllables would form a constant enough phonetic unit to serve as a line of verse without the addition of any other feature of regularity.

In English, of course, no such democracy prevails among syllables. For English syllables are distinguished from one another by varying degrees of stress, and they fall not singly but in groups or phrases.

There are three degrees of positive stress in English as well as wholly unstressed syllables, a fact which linguists are wont to illustrate by an analysis of polysyllabic compound nouns. When, to take a prosaic example, we speak of "leather manufacture," we place a primary stress on the word "leather" because we are distinguishing leather manufacture from, for instance, woolen manufacture, and we further acknowledge a greater and a lesser stress within the word "manufacture"—which is to say that we variously distribute primary, secondary, and tertiary stresses:

Leather manufacture
Furthermore, the syllables of an English sentence fall not singly but in phrases, these being set apart by configurations of pitch, by a single predominant stress in each, and—a fact of great significance to prosody—by partial conformity to a standard time interval. In the illustrative sentence,

I told him / that in that event / he should go,

we feel a certain compulsion to conform the five-syllable phrase "that in that event" to the norm established by the phrase "I told him." We remain under the same compulsion if the five syllables are increased to six, seven, eight, or any number, so long as these still constitute a single phrase ("I told him / that under the circumstances / he should go"). And we are moved to accommodate very brief phrases, including even monosyllables, to the same norm ("I told him / that in this / hot, / damp / weather, / he should go slowly"). A metronome keeping pace with an English sentence tends to count not syllables but phrases.

These things being so, we should expect the principle of phonetic regularity in English poetry to inhere in patterns of accentuation and phrasing rather than in a constant number of syllables per line. And such is, in fact, the order we find in an indigenous prosody. The following lines from the prologue to *Piers Plowman* are representative:

Ermytes on an hep / with hokide staves  
Wenten to Walsyngham, / and here wenchis aftir.  
Grete lobies and longe, / that loth were to swynke,  
Clothide hem in copis / to be knowen from othere;  
Shopen hem ermytes / here ese to have.¹

A pair of primary stresses in each half-line are here thrust into prominence, with alliteration emphasizing one or both of the stresses in the first half-line and one in the second.
And, since each stress is normally the predominant stress in its phrase, the metrical progression is usually identical with a natural phrasal progression.

A similar prosody remains current today chiefly in nursery-rhymes and aphoristic jingles, though in such verses end-rhyme is usually an auxiliary feature, and conventional metrical feet are often in counterpoint with the stresses falling two by two. The following are familiar and fairly representative examples:

There was an old woman / who lived in a shoe.
She had so many children / she didn’t know what to do.
She gave them some broth / without any bread
And whipt them all soundly / and put them to bed.

Friday’s child / is loving and giving,
Saturday’s child / works hard for a living,
But the child that is born / on the Sabbath day
Is blithe and bonny / and good and gay.

The tendency of modern editors is to regularize the metrical feet in such jingles, for we are never taught how fully a rather free pattern of accentual and phrasal balance will satisfy the English ear.

The prosody which we have been schooled to hear originated with the introduction of the syllabic line into English poetry. And its subsequent history saw the foreign principle of syllable-counting sometimes displacing the conventions of the old alliterative measure and sometimes marrying with them. It is chiefly the marriages which concern the historian of the heroic couplet, for these anticipate and partly explain the synthesis of verse conventions which characterizes that form.

A partial accommodation of a syllabic prosody to the English language came early. For when Chaucer began to imi-
tate the verse forms of French poetry, he incorporated the English phoneme of stress into eight- and ten-syllable lines and thereby "invented" four- and five-foot English iambics. And this achievement, so definitive in its way, must be seen in proper perspective or we can account neither for later experiments with other formulas nor for the eventual disposition of couplet writers to restore an accentual and phrasal balance to the rhymed pentameter line.

An iambic meter is the least unnatural of those English meters requiring a fixed number of syllables per foot. We hear it as a sort of groundwork in much English speech. Yet the only concession which it makes, of itself, to the English language is that it acknowledges some syllables to be stressed and others not. It is hence deficient, or susceptible of admitting deficiency, in two particulars.

First, it fails to acknowledge differences between the degrees of stress, though these are often as clearly heard as the simple opposition between stressed syllables and unstressed. There are certain jigging cadences, for example, in which the alternation of greater and lesser stresses keeps a technically regular iambic meter from being heard as iambic at all:

\[ \text{\textmd{There was a man of Thessally, and he was wondrous wise.}} \]

Secondly, an iambic meter fails to acknowledge English habits of phrasing. The unit upon which we naturally impose uniformity is neither the syllable nor the metrical foot of a fixed number of syllables but the phrase of from one syllable to four or more. Alliterative and nursery-rhyme verse, Coleridge's "Christabel" and Gerard Manley Hopkins' poems in "sprung rhythm" are all more faithful to English habits of phrasing than are regularly iambic poems.
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An iambic meter being actually or potentially deficient in these regards, when rapid language change had obliterated Chaucer's example and poets introduced the decasyllabic lines from the Continent a second time, they did not immediately reproduce Chaucer's achievement. There was instead a period of moil during which a number of different verse conventions were in competition.

The development which most clearly anticipates the neoclassical couplet line may be indicated by three lines written in the 1530's, the 1560's, and the 1590's respectively and hence representing in a general way the three generations of poets in the Sixteenth Century. If, by a convenient fiction, we regard the eventuality as consciously sought, we may say that these poets worked to tighten their grasp on an iambic meter while supplying its deficiencies from the repository of older conventions. The first line is from John Heywood's Epigrams:

Most of our sauours are more sowre than sweete.²

This is heard primarily as an alliterative line. It nevertheless adumbrates an iambic line with an inverted first foot and a pyrrhic medial foot:

Most of our saúours are more sówre than swéete.

More satisfactory syntheses of the old conventions and the new are found in Sackville's induction to A Mirror for Magistrates, in which we come upon lines like,

The flyckering flame that with the fyer is wrought.³

Though this line retains all characteristics of an alliterative measure, an iambic meter is now clearly heard. A final
synthesis appears in a line from the prologue to Book V of *The Faerie Queene*:

Pardon the boldnesse of thy basest thrall.4

It would no doubt have pleased Spenser to know that he here seems to levy an equal tribute upon Chaucer and Lang­land. The iambic principle is grasped with perfect firm­ness. Yet the alternate stresses and metrical progression of the iambic line are in counterpoint with the accentual bal­ance and phrasal progression of the alliterative line. Spenser has woven into a single harmony the several conventions with which Tudor poets had experimented. He has thereby attained to a prosody which is at once musical and natural.

If it is not an impertinence to speak of further “reforms” of English prosody after Spenser, we may now turn to Edmund Waller. For it was chiefly he who transmitted to neoclassical couplet writers the late-Elizabethan synthesis of old conventions and new. Though there are more various and more interesting cadences than his in the best couplets of his predecessors, in no previous couplet verse is an ac­centual and phrasal balance at once so uniformly sustained and in such precise equipoise with an iambic meter.

These are the first lines Waller wrote, or among the first:

Now had his Highness bid farewell to Spain,
And reacht the sphere of his own power, the main,
With British bounty in his ship he feasts
Th’ Hesperian Princes, his amazed guests
To finde that watry wilderness exceed
The entertainment of their great Madrid.
Healths to both Kings, attended with the rore
Of Cannons echo’d from th’ affrighted shore,
With loud resemblance of his thunder prove
Bacchus the seed of cloud compelling Jove;
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While to his harp divine, Arion sings
The loves and conquests of our Albion Kings. (I.1.1-12)

I would call attention to lines like

With British bounty / in his ship he feasts
Th' Hesperian Princes, / his amazed guests.
The entertainment / of their great Madrid.
The loves and conquests / of our Albion Kings.

And, perhaps more significantly, this pattern takes on a kind of independent life, remaining as a secondary thrum in lines which are only imperfectly accommodated to it:

Of Cannons echo'd / from th' affrighted shore,
With loud resemblance / of his thunder prove.

In such lines, the iambic principle is sometimes preserved by a light stress in the medial foot; sometimes it seems recorded in the mind rather than in the ear. In either event, it is altogether secure. Yet one hears with equal clarity the predominant stresses falling two by two. And the phrasing is perfectly balanced, perfectly accommodated to the fall of the stresses.

It remains to add that rhyme, the convention which I have hitherto neglected, is at once subsumed into this scheme and given a new prominence by it. Rhyme-words receive the last of the four predominant stresses as well as the stress which is due to their position in the iambic line. And, participating so in both accentual systems, they set as it were a final seal on the union between the two. All of the verse conventions are clearly heard; all are in harmony with one another. The potential deficiencies of an iambic meter are fully supplied.
Toward an Augustan Poetic

I impute no magic to this single formula. The writer of couplets must still grasp the general principle upon which it is based, variously and flexibly accommodating his lines to the character of the English language. In practice, nevertheless, he may either attend to the principle as a whole or lay hold of a single embodiment of it, a single norm, upon which he then plays variations. In so far as the writers of neoclassical couplets are collectively distinguishable from (for example) Marlowe before them and Keats after, they tended precisely to choose the latter expedient. And it was Edmund Waller who first clearly envisaged that expedient as a means of obviating barbarities and giving smoothness to English prosody. When he concluded as a young man that English verse wanted smoothness and that he might be able to supply that lack, one of his motives to composition must have been the thrum of the perfectly balanced line in his ear.

Such, at least in part, is the justification for the Augustan belief that Waller reformed our numbers. "Before his time men rhymed indeed, and that was all," said his 1690 editor, Bishop Atterbury; "as for the harmony of measure, and that dance of words which good ears are so much pleased with, they knew nothing of it." Though the bishop's knowledge of an earlier English poetry was no doubt limited, his ear was not false. Waller so orders his phrases that his measure is indeed harmonious, and he so orders his predominant stresses that the words dance to a new—or old-new—rhythm. And if before his time men did not merely rhyme indeed, or merely keep accent, neither did they, to the same degree, apprehend a formula for incorporating a further principle of regularity into the pentameter couplet.

Perhaps it may now stand as demonstrated that poetic lines of a fixed number of syllables are of foreign origin;
that an iambic meter does not of itself fully accommodate them to the English language; that one means of domestici­cating the decasyllabic line in particular was to marry an iambic meter to the accentual and phrasal balance which had characterized a purely native poetry; and that Edmund Waller adapted such a phrasing to the prosody of the couplet. In view of these facts, his successors had a rational basis for assuming that he had resolved the uncertainties of Elizabethan and Jacobean prosody, and that he had re­solved them according to more or less inevitable principles.

In the course of transition, one may note that it was his pursuit of a regular cadence which led him to close most of his metrical units—not, apparently, the other way around. For he settled immediately upon balance as a metrical principle but only later abandoned the run-on couplet alto­gether. In his earliest poem, he ran on about one first-line out of four and one couplet out of ten. Some twelve years after (1638), when he appears to have been under Thomas Carew's influence, he was capable of running on more than one first-line in three and nearly one couplet in three. But he still brought enough couplets to definitive periods to affirm the authority of the form. And when he began to write again in about 1650 after his ill-fated excursion into politics, he ended his first lines with commas and his couplets with periods to the point of virtual monotony. He pro­claimed, in sum, a general peace or amnesty between his matter and his meter; and in the end this amnesty came absolutely to entail grammatical accommodation.

To speak of amnesty suggests only the negative circum­stance that the matter does not militate against the prosody. And something positive should be affirmed concerning the manner in which his lines bore their conceptual freight. According to some hard sayings in the Soames-Dryden "Art
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of Poetry,” he imparted “just weight” as well as “just measure” to verse, and was the first English poet to “teach the force of a well-placed word.”

Dryden meant, I believe, that, in the course of proclaiming a necessary peace between the matter and the meter, Waller helped devise a metrical instrument for thrusting the matter to the fore. If his strongest poem is given as emphatic a reading as it will reasonably permit, it begins:

While with a strong, / and yet a gentle Hand
You bridle Faction, / and our Hearts command;
Protect us / from our Selves, / and from the Foe;
Make us Unite, / and make us Conquer too. (II.10.1-4)

The thought in these lines inheres with remarkable consistency in the words receiving the principal thrust of the metric. Cromwell is politically strong, yet exercises his power gently; he is able at once to bridle faction and to command men’s hearts. The first line represents the mode of emphasis at its simplest, the second represents it in ideal conjunction with metrical and phrasal balance. Although Waller sometimes varies this basic design and sometimes intermits it, he clearly seeks not only to wed his matter to his prosody but, through the formulary character of that union, to give a regular prominence to significant words.

Dryden himself brought this made of emphasis to virtual perfection, his prosody at its best bearing upon his language exactly as the sense requires. One of his favorite and most characteristic couplets describes the Duke of Buckingham, who, being

Stiff in opinions, / always in the wrong;
Was everything by starts, / and nothing long.
These predications are borne out by the iambic meter, the pattern of predominant stresses falling two by two, and the couplet rhyme. When the concluding words, "and nothing long," fulfill all our metrical expectations as well as the concurrent logical and rhetorical expectations, we are left with little disposition to argue. The force of well-placed words is such that we freely confess Buckingham to be as he is here described.

Whether Dryden would have gained so perfect a command of his medium without benefit of Waller's example, we cannot positively know. The clang of his rhyme, in particular, associates him rather with John Denham. There is still, however, a ring of plausibility in his late (1691) tribute to his suave and genial predecessor, "Unless he had written, none of us could write." Relating this tribute to his concrete praise in the "Art of Poetry" and to his own mature practice, we may reasonably suppose that he learned something from Waller about the thrust of couplet prosody upon couplet content.

The smooth prosody for which Waller was celebrated, then, served the interest of a new and characteristically Augustan vigor of expression. He foreshadowed and in some measure made possible an easy vigor in which strength and sweetness joined. Yet even when he attains the synthesis described, we may have the sense that a not very urgent cadence is advancing the cause of a not very compelling thought. And it was commonly agreed that he attained to a sweetness not only not conjoined with strength but in some manner opposed to it. I want now to consider these qualities both analytically and genetically, inquiring wherein they were in fact opposed and what was meant when Waller was described as predominantly sweet.

When he first began to write, he was reacting against
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the "strong lines" of John Donne and Ben Jonson. These were couplet verses, chiefly, in which the matter was so highly condensed and was, or was held to be, of such compelling importance as to license or even demand a rough metric. Thomas Carew had justified Donne's roughness, for example, by saying that the flights of his "giant fancy" were too vigorous to be contained in the "soft melting phrases" of classical or neoclassical poetry.13

The theory of the strong line was an invitation to license. Donne, when he chose, could write as licentiously as this:

Being among
Those Askaparts, men big enough to throw
Charing Crosse for a barre, men that doe know
No token of worth, but Queenes man, and fine
Living, barrells of beefe, flaggons of wine;
I shooke like a spyed Spie.14

Though a tension between spoken cadences and metrical tells us that Donne could hear an iambic meter, the most straightforward defense of his total practice is that the modulations of the dramatic voice are interesting enough to sustain his lines even apart from formal metrical considerations. Otherwise we must at least occasionally agree with Ben Jonson "that John Donne for not keeping of accent deserved hanging."15

It is nevertheless of secondary importance that "strong" poets sometimes failed to observe the standard verse conventions very strictly. A condensed or difficult matter plainly expressed can so fully engage the reader's attention that he is hardly at leisure to listen for a formal prosody even when accent is kept.

An example of a poem which is metrically rough in places even though it is careful of verse conventions is an epigram
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of Jonson’s to King James, written at some time after the Gunpowder Plot. In this epigram, James is said to rule less by exercising his royal authority than by exemplifying the attractive power of the Good:

Who would not be thy subject, James, t’ obay
A Prince, that rules by’ example, more than sway?
Whose manners draw, more than thy powers constrain.
And in this short time of thy happiest reign,
Hast purg’d thy realms, as we have now no cause
Left us of fear, but first our crimes, then laws.
Like ayes ’gainst treasons who hath found before?
And than in them, how could we know God more?
First thou preserued wert, our king to bee,
And since, the whole land was preseru’d for thee.16

Jonson so wrestles with his matter and uses such plain, spare English that he becomes crabbed. When he says that we have no cause “left us of fear, but first our crimes, then laws,” for example, or when he asks, “Than in them, how could we know God more?” the lines fail to move at a pace sustaining an iambic rhythm.17

Confronted with such phenomena, we must refer the concept of strength not to a licentious prosody alone but to the whole complex of relationships between a poet’s meter and his matter. Jacobean strong lines are not necessarily technically inexact lines. They are lines in which the thought demands a primary attention and the prosody a secondary; in which spoken cadences are heard to the exclusion of metrical; in which, finally, sense is dominant and sound recessive.

The tradition opposed to the Jacobean “strong” tradition was also antecedent to it. The chief exemplar of “sweetness” for his own generation and the generation following was the Elizabethan Edmund Spenser. When Spenser, like Jonson, celebrated his monarch’s administration of
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justice, he wrote not in close and laborious couplets but in a leisurely and harmonious stanza:

Dread Souerayne Godd esse, that doest highest sit
In seate of iudgement, in th'Almighties stead,
And with magnificke might and wondrous wit
Doest to thy people righteous doome aread,
That furthest Nations filles with awfull dread,
Pardon the boldnesse of thy basest thrall,
That dare discourse of so diuine a read,
As thy great iustice praysed ouer all:
The instrument whereof loe here thy Artegall.18

Spenser’s meter is regular, his phrasing long and even. And the matter which he unfolds at this unhurried pace is in perfect keeping with his measure; his thoughts are as simple, regular and predictable as his cadences. His diction, finally, with its sprinkling of archaic words, its formal and almost ritual epithets and its frequent inversions, is remote enough from a colloquial language so that the cadences of the speaking voice are reined in, as it were, and the metric allowed to assert itself. In Spenser’s stanzas, the sound is dominant, and the sense in some manner recessive. He is a “sweet” poet as opposed to a “strong.”

A medium through which Spenserian “sweetness” entered into the prosody of the couplet was Edward Fairfax’s translation of Tasso’s Gerusalemme Liberata—the work known in its English version as Godfrey of Bulloigne.19 Spenser, as his Augustan critics complained, had relied too heavily upon archaic diction and had employed too long and langorous a stanza. Fairfax removed these barriers to neoclassical imitation, as the following stanza shows:

Ye noble princes, that protect and save
The pilgrim muses, and their ship defend
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From rock of ignorance and error's wave,
Your gracious eyes upon this labor bend;
To you these tales of love and conquests brave
I dedicate, to you this work I send,
My muse hereafter shall perhaps unfold
Your fights, your battles, and your combats bold.

Fairfax uses archaic diction sparingly and his stanza form, ottava rima, is divisible into two-line units. His line commas tend to be stronger than Spenser's, moreover, and his phrasing, though less even overall, falls into more obvious parallels. Yet the progress of his lines remains leisurely and predictable. His language is still somewhat formal and poetic, with inversion very frequent. Fairfax, like Spenser, reduces the urgency of the speaking voice and gives his metric free play.

It was Waller who provided the last link between a Spenserian tradition and a neoclassical. He dealt almost wholly in clear and accustomed concepts; he neither sported his ideas nor wrestled with them; he admitted no conceptual impediments to the even flow of his verse. By means of a somewhat formal diction and a casually artificial word order, finally, he kept spoken cadences from competing with mertrical.

He is given to bland and obvious assertions, like these concerning Cromwell's rise to power:

Your private life did a just pattern give,
How fathers, husbands, pious sons should live;
Born to command, your Princely vertues slept
Like humble David's, while the Flock he kept;

But when your troubled countrey call'd you forth,
Your flaming Courage, and your Matchless worth
Dazeling the eyes of all that did pretend
To fierce Contention, gave a prosp'rous end. (II.15.133-40)
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Such lines yield up their conceptual freight without strain or delay. As an Augustan admirer might have said, it was Waller's happy genius to conjoin easy thoughts with pleasing numbers. And his numbers are pleasing in part because his thoughts are so accustomed and so bland.

They are pleasing also because his language is somewhat elevated. The judgment which I have in fact recalled is the couplet in the Soames-Dryden "Art of Poetry,"

His happy genius did our tongue refine,
And easy words with pleasing numbers join.²¹

The context makes it clear that his words are here called easy both in the sense "readily understood" and in the sense "smooth and urbane": they are easy as manners were said to be easy. Waller preserved his prosody from the vitiating effect of a wholly slack or colloquial diction—from a language so flat that it would have made any conformity to verse convention seem accident or mockery. Imposing on his style a prior social discipline, he rendered it amenable to the final discipline of versification.

It remains to notice the effect of stylistic inversion on the sound of his verse. For if one means of sweetening English numbers is to use a diction which reduces the urgency of spoken cadences, another is so to transpose words and phrases within the sentence that these cadences cannot develop in the first place.

The topic perhaps merits brief theoretical consideration. English is primarily an analytic language, grammatical relationships being determined, that is, by the order in which sentence elements fall. And a natural rhythm develops as we follow an accustomed course from subject to verb to object. It is this natural rhythm which competes
with a formal meter for attention. We may consider the sentence,

She laid the little children in their beds.

Though this fulfills the formal requirements of an iambic pentameter line, the spoken cadence so overrides the metrical that we hear only the sound of talk.

In an abnormally ordered sentence, nothing of the sort can happen. For our grammatical expectations are then thwarted and we must proceed somewhat tentatively, waiting for the context to supply semantic clues. Under these circumstances no natural rhythm develops. The formal meter, if there is one, supplies the only cadence clearly heard. When the phrases in the sentence just given are transposed, we have the modest but unequivocal iambic line:

The little children in their beds she laid.

Besides exercising this general influence on prosody, verbal or phrasal transposition can secure some particular metrical effects. Words or phrases appearing in an unaccustomed place in the sentence are set off by rhetorical commas, which can serve for medial or final stops. And when verbs are transposed to final position in particular—an expected element being first withheld and then supplied—the metrical period is strengthened. So, in the line

The little children / in their beds she laid,

the inversion both creates a medial caesura and strengthens the final period.

The same effects, both general and specific, appear in Waller's work from the beginning. "Wherever the natural
stops of [the couplet] were,” wrote his 1690 editor, “he contrived the little breakings of his sense so as to fall in with them; and . . . he commonly closes with verbs, in which we know the life of language consists.” The examples of verbal transposition given earlier included the couplets,

Had you some Ages past, this Race of glory
Run, with amazement, we should read your story.

Where shining Pearl, Coral, and many a pound
On the rich shore, of Amber-greece is found.

As in old Chaos Heaven with Earth confus’d,
And Stars with rocks, together crush’d and bruis’d
The Sun his light no further could extend
Than the next hill, which on his shoulders lean’d.

Speech cadences which might have competed with metrical cadences are here kept from developing; interpolated phrases supply medial commas; verbs transposed to final position contribute to line and couplet closure.

The editor’s assumption that these features of Waller's style were notably original has little basis, of course. But no couplet writer before him used verbal arrangement so uniformly as a means of avoiding colloquialism or so consistently transposed words and phrases to supply or strengthen metrical pauses and stops. He sought to assert his metrical norm clearly in each individual line and to preserve that norm from all tyrannies of language as of sense.

When we examine the rhetoric of his lines and couplets, finally, we discover a further emphasis on euphony and hence a further affinity with poetry in the “sweet” tradition.

The first principle of couplet organization was rhetorical balance, and precedents for this balance may be found, locally, in almost any body of rhymed pentameter verse.
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before Waller. They may be found in Spenser's stanzas, in the sonnet sequences, in the couplets of Shakespeare's early plays, in Drayton's couplets, in Jonson's couplets, and in both the stanzaic and couplet verse of John Donne. Within this total body of verse, however, two different occasions for the balance are distinguishable. It is sometimes the even fall of words and sometimes the opposition of concepts which is the primary motive or formal cause of the rhetorical balance in Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry.

In couplets in the "strong" tradition, a parallel phrasing normally subserves the thought. When Donne describes the lamentable estate of man in this declining age of the world, he falls into antithetical phrases in the course of his analysis:

But 'tis not so: w'are not retir'd, but dampt;
And as our bodies, so our mindes are crampt:
'Tis shrinking, not close weaving that hath thus
In minde, and body both bedwarfed us. 24

A similar parallelism appears in an epistle of Ben Jonson's expressing gratitude for a voluntary gift:

You then, whose will not only, but desire
To succour my necessities, tooke fire,
Not at my prayers, but your sense; which laid
The way to meet, what others would upbraid;
And in the Act did so my blush prevent,
As I did feele it done, as soone as meant:
You cannot doubt, but I, who freely know
This Good from you, as freely will it owe. 25

A more concise example, upon which a stand may be made, is a line from the epigram of Jonson's already quoted:

Whose manners draw, more than thy powers constraine.
The phrasing clearly subserves the thought, the sense rebounding, as it were, from a statement of its opposite.

In poetry in the sweet tradition the second element in a balanced line tends to be less evidently antithetical. In the line of Spenser's,

And with magnificke might and wondrous wit,

the alliteration and the metrical prominence of the nearly synonymous epithets suggest that the chief occasion for the balance is the even fall of words—this though the concepts might and wit are neatly enough opposed. Such a style tends toward sheer repetition, as in this couplet from "Astrophel":

In euery one he vanquisht euery one,
He vanquisht all, and vanquisht was of none.26

In Fairfax's "Tasso"—the historical link with Waller—the second half of a balanced line is again quite normally supplementary rather than antithetical:

But with less terror and disorder less,
The Gascoignes kept array, and kept their ground,
Though most the loss and peril them oppress;
Unwares assail'd they were, unready found.27

The sense does not here rebound from a statement of its opposite. It is merely repeated with a casual difference.

Waller quite customarily adopts an antithetical cast of expression, and this in turn is sometimes the mirror of his thought. Yet if we contrast the rhetorical oppositions in his verse with those in the Jacobean strong line, we find a partly autonomous concern for regularity of phrase:

While to Your Self severe, to others kind,
With power unbounded, and a will confin'd,
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Of this vast Empire you possess the care,
The softer part falls to the Peoples share. (II.39.103-06)

Sometimes the antithesis seems to exist almost entirely to justify the isocolon:

To pardon willing, and to punish loath,
You strike with one hand, but you heal with both.

(II.15.117)

In the latter line, the reach for antithesis has closed barely on its semblance. And, in point of fact, any words which are members of a recognizable pair will suffice if only they are equitably distributed among the metrical phrases:

Tygers have courage, and the rugged Bear. (II.14.115)

The Dutch their Wine, and all their Brandee lose. (II.49.43)

The seat of Empire, where the Irish come,
And the unwilling Scotch to fetch their doome.

(II.10.15-16)

A more positive realization of euphony and regularity and a further evidence that he learned his harmony from poets in the sweet tradition can be found in verses in which the rhetorical balance is reinforced by verbal repetition:

At once they promise what at once they give. (I.67.43)

Resolv'd to Conquer, or resolv'd to Die. (II.49.18)

The greatest Leader, and the greatest Ile. (II.11.24)

He sometimes repeats the sense without repeating the words:

The Tools of Peace, and Instruments of War. (I.70.43)
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There are some genuine antitheses here: promise and give, conquer or die, peace and war. But there is also an attenuation of—a shifting of the attention from—these oppositions, and a compensatory emphasis upon evenness of phrasing. Though the isocolon in Waller's lines is characteristic of the neoclassical couplet generally, his sacrifice of tension between the balanced elements to symmetry and metrical fluency makes him a sweet poet rather than a strong—a poetic heir to Spenser rather than to Jonson and Donne.

This mode of sweetness, to which neither Dryden's interest nor perhaps his ear was attuned, recurs with further refinement but otherwise without significant change, in the early verse of Pope. For Pope went systematically to school to Waller and applied what he had learned to the "Pastorals" and "Windsor Forest." In the "Pastorals" the evenness of phrasing cultivated even apart from antitheses of sense—

Oh deign to visit / our forsaken Seats,  
The mossie Fountains, / and the Green Retreats!  

reflects the practice of Waller and of Waller's disciple Granville. In "Windsor Forest" Pope's indebtedness to Waller is revealed both by a partly expletive balance and by specific verbal echoes, as in the couplets,

Not thus the Land appear'd in Ages past,  
A dreary Desart and a gloomy Waste,  
To Savage Beasts and Savage Laws a Prey,  
And Kings more furious and severe than they.

On the basis of these lines alone one could trace a simple and direct line of descent from Fairfax to Waller to Pope.

When Pope found his true forte in discursive and satiric poetry, he ceased for the most part to imitate Waller directly.
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When he fell quite into Waller’s vein, as in some of the panegyrical lines of his “Epistle to Augustus,”32 his intent was usually wry. Nevertheless his prosody stands all the while for the culmination of tendencies to which Waller had given direction. It is to Pope that one naturally turns for an illustration of the ideal neoclassic line.

In a deft and formulary line in his “Epistle to a Lady,” for example, he wrote that Calypso

Was just not ugly, and was just not mad.33

Though this is clearly a pentameter line with a pyrrhic medial foot, the auxiliary design is a balance such as we find in wholly indigenous verse. The stresses fall on

\[
\text{just not ugly / just not mad},
\]

quite as they fall on

\[
\text{Jack be nimble / Jack be quick}.
\]

The meter-making argument of the line, moreover, which is that the most arresting feminine beauty borders on irregularity just as the most interesting intellection borders on irrationality, is an apt instance of neoclassical wit. There are no more perfect examples in English poetry of the marriage of matter and metrical form than the unions of thought and cadence in the heroic couplet at its best.

The absolute value of Waller’s reform—a topic of another sort—deserves final attention. Romantic poets were to find the regularity of the couplet monotonous and the clear coincidence between its meter and its matter merely blatant.

They sway’d about upon a rocking horse,
And thought it Pegasus.34
TOWARD AN AUGUSTAN POETIC

There can be no answer to such objections unless we challenge their presuppositions. If, like Bishop Atterbury, one contrasts Waller’s couplets chiefly with Donne’s, one perceives that he filtered out of English poetry a kind or mode of immediacy, the fact or fiction that the poet was directly transcribing the processes of his mind. The reformed couplet, in which the content attends upon metrical expression, has by contrast the suggestion of afterthought. Waller asserted the values of sanity and order as opposed to those of freedom and rapture.

If these values were to become audible in poetry, some such reform as his had to occur. If there had not been a Waller, it would have been necessary to invent one. The element of exaggeration in Augustan estimates of him testifies that he was in point of fact “invented” to some degree. Yet whoever will read almost any subsequent body of couplet verse will detect in it the manner and the cadences of the self-assured young poet who once said, “Me thought I never sawe a good copie of English verses; they want smoothness; then I began to essay.”35

There remains an absolute virtue in his practice, a virtue neither compensatory nor contingent on our leaving any prepossessions unexamined; and that is the union of the matter with the form and of both with sensibility or philosophic disposition. He was a literal-minded poet, harbinger of a literal-minded age; he accordingly selected real persons and historical events as his themes. Anticipating the empirical temper of the new age, he forsook all obscurity—tended, even, to forsake all sustained processes of reason—and resorted instead to the graceful modulation of such thoughts and sentiments as would instantly recommend themselves. The uses of wit he tempered with the solider and more certain uses of judgment. He devised, finally,
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a metrical instrument perfectly suited to giving already evident thoughts an interesting and somewhat novel sali­ence.

His topics, the manner of his discourse upon them, and the cadence into which he naturally fell were all at one. And all of them lie near the center of the Augustan poetic con­siciousness.
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No couplet poet before Waller and no other prominent poet in the neoclassical succession before Pope had returned so often to an exact or formulary balance. Having noted the placement of caesuras in some three thousand lines from Fairfax to Pope, I found that Waller divided a uniquely high percentage of his lines into two five-syllable phrases and that his even phrasing normally entailed an even distribution of stresses.

Elizabethan poets had tended to avoid a precisely medial division of the line, preferring caesuras in "strong" position—usually after the fourth syllable. George Puttenham had insisted that the pentameter line "must haue his Cesure fall vpon the fourth sillable, and leaue sixe behinde him" [Arte of English Poesie, ed. by Willcock and Walker, p. 72]. And in some doctrinaire practice, like Sir Philip Sidney's in lyrical portions of The Arcadia, this rule had been uniformly obeyed. It had indeed been rather closely followed in much late-sixteenth-century practice. Fairfax had broken about one line in three after the fourth syllable, and one in nine after the sixth, but fewer than one in twelve after the fifth. [Such is his practice in Book 16 of his Tasso.] Even as able and flexible a prosodist as Marlowe in the first sestiad of Hero and Leander had broken about one line in five after the fourth syllable, one in eight after the sixth, and
only one in ten after the fifth. The same preferences remain in Jacobean couplet verse. In Ben Jonson's couplets, about one line in four is broken after the fourth syllable, one in five after the sixth, and one in eight after the fifth. [This is his practice in 468 lines, Epigrams 100 to 132.]

Waller admitted many more precisely medial caesuras than his predecessors. Though continuing to break about one line in four after the fourth syllable, he divided upwards of one in five after the fifth and only about one in twenty after the sixth. In some influential early poems like "To the King, on his Navy," and "Upon his Majesty's Repairing of Paul's," caesuras after the fifth foot outnumber all other medial divisions.

In most of these respects (the avoidance of caesuras after the sixth syllable excepted), Waller was not unrepresentative of Caroline poets generally, but he sought a higher degree of regularity than any of his fellows. He may be compared specifically with Sir John Denham and Lord Falkland, the former of whom has always been named together with him, and the latter of whom has been found, in an influential modern article, superior to him in almost every particular. [See Ruth Wallerstein, "The Development of the Rhetoric and Metre of the Heroic Couplet," PMLA, L (1935), 200.]

Though his grasp on the couplet as a unit was firmer than Waller's, Denham broke about one line in seven precisely medially, as opposed to Waller's one in five. [These figures are based on "Cooper's Hill."] The major differences between Denham's practice and Waller's may be illustrated by couplets from "Cooper's Hill" and Waller's St. Andrew's poem respectively:

While luxury, and wealth, / like war and peace,
   Are each the others / ruine, and increase.  (vss. 33-4)

Like bright Aurora, / whose refulgent Ray
   Foretells the fervour / of ensuing-day.  (vss. 121-2)

Denham is the more vigorous poet, Waller the more regular.

Lord Falkland, who breaks one line in eight precisely in the middle, is to be compared with Denham. He conceives of the
couplet as a metrical unit rather than as a pair of evenly-phrased rhyming lines, and he has a good metrical command of series of couplets. But he deserves only a modest place in the neoclassical succession because his language has not been consistently refined and his metric is sometimes amateurishly rough.

Dryden brought to their logical culmination the metrical tendencies noted in Denham and Falkland. Being concerned, as a general rule, with the decisiveness of his prosody rather than with its musical quality, he fell into a precise or formulary balance chiefly in the second line of the couplet where it is felt in the couplet close, but not so often as Waller even there. [In “Mac Flecknoe” he precisely balances one second line in seven, virtually no first lines at all.] Among major poets, it was Pope who at length revived Waller’s ideal of even phrasing. Returning to the paradigm of balance in nearly one line out of five, he closely approaches it in a number and diversity of other lines. Pope conceives the couplet to be both a well-defined metrical unit and a pair of evenly phrased rhyming lines. His prosody is a marriage of Waller’s and Dryden’s.
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NOTES TO CHAPTER 1


NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

6. Ibid., p. 71.
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Muses' Library," New ed.; London, 1901), I, 1, vss. 1-6. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume, page, and line number—e.g. (I.1.1-6). Professor Philip R. Wiklund of Indiana University has emended all quotations of a line or longer to accord with his forthcoming edition of Waller.

15. See Thorn Drury's note, II.200.
17. Poems, p. 69, vss. 1-14. Pope found Carew "of one school" with Waller and Granville and dismissed him as "a bad Waller." See Joseph Spence, Anecdotes, Observations, and Characters of Books and Men, ed. S. W. Singer (London, 1858), p. 17. A series of Waller's poems written in about 1638 are influenced by Carew's metric and phrasing.
19. I. p. xiii, "The Printer to the Reader" (1664). The statement quoted has been attributed to Waller himself, and he must in fact have given it out at some time.
20. Quoted by Elijah Fenton, editor, The Works of Edmund Waller (London, 1729), "Observations," p. iii. Fenton adds, "Whether or not Dr. Tillotson had Mr. Waller in his thoughts when he was giving this description of Wit, it is evident that he has in the liveliest colors delineated the character of his genius and writings."
22. The phrase is from Gulliver's Travels, Bk. IV, chap. viii.
25. "To Mr. Addison," vss. 67-72; Poems, VI, 204.
27. This applies also to apprehensions of mathematical abstraction. See An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Bk. IV, chap. iv, sects. 6 and 7.
28. David Hume, "An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," sect. 8; The Philosophical Works (Boston, 1854), IV, 333-34.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Essays, I, 105.
2. John Dennis, in "The Impartial Critick" (1693), represents a young connoisseur of poetry as surprised to find that Waller can err at all. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, III, 169-70.

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5. 1.73.64; *Aeneid* ii. 749.
6. 1.4.88; *Aeneid* v. 787.
7. 1.3.50. Pope so uses the word in *Dunciad*, IV, vs. 592, and Gray in "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," vs. 30.
8. I.15.4. This word, sometimes connoting "concenct," is a favorite of Waller's. For a use illustrating the conclusions which follow, see Pope's "Summer," vs. 8.
12. II.33.154. The entire line "adnixi torquent spumas et caerula verrunt," he renders, "the lusty Trojans sweep / Neptune's smooth face, and cleave the yielding deep."
13. II.67.1-8. The simile is conveyed from *Aeneid* xi. 67-71.
16. So Dryden reports; *Essays*, II, 14.
18. *Iliad* i. 113-14; Chapman I, 110-111.
20. *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.56.
23. 1.69.21-22. The phrase *somno vinoque sepulti*, appearing in some of Waller's Latin verses (II.20.17), is from *Aeneid* ii. 265. The same hendiadys appears in *Amores* i. 4. 53.
29. *Aeneid* iv. 455.
30. *Georgics* iv. 209. Dryden supplies this example and those cited in notes

38. Fairfax IX. 50. Pope parodies lines so organized in *Rape of the Lock*, I, vss. 101-02.
40. Tasso X. 34.
42. II.76.27. A modification of Fairfax's line cited on p. 40.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

3. *Aeneid* i. 586-91. The translations of this passage and of the two following are abbreviated.
5. *Fasti* i. 247-50.
6. Sonnet 29, vss. 10-12. This sonnet itself follows the Italian organization.
11. "Neither are all these [correspondences] only similitudes (as men of narrow observation may perhaps conceive them to be), but plainly the same footsteps . . ." etc., Francis Bacon, "De Augmentis," Bk. III, Chap. i; *Works*, ed. James Spedding et al. (London, 1869), VIII, 474-75.
12. So, for example, Thomas Sprat: "The Wit of the Fables and Religions
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of the Antient World is well-nigh consum'd: . . . they have this peculiar
imperfection, that they were only Fictions at first: whereas Truth is
never so well express'd or amplify'd, as by those Ornaments which are
True and Real in themselves.” History of the Royal Society (1667);
quoted in Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (London,

15. Thomas Hobbes, “Answer to Davenant” (1650), Critical Essays of the
Seventeenth Century, II, 59.
Society,” PMLA, XLIII (1928), 162-65.
17. Essay on Man, I, vs. 11-12.
18. “To a Lady” (Moral Essays, Epistle II), vs. 247.
19. Dunciad, IV, vs. 652.
20. Paradise Lost, III, vs. 41-44.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. A-version, Prologue; vss. 50-54; Piers the Plowman, ed. Thomas A. Knott
and David C. Fowler (Baltimore, 1952), p. 68.
4. Stanza 11.
5. In an appendix I comment on the relative number of evenly divided
and more or less formulary lines in the works of Waller and some other
neoclassical poets.
9. In a little over 2,000 lines written after about 1650, he ran on only about
one first line in six and one couplet in fifty.
10. Canto I, vs. 131-33; Dryden, Poems, p. 909.
Scott and George Saintsbury (London, 1882-93), XVIII, 6.
15. “Conversations with Drummond”; Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Hereford and
Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1925-52), I, 133.
17. “If there was any fault in his language, ‘twas that he weaved it too
closely and laboriously.” Dryden, Essays, I, 92. Dr. Johnson finds in
Dryden himself “no traces of Donne’s or Jonson’s ruggedness.” Lives,
I, 426.
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19. "Many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own, that he derived the harmony of his numbers from Godfrey of Bulloign, which was turned into English by Mr. Fairfax." Dryden, *Essays*, II, 247.
20. I, stanza 4. Waller remembers the concluding couplet in his Panegyric to Cromwell, II.17.173-76.
23. See above, pp. 43-44.
26. Vss. 78-79.
27. XX. 78.
30. See Pope's "Spring," vs. 46.
33. Vs. 50.
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