TIME AND RHYTHM IN LITERATURE AND PAINTING

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Critics commonly explore the temporal extendedness of literary works but treat graphic works as if all their parts coexisted in an instant. Yet graphic, like verbal art takes time to read. Traditional notions of verbal rhythm rest on the analysis of poetic feet which have stress and length inherent in them. But narrative rhythm arises from variations among narrative techniques: the slow pacing of description makes reading time long exceed a real-world glance at the object described; the even unrolling of dialogue makes dramatization parallel reading time; and fast summary allows generations to be covered in the reading time of a few seconds. This sort of rhythm, based on manipulation of the interaction of the reader's time with the techniques of the art, describes our engagement with images as well as with narrative. Close analysis of examples from both domains allows us to build a common analytic vocabulary. Using that vocabulary to explore a multimedia example then suggests that the concept of reader-based rhythm, and its application both in aesthetics and in psychology, transcends media.

Anyone who reads a printed newspaper cartoon knows that the common notion that texts are dynamic while graphics are static is wrong. Both are dynamic. Picture the famous *New Yorker* cartoon in which we see two centipedes, one larger and higher in the frame, the other smaller and lower. The larger one, with slightly open mouth, is looking down at the smaller; the smaller, with closed mouth, is looking up at the larger. There is no other drawn detail. The caption below the graphic says, "Don't think about it. Just walk." This cartoon takes time to read, going from a scrutiny of the graphic to a reading of the caption, and a recognition that both function in a single system of meaning, a meaning that conveys a narrative reality that neither could convey alone nor which could be experienced by somehow absorbing both at once. But that extended experience becomes explicit only upon reflection. In the instant that the caption is read within the normal context of "reading" the graphic, the truth of the cartoon is simply palpable.

By necessity, we do many things without thinking, or at least without thinking explicitly about each of the details involved. When we admire a person's haircut, we don't usually admire the cut of each hair, and yet in some sense we must sense each hair. To take an example that embodies the useful

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habit of elided attention to detail, we run across a soccer field to intercept a flying ball neither too early in its path nor too late. But note that "early" and "late" are defined not only by the velocity or direction of the ball but by our instant judgment of those extrinsic realities and also of our own abilities to run across the field. We would rather intercept the ball earlier in its path, in order to minimize the opportunities for the opposition, and we also would rather intercept the ball later, in order to maximize our chance to reach its path before it passes; forsaking both options, we seek to optimize our streak across the field, aiming to reach the ball neither earlier than we can execute nor later than we must, all without making a single conscious calculation. At the best moments, then, our response to the ball (or, more accurately, our response to the dynamic situation in which we have certain desires we want to fulfill in relation to the moving ball) may well be thoughtless, yet that thoughtless response is decidedly our response and not someone else's. The speed and direction of interception reflect the often unconscious mental processes of ourselves as players caught up in the game. And, given the informational complexity of both literature and painting, the speed of our experiences of them also reflects the often unconscious mental processes of ourselves as readers.

I use the term "reader" both for those engaged in experiencing a text and those engaged in experiencing a painting precisely because both take time to experience, both engage us, both cause us to dwell or hurry, reflect and anticipate, review and question and conclude. The written speculations about the smile on Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* could fill volumes. Is she smiling at all? What might she be thinking of? What was Leonardo trying to convey by making her expression so enigmatic?

As we read this famous painting,[*] our eyes may eventually seek context to address our questions. We look at the background, to either side of her face, and find dim, distant, harshly sheer gray mountains. Our eyes come back to the level of the smiling mouth below her eyes and we realize that there is a lake or river widening beneath those mountains. Looking lower, we may look first to the right – the direction indicated by our lady's eyes – and see a river flowing crookedly toward the foreground and then on the left, given the painting's formal symmetry, we may notice the river flowing more widely, more hotly, away toward that cooler, slower widening river that perhaps forms a lake. Suddenly we recognize that the coolness of the possible lake and of the upward-striving crags of mountain are background to our lady's head, but the river that flows toward her and then from her, heated to redness, flows at the

[*] This essay includes extended analyses of three very famous paintings all readily available on the web. Readers may find it helpful to have these images visible during their reading: Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Arthur Hughes's *April Love*, and William Blake's plate for "The Tyger."

level of her body, visually through – at least on the vertical level with – her heart. Suddenly we realize that we cannot see if the source of the distant river is or is not the lake itself. Perhaps the whole background represents an endless circulation from thought to feeling, from other to self, from immobile, rocky nature to flowing human life.

She smiles because she is the source of human fire, the river of blood. The sinuous flows, both toward and from her, now seem symbolic of pulses, of throbbing life. While the painter undoubtedly uses his hands to create this image, we note that her hands calmly rest one on the other. She need not lift them to do her indispensable work. They rest on the arm of a chair we only now discern. They cover our view of the area of her womb. She is enthroned. Is this an annunciation?

We glance at her head. Indeed, the sky is just a bit lighter around her, although there is no halo, but perhaps the memory of a halo; not a Christian icon but a devotion to a woman by someone who has knowledge of Christian icons. We drop our eyes again. Her breast – her heart? – is the lightest part of the painting. It is matched in lightness only by her forehead. Her spirit comes from within her, body and mind.

And then we notice, as dark as the base of the distant mountains, two dark, half-visible sculpted balls on the edges of the picture below the level of her shoulders. The balls sit, we suddenly realize, on a stone handrail. Our lady sits on a high porch or before a wide-flung window, all the world background to her centered consciousness of what she is, the perfect presence powering the flow of inanimate nature, heating it, and creating the circulation that, someday, will be life. She could stand, turn, rest her hands on those stone balls, lean forward, and reign over that entire domain. But instead, utterly satisfied in her power, she sits composed, looking not quite at us, nor even at the painter, but over our right shoulders at the fate that will intercept us. She is prepared. We so clearly are not.

I find this, my own reading of the painting, disturbing. The fire of that river is not joyful but infernal. The barrenness of the craggy mountains is not merely stony but sterile. Can mere mortals ever take possession of nature, make it live, inhabit it? Even Mona Lisa, on her porch, inhabits a different space: behind her, the signs of architecture and cold nature; before her, the artist's studio. Here is a made thing of beauty, but a thing external to us all. It is a small wonder that recent researches (Schwartz's, for example)[1] have suggested that Leonardo used himself as the model for Mona Lisa's face. Do you think you are truly making something here, Leonardo, his painting asks him? A real woman? That, you cannot make. Behind me, nature is barren, and you can't get past me to fertilize it. Do you feel pride in the work of your head,

[1] See Lillian F. Schwartz's work at http://www.lillian.com (retrieved June 17, 2008).

heart and hands? You may be a great artist, but you are only an artist. I am a woman, a woman you can never be.

You may, of course, disagree with this reading of the painting that I have just offered, but it is clear that this is a reading, not a glance; this is an extended process of questioning, noticing, reflecting and anticipating, bringing extra-artistic knowledge to bear, in order to experience the intra-artistic signifiers, and so on. We read paintings just as surely as we read literature, and the amount of time we take to do so in both media depends not only on the signifiers but on us.

When an experience requires extended time, it becomes possible to imagine the experience as potentially rhythmic. Standing in the outfield waiting for a batter to hit a ball in one's direction during a baseball game, although it requires extended time to experience, is not rhythmic. Indeed, baseball itself is far from rhythmic despite its obvious divisions: irregularly long innings, punctuated at surprising moments by hits and players running for longer or shorter times. But one can think of the children's game of rope jumping as rhythmic. Indeed, rope jumping is often accompanied by verse.

> A my name is Alice / And my husband's name is Al. / We come from Atlanta/ And he sells Apples.// B my name is Betty / And my husband's name is Bob./ We come from Bermuda / And he sells baseballs.

The rope strikes the ground with each stressed syllable and the game goes on, supposing there's no tripping of the feet or tongue, through the rest of the alphabet with the jumper making up the verses, the only requirements being the rhythmic execution of the simultaneous fulfillment of the verbal template and the physical act. The more skillful the rope jumper, the further she can work her way through the alphabet. Most definitions of "rhythm" refer either to music or verse and always speak of recurrences in time. This, for example, is the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of rhythm in the field of prosody:

> The measured recurrence of arsis ['strong syllables'] and thesis ['unaccented syllables'] determined by vowel-quantity or stress, or both combined; kind of metrical movement, as determined by the relation of long and short, or stressed and unstressed, syllables in a foot or a line.

The key point here is the recurrence in time of a thing that can be objectively measured in time. Some syllables are simply shorter or longer than others, stressed or unstressed. You must read the word "above" with the stress on the second syllable. Any other stress would be perverse. Rhythm, then, depends in this definition, in most definitions, solely on qualities of the parts themselves which determine, it seems, how they flow.

The word "rhythm" comes from the Greek "rhuthmos" which in turn comes from the verb "rhein," to flow. Rhythm in language has been applied to the flow of syllables of different sorts, long and short, stressed and unstressed. C. Hugh Holman's *A Handbook to Literature* says that "The passage of regular or approximately equivalent time intervals between definite events or the recurrence of specific sounds or kinds of sound or the recurrence of stressed and unstressed syllables is called rhythm."[2] In other words, long-short-short / long-short-short is a rhythm. There is no question, however, about whether the longs and shorts are long and short in themselves rather than because we see them as such. They are always taken to be intrinsically long and short. This view, which I believe is too narrow, reveals itself in Holman's treatment of "Prose Rhythm":

> The recurrence of stress and emphasis at regular or, much more usually, irregular intervals which gives to some prose a pleasurable rise and fall of movement. Prose rhythm is distinguished from the rhythm of verse in that it never for long falls into a recognizable pattern, for if it does it becomes verse rather than prose.[3]

In effect, Holman's distinction between rhythm in verse and in prose amounts to a definition of verse, language characterized by regular recurrences of temporal units the quantity of which is inherent in those units. But this is not the only sort of rhythm one can imagine.

A. E. van Vogt, asked about the great success of his science fiction, explained that he "religiously" followed a simple technique. No matter what a given story might be about, he claims he always thought of it:

> in scenes of about 800 words [...]. Every scene has a purpose, which is stated clearly near the beginning, usually by the third paragraph, and that purpose is either accomplished, or not accomplished by the end of the scene.[4]

As he elucidates this technique, he suggests that a scene will begin with a character in some predicament or otherwise demonstrating a clear desire. The scene goes on to paint a picture of the environment in which the character

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2 C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York: Odyssey, 1972) 456.

3 Holman, *Handbook*, 420.

4 A. E. van Vogt, "Complication in the Science Fiction Story," in *Of Worlds Beyond*, ed. Lloyd Arthur Eshbach (Chicago: Advent, 1964) 54.

finds himself at the moment (thus laying out the available resources to deal with the predicament or desire), then follows action in which the character seeks to fulfill his desire (the "purpose" of the scene). And at the end, the character is either successful or thwarted. Of course, either outcome sets us up for the next scene unless the purpose of the scene also happens to be the purpose of the whole story (for example, saving a space ship crew from mind-controlling aliens), in which case we feel a comforting sense of closure, a return to the opening exposition of overall purpose which we now see resolved for good or ill.

One can easily criticize van Vogt's artistic religion as trivial, inflexible, and mechanical. All stories are to be made of 800-word scenes, novels of chapters composed of 800-word scenes, and so on. Yet, anyone who reads van Vogt's classic *Slan* (1940) will feel the power of this technique. There is no other word for it but rhythm. Van Vogt wrote rhythmic stories and novels, not in the sense that each unit was long or short in itself (each unit was about 800 words), but in the way each unit felt. This was something even van Vogt did not make explicit himself. However, we should because it extends the traditional notion of rhythm to account for many of the temporal effects of narrative.

In a rough way, we can divide narration into three techniques that bear three different relations to the time of the reader: description, dramatization, and summary. In description, reading time is much longer than narrative time; in dramatization, reading time is about as long as narrative time; and in summary, reading time is much shorter than narrative time. We can call these temporal relations slow (it takes a long time to read a detailed description of a single, stable object), even (the drama on the page passing even with the passage of time in the reader's easy chair), and fast (the summary of the generations of "begats" in the Bible takes only moments to read). Unconsciously, we feel these differences between slow, even, and fast passages. And the manipulation of our experiencing slow, even, or fast passages can confer a rhythm on the reading experience hypothetically independent of the rhythm of the sentences offering description, dramatization, and summary.

Van Vogt's 800-word scenes exploit this regular variation of narrative technique, more precisely of narrative temporality, typically beginning with dramatization (the character's thinking about what he wants), moving on to description (indicating the resources available for possibly fulfilling that want), then to summary (expounding the actions taken), and back to description. That is, in temporal terms, each scene is even-slow-fast-even. The slowing down from the first to the second movement is like a baseball pitcher winding up to throw; the speedy fast third movement feels all the more exciting by contrast to the slow second; and the return in the fourth movement to the even pace of the first affords a kind of closure. Van Vogt has created a narrative "foot" equivalent to a poetic foot, in some sense, such as the iamb or

trochee we know from verse, but which is, in another sense, quite different. The similarity is that we can recognize the different temporal qualities of the components of the foot. The dissimilarity is that there is no pretense in the narrative that the time of the component is inherent in the component itself. The temporality of the components of the narrative foot come from the way we read them, from our sense of our time versus the narrative's time.

Sentences with the same sentence rhythm can have quite different narrative temporality. Description: "The faintly shining star emitted light." Dramatization: "The faintly shining star above me shone." Summary: "The faintly shining star heard my long groan." Each of these sentences is iambic pentameter, but we feel them – and can understand them – to have different relations to the time it takes to read them. Just as van Vogt creates a rhythm by manipulating narrative temporality in regular ways, we can build such a rhythmic block by returning to the even temporality of dramatization:

> The faintly shining star emitted light.
> The faintly shining star above me shone.
> The faintly shining star heard my long groan.
> The faintly shining star fades into night.

Or

> Description – slow
> Dramatization – even
> Summary – fast
> Dramatization – even.

If we were writing extended verse, in addition to the closure offered by the A-B-B-A rhyme scheme and the insistent rhythm of anaphoric repetition of "The faintly shining star," we might also try to reproduce the manipulation of narrative temporality, or work against it strategically, as poets like Shakespeare do by notably failing to fulfill the expectations of iambic pentameter.

Hemingway uses narrative rhythm to winning effect in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." Consider this passage from the famous story of death and infidelity on a safari:

> She was a fine woman, marvelous really. And just then it occurred to him that he was going to die.
>
> It came with a rush; not as a rush of water nor of wind; but of a sudden evil-smelling emptiness and the odd thing was that the hyena slipped lightly along the edge of it.

"What is it, Harry?" she asked him.
"Nothing," he said. "You had better move over to the other side. To windward."
"Did Molo change the dressing?"
"Yes. I'm just using the boric now."
"How do you feel?"
"A little wobbly."
"I'm going in to bathe," she said. "I'll be right out. I'll eat with you and then we'll put the cot in."

So, he said to himself, we did well to stop the quarreling. He had never quarreled much with this woman, while with the women that he loved he had quarreled so much that they had finally, always, with the corrosion of the quarreling, killed what they had together. He had loved too much, demanded too much, and he wore it all out.[5]

In a rough way, we can say that the passage begins with fast summary (of the narrator's habitual thoughts, all in the first sentence), even dramatization (of the narrator's realization in the second sentence), slow description (of the qualities of that recognition in the second paragraph), moves to even dramatization (in the extended dialog), and returns, in the last paragraph, to fast summary (of his relations with this woman and others), ending with the last words ("and he wore it all out") that apply to both this situation and all his situations, both a reflection and a prediction. He foresees the end in a flash, the speed of the insight feeling all the faster arising from the narrative temporality of the passage as a whole, a temporality that we can say more generally is fast-even-slow-even-fast with the second even unit being extended. This same narrative foot – fast-even-slow-even-fast – is repeated several times in the story. It sets a rhythm.

It is crucial to recognize that narrative rhythm is not shackled to the inevitable lengths of syllables. Here is a famous description from Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers*:

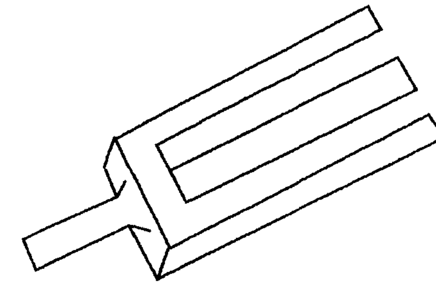
A quarter of tomato that is quite faultless, cut up by the machine into a perfectly symmetrical fruit.
The peripheral flesh, compact, homogenous, and a splendid chemical red, is of an even thickness between a strip of gleaming skin and the hollow where the yellow, graduated seeds appear in a row, kept in place by a thin layer of greenish jelly along a

5 Ernest Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," in *The Short Stories* (New York: Collier Books, n.d.) 64.

swelling of the heart. This heart, of a slightly grainy, faint pink, begins – toward the inner hollow – with a cluster of white veins, one of which extends toward the seeds – somewhat uncertainly. Above, a scarcely perceptible accident has occurred: a corner of the skin, stripped back from the flesh for a fraction of an inch, is slightly raised.[6]

Obviously this passage is description. The character sees the piece of tomato. In a film, this would be a close-up. The tomato does not move but the time it takes to make explicit precisely what it looks like is much longer than the glance needed. Read this way, this passage conveys a slow narrative temporality. We will return to this passage later.

Since objects represented in graphics are what they are, one might suppose that the unshackling of narrative rhythm from prosody would have no equivalent in painting, but I believe that it does. I believe we can see this in two ways. First, consider the famous three-pronged tuning fork.



This graphic is highly self-reflexive. By offering what M. C. Escher has called "an impossible object," the graphic calls attention to the fact that two-dimensional representation, no matter how much we may unthinkingly suppose it to offer three-dimensional reality, does so only by convention. Thus, part of the importance of this graphic comes from the way it makes us recognize that we have been fooled not so much this time but countless earlier times. The graphic, in other words, works not because of something intrinsic to the graphic but because of how we take the graphic.

The involvement of the viewer, however, is not fixed. It can vary. Seek, for example, the answer to a simple question: At what point does the two-pronged tuning fork we see on the lower left become the three-pronged tuning fork we see on the upper right? To answer that question, cover the whole graphic with

6 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *The Erasers*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove P, 1964) 152–153.

your hand and then slowly move your hand from lower-left to upper right. You will discover that the shift from two to three prongs occurs only at the far upper-right. Now seek the answer to a related question: At what point does the three-pronged tuning fork we see on the upper-right become the two-pronged tuning fork we see on the lower-left? To discover the answer, cover the graphic again but this time move your hand slowly in the opposite direction. You will discover that the shift from three to two prongs occurs only when we get to the cross-bar on the left. In other words, there is no single place intrinsic to the graphic at which the oddity – which is at the center of the meaning of the work – arises; it arises as a consequence of our reading procedure. Change procedures and the experience of the graphic changes, which is to say, the graphic – which can only exist as experienced – changes.

To see the importance of our involvement in the temporality of a graphic, consider Arthur Hughes's well known *April Love*. This painting, like all Pre-Raphaelite paintings, is unmistakably narrative. The woman in the sunny foreground is shielding herself with one arm while, back in the shadows, her other hand seems to be kissed by a huntsman who has drawn her hand to his lips. He is in the darkness of some archway while in the foreground and again in the background through the archway we see bright verdure.

Just as verbal narrative temporality allows us slow description, even dramatization, and fast summary, so in this (and every) painting, we can find (the possibility of) slow complexity (try attending to each shimmering leaf in both the foreground and background), even representation (the moment of handing kissing and hesitation may take as long as it takes us to observe it), and fast symbolism (the archway in an instant conveys meaning that we need not but could unpack: the path from spring to spring, from protestation of love to the forest of love, is through a man-made darkness). As our eyes move from fore to back, from left to right with its light to dark to light to dark, there is an unmistakable rhythm. But the rhythm, of course, unlike that of verse, varies with the reader. Those who come to understand the arch as symbolic recognize that it gives in an instant of reading time something much, much longer in narrative time, the passage through the man-made darkness of a love forbidden, in this case, by the class difference between the well dressed maiden and the obscure huntsman. But to those who do not see this symbolism, the rhythm of light to dark to light to dark goes much more quickly. In other words, symbolism in painting equates temporally with summary in narrative. Of course, there are many types of symbolism (natural, conventional, intrinsic) and for an element of painting to function symbolically, the reader has to notice that element as symbolic.

Let us return to Robbe-Grillet's tomato. Once we have grasped the novel as a whole, once we have recognized that the protagonist's, Wallas's, detective story is a version of the Oedipus myth in which he is unconsciously caught, many of the terms in the supposedly objective description take on symbolic

value. If we realize that Wallas, like Sophocles' (not Freud's) Oedipus, suffers through no fault of his own, as he tries to come to grips with his own past, phrases like "flesh," "heart," and "veins" seem more than metaphoric. The correspondence between Wallas and Oedipus echoes in "a perfectly symmetrical fruit." The downfall of both is adduced by "a scarcely perceptible accident [that] has occurred: a corner of the skin, stripped back from the flesh [...]." The modernity of this ancient accident, the way we, too, are fooled, rings through the irony of "a splendid chemical red." The "layer of greenish jelly along a swelling of the heart" may refer to the tomato, of course, but also perhaps to the fecund corruption of Oedipus' relation with his mother-wife and Wallas's arousal by the woman who may have been the wife of the murder victim whose killer he seeks. Those who know French may recognize that another word for tomato is "pomme d'amour," "apple of love," ringing with both the passions of love and the apple's complex associations with the fall and the revelation of hidden knowledge. In short, read as description, the tomato passage is slow, taking much longer in reading time than the glance we would give to a tomato. Read as a summary of the story of Oedipus not once but three times – for Oedipus, for Wallas, and for us as moderns susceptible to the same narrative forces – the passage is fast, going by in summary reading time much more quickly than we can unpack it in normal reading time. But this sort of summation is clearly symbolic. In the course of the novel, Robbe-Grillet modulates his narrative temporality among the three dominant modes, but as all readers of the novel know, on rereading, when we follow no mystery but rather the unfolding of Wallas's embroilment in myth and history, the novel, like the tomato passage, changes what it means to us and hence the rhythm we feel in reading it. What had been on first reading an attempted approach to a solution of a crime becomes on rereading an ever-expanding unfolding of a complex, coexistent reality, all the pieces of the myth–summary–extant, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has written, at one time; that is, the pieces extend a bit in the work (reading time), coexist as synchronic elements of a myth, but extend over much time, on this rereading, in our minds.

The process by which the rereading of Robbe-Grillet's tomato passage changes its narrative temporality is equivalent to the process of continued scrutiny of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* that changed the temporality of the elements we observed. What had been low-detail background, the craggy mountains and the river, once understood as symbolic, changed. Distant vistas with little detail are taken in at a glance, as we first take them in reading this painting. Their temporality is even. Once they are seen as symbolic, summarizing possible relations of humanity to nature, of the role of woman, and so on, we find they have gone by much too fast. Those aren't just curves in the river but symbolic heartbeats. That isn't just a handrail behind the lady but an artifice to steady oneself against the vertiginous fall from the comfortably artificial, the made, into the harsh and extensive natural, the implacable Other. We would

hold the whole world in our hand, but only half of each globe can be seen. We are blind to much here, as, at first, we are blind to the symbolic–summary–readings of the elements of the painting.

What I have argued so far is that rhythm is a much broader category than the conscious notion of rhythm we habitually hold using verse or music as its model. That model relies on the intrinsic stress or length of the elements that occur (usually recur) through time. The broader model includes that habitual view but recognizes that there is a second-order temporality, one of which we are often necessarily unconscious yet one that moves us nonetheless, a temporality in which each narrative element bears a slow (description), even (dramatization), or fast (summary) relation to our reading time. This broader sort of rhythm is susceptible to change as the reader understands the narrative element differently. And I have argued further that this same broader notion of rhythm may apply in our reading of a painting.

The terms we use for literature have their equivalents in painting.

Narrative temporality	*Literature*	*Painting*
Slow	Description	Complexity
Even	Dramatization	Representation
Fast	Summary	Symbolism

I mean each of these correspondences to point to the same sort of deployment of information. Both description in narrative and complexity in painting give us dense immediate detail that, should we wish to attend to it in all its variety, would cause us to slow down our reading. Both dramatization and representation give us detail that we can absorb more or less as quickly as we see it. Both summary and symbolism convey not only possible description and dramatization, possible complexity and representation, but other information about other elements both intrinsic and extrinsic to the works that, fully understood, reveal in a flash whole worlds of meaning. And in all cases, the manipulation of these narrative temporalities allows for the creation of rhythm.

If we can use equivalent terms to discuss the rhythmic effects, both conscious and unconscious, of both literature and painting, we ought to be able to find rhythms collaborating effectively in multi-media works. And this is true. The analysis of any good, modern graphic novel will make this clear. One feels how sword fights fly across the swiftly turning pages in Japanese manga (like Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha*) while often dense Anglo-American works (like Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*) repeatedly force us to read and reread words and images. All filmmakers understand this, working as they do with words and images, and William Blake understood this, too.

In "The Tyger," for example, the horizontal branches of the tree separate the poem's six four-line stanzas into groups of one, two, two, and one. The famous first and last vary only by one word and one punctuation mark which are found in their last lines: "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" and "What immortal hand or eye / Dare frame they fearful symmetry?"

In switching from "Could" to "Dare," the poet is moving from thinking of the making to feeling the making. On the page as Blake printed his etching, the title is in the intellectual blue sky and the "Dare" is just above the etched tiger's head. We have gone from thinking to feeling, from the heavens to the earth, from the eternal to the fatal. The fearful symmetry may be in the body of the supreme, hunting animal, but there are other symmetries as well, including the grouping of the stanzas. Just as the first and last exist in a relation to each other, the first pair – focusing on the maker – and the second pair, focusing on the maker's tools – form a parallel relation. Both relations go from the conceptual to the actual. These groupings appear because of the tree limbs, but the tree is more than a frame. This is not Eden. There is no fruit, unless we count the tiger. The tree trunk, as the eye comes toward its base, becomes more gnarled, the bark stressed into parallel lines that we see either as echoes or progenitors of the tiger's pelt. As we go from blue to the tawny earth, through the poem from sky to animal, the upward-reaching tree goes from tawny to blue. There is a contrapuntal rhythm here of the eye going down the text and up the tree, of the eye going down the tree and, with the quick, periodless move from "Could" to "Dare," up the text. Yes, tigers are fierce, but their makers are fiercer. Just before the last stanza, which is also just before the blue sky gives way to the tawny earth, the poet asks "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" Could a being as fierce as a tiger-maker be as compassionate as God the Father? In the mid-eighteenth century, with the Industrial Revolution destroying children (as in Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper") without redemption, one cannot help but doubt. The look of Blake's tiger's face is not ferocious but doubtful. God is most-powerful, but the tree is bare and the times are grim. We come to understand this through a complex reading that exploits rhythmic effects produced by the interwoven rhythms of the verbal and the visual.

Yet to many in the modern world, the possibilities of rhythm arising in the visual as well as the verbal domain need to be made conscious. True, the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests a definition of rhythm from the domain of art, but it does so only to withdraw it. The definition is this: "Due correlation and interdependence of parts, producing a harmonious whole." Note that there are three crucial active elements to this definition. "Due correlation" suggests that artistic rhythm conforms to some prescription, some extrinsic and immovable reality, like the stress of syllables. "Interdependence" and "whole" suggest that we have elements each of which has a place. And what

sort of place? A "harmonious" one. That is, the definition for rhythm in art relies on an unacknowledged metaphor drawn from music. The inability of the OED to do better reflects the conceptual world we inhabit. Here is the most recent exemplary quote the OED offers: "While symmetry is an architectural idea [...] rhythm is a plastic idea [...] Symmetry implies and expresses the lasting, uniform and inorganic; rhythm implies change, the organic, as sculpture deals with animal life" (ellipses in original). A building could not have rhythm, but perhaps a statue of a tiger just might. In other words, even in defining rhythm in art, the OED questions its possibility.

Once upon a time, the rhythms we feel in painting were acknowledged, but, in my researches, more so in the East than in the West. Over a thousand years ago, Ching Hao wrote "There are Six Essentials in painting. The first is called *spirit*; the second, *rhythm*; the third, *thought*; the fourth, *scenery*; the fifth, the *brush*; and the last is the *ink*."[7] The ancient master is concerned not with the fixed object alone but with the work coming from the hand of its maker, a process we can understand if we read the work for it. The OED reports in its first exemplary sentence on rhythm in art that this was known in the West, too. "In which [works in painting and sculpture] they [*sc.* the Greeks] have called that symmetry [*sic*] and just proportion which reigns in all the parts by the name of rhythm." But while we can, if we slow down to feel the rhythm of the painting, embrace this idea, at a conscious level we seem to have forgotten or suppressed it. We have separated the maker from the made. In reading a narrative, we always hear the voice of a narrator and sense the presence of an author. In reading a painting, we always see the objects painted and only on long reflection, as in recognizing the symbolism of Mona Lisa's resting hands as she gazes past the artist and into the studio, do we connect maker and made. But that connection is vital to feel the full force of painterly rhythm, a force that exists in all the best works but it is a force that, passing even slowly through a museum, we cannot grasp, although it grasps us: "Don't just walk. Think about it."

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[7] Ching Ho, "Notes of Brushwork" [fl. 925], http://www.radicalacademy.com/philosophicalquotations8.htm (retrieved June 17, 2008).

SYMBOLISM

An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics

Volume 8

Editors

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AMS Press, Inc.
New York