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**Issues in the Instrumental Study of Poetry Reading
(Abstract)**

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This paper presents in a nutshell aspects of the author's research in poetry reading (rhythmical performance and voice quality). At the beginning it states the impossibility of straightforward instrumental research in poetic rhythm, and suggests a work-around within a comprehensive theory (the Perception-Oriented Theory of Metre). All rules for metrical vs unmetrical are violated by the greatest masters of musicality in English poetry (Milton and Shelley, for instance); instead, the theory places the constraints in the performer's ability or willingness to perform the verse line rhythmically, a rhythmical performance being one in which conflicting patterns of language and versification are simultaneously perceptible. At a pre-instrumental stage the author applied hypotheses derived from the empirical research of others (stress perception, nonlinguistic tick-tack perception and performance of nonsense lines) to account for the peculiar nature of the trochaic metre; as well as hypotheses derived from the limited-channel-capacity hypothesis and gestalt theory to account for the mental processes that govern the vocal devices used in a rhythmical performance. He put to a non-instrumental test this theory in an experiment with the rhythmical performance of stress maxima in the seventh position in the iambic pentameter. Finally, he presents six case studies illustrating six theoretical issues, through computer analysis of recorded readings and electronic manipulations thereof in order to compare minimal pairs of alternative solutions. These case studies explore enjambment, convergent and divergent delivery style, triple-encodedness, listener response, voice quality and issues of interpretation.

Such variety of effects is achieved by a homogeneous set of vocal manipulations: grouping and overarticulation which, in the final resort, boil down to conflicting phonetic cues for continuity and discontinuity at the same time. At the end of an utterance in ordinary speech there is, usually, redundancy of cues. We cue discontinuity by a pause, falling intonation contour, prolongation of the last syllable or speech sounds of the utterance, overarticulation of word-final stop releases, if any, overarticulation of the last word boundary, and so forth. In enjambment, for instance, where a syntactic unit overrides the line ending, the performer may have recourse to conflicting cues, indicating at the same time syntactic continuity and discontinuity of the versification unit. When a stressed syllable occurs in a weak position, overarticulation of the phonemes and of the syllable boundaries may save mental processing space, allowing to perceive the conflicting patterns of language and versification. At the same time, continuity must be indicated, to preserve syntactic coherence. A stress maximum (that is, a stressed syllable between two unstressed ones in mid-phrase or mid-word) in the seventh (weak) position of an iambic pentameter line renders it, according to Halle and Keyser, unmetrical. Experienced performers, however, seem to be able to perform such verse lines rhythmically, and tend to have recourse to similar vocal strategies. They are surprised to discover that they over- rather than under-emphasize the deviant stress, isolating the last four syllables as a perceptual unit, and generating a perceptual drive toward the last (tenth) position, where the two patterns have a coinciding downbeat, emphatically closing the verse line. After the sixth position cues for discontinuity are required to perceptually isolate the last four metric positions, but also cues for syntactic continuity (in mid-phrase). As to triple-encodedness, the same phonetic cues, e. g., overarticulated word-final voiceless plosives may indicate, at the

same time, sentence ending, line ending and, e. g., a dominant, determined personality. As to convergent and divergent delivery styles, the distinction refers to the performer's tendency to have recourse where possible to redundant or conflicting phonetic cues to effect a rhythmical performance, within the constraints of the conflicting linguistic and versification patterns of the text.

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