

On the Verbal Art of William Blake and Other Poet-Painters

I. One of the Songs of Experience

Not a line is drawn without intention . . .
as Poetry admits not a Letter that is
Insignificant so Painting admits not a
Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass
Insignificant much less an Insignificant
Blur or Mark.

Blake, "A Vision of the Last Judgment"

The spelling and punctuation of "Infant Sorrow" presented below strictly follow the text which was engraved by William Blake in his *Songs of Experience* (1794) and which is entirely uniform both in all the early copies owned by the Houghton and Widener libraries of Harvard University and in the facsimile edition of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* published by Trianon Press in London and Beccles.

₁My mother groand! my father wept.
₂Into the dangerous world I leapt:
₃Helpless, naked, piping loud:
₄Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

₅Struggling in my fathers hands:
₆Striving against my swadling bands:
₇Bound and weary I thought best
₈To sulk upon my mothers breast.

The two quatrains of the poem are divided into four clear-cut couplets. In particular, the two lines of each couplet are bound by a rhyme, and the odd couplets of the poem differ from the even ones in the structure of their rhymes. Both rhyming words of any odd couplet belong to the same morphological category, end with the identical consonantal inflectional suffix, and are devoid of agreement in their prevocalic phonemes: ₁*wep-t*: ₂*leap-t*, ₅*hand-s*: ₆*band-s*. The similar formal makeup of the two odd rhymes underscores the divergent semantic orientation of the two quatrains, that is, the conceptual contrast between the inaugural preterits and the inanimates looming over the second quatrain which are, *nota bene*, the sole plurals of the poem. The grammatical rhyme is combined with the deep parallelism of the rhyming lines. The third couplet consists of two strictly symmetrical clauses: ₅*Struggling in my fathers hands*: ₆*Striving against my swadling bands*. In the first couplet two coordinate clauses of the initial line, the only parallel hemistichs within the poem—₁*My mother groand! my father wept*—find their response in the third coordinate clause: ₂*I leapt*. In contradistinction to the odd couplets, the even rhymes confront grammatically dissimilar words; namely, in both cases an adjectival adjunct rhymes with an inanimate noun. The entire phonetic makeup of the former word appears to be included in the second member of the rhyming pair: ₃*loud*: ₄*cloud*, ₇*best*: ₈*breast*.

Thus the even rhymes, nongrammatical by themselves, are patently grammatical in their juxtaposition. In particular, they assert the kinship of the two terminal images—₄*a cloud* as a metaphor of placenta and ₈*breast*—two successive links between the infant and his mother.

The eight lines of the poem build an array of close and telling grammatical correspondences. The four couplets of the octastich are divided into two pairs in three different ways similar to the three types of rhymes within a quatrain. Both successive pairs of couplets—the two *anterior* couplets (I–II) of the first quatrain (lines 1–4) and the two *posterior* couplets (III–IV) of the second quatrain (lines 5–8) are comparable to the two paired (or plain) rhymes *aabb* within a quatrain. The relation between the two *odd* couplets (I, III: lines 1–2 and 5–6) and the two *even* couplets (II, IV: lines 3–4 and 7–8) is analogous to

INFANT SORROW

My mother ground! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud:
Like a fiend hid' in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands:
Striving against my swaddling bands;
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.



the alternate rhymes *abab*. Finally, the contraposition of the *outer* couplets (I, IV: lines 1–2, 7–8) and the *inner* couplets (II, III: lines 3–6) is tantamount to the embracing rhymes *abba*. These three types of grammatical correspondences are distinctly interconnected in “Infant Sorrow.” An isomerism, i.e., an equal number of equivalent components, underlies the correlation of the couplets and presents two significant varieties. A *global* symmetry equating both couplets of one class with both couplets of the opposite class, namely $I + II = III + IV$ or $I + III = II + IV$ or $I + IV = II + III$, differs from a *sectional* symmetry which builds an equation between the couplets within each of the two opposite classes, namely $I = III$ and $II = IV$ or $I = IV$ and $II = III$.

Here in each instance of global symmetry between the anterior and posterior couplets, one of the two further correspondences—outer/inner or odd/even—is also global and supports the equilibrium of the quatrains: it assigns the same total number of similar grammatical units to the two pairs of opposites (to the entire pairs of odd and even or of outer and inner couplets), whereas the other displays a sectional symmetry and assigns a like number of similar grammatical entities to both couplets of one and the same pair.

In addition to the leading constructive role assumed by the entire couplets, the autonomous part played by the single lines within the quatrain must also be taken into account. Thus, the two outer, marginal lines of each quatrain and also of the whole octastich appear to present particular correspondences.

Blake’s reminder that both Invention and Identity “are Objects of Intuition” provides a paramount clue to the poetic network of his words. Each of the two quatrains contains five nouns and five verbal forms. These five nouns are distributed in an equal manner among the four lines of each quatrain:

1. <i>mother, father</i>	=	2 = <i>fathers hands</i>	5.
2. <i>world</i>	=	1 = <i>bands</i>	6.
3.	=	# =	7.
4. <i>fiend, cloud</i>	=	2 = <i>mothers breast</i>	8.

In the disposition of nouns all three compositional correlations of the couplets prove to be involved.

I.	3	3	III.
II.	2	2	IV.

The global symmetry between the anterior and posterior couplets ($I + II = III + IV = 5$) is accompanied by a similar global symmetry between the outer and inner couplets ($I + IV = II + III = 5$) and by a sectional symmetry of the odd and even couplets ($I = III = 3$; $II = IV = 2$). This sectional symmetry is not confined to the entire couplets but applies also to their constituent lines: there are (1) two nouns in the first and one in the second line of the odd couplets, (2) no nouns in the first and two in the second line of the even couplets. In this way the homogeneity of the odd couplets and that of their even opposites as well as the contrast of these two classes are outlined. In contradistinction to all other lines of the poem, the marginal lines of both quatrains differ from all other lines of the octastich: each of the four marginal lines contains one pair of nouns: ₁*mother, father*; ₄*fiend, cloud*; ₅*fathers hands*, ₈*mothers breast*.

The ten nouns of the poem are divided evenly into five animates and five inanimates. The five animates are confined to the four marginal lines of the two quatrains. The distribution of animates and inanimates among the two anterior couplets of the first quatrain and the two posterior couplets of the second quatrain and, moreover, among the outer and inner couplets, follows the principle of antisymmetry:

Anterior couplets:	3 animates,	2 inanimates
Outer couplets:	3 "	2 "
Posterior couplets:	2 "	3 "
Inner couplets:	2 "	3 "

A manifestly spatial treatment opposes inanimates to animates. The inanimates are constantly bound with locative prepositions, whereas, of the five animates, four are used without any preposition, and one with an equational preposition (₄*Like a fiend*).

Two epithets emerge in the poem. Both are attached to the second line of the quatrains and pertain to similar syntactic constructions: ₂*Into the dangerous world I leapt*; ₆*Striving against my swadling bands*. Jointly with all other prepositive attributes—possessive forms of nouns and pronouns, definite and indefinite articles—these epithets form a conspicuously symmetrical design in the poem. Such attributes occur twice in each line of both quatrains with the exception of their penultimate line: ₁*My, my*; ₂*the dangerous*; ₃*#*; ₄*a, a*; ₅*my fathers*; ₆*my swadling*; ₇*#*; ₈*my mothers*. Six of these attributes belong to the first, and six to the second quatrain; correspondingly, an equal number pertain to

the outer and inner couplets of the poem. The odd couplets oppose four (2 + 2) prepositive attributes to two (# + 2) in the even couplets.

As compared with the ten nouns, the ten verbal forms present significant similarities and divergences in their distribution among the four couplets:

I.	3	2	III.
II.	2	3	IV.

We are faced with the same global symmetry between the anterior and posterior couplets ($I + II = III + IV = 5$), but the treatment of the correlations outer/inner and odd/even is diametrically opposite in the nominal and verbal sets. The disposition of verbal forms exhibits a global symmetry between the odd and even couplets ($I + III = II + IV = 5$), and a sectional symmetry of the outer and inner couplets ($I = IV = 3$; $II = III = 2$). This symmetry applies both to the couplets and to their lines. The first line of the outer couplets contains two verbal forms (₁*groand, wept*; ₇*bound, thought*), the second line contains one (₂*leapt*; ₈*to sulk*); and each line of the inner couplets contains one verbal form (₃*piping*, ₄*hid*; ₅*struggling*, ₆*striving*).

There is a sensible difference between a global symmetry of outer/inner and odd/even constituents: the former suggests a closed configuration, and the latter, an open-ended chain. Blake's poem associates the former with nouns and the latter with verbs, and one ought to recall Edward Sapir's semantic definition of nouns as "existents" and of verbs as "occurrents."

The passive participle appears once in each even couplet (₄*hid*, ₇*bound*). No transitives occur among the active verbal forms. In the active voice the first quatrain counts three finite and one nonfinite form, while the second quatrain displays an antisymmetrical relation of one finite and three nonfinite forms. All four finites are preterits. A sharp contrast arises between the inner couplets, with their three gerunds as the sole verbal forms, and the outer couplets, which possess no gerunds but have five verbs proper (four finites and one infinitive). In both quatrains the inner couplet is subordinate to the contiguous line of the outer couplet: lines (3, 4) to the second line of the octastich, and lines (5, 6) to the second line from its end.

Prepositions parallel the verbs in the global symmetry of their distribution. Among the six prepositions in the poem, three belong to the

anterior couplets (₂*into*, ₄*like*, *in*) and three to the posterior couplets (₅*in*, ₆*against*, ₈*upon*) and, correspondingly, three to the odd and three to the even couplets, whereas any outer couplet uses one preposition and any inner couplet, two.

The impressive grammatical balance between the correlative parts of the poem frames and sets off the dramatic development. The only four independent clauses with the only four finite predicates and the only four grammatical subjects—two of them pronominal and two, nominal—are all confined to the outer couplets. While the pronominal clause with the first person subject occurs in both quatrains—in the next to the first and next to the last line of the octastich (₂*I leapt*; ₇*I thought*)—the two nominal subjects detach the first line from the rest of the poem, and Blake concludes this line with a period. *Infant*, the title hero, and the two other dramatis personae are presented with reference to the addresser of the message: *I, my mother, my father*. Both nouns along with their determiners reappear in the second quatrain, however, with significant syntactic and semantic shifts. Grammatical subjects are transformed into possessive attributes of indirect objects, which are governed by subordinate verbal forms. The two matching parts of the inaugural octosyllable become disjointed. The initial line of the second quatrain concludes with the same paternal evocation as the corresponding line of the first quatrain: ₁*my father wept*; ₅*my fathers hands*. The original vision of the weeping parent yields to the twofold image of strife against *fathers hands* and *swadling bands*, the hostile forces which befall the infant at his leap *into the dangerous world*.

The opening words of the poem—₁*My mother*—reappear once more at its end—₈*my mothers*—and, jointly with the subject *I* of the second and seventh lines, they display a mirror symmetry. The first of these two pronouns is followed by the pair of semipredicates ₃*Helpless, naked*, while the second *I* is preceded by a syntactically analogous pair: ₇*Bound and weary*. The placement and chiasmic structure of this pair retain the principle of mirror symmetry. The participle *Bound* supersedes the antonym *naked*, and the primordial helplessness turns into exhaustion. The loud piping of the infant, which supplanted the deep moan of the mother, yields to an urge for silence: ₇*I thought best* ₈*To sulk upon my mothers breast*. The exodus from the mother portends the return to her, a new maternal screen for shelter and protection (₄*hid in*—₈*To sulk upon*).

The author's drafts of a longer poem were reduced to its first eight

lines for his *Songs of Experience*.¹ The inquiry into the verbal texture of these two quatrains corroborates and strengthens the intuitive grasp expressed astutely by Jacob Bronowski: "The whole progression lies coiled in the first helplessness."² A scrutiny of the chiselled octastich with its far-flung grammatical framework may illustrate and specify another pertinent conclusion of the same author: "Blake's was an imagination of pictures, astonishing in its geometrical insight."³

In this connection it seems to me suitable to restate the "remarkable analogy between the role of grammar in poetry and the painter's composition based on a latent or patent geometrical order or on a revulsion against geometrical arrangements."⁴ In particular, the headwords, the principal clauses, and the prominent motifs which fill the diverging outer couplets stand out against accessory and subordinate contents of the contiguous inner couplets, quite similar to the converging lines of the background in a pictorial perspective.

The firm and plastic relational geometricity of Blake's verbal art assures a startling dynamism in the development of the tragic theme. The coupled antisymmetrical operations outlined above and the categorial contrast of the two parallel grammatical rhymes underscore the tension between the nativity and the ensuing worldly experience. In linguistic terms, the tension is between the initial supremacy of animate subjects with finite verbs of action and the subsequent prevalence of concrete, material inanimates used as indirect objects of gerunds, mere verbals derived from verbs of action and subordinate to the only finite *thought*, in its narrowed meaning of a wish conceived.

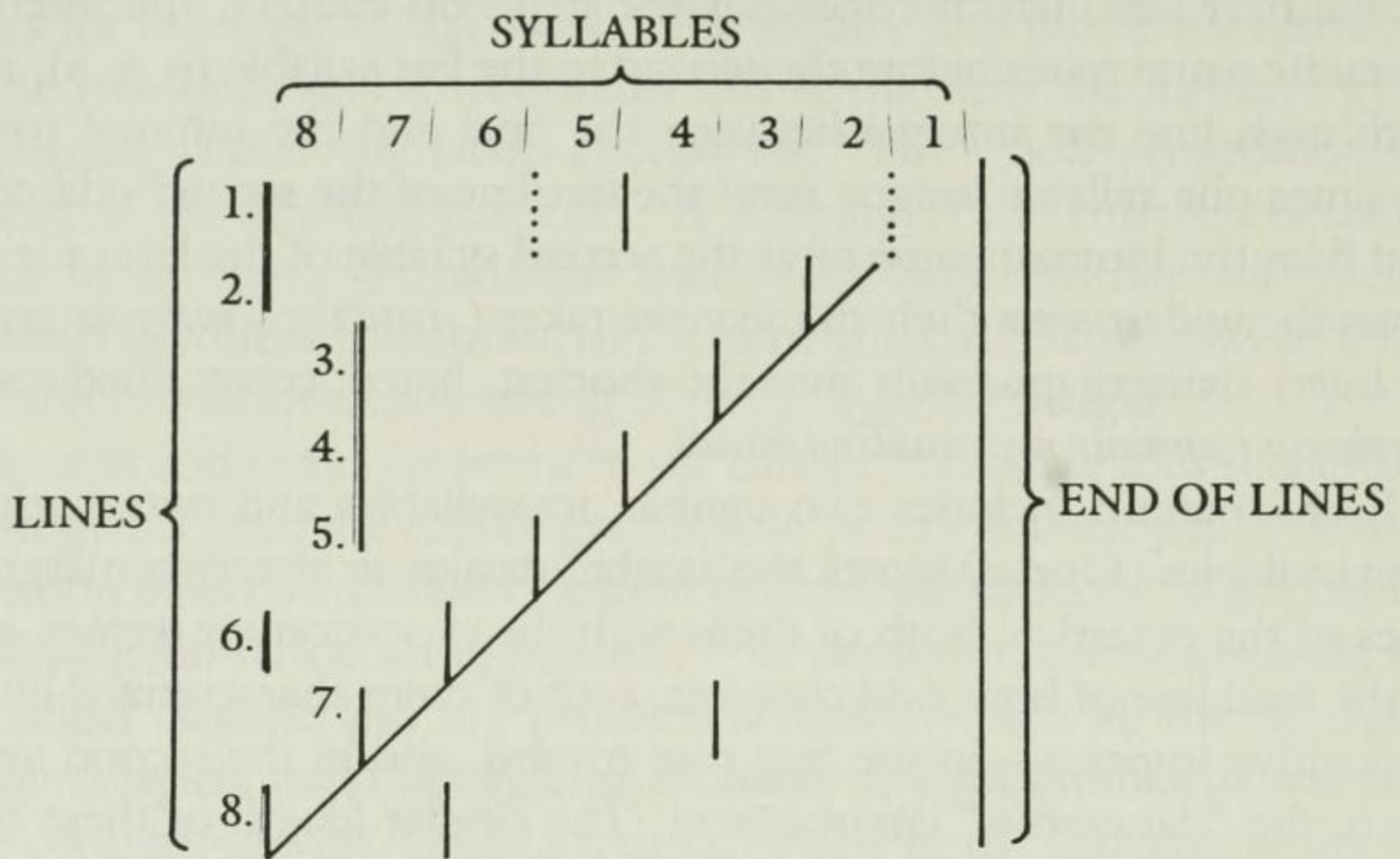
The peculiar feature of Blake's punctuation is his use of colons. The colons of "Infant Sorrow" signal the division of the inner couplets into their constituent lines and dissociate the inner couplets from the outer ones. Each of the inner lines containing a gerundial construction ends in a colon and is separated by a colon from the antecedent clause of the same sentence.

The growing motif of weary resignation finds its gripping embodiment also in the rhythmical course of the poem. Its initial octosyllable is the most symmetrical of the eight lines. It consists of two tetrasyllabic coordinate clauses with an expressive pause between them, rendered in Blake's text by means of an exclamation point. An optional secondary pause emerges between the subject and predicate of both juxtaposed clauses. The consequent of these contrastive pauses precedes the final syllable of the line: ₁ *My mother groand! my father wept.*

In the next line, which concludes the first odd couplet, the internal syntactic pause arises before the second to the last syllable (6 + 2), and with each line the interval between the final and the internal pause becomes one syllable longer, until the last line of the second odd couplet fixes the internal pause after the second syllable of the line: 2 + 6. Thus the widest swing which the verse takes (₂*Into the dangerous world / I leapt*) changes gradually into the shortest, bated, constrained span: ₆*Striving / against my swadling bands*.

Each quatrain includes two iambic octosyllables and two trochaic heptasyllables. One observes the iambic design in the two marginal lines of the octastich, both of them with the evocation *my mother*, and in the final line of both odd couplets, each of them characterized by an opposite impetus—in the first case toward, and in the second away from, the “dangerous” environment. The similar length of these two correlative lines lends a particular cogency to the double contrast of their rhythmical phrasing and semantic orientation. The thought of salvation *upon my mothers breast* as a retort to the image of hateful *swadling bands* reinforces the association between the two even lines of the second quatrain by their rhythmical identity: ₆*Striving / against my swadling bands* and ₈*To sulk / upon my mothers breast*. The intermediate line which opens the last even couplet shares, as mentioned above, several structural features with the initial line of the first even couplet and duplicates its trochaic measure with a medial pause (4 + 3).

In the iambic lines the main or only pause always falls before an upbeat. In the trochaic lines the pause occurs before the downbeat or, exceptionally, before an upbeat fulfilled by a stressed syllable (₄*Like a fiend / hid in a cloud*). The distribution of pauses in Blake’s octastich illustrates its stunning symmetry. In the diagram below, numerals followed by a dot show the order of the eight lines; the subsequent vertical indicates the beginning, and the oblong vertical at the right of the table, the end of the line. The syllables of the line from its end toward its beginning are designated by the upper horizontal row of numerals. The vertical between the two limits of each line renders its inner pause, while the secondary, optional inner pause is represented by a dotted vertical. A slant marks the increasingly regressive tendency displayed by the disposition of the interlinear and then, in the last couplet, pre-linear pauses.



As the poet himself asserts in the foreword to "Jerusalem," he has indeed attained "a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables" within its segments.

The initial heptasyllabic line of each even couplet is linked with the octosyllabic end of the foregoing odd couplet by means of an alliteration of the two final words (₂*Leapt*—₃*Loud*, ₆*Bands*—₇*Best*), and by a paronomastic affinity between the final and initial word of both successive lines (₂*LEAPT*—₃*hELPless*, ₆*BANDS*—₇*BOUND*). Within a couplet the lines are parisyllabic in the first quatrain, imparisyllabic in the second. Two words alliterate in the former case, three in the latter: ₁*Wept*—₂*World*, ₃*Loud*—₄*Like*; ₇*Bound*—*Best*—₈*Breast*. In the first, parallelistic couplet of the second quatrain, the alliteration develops into a paronomastic blend of two subsequent words in the antecedent member of a triple chain: ₅*STRUGGLING*—₆*STRIVING*—*swadLING*. The similarity of clusters counterbalances the dissimilar distribution of downbeats and upbeats in both confronted gerunds, one of which begins a trochaic (₅*Struggling in*) and the other an iambic line (₆*Striving against*).

At the limit of both quatrains the parisyllabic contiguous lines of the two inner couplets, one even and the next odd, display a manifold propinquity in their sound texture: ₄*FiEND*—*HiD IN*—₅*IN my Fathers HANDS*. No sooner has the fourth line, the only simile of the poem, introduced a mythicized hero, than the adverse image of the father's fettering hands, in a kind of filmic dissolve, appears slightly under the

first shot, whereupon the salient metamorphosis comes into being: the would-be supernatural hero (₄*Like a fiend hid in a cloud*) is victimized (₅*Struggling in my fathers hands*).

The eight lines of "Infant Sorrow" are remarkably rich in what Gerard Manley Hopkins infers by "figures of grammar" and "figures of sound," and it is to their eloquent symmetry and palpable interplay imbued with diaphanous symbolism that this succinct, ingenuous story owes most of its mythological power and suggestiveness.

The Douanier Rousseau has been compared with Blake and said to be close to him.⁵ An octastich of the French painter will be our next topic.

II. Henri Rousseau's Poetic Appendix to His Last Painting

I have kept my naïveté . . . I will not now be able to change my manner which I have acquired by stubborn application.

Rousseau to André Dupont, April 1, 1910

Shortly before the artist's death (September 2, 1910), he exhibited one single painting, *The Dream*, at the Salon des Indépendants (March 18–May 1 of the same year) and wrote to Guillaume Apollinaire: "I have sent my large picture; everyone finds it pleasing; I think that you will deploy your literary talent and avenge me for all the insults and affronts I have received" (March 11, 1910).⁶ Apollinaire's commemorative paper "Le Douanier" recounts that Rousseau had never forgotten his early, Polish love, Yadvigha (Jadwiga), "who inspired *The Dream*, his masterpiece," and among a few instances of the painter's poetic activities ("gentils morceaux de poésie") his "Inscription pour Le Rêve" supplements Apollinaire's essay.⁷

- ₁ Yadvigha dans un beau rêve
- ₂ S'étant endormie doucement
- ₃ Entendait les sons d'une musette
- ₄ Dont jouait un charmeur bien pensant.
- ₅ Pendant que la lune reflète
- ₆ Sur les fleuves, les arbres verdoyants,
- ₇ Les fauves serpents prêtent l'oreille
- ₈ Aux airs gais de l'instrument.

A nearly literal English translation reads as follows:

Yadwigha in a beautiful dream
 Having fallen asleep peacefully
 Was hearing the sound of a reed
 Upon which a well-meaning charmer was playing.
 While the moon casts a reflection
 Of the greening trees on the rivers,
 The savage serpents lend their ear
 To the gay tunes of the instrument.

This octastich was written by the painter on a little gilded plate as an “explanation” of this painting, because, according to Arsène Alexandre’s report on his visit to the artist published in *Comœdia*, March 19, 1910, Rousseau declared that paintings need to have an explanation: “People don’t always understand what they see . . . it’s always better with a few verses.”⁸ In the *Catalogue de la 26 Exposition* of the *Société des Artistes Indépendants* (Paris, 1910, p. 294) the reference to Henri Rousseau’s “4468 *Le Rêve*” is accompanied by the same verses, printed, however, with gross errors and distortions, e.g., *Yadurgha*, so that Apollinaire’s version and the identical text in W. Uhde’s *Henri Rousseau* (Paris, 1911) still appear to be the most reliable.

The four even, “masculine” lines of the poem end in one and the same nasal vowel, whereas the four odd, “feminine” lines end in a closed syllable with a short or long variety of [ɛ] as its nucleus. Among the approximate rhymes displayed by these two sets of lines, those which tie together the two inner couplets (lines 3–4 with 5–6) and, in turn, the rhymes of the two outer couplets (1–2 with 7–8) exhibit a supplementary similarity between the rhyming words in comparison with the rhymes within the quatrains: in the outer couplets the complete identity of syllabic vowels is reinforced by a supporting prevocalic consonant (₁RÊve—₇OREille; ₂douceMENT—₈instrument) and in the inner couplets a similar vocalic identity is seconded by the postvocalic consonant of the feminine rhymes (₃musETTE—₅reflÈTE) or by the salient grammatical sameness of the words sharing the masculine rhyme (₄pensant—₆verdoyants, the only two participial forms in the poem).

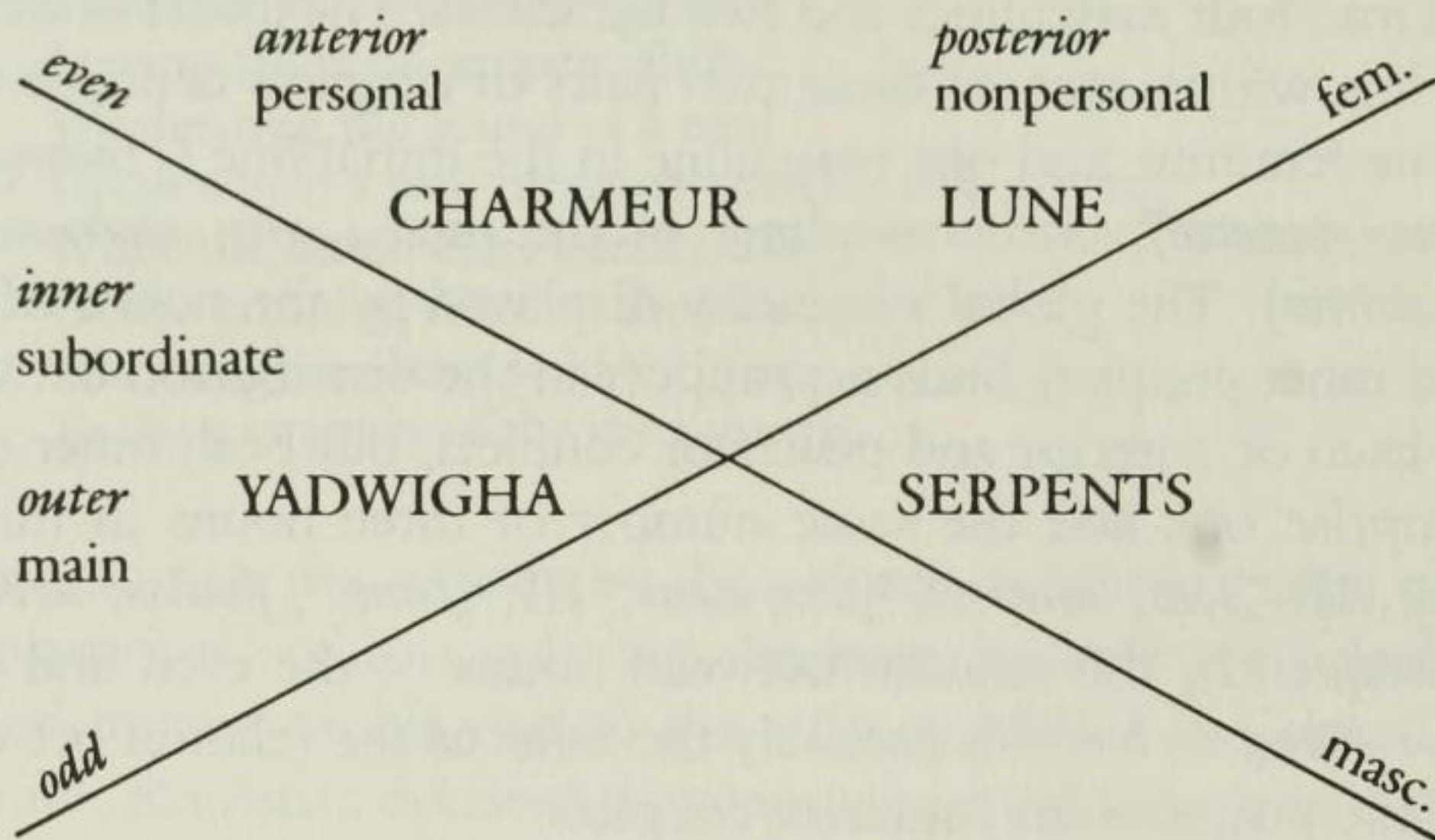
As the rhymes underscore, the octastich presents a clear-cut division into outer (I, IV) and inner couplets (II, III). Each of these two pairs of couplets contains an equal number of six nouns with the same bi-

furcation into four masculines and two feminines. The initial as well as the final line within each of these two pairs of couplets contains two nouns: one feminine and one masculine in the initial line (₁*Yadwigha*, *rêve*; ₃*sons*, *musette*), two masculines in the final (₈*airs*, *instrument*; ₆*fleuves*, *arbres*). The global symmetry displayed by the nouns of the outer and inner couplets finds no support in the distribution between odd and even or anterior and posterior couplets, but both inner couplets comprise one and the same number of three nouns in mirror symmetry (II: ₃*sons*, *musette*, ₄*charmeur*; III: ₅*lune*, ₆*fleuves*, *arbres*), and, consequently, the relation between nouns of the even and odd couplets—seven to five—is precisely the same as the relation between nouns of the posterior and anterior couplets.

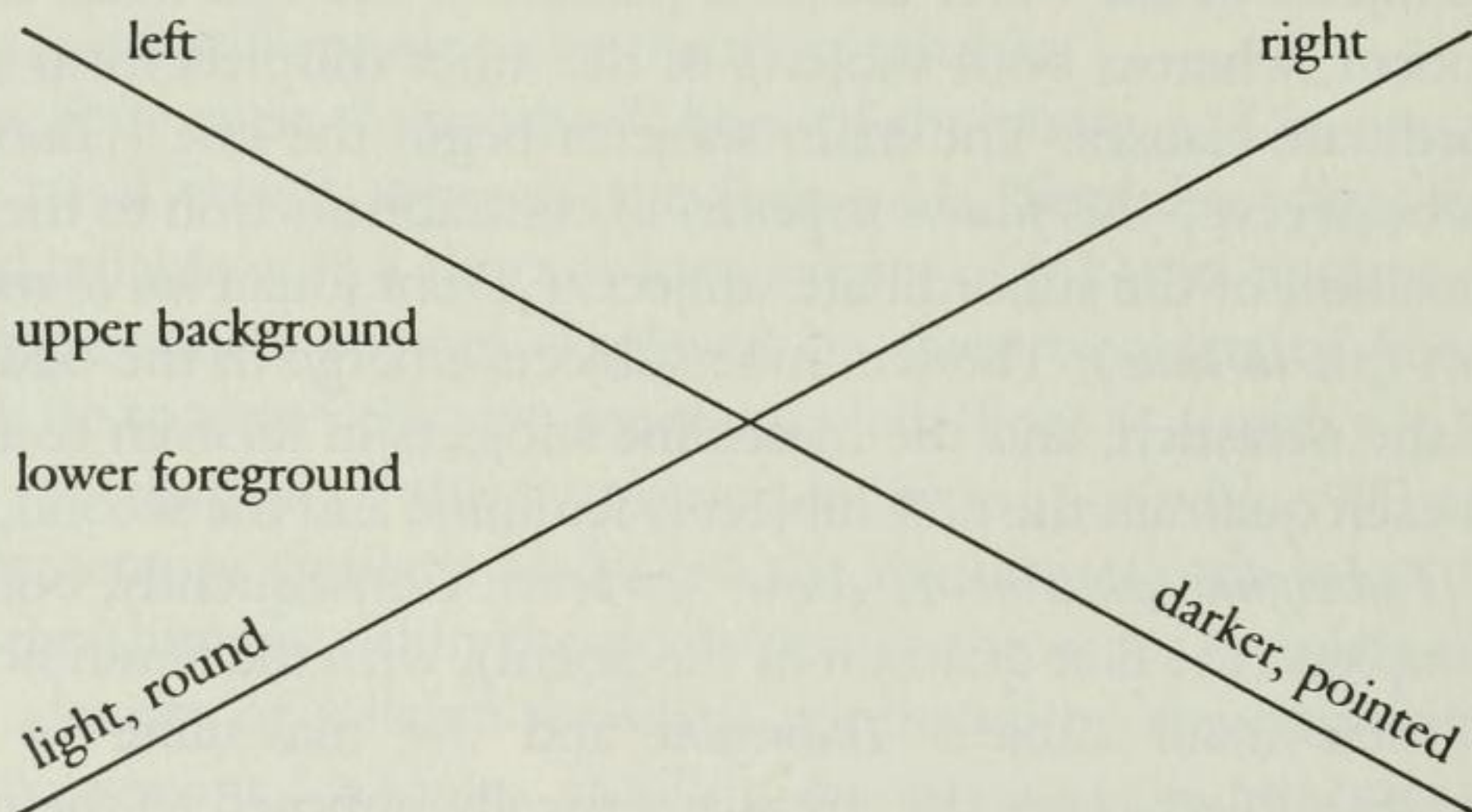
Each of the two quatrains comprises one sentence with two subjects and two finite predicates. Every couplet of the octastich contains one subject, while in the distribution of the finites—three to one—the even couplets have the same relation to the odd ones as the inner to the outer couplets.

The subjects of the outer couplets pertain to the two main clauses of the poem, whereas both subjects of the inner couplets form a part of subordinate clauses. The main subjects begin the line (₁*Yadwigha* dans un beau *rêve*; ₇*Les fauves serpents*) in contradistinction to the non-initial position of the subordinate subjects (₄Dont jouait *un charmeur*; ₅Pendant que *la lune*). The feminine subjects emerge in the odd couplets of the octastich, and the masculine subjects in its even couplets. Thus in each quatrain the first subject is feminine and the second, masculine: ₁*Yadwigha*, ₄*charmeur*; ₅*lune*, ₇*serpents*. Consequently, both anterior couplets (the first quatrain of the poem), with the feminine gender of their main subject *Yadwigha* and the masculine of their subordinate subject *charmeur*, are diametrically opposed to the posterior couplets (second quatrain), where the main subject *serpents* is masculine and the subordinate subject *lune* is feminine. The personal (human) gender distinguishes the grammatical subjects of the anterior couplets (₁*Yadwigha*, ₄*charmeur*) from the nonpersonal subjects of the posterior couplets (₅*lune*, ₇*serpents*).

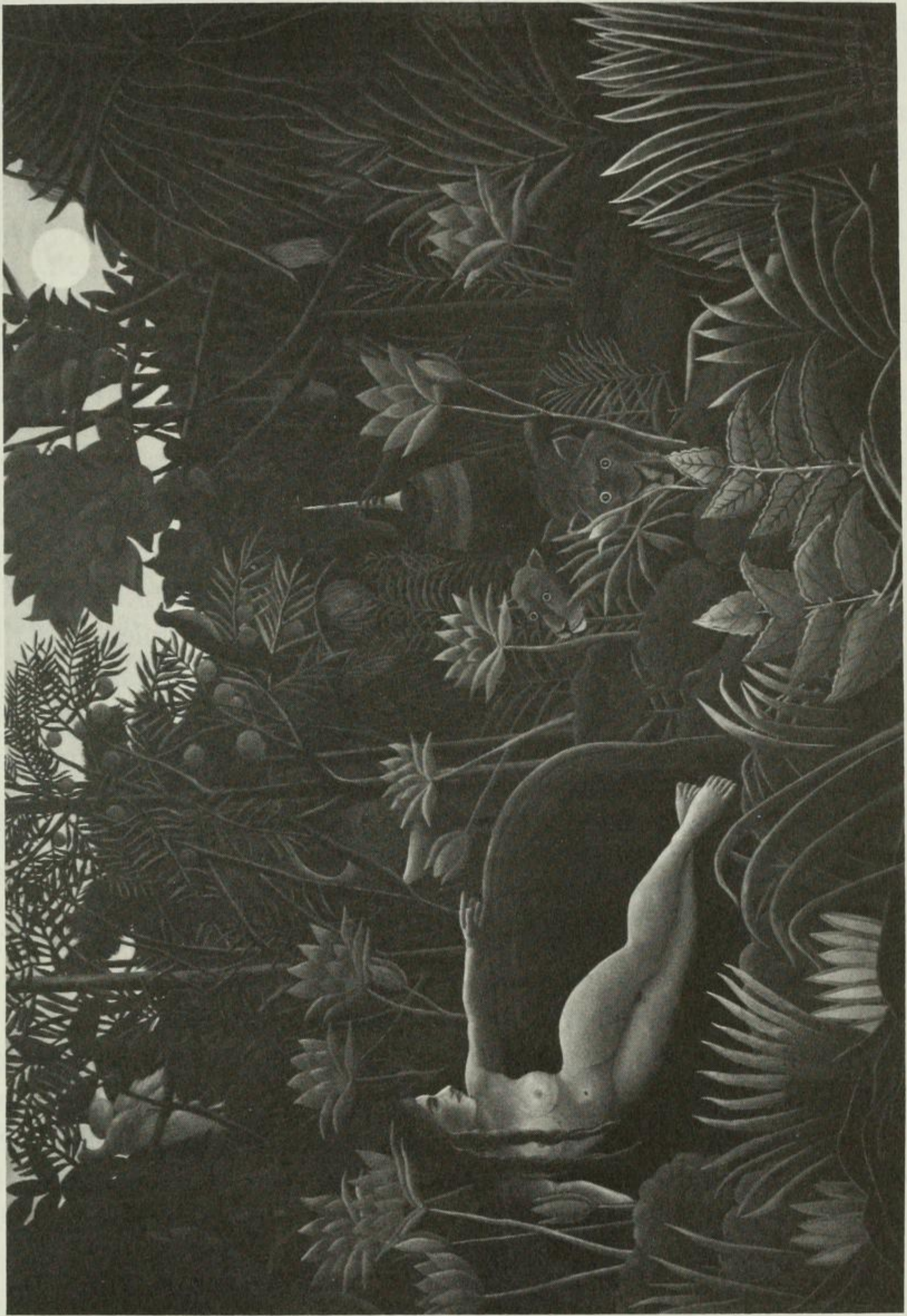
These data may be summarized in a table with italic inscriptions indicating the placement of the four subjects in the composition of the octastich and with roman type denoting their grammatical properties.



This distribution of the four grammatical subjects proves to correspond to the *relative* disposition of their pictorial referents on Rousseau's canvas.⁹



The pictorial figures of the foreground areas are rendered in the poem by the main subjects' placement in the diverging, outer couplets, whereas the background figures which have been moved upwards and shortened in the painting produce subordinate subjects assigned to the converging, inner couplets of the octastich. Tristan Tzara's suggestive essay, published as a preface to the exhibition of Rousseau's paintings in the Sidney Janis Gallery (New York, 1951), discusses "The Role of Time and Space in his Work" and points out the relevance and peculiarity of "perspective as Rousseau conceived it" and, in particular, a



Henri Rousseau, *The Dream*, 1910 (Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

significant trait of his great compositions: a series of movements split up “into individual elements, veritable slices of Time bound together by a sort of arithmetical operation.”¹⁰

While the charmer and the full moon face the spectator, the profile figures of Yadvigha and the snake are turned toward each other; the snake’s windings parallel the curve of the woman’s hip and leg, and the vertical green ferns jut out under both of these curves and point to Yadvigha’s hip and to the upper curve of the reptile. In fact, this bright and slim snake emerges against the background of another, thicker, black, and hardly discernible serpent; the latter mirrors the skin of the charmer while the former corresponds to the color of a stripe in his variegated belt. The blue and violet flowers rise above Yadvigha and the two snakes. In the poem two parallel constructions connect the heroine with the reptiles: ₃*Entendait les sons d’une musette* and ₇*prêtent l’oreille* ₈*Aux airs gais de l’instrument.*

Some challenging questions of grammatical gender arise in this connection. To the two feminine subjects of the poem the painting responds with two salient features characteristic of Yadvigha and the moon, their diverse paleness in comparison with the deeper colors of the environment and especially of the charmer and reptiles, and the similar roundness of the full moon and of the female’s breast in comparison with the pointed body of the bright snake and the charmer’s reed. The *sexuïsemblance* (sexual likeness) of the feminine and masculine genders experienced by any member of the French speech community was scrutinized lucidly and exhaustively by J. Damourette and E. Pichon in the first volume of their historic accomplishment, *Des mots à la pensée—Essai de grammaire de la langue française* (Paris 1911–1927), chap. 4:

All of the nominal substantives in French are masculine or feminine: this is a fact that is both incontestable and uncontested. The national imagination has reached the point where it can no longer conceive of nominal substances except as they contain an analogy with one of the sexes; so much so that “sexual likeness” has become a mode for classifying these substances generally [§302] . . . It has in the speech and thought of every French person an omnipresent role [§306] . . . This assessment is obviously not of a purely intellectual nature. It is something in the realm of affect . . . “Sexual likeness” is so clearly a comparison with sex that feminine vocables in French cannot be figuratively compared to anything

but women [§307] . . . The classification of “sexual likeness” is the mode of expression for the personification of things [§309].

It is noteworthy that the four feminines of Rousseau’s poem are tied to its four odd lines. They inaugurate the line when functioning as grammatical subjects in the odd couplets, and they terminate the line when they act as modifiers in the even couplets.

The mandatory association of the feminine gender with odd, or feminine, lines demands an interpretation. The tendency to differentiate feminine and masculine forms by the closed and open end of the word¹¹ creates an association between the final syllable of the line, closed or open, and the gender, feminine or masculine. Also the term “feminine rhymes,” popular even in French elementary textbooks, may have favored the distribution of feminine nouns among those lines.

In Rousseau’s verses the distribution of genders is submitted to a dissimilative principle. The closest object of the verb belongs to the gender opposite to that of the subject of the given clause, and if there is a further governed modifier, be it adverbial or adnominal, it retains the gender of the subject; in this way the role of genders in the poem becomes particularly accentuated: ₁*Yadwigha* (f.) . . . ₃*entendait les sons* (m.) *d’une musette* (f.); ₄*Dont* [referring to *musette* (f.)] *jouait un charmeur* (m.); ₅*la lune* (f.) *reflète* ₆ . . . *les arbres* (m.); ₇*Les fauves serpents* (m.) *prêtent l’oreille* (f.) ₈*Aux airs gais* (m.).

The foreground of Rousseau’s painting and poem belongs to Yadwigha and the snakes; one is prompted to recall *Eve*, his somewhat earlier picture, with its stupendous duet of two profiles, the naked woman and the serpent.¹² This hierarchy of the dramatis personae was overlooked, however, by critics. Thus Apollinaire’s eulogy of March 18, 1910, “De ce tableau se dégage de la beauté,”¹³ saw the nude woman on a sofa, tropical vegetation around her with monkeys and birds of paradise, a lion, a lioness, and a fluting Negro, “a figure of mystery.” But the snakes and the moon remained unmentioned. Jean Bouret¹⁴ also confines his discussion of the compositional order in *The Dream* to the flute player, the tiger(?), the bird, and the reclining woman. These observers stop at the left, larger section of the painting without shifting to the minor right part, the topic of the second quatrain. The initial stage of inspection of the picture is, naturally, its left side: “this woman sleeping on this sofa” who dreams that she has been transported “into the middle of this forest, hearing the notes of the charmer’s pipe,” according to the painter’s explanation of his own picture.¹⁵

From *Yadwigha* and the mysterious charmer the focus shifts to the second fold of the diptych, separated from the first one by a blue flower on a long stem, which parallels a similar plant on the left side of the heroine. The narrative order and successive cognition and synthesis of the canvas *Dream*¹⁶ find their terse correspondence in the transition from the first quatrain with its two parallel imperfects—or present preterits, in L. Tesnière's terminology¹⁷—(₃*entendAIT*—₄*jouAIT*) to the two rhyming presents of the second quatrain (₅*reflÈTE*—₇*prÊTENT*) and in the substitution of mere definite articles (₅*la lune*, ₆*les fleuves*, *les arbres*, ₇*les serpents*, *l'oreille*, ₈*aux airs*, *l'instrument*) for the indefinite articles, which, with the sole exception of ₃*les sons*, dominate the preceding quatrain (₁*un rêve*, ₃*une musette*, ₄*un charmeur*).

In Rousseau's poetic as well as pictorial composition, the dramatic action is borne by the four subjects of the poem and their visual referents on the canvas. As outlined above, all of them are interconnected by three binary contrasts, glaringly expressed by the poet-painter and transforming this unusual quartet into six opposite pairs which determine and diversify the verbal and graphic plot. In the "Inscription" each of the four subjects is endowed with a further categorial feature which contrasts it with the three other correspondents: *Yadwigha* is the only proper name in the poem; *un charmeur*, its sole personal appellative; *les serpents*, its only animate plural; and *la lune* is the one inanimate among the four subjects. This diversity is accompanied by a difference of articles—the zero article which signals the proper name, the indefinite *un*, followed by the plural *les* and the feminine *la* of the definite article.

A multifarious interplay of concurrent similarities and divergences underlies and vivifies the written and painted *Dream* in all its facets: the silence of the moonlit night interrupted by the tunes of a swarthy charmer; the enchantment of moonshine and musical charms; the female's moonlight dream; two auditors of the magic tunes, the woman and the serpent, both alien and alluring to each other; the serpent as the legendary tempter of the woman and the inveterate target of the snake charmer and, on the other hand, the maximal contrast and mysterious affinity between the pallid *Yadwigha* on her old-fashioned sofa and the well-meaning tropical flutist amid his virgin forest; and, after all this, in the eyes of the inhabitant of *2 bis, rue Perrel* the equally exotic and attractive tinge of the African magician and the Polish enchantress with her intricate name.

As to the lion escorted by a lioness and omitted in the poem, in the picture it belongs to the fluteplayer's triangle and, as Bouret¹⁸ has observed, builds its "apex" pointing downwards. This front face seems to be a double of the superposed charmer and in a similar way the bright half-faced bird over Yadwigha looks like her double. Yet in the iconographic comparison of Rousseau's canvas and poem, our attention has been focused upon their common denominator, easily extractable despite their different props, such as the rivers reflecting the trees in the verse or the zoological abundance in the painting.

Like Blake's "Infant Sorrow," Rousseau's octastich, in order to ensure the cohesion of its expressly differentiated couplets, connects them with tight phonological bonds between the even and the subsequent odd lines: / ₂setā tādormi dusmāt ₃ātāde/; / ₄pāsā ₅pādā/. Moreover, the last two couplets are tied together by a palpable sound texture: ₆les FLEUVes—₇Les FAUVes (with two corresponding rounded vowels); ₆SUR . . . les ARBRES—₇SERPENTS PRêtent (where the phoneme /R/ alternates with hissing continuants and labial stops).

In my natural conclusion I am following Vratislav Effenberger when this Czech expert on Henri Rousseau's work defines it as "a sign of rising symbiosis between painting and poetry."¹⁹ A similar appraisal of Paul Klee by Carola Gledion-Welcker²⁰—in this artist "ist der Dichter mit dem Maler eng verknüpft" (poet and painter are tightly bound)—impels us to go on to Klee's poetic remains.

III. Paul Klee's Octastich

Senseless talk . . . Does inspiration have eyes, or does it sleepwalk?

The work of art as an act: the division of the toes into three groups: 1 + 3 + 1.

From Klee's diaries of 1901 (nos. 183, 310)

The painter's poem of 1903 about beasts, gods, and men, written down, according to the author's custom, without any vertical arrangement of verses, displays nonetheless a clear-cut rhythmical division into eight lines of two hemistichs; the second hemistich in the first and third lines carries three, and each of the other hemistichs bears two strong word stresses. Actually the author himself separates the verses of this poem by spacing the intervals between them, especially when these verses are not divided from one another by a punctuation mark.²¹

₁Zwei Béрге gíbt es / auf dénen es héll ist und klár,
₂den Bérg der Tíere / und den Bérg der Götter.
₃Dazwíschen aber líegt / das dämmerige Tál der Ménschen.
₄Wenn éiner éinmal / nach óben síeht,
₅erfásst ihn áhnend / eine únstillbare Séhnsucht,
₆ihn, der wéiss, / dass ér nicht wéiss
₇nach ihnen die nicht wíssen, / dass síe nicht wíssen
₈únd nach ihnen, / die wíssen dass sie wíssen.

A literal translation:

There are two mountains on which it is bright and clear,
 the mountain of beasts and the mountain of gods.
 But in between there lies the dusky valley of men.
 When once someone looks upwards,
 an unquenchable longing seizes him forebodingly,
 him who knows that he doesn't know
 after them who don't know that they don't know
 and after them who know that they know.

Klee's punctuation in his autograph of this poem reveals a significant difference between the rhythmical phrasing of syntactic constructions in the two final lines: *₇nach ihnen die nicht wissen, dass sie nicht wissen* and, on the other hand, *₈und nach ihnen, die wissen dass sie wissen*. The comma indicates the different place of the boundary between the hemistichs in these two lines. Thus the reading *únd nach ihnen, / die wíssen dass sie wíssen* with an emphatic stress on the antithetical conjunction appears to be the only correct one.

The transcription of this poem in Felix Klee's edition of his father's diaries and poems²² unfortunately reshapes the artist's punctuation according to the orthographic norm. Of these two publications the former prints the octastich like prose, while in the latter it is artificially broken into twelve lines; namely, some of the hemistichs are treated as separate lines, and, moreover, the inaugural proclitic of the second hemistich is assigned to the end of the first hemistich:

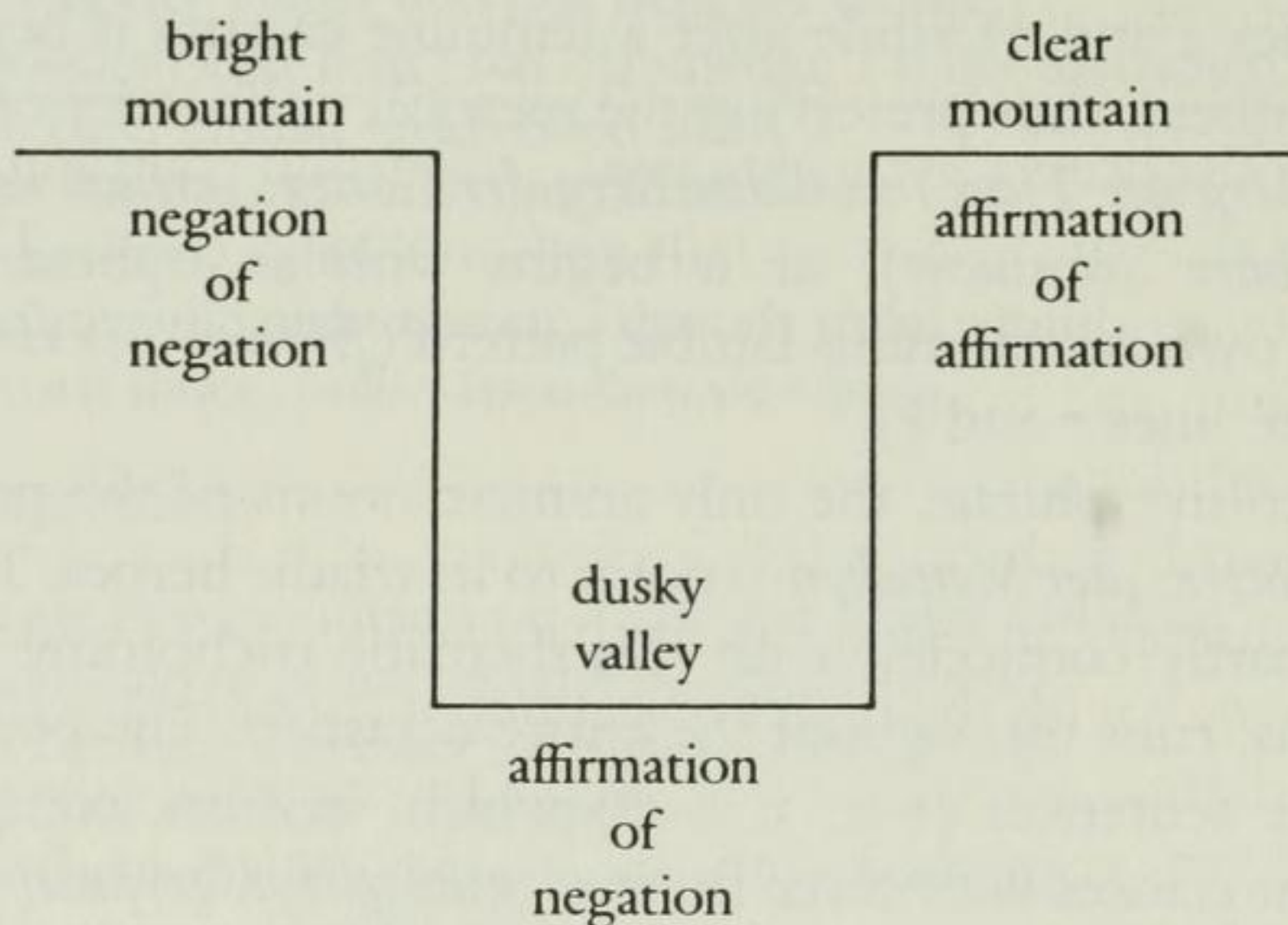
Dazwischen aber liegt das
 dämmerige Tal der Menschen.

With the exception of the second, solemn amphibrachic hemistich of the first line—*auf dénen es héll ist und klár*—the verses of the poem display a duple, predominantly iambic rhythm. The first hemistich, dipodic in six and tripodic in two lines, loses the initial upbeat in two instances: *₆ihn, der wéiss*; *₈únd nach ihnen*. The second hemistich of

two, three, or four duple feet begins with an upbeat after a masculine caesura (lines 3 and 6) while after a feminine caesura it begins either with a downbeat, thus preserving the metrical uniformity of the entire line (₂*den Bérg der Tiere / und den Bérg der Götter*; ₅*erfasst ihn áhnend / eine únstillbare Séhnsucht*), or it begins with an upbeat, and thus achieves its own autonomous iambic pattern (₄*Wenn éiner éinmal / nach óben síeht*; cf. lines 7 and 8).

Three genitive plurals, the only animate nouns of the poem—₂*der Tiere, der Götter, 3der Menschen*—point to its triadic heroes. The ternary principle, partly connected with this thematic trichotomy and partly autonomous, runs throughout the entire octastich. The poem encompasses three sentences (1–2; 3; 4–8) which, in turn, comprise three independent clauses with three finites: ₁*gibt, 3liegt, 5erfasst*, all three of which are placed before the subject in contradistinction to the predicates of the dependent clauses. The accusative plural ₁*Berge* is followed by the double apposition ₂*Berg . . . Berg*, and the relative pronoun ₁*denen* by the cognate articles ₂*den . . . den*. Three neuters with three finite predicates—₁*gibt es, es hell ist, 3liegt das*—begin the poem. The domiciles of the threefold heroes—₂*Berg der Tiere, Berg der Götter*, and ₃*Tal der Menschen*—are associated with three adjectives: ₁*hell, klar, 3dämmerige*, and the contrasting images which end the first two sentences are underlined by paronomastic contrivances: ₂*Berg der Götter* (erg-erg); ₃*dämmerige . . . der Menschen* (dem.r-derm). The third sentence, too, is permeated by ternary repetitions; ₄*einer, einmal, 5eine; 4nach, 7nach, 8nach; 6ihn, der weiss, dass er nicht weiss—7ihnen die nicht wissen, dass sie nicht wissen—8ihnen, die wissen dass sie wissen*—with the triple negative *nicht* thoughtfully distributed in the sixth and seventh lines. The thrice occurring conjunction _{1, 2, 8} *und* is connected with a correspondence between the first and last sentences: the accusative ₁*Berge*, followed by an apposition of the two pleonastic accusatives interlinked by *und*, is paralleled by the accusative ₅*ihn* and its pleonastic apposition ₆*ihn* with two subsequent datives ₇*nach ihnen . . . 8und nach ihnen*.

A purely metaphorical, spatial design of biblical stamp underlies the whole poem. The valley is the only abode of the unsolvable antinomy between the two contraries, the awareness of one's own unawareness, which perhaps alludes to its likewise antinomic reversal, the tragic unawareness of one's own awareness.



The thematic tripartition of the octastich superposes a symmetrical pattern upon its syntactic division into three uneven sentences of two, one, and five lines. The first three lines of the poem depict the permanent quasi-material status of its heroes; the outer, initial couplet (lines 1 and 2) is devoted to beasts and gods, while the third line deals with men. Correspondingly, the last three lines of the poem characterize the permanent mental status of its heroes, and the outer, final couplet (lines 7–8) contemplates the beasts and gods, whereas the third line from the end (6) is consecrated to men. The central of the three sections (lines 4–5) may be defined as dynamic and is concerned with active processes which occur—once again with permanence—in “the dusky valley of men.” Each of these three sections is signaled by a stressed monosyllable at the end of its initial line (₁*klar*, ₄*sieht*, and ₆*weiss*), whereas the other five lines of the poem are closed with a paroxytone.

Since the two-line central section (4, 5) jointly with the two adjacent lines (3 and 6) focuses on men, all four inner lines may be treated in a certain regard as a whole opposed to the towering theme of the two outer couplets. The borderlines (3 and 6) are evoked by a stressed monosyllable at the end of their first hemistich (two parallel verbal forms ₃*liegt*, ₆*weiss*), while the two pairs of lines surrounding each of these borderlines display a feminine caesura.

In their grammatical shape, lines three and six occupy an obviously transitional position; each of them is basically akin to the contiguous

outer couplet, but at the same time they share certain formal features with the two central lines.

This central distich, the most dramatic part of the poem, is endowed with verbs of process (₄*nach oben sieht*, ₅*erfasst*), in contradistinction to the verbs of state in (1–3) and to the *verba sciendi* in (6–8). The abstract noun ₅*Sehnsucht* differs from the six concrete substantives of the three preceding lines and from the total absence of nouns in the next three lines. The components of *Sehnsucht* are related, one with the verb *sehnen*, and the other, through folk etymology, with the verb *suchen*. The entire line displays an ostensibly verbal leaning, and besides the transitive verb *erfasst* with the direct object *ihn*, it contains a gerund *ahnend* and a deverbative adjective *unstillbare*. The temporal adverbial clause (₄*Wenn . . .*), as compared with the relative clauses in the other two sections, underlies the primacy of the verb in the central lines. The verb-oriented hexapodic line which concludes the central distich—₅*erfasst ihn ahnend / eine unstillbare Sehnsucht*—contrasts in particular with the terminal, purely nominal pentapody of the initial distich—₂*den Berg der Tiere / und den Berg der Götter*—the only two integrally iambic lines with feminine endings in both hemistichs. The indefinite triplet ₄*einer-einmal*-₅*eine* contrasts with two chains of “determinates”: ₁*denen*-₂*den*-*der*-*den*-*der*-₃*dazwischen*-*das*-*der* (including the alliterative *dämmerige*) in the first section and ₆*der*-*dass*-₇*die*-*dass*-₈*die*-*dass* in the final tercet. The vocalic onset of the thrice repeated *ein-* is reinforced by the similar initials of the surrounding words—₄*einer einmal . . . oben . . .* ₅*erfasst ihn ahnend eine unstillbare . . .*—while the final words of this distich produce a triple alliteration of hissing continuants: ₄*sieht*-*Sehnsucht*.

With the antecedent transitional line, the central distich shares the only nominal subjects and the only epithets in the octastich; by the way, these two tetrasyllabic attributes in the unique tetrapodic hemistichs—₃*dämmerige* and ₅*unstillbare*—are the lengthiest vocables of the entire text. These sole nouns in the nominative case together with their adjectival modifiers refer indirectly to men and are contraposed to the three nominal accusatives of the initial distich, which points to beasts and gods. Furthermore, the gender opposes the obscure ₃*Tal*, the only neuter noun of the poem, and especially its only feminine, the affective ₅*Sehnsucht*, to the five masculine nouns of the initial distich, as if this difference were to confirm the peerlessness of human whereabouts and troubles. In general, oppositions of contraries and of contradictories

are much more typical of Klee's grammatical texture than the numerical correspondences between its different sections.

With the subsequent transitional line the central distich shares the only singular forms of masculine pronouns (₄*einer*; ₅*ihn*; ₆*ihn, der, er*) and the absence of plurals, against the numerous nominal, pronominal, and verbal plurals of the other lines.

This singular loneliness, graphically delineated in the acme of Klee's poem, finds a kindred preamble in the immediately preceding lines of his diary (no. 538): "to reduce oneself completely to oneself, to prepare oneself for the greatest solitude. Distaste for procreation (ethical supersensitivity)."

The three final, strictly relational and cogitative lines manifesting three varieties of a double hypotaxis and consisting of nine pronouns, six forms of the verb "to know," three times with and three times without the negative *nicht*, and of six conjunctions and prepositions, put an end to the metaphorical network of the two prior sections with their conventionally figurative inanimates and verbs. The reader is called upon to proceed from spatial visions to stringent spiritual abstractions.

In agreement with the longing of the terminal distich for the inhabitants of the mountains, *auf denen es hell ist und klar*, or perhaps in agreement rather with the terminal striving for the heights of abstract meditation, seven full stresses of the two final lines fall on the acute and diffuse vowel /i/—₇*nach ihnen die nicht wissen, dass sie nicht wissen* ₈*und nach ihnen, die wissen dass sie wissen*. Also in the three lines of the initial section, it is /i/ that carries the last stress of the first hemistich. Among the thirty-four strong stresses of the octastich, twenty-three fall on front (viz. acute) vowels, and, in particular, thirteen fall on /i/. The four diphthongs /ai/ with their acute termination in turn reinforce the "bright" tinge of Klee's poem, which manifestly avoids back rounded vowels under stress and tolerates merely two /u/ and one /o/.

An astounding union of radiant transparency and masterful simplicity with multiform intricacy enables Klee the painter and the poet to deploy a harmonious disposition of unusually varied devices either on a strip of canvas or in a few lines of a notebook. The appended scheme may summarize those concurrent binary and ternary arrangements of subject matter and grammatical expedients which lent depth and monumentality to the artist's verbal miniature and which appear to exemplify Klee's dialectic of artistic markedness with his acute sense for cor-

1st sentence	Beasts and gods		1. Initial 2. distich	I Externalized status	Imagery
2nd sentence			3.		
3rd sentence: men in relation to beasts and gods	Men	Seclusion	doom	4. Central distich 5. 6.	II Motion
	Beasts and gods			7. Terminal distich 8.	Internal status

relations of dynamic and static, of bright and deep, of intensive and extensive, of grammatical and geometrical concepts, and, finally, of rule and overruling, all of which he intimated in his diary of 1908 (no. 832):

Let action be the exception, not the rule. Action is in the aorist tense; it must be contrasted with a static situation. If I want to act light, the static situation must be laid on a dark base. If I want to act dark, we need a light base for our static situation. The effectiveness of the action is greater when its intensity is strong and the quantity of space occupied by it is small, but with slight situational intensity and great situational extension. Never give up the all-important extension of the static element! On a medium-toned static ground, however, a double action is possible, depending on whether one considers it from the point of view of lightness or that of darkness.

of the first of these two gesticulatory synonyms in southern Italy is interpreted in the same way as a look meekly directed upward in avoidance of a bold, unseemly, categorical denial or of an impolite, point-blank refusal.

11. A similar correlation has been observed among the Persians (see Phillott) and the Polynesians (A. Métraux, *Ethnology of Easter Islands*, Honolulu, 1940, p. 33).

12. I would like to thank Claude Lévi-Strauss for the valuable bibliographical references he so kindly provided.

29. *On the Verbal Art of William Blake and Other Poet-Painters*

Originally published in *Linguistic Inquiry* 1:1 (1970), dedicated to Meyer Schapiro.

1. See *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. D. V. Erdman (New York, 1965), pp. 719-721.

2. Jacob Bronowski, *William Blake and the Age of Revolution* (New York, 1965), p. 161.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

4. Jakobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," in *SW* III, 94 [included in this volume].

5. See Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (New York, 1965), p. 105.

6. See Guillaume Apollinaire, "Le Douanier," in *Les Soirées de Paris* 3:20 (January 15, 1913, actually 1914), 56.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 65.

8. See Dora Vallier, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Henri Rousseau* (Paris, 1970), p. 10.

9. Thanks are due to the Museum of Modern Art in New York for the reproduction of *The Dream* and for their kind permission to use it as an illustration in this essay.

10. Cf. Tristan Tzara, "Le Rôle du temps et de l'espace dans l'oeuvre du Douanier Rousseau," *Art de France* 2 (1962).

11. Damourette and Pichon, *Des mots à la pensée*, sec. 272.

12. Vallier, "Tout l'oeuvre peint de Henri Rousseau," pl. 25.

13. See Guillaume Apollinaire, *Chroniques d'art* (Paris, 1960), p. 76.

14. Jean Bouret, *Henri Rousseau* (Neuchatel, 1961), p. 50.

15. See Apollinaire, "Le Douanier," p. 57.

16. Cf. Alexander Luria, *Higher Cortical Functions in Man and Their Disturbances in Local Brain Lesions* (Moscow, 1962).

17. Lucien Tesnière, *Éléments de syntaxe structurale* (Paris, 1966).

18. Bouret, *Henri Rousseau*, p. 50.

19. Vratislav Effenberger, *Henri Rousseau* (Prague, 1963).

20. C. Gledion-Welcker, *Anthologie der Abseitigen* (Bern, 1946).

21. See the autograph reproduced in *Gedichte von Paul Klee*, edited by the painter's son, Felix Klee (Zurich, 1960), p. 56.

22. *Tagebücher von Paul Klee, 1898-1918* (Cologne, 1957), no. 539; *Gedichte*, p. 56.

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