

The standards for measuring numerical precision are not the same as those for judging literary accuracy. In “The Serious Artist,” Pounds says, “You can be wholly precise in representing a vagueness.” This paradox is an example of an area of experience in which only forms of non-numerical expression are capable of precision. It is an instance within the domain of emotion. The numerical scientific method can measure physiological responses to different kinds of emotion, yet it cannot evoke emotion itself. Only the artistic manipulation of non-numerical images, symbols, or sounds can reproduce particular emotions. The forms of communication within the arts are not purely mathematical yet that does not mean their methods are not scientific.¹

The evolution of English/English-American poetic technique has been, and continues to be, *scientific* in the sense that it experiments with different elements of expression taken from cultural circumstances in order to achieve specific emotional effects. An example of this is found early in the development of English poetry when the behavioral habit of repetition was integrated into the making of a poem resulting in the use of refrain. Rhyme was a refinement of repetition. End-rhyme, which occurs at the end of a line in a strict pattern, was discovered to be effective in creating feelings of predictability and security. Centuries later, irregular rhyme, used well by poets like Frost, was discovered as a tool for capturing the anxiety and ambivalence that became predominant and defining emotions in the 20th century.

The serious poet—whether he or she realizes it or not—is a social scientist. On a daily basis the poet is inundated by a vast amount of cultural data which excites the sensibility, is synthesized and stored by the brain, until on occasion, something happens—sometimes immediately, sometimes weeks, months, or years later—which results in a poem.