Chapter Six

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METER

Meter is so much the principal component of verse-structure that the part and the whole are routinely conflated and the terms for their study commonly interchanged. Thus, Halle and Keyser's "Study of Prosody" is nothing more than a theory of meter, and the German "Mettick" has given the English term "metric" the sense "comprehensive verse-technique," as may be seen in Jack Lindsay's burnished discussion of Blake. To say that the terms are used loosely is to characterize critical usage with unreasonable generosity. Meter itself is, in Chatman's admirable phrase, "a systematic literary convention whereby certain aspects of the phonology are organized for aesthetic purposes." The relevant phonological aspect for English meter is stress, and hence the axiom of all English metrical theory is that the linguistic stresses in the words of a verse line are the elements of its metrical structure.

Historically, English metrical theory has taken three lines (see chart). A few theorists have believed that English verse either could or should be written according to the classical rules of quantity. But the majority recognized the primacy of stress, a view which has been transmitted intact from 1575 to the present. In the eighteenth century, however, several men recognized that the timing of verse had not been adequately explained, and in fact the history of all English metrical theory from 1775 to the present can be characterized as a struggle
to establish the correct position of timing within the theory. The proponents of temporal metrics (all three branches) admit that stress demarcates verse pattern; the proponents of stress metrics (two ) admit that timing is one feature of verse. I give below a neutral account of the three principal theories that have been proposed for English meter, even though many modern theorists would say that syllabic length, timing, pitch, and pausing are not aspects of meter but of rhythm, a view in which, as it happens, I myself concur. But the quantivists and temporalists have believed implicitly that they were addressing the level of meter, and our modern insistence on a distinction between rhythm and meter would, I suspect, have struck many of them as a superfluity if not a redundancy. Too, the last word is not yet in: it is quite possible to imagine a "unified field theory" for metrics, along the lines pursued by continental metrists and sketched out by Crystal (E20). We want to be clear and pragmatic, and preserve all the necessary distinctions, without being needlessly exclusionary.

Reading metrical treatises is an exercise in double-reading. The issues they treat--the nature of phonetic patterning in language, for example--are exceedingly subtle, and their conceptual apparatus is usually primitive at best. Linguistics has not codified its concepts until this century; consequently, the earlier treatises force us to read and hypothesize, read and guess, read and translate, as we search for the modern correlates for linguistic phenomena confusedly felt, dimly understood, or vaguely articulated by a writer. In the study of metrics, the philosophers' dictum, "Not Meaning But Use," formulates succinctly the most salubrious praxis. One must attend not to what a metrist says but to what he does, particularly in cases of discrepancy. Go to the scansion last, if not first--that is where the real principles appear. This procedure is particularly necessary for the eighteenth century, and it will make short work of such mumblers and autodidacts as Saintsbury.

The first section of General Studies below includes several of the principal period-histories for the development of, respectively, English meter and English metrical theory; these are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Metrical Practice</th>
<th>Metrical Theory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>for the early Tudor period</td>
<td>Bernard (E6),</td>
<td>Ramsay (E73)</td>
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<td>Ramsay (E73)</td>
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<tr>
<td>for the high Renaissance</td>
<td>Ing (E47)</td>
<td>see Attridge (E112)</td>
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<td>Thompson (E91)</td>
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<tr>
<td>for the Augustan Age</td>
<td>see Piper (E1404)</td>
<td>Fussell (E34)</td>
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<tr>
<td>for the nineteenth century</td>
<td>none; see Saintsbury</td>
<td>none; see Omond (A5)</td>
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<td>(A8)</td>
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<td>for the moderns</td>
<td>Gross (E38)</td>
<td>Barkas (E5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>for American verse</td>
<td>Eaton (E25)</td>
<td>see Allen (A2)</td>
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No comprehensive history of English metrical theory yet exists (it would be a desiccated tome, a history of error and ignorance), Omond (A5) and Schipper (A9) offer the necessary scope, but there is no model of a satisfactory treatment presently available. For meter, however, the exemplary study is the recent analysis by Tarlinskaja (E673).
GENERAL STUDIES

"It is here that . . . metre gives to the poet's words a form which is itself a direct expression of the emotion which the words enclose."

For discussion of meter in the iconic texts of criticism, primarily English, s.v. "Meter" in the Index. Also s.v."Rhythm."

A review which digresses largely to Wordsworth's views on meter in poetry.

A suggestion that both ends of a verse line, being "weighted," tend to be counterbalanced by a medial caesura and other devices, so that the weight may shift from one end to the other, creating an effectual "pull" or motion downward--i.e., down the page.

A correlate study to Fussell (E34), less urbane but more orderly and usable and absolutely impartial. Barkas gives a history of what was surely the most contentious and confusing--and probably the most important--period in the history of versification by explicating separately the theory advanced by every major worker in the field from 1880-1930--i.e., Mayor, Bridges, Young, Abercrombie, Hamer, Lanier, Alden, Omond, Saintsbury, Smith, Andersen, Stewart, Sonnenschein, Bayfield, Thomson, Wilson, and Scott. Each short review, generally three to four pages, is succinct yet informative. Throughout the book, Barkas distinguishes carefully between Prosody [i.e. Meter] and Rhythmic [Rhythm], though the remainder of his terminology is still much too elaborate, imprecise, and cumbersome even after his best efforts to codify (see pp. 12-17). The same can be said for the more important typology of metrical theories sketched on pp. 7-11 and extended in the last chapter (pp. 86-100); it wants Occam's razor. Barkas distinguishes six types of theory, two of the them having subtypes (the non-Temporal, three, and the Temporal, five). He also distinguishes, elaborately (see p. 90) between metrical pattern and actualization, which he calls respectively Rule Verse and Base Verse: "In Rule Verse whatever the Metrical Rule prescribes is objectively present in the verse-pattern, but in Base Verse the elementary unit of the base need not always be objectively present."
In sum, though his classifications multiply distinctions needlessly, Barkas's synopses of the theories of the eighteen metrists are full, fair, and useful.
Not a synthetic study but nonetheless a highly useful reference work which analyzes separately 72 of the folk-drama interludes written between 1497 and 1593 (up to Nashe). Each analysis includes tabular information on meter and rhymes and two to three pages of discussion. Conclusions (pp. 193-211 and Preface): the various meters of the interludes were indigenous, not Continentally derived, not "doggerel" but in fact quite complex at times, and could display variation for purposes of characterization and structure. Appendices of metrical information. Sound scholarship. Note that Bernard uses the terms "heavy" for iambic rhythm and "light" for anapestic. Cf. E73 and K307.

The scissors symbolize the instrumentality of versification, which Blackmur examines in the work of some twentieth-century poets, especially Eliot, Yeats, and Pound. Note also p. 211 ff on prosaic syntax in poetry.

Statistical tallies of lines containing only monosyllables in non-dramatic verse, the Shakespearean canon, and dramatic verse; percentages of monosyllabic words in selected prose passages also studied. Note that only five-stressed lines were tallied.


Confutes the received opinion in English metrics that the great bane of English verse is its surfeit of monosyllables by showing (1) that English poets--even Pope--have successfully used sequences of monosyllables often, and (2) that the objections historically given to using monosyllables have no weight. In fact, the number of monosyllables in the language has not appreciably changed since Middle English, while the rise of science has added a great many polysyllabic words to the lexicon.

Nontechnical and nonessential.

Should be useful in elementary schools.

Coleridge's reply to Wordsworth's Preface (E100) begins at chapter 14, discussing the "superadded charm of metre" passim; chapter 18 is the crucial discussion, however. I hazard lengthy quotation, given the importance and
breadth of the subjects Coleridge raises.

Since "a poem contains the same elements as a prose composition, the difference therefore must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object proposed. . . . it is possible that the object may be merely to facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observations by artificial arrangement, and the composition will be a poem, merely because it is distinguished by metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly." But these constitute mere "superficial form," and of course many works achieve their objects of truth or pleasure which are not in meter, e.g. novels. "Would then the mere superaddition of metre, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poems? The answer is that nothing can permanently please which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it. They must be such as to justify the perpetual and distinct attention to each part which an exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound are calculated to excite." This is the familiar argument of "organic form." Yet Coleridge allows that "poetry of the highest kind can exist without metre" (the argument runs on a distinction between verse and poetry that is operative without being consciously articulated).

Denying absolutely that "between the language of prose and that of metrical composition there neither is, nor can be any essential difference," Coleridge argues that things not controvertible are not identical. "The true question must be whether there are not modes of expression, a construction and an order of sentences, which are in their fit and natural place in a serious prose composition but would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry; and vice versa, whether in the language of a serious poem there may not be an arrangement both of words and of sentences and a use and selection of . . . figures of speech . . . which would be vicious and alien in correct and manly prose. I contend that in both cases the unfitness of each for the place of the other frequently will and ought to exist."

Five arguments for this position are adduced. First, the psychological basis of meter lies in "the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion." That is, "the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement," but these elements are also "formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, with the design and for the purpose of blending a delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language be proportionally discernible." The result is "an interpenetration of passion and of will." These emotions will naturally dictate forms not otherwise procurable.

Second, the effect of meter is "to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continued excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited." This is the same effect "as a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation," or, better yet, "as that of yeast, worthless or disagreeable by itself but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionately combined." "Meter in itself is simply a stimulant to the attention, and therefore excites the question: Why is the attention thus to be stimulated? . . . . N either can I conceive any other answer that can be rationally given, short of this: I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of prose." Both these arguments amount to the same thing: meter is indicative, or adumbrative, of a special use of language in poetry, both lexically and syntactically (it is this latter especially which seems to be in the center of Coleridge's attention).

Third, meter functions also as a catalyst or fixative. Meter having been associated, time out of mind, with poetry as its proper form, without which poetry will commonly be considered deficient, any other material which might
be combined with meter "must, though it be not itself essentially poetic, have nevertheless some property in common with poetry as an intermedium of affinity, a sort . . . of mordaunt between it and the superadded metre" (mordaunt being a chemical applied to fabrics to fix their color during dyeing).

Fourth (obscure), there is a human instinct for "unity by harmonious adjustment." And fifth, the practice of all the best poets confirms: the excitement and passions aroused by poetry "demand a correspondent difference of language."

It will be seen through all this that the problem is the insufficiently clarified term language. Later in the chapter Coleridge rejects the idea that rules could be given for analysis or differentiation of, say, the languages of rage and jealousy; necessarily it must all be a matter of intuition. (By this point his reaction to Wordsworth's claim that meter is the sole differentia of prose and poetry has reached the level of near-ferocity.) It is evident that in his remarks on meter he is concerned as much or more with syntax as with meter strictly speaking, but his position is important historically for its clear psychological basis (one thinks at once of I. A. Richards in the twentieth century): for Coleridge, meter both arouses and regulates passionate response.


Comfort. A. "It Goes Like This." Life and Letters To-day 31 (1941): 36-40. In praise of metered verse, in search of a compelling narrative poem.

Creek, Herbert L. "Rising and Falling Rhythms in English Verse." PMLA 35 (1920): 76-90. Regardless of what we may choose to call the meter of a line, whether we view it as in either "rising" or "falling" rhythm seems to depend on seven factors: the reader's expectations, syllable-structure at the beginning of the line, and at the end, and around the caesura, weak endings, phrasal structure, and vocabulary. Creek is groping toward a recognition that the "rhythm" of a line is a function of its syntactic and, more importantly, morphological structure. Useful statistics here on the proportion of "imabic" to "trochaic" disyllables in iambic verse. Cf. Crapsey (E516), Stewart (E331), Atkins (E467), H ascall (E783), and Newton (E799).

Croll, Morris W., et al. "Report of the Committee on Metrical Notation appointed at Philadelphia 1922." PMLA 39 (1924): lxxxvii-xciv. The Committee here furnishes the two schools of metrists—those favoring a "syllabic scansion" (meter based on accent) and those favoring "musical scansion" (rhythm based on time)—with a uniform set of symbols, the first denoting, in syllabic scansion, stress, and in musical scansion, quarter-note, the second denoting, in syllabic scansion, unstress, and in musical scansion, eighth-note, and so on. These symbols expedite printing and may eventually result in theoretical rapprochement, the Committee hopes.

In this very salient reappraisal and prospectus Crystal shows how metrical theory over the past century moved from confusion (quantity or stress?) to doctrine (stress) without inquiring much further. But "on what grounds, other than Tradition, has stress been singled out from the other phonological features of verse [i.e. intonation] and been identified with the metre? What experimental evidence is there to justify the priority of stress in this way? None has been provided." Yet the arguments supporting stress in meter apply equally well to intonation. The recent literature shows that many Continental metrists have already accepted an intonational metrics, while Anglo-American metrists seem content with stress metrics. Their contentedness is partially a reaction to the older confusions and skirmishes, which lasted far too long, but it is also a tribute to the enormous influence of the Trager-Smith phonology. An intonational metrics will have to reject this analysis, yet it would still retain the virtue of selectivity (not all intonational features are equally important), and it should give greater explanatory adequacy, as in describing free verse. In Crystal's view the "fundamental criterion" of such a metric is the line, "the identifying experience of which is non-segmental, a prosodic contour" [original italics]. Two experiments comparing a text set as verse and as prose showed that the line is coterminous with the "tone-unit," that the prominences are contrastive by pitch not by loudness, and that more degrees of gradation are required in poetry than in prose. The synchronic view of English metrical theory ca. 1971 given here is valuable, but more valuable still is the glimpse provided of the course of the theory over the next several decades. Cf. D322, D337, E608, L1323, and L1341.

Answer: in meter. Cunningham examines the available "metrical languages" in English: free verse ("grammatical meter" or "parsing meter"), accentual verse, syllabic, quantitative, and "traditional and . . . parasitic meter." The tone is iconoclastic (e.g., "the basic English measure is the iambic octosyllable"), vigorous, and pragmatic.

Form is "that which remains the same when everything else has changed. . . . form is discoverable by the act of substitution. It is what has alternative realizations. And the generality or particularity of a form lies in the range or restriction of alternatives. It follows, also, that the form precedes its realization. . . ." It is "not that a literary work has form, but that it is a convergence of forms, and forms of disparate orders. It is coincidence of forms that locks in the poem. . . . For this is the poet's Poetics: prose is written in sentences, poetry in sentences and lines. It is encoded not only in grammar, but also simultaneously in meter, for meter is the principle or set of principles, whatever they may be, that determines the line. And as we perceive of each sentence that it is grammatical or not, so the repetitive perception that this line is metrical or that it is not, that it exemplifies the rules or that it does not, is the metrical experience. It is the ground bass of all poetry."

The first installment may be ignored altogether. The second represents an elaborate appeal to ignorance ("no precision of analysis, I think, is attainable"), though there is a long passage on sonal mimesis and a good point on "verbal melody." Emblematic: "units of English metre were better called boots than
E24 Eaton, Horace, A. "Irregularities in Verse." English Journal 1 (1912): 601-10. For its time, a very astute recognition of the implications of the dictum that "perfect regularity means monotony, and monotony destroys attention." Not only are the five theoretically equal feel unequal in timing or pacing, the stresses are unequal, as are the unstressed syllables, and the greater and lesser pauses. Variation is everything in verbal--as all other--art.


E27 Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The Poet." In Essays: Second Series. Vol. 3 of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. 12 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-4. pp. 9-10. "For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem--;a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form." Two other dicta: "Art is the path of the creator to his work" and, better, "Language is fossil poetry."

E28 Erskine, John. "A Note on Whitman's Prosody," SP 20 (1923): 336-44. Insofar as this essay is about Whitman it is nothing other than utterly ludicrous. But in fact it is not about Whitman, it is about the nature of the line-end in verse. The line-end is the "one fixed mark" which enables the reader to distinguish between verse and prose in audition. It can be denoted either by a rhyme-chime or by a pause. Lines having an odd number of stresses have an invariable pause, but lines with an even number have none and so naturally tend to be enjambed. Larger issue looming in the distance: poetry's two modes, visual and aural.

E29 Fairchild, Arthur H. R. "The Making of Poetry: Versifying." The Making of Poetry: A Critical Study of Its Nature and Value. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912. pp. 105-51. A curious but interesting fifth chapter eschews the process of verse-making for its (undeniably more interesting) effects: to mold language into a a kind of inevitable, measured rhythm . . . is to bind the language more closely together, for these are really forms of word-association by sound. And to bind the language more closely together is to help knit together the images which that language represents."


Actually "typological and historical": the article surveys the four principal metrical systems (accentual, syllabic, combined, quantitative) and traces the development (or at least change) of English metrics through six periods (O E to 20th c.) of extensive historical changes in the language and oscillations between convention and experimentation in poetic technique. The essay merely revises the material the author had used earlier in his handbook (E537) and in his Princeton Encyclopedia articles (E33 and E535).

"English Prosody," Princeton (A18), pp. 238-40. A valuable review, organized chronologically, reaching from Old English to the present. Fussell believes that no one metrical system can account for the entire gamut of English poetry, but that three things may at least be said: English verse is accentually based; it seems to flow "most pleasantly and naturally" in rising rhythm; and its natural line-length is one of "4 or 5 isochronous units." The essay then proceeds by showing the drifts toward either pure Accentualism or Syllabism that have taken place at various times in the history of English verse, drifts from the central norm of a regulated number of both syllables and stresses. (The only faltering in this regard is the statement that Lanier's Musical prosody has a theoretical position emphasizing accentualism; obviously, it emphasized timing.) "Prosody" in the title is a solecism for "Metrics."

Fussell's approach to the history writing is (a) thematic and (b) partitive. From the various prosodic issues and trends of the century he selects three for examination: views on the metrical structure of the line; theory of elision (i.e. syllabism preserved thereby); and the increasing legitimacy of trisyllabic substitution (i.e. anti-syllabism, or the rise of accentualism as the dominant metrical principle). He therefore ignores: the crucial question of the definitions and employments of accent vs. quantity; rhyme; the complex relations of poetry and music, so important in the age; and the sundering of metrical theory between Timers and Stressers early in the century. In short compass, the history of versification in the period 1660-1800 is as follows: heavy French influence on English letters after the Restoration resulted in the complete establishment of Syllabism (syllable-counting) as the chief principle of meter; Bysshe is the central figure here (1702 etc.). At the same time, by a process that (pace Fussell) is still not well understood either theoretically or historically, counting-of-syllables led inevitably to regularity (regular alternation) of stresses. These principles dominate the theory until about 1740 and remain visible up to about 1770; thereafter, the story is one of Accentualist insurgency, leading to (the French Revolution and) Romanticism. Over the century there is also a concomitant diremption in the view of prosodists as to whether Quantity, Time, or Accent is the basis of
verse. This area is far more complex than Fussell allows. Altogether his study makes a series of compromises between a full history of versification theory in the century and a full account of the positions of the major theorists, who sometimes receive short shrift when their views are fragmented among Fussell’s thematic divisions. Omond’s method (A5) is less artful but more cogent: there we find a fuller assessment of the contribution of each theorist to the developing understanding of the century. See also the criticisms in Kumbier (E1009).

E35 Gillis, Everett A. "American Prosody in the Eighteen-Nineties with Special Reference to Magazine Verse." Diss., University of Texas, 1948. Still a useful source of information, mainly on account of its scope. Gillis examines the (a) prosodic theories or comments and (b) prosodic practices in the verse printed in the prominent American literary journals of the Nineties, placing both of these within the wider perspectives of both prosodic theory and practice in America, and also in England, in the nineteenth century. Out of the enormous mass of verse he examined (as cited), he scrutinizes more closely the work of eight prominent young poets (none of which ever rose into the first rank); nearly all of it is metrically very conventional. In the area of theory, the decade was still spinning out the ideas of Poe, Lanier, and perhaps Whitman; essays by the would-be literati were legion, of course, though Alden and others were pursuing the quiet ends of scholarship, while Bolton, for the scientists, looked into the mechanics of rhythm. Perhaps the principle issue of the day was the legitimacy of off-rhyme. Whoever writes the successor to Allen’s American Prosody will find source-material here.


E39 Haas, Robert. "One Body: Some Notes on Form." Antaeus 30/31 (1978): 329-42. "The pure iamb in fact can't be rendered; it only exists as a felt principle of order, beneath all possible embodiments, in the mind of the listener. It exists in
silence, is invisible, unspeakable."

"I don't think we are in a position yet to understand the reaction against metrical poetry that began in the middle of the nineteenth century. It's an astonishing psychological fact, as if a huge underpinning in the order of things had given way, and where men had heard the power of incantatory repetition before, they now heard its monotony. Or worse."

A study of Ascham (E109), Gascoigne (E538), John R aioldes' O ratorio in laudem artis poetica (1572), and Richard W illis' De re poetica disputatio (1573).

In the relation of these two dimensions two factors may be discerned: "a principle of phonetic autonomy and a principle of semantic cooperation." Of the former, the level of background texture, Ransom is simply wrong to thing the meter a mere correlative or superadded external form; the meter is "part of the meaning," a kind of "emotional semantic," a statement of ambience or, at the very least, order. Of the latter: meter can (1) serve as expository function, reinforcing lexical sense; (2) "modulate and define emotion" in its emotive function; or (3) reassure or else surprise the reader, in its affective function.

"Some poetry is manifested heavily through phonetic recurrence in patterned configurations; other poetry is characterized by patterned configurations in rather abstract semantic features; and there is some poetry, a great deal in fact, that relies on a skillful blend of these two configurational mechanisms." More simply: a poem may be "metered" or organized not only by stresses or syntactic structures but by underlying semantic units also.

Actually he gives statistics for monosyllables in French, German, and English prose fiction and poetry.

E44 Hart, James M. "The College Course in English Literature, How It May Be Improved." PMLA. 1 (1884-85): 84-95.
A fascinating note on pp. 92-95 deplores the absence of any convenient metrical handbook, followed by a divagation on the history of blank verse. Was it this tiny crack which started the flood?

Suggests defining rime as "modern conventions of verse." Cf. E74.

Peregrine. Topics covered: linguistic treatments of metrics; the rhythmic structure of the mimetic lines in Pope's Essay on Criticism; alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, and echoic patterns in general; and musical-metrical modality.

Rev: in TSL, 9 May 1952, p. 314; in English Essays 5 (1952): 155-56; in Shakespeare Quarterly 4 (1953): 79-83; in Shakespeare Jahrbuch 89 (1953): 239-40. Though now supplemented by more recent, specialized studies, Ing's book remains a classic still to be consulted. The general plan is to anatomize Elizabethan theories of meter and then compare these to the actual productions in verse--the lyrics--which were nearly always meant to be sung as madrigals and airs. Chapter 2 provides an extremely convenient synopsis of the theorists reprinted in Smith's Elizabethan Critical Essays (A26). Chapter 3 gives a similarly valuable Glossary of prosodic terms; the usage of such terms in the Renaissance was often ambiguous, inconsistent, and indiosyncratic, yet discriminations are crucial, and the terms are delicately unravelled. (Cf. these two chapters to E57 and E228.) Chapter 4 examines the "visual thing" of pattern poems and also the theories about quantitative verse (cf. Attridge, E112); chapter 5 confronts the central metrical phenomenon of the age, verse set to music.

Chapter 7 explores the role of the three prosodic aspects of speech--pitch, stress, and duration--in Elizabethan lyrics in considerable detail; p. 200 ff discusses the role of stress in meter. Remaining chapters focus on the lyrics of Campion, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Donne. The book must be set alongside Thompson's (E91), since the latter stops with Sidney, while Ing, beginning with Tottel, surveys 1557-1633. More elegantly informed in its style and more synoptic in its erudition than Fussell (E34), Ing's work may be our best period study.

E48  Jacob, Cary F. "Some Phases of Recent Study in English Versification." Sewanee Review 19 (1911): 498-503. A review of Schipper (All), Verrier (E454), and Matthews (E588), praising Verrier while denigrating the other two works.

E49  Justice, Donald. "Meters and Memory." Antaeus 30/31 (1978): 314-20. The question of "the mnemonic value of meters," intriguing in itself, yet leads to the even-deeper question of the effects of meter: Justice points to "the various combining and intersecting functions" of metering, remembering, control, and understanding in the poetic craft. In contrast to some others, his own view is that "the meters move along in their own domain, scarcely intersecting the domain of meaning, except in some illusory fashion or by virtue of conventions nearly private. The responsibility they bear to the sense, comic writing aside, is mostly not to interfere." That is, in themselves they are little, as Coleridge said, but their effect superimposed on powerful sense is more powerful still. "The twin illusions of control and understanding seem more valuable to me than this illusion of the real or the natural [i.e. mimetic meters]. Yet he can admit that "the meters seem always faintly teleological by implication. . . . they seem to propose that an emotion, however uncontrollable it may have appeared originally, was not, in fact, unmanageable." (Cf. Maloff, E582.) And "the meters serve as a neutral and impersonal check on self-indulgence and whimsy; a subjective event gets made over into something more like an object." Even memory is an "act not without craft," we know, and the metering of our verbalizing of our experience we want to know much more about.

E50  Kelley, Frank B. "The Rise and Development of English Metrification, with Special Reference to the Question of Quantity versus Accent as the Underlying Principle." Diss., New York University, 1894. 36 pp.

Remarks in the first lecture on the foreign and early influences on our versification.


A general theory of poetic structure (expressed in very concise form) based on the key feature of recurrence; the three modes of analysis identified are Topical, Metrical, and Stylistic. In Metrics, recurrence may be either Phonetic, Syntactic, or Semantic (English verse has heavily exploited the first of these, but who has demonstrated a metering of "sememes"?) or a combination of them (i.e. phonetic + syntactic rather than phonetic + phonetic). Koch then examines the relationships of metrical constituents ("immediate juxtaposition, recurrent interval, non-recurrent interval"), patterns of such relationships ("contiguous overlapping, congruent, engrafted"), and the principles of metrical "piling," "imposition," and "saturation." Altogether the merit of this brief monograph is to demonstrate afresh the possibilities for complexity in meter and (even further) in poetry.


An early philological handbook. Chapter 8, "Die Rhythmik des Englischen," pp. 368-90, gives a summary of the research to that date on Old through Modern English meter. K. accepts the vierhebungstheorie for OE and ME. Bibliography.


In part Koziol is interested in how the names of numbers are used by poets to fill slots in the stress pattern of the verse-line.


An extremely convenient and useful resource which cites brief extracts from the major Renaissance prosodists--Gascoigne, Puttenham, Sidney, Spenser, Harvey, Stanyhurst, and Webbe--on thirty-nine topics in prosody--e.g. rhyme, rhythm, meter, accent, quantitative verse. Prefixed by short topical Index. (Unfortunately the overprinted typescript is painful to read.)


A remarkable general survey, sustained at a level very near the purely theoretical. Prosody is defined as the study of "the elements and structures involved in the rhythmic or dynamic aspect of speech ... as they occur in speech and language generally (linguistic prosody) or in the compositions of the literary arts (literary prosody)" (italics original). This latter area has been more often termed ver-
Descriptive prosody may be either theoretical or historical, while evaluative work lies in the domain of criticism. The rhythm of verse is one manifestation of rhythmic activity in general, and as a species is more closely related to the rhythms of dance--bodily movement--than to those of music, since the speech-mechanism itself is a motor behavior. Yet, "it is the sound as heard, the perceptual 'phone' or 'allophone' rather than the phoneme as such, that is relevant for literary, as distinct from linguistic, structure of sound." All verse-rhythm is a patterning of the qualitative and quantitative features of sound, chiefly intensity or duration: La Dri`ere gives a very extensive theoretical account of the systematic possibilities of such patterning. Worthy of special note: "the datum of a prosodic analysis is ideally an oral performance (actual or conceived) rather than a written text."


"The modern versification of England is the result of compromise, the triumphant but painfully laborious ordering of chaos. It was only attained after years of groping efforts to fuse and reconcile antagonistic elements. . . . In fact, it took centuries to accommodate the language to the versification or the versification to the language. The verse which prevailed in the end was not primarily made for the language upon which it was imposed." The result? "English has emerged with two distinct kinds of verse, now no longer confusedly blended but kept separate for different uses and different effects." Nowhere is the whole history of our metric more succinctly or accurately expressed.


The modern sensibility is so glaringly inept at recognizing and discussing poetic meter primarily because no adequate system of scansion is currently taught or understood. Scansion is not a theoretical construct but simply a "practical language of description," and the best notation is the one which provides the most accurate, concise, yet flexible description of the interplay between rhythm and meter. To deride scansion as "artificial" is to misunderstand its very nature. There is no one right scansion, all others being wrong; there are only better and worse scansion.


A true curiosity, this. The most dogged of prosodic historians will find relevant remarks following p. 152; all others will be intrigued by the illustrations more than anything else.

E62  "Metrical Technique." TLS, 6 April 1956, p. 207.

Encourages the teaching of metrical form, not so much in the spirit of rigid rules and devices, but in such a way that the student can attend to the supple nuances of sullables.


Interminable debate, each correspondent propounding his own theory of metrics--Moore, the intuitivist; MacColl, the temporalist; Bayfield, the trochaic--and the whole dreary exchange degenerating into bickering between Moore and MacColl. However, T. B. Rudmose-Brown's acknowledgment of significant shifts in his thinking (at p. 83) must not go unnoticed.
An anthology arranged by meters for training students to recognize and memo-
rize metrical verse. Divided merely into Iambic, Trochaic, Anapestic, and

Metrical evidence generally corroborates the accepted chronologies for Mil-
ton, Keats, Browning, and Tennyson.

An urbane, informed, detailed, non-technical explanation of the differences
between Classical Greek and Modern English versification, with Hebrew and
Chinese also discussed for contrast. Should be just the thing for undergraduates.

Compares the Traditional, Trager-Smith, and Halle-Keyser systems.

"Poetic rhythm is, in short, neither strict mechanical rhythm nor free speech-
rhythm: it is speech limited by metric law, or Prosody, . . . A prosody, then, or
metric law, there must be, to save the gesture from becoming invertebrate."
Reviewing the course of meters over European history, the author makes an
articulate plea for "the recognition of two principles": "That poetic rhythm is
not an applied ornament" and that "the natural tendency of poetic rhythm will
be toward perpetual change."
Part I appears on pp. 285-300 of the same vol. 10.

See the sections on "Verse Rhythm" (pp. 50-59) and "Prose Rhythm" (pp. 59-
74). Despite all the pedagogical platitudes about iambic meters, Ogden insists,
the English language is deeply, irrefrangibly trochaic, and so therefore is its
verse. Longfellow and the Hiawatha-meter merit a long digression in the
"Verse" section, and indulgence which then widens to include the whole of the
following section, a peregrination on the subjects of the relations of verse and
prose, isochronism, prose rhythm, and stress. Surprisingly well informed.

Since one of the linchpins of Wordsworth's poetics in the 1800 and 1802 ver-
sions of the Preface is his view of poetry as "the natural language of men," his
simultaneous insistence on the preservation of meter in poetry would seem in-
consistent. W W's defense rests on three conceptions of the function of meter:
pleasure, regularity, and contrast. Meter per se gives pleasure as an ornament to
language already efficacious. The regularity of meter tempers and restrains the
excitement raised by the poetic fiction, as well as reminding the reader, implic-
itly, that he is experiencing literature not life. And meter balances or contrasts
the real language of men. Owen notes the evident discrepancy in W W's theo-
ries and his practice, also admitting that "the prose parts of Wordsworth's blank
verse, especially, appear to gain no advantage from being in metre."

By close explication of the statements and arguments made by Wordsworth (in the Preface) and Coleridge (in BL) on meter, Parrish controverts the received critical opinion that Wordsworth denigrated meter as adventitious while Coleridge defended it as indispensable to the organic whole, the poem. That is the view Coleridge would have us believe. But in fact, though Wordsworth did argue that meter has no necessary connection with language, he held it to be essential for effecting the tranquility that is poetic pleasure, while for Coleridge meter was a stimulant and a matter of "superficial form," separable from the language that was central. Indeed to Coleridge meter was a symbol of a specialized poetic language—precisely the view Wordsworth attacks in the "Preface." Wordsworth, focusing on the function of art, treats the role of meter in aesthetic response; Coleridge, focusing on the sources of art, treats the role of meter in the creative process.


Short exposition of the metrical forms of blank verse, couplet, octosyllabic verse, quatrains, Spenserians, and the sonnet. Most interesting are the remarks on the structure of blank verse and citations of several obscure remarks on that form by Dr. Johnson; the rest is trite.


From 1480 to 1590 the verseform of English drama developed from the rhyme-royal and tail-rhyme stanzas (in four-stress lines) through the "septenary" couplet (the Fourteener) to the decasyllable (rhymed and blank) and prose. But "the attempt to find pentameters, alexandrines, or septenaries, even of an imperfect kind, in [the dramas of the first half of the sixteenth century] reduces their versification to chaos." The old order was completely upset by "the most important innovation in versification of the century," the introduction of regular meters (regular in syllable-count), the earliest example of which in the drama is Jasper Heywood's Senecan Troas of 1559. Blank verse, of course, first appeared in Gorboduc, 1562.

See esp. p. 188 here, and see also K307. The final paragraph summarizes succinctly "the residuum of a hundred years of experimentation" in dramatic verseform, specifically the four metrical styles employed by the dramatists of the day to differentiate the Virtue and Vice characters and high social stations from low. Highly informative, Ramsay's essay is still authoritative, and its lucid mapping of a bewildering terrain is augmented by frequent, detailed metrical analyses of plays.


Proposes an etymology for the idiom based on medieval Latin grammar: rhythmus denoted accentually based verse, while ratio meant quantitative, syllable-counting meter. (This was also the distinction between rhythmus and metrum.) The Renaissance classicists, then, used rime in the older sense of rhythmus, to indicate meter based on stress.

See also E45 and C273.


Coleridge gives English accentual equivalents of the Greek quantitative feet in the first letter and exemplifies them in a Pindaric ode. In the second letter he muses on a stray couplet which he couldn't get out of his head on account of
the intonation of the second line, "The pretty, pleasing playful, proley-prowley Pricket."

Defining "doggerel" as "un mechant poeme depourvu d'originalite et sans proportions, mais il semble avoir surtout trait a sa versification d'une regularite excessive," Reyher examines incompetently wooden and parodically incompetently wooden verses from Layamon to Swift, with heavier emphasis on the Middle English period.

Richards takes what might be called a Gestalt (i.e., perceptional-field) approach to literature. Sound in poetry depends for its meaning entirely on context: its effect cannot be separated from the effects of other contextual elements; sound in itself has no meaning. The sound of a word cannot be considered apart from its meaning. The interaction of succession and simultaneity comprises rhythm. Metre, as "a specialized form of rhythm," is not a patterned stimulus but a patterned response, as well as being a "framing device" (cf. Hollander, E46).

A model of import and economy. The question raised is how repeated words in verse are fitted into the metrical pattern (or grid), or in other words, the effect of repetition on word-meter alignment and, hence, the rhythm of the line. Given any word repeated (as a then b), there are four possibilities: (1) a and b have identical placements in the meter--such diaeresis tends to make the meter glare, and Richardson calls it "unmusical" in contrast to the other three types; (2) a and b may vary slightly in word-form (lover, loved, etc.) but be identically metrically treated; (3) a and b fall in different metrical positions (now arsis, now thesis) though identical in word-form; and (4) a and b differ both in metrical and in lexical treatment--the most "musical" type of all four. Convincing examples from both poets (no influence is claimed).

On words used in poetry which have dropped the final syllable: the most common are divided into seven categories and discussed, with etymologies and very copious examples, Renaissance to Modern.

The Elizabethan theory of the "roughness" of true satire understood the Roman view correctly in terms of roughness of tone (invective, vituperation), but not in terms of roughness of versification, since Horace believed that the numbers should be polished even in the most virulent of lines. Jonson and Dryden, however, were the chief exponents of a return to the orthodox classical view demanding smoothness of meter despite sharpness of matter. A dense, discrimination, yet extensive essay.

Shapiro finds two historical trends to lament: one is that prosody, as an
ostensible science, has seen little progressive development until the late
nineteenth century; the other is that after the turn of the century and "one of
the few great upheavals" in English poetry--free verse--prosody was thrown
again into anarchy, from which it has not yet recovered. Shapiro then sketches
in cameo the theoretical positions of the two chief schools of prosody, the
Accentualists (Saintsbury and Bridges) and Temporalists (Lanier), with Omond
in a medial position. These correspond roughly to the two broadest traditions
in English verse, the stress-verse (Beowulf to Skelton to Hopkins) and the
stress-verse (Chaucer to Housman). But the nineteenth-century prosodic
synthesis was unable to cope with the new prosaic structures and rhythms in
verse.

690, rejoinder by Schwartz, pp. 691-92.
In the first major section, "The Confusion of Prosody," Shapiro attempts to
map out the theorists and practitioners of his time in a prosaic verse, as if the
Essay on Criticism were rewritten as The Prelude of the theorists; Bridges on
Milton, Lanier on verse, and Saintsbury on prose-verse are discussed; of the
cloistered makers, Joyce and Eliot are assayed the great masters of our time
(both indebted to Pound), as against the more ephemeral, weaker metrics of
Donne, Browning, Hopkins, Whitman, Cummings, Lawrence, Williams, and
the Imagist, Visual, and Objectivist prosodies. Strong stressing is hammering
down the old "rising rhythm," and Shapiro ventures his hypothesis that
"rhythm Flows but in one direction, and that from Prose/To rime. The oppo-
site is upstream, against/Th e grain of language and the course of change./  The
measure of prosody is the current speech,/Th e cadences inherent in the
voice/Of one particular generation." See also:

And

E85 Sharp, Robert L. "Some Light on Metaphysical Obscurity and Roughness." SP 31
(1934): 497-518.
(Begin at p. 510.) This is a clear statement of the older view that Donne and
the metaphysicals deliberately wrote their meters rough, so as to suit the verse-
form to the sense and mood of satire. This "harshness" lay not in syllable-count
(here they are all relatively regular) but in preserving regularity of stresses. 
Roughness was also associated with "masculinity." The virtuosity of the meta-
physicals in stanza-forms is also adduced as proof of the intentionality of their
writing rough.

E86 Stanford, Donald E. "The Experimentalist Poet." In his In the Classic Mode: The
80-125.
Presently the authoritative survey of Bridges' theories and experiments in stress-

E87 -----. "R obert Bridges and the Free Verse Rebellion." Journal of Modern Literature 2
Summarizes Bridges' metrical experiments in non-conventional meters, i.e. ac-
ccentual verse (cf. Milton's Prosody), quantitative verse (Now In W intry Delights,
etc.), "Neo-Miltonic syllabics" (The Tapestry), and "loose Alexandrines" (The
Testament of Beauty).
The author requires nineteen pages to tell us that metrists are confused about whether English verse is metered by time, accent, or syllables. Criticism of Bayfield (E336).

A critique of both Structuralist and Generative M etrists. Thiesmeyer notes that though the history of metrics has been muddled, the new linguistic efforts have been no improvement because they, like all the rest, have failed to be utterly explicit about defining terms.

Reviews and criticizes traditional, structural, and generative metrics. Metrical theory itself is said to be unsuccessful because it has not yet answered the fundamental question of poetic ontology--what kind of object the poet is--and critical epistemology--how prosodic data is to be defined, gathered, and verified.

Thiesmeyer proposes a solution to the impasse in theory by redefining the subject of metrics as the poetic experience rather than the poem-object.

E91  Thompson, John. The Founding of English M etre. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961; 2nd ed. 1989, with Preface by John Hollander. Rev: in Sewanee Review 70 (1962): 688-91; in Criticism 5 (1963): 80-82; in Archiv 200 (1963): 219-21. See also Hawkes and Bateson (E719). Based on his dissertation, "The Iambic Line from W yatt to Sidney," D A 18 (1958): 1040A (Columbia). Should become the locus classicus on Renaissance metrics and, indeed, on the more general subject of the nature of English accentual-syllabic meter in its staple form, the iambic pentameter line. Beginning with a rigorous distinction between the natural (rhythmic) stresses of the language and the abstract metrical pattern, and adopting the two axioms entailed by this distinction--that verse can be read one way and scanned another, and that the effect of counterpoising rhythm against meter is to create tension [this is the hallmark of the structural approach]--Thompson traces out carefully the development of the pentameter line in early Renaissance verse, from the domination of natural speech rhythms in W yatt through the other extreme of excessive metrical regularity in Surrey to the synthesis of both of these styles in the supple, finely modulated metrical instrument of Sidney, the meter which will be the standard of English poetry for three centuries thereafter. But equally remarkable is Thompson's argument that "the iambic metrical pattern has dominated English verse because it provides the best symbolic model of our language"--that is, through meter "what poetry imitates is the structure of the language itself." Meter crystallizes (by selection, reduction, and abstraction) the deep structure of the language.

Chapters: on W yatt, T ottel, and Surrey; The M irror for Magistrates; G ooge, T urberville, and Gascoigne; The Shepheardes Calendar; classical meters; and on Sidney. Two Appendices, Bibliography. Synopsis of the book will be found at E687.

The relationship of grammatical to prosodic features ("strings") in verse may be either convergent or divergent, states which differ markedly in "perceptual quality" or texture; divergence produces either soft focus (Milton, Shelley) where the two kinds of features gradually fade into each other, or split focus (Pope),

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where they are polarized. Articulateness and requiredness, antinomies, two sides of the same coin, are the two aspects of "breaking up a whole into segments." Articulateness implies segmentation of a whole into parts both "distinct" and "jointed" in order to simplify its perception. Requiredness implies the integrity of the whole through its parts: no part is superfluous. In general the more highly articulated a structure is, the more highly required are its parts, though not always.

Split Focus: Clearly one of if not the chief function of verse-structure is to heighten the "visibility" of the segmentation, i.e. of the small-scale units. When grammatical and metrical units are not convergent, they "compete" with each other for our attention. The first of the two versions of the couplet below seems wittier to us--sharper in bite, stronger in pull--because "awake" (first version) is more highly required by the positioning of the syntactic break late in the line:

Now Lapdogs give themselves the rowzing Shake,
And sleepless Lovers, just at Twelve, awake.

Now Lapdogs give themselves the rowzing Shake,
And, just at Twelve, the sleepless Lovers awake.

From this example and others we can see however that position is by no means the only factor in establishing tension--meter, narratorial voice, and many other factors pertain. Among the major English poets, Browning is by far the most vigorous at sustaining split focus; his verse has a very evident sharpness and a "conclusive" tone.

Soft Focus: More extreme pressures and more complex structures produce a melding of polarity into continuity and a "suspensive" tone, as in Wordsworth, Shelley, and Milton. A high frequency of syntactic breaks near the ends of the line normally produces split focus, but after sufficient reiteration will slide over into the blurred, multi-layered texture so common in Milton. Similarly the strong requiredness generated by enjambment produced fluidity by weakening the line-end. Stress-shifts and complex syntax may achieve the same effects. An important new approach to the description of verse-structure; see also Tsur's monography (E810), of which this article is anything but a mere redaction.

Meter is as indispensable to poetry as the laws of perspective and color are to painting or the laws of scale and harmony are to music.


The author believes that certain emotions are expressed in certain characteristic rhythms, and so her little experiments find what they were designed to find. She divides passages of prose into lines and feet of verse, mainly on the basis of logical breaks, then hunts for meters, producing such results as "Joy fell into two feet anapestic lines. The rhythm of love was very complex."
A very broad yet informed survey of Poetic Influence, particularly metrical. The most interesting claim is that modern poetry is metrically more indebted to Medieval, Elizabethan, and Cavalier verse than to the Augustans, Romantics, and Victorians. Many examples.

Generalizations and observations on what is probably the most crucial area in all of poetics—the reader's perception of the line as a unit in the poem; why wasn't this essay written twenty years ago?

Peregrine thoughts.

Woods tries to distinguish mimetic rhythms (metrical figures which imitate "the speaking voice the poem seeks to present or the statement the poem is making") from aesthetic ones ("in themselves somehow pleasurable"), but the first definition fails to explain how the actual presentation differs from a simulacrum of it, and the second amounts to nothing more than "non-mimetic," since no corollary class of "displeasurable" rhythms is identified. This distinction she claims did not obtain before the sixteenth century and cuts across the traditional separation of plain and aureate styles in Renaissance verse.

In the fifth paragraph Wordsworth commences upon the creation of his proper audience by warning his readers against any expectation of (what later came to be called) the "metrical contract"—reader presuppositions about the style and themes of poems set in a certain meter. His larger problem is to explain his paradoxical view that the "language" of poetry is identical to the language of prose, the "real language of men." Part of his strategy for a solution is to map out a rough theory of meter, defending meter as a source of "charm" and "pleasure" which may be beneficially superadded to the effects of prose, sense and order. The pleasure inhering in the regularity of meter will function as a mild narcotic, soothing the reader whenever the sheer excitement of good poetry tends to overwhelm his emotions, and reminding him subliminally that what he is experiencing is art not reality. Thus the meter, emblem of "similitude in dissimilitude," produces "a complex feeling of delight." And what Wordsworth terms "the tendency of meter to divest language in a certain degree of its reality" will later be called "aesthetic distance." See Coleridge's reply at E13, and see E70 and E71.

Especially section 3; Yeats's phrases speaking of the language and meters of poetry, have come to be scarcely less memorable than Wordsworth's "I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete
coincidence between period and stanza. Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional meters that have developed with the language. . . . If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accident, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion. . . . all that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt. . . . I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional."

See also section 5 of "The Symbolism of Poetry" [1900] in the same volume.

QUANTITATIVE METRICS

Perhaps the single most persistent and influential force in English intellectual life over
the last millennium has been the teaching of Latin to English schoolboys—not only the vo-
cabulary, but also the grammar and prosody. Up until the twentieth century, educated Eng-
lishmen had been inclined to look at English verse through the lenses of Latin verse for
centuries. Coleridge is a prime example. It was long believed that English verse could
(should) be written to the rules of Latin metric (Bridges thought so as late as 1916; some
think so still), but even those who recognized that stress was the thing continued to speak--
perhaps think--of quantities.

"Quantitative," however, is not entirely accurate as a descriptor, for the distinction is
not one between a meter written on the basis of stress and one written on the basis of syl-
labic duration (or any convention about such), but rather between any meter which attempts
to reproduce the classical Greek or Latin metrical patterns (usually the hexameter), whether
in stress (as an accentual analogue-meter) or quantity (as a direct transplant of the rules for a
meter in one language to another language, regardless of how dissimilar), and a meter with
an abstract metrical pattern originally established in English and therefore organized by
stresses, and possibly quantities also in some cases (Old English, for example). For in fact
three types of "quantitative verse" are possible in English:

(i) Verse that observes quantity strictly, according to the classical rules, ignoring
accent altogether. Bridges though such a verse possible and pleasing for a very sensitive ear
even though unnatural to English.

(ii) Verse that replaces quantity with accent, so that the stress-pattern is a
simulacrum of the classical metrical patterns of longs and shorts. Such as the "accentual hex-
ameters" of the Germans, Southey, Clough, and Longfellow among many. This kind of
"mixed-breed" analogue-verse retains the English verse-constituent while adopting the clas-
sical verse-design.

(iii) Verse that manages to make both quantity and accent coincide systematically
(and also make sense). Such double identity is understandably difficult to maintain for long,
though Tennyson seems to have managed it.

Altogether, "classical-imitative" or "pseudo-classical" seems a better cover term,
though awkward, than "quantitative." The standard authority on the Renaissance effort to
write classical-imitative verse is now Attridge (E112); the history of the nineteenth-century
movement remains to be written. The long-weakening but historically important practice by
English poets of writing Latin verse directly is closely related: consult J. W. Binns, ed. The
also important, and they were legion (today we are inclined to think only of Lyly or Foster);
the question of how much English metrists took from Latin grammars seems to have been
little studied.

(1964), pp. 5-13; rpt in his Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics. Language and
16-25; rpt also in Phonetics in Linguistics: A Book of Readings. Ed. W. E. Jones

The study of verse-structure is a proper domain of phonetics "because verse is
verse as a result of the way certain aspects of sound, or rather perhaps the
sound-producing movements, of speech have been exploiting or organized." The
air-stream produced in speech is not continuous but pulsatory in two di-
dimensions: the regular muscular contractions creating pressure peaks, here termed chest-pulses (each of which corresponds to one syllable), and also the "less frequent, more powerful contractions of the breathing muscles which every now and then coincide with, and reinforce, a chest-pulse stress-pulses." Languages which organize the latter are stress-timed, those organizing the former, syllable-timed. English verse, not different in kind from English speech, is stress-timed (stress-pulses may occur even in the absence of a sounded syllable), divided into isochronous stress-initiating units called feet, and "must be therefore in some sense quantitative." Silent stresses are unexpectedly common, English verse has many more types of feet than Greek, and line-end is usually signaled by a silent stress, monosyllabic foot, or the rhyme.

Notice the sample scansion, which seem especially forced and unnatural.


Appropriating the concepts (while oddly eschewing the terms) of classical versification to the description of the rhythm of the English language (and verse), A. argues that there are consistent relations of quantity to be found between English syllables. Quantity in English syllables is relative to that in adjacent syllables and varies with context, in contrast to Greek, where syllabic quantity was absolute and constant. N.B.: syllable-quantity does not equal vowel quantity. A. postulates that English utterances are divided into isochronous stress-timed feet, such that "we cannot therefore sway anything about the quantity of a syllable until we know its place in the foot." Three disyllabic feet are identified (short-long, equal-equal, and long-short), all in triple time.


Explicates those two principles in Pound's poetry. By the latter, he meant "melopoeia," or the absolute association of emotions with word-sounds—a complex but precise system of correspondences Pound held to be different for each language. Hence, Adams shows, he often subordinated lexical and semantic accuracy in his translations to melopoeic accuracy. By the former, Pound meant a rigorous system of verse composition based on quantity, but lacking any consistency of principle: "Pound's syllable may be long either by nature, or by position, or by stress, but sometimes a stressed syllable is insisted on as short and counterpointed. Pound's principles are thus arbitrary and contradictory. . . . This is not to say that Pound's sapphics are failures, but that they are an illusion—-a skillfully designed illusion."


Argues Catullus's meter to be highly regular (contrary to opinion) and of the form E E i E i E i E i E i E i, the half-lines being derived from Greek iambic tetrameters. Tennyson's translation uses trochaic meter, George Meredith's iambic-anapestic. Tennyson's choice, Allen believes, arose from a mistaken accentual scansion of the classical verse.


Corrects a mistake by Theodore Spencer in ELH 12 (1945): 251-78. Sidney's fine little poem "When to my deadly pleasure" is written in the Aristophanic not the Anacreonic meter. Wider discussion of Sidney's classical-imitative experiments follows.


On the critical question of audience, Arnold considers the best reader and judge of a Homeric translation to be the scholar, both fluent in the original Greek and possessed of genuine taste in poetry. And though the lectures treat mainly of style and movement, the third of the original three turns to the question of meter, Arnold rejecting couplets (Chapman’s and Pope’s), blank verse (Cowper’s Miltonic convolutions) and ballad meter (Francis W. N ewman’s), preferring instead the hexameter (H aytrey’s are approved, C lough’s and Long-fellow’s rejected) as being the closest to the original Homeric “movement” (a crucial term). The stiffness of the dactyls in the English hexameter may be avoided by frequent spondees; the only other requirement (also crucial) is that the lines must “read themselves”—i.e. the natural accent should not be wrenched unnaturally to fit the metrical pattern. The lines must read naturally to the English ear, though at the same time the quantities must not be “utterly discarded.”

In the Last W ords lecture (delivered November 30, 1861), Arnold makes a sincere effort to mollify N ewman (whose R eply to Arnold’s earlier criticisms in the second lecture showed him eager to avenge an inflated sense of injury) while at the same time defending his original judgments, then examines the views of Spedding (English hexameters should be quantitative) and M unro (quantity should be entirely ignored) with surprising energy, generally siding with M unro in favor of the accentual imitation as something “necessary and inevitable” to the English ear. “We must work with the tools we have.” The lecture concludes with the memorable soft eulogy for C lough.

See also the untitled review by N oel A nnan in T he N ew Statesman n.s. 27 (1944): 191.


Near the end of Book II, Ascham criticises his contemporary verse-writers, those “rash, ignorant heads, which now can easily reckon up fourteen syllables, and easily stumble on every rhyme” but are too idle and ignorant to labor for complete perfection of verse, “true quantity in every foot and syllable.” R rhyme too earns his scorn: “our rude beggarly rhyming [was] brought first into Italy by Goths and H uns, when all good verses and all good learning too were destroyed by them. . . . to follow rather the Goths in rhyming, than the Greeks in true versifying, is even to eat acorns with swine, when we may freely eat wheat bread among men.” Surrey and Periz are noticed as laudable poets who avoid rhyme and “observe just number and even feet” but their feet are unfortunately “feet without joints, that is to say not distinct by true quantities of syllables.”

Thus, the first important English commentator on verse-structure misunderstands the native accentual meter entirely, and so damn it for being too formless and easy, requiring neither labor nor learning. See also E40.

As for the earliest English verse written in quantitative meters, there are
some specimens in Ascham's *Toxophilus* (a popular treatise on archery) of 1545, and in Book I of *The Scholemaster* Ascham quotes verses by Thomas Watson (Bishop of Lincoln) from his unpublished translation of the *Odyssey* (ca. 1545).

The interest in England in setting modern verse to classical meters seems to have been transmitted through Jacques de la Taille in France from Claudio Tolomei in Italy (1539). For further discussion of Ascham see:


Attridge is now the standard reference on the subject of quantitative experiments in the Renaissance. The book contains three parts: parts 2 and 3 review the theorizing and the verses of poets, first synthetically (in 2), examining the Renaissance attitudes toward both vernacular verse and classical imitators, the origin and extent of the vogue for quantitative verse, and the nature of the verse itself, then analytically by author (in 3), with separate examinations of each of the major theorists and poets. But more important is the more abstract-but more crucial-analysis in part 1, not hitherto researched fully or directly, of the exceedingly complex question, "What is quantity?" This question resolves itself at once into three others, scarcely easier--"What is the modern understanding of Latin verse?" "How did the Renaissance understand Latin verse?" and "How did the Romans understand Latin verse?" Everyone speaks glibly of longs and shorts, but as Attridge convincingly shows, the phonetic evidence is far too complex and ambiguous for the simplistic, text-book definition of quantity to be correct. It would seem, judging from Renaissance primers for schoolboys, that the Renaissance approach, at least, was not to stress (in pronunciation of Latin verses) the ictuses (i.e. the "long" syllables) but rather the syllables which would be stressed according to normal English rules of accentuation. Such a "prosaic" stressing, rather than an ictic stressing, would effectually polarize the normal accentual system from the more abstract and artificial "quantities," which were determined by a complex system of rules (not really very intelligible, even to them, but accepted on authority), among which was one which allowed determination of quantity by orthography (i.e. by varying the spelling of a word one could produce a desired quantity). Thus we can see how abstract and visual rather than aural was the whole Renaissance understanding of Latin verses, and also how sophisticated and antithetical it seemed in the face of vernacular poetry. It is this demonstration of the crucial role of phrase-stressing and orthography (taught to the Elizabethan schoolboy as he scanned his Latin verses) that Attridge is able to achieve an altogether remarkable synthesis of some very confusing evidence into that most difficult of all hisorical results, a coherent, convincing, and "natural" account of what the problem looked like through the eyes of the men of the time.


The poet setting verse to music must take vowel length into account, and
surely Greek meters were originally derived from music. Scansions. Cf. E177.


How closely did Milton approximate the classical model? Aylward emphasizes the considerable inadequacies of the models--contemporary grammars, school training, scholarship and informed opinion, and treatises on poetics--as partial justification for Milton's achievement, which he characterizes in various poems as "peculiar," "uncertain," "indiscreet," "insensitive," "inexp," and "arbitrary," the last of these being particularly apt.


A thesis Baker can uphold because he believes that stress "is the only cause of" quantity, or that quantity "more or less rides along with stress" nearly always. [This has yet to be proven.] "In Latin, syllables are long by intrinsic nature or position, and they stay in position. In English, stress alone makes quantity, and what one minute you think is stressed may not be the next time you look." [This is question-begging.] Baker identifies two types of short syllables in English (time-values 1/4 and 1/2) and three types of longs (1, 3/4, and 1 1/4).


Pound suggested a reference for study of Greek meters to this poet; she eventually developed a short "balanced" line for translating the Sapphic fragments.


A comparative grammar. Bayly complains of the absence of fixed quantities for English words, then later remarks that "Accent is in English the same as Quantity, making that syllable long, on which it is laid, and the other syllable short." Accent (acute, grave, or circumflex) is taken as the rising or falling of the voice; "quantity then may be considered as the time, and accent, the tune [of language]."


The scope of Prosody encompasses Accent, Quantity, Feet, and Rhythm. Accent, the elevation or depression of the voice, "answers to tones in musick." Musical notes are occasionally used in scansions, and though Bayly traces accent back to Greek versification, still he thinks that "certain syllables of a certain quantity constitute feet" in English verse.


Correcting an ill-informed critic, the author mentions the hexameters of Coleridge, Clough, Longfellow, and Kingsley, discusses Harvey and Spenser at greater length, then notes the elegiac verses of Arthur Munby and Sir Lewis Morris, discussing Browning's "Ixion" at length.


On the possibilities for English versions of the classical Hexameters, Pentameters, Iambic Trimeters (our Alexandrines), Sapphics, Alcaics, Hendecasyllabics, and irregular meters. M entions the poverty of English spondees.

E122 [Benson, William.] Letters concerning Poetical Translations, and Virgil's and Milton's
Professor Blackie takes a more philosophical view of the question than most of the reviewers did; he also gives a lengthy defense of rhyme, concluding therefrom that the ballad-meters (long-line couplets of Common Measure, that is) would be best. Penultimate paragraphs takes up (and promptly flings down) the hexameter.

"The beau ideal of a translation as a work of art unquestionably is, that it shall be... a FACIMILE, as far as may be... a translator is bound to transfer every measure of his original into that measure of his own language, which in its style, character, associations, and effects, corresponds to his model." The principle to be followed, then, is not literal reproduction but correspondence of effect, whatever the means. Blackie favors the old fourteeners of Chapman and the fifteen-syllabled trochaic lines of Locksley Hall to any other measure in English—quantitative or accentual hexameter, couplet, or blank verse—for rendering Homer.

E126  [Blundell, James, tr.] Hexametrical Experiments, or A Version of four of Virgils Pastorals... done in a structure of verse similar to that of the original Latin, with hints to explain the method of reading and a slight essay on the laws of the metre. London: William Pickering, 1838.
The two "slight" introductory essays on the hexameter (pp. 1-25) take up a fourth of the book. Though the "longs" and "shorts" of Blundell's metric thwart accent only rarely, he bases his system of quantitative hexameters on time: "in relation to the time which their utterance requires, the syllables of our language may be divided into four kinds, the long, the short, the double short, and the common."

Hexameter verse, with a "Summary of Stone's Prosody," pp. 165-67. Said to be the second of two Epistles, the first being Now in Wintry Delights. See also "A Peace Ode" (alcaics?) in the same periodical, 11 (June 1903): 141-43.

Brief note at the end, dated 1885. The meter of his version of Terence, Bridges says, is a six-stress line, with certain additional provisions for "distribution" of stress among several short syllables, and any other similarity to the iambic trimeter of Latin comedy is accidental.

The Introduction, "Virgil's Rhythms," pp. 1-18, originally appeared in the New Quarterly for January 1909. "A Note on Stone's Prosody," at the end, pp. 154-58, reprints Bridges' 1903 "Summary of Stone's Prosody" (E130) with new 1916 "Observations" in parallel columns. Throughout the Introduction Bridges reiterates that a poet can achieve great effects only in those forms that are congenial to the language, so that any attempts to reproduce a form successful in another language but graceless in one's own, simply for the sake of copying, is ut-
ter folly. Bridges' own "undertaking was not to copy the Latin imitation of the Greek but to make an analogous attempt in [his] own language."


See the six-page note at the end, where Bridges confirms that this verse is written in a classical-imitative meter based on the system of Stone. (E251), which Bridges sketches briefly for readers unfamiliar with it, adding remarks and observations.


The Prosodia affixed to the grammar mainly treats the principal genres of poetry, but chapter 1 gives a quantitative account of meter. I have seen only the second edition, but Culler reported that the first edition titled its section on verse "New Prosodia; or the Art of English Numbers." Three degrees of quantity are stipulated (long, short, and variable) as well as three of accent: "Accent is the raising and falling of the Voice, above or under its usual Tone, but an Art of which we have little Use, and know less, in the English Tongue." Bysshe is criticized in a note for the "erroneous use of Accent for Quantity."

E132 Calverley, C. S. "On Metrical Translation" and the two following essays in Literary Remains of Charles Stuart Calverley. London: George Bell, 1885. pp. 172-85. (The first originally appeared in the London Student for October 1868.)

Calverley intends to correct a modern misconception by insisting that the ancients read (pronounced) their verse one way but scanned it another, i.e. "by an accent which was so far arbitrary that it was wholly independent of the scan-sion, and was intended partially to conceal the scansion," in contrast to modern imitations of classical meters. In these latter he finds their monotony and cacophony most offensive.


Longfellow's early dislike of the accentual hexameter (1841) was apparently reversed by an approving review in a German periodical, resulting in his use of the meter in 1845.


Written perhaps as early as 1591, by its publication date Campion's treatise had become simply an index of what concessions the faltering theory of classical-imitative verse in English was driven to in order to have any credence at all. In the First Book of Ayres in 1601 Campion had declined the use of quantitative meters in favor of "ear-pleasing rimes," and when he came to a full-scale defense of the classical forms the following year, his position was mixed at best: he bases quantity directly on accent ("above all the accent of our words is dilli-gently to be observed, for chiefly by the accent in any language the true value of the syllables is to be measured"), though "accent," being described as rising, falling, grave, or flat, seems to be not only stress but pitch. Yet at the same time he allows length by position, which does in fact wrench accent. Fortunately, though, he scans by ear (phonetically) rather than by eye, allowing no clumsy machinery of orthography. The bulk of the Observations presents the eight measures (iambic, dimeter, trochaic, elegaic, three types of lyric, and ana-
creonic) which English could improve itself by adoption. But the most interesting matter is that Campion's close training in music leads him to treat verse-structure (quantity) in terms of time. Anyone who can "time a song" can see that Latin and English pentameters "are in nature all of the same length of sound . . . for either of them being timed with the hand, quinque perficiunt tempora, they fill up the quantity (as it were) of five semibreves." Metrical rests are allowed in verse as in music, and the failing of pyrrhic substitutions in iambic lines lies in their "curtailing their verse." Number in poetry, too, refers not only to the number of syllables but also to "the length or shortness of their sound" as is the case when verse is set to music. O mond (A5) misses this crucial matter entirely, as well as one other: in his chapter 4 Campion reveals what is demonstrably a clear understanding of trochaic and trisyllabic substitutions. But none of these keen perceptions did any good: the whole quantitative controversy had been moribund for a decade when the Observations was published, and Daniel's reply (E521) was irrefragable. And Campion's defense, by revealing the severe weaknesses of his position, served only to advance the case of the Accentualists. See N 75.

Lucid technical analysis of The Cantos and some Greek verse to show that Pound's metric is based on a "rhythmic constant" (recurring phrases equal in syllable count) and, indeed, quantity (taking quantity in English verse as pitch is in Greek, i.e. variable not central). The impressively marshalled evidence includes a little book which Pound read, Duhamel and Vildrac's 1912 Notes sur la technique poétique.

Very skeptical of the practicability or range of the quantitative hexameter in our stress-marked language. Discusses Clough (E140), Arnold (E108), and Stone (E251).

Seven page Preface: "I have endeavoured to realize the metres of my original by the strictest consideration of the quantities of the words I have employed," and further, "I have taken pains to combine the accents of my lines in modes partially regular and familiar to the English ear."

A series of divagations ending in an outright evasion, but one gathers that, for Cayley, paying attention to the accentual structure of classical verse is of even greater importance than attending to the quantities of English syllables. But he denies that accent lengthens syllables in English and that "accent in the modern languages is the same thing as quantity in the ancient"; indeed, an accentual hexameter is "diametrically opposed to classical usage and principle." Yet modern translators of classical verse can never succeed until "they can become in pose, if not in esse, exact imitators of both the accentual and quantitative combinations of the ancients." Time and pauses in English verse also mentioned (first page).


Accentual hexameters written in imitation of the classical quantitative meter. Also in accentual hexameters are A mours de V oyage and the six "E ssays in C lassical M etres" (two passages from the I liad, two E legiacs, on A lcaic, and "A ctaeoun". A dd to these an essay, "I llustrations of L atin L yrical M etres," and the "L etters of P arepidem ius, N umber T wo: O n T ranslating H om er" which may be located conveniently in the S elected P rose W orks edited by B uckner B. T rawick (U niversity of A labama P ress, 1964, pp. 66-84,180-86). T he latter e ssay first appeared in the 1888 edition of the P rose R e mains.

Clough's view is that both accent and quantity are important to both classical and modern verse; in classical verse, however, the metrical accent was based on pitch, and independent of the ordinary accentuations based on stress--i.e., "The accent of speech was lost in the accent of song." T hus, "with the ancients the accent of words in metre was . . . independent of their colloquial accent; while with us the two are kept simply identical. T he accent of words with us is fixed, with them was in metre arbitrary. So on the other hand, with them, the quantity was fixed and carefully observed; with us it is variable, and greatly neglected. Still there can be no question but that discrimination of quantity enters largely into the modern art of versifying." To modernize a classical meter, then, two rules are necessary: "the M etrical A ccent must remain the same" and "Q uantity should be preserved." Clough cleaves strictly to the first but not the second. In short, he uses the modern English stress-accent as analogue of the classical G reek pitch-accent to mark the metrical ictus. T he British reader has no patience, he observes (second letter of P arepidem ius), for so sophisticated a treatment as one which might counterpoint or oppose the stress and the ictus.


Accentual hexameters, mainly, written about 1799 in most cases. T he E legaic M etre" couplet is the only that has become well-known, but the note to "H ymn to the E arth" proffers some instruction for "i ntelligent female readers of p oetry": "in the attempt to adapt the G reek metres to the E nglish language, we must begin by substituting quality of sound for quantity--that is, accentuated or comparatively emphasized syllables, for what in the G reek and L atin verse, are named long. . . ."


P ublic O rator of long standing at O xford, C rows's t heoretical p osition dates from the 1760's; he accepts q uantity as the basis of verse almost as if it were a xiomatic. M ore curious still, "the simplest elements of verse are letters--of letters are formed syllables--of syllables feet--of feet a verse." Y et having -- 172 --
been faithful to the letter, he turns to the spirit--sounds. The Introduction gives an interesting historical review of the prosodists--Webbe, Gascoigne, Puttenham, Campion, Daniel, Cowley, Woodford, Poole, Bysshe, Pemberton, Foster, Mitford, and several other lesser mortals. Of the several "experiments" in metric undertaken in English poetry (alliterative, classical-imitative, and fourteener, e.g.), only that of "ten syllables, free from rhyme" has succeeded. From this we can see that Crowe takes decasyllabism as an absolute. In its time, his book was the voice of things past.

Proposes a new explanation for Dickinson's verseform: the meter is meant to be quantitative. What E. D. learned in the Stoddard and Andrews Latin grammar text she read at the Amherst Academy she later tried to replicate in her own work, using dashes to denote caesurae and foot boundaries and using capitalization and italics to insure that certain words within the lines would receive unusual stress and hence lengthening of syllables.

The requirements for meeting Arnold's dictum about the smoothness of English hexameters are that "accent should not be sacrificed for the sake of quantity" and that "every ictus syllable should be an accented syllable." Cummings distinguishes ictus, accent, and emphasis, and constructs a schema of nine line-types, based on the number and position of "emphasized feet"; "emphasis may be effected by stress or by lengthening the vowel." But after the Introduction of the English forms, the book turns exclusively to Greek and Latin examples.

Campion repeats vowel sounds to insure identical quantity and thereby enriches the traditional accentual meters with superimposed quantitative effects in "Come let us sound," "Turne backe you wanton flyer," and "Harke al you la-dies."

In the hexameter poem, Milton's metrical style is mixed, resembling the Vergilian Eclogues rather more than the Aeneid or Ovid; in the elegies, he resembles Ovid more closely than the classical Roman poets did themselves. Extensive statistical analysis.


The fourteen page Preface praises Tennyson's work and sets forth explicitly the "rules" for quantitative verse on "the true positional principle": (1) "accented syllables, as a general rule, are long, though some syllables which count as long need not be accented"; (2) the laws of position are to be observed according to
the general rules of classical prosody. Problems of application are discussed directly. General principle: "Quantity," in English revivals of ancient metre, depends not only on position, but on accent. (The ambiguity is evident; see Munro (E203).)


Formerly the best available source on English quantitative verse, Elze has not been entirely superseded by Attridge (E112); his treatment of second- and third-rate writers is more detailed, and he covers both the Renaissance and the nineteenth century and also the classical imitations in general and the translations of Homer in particular.

E150 English Hexameters Translations, from Schiller, G öthe, H om er, C allinus, and M leager. London: John Murray, 1847.

Contributions by H are, Hawtrey, H erschel, Lockhart, and W hewell; "all the pieces are executed with the intention that the lines, being read according to the natural and ordinary pronunciation, shall run into accentual hexameters or pentameters." Fifty pieces in a small oblong volume, bound in beautiful Oriental boards.


E153 Evans, Robert O. "Spenser's Role in the Controversy over Quantitative Verse." Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 57 (1956): 246-56. Evans believes that (1) the whole controversy has been "exaggerated," that (2) Spenser's skill at writing q. verse has been underrated, that (3) the Harvey correspondence should not be taken seriously, and that (4) though "there is no reason to assume that quantitative verse cannot be written with some success in English," the whole phenomenon is simply a sophisticated literary game.

E154 Fairclough, H. R. "The Influence of Virgil upon the Forms of English Verse." Classical Journal 26 (1930): 74-94. Taking Bridges' I bant O l auri for a point of departure, Fairclough surveys the English attempts at hexameters from Stanyhurst through T ennyson, especially the flurry in the nineteenth century, finding that none "has ever been really successful." The review then turns to the metiers of couplet and blank verse -- the couplet in Douglas, Dryden and Pope, blank verse in Chaucer, Shak espeare, Dryden, many lesser poets, and most importantly, Milton.

E156  The First Booke of the Preservation of King Henry the VII. London: 1599. Written in quantitative hexameters and containing a noteworthy short preface.


E159  ------. The Countess of Pembroke's Emanuell. London: 1591. Also ed. by Grosart for the Miscellanies of the fuller Worthies' Library, 1871. Next to Stanyhurst's Aeneis the most substantial body of quantitative hexameters written in the Renaissance. The title of the first section of Emanuell declares the verse to be in "ryming hexameters."

E160  Fuller, Roy. "Boos of Different Durations." Southern Review 11 (1975): 825-37. Leisurely speculations, acute and intelligent observations, and errant reasoning on duration of syllables (Quantity) in poetry. From a reading of Sonnenschein and Scripture's work on acoustic metrics, Fuller derives "the 'myth' of stress" as the basis for English verse. Duration is the thing. Noteworthy digression: "difficulties or irregularities of scansion may be minimized or explained if the questionable passage is read for sense."

E161  Fulton, Edward. "Sidney, Spenser, and the Areopagus." M L N 31 (1916): 372-74. Though there is no evidence definitely establishing the existence of the Areopagus as a club, it is indisputable that Spenser and Sidney were intimate friends and that Spenser was seriously concerned to obtain agreement among the poets practicing quantitative verse on the rules they were to follow.


E163  "German Epics and English Hexameters." Dublin University Magazine 44 (1854): 55-72. Reviews translations by James Cochrane of German poems by Voss and others into English accentual hexameters; the reviewer complains that though accent is principle in English, quantity should be attended to also. Technical notes on meter in translation, pp. 63-64, 66-68. Omond was disappointed by this.

E164  Gildon, Charles. The Complete Art of Poetry. 2 vols. London: Charles Rivington, 1718. Vol. 1, pp. 293-303. Gildon, arch-enemy of Bysshe (E505), represents the reactionary forces in eighteenth-century English metrics still attempting to apply the Classical system to English verse. In this fictitious dialogue, Laudon defends the quantities of classical Greek as being the basis of English versification, accent being a matter pertaining only to performance, not to meter. The classical "feet," in fact, are represented by notes on a musical staff, since the "quantities" were thought to be derived originally from actual time-values. Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" is so scanned as example.


The author of the essay, rather ill-informed, seems to have been reading the Renaissance theorists. He claims that number in modern verse pertains only to syllables rather than to feet as in the classical, and that quantitative verse could be written in English if only a little effort were bestowed, since "it is impossible that the same measure, composed of the same times, should have a good effect upon the ear in one language, and a bad effect in another." This is thoughtless.


Though recognizing the differing prosodic bases of classical and modern verse, Goodell agrees with Lanier that time-values are the basis of English verse, which is therefore somewhat like Greek. The similarities between the two prosodies are thereafter emphasized throughout, musical notation is correlated to the classical scansion marks, and two modes are indentified: "feet of three times and feet of four times."

Rules are given on pp. 100-2. The essay explicitly conjoins the Temporalist scansion with the classical Greek system. Notice M77.

E168  Hampton, Barnabas. Prosodia Construed, and the meaning of the most difficult words therein contained plainly illustrated; Being an addition to the construdion of Llile's Rules, and of like necessary use. London, 1639; rpt 1704. 29 pp.

A pocket-sized standard handbook of the time giving metrical rules based on quantity. The text is in Latin and English, alternating after every term or phrase.


Accentual hexameters. Cf. Moyne and Mustanoja (E205), Larrabee (E193), Kunze (E189), and Holman (E180).


The only possible verseform for translating the classics (Homer, Virgil) into English is blank verse.

E172  Harvey, Gabriel, and Edmund Spenser. Three Proper and witty familiar Letters: lately passed betweene two Universitie men: touching the Earthquake in Aprill last, and our English refourmed versifying. London: H. Bynneman, 1580. And later in the same year, by the same printer:

E173  -----. Two other very commendable Letters of the same mens writing: both touching the foresaid Artificall Versifying, and certain other Particulars M ore lately delivered unto the Printer.

The second letter of the Three concerns the earthquake and may be ignored; the other four are reprinted in Smith (A26), vol. 1, pp. 87-122, and see also pp. 123-24 (note that Smith prints the later two letters first, followed by the earlier two, deleting the one on the earthquake). Harvey's other Four Letters and his

The double exchange between "Immerito" (Spenser) and Harvey is perhaps the central surviving text of the whole quantitative movement, since it is our source for the differing opinions of Drant, Spenser, and especially Harvey, who seems to have been the prime mover behind it all. Spencer was himself mainly unmoved. It used to be thought that these three writers formed a literary coterie, the Areopagus (see p. 89 in Smith and accompanying Notes), but the evidence is tenuous and the opinion is not much promoted anymore. I follow Smith's ordering of the letters below.

In the first letter, Spenser acknowledges that Sidney and Dyer have "prescribed certaine Laws and rules of Quantities of English sillables for English verse" and "drawen mee to their faction"; indeed, "I am, of late, more in loue wyth my Englishe Versifying than with Ryming." He chides Harvey for "a breache in Maister Drant's Rules" and provides a sample of quantitative lines, the "Iambicum Trimetrum," which Harvey then chides in return, in the second letter, with wit and energy turning serious, as not being precisely perfect (though he admits knowing nothing of Drant's rules). Spenser in the short third letter asks for a copy of Harvey's rules and offers to send Drant's as annotated by both Sidney and himself; he also opines that the English Exameter "will easily and fairly yeele it selfe to oure M other tongue. For the onely or chieuest hardnesse, whych seemeth, is in the Accente; whych sometime gapeth, and as it were yawneh illfaouuredly, comming shorte of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the Number, as in Carpenter the middle sillable, being vsed shorte in speache, when it shall be read long in Verse, seemeth like a lame Gosling that draweth one legge after hir. . . ". His following question is significant for implying a sharp distinction between (accentual) reading and (quantitative) scansion of the orthographic line: "for why, a Gods name, may not we, as else the Greekes, haue the kingdome of oure owne Language, and measure our Accentes by the sounde, reserving the Quantitie to the Verse?"

It is in the fourth letter then that Harvey comes to give examples of his own practice and to quarrel about theory. His view in a nutshell: "the Latine is no rule for us. . . Position neither maketh shorte nor long in oure Tongue." English orthography is far too fickle to serve as the basis of a visual versification: only pronunciation will serve: "it is not either Position, or Diphthong, or Diastole, or anye like Grammer Schoole Deuice that doeth or can indeede either makelong or short, or encrease, or diminish the number of Sillables, but onely the common allowed or receiued PROSODY. . . . you shall neuer haue my subscription or consent (though you should charge me wyth the authoritie of fiue hundreth Maister DRANTS) to make your Carpenter, our Carpenter, an inch longer or bigger than God and his Englishe people haue made him." All this may amount to no more than saying that the quantity of an English syllable does not entail an accent, or vice versa; if so, Drant and Sidney thought precisely the same. Harvey does not dispel Spenser's confusion on this point. And his purpose throughout is to secure the right basis for determining quantity, not to substitute accent for it. W ebbe observed that Harvey's whole approach was not entirely serious, and clearly the statements near the end of the fourth letter are more rhetoric than anything else: they certainly are not a clear or careful synopsis of his views. In practice, Harvey scans by quantities, and he even admits length by position except for doubled consonants, which he recognizes are not sounded so. His verses are more or less passable by accent, but Hendrickson attributes this to the arbitrary monosyllabic structure of the language not to any conscious choice. See also E224, E227, and E268.
The criticism of Elizabethan classical-imitative verse commonly raised by prosodists— that its pronunciation is aberrant beyond redemption—is a simple category mistake: the quantivists never intended to write accentual-analogue hexameters, where the natural word-stresses correspond to the quantities and the ictuses. When they read their (English quantitative) verses, they read following the accents, even as Latin verses themselves were read during the Renaissance. When they scanned their verses, however, they scanned the metrical quantities without regard to accent. This is not a case of “double audition” but rather of two separate activities altogether. It is true that the quantities and the accents do correspond perfectly in some lines, but this is due not to design but to the structure of the language itself; all such lines will be found to be entirely monosyllabic.

Critics have also misunderstood Harvey. His theoretical statements are confused, and he does recognize the impossibility of length by doubled consonants in English, but his verses show that like the others he accepted length by position. Like them too he scans by quantity but pronounces by accent. Stanyhurst even went a little further toward Latin polysyllabicity in his verses, but he too conforms. See E240.

The initial article reviewing Ibant Obscuri is sympathetic and appreciative, taking the trouble to explain very carefully both the general phonetic aspects of English hexameters (accent must be entirely disregarded) and also Bridges' modifications of his Latin prosodic models. The correspondents are of mixed opinions, several of them thinking "the metre is really hopeless in English," but the last two adduce modern parallels in Indian and Arabic, where the quantitative meter is successfully preserved apart from any accentual articulation.

A lucid short account of the nature of quantitative verse in classical Greek and Latin and "the two different ways that 'quantity' could be used, both metaphorically, in English verse," i.e. in a stress-analogue meter (the stress pattern identical to what the quantitative pattern would have been in Latin, the quantities being ignored in the English) and in the Renaissance experiments, a kind of "written code" meter (where the quantities of the English syllables are determined by applying the Latin rules to the English orthography, the sounds and stressing of the line being ignored altogether). Hollander thinks Tennyson's remark about "scissors" a joke and some of his verses a "burlesque" revealing his "contempt" for the whole business.
The lyrics in Simms's novel are in Longfellow's hexameters. Cf. Larrabee (E193), Hardy (E170), Moyne and Mustanoja (E205), and Kunze (E189).

A review of the dispute between Arnold and Francis Newman, partial to the latter.

"The difficulty of converting quantitative to accentual meters...is greatly exaggerated." The Latin shows accentual effects, and quantitative effects cannot be avoided in English (examples). The real problems in translation are the great variety of feet in classical meters, the dissimilarity of conventional line-lengths, the immense resources of word-order denied to English, and the preservation of some modicum of the sound-structure of Latin.


The Preface, pp. xiii-xvii, gives rules for quantitative verse.

The posthumous treatise of an Australian poet on the possibilities for metering syllabic duration in English poetry. Jury observes, sensibly, that stress is the dominant characteristic of our language, but that quantity exists as well, and that major English poets (e.g. Pope in the Essay on Criticism) have sometimes employed syllable-length very successfully in English verse. The poet who wishes to imitate classical verse in English may do so in one of five ways: (1) substitution of stress in the (quantitative) metrical patterns, ignoring quantity altogether (Clough, Longfellow); (2) occasional foregrounding of quantity in accentual verse for sharp effects (Pope); (3) a serious attempt to order quantities in the English syllables on the classical model, which yet is willing to yield to the native stress patterns wherever the verse becomes strained (Swinburne)--Jury terms this verse quasi-quantitative; (4) rigorous quantitative meter regardless of stress (Bridges); and (5) both a correct quantitative pattern and a natural, correct, and corresponding stress pattern (Tennyson). Rules are given for the quantity of English syllables.

On Pound's translations-and transformations-of the Sapphic fragments.

This Indian poet has written English poems in both stress verse and quantitative verse. Rules for the latter, summarized here, are said to be taken from Aurobindo's long essay on the subject in vol. 30 of the Complete Works.

E188  Koschat, Erna. Versuche in antiken Metren bei R. S. Bridges. Diss., Vienna, 1929.

Cf. Hardy (E170), Larrabee (E193), Moyne and Mustanoja (E205), and Holman (E180).


"Had there been an English Ennui to express the theories of Harvey and other pedants of his kind in some great poem, the verse of the Elizabethan Age, if not of succeeding periods, would be very different from what it really is." Short views of the major metrists and their opinions on the subject.


The original charge of plagiarism (of meter) was levelled by W.C. Porter in the Mercersbury Review for November 1855. Cf. Moyne and Mustanoja (E205) and Hardy (E170), Kunze (E189), also Holman (E180).


English meter, Larminie opines, is based on not two but four quantities, though stress "greatly helps out the quantitative deficiencies." Rhyme is and "unnecessary burden" to be got rid of (in English; L. admits in a long digression its importance in the other languages). Assonance, however, can be valuable support to English verse. Swinburne is praised for the wide use of feet of three or more syllables, and the rhythms of the Authorized Version are upheld as exemplary.


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The critics have generally panned this meter as a medium for translation of classical hexameter; the translators themselves have been more receptive. Samples.


Written in accentual (dactylic) hexameters, though the rhythm is much more
supple than many people think. Longfellow had tried this meter earlier in his "The Children of the Lord's Supper" and "To a Driving Cloud," but it was the discovery of a translation of Homer of Blackwood's Magazine that fixed him upon it. The poem is also famous for inspiring Clough to write his Bothie (E140). See Sieper (K350) for more details. See also p. 240 of the review in North American Review 66 (1848). See also E235 and E242.

Eschewing accentual hexameters, Mackay sets forth the metrical form for the hexameter line in any language, the rules for quantity in English (the ear must be the absolute judge; no length by rule or position is to be allowed), and the special difficulties of writing the true quantitative line in our language.

Cogently, McKerrow classes "practically all verse that has ever been called classical" as (1) verse called quantitative but in fact accentual and nothing else; (2) verse adopting the abstract pattern of classical verse but substituting accent for quantity; (3) "quantitative" verse in which the quantities are determined by natural English pronunciation; or (4) "quantitative verse which adopts, at least in part, the true classical rules, such as length by position. In general the development was from the fourth type to the second. McKerrow observes quite correctly that, as for judgments on the whole enterprise, "to accuse such men of simple folly were surely a still more simple presumption in ourselves." Given the authoritative status of the classics and the wretchedness of vernacular poetry at the time, it would be surprising if no classical-imitative verses had been attempted. As for quantity, the determination of the length of the syllable had nothing to do with (1) whether or not the length of the vowel was noted, (2) pronunciation, or (3) actual duration of time. It was entirely conventional; scansion was divorced from pronunciation. Nothing else explains the theorists' concern with orthography. McKerrow essays separately the contribution of each of the known figures of the movement--Drant, Dyer, Sidney, H arvey (the disparity between his theory and practice is noted), Stanyhurst, Webbe, Fraunce, Puttenham, Sabie, Dickinson, the anonymous author of The First Booke of the Preservation of K ing Henry VII, Campion, and Sandford [in the supplementary note; chronologically he comes first]. A wellspring essay: McKerrow's immense bibliographical knowledge enabled him to make many suggestions here that had never been made previously and even now have not been pursued. See also:


Discusses, inter alia, the Harvey-Spenser correspondence (E172-3). The first known reference to the Areopagus per se is in the late nineteenth century, hardly early enough to be reliable evidence.

Close analysis of quantitative poetry by Longfellow, Bliss Carman, and C. G. D. Roberts, with some wider remarks on the Victorian penchant for classical meters in English verse. Carman's translations of Sappho evidence particular metrical variety.
E203  Monro, C[harles] J[ames]. "Latin Metres in English, After Sidney, Tennyson, and Mr. Ellis." Journal of Philology 4 (1872): 223-30. A skeptical assessment of Ellis's (E148) two rules for quantitative verse in English, namely, that (1) syllables otherwise short may count for metrical purposes as long if accented, and (2) the syllable under the ictus must be accented. Hence Monro concludes that by not allowing long by unstressed syllables in ictic position Ellis is writing only "a metre and a half"--a fully accentual meter but only partly a true quantitative meter. Praises Sidney's quantitative work.


E206  Murray, Gilbert. "What English Poetry May Still Learn from Greek." Essays and Studies 3 (1912): 7-31. It may learn three things: religion, architecture, and texture. The third of these occupies most of the article, beginning on p. 15. Murray gives detailed attention to the English meters appropriate for translation as well as the nature and strengths of the Greek meters in epic, dramatic, and lyric poetry.

E207  Murray, Lindley. English Grammar, adapted to the different classes of learners. York: Wilson, Spence, and Mawman, 1795. The fourth part, "Prosody," (pp. 146-59) discusses versification only on pp. 155-59, since in this author's view, "prosody" consists of both the rules for pronunciation in English and also the laws of versification.

E208  Nares, Robert. Elements of Orthoepy, containing a distinct view of the whole analogy of the English Language, so far as it relates to Pronunciation, Accent, and Quantity. London: T. Tayne and Son, 1784; facsimile reprint: Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1968. Founder of the Royal Society of Literature, Nares produced a book on pronunciation that was authoritative in its time and influential on Walker's Dictionary. Part 2 treats accent, Part 3 quantity. Accent he calls "a species of emphasis," distinguishing it from the Greek pitch-accent. Quantity he admits is variable in English, though the gradations can all be grouped as simply short or long. Rules for quantity, pp. 216-18. Nares refuses to let accent determine syllables as long, yet he also insists that modern meters are deficient in comparison with classical ones (pp. 211, 219-21). Chapter 10 of Part 3 sanctions elision and diaeresis in verse. For a fuller account of the laws of versification the reader is referred to Mitford (p. 142). There is a full-scale study of Nares' treatise by Claus-dirk Pollner (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976).

E209  Newman, Francis W[illiam]. Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice. A Reply to Matthew Arnold, Esq. London: Francis and Norgate, 1861. 104 pp. A wincing response to Arnold's severe censures of Newman's translation of Homer; Newman replies by condemning the hexameter translation by Arnold as unfit for the common, unscholarly reader. Written while its author still felt the sting of the wound, the book is a close rejoinder to both accusations and phrases, and so has little of independent value. Arnold replied the following
year in his Last Words lecture (E108).


Nowell-Smith catalogues and analyzes the manuscripts of the poems in Bridges' quantitative period, here dated 1901-3, in disagreement with Guérard.


A response to Bridges' hexameters in the 1909 New Quarterly, attacking the Laureate's complete rejection of accent (in favor of quantity) as the basis for English meter.


All discussions of translating Homer eventually come to the question of an appropriate meter. This one does, too, in the midst of a helpful review of the entire subject. Illuminating comparisons of translations. Arnold himself, it happens, preferred the Hexameter above Blank Verse and all other English meters as the best form for rendering Homer. Omond sketches the history of hexameters beginning on p. 84; this essay might be read most profitably just after reading Arnold's lectures directly; no study of English quantitative verse is needed.


Omond's earliest work on the classical meters; his continued research allowed him to expand this essay in both scope and detail into the 1903 English Metrists, all of this work being finally superseded by the 1921 edition (A5). See also E310. Here Omond rough-sketches the Elizabethan efforts to reproduce quantity in English verse, the nineteenth-century German and English efforts to imitate the quantitative pattern in accent, and Omond's own approach, the view that "the true unit of English verse is not the foot, nor even the accent, but simply a period of time," so that the hexameter becomes "simply a verse of six periods" (italics original). The essay concludes with a free translation of Book 5 of the Odyssey.


Bickering over Tennyson's hexameters, whether accentual or quantitative.


Urges the use of authentic "classical metres" in translating Greek verse: Oxenford is emphatic that the position of the ictus must be preserved (by accent, in English), and he seems to think that the classical pattern of quantities can be preserved as well, albeit with "much greater latitude," given the nature of our language.


Palmer finds the former of these unsuited for translation of Homer (on the grounds that English is weak in dactylic words) and recommends instead the latter, or an "iambic recitative," subjoining his translation of Book 23 of The Odyssey as example.


Milton's imitation of the classical meter (the fourth Asclepiadhean) of Horace's
Carm. 1.5 in his translation of it ("What slender Youth bedew'd") is intelligible only if we postulate that he took for the final syllable in the English line what was the final accented syllable in the Latin line (thereby shortening the syllable count for all the lines in the translation). In other words, Milton took over the accentual pattern which is formed as a by-product of the quantitative meter in the Latin. The same stanza-form is used by Collins for the "Ode to Evening," by Southey for "To Hymen" and "W ritten on the First of January," and (with rhyme added) by Marvell for the "H oratian Ode."


E220 Redesdale, John Thomas Freeman Mitford, Lord. Thoughts on English Prosody and Translations from Horace. And

E221 Further Thoughts on English Prosody. Oxford and London: J.H. and James Parker, 1859. 16 pp and 15 pp. (Tracts). The author is the nephew of William Mitford (E599). Established quantitative rules based on his earlier translation of several Horatian Odes. "When quantity is governed by fixed rule, the strongest emphasis may be placed on a short syllable without injury to the metre, and reading is carried on without regard to anything but the sense of the passage." The second essay, written a month later, defends this position against some intervening criticisms.


E223 "R hymed Hexameters and Pentameters." Blackwood's Magazine 59 (1846): 496. Four poems in the mixed meter, with a headnote.


E225 Sandford, James. Hours of Recreation . . . done first out of Italian into English. 2nd ed. London: Henry Binneman, 1576. It was McKerrow who first noticed that one of the poems appended to this little book is in five languages--Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and English--and in the Classical "elegiac couplet" metre, thus representing the second known instance of quantitative verse printed in English (after Ascham's). The verses do not appear in the first edition (1573), which was entitled The Garden of Pleasure.

E226 Sayers, Frank. "Of English Metres." In his Disquisitions Metaphysical and Literary. London: J. Crouse and W. Stevenson, 1793; rpt in his Works. London, 1830; rpt New York: Garland, 1971. pp. 129-37. Since English syllables may be denominated long or short, as in every other language, "it is difficult to assign a cause why the same arrangement of English syllables [as that in classical verse] should not be pleasing also." Notes instances in the Renaissance and by Milton; is hopeful of more to come.

E227 Schelling, Felix E. "The Inventor of the English Hexameter." MLN 5 (1890): 212-14. Those scholars who have impugned Harvey's character for his having said that he wished to be remembered as The Inventor of the English Hexameter have taken the sentence out of a sensitive context and thereby misconstrued it. It
would seem that Greene had taunted Harvey with that epithet and worse, and Harvey, replying in his Fowre Letters, naturally would prefer the best of them. For references see the citation data at E173 and also E174.


E229 Schuman, Sharon. "Sixteenth Century English Quantitative Verse: Its Ends, Means, and Products." M.P. 74 (1977): 335-49. Attempting to ferret out the elusive definition of "quantity" used by the Elizabethans and also a legitimate rationale they could have held for their poetic practice, Schuman examines (1) the "aesthetic assumptions" made by the Elizabethan poets, (2) their conception of Latin versification, and (3) the principles which they seem to have used in constructing their quantitative verses. Her conclusion is that the Elizabethan poets scanned a syllable as long or short by two rules, operating sequentially, the first mandatory and the second optional: if a syllable was not long by (positional) definition in the Latin system, then it might be by accentuation in the English one. That is, the English poets wrote quantitative verse which was to be scanned according to the Latin rules but read (stressed) according to the regular English pronunciation. The first system was visual, the second aural.

Astoundingly, the author seems totally unaware of the work of Attridge (E112), but nevertheless the article is closely argued and offers a useful comparison of the work of Willcock and Hendrickson (E265 and E175).


E231 Shawcross, John T. "The Prosody of Milton's Translation of Horace's Fifth Ode." Tennessee Studies in Literature 13 (1968): 81-89. Noticing that Sprott's accentual-syllabic scansion of the Ode left numerous irregularities, Shawcross scans it by quantities, but the numerous irregularities then left force him to conclude that Milton frequently reduced (1) two short syllables to one long and (2) a trochee to a stressed monosyllable. Choruses from Samson Agonistes are likewise scanned.

E232 Shipley, Joseph. "The Problems of the Elizabethan Poets." Poet-Lore 38 (1927): 358-72. Surveys the opinions of all the major Elizabethan metrists on the issues of (1) the use of rime and (2) accent vs. quantity. The general problem for the poets of course was to discover and legitimize a model for the new poetry.

E233 Short, R. W. "The Metrical Theory and Practice of Thomas Campion." PMLA 59 (1944): 1003-18. Campion's theory of English meter can be properly appraised only by setting aside altogether his interest in music (and musical settings) and by understanding his beliefs about accent and quantity. Short, claiming [without any further explanation] that English has "four classes of syllables" differentiated by stress,
pitch, and length, argues (1) that Campion was interested not in classical metrics but in the quantities (and accents) properly a part of English meter, when the classical rules are reconciled to the vagaries of English pronunciation, and also (2) that Campion sought to write verse having lines comprising equal periods of time regardless of their syllabic filling. Such a theory with such a practice Short has understandable difficulty reconciling; he therefore argues that the proper illustrations of Campion’s position in the Observations are not the examples given therein but Campion’s own poems published the year before in A Book of A yres. These latter are then compared to verses by Greene and Dekker. A patchwork explanation, of thin and motley material erratically stiched.

E234  Sidney, Sir Philip. The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia. London, 1590, 1593, etc. A number of the verses in the Arcadia are frankly experimental, including imitations of quantitative meters. There is no full-scale essay on this matter, so the reader will have to consult: (1) The Index, s.v. “Versification,” in Jean Robertson’s edition of the Old Arcadia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 513, though the references lead only to her Commentary, which is heavily reliant upon (2) The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney. Ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962. Ringler’s invaluable edition offers both Commentary (see pp. 385-86, 390-93 (above all), and 402-3) and a Table of Verse Forms (pp. 569-72). See also Maynadier (E201), Underdown (E259), Applegate (E106), Hanssen (E169), Poirier (E219), and Ringler (E224).


Sonnenschein’s treatise on rhythm contains three general chapters—“Rhythm Defined,” “Rhythm and Music,” “Music and Verse,”—three chapters on Rhythm in Isosyllabic [Vedic], Greek, and Latin Verse, and four chapters on quantity—“Rhythm in English Verse: The Ratio of Foot to Foot,” “Syllable Measurement in English,” “Quantity in English Verse: The Ratio of Rise to Fall,” and “English Experiments in Classical Metres.” His definition: “Rhythm is that property of a sequence of events in time which produces on the mind of the observer the impression of proportion between the durations of the several events or groups of events of which the sequence is composed.”

“My own proposed system of scansion may be described as an attempt to reinstate the foot (in the ancient sense of the term) as a unit of measurement.” That is, he believes that English is exactly like Greek and Latin in that two “short” syllables may stand for one “long” and so receive metrical ictus, and also in that accent and quantity are inseparable. Chapter 8 gives rules for the quantity of every English syllable, based on the kymography measurements in the Appendix.

With this poem Southey initiated the vogue of accentual hexameters in English in the nineteenth-century—a classical-imitative meter substituting stress for length. Southey's hexameter line contains six feet, the first four of which may be either dactyls or trochees, the fifth being always a dactyl and the sixth a trochee. In this practice he follows the Germans, substituting trochees in the modern verse for spondees in the classical, since he agrees that the true spondee is so rare a species in modern speech as to be scarcely ever seen.


Reviews Arnold (E107), squarely objecting to his argument that the hexameter is the best meter for rendering Homer in English; in a closely reasoned and technical counterargument, Spedding examines the nature of accent and quantity in both Greek and English, and the rules for the hexameter in each, in order to show that the effect of the English hexameter line on the Englishman who knows no Greek is not the same as the effect of Homer's lines on a Greek; it is that man whom Spedding claims is the proper judge of a translation, not the scholar fluent in both languages. The 1879 volume adds "corrections and explanations." Munro (M140) disagrees sharply.


A short account of the theories of the major Renaissance prosodists. Not entirely reliable, as subsequent scholarship has shown.


A long, close review of Hendrickson (E175), generally approbatory. Standop reminds us that the classical-imitative phenomenon is not restricted to the Renaissance, and that we still cannot judge very well the aesthetic (metrical) value of the experiments. The Renaissance read such verse with normal prose accents, not with a melodic accent, though perhaps both systems were heard simultaneously (Standop). Thus our reading or quantitative verse by accent may not be so unrealistic; the Renaissance poets generally avoid congruence of accent and ictus, and it may be that counterpointing of stress and ictus is the best compromise solution, as we see in the "thin"spondees of Voss with their "free-floating' stress. The ultimate question in these matters is whether English syllables are long and short; the answer must be No. Conclusion: the nature of quantitative verse arises not from the hypothetical pattern but from the real accentual pattern, whether intended or not. A balanced theory will pay attention to both.


Praised by Harvey but treated cooly by some others (who were put off both by his language and by his uncompromising classicism, probably), Stanyhurst seems to have the strongest effort of any of the Renaissance quantivists to adhere to the Latin metrical system. Not only does he follow the quantitative structure of the Latin line strictly, he also adheres to the accentual structure of its last two feet, and he even conforms to the morphological structure of the
meter as well. Observing that the stress rules for English are radically different from those for Latin, Stanyhurst concludes that the strictest application of the Latin rules to English will be disastrous, so that he is willing to scan sometimes strictly by syllabic quantity (as for words of Latin etymology) and sometimes by letting the accent qualify the syllable as long. He speaks much of sounds, but it is clearly the orthography that is the actual determinant in practice, as can be seen in his selection between variant spellings of a word so as to fit the quantitative rules for length by position (which were visual rules anyway). But since the Preface to his Aeneis is very short and sketchy, and since his verse is intended to be read as anything but accentual-syllabic English meter, it is very difficult to have a clear grasp of his entire position. Attridge is helpful here; he devotes a short chapter to Stanyhurst.

Cf. E197. The accentual hexameter may be compared to the classical quantitative hexameter by examining the three main characteristics of the latter in the former—the proportion of dactyls to spondees, monosyllables at line-end, and caesura-placement. The same features are also treated in the subsequent


An extravagant system of new terminology and convoluted scansion operations based on quantity. Every syllable in English is said to have a quantity fixed by usage, and which depends on "texture," "metrical stress," (?) and "incidental emphasis." A numerical score for each of these three factors is tallied, giving the "scansion feet of sound." This metrical tally may then be set against the "spans of thought or emotion" (the line divided syntactically and marked for natural speech-stresses). Conflict between these two systems is called a "cross-draw"; the classical longs and shorts are renamed "strokes" and "flicks," and any monosyllable which can be either is called a "rover." Arf.
The rules for assigning quantity, besides being garbled, vague, and ludicrous, are actually based on accent, as is this entire misconceived system. Subsequent essays written by this author:


Doubtless Stephens would have both been and not been, had he had his preference. He speaks here of strokes as "the stressed syllable in the word," yet "theMetrical Quantity" of both monosyllables and polysyllables is "invariable," even though the influence of Classical Prosody on English has been pernicious; worse, there are "Seven Dominant Rhythms or Measures (or Metres)" such as "Two-Time," etc. This is lunatic.
E251  Stone, William Johnson. On the Use of Classical Metres in English. London: Henry Frowde, 1898. 59 pp. [Omond and Bridges cite this date; BMC cites 1899.] Posthumously published (with some revisions (by Bridges?)) as Classical Metres in English Verse, the second part of Bridges' 1901 edition of Milton's Prosody (E495).

Omond thought that had Stone lived longer (he died at 26) his judgments, particularly phonetic, would have been sounder. In any event the substance of his theory--and it is a significant statement--would not have changed. Part I of his treatise give a short history of previous attempts at quantitative verse and theory in the Renaissance and Nineteenth Century; Part II presents his argument. Stone believes that classical verse was just the reverse of the modern: Greek meter was quantitative but "combated" by speech-accents, while English meter is accentual but opposed by quantities. Hence a truly quantitative verse must be metered by quantities with combative(counterpoised) accents. Such a verse must be written with strict attention to quantity ("any compromise is fatal"); accent and quantity are not to coincide, as in Tennyson, and accentual imitation of quantitative structure is deplorable. Accent in English does not lengthen the syllable. Stone thinks, nor do double consonants lengthen the vowel--there is no length by position for us. Accent in the modern languages is precisely the same as it was in Greek--a rise in pitch.

E252  Swanson, Roy A. "Classical Meters in Modern Languages." Princeton (A18), pp. 126-28. See also s.v. "Hexameter." Not as systematic as it might be, but cogent and reasonably accurate.


E254  [Taylor, William.] "English Hexameter Exemplified." The Monthly Magazine 1 (1796): 404-5. Omond (A5) identifies this "transversion" of 19 lines from Macpherson's Ossian as the first specimen of accentual hexameters in English on the German model; after this first dislodgement, the avalanche soon followed.


Two fragments of experiments in quantitative-imitation written by Hallam with some assistance by his father; accent and quantity are intended to coincide. The "Bluebeard" first appeared in 1874.

A valuable study for its particular subject: Tillbrook gives a very widely informed historical survey of hexameter verse both in other languages and (especially and preponderantly) in English Renaissance verse. His view of the German accentual hexameters is deprecatory, apparently assuming that all proper classical-imitative verse must be essentially quantitative; indeed there is very little discussion of theory, but see pp.62-63.

Trevelyan essays to explain why the English meters never could (and never can) equal the mellifluousness, grace, and complexity of the Classical meters of Virgil, Horace, Pindar, Sappho, etc. His view of our prosody is a Temporalist one: English has only "dupe time" and "triple time" meters of isochronous bars always beginning on a stress. And the fact, in his view, is the explanation: In English the bars must always be equal in duration, but the constituent syllables may vary greatly in number or length in order that the bar-lengths come out equal. In Classical verse, on the other hand, each syllable has a fixed proportion relative to the others, and the lengths of the bars do not matter. The result is regularity for our verse but variety for ancient verse. He reviews the various English efforts at imitation, especially those of Bridges, and offers his own translation, thinking that any successful modern imitation of the classical patterns "would have to be mainly indicated and expressed by accent."

The nature of Sidney's early education in Latin enabled him to apply the rules for Latin verse, including the all-important "position" rule, to English verse while still preserving the distinction between accent and quantity. Underdown explicates the mechanism whereby "the quantitative structure of [Sidney's] verse regulates its phrasing, which in turn forms the basis of rhetorical organization," the word-group replacing the Latin polysyllable for purposes of avoiding metrical diaeresis.

Milton uses accentual equivalents to the classical quantitative meters in the play, dividing them into stichic meters (dialogue) and lyric meters (choral odes). Milton's meters in general parallel the Greek dramatic verseforms very closely.

The student may begin at p. 266 in Smith. The first twenty or so pages (up to p. 247) trace the history of poetry from classical times through Middle English (Webbe notices Gower, Chaucer, and the author of Pierce Ploughman, who he
says was the first to observe quantity without rhyme in English) up to his contemporaries, Webbe dispensing praise for many but condemning the "uncountable rabble of ryming Ballet makers." The next twenty pages discuss the genres, subjects, and moral ends of poetry.

The common English verse Webbe observes is based upon counting of syllables and rhyme and has three requirements: equivalence of line-lengths (the lines must be "answerable" to each other in syllables or feet), observance of natural stressing (i.e. an ordering of words such that none are "wrested contrary to the natural inclination or affection of the same"), and rhymes which do not wrench violently syntax or sense. Diversity of line and stanza is illustrated from the Shepheardes Calendar. Webbe notes that the "natural course" of English verse seems to be iambic, and if the "right quantitie" of the words be followed the line will turn out properly as an iamb. But the scansions show that this "quantitie" means stress and nothing else. Rhymes and various sorts of acrostics are noticed; Webbe then turns (p. 278) to classical-imitative verses, arguing (a little opaque but shrewdly) that even if the languages are dissimilar English should be able to adjust its rules to Latin even as Latin did to Greek. He admits that length by position will have to be abandoned, he cites twelve types of metrical feet, and he complains that monosyllables naturally long in English he was forced to treat as short in his own quantitative verses so as to supply the serious deficiency of short syllables in English, under the Latin rules. His actual statements about quantity in English are confused and his practice is inconsistent: his scansions ignore accent altogether yet length by position is admitted at points. Examples of Hexameters, Sapphics, and other meters conclude the treatise. In large part derivative and on the whole unexceptional, Webbe's prosodia is something of an anomaly: it seems scarcely to have been noticed by his contemporaries. Its chief characteristic is conservatism.

E262 Whalley, George. "Coleridge on Classical Prosody: An Unidentified Review of 1797." Review of English Studies n.s. 2 (1951): 238-47. Reprints the text of a review of Bishop Horsley's On the Prosodies of the Greek and Latin Languages which Coleridge wrote for the February 1797 number of the Critical Review, at a time which his views of versification were being formed. Horsley is cited at M104; see also Patterson at E845.


E264 Hewell, W. ] "Dialogue on English Hexameters." Frazer's Magazine 36 (1845): 665-70. Attribution given by Omond (A5). Defends accentually based hexameters on the grounds that even recitation of Latin verses uses stress as a marker. Trochees will be allowed to substitute for dactyls (the time being equal), though spondees in English verse are claimed.

E265 Willcock, G[dalys] D. "Passing Pitefull Hexameters: A Study of Quantity and Accent in English Renaissance Verse." MLR 29 (1934): 1-19. A general review of the whole Elizabethan quantitative movement which is constrained, by the very scope and difficulty of its subject-matter, into a terse, generalizing style. A number of the author's judgments have been subsequently refined or reversed, but it is to her credit that she recognizes the absolutely central position of orthography (so seemingly superficial) in the whole problem of writing and reading quantitative verses correctly: "the conclusion is forced
upon one that when Elizabethans... talk about quantity and so on, they are speaking of something visible rather than audible. "Otherwise not entirely reliable. Cf. Hendrickson (E175).


E267 Wölk, Konrad. Geschichte und Kritik des englischen Hexameters. Normannia: Germanisch-Romanische Bücherei, vol.3. Berlin: Emil Felber, 1909. 146 pp. This is the most extensive review of the subject available, even though it represents little advance upon the studies of Elze (E149) and the bibliographic spadework of Omond (E214). Usefully, Wölk devotes his attention between the quantitative hexameters of the Renaissance and after (50 pages) and the accentual-imitative hexameters mainly of the nineteenth century, up to Stone and Bridges (60 pages). This distinction, along with the diachronic organization, makes for great clarity, and there are frequent long extracts, though unfortunately without scansion (who will ever be as assiduous as Omond?).
