STRESS METRICS

No matter what terms they have used--whether "accent," "emphasis," "intensity," "loudness," "tone," "weight," "stress," "pulse," or whatever--metrists since the Renaissance have recognized the irrefragable fact that English meter is filled, demarcated (the root sense of meter is "measure," or a measuring-off), and thereby established by stress. They have quarreled about many other issues, such as whether or not to count syllables, or whether or not syllabic length is relevant to meter (quantitative metrics) or whether "filling" of the abstract metrical pattern is not temporal rather than merely accentual (temporal metrics), but even those metrists defending other theories have conceded at least some functions for stress in English meter. To leaf through the pages of Renaissance and eighteenth-century treatises, this is not immediately apparent, mainly because the issues, subtle and complex, are usually confused, and the terms used to discuss them worse than chaotic. But if we realize that many early theorists used the term "quantity" for what we would today call "ictus" rather than actual syllabic "length" (i.e. on the metrical level not the linguistic), then there is a certain crude sense in saying (what would otherwise be idiocy) that the accents in English verse make quantity; ictus in Latin is indeed filled by length even as the ictus in English is filled by stress. It is extraordinarily difficult to know exactly what the early theorists perceived about the sub-structure of the language, given their statements and terms. But it is clear beyond quarrel that the main line of descent in English metrical theory, the traditional view, is accentual. That is by no means to say that everything is settled, however: nearly everything is still unsettled. We have learned more about English verse-structure in the last thirty years than we had in the last three hundred, more in the last century than in the last millennium. But the ontological status of verse, the place of intonation in the theory, the mutual entailments of syntax and meter--all these problems and many others remain to be solved.  

N. B.: in summarizing the positions of various metrists I commonly make statements of the form "recognizes three degrees of stress," which will be understood to mean that non-stress is included as one of the degrees; in the present example, the three degrees are primary stress, secondary (or half) stress, and absence of stress.

TRADITIONAL

The traditional view of English meter has held, as its stay against all other confusions, that the principle constituent of our verse-structure is stress. Syllabic length may pertain as adventitious ornament, and isochronous timing may pertain at the lower level of rhythm, but meter in English is a simple pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.

E458 Abbott, Edwin A., and J. R. Seeley. English Lessons for English People. London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1871; rpt almost annually thereafter for over two decades. A grammar for the newly created English courses in schools. Part 3 treats "Metre," giving a simplified, conventional account of meters (accent is the basis in English), rhyme, quantity, caesura, and alliteration. Metrical Rules: (1) no succession of three syllables without metrical accent; (2) no two consecutive syllables in the same word may be metrically accented; (3) metrical accent in polysyllables must fall on lternate syllables. See the critique of Abbott's metrical system (both here and in his Shakespearean Grammar) in Chapter 3 of Mayor's Chapters on English Metre (E592) and the predecessor of that chapter, E594.
A small primer in paper covers. Meter is discussed on pp. 16-36.

An introduction to meter on accentual principles which was influential in its time. Meter is defined as "rhythm varying over a constancy . . . the modulated repetition of a rhythmical pattern." This principle--"rhythmical constancy persisting through rhythmical variation," or the variation and the norm--has become a central axiom of stress metrics. Yet beyond that point Abercrombie is on a shaky ledge in defending the old principles of "equivalence" and "substitution." He can ably distinguish metrical base from rhythmic norm, yet he claims that any type of foot may be substituted in the rhythm of a blank-verse line for an iamb in the meter because "whatever foot occurs [in the rhythm] represents _ / standing in place of it when the verse is spaced out in the hearing against the ideal pattern," so that any rhythm is perfectly "equivalent" to its metrical base. But that is nonsense--no trochaic line fits an iambic base; rhythm is not "equivalent" to meter, it corresponds to meter if the rules for correspondence are satisfied.

Altogether, the book is marred by the lingering influence of Saintsbury, yet it has great fixity of purpose in riveting its attention on the theoretical bases of scansion.

Abercrombie exerted a modest influence on the thinking of the literati in the early decades of the century, and his critical opus shows the style of the times---elegance and generality. See chapters 3 and 5 on rhythm, sound, and meter.

Stenberg neatly summarizes Abercrombie's view of the emergent vers libre: "Free verse loses rather than gains by freeing itself from metrical patterns, for metrical rhythms are continuous, whereas free rhythms are not. Metrical rhythm, then, lends a certain unity, as well as a certain heightening of emotion, that free verse and prose are not likely to have. Poetry can, however, exist without metre."


In search of a mathematically absolute Constant through all syllabic Variations, Anderson compares the Virgilian hexameter, the French Alexandrine, and the Old English alliterative line, finding in them B ases of (respectively) quantity, number, and stress. Each of these three qualities is then considered as the possible Constant for modern English verse, but all are rejected, as is time. Instead, the Base which underlies all realizations is recognized as a "subjective," abstract pattern of repetition of abstract elements [some others would call these non-ictus, idus], such that the pattern for the heroic line is

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Verse itself, as a system of abstractions and concretions, may be divided into:

1. "the fixed element as predictable, or expected"----the Base
2. "the fixed element as heard"
3. "the variable element"----the Modulation

The best pedagogy is to define meter in terms of its expressive variation, not in terms of Regularity. The variations are central not incidental. Scans Shakespeare's Sonnet 73.

An elementary manual, primarily on stanza-forms, appallingly cavalier in definitions.

"Metre is the arrangement into verse of definite measures of sounds, definitely accented. Thus the hexameter is the arrangement in lines of six equivalent quantities of sound, called feet, each of which consists, or has the value, of two long syllables, and is accented on the first syllable. . . . In English poetry, length or quantity depends almost entirely upon accent. Accented syllables are long, unaccented syllables short." Feet recognized are the iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, spondaic, and amphibrachic. Metrical and stanzaic forms are illustrated.

Written before Schipper, Arnold's short essay is aware only of Guest (E543); his principles are clearly accentual, and we can see here his deliberate (struggling) effort to preserve the old classical terminology for the modern verse.

In English "there is no natural trochaic verse, but only trochaic lines in which the falling rhythm is maintained deliberately by the use of a very definite and conspicuously employed linguistic material, failing which the natural iambic rhythm inevitably reasserts itself." Cf. Creek (E18), Stewart (E331), Crapsey (E516), Hascall (E783), and Newton (E799).

A synopsis of the theory and "linguistic-statistical" methods of Russian metrics, followed by an application of the principles of dol'nik verse (a mixed stress-meter) to Yeats's "Cap and Bells." Concludes with a defense of statistics in metrical studies.

A study narrower in scope and therefore more accessible to most students as an introduction to the Russian (i.e. inductive) method in metrics than the monograph by Tarlinskaja (E673). Bailey compiles statistics and displays his results in graphic form for stress placement and variation, syllabic variation, enjambement and rhyme, lexical selection, and stanza form in the iambic tetrameter verse of Jonson, Milton, Pope, Cowper, Blake, Wordsworth,
Tennyson, Eliot, Auden, and Graves. In respect to rhythm the iambic tetrameter has undergone the greatest changes in the twentieth century; it has remained constant in the basic syllabic- and stress-structure of the stem of the line, in use of anacrusis, avoidance of contiguous unstressed ictuses, and nonmetrical stressing, but substantial changes have occurred in rhythmical variety and average stressing, frequency of hiatus and polysyllabic words (higher), and use of elision (lower). Bailey has an acute awareness of the uses and abuses of statistical information, and his study takes a well-modulated and effective stance between the rocks and the whirlpool, generalization and detail. An important direction for metrics in the future.


The chapter on "Prosody" gives a rather full comparison of classical Greek and modern English meters. The following chapter on "Rhyme" gives an even fuller comparative view of Occidental and Oriental varieties of rhyme. Barnes was a poet and (prodigious) philologists, a close friend of Hardy, and influential on the early work of Hopkins.


Four branches of metrical theory are identified: the accentualist (Guest, etc.), the quantivist (Saintsbury having one view, Bridges and Stone another), the sectionalist (Guest again), and the musical (Lanier).


Taken from the Manchester Quarterly for 1894.


Baum's handbook is leisurely and urbane: it will be found useful for undergraduates, though at advanced levels students will see that his refinements of taste interdict any refinement of distinctions. He asserts quite clearly that "the basis of English metre is dual: time and stress are inextricable," but in practice he works by stresses, though musical notes are used for illustration. The chapters on Rhythm in Prose and Verse and on Modulation are the best, with excellent examples of prose recast as verse and vice versa.


Actually written ca. 1762. There are apparently two editions in 1776, a quarto of four essays and an octavo of three. See the final chapter in the essay, especially the last ten pages, though also p. 158 ff; see also the next entry.

Beattie accepts the Latin terminology and scansion sigla but bases meter on "emphasis" (i.e. stress, the term "accent" denoting pitch), though some musical notation is used. The iambic pentameter consists of five feet, with thirty types of variation. He declares himself adverse to strict syllabism, holding that contractions are never made in recitation and hence should not be made in print.

Further reading:


E481 Bernhart, A. Walter. "Complexity and Metricality." Poetics 12 (1974): 113-42. A look into Jespersen (E562) which concludes that "the criterion for determining the metricality of the line is the predominance of pattern-affirming parts over pattern-contradicting parts within the line." A new scansion system is then presented (cf. Jespersen's) which is concerned not with Position but with Changes in Position. Cf. also Chatman's "meter-fixing" feet (E713).

E482 Blackstone, Bernard. Practical English Prosody: A Handbook for Students. London: Longmans 1965. 164 pp. I have only one quarrel with this student's manual--it allows spondees and pyrrhics; otherwise, the first word of its title is amply justified: The book is clear, compressed, thorough, and not unduly elementary. Perhaps chapter 2 on metrical style--shifts and vacillations--is the most useful. Long final chapter on the Lyric. Exercises.

E483 Blair, Hugh. Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres. 2 vols. London, 1783. Blair's Rhetoric, which had gone through over 130 editions by the turn of this century, offers us an excellent view of the contemporaneous conception of versification on the "lower" levels of pedagogy. See Lecture 38 on "Nature on Poetry--Its Origin and Progress--Versification," specifically pp. 324-34. Blair recognizes the difference in versification between the ancient and the modern languages, so that "mere quantity is of very little effect in English versification," and he allows "some liberty for the sake of variety" in the
placement of accents. The general rule is for five accents and ten syllables in the heroic line. A long discussion of caesura-placement shows the influence of Bysshe, and remarks on Blank Verse and Couplet Verse conclude the lecture. Lecture 41 (vol. 2) on "The Poetry of the Hebrews" is also of interest, as is lecture 13 (vol. 1), "Structure of Sentences--Harmony," esp. p. 259 f. The date of the work is not exactly indicative of the true period of influence of these ideas since the Lectures were published at the conclusion of Blair's career as Professor of Rhetoric at Edinburgh.

E484 [Blake, J. W.] Aænt and Rhythm Explained by the Law of Monopressures. Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1888. The principles of this work were adopted and later expanded by W. W. Skeat in his prefaces to Chaucer and in his Philological Society paper (E656).

E485 [Blenerhasset, Thomas] "The Induction" to "The Complaint of Sigebert." In The Seconde Part of the Mirror for Magistrates. London, 1578. Rpt in Parts Added to "The Mirror for Magistrates" by John Higgins & Thomas Blenerhasset. Ed. Lily B. Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946. pp. 450-51. In this Introduction is found the first known reference to our staple English line as iambic. Note also that the tragedy which precedes it, "The Complaint of Cadwallader," is written in accentual hexameters, iambic and unrhymed. The salient passage: "But first tell me Inquisition, will you penne this mans meterless Tragedy as he hat pronounst it? good Memory geue me your aduise, for it agreeth very wel with the Roman verse called Iambus, which consisteth on sixe feete, evry foot on two syllables; one short and an other long, so proper for the English toung, that it is great maruaile that these ripewitted Gentlemen of England haue not left of their Gotish kinde of ryming, (for the rude Gothes brought that kind of writing first, & imitated the learned Latines & greekes)."

E486 Brenton, Thaddeus R. T. An Essay on Poetics. London: Oxford University Press, 1932. 58 pp. Distinguishes meter from rhythm: "if, in general, rhythm aside from metre is a poetical tenet, it is only secondary to, and superimposed upon, metre." Criticism of free verse.


E489 Orthometry: The Art of Versification and the Technicalities of Poetry. Edinburgh: John Grant, 1912; rpt 1950. 376 pp. For all its enormous length and pretentious title, the book is a mere handbook of forms. Chapters on meters, stanzas, forms, imitative sounds, and classical meters in English; R hyning Dictionary at the end. Philbrick (D323), pp. 274-76 accuses Brewer of plagiarisms "too numerous to mention" from Crowe (E142).

tive, Syllabic [i.e. Accentual-Syllabic; Bridges' term is misleading], and Stress Verse. Bridges believes that the English accentual-syllabic meter is a descendant of the Medieval Latin system, arising out of inattention to the quantities; he identifies the four principles of English verse as syllable-counting, alternation of stress, reduction of extra syllables by elision, and ignoring of syllabic quantity. Bridges also returns to classical versification throughout the letter.


E493 -----. On the Prosody of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes: Being a Supplement to the paper "On the Elements of Milton's Blank Verse in Paradise Lost," which is reprinted in the Rev. H. C. Beeching's edition of Paradise Lost, Book I, Clarendon Press, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1889. 12 pp. This is a small tract in paper covers. Thereafter, the two essays were revised and published together as


E496 -----. "Miltonic Elision." The Athenaeum, January 1904, pp. 83-84, 113-14, 147-48. Here he argues that Milton's extra syllables are to be elided for purposes of the meter but are to be spoken aloud without reduction, thereby enriching the complication of the verse.

Even though Bridges' work on the versification of Milton may soon be superceded by Weismiller (E1342), his final edition of Milton's Prosody will nonetheless remain a classic. In fact, it may be said that the descriptive-analytical approach to metrics so extensively pursued in the twentieth century received its impetus chiefly from Bridges. His principles throughout Milton's

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Prosody are three: (1) his method is Inductive; (2) he conceives of the verse-line as consisting of a Norm and its Variations; and (3) he considers the verse of Milton to be essentially syllabic, and only secondarily accentual. Bridges repeatedly evidences his firm grasp of historical phonology, his keen attention to Milton's technic, and his wide reading in the history of classical versification.

Part I, "On the Prosody of Paradise Lost," treats the counting of syllables and accents as the fundamental principles of Miltonic meter; Bridges' view of Miltonic elision is that syllables are to be fully realized in pronunciation but elided in scansion. The number and placement of accents belongs to the rhythm but not to the meter, since for Bridges the accentual structure of Milton's verse is only accessory, "like the flesh on a skeleton." He cites lines with three, four, and five accents, with inverted feet in each of the five positions, and with line-breaks (he eschews the term "caesura") in each of the nine possible positions. Part II, on PR and SA, cites instances of Milton's steady relaxation of the rules he followed for PL. Part III, "O solete Mannerisms," discusses the old conventions for "recession of accent," spelling, and pronunciation.

The newly-added Part IV, "On the Prosody of Accentual Verse," offers remarks on Christabel and seven rules for the prosody of stress verse, the joint effect of both of which is that the metrical units or measures in the scansion are to be "sometimes determined" by grammar (remember that stress for Bridges is an element of rhythm and that sentence-stress in normal speech-rhythm is partially determined by syntax). His scansion system marks (in accent) single and double stress and (in quantity) heavy, light, and short syllables in combinations producing sixteen varieties of feet.

This account will suggest that Bridges' mind always remained a little swayed by classical versification, and his typology sometimes looks a bit eccentric to us. Yet he insisted on accurate phonetics, his ear was good, and his conception of Rules and Norms has had illustrious adherents later in this century. And at least one part of Milton's Prosody is entirely beyond cavil—the Preface: delightful wit.

Discussion of Bridges' work may be found in Prince (E1279), Kellog (E567), Stanford (E86, E87), Diekhoff (E1141), and Stall (E664). Note also E689 and E938.

E497 Bright, James W. "Concerning English Rhythms." The Athenaeum, 8 July 1899, p. 70.

Abstract of a paper read before the Philological Society on June 30: Bright censures the notions of "inversion of accent" and "substitution," which "must be corrected by a consideration of the secondary word-accents of the language, which are capable of ictus, and of the rhetoric of verse, which permits a new emphasis on words of subordinate force. . . . a verse must be read, or scanned, with a strict observance of the regular recurrence of the ictus; when the ictus is 'in conflict' with the chief word-stress, it will be marked for the ear by a slight increase of pitch. . . ." More imaginatively, Bright suggests that Sievers' Five Types may be found in modern verse, and also that "the rhythmic employment of the secondary word-stress as possible ictus furnishes the means for passing from an 'accentual' to a 'quantitative' system of versification," as in early and late Latin.


Metrical ictus can be filled not only by primary word-accents but also
promoted secondary accents, and readings of verse should reflect this fact.

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E499 "Rhythmic Elements in English, with Illustrations from Shakespeare." University of Texas Bulletin, no. 1701 (1917), pp. 68-88. For its location this essay seems unusually opaque (stylistically) and defensive (tonally); its purpose is a formal statement of the method of "routine scansion" ("the artistic effects of scansion according to rhythm-signature"), which is simply the notion that word-stress and sentence-stress are both controlled by ictus when words are arrayed in verse. To this end Bright must show how "versification in a language is intimately bound up with the special system of accentuation of that language," which he performs for English by showing that "secondary word-accent is available for verse-stress (ictus)."

E500 Bright, James W., and R. D. Miller. The Elements of English Versification. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1910, 1913; rpt Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973. 157 pp. A student handbook: Part One gives definitions of terms and examples of meters (the four commonest, in line-lengths up to octameter) and sound-effects, including a chapter (4) on Scansion; Part Two illustrates stanza forms from couplet to sestina.

Bright, Professor of English at Johns Hopkins and President of MLA, exerted considerable influence on the study of both versification and Old English early in this century, both himself (see J34, J35) and through the studies of his graduate students Huguenin (J133), Melton (E1018), Miller (E596), and Brown (E1112), though he himself curiously never undertook a work on the order of Mayor's. The crux of Bright's metrical theory is the secondary accent posited between the levels of stressed and unstressed in phonology (most conspicuous in compound nouns and other polysyllables) which is available in meter as either (promoted to) ictus or (demoted to) non-ictus depending on the contiguous stresses. Such a tripartite system was by no means new, but Bright augmented it with something that was, his correlate theory of "pitch-accent," a proposal that when the syllable under ictus is not marked by stress-prominence (as in "trochaic substitution") a compensating prominence by pitch or length is adduced. A further refinement was added by his students, called "arsis-thesis variation" (a poet's use of the same word twice, fairly close together, but with the stress-pattern of the word reversed the second time for semantic and aesthetic effect). Yet Bright's theory is not entirely free from ambivalences. Omond is unquestionably right to declare that he "scans wholly by accents," yet he also states that stresses recur at equal intervals, and syllable resolution is explained in terms of timing. This is the turn-of-the-century desire to have the best of both worlds. But note Philbrick's accusation that Miller and through him Bright was guilty of outright plagiarism from Alden and others (D323, pp. 276-77). Still, Bright's 3-level system is a significant milestone in the correlation of Phonetic to Metric, to be compared with the later 4-level Trager-Smith structural-linguistic system.


A long judicious discussion of prosody in what is probably the most influential introduction-to-poetry textbook in our century. Brooks and Warren's presentation of stress metrics has also had a comparable influence in

E502  Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. The Art of Scansion. Intro. by Alice Meynell. London: Clement Shorter, 1916. 12 pp. This is a private printing of a letter from E. B. B. to Sir Uvedale Price in 1827, which she wrote in response to reading his Essay on the Modern Pronunciation of Greek and Latin (1827). Inter alia, she insists on a distinction between anapestic and dactylic rhythms and on the existence of pyrrhics and choriambi, in English verse as in Greek and Latin. Noteworthy: "The plea of expression in versification is something like the plea of expediency in morals."

E503  Brunhumer, Anne B. "Metrical Principles of English Poetry: A Course of Lectures by Professor Ruth Wallerstein." D A 21 (1961): 3087A (Wisconsin). Transcription of shorthand notes taken in Prof. Wallerstein's seminar, to take the place of a metrical handbook she did not live to write. Her theoretical position was traditional; her method was entirely inductive.


E505  Bysshe, Edward. The Art of English Poetry. Containing I. Rules for making Verses. II. A Collection of the most Natural, Agreeable, and Sublime Thoughts, viz. Allusions, Similies, Descriptions, and Characters, of Persons and Things, that are to be found in the best ENGLISH POETS. III. A Dictionary of Rhymes. London, 1702, 1705, 1708, 1710, 1714, 1718, 1724, 1737, 1762, etc. The second and third editions were successively revised and expanded, but no substantive changes were made thereafter; the third edition therefore constitutes the copy-text for our purposes. Part I of the third edition has been reprinted by the Augustan Reprint Society (Publication no. 40) with an introduction by A. Dwight Culler, Los Angeles, 1953. There is also a facsimile of the first edition edited by R. C. Alston, Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1968. Another reprint: New York: Garland, 1971.

Bysshe's is not only the most influential prosodic work of the eighteenth century, it is also very likely the most influential prosodic handbook ever written. M any times reprinted in the eighteenth century and probably at least skimmed by anyone with the slightest literary aspirations at all, it was the major source for Walker's equally ubiquitous Rhyming Dictionary of the nineteenth century, a book which was itself the model and source for similar works in the twentieth. Hence, a close simulacrum of at least part of Bysshe's handbook can be picked up in any bookstore today nearly three centuries later. The Art of English Poetry itself was based on (indeed virtually a translation of) Claude Lancelot's Quatre Traitez de Poësies, Latine, Françoi sequence, Italiene, et Espagnole (1663) and on the Preface to Joshua Poole's English Parnassus (1657 and 1677; see E520), respectively a treatise in comparative versification and a popular handbook of the seventeenth century, and it is composed of three parts: the "Rules for Making Verses" (a short metrical treatise), a "Collection of Agreeable Thoughts" (a commonplace book, or rough equivalent of our dictionary of familiar quotations), and a rhyming dictionary. Now although
Renaissance miscellany has its analogue in our modern anthology of verse, and the rhyming and quotation dictionary as well as prosodic manual are not recognizable sub-genres to us, the "poet's handbook" has not survived in unaltered form: in Bysshe's time it occupied a position between those of the modern-day students handbook and the technical or theoretical study of versification. In our time technical or theoretical study of versification. In our time poets prefer to shift for themselves, finding the thought of imitating traditional forms repugnant to their individual talents.

Bysshe's influence on metrical theory is equally significant. His "Rules," which was the first explicit Prosodia written in England in nearly a century, is responsible for reasserting a fundamental principle of English meter which had been asserted with equal insistence only once before, in the early Middle English period (though even then not by treatise but by practice), syllabism. And insofar as any modern manual includes, as part of its definition of English meter, stipulation of a certain number of syllables, it is echoing Bysshe, behind him Chaucer, and ultimately the faint and distant sounds of the Chansons.

Indeed counting of syllables is the essential criterion of metricality in Bysshe: the heroic line is for him composed of ten syllables (not counting feminine endings), and all lines falling this standard are simply unmetrical. "The structure of our Verse . . . consists in a certain Number of Syllables, not in Feet composed of long and short Syllables . . ." So runs his first sentence, an opening salvo against his nemesis Charles Gildon (E164-165). In order to insure strict count of syllables Bysshe is obliged to devise very elaborate rules for elision. After N numbers, the two criteria to be observed are "the Seat of the Accent" and "the Pause." Bysshe recognizes accent ("an Elevation or a Falling of the Voice," i.e., based on pitch) but not feet; he stipulates only that the accent must fall on the 2nd, 4th, or 6th syllable of the decasyllabic line so that the caesura ("Pause") will be thereby correctly placed--all other placements are faults to be corrected. The "Rules" also give some lesser attention to rhyme and other types of meters and stanzas. See the immensely informative essay by Culler (E517), whose scholarship is a model of thoroughness, Gabrielson (C10), and Lancelot (L82).

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The "Prosody" of some sixty pages summarizes principles: "in English poetry [metre] consists in the number of syllables, and the position of the accents." Eight types of feet are allowed (including tribrachs and amphibrachs). The remaining "Versification" section sets students verse construction and revision exercises.


Above the counterpointing of stressed meter to temporal rhythm there is another dimension, counterpointed to the first, of pulse, variable with each reader, not heard but felt.


feet and observed that these will suffice to scan Shakespeare (using accent in place of length), while for Milton the compound feet--ionics, paeons, and epitrites--will be required.


E512 ------. Table Talk. London: G. Bell, 1884; 1909; rpt as vol. 14 of The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. 15 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. See s.v. June 7, 1823, on "Lord Byron's Versification" (short and depreciating); August 23, 1833, on "Greek Accent and Quantity" (C. Allows that the latter controlled the recitation of verse but argues that the utterance of prose was marked by the former); and June 2, 1834, on "Schiller's Versification--German Blank Verse" (Schiller writes blank verse like "a fly in a glass bottle"; the trochaic endings of German words make German blank verse "almost impracticable"). Notice also the passing remarks on "Greek and Latin Pentameter" on October 23, 1833.

E513 Conway, Gilbert. A Treatise on Versification. London: Longmans, Green, 1878. 113 pp. A vigorous statement of the Accentual theory of English metrics, as concise in its texts as it is voluminous in footnotes (many of them drawn from the original Latin and Greek). The prosody of English verse is posted upon accent not upon time or quantity, there being four laws of accentuation: (1) every word of more than one syllable has a "Tonic accent"; it has (2) one and only one such accent; (3) monosyllable accent varies with the relative importance of the word; and (4) accent rests on the entire syllable not the vowel. Similarly, there are four laws of verse: (1) verse-rhythm depends on repetition of accent, which can be (2) nothing other than word-accent [lexical stress]; (3) "no syllable not sounded in declaimed prose should be sounded in verse"; and (4) hiatus must be removed by elision. The metrical accents falling on the even positions of the decasyllabic Heroic line may occur in any of thirty-five possible combinations. Conway recognizes what will later be called the Allophonic Stress Principle (p. 30)--i.e., that the second of any two equally stressed syllables dominates. He gives an exceedingly meticulous analysis of the metrical treatment of syllables, especially elision; the book ends with brief remarks on hypermetrical syllables, rhyme, stanzas, the sonnet, hexameters, and sound.

In a real sense this dense little volume could be considered an early work in Comparative versification, since the Romance languages are treated as a whole, with references to and examples from Italian and the classical languages. But English is taken as the unquestionable head.

Philbrick (D323, pp. 274-76) accuses Conway of plagiarizing from Crowe (E142).


E515 Coward, W[jilliam]. Licentia Poetica discuss'd: or, the True Test of Poetry. W ithout with

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It is Impossible to Judge of, or Compose, a Correct English Poem. . . . London: William Carter, 1709.

In the thirty-page Preface Coward approves the writing of English measures by “imitation” of those of the Greek and Latin Poets. In practice he never thwarts an English stress for a “long” syllable but he does promote and suppress his stresses rather erratically, making “ruine” a pyrrhic (Ē Ė), “aeternal” a molossus (I I I), “every” a tribach, and “And bid the” antibacchic (I I Ė).


Curious and interesting: Crapsey asserts that this study applies phonetics to metrical problems, but in fact this is a lexical-syntactic study: there are tables of data here on the incidence of monosyllables, disyllables, and polysyllables in nursery rhymes, Milton, Tennyson, Swinburne, Pope, and others. The rationale for this method is that metrics analyzes “units of verse-feet,” and that we must similarly analyze “the basic phonetic units of speech--i.e., phonetic word-forms” in order to possess concrete information for the study of “one of the fundamental problems of verse as a whole, the relation of the word to the foot.”

Thereafter, the author works to produce a "consistent theory of English verse-structure as a whole" by reviewing the metrical theory of the time (Saintsbury, Omond, Bridges, and others), followed by remarks on the problem of "secondary accent." The author, a poet, died in 1914. I must confess to finding this work surprisingly well-informed. Cf. Creek (E18).


Based on his dissertation work at Yale in 1941, "Handbooks for Poets in the Eighteenth Century."

With immense erudition Culler traces the sources, nature, and influences of Bysshe's enormously influential handbook (E506); indeed, it is not too much to say that Bysshe is the most important prosodic work produced between 1589 (Puttenham) and 1775 (Steele). Culler shows convincingly that Bysshe was heavily indebted to Joshua Poole's work (E520), and also that virtually every other poetic handbook, grammar, dictionary, rhyming dictionary, and commonplace book of the eighteenth century is derived, usually nearly entirely, from Bysshe. And through Walker's later rhyming dictionary, which also is Bysshe's progeny, he remained a standard source well into the twentieth century. If we remember that Bysshe meant his book as a reference and a handbook, not a prosodical treatise, we can obtain a rare glimpse of what the poets of the age took as an authority on versification, as opposed to the pronouncements of the scholars, the two being scarcely reconcilable at best. In terms of prosodic theory, however, Bysshe's influence was wholly pernicious, and quite extended. His system is entirely syllabic, basing meter on count of syllables instead of accents or feet. He obtained this system by lifting it wholesale from Claude Lancelot's 1663 French Treatise Quatre traités de poésies latine, Française, Italiene, et Espagnole. Thus Bysshe simply attempted to force-fit the template of Romance prosody onto the English language, ignoring the fact that it did not--never could--fit, thereby perpetrating a misconception that would hold sway until the Romantic era (esp. Christabel). The Classical system would not fit the verse native to England, nor would the French, even though Bysshe could make men believe it for nearly a century.

In contrast to all the other metrical theories of this century, Cummings' system conflates meter and rhythm rather than distinguishing them. In chapters 1 and 2 here a system for analyzing "rhythm phrases" is given which combines traditional metrics with acoustic phonetics under the aegis of a Gestalt theory of reader perception. The practical results are that in his scansion (model on p. 22; diagram of method on p. 14) he refuses to let the metrical divisions cut through words; he can provide no clearcut rules for scansion, and no discerning consistency is evident in the analysis. But in chapters 3-5 he maps out three new types of analysis which are sophisticated and intriguing: "extrinsic stress" analysis combines a marking of the phrase-boundaries with Trager-Smith stress levels, adjusted by "weighting," to produce Stress Contour graphs and concomitant Transitional Features charts; "intrinsic stress" analysis argues that primary stresses are no more equal than syllables are in general, and if we establish "intrinsic vowel scales" assigning a weight to each vowel in terms of stress, pitch, and duration in each consonantal environment, an improved Stress Contour results; analysis of sound patterning can be improved if vowels and consonants are grouped by phonetic families in a "fusion" analysis which will reveal asymmetrical (ground) and symmetrical (figure) repetition as well as heightening and muting of the meter in verse-lines by clustering and linking of sounds. A very detailed yet expansive study.


"The perception of metrical effects depends on set expectations in the mind of a reader. These expectations provide . . . a norm, a predisposition toward a certain patterning." A Gestalt approach based on the premise that the experienced reader of English poetry "tries to perceive a segmentation into units corresponding to iambic feet" (italics added). The authors argue, that is, that there is a pressure in English poetry for the reader to perceive the iambic line not as pairs of syllables grouped accentually, but simply segmentally--by "phrasal segmentation after each strong stress"--the simple grouping of pairs of syllables.

"The English iambic tradition rests upon more than the iambic accentuation normally seen as characteristic of it; it rests, too, on a norm of iambic segmentation." These segments, which are "the basic rhythmic units in English metrical verse," the authors term rhythm-phrases; they serve to resolve "the demands exerted by the grammatical, the rhetorical, and the metrical norms."

The authors explore the problems of diaeresis, without terming it so, and discuss various segmentations which try to resolve the conflicting pressures in various lines. The whole argument is ingeniously simple and intriguing even though it clearly borders on circularity.


A comparison of this with Daniel (E521) will show its principal source, I think; its principle influence is on Bysshe (E505), who takes over the general plan of the book--a short prosodia followed by a dictionary of rhymes, a collection of apposite epithets, and a compendium of choice phrases and quotations. The Preface treats mainly of the genres in poetry and of those things to be avoided in order to insure harmonious verses, viz.: any failure of "exact observation of the accent," syntactic dislocation, awkward elisions, feminine rhymes, near rhymes, rich rhymes, long polysyllables, and empty epithets (mere fillers). We are told that "harmony, in prose, consists in an exact
placing of the accent... in poesie, it consists besides the aforesaid conditions of prose in measure, proportion, and rhime. It seems very unlikely that the author of this rather simpleminded preface was the young Dryden.

Daniel's reply to Campion's Observations (E134) defending the native versification would have swept the field even if Campion's advocacy of the classical meters had been timely and persuasive (instead of a decade too late). With remarkable vigor D. sets about the construction and application of an unmatchable engine of assault, binding plain act and force of argument with engaging eloquence: "All verse is but a frame of wordes confinde within certaine measure... which frame of wordes consisting of Rithmus or Metrum, Number or Measure." And in English "accent [is] the chief Lord and graue Gouernour of Numbers." It were outright folly to apply the laws of one language to the verse of another; "every language hath her proper number or measure fitted to use and delight," enforced and given legitimacy by "both Custom and Nature." (Besides, "it is but a fantastike giddinesse to forsake the way of other men.") "For as Greeke and Latine verse consists of the number and quantitie of sillables, so doth the English verse of measure and accent... so that the English verse then hath number, measure, and harmonie in the best proportion of M usike."

Daniel is even willing to admit that the continual reappearance of rhyme in the couplet is tiresome (his suggested remedy is emjambment, which he thinks "graceful"), yet he denies, adamantly, that Rhyme is too flimsy a support for verse (it "hath more of delight than euer bare numbers," since its "known frame hath those due staies for the minde, those encounters of touch as makes the motion certaine, though the varietie be infinite"), or that the necessity of finding rhymes is any "impediment to [the poet's] conceit." Finally, he will not flinch to face Campion directly: "For what a doe haue we heere, what strange precepts of an Arte about the framing of an Iambique verse in our language, which when allis done, reaches not by a foote, but falleth out to be the plaine ancient verse consisting of tenne sillables or fiue feete, which hat euer beene vsed amongst vs time out of minde... So that of all these eight seuerall kindes of new promised numbers [Campion's] you see what we haue. O nely what was our owne before, and the same but appareled in forraine Titles..."

"The main aim of the following pages is to show that the one essential characteristic of verse--the language of poetry--in English is Rhym. We dismiss, at the outset... the long and learned-looking array... the endless but never-nameless array of metres... all the lumber of the old time prosodies. W e shall retain only so much of the classical phraseology as we need in order to make plain the naturally easy subject of versification."


1939. Vol. 2, pp. 236-40. See also the Prefaces to The Monument and to Britannia Triumphans (pp. 297, 375-79 in vol. 1) and accompanying Notes (499-500, 518) for Dennis's approbatory views on Blank Verse; on this see also s.v. "Versification," "R rhyme," and "Blank Verse" in the Index (end of vol. 2).

The short essay "Of Prosody" originally appeared in James Greenwood's An Essay towards a Practical English Grammar [1722]. Dennis distinguishes Numbers, Measure, Cadence, and R rhyme, the definitions being relatively traditional. He disagrees with Bysshe only in allowing more metrical variation and deploring the use of rhyme.

E525 Earle, John. "Of Prosody, or the Musical Element in Speech." In his The Philology of the English Tongue. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1866; 1871; 3rd ed. 1880 (Omond thinks it the best); 4th ed. 1887. The final chapter touches on accent (the basis of modern verse, and to be distinguished from emphasis), alliteration, sound-mimesis in language (onomatopoeia), rhyme, and meter (sections 648-52).

E526 Eaton, Richard B., Jr. "The Contributions of James Rush to Prosodic Theory." West Virginia University Philological Papers 19 (1972): 1-11. Rhetorician and phonetician, Rush was author of the influential treatise The Philosophy of the Human Voice in 1827, which was one of the three works singled out for review by Patmore (E384). Indebted to Steele (E394) and Sheridan (E651), and repeating some of the commonplace of the day, Rush is nevertheless important for his significant analysis of pitch in rhythm (tone-color and the emotive effects of intonation are also noteworthy topics in his book). Verse he believed regulated chiefly by accents, though he recognized that quantity, even though variable in English, is too significant a feature to be ignored entirely. Steele's musical analogy and scansion he declined to follow.


E528 "English Prosody." Edinburgh Review 213 (1911): 1-31. A long, generally laudatory review of Saintsbury (A8), which begins with his principles—equivalence and enjambment—and prose style ("it is a kindness to say the least possible"), then turns to an expansive summary history of English versification from Old English to the turn of the twentieth century.

E529 "English Prosody." The Quarterly Review 215 (1911): 69-96. An excellent critique of the theoretical position of Saintsbury (22 of the essay's 27 pages are devoted to him), followed by quick glances also at Bridges, Stone, and Omond, some striking observations on the accentual vs. the syllabic impulses behind English meter (pp. 92-93), and a distinction between meter and rhythm. Dispassionate and judicious, yet keenly discriminating, the article offers such provocative statements as: "an accent has more influence over the syllable which precedes than over that which follows it. Every musician will understand this." Who wrote it? Alden?

E530 Evans, Robert Wilson. A Treatise on Versification. London: Francis & John Rivington, 1852. 169 pp. Among the various efforts of its century, this book rests with a greater weight than most of the others, a weight and measure of contemplation, one might say, far removed from the usual treatises. Verse is based, we find, on "the
regulated recurrence of a syllable which is peculiarly marked" by duration, tone, or emphasis in pronunciation; each of these latter has been used at some time, though stress "is the only basis of versification in every modern language." Chapters follow on Quantity and Stress, six chapters on the (nonmetrical) Pause, and, late, two chapters on the Hexameter. The book is actually, though, a study in comparative versification, since Evans' emphasis (along with his examples) falls equally on the Ancient and the Modern languages.


Chapter 1 is on Quantity, which, we are told, is the basis of English verse, but "the quantity of each word depends on its accent," so that even though the classical terms are explicitly used, Everett scans by stress. Monosyllabic words are "long" or "short" by parts of speech. But "long" syllables also take twice as long to pronounce as "short." Chapters on metrical types (eight kinds of feet), pause, hiatus, elision, rhyme, and (syntactic) inversion. See E263.


See Dissertations XI ("On Prosody") and XII ("On Versification") in vol. 2, pp. 185-202. (This second volume was later reissued as Dissertations Grammatical and Philological; there see pp. 55-72.) "The music of English verse depends on the disposition of accents." In degrees of accent he recognizes heavy, light, and very light; quantity he thinks may exist either by lengthening the vowel or dwelling on the final consonant.


Fowler's metatheoretical inquiry into the components of an adequate theory of English meter appropriates Jakobson's pair of conceptual couples—verse design, verse-instance; delivery-design, delivery-instance—and adds one more, verse-type and metrical set, producing an ordered hierarchy:

(verse)

verse type

verse design

metrical set delivery design

verse instance delivery instance

(It will be seen that metrical set and verse instance thus correspond to reading design and reading instance, though Fowler does not make this explicit.) Each level of the hierarchy is then discussed in detail. "Verse is language with additional formal constraints." Verse-type is determined by the feature relevant to the verse—stress, quantity, or tone. Verse design is the inflexible pattern (e.g., iambic pentameter) set as invariant for the poem as a whole; actual variations (e.g., "trochaic substitutions") occur at the level of verse instance and
“must not be spuriously reified” (this is a crucial nexus in the theory). Metrical set is “a reader’s disposition, through past experience and through design-signals in the poem, to impose a familiar reading on any metre which does not absolutely forbid it.”

Thereafter the bulk of the essay tackles the critical and delicate problem of verse instance, Fowler giving a detailed account of that “whole area of descriptive metrics” whose responsibility is to show how a reader, operating under regular phonological and syntactic rules, (four such rules are given), determines which syllables in a line are ictic, whether or not the line is regular in number of syllables (Fowler thinks the theory of elision unlikely and prefers to admit extra-metrical syllables), and whether the number and positions of the syllables are acceptable (iambic pentameters frequently fail of five stresses, and reversed feet do occur). Actually “the ontology of verse instance remains uncertain,” but since it partakes of both the objective linguistic features of the line, and also the reader's predisposed metrical set, the perfect pattern of the design need never be realized anywhere at all in a poem for it to be perceived as in that design. Fowler takes the position that even lines identical in syllable-count and stress-pattern are different verse instances, since their linguistic textures are different in many other respects. Concluding remarks on delivery. All this amounts to a theory of meter, as Fowler admits at the end. An advanced study, very dense in import and rather stiff in tone; not for students. The essay thoroughly substantiates its opening observation: “the verse situation is extremely complex.”


See also s.v. "Alliterative Meter," "Ballad M e ter," "Ch ristabel M e ter," "Scansion," "Foot," "Compensation," and "Poetic Contractions." The head article on meter treats, in small compass, definition, origins, types, and functions. The definition is indecisive; the types are four—accentual, syllabic, accentual-syllabic, and quantitative; the functions include being "one of the primary correlates of meaning," a distancing effect, and a framing or de-naturalizing effect. Metrical tension is also discussed. The metrical variations are the traditional mono-,di-, and tri-syllabic substitutions (Fussell allows the traditional but very problematic pyrrhics and spondees). Given the nature and scope of the Princeton, surely a more extensive treatment of this absolutely central subject was required.


Fussell, Paul, Jr. Poetic M e ter & Poetic Form. New York: Random House, 1965; 2nd rev. ed. 1979. The most widely disseminated student's manual of metrics available at present, the intent of which is not so much typological as heuristic: Fussell aims to "sensitize" students to the supple flexes of poetic form. But, as paradigm of the perfect American consumer, he is more than willing to trade in precision for style, so that what this book gains in urbanity it more than loses in rigor. Fussell allows up to seventeen types of feet, and his scansions are consistently, sometimes wildly, unreliable. His theory in general is almost purely expressionist, even though none of the explanations of metrical effect he lists in chapter 1 is seriously maintained by anyone anymore. Worse, he can
sometimes say the most embarrassing things: substitutions in meter "are
governed by instinct, whim or taste rather than by rule"; Old English meter
has only a limited capacity for interplay"; the volta in a sonnet "occurs
somewhere in the white space that separates line 8 from line 9." We should
expect as much from anyone whose theory is that "to do something to the
reader is the end of poetry."

Metrical types are enumerated in chapter 3, stanzas in chapter 7. The
revised edition alters a few judgments, prunes the Bibliography, and adds a
chapter on Free Verse, which is also separately published (E1473). Whatever
the beginning student might learn here about "sensitivity" cannot be valued
over his learning a fundamentally licentious method; send him instead to
Malof (E581) for information on forms, McAuley (E578) for scansion-
technique, and Smith (B202) and Booth (B20) for close reading.

E538 Gascoigne, George. "Certayne N otes of Instruction concerning the making of
verse or ryme in English, written at the request of Master Edouardi Donato." In
his The Posies of George G asoigne. . . . London: Richard Smith, 1575;
thereafter rpt in The W hole W orks of G eorge G asoigne, E squire. . . . London,
1907-10; rpt G rose Pointe, M ich.: Scholarly Press, 1969. Also, of course, in
Smith (A26), vol. 1, pp. 46-57.

Our first native treatise devoted entirely to native versification.

Gascoigne's sixteen practical pointers emphasize the importance of Invention,
syllabic regularity ("hold the just measure wherewith you begin your verse"),
meter based on accent ("place every word in his natural Emphasis or sound . . .
with such length or shortness, elevation or depression of syllables, as is
commonly pronounced or used"; such accent has three degrees in English,
grave, circumflex, and light, and "the grave accent is drawn out or elevate, and
maketh that syllable long whereupon it is placed"), feet (Chaucer's verse,
though seemingly uneven to the eye, is in fact regular to the ear, and he
teaches us not to wrench any accent for the sake of the meter), monosyllables
for facility and native origin, rhymes which do not strain the sense in order to
chime, familiar diction and normal stanzaic order, caesuras, stanza (rime royal
and other Italian forms, Poulter's Measures), correspondence of sentence with
verse-unit, and riding rhyme. See also E40.

E539 "General Introduction to the Science of M etre and the Structure of Verse."
Schipper (All), Book I, Part I, Chapter 1, pp. 1-14.

Schipper's General Prologue sets forth the purposes and value of "the science
of metre." Four varieties of stress are recognized--lexical, syntactic, rhetorical,
and rhythmic--as well as four degrees--primary, subsidiary, weak, and absent.
The cardinal rule of English stress is that it must fall on the lexical root syllable.
Schipper bases English meter on stress, and "the measure or foot always remains
the unity which is the basis of all modern metrical systems." Three types of
rhyme are noted.

Argues reasonably that sequences of three weak syllables are not all that
uncommon in English verse, and that these (/ x x x) should be
acknowledged as Paeons rather than as dactyles (eliding one syllable) or double
trochees (by secondary stress on the third syllable). A number of poems dense
in paeanic feet are mentioned, and all four of the classical types of paeons are
demonstrated, the second (x/ xx) and third (xx/ x) apparently being the most
common.

Gill was Milton's tutor. Sections 25-28 treat "Accent," "M etre," "Accented Rhymed Verse," and "Of Poetry Composed in M etres of Latin Poets." Though the term "meter" is used to describe the quantity of every syllable, of a foot, of metre properly speaking, and of poetry," "quantity" is used only to satisfy the adamant Latinists, since "every syllable which has an acute or circumflex accent is long," based on the premise that "our prosody should not be yoked to the rules of Greek or Latin, but should be measured by the yardstick of our own rules alone." Gill produces elaborate rules for determining "quantity" from accent. Though he will admit rhyme in English verse, he allows it only grudgingly, citing numerous other devices necessary to "moderate" the "nausea or wearying" of a too-frequent use. Metrical feet acknowledged for English: spondee, trochee, iamb, tribrach, molossus, dactyl, anapest, amphimacer, fourth paeon, and choriambus.


A thoroughgoing handbook; it states at the very outset that "Verse is Metrical" and "Verse is Accentual." In meter, "the foot consists of an accented syllable (or rather accented place) to which are affiliated one or more weak places"; thus the meter is separated from the rhythm of verse. Indeed, Grew gives the fullest collection of apposite examples of rhythmic "Phrasing" against the metrical "Abstract Pattern" that I have seen; his only failing is that he insists on keeping the old and misleading terms (monosyllabic foot, weak foot, spondee, pyrrhic, ionic, paeonic, inversion, substitution, equivalence) as denoting variations in the meter, but these are in fact variations in the rhythm against the metrical paradigm, not flexes in the meter itself. In this book one can observe perhaps more clearly than anywhere else the nexus between the old prosody and the new.


Under the influence of the early nineteenth-century revival of interest in Anglo-Saxon, Guest was encouraged to apply the principles of Old English verseform to the modern languages as well. He results, though fundamentally misconceived, is nevertheless a great early milestone in the history of English metrics. Against the general opinion of his time, Guest insisted that the basis of English meter was the succession of accents and not of time. By profession he was a philologist, not a literary critic, and indeed, in order to gather quotations for the first edition of this book, Guest was forced to copy out the great majority by hand from the original MSS themselves, there being no standard texts in 1838. Skeat, then, was forced to search out and verify these thousands of passages for the second edition.

Guest’s specialty, moreover, was Old and Middle English, a fact which insured that not only would the historical focus of the book be overweighted on the earliest times in our poetry, but also that he would draw his principles and methodology from the analogy with the Anglo-Saxon system. Thus, Guest identifies not “feet” but “sections” of syllable-groups as the basis of meter. He identifies twelve types of these sections, each type having three
variants, Normal, Lengthened, and Doubly Lengthened. In Skeat's notation, where the capital A stands for an accented syllable and the lower-case b stands for an unaccented syllable, these twelve types of sections (hence rhythm-units) are:

1. \( AbA \)  
2. \( AbbA \)  
3. \( AbAbbA \)  
4. \( AbbAbbA \)  
5. \( bAbA \)  
6. \( bAbbA \)  
7. \( bAbAbbA \)  
8. \( bAbbAbbA \)  
9. \( bbAbA \)  
10. \( bbAbbA \)  
11. \( bbAbAbbA \)  
12. \( bbAbbAbbA \)

Each type may be expanded (or replicated internally) so long as its nature is preserved; type 5 may be either \( bAbA \) or \( bAbAbA \) or \( bAbAbAbA \), etc. Guest also uses the colon to denote a caesura in the line, and an upright bar (|) to mark a preceding syllable as stressed. Thus Milton's "Anguish and doubt and fear, and sorrow and pain" may be scanned as:

An\( |\)guish and doubt\( |\)and fear\( |\):and sor\( |\)row and pain\( |\)

and conveniently notated as 2:5.

Structurally, the History of English Rhythms is divided into four Books: the first defines syllable, accent, quantity, rime, and pause; the second gives illustrations of each of the twelve rhythmic types, the third is a history of stanza forms.

In many respects not even Saintsbury's three-volume History (A8) can rival the erudition, clarity, industry, and graceful tone of Guest's treatise, and though his system seems to us an odd one, it is easy to learn and use. As Henry James said in another place, the book "supports familiarity"; it will not weary the reader soon, as Saintsbury will. Though Guest's direct influence has been slight in the century after his work was first published, his Accentualist principles have pretty much won the field. Guest's system has been applied only by T. R. Price (E1278), however.

See Gummere's further statements on meter in MLN 1 (1886): 35-36.
"quantitative stress" (apparently rhetorical emphasis deriving from syllabic "weight" of duration) and "emphatic stress" (emphasis resulting from accent). The rhythm of verse he considers to be based on both (i.e., the metrical ictus can be fulfilled sometimes by one, sometimes by the other, or both together). English meter has no predominant base-foot, he thinks, but is much more diverse than we usually believe; e.g., the first line of Paradise Lost actually comprises an iamb, monosyllabic foot, trochee, dactyl, and an anapest.

In iambic verse the important differences of stress between syllables are relative, within the two-member metrical foot (this is the Relative Stress Principle), whereas in all the other meters the differences are absolute. (I.e., in iambic verse, metrical foot demarcation precedes metrical stress assignment, whereas in the other meters metrical stress assignment follows directly from the linguistic stresses: the strong are strong and the weak weak). This explains our common sensation that the beats in trochaic in the ternary meters are so "clear and emphatic" in comparison with the unstressed syllables, while they are not so in iambic meter: in iambic verse the gradations are modulated. The trochaic the ternary meters, like simple stress verse, are isoaccentual and isochronic (iambic verse is neither), but unlike stress verse, which achieves some modulation by varying the number of syllables, these meters, having a regular syllable-count, lose modulation altogether, which explains why we cannot bear them for extended runs. In iambic verse the only permissible variations are the addition or deletion of a syllable or reversal of a foot.

A survey of metrical forms in English verse, with copious examples. Hamer's metrical principles are accentual (three degrees of stress are identified--strong, mid, and weak), but no clear distinction is made between either (1) rhythm and meter, or (2) stress verse and syllable-counting verse, with this result: the four commonest feet are denoted the rhythmic base, with some twelve other feet admissible as modulations: stressed and unstressed monosyllabic feet, major and minor ionics, pyrrhics and spondees, choriambics, tribrachs, amphibrachs, bacchics, antibacchics, and second paeons. The result, predictably, is that Hamer's scanions are wildly unreliable. But the book offers four chapters on the evolution of Blank Verse, as well as one on French forms and one on Classical imitations.

A pamphlet. Not seen (not in the British Museum), but Omond looked at it or owned it, and it is annotated in Lafourcade (q.v. in Appendix D).

A highly simplified account for Japanese students. Allows only the four commonest feet. Hearn, a well-known writer, forsook the west for Japan in 1869.

There is a summary on pp. 77-79, and Herbert gives his own view of English versification on pp. 65-71. The essay opens with a long discussion of Greek and English phonetics and Greek popular accentual poetry. Herbert argues that Greek speech and verse had tonic (stress) accents as well as quantity and that English stress does not lengthen a syllable (contrary to Foster, Sheridan, and Kames). On the modern accentual hexameters he observes keenly that since classical verse had both accent and quantity, to replace the one by the other is not to reproduce or even achieve an analogous effect but to confound, conflate, and wreck the original meter. The modern Romance meters were "not modern inventions, but the old accentual laws of Latin verse, which survived those of quantity." English meter is based on "accentual feet," one stress to the foot, but quantity "neither is, nor ought to be entirely disregarded"; in fact, since many links have seven, eight, or nine long syllables, "variety of quantity is rather to be sought for than restricted."


A curious early work of rhetoric and elocution; the author believes that English verse is of precisely the same mold and material as Latin and Greek, yet he refuses to consider quantity at all (p. 123 ff), apparently thinking that Greek versification was based on accent. He recognizes the "absurd notion that has long prevailed, viz: that there was no difference between the accent and the quantity, in the English language"; his response: "an absurdity so glaring, does not need a refutation." His misconception of Greek leads him to a true conception of English; so the lame and the halt shall be first. Versification is discussed on pp. 123-88.


A seemingly indefatigable defence of the accentual basis of English versification against the views of Guest (E543), Mitford, Patmore, Ruskin, and others, though Hodgson seems to accept Guest's principle of sections early in part IV of the essay (p. 265 ff), and he asserts that "the distinction into feet, therefore, founded on the counting of syllables, is a thing which has no natural connection with metres based on stress." Parts I and II establish a phonetic basis for the stress-theory; part III surveys Old and Middle English meters; part IV expounds the author's system of analysis; V discusses the expressive devices of duration, pitch, and tone-color; VI surveys Blank Verse and VII the classical-imitative meters; VIII is the Summary.


Saintsbury approved of this little book, though it is merely a verse-making handbook. Nearly half of the volume is taken up by a Dictionary of Rhymes and by the excerpted Byshe. For us, now, the most interesting part is Chapter 1, which analyses Pope's "mimetic" lines in the Essay on Criticism.

Hooker, [William] Bryan. "The Rhythmic Relation of Prose and Verse." The...
I should think this essay would be excellently useful for pedagogy: it covers a
great deal of ground cogently and gracefully. Meter is seen as recurrence of
accent at regular intervals, variation and phrasing are recognized as essential,
and the distinction between metrical and speech stresses is carefully preserved.
"The ultimate structural relation between Prose and Verse...is that each
gains in beauty as it approaches the other, just so far as each clearly retains its
own distinctive character."

Tests given to high school and college students asking them to pick out one
line from a group of four, the meter of which (iambic, trochaic, dactylic, or
anapestic) corresponds to that of a sample line (given but not scanned, of
course). Banal results.

E557  Humphrey, Asa. The English Prosody, with Rules Deduced from the Genius of our
Language and the Examples of the Poets. Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1847.
Omond did not see this work, which, for its rather insular position, shows
some unexpected perception. Humphrey identifies the qualities of sound in
orthoepy (pronunciation) as accent ("stress of voice"), cadence (absence of stress),
emphasis (rhetorical or sentential stress), tone (intonation, pitch), time, and
quantity. Quantity is "the weight, or aggregate quantum of sounds, either
longer or shorter" and thereby "differs materially from time: time only
determines the length of sounds." Though these are two distinct entities, they
both inhere in verse-structure; "they are both affected by accent and cadence,
but quantity more than time, and quantity more than time also constitutes
numbers." Humphrey realizes that though time was the origin for quantity in
ancient Greek verse, quantity is in essence an abstract concept, and though it
was called long and short in Greek, it would be more accurately termed "great
and small quantity" in English. In short, he recognizes the hegemony of accent,
even though the old terms are preserved. Twelve types of feet are allowed,
five of them denoted as commonest. Rules for scansion and also for reading
are given. The remainder of this little book treats stanzaic forms.

Also treats grammar, lexis, and semantics.

268 pp.
Cited in MHRA (1964, #1900) but unlocated by the Library of Congress.

E560  James, VI, King of Scotland. "Ane schort Treateise, conteinig some revlis and
cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie." In T he E ssays of a
Prentise in the divine art of poesie. Edinburgh: T homas Va toullier, 1584. Ed.
(A26), vol. 1, pp. 208-25.
W ritten by the King when he was only eighteen, this treatise on the writing of
native (not classical-imitative) verse speaks of quantities throughout (syllables
are termed either long, short, or indifferent) without any deeper inquiry, and the
only indication that he takes accent to determine quantity--and hence
confounds accent with quantity--appears early on, when the versifier is
enjoined to "ryme ay to the himnest lang syllable (with accent) in the lyne" as
in "byte and flyte, because the lenth of the syllable, and accent being there."
None of his quantities violates accent. The rules for rhyme, sectioun (caesura),
fitting of the words into the meter, stanzas, comparisons, and Inventions are all
familiar enough; of interest are his terms flowing (for steady or smooth rhythm) and Literall and Tumbling verse (the former the old Alliterative line, the latter in anapests and said to be best for flying (invective)).

The substance of the treatise Dryden said he had prepared may be reconstructed by examining his scattered critical statements on: prosody (a body of mechanical rules); the functions of poetry (first to delight, then to instruct); the sources of delight in poetry (chiefly the versification itself); qualities of good verse (smoothness, variety, vigor); quantity [Jameson is obscure here]; measure (= verse, or line?); number (of syllables per foot, perhaps of syllables per line); feet (based on accent and strictly disyllabic); cadence (rhythm); pause (caesura?); synaloepha (to be eschewed); rhyme; and stanza. In constrast to Bysshe's, Dryden's metric is based on accentual (disyllabic) feet.

E562 Jesperson, Otto. "Notes on Metre" and "Postscript." In Linguistica: Selected Papers in English, French, and German. Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1933. pp. 249-74. Also rpt in Journal de Psychologie 30 (1933): 333-38; in Chatman and Levin (A21), pp. 71-90; and in Gross (A23), pp. 111-30. Originally published in 1900, this essay remains a classic of early, clear-sighted argumentation in metrics. Jesperson's insights here are at least half a century ahead of their time. He attacks the "permissible substitutions" or "variations against the norm" theory of meter, showing it does not explain the facts. He rejects the idea of the metrical foot and of only two degrees--Stressed or Weak--in English meter, preferring himself four degrees of metrical stress. He asserts the Relative Stress Principle- the metrically relevant differences in stress are only relative not absolute. He acknowledges the Pause as metrically important and devises an entirely new scansion system to show the rises and falls between syllables in the [pentameter] line:

a / b \ a / b \ a / b \ a / b / b

From our vantage, the whole essay remains unwavering in its strength and directness: the questions are the hard ones, the position taken is argued simply and clearly, the exemplification is adequate to its purpose. In metrics we are not very often in the presence of a first-order mind. See Minaishi (E597), and see L413.

"Prosody comprises orthoeey, or the rules of pronunciation, and orthometry, or the rules of versification." Versification consists in "the arrangement of a certain number of syllables according to certain laws," i.e. placement of accent, the regularity of which renders every line "the more harmonious, as this rule is more strictly observed." The principle English meters are iambic and trochaic, though Alexandrines, fourteeners, and anapestic meters may also be observed. English versification allows but "few licenses," these being mainly varieties of elision. See also E536.

A general introductory handbook. His metrical principles are accentual, and quantity is then consigned to be an element of rhythm rather than meter. He allows secondary accent and admits seven metrical feet--the common four and the spondee, amphibrach, and cretic. The book's three parts treat versification,
figures, and genres.


E566  Kames, Henry Home, Lord. Elements of Criticism. 3 vols. London, 1762; rpt Hildesheim, Germany, and New York: Georg Olms, 1970. See vol. 2, chapter 18, section 4, "Versification." The reader should notice p. 360 ff (the succeeding pages examine the classical Hexameter) but may begin in earnest at p. 381. Lord Kames is the voice of l'ancien régime: he prefers to speak of quantities, and though he recognizes the existence of accent, he thinks it can be dispensed with on the grounds that "accenting is confined to the long syllables." He allows thirty-four types of feet. The inquiry into verse-structure is ordered on the consideration of number, quantity, and arrangement of syllables, pause, (caesura-placement receives a very long treatment), and accent. He identifies four types of the heroic line (by the caesura after the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh syllable) but at the end comes finally to prefer Miltonic blank verse. Though the substance in this chapter is errant in many ways, the style is refreshingly clear, the method inductive and orderly. See E825.

E567  Kellog, George A. "Bridges' Milton's Prosody and Renaissance Metrical Theory." PLMA 68 (1953): 268-85. An exposition and critical appreciation of the central argument of Bridges' landmark study (E491), augmented by a review of what little can be discovered about Milton's personal notions on versification, and also by an examination of some Renaissance prosodic manuals. The resultant triple focus illuminates more sharply the whole syllabic tradition operant in English verse since the Renaissance, the tradition which Bridges' theory of elision entails and confirms, in opposition to the Saintsbury heresy, "trisyllabic substitution." The syllabic metrical theory at the center of Milton's practice, as described by Bridges, is nearly identical to that set forth in the verse-manuals of the Italian Renaissance (e.g. Minturno's), which were themselves descriptions of the syllabic meters of such poets as Trissino. These four writers - two poets, two prosodists - represent the four most crucial figures in a metrical tradition spanning more than half a millennium. The influence of Alexander Gill (E541) on Milton is also discussed.

E568  Kenrick, William. "Rhetorical Grammar." Prefixed to his New Dictionary of the English Language. London, 1773; republished separately in 1784. Facsimile edition: Menston, Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1972. See Chapter 1, Section 6: "Of Prosody and Versification"; Chapter 2, Section 6: "Of English Prosody," Section 7: "Of Poetical Measures," and Section 8: "Of Vocal Melody." Kenrick ridicules prosodists for confounding the versification of modern languages with that of the ancients, yet he is inclined to believe English has "all the variety of long and short" that Greek and Latin had. But Greek speech was more like our song, the two being separated later, so that "the present meaning of the word accent bears no relation to its original use." In classical times speech was "a kind of song," but we have lost this "chaunt of accent" (i.e., tone). In classical verse, accent and quantity did not coincide; neither do they in modern verse. Stress "supplies the place of" length for us. The term "feet" he rejects in favor of "measure." Frequent references to Mason (E586).


The sections of interest in this treatise are Part 1, Chapter 4, Sections 10 and 12, and Part 2, Chapter 1, Sections 15-37. We are told that "English verse arises from a limited and regulated distribution of accents and pauses, as well as of quantities," which would leave the matter entirely unclarified, but for Knight to say that "the relations of measure and quantity are fixed and determinate...they must therefore be the same in Greek as in English" pretty well establishes his position. Though he refers to verse as a "metrical and accentual arrangement of syllables," it seems that the accents serve only to mark the time-divisions; Knight is aware of both features of verse -- accent and quantity -- nearly equally, which means also that he is not yet willing to surrender the latter. He thinks Pope superb and Milton only capable of "the most rugged anomalies" in verse.


Identifying three possible notation systems for marking the suprasegmental features of speech (by diacritical markings; by complete graphic transcription, either phonetic or phonemic; or by an "abstract schematic symbolism"), La Driére supports the third system as being value-free, applicable to all languages, and restricted to the rhythmic features of interest. Various sorts have been tried, using as symbols (1) letters of the alphabet (Verrier, Stewart), (2) numbers, to mark intensity or position or both (Macar, Lotz, Croll), (3) musical notation (Gildon, Lanier), or (4) arbitrary graphic markers (Steele, Skeat, Thomson, Huesler, and La Driére himself). The author's own system, employed in the following article, is explained: the syllable is abstractly symbolized as o, with diacritical marks for four degrees of stress and hovering stress, the comma for breaks between stress-groups, and the subscript caret for longer pauses. Marks for primary, secondary, tertiary, and weak accent (respectively): ó ò o oo. Hovering primary-secondary uses a hacek over the o. La Driére's system also differentiates group cadence (the rhythmic or phrasal groups of stresses determined by syntax), general cadence (meter, in effect), and measure (balance within the line and equalization between lines). This system will also be found employed in the subsequent studies by Barry (E1448), Dougherty (D272), Holloway (E914), and Berg (E950). A more conventional scansion system is described in Princeton s.v. "Scansion," pp. 740-41.


Fairly abstract, but cogent and not particularly tendentious; La Driére promotes nothing of his own system except the distinctions cadence, grouping, and measure. For rhythm he adopts Scripture's term "centroid" for the dominating stress; for meter he discusses the various theories briefly.


An essay in metrical stylistics, or perhaps better, "syntacti-metrics": One of the best indices of a poetic style is the interwoven pattern of meter and syntax, since "in metrical composition the author is at the same time moulding syllables into prosodic groups and words into syntactic constructions." Seven major classes of Line-types are identified along with 22 sub-species, and 42 passages (500 lines each) of major English poetry from Chaucer to Browning.
are analyzed, with results in tabular form. This sort of "grammetrics" is unquestionably both underexplored and valuable, yet one can only agree here that "it is apparently impossible to frame simple terms by which to describe most of these types of line-structure." See also E1234.

E573  Latham, R[obert] G[ordon]. The English Language. 2 vols. London: Walton and M abery, 1841; 2nd ed. 1848; 3rd ed. "revised and greatly enlarged," 1855; many later editions. See Part VI, "Prosody," p. 439 ff. Latham's scansion is based entirely on accent ("Meter" is defined as "a general term for the recurrence within certain intervals of syllables similarly affected."), and he proposes a scansion notation of x and a for unaccented and accented syllables (respectively) which was deemed useful enough for adoption by Skeat and others after him. This Part of Latham's opus surveys the Classical meters, the Old Germanic alliterative meters, and the English syllable-stress meter. An especially long concluding chapter takes up English hexameters.

E574  Leathes, Sir Stanley. Rhythm in English Poetry. London: William Heinemann, 1935. 154 pp. Rev: in TLS, 17 October 1935, p. 655. An historical survey of the development of English verse on its accentual basis from Chaucer to 1900. But Leathes devotes considerable attention not only to stress but also to quantity, giving digressive chapters to the nature of quantity in Greek and Latin verse as well as modern German verse, taking the position that though stress governs our meters, still "in all the best English poetry quantity tells," and devoting a chapter to the quantitative verse of Swinburne and Bridges (the former wrote verse correctly to both quantity and stress patterns; the latter wrote in quantity alone, ignoring stress). Treats blank verse at some length, too, though with little fresh material.

E575  Lewis, Charlton M. The Principles of English Verse. New York: Henry Holt, 1907; 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929. 142 pp. Rev: in Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire 10 (1931): 237. Lewis emphasizes that rhythm is composed of equal periods of time marked by stresses, and he differentiates (not at all clearly) meter as a measuring of syllables and stresses. He will allow six varieties of metrical feet, though he declines to defend that number in any way, a declination which characterizes the tone of the entire work.

E576  Lewis, C. S. "Metre." Review of English Literature 1 (1960): 45-50; rpt in his Selected Literary Essays. Ed. Walter Hooper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. pp. 280-85. An essay of wonderful simplicity, elegance and penetration: Lewis distinguishes meter ("an imaginary archetype or paradigm") from performance, the latter given to us either by Minstrels (who overdo the singsong meter) or Actors (whose flamboyant recitation ignores the meter entirely). And "metrical questions are profitable only if we regard them, not as questions about fact, but as purely practical." Scansions are not right, they are only more or less useful. The meter of a poem must be found by the norm of the entire poem, not by inductively categorizing all the line-types--that is not a meter. As for scansion, musical symbols will not do; the old conventional system still works best.

line made by Irish poets in the history of English verse, especially Thomas Moore (influential for Byron, Shelley, Scott, and other Romantics) and Yeats. This, in the midst of a more sweeping review of Irish verse-forms, especially the anhrán. Long and valuable.


Chapter 3 also appeared as:

E580  Malam, Phosphor. An Approach to Poetry. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1930. Chapter 2 treats alliteration, assonance, and rhyme; in chapter 3 rhythm is defined as stresses recurrent at equal periods of time, meter being a simplification and artificial division of rhythm. Correctly, and with a useful metaphor, the author recognizes that "the same rhythm may give us different kinds of metre according as whether we cut into the rhythm at a rung, or between two rungs."

E581  Malof, Joseph. A Manual of English Meters. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970; rpt Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978. 236 pp. The best general metrical manual presently available—logically organized, clear in terminology, thorough. Malof accepts the structural-linguistic four degrees of stress, then shows how these rhythmic four are resolved into the metrical two. Full chapters are given to Foot (Accentual-Syllabic) Verse, Stress Verse, Syllabic Verse, and Free Verse, and the Appendices include a glossary, bibliography, and checklists of rhyme and stanza forms. Malof’s specialty is ballad meter, which he gives the piquant general term "Folk Meters"; these are explicated very fully in chapter 4. The only demure we might make to this useful "repository of information" is the unfortunate terming of metrical variation of "Exceptions to Regularity."

E582  ------. "Meter as Organic Form." MLQ 27 (1966): 3-17. More useful than the conception of meter as an abstract form—i.e., as container, or else one element contained—is the conception of meter as organic form, as a force for order within "a coherence of activities," "a system of dynamics," the poem. Within that dynamos energy is balanced against
tension, so that the poem moves by "an accommodation of movement to the resistances against it," the antinomian forces generating "form" by their constructive and vitalic oppositions. Over all of these stands the impassive Meter, making its subtle Authority manifest only through the body of the lines, creating an immanent fixity and stricture of rule which is the paradoxical source of a nearly infinite range of variation. Throughout every supple or sudden divagation, underneath every gesture of hand or voice, nearly behind the field of view in every image, the form of the poem speaks Constancy, promises Order, satisfies Expectation, indeed nearly convinces us that all is for the best and that the poet is really very sane.

E583 -----. "The Native Rhythm of English Meters." Texas Studies in Literature and Language 5 (1964): 580-94. A remarkable effort at synthesizing the entire history of English metrics into a single cogent interpretation that can be demonstrated within a very small compass. Malof's thesis is that the native English verseform, the old four-stress line, and the more complex foreign form, the (syllable-counting) pentameter line, have developed side by side, neither one very far from the other, throughout the entire history of English poetry: "the old native rhythm runs through much of our pentameter verse, providing a basis for a continual modulation of counterpoint." Indeed, what one may say of the Romantic revolution and of the verse of the twentieth century, as of the late Shakespeare, is that the foreign verseform may "take over momentarily and denaturalize the native line, but that in time the native element reasserts itself and renaturalizes the line, transforming the foreign element into something new as it does so." In any period of crisis or uncertainty the sturdier native form will resurface. There is, then, a fundamental ambiguity between stress verse and foot verse; they permeate each other yet seem somewhat immiscible, so that much English verse more or less qualifies as either; the great success of our poetry has been to hold them both in solution together, productively.


E586 -----.. Two Essays on the Power of Numbers. London, 1961. Mason intends to scan by quantity, as he constructs verse of "time, syllables, feet, and measures," yet he is utterly undone by the confusion of quantity with accent. Though an unaccented syllable is naturally Short, he says, "yet if it be Accented in the Ordinary Way of Pronunciation, or the Sense requires the Emphasis to be laid on it, it becomes a long Quantity." He recognizes four disyllabic feet, eight trisyllabic, and sixteen tetrasyllabic; these last are formed of combinations of the disyllabic types and called "Dipodies"; whenever the two simple feet are dissimilar, they are termed a "Syzygy." More interesting historically, though, is the conjunction of poetic measure and music made in chapters 7 and 8. It is fair to say that Mason is heavily indebted to Say (E646).


A textbook-primer: he allows only the four common metrical feet, denying spondees and pyrrhics, yet calls the constituents "long" and "short," saying that a syllable may be emphasized sometimes by duration, sometimes by pitch or stress, sometimes by combination. Preservation of the old terminology is unfortunate, as is the liberal marking of metrical pauses. Matthews seems incapable of distinguishing stress verse from accentual-syllabic verse. He applauds and elaborates on Oliver Wendell Holmes's theory (I30) that the line = one breath group. Not a reliable guide, since he shows every evasion about axioms.


A simple primer, with long notes at the end on Sprung Rhythm and Free Verse. Its virtues are (1) acceptance of the double levels of meter and rhythm, as in McAuley (E578), and (2) an interesting method of marking syntactic phrasing against metrical pattern in the line.


A good many of us could go to school here: Maxwell's thesis is metrical counterpoint--that effect wherein "every reader of poetry is quite well aware of two movements, the first a pattern borne in mind, the second a speech movement which, whether in identity or variation, is related to it, though a momentary forgetfulness of the relationship is possible and sometimes pleasing." His point, more specifically though, is "a clear distinction between the sort of feet which may compose the basic pattern [the meter] and those which may be introduced by way of variation [in speech]. The second sort may be made up in almost any way" [italics added]. Thus each syllable of Tennyson's line "Break, break, break" is a foot in the second system but not in the first. "The principle to be observed is that the basic pattern must always determine the number of metrical divisions" rather than the actualized variations. The reader of verse, then, feels "the need to follow two movements at once," yet surprisingly the effort produces not an added difficulty, but "a curious grace." That is the pleasure we take in the lines of accomplished actors.


One of the lesser-known monuments of late Victorian metrics, but likely second only to Schipper (A9) in scope, method, and significance. Saintsbury said that "had Mr. J. B. Mayor's Chapters on English Metre been fuller, I had hardly written this book. . . . an unsound criticism is rare, an unsound scansion rarer."

Unfortunately, though, Mayor compiled the book not by writing out his views on metrics directly but by collecting five essays he had previously published reviewing the major metrists who had preceded him--Guest, Abbott, Symonds, Ellis, Bridges, and Skeat (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 of Chapters respectively), four essays on the history of Blank Verse (chs. 10-13), an essay on Shelley's meters (see E1017), and a chapter on the Hexameter, adding for the book publication only an Introduction, two Appendices, (the first on the Old French decasyllable, with an abstract of Zarncke's obscure
monograph (L658), the second listing the terminology of classical versification), and two new essays on metrical classification (chapters 8 and 9). Thus we are forced to find Mayor out by indirections, watching his theory unfold in his reactions to the critical minds around him. That theory scans verse entirely by accent (Mayor thinks the concept of quantity very nearly ludicrous) but views the line as comprising metrical feet, not merely syllables. This position, the stress-and-foot theory, has become virtually High Orthodox in the century since Mayor's book. He is willing to retain the classical nomenclature (for convenience's sake), but oddly, he seems to think that the function of the metrist is to discover and categorize all the variations on strictly regular meter that are to be found in a poet's lines - ascendent or descending, disyllabic or trisyllabic, truncated, hypermetrical, or downright irregular. In retrospect, that function seems necessary as a preliminary to the interpretation and criticism but worse than pedantic as an end. Mayor recognizes three degrees of stress, and he uses the 0, 2, 3 system of Ellis (C9) to mark them in scansion. Halpern (E546) believes that Mayor recognized the Relative Stress Principle in the 1870's, nearly thirty years before Jesperson.

On Guest, Mayor demonstrates in too painful detail the easy recognition that his system is entirely perverse: to believe that the Old English prosody of "sections" (halflines) is the authentic metric of all English poetry up to the present is indeed to find that by such a system all the best modern poets have been bunglers and gross incompetents. So Guest's system, ponderously cumbersome, misrepresents those lines that it does not misunderstand.

The accent-based metric of Edwin Abbott (E458) Mayor thinks the "true and natural" approach, though his distinction of word-accent, metrical-accent, and emphasis creates some needlessly complicated rules for assigning metrical ictus. Mayor argues for pyrrhics and spondees.

In the case of A. J. Ellis's system, however, the complications are compounded beyond all reason. Hoping to avoid the very nebulous terms "accent" and "emphasis," Ellis distinguishes between force, length, pitch, weight, and silence in syllables, allowing a scale of nine degrees of gradation for each feature, each of the degrees having an individual descriptive term - e.g. "superheavy," "sublong," "supershort" - producing, thus, forty-five terms altogether. Mayor can only "with difficulty repress a shudder at the elaborate apparatus he has provided for registering the minutest variations of metrical stress." The concept of weight is also questionable.

Three other theorists are reviewed: Symonds (E1320) is censured for the dilettantism of his "intuitivism"; Bridges is judged by setting his theory of stress meter in Milton (E491) against his own work in The Feast of Bacchus and Nero, where its neglect of syllable-counting results in ineffective description (notice that Mayor's concern with syllable-counting, though, leads him in chapter 9 to a total misunderstanding of Hymn Meters); and Skeat (E646) is found confused and unnatural, his groupings of syllables around an accent more a matter of rhythm than of meter.

Chapter 6, however, deserves final attention: there Mayor elaborates his method - which is, simply put, Empiricism - in an attempt to arbitrate alternative scansion of problem lines. Two principles emerge: the prevailing context will control our scanning of any given line, and in general the range of permissible variations for a meter can be stated. But this sort of statement (p. 91) turns out to be rather unpleasantly extended and qualified, allowing only a cautious general rules: "one or two unaccented syllables preceding the initial accent or following the final accent of the line are non-essential to the rhythm." Such a result must surely cast doubt over the utility if not the validity of the method.
E594  "Dr. Guest and Dr. Abbott on English Mètre." Translations of the Philological Society, 1873-74, pp. 624-47.
Expanded, revised extensively, and divided into chapters 2 and 3 of his Chapters on English Mètre (E592), q.v. But note the discussion in TPS by the other members after Mayor had given his paper (pp. 644-45), and also the extract from Gaston Paris on the Old French decasyllabic meter (pp. 646-47); Mayor does not reprint the first of these in CEM.

A student's manual which scans by stress but includes, illogically, isochrony in meter. It also, illogically, defines pyrrhic as a foot of two syllables unaccented in prose, one of which may however be accented in verse. Recommends assigning students blank metrical patterns to be fleshed out with words.

E596  Miller, Raymond D. Secondary Accent in Modern English Verse (Chaucer to Dryden). Baltimore: J. H. Furst Co., 1904. His dissertation at Johns Hopkins in 1904. Miller, a student of Bright's (see E500), follows Huguenin (J133) and Brown (E1112) in extending Bright's theory over the whole range of English poetry. The crux of that theory is the point that three levels of phonetic stress may provide variety in verse when adjusted to the metrical two, secondary stress being optionally available for ictus.

Approves and explicates Jesperson's 4-3-2-1 notation for stress in verse (E562).

E598  A Mirror for Magistrates. London: Thomas Marshe, 1559, 1563, 1571, 1578, 1587, etc. The standard modern text is that edited by Lily B. Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938; rpt New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960. The Mirror, an anthology of short "Tragedies" on the theme of the Fall of Princes and written generally in Alexandrines and rhyme royal, is a milestone in the early development of Elizabethan drama. Two points in particular stand out, prosodically, in the second edition: the short prose link [no. 24] after the tragedy of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, of which the narrator comments that "the matter was well enough lyked of sum, but the meeter was mysliked almost of all" (Richard is rebuked for his "uncertayne Meter," though, admittedly, his demeanor had become so notorious that "it were agaynst the decorum of his personage, to vse eyther good Meter or order"). Second, Sackville's "Induction" to the volume, which Saintsbury praised as "the finest piece of versifying in southern English between Chaucer and Spenser." (These are at pp. 371-72 and 298-317, respectively, in Campbell's ed.)

Quite possibly our earliest English effort at a comparative versification for the modern languages as well as for the ancient. I treat the second edition here; the 1774 Essay was directed against Foster, but the Inquiry retracts a bit in favor of more general principles.
For Mitford, harmony in language is the result of the combination of measure and melody. Accent or Tone he considers the result of both force (loudness, in three degrees) and higher pitch. "Emphasis" is rhetorical accent. Syllabic quantity is recognized—regardless of long and short vowels and long and short syllables—as is length by position: a short vowel followed by two distinct consonants makes the syllable long. But Mitford is careful not to confound accent and quantity; stress does not lengthen syllables. The "rhythmus or cadence" of English speech is compared to music, but even though he can speak of "the identity of poetical and musical measures," in general he considers the relation of verse to music to be one of analogy. Verse, like music, runs in either common or triple time, the beats beginning the bars and hence disposed isochronously in relation to each other. Yet when Mitford comes to scansion, no musical apparatus is anywhere in sight: the accents end the iambic measures rather than begin them, and though quantities are marked throughout (virtually all syllables turn out to be long, of course), they clearly have no relation to the stressing. He recognizes that the irregularities of syllabic quantity are such that "the disposition of long and short quantities cannot be the foundation of that order which constitutes the order of verse." And "as the arrangement of music in bars has been decided by the convenience of the musical performer without any consideration of the competition of music with poetry, so the arrangement of the syllables in verse in feet should be decided by the convenience of metrical analysis, without regard to those divisions which music has established for its own separate purposes."

In short, Mitford scans by accent alone, regardless of the theoretical genuflections he makes to the musical ideas of the day. (Elsewhere he calls accent "not the constituent but the indicant only of measure.") That order which does constitute the verse in English is one wherein "the alternate syllables are acuted." Permissible "aberrations of accent" include the doubling, absence, and reversal of the stress in the foot, and extra syllables are to be admitted as trisyllabic substitutions rather than removed as elisions (perspicuously, Mitford sees that "the poetical or metrical syllable is not precisely the same with the grammatical syllable" in some cases).

Section 3 treats Quantity, 4 Accent, and 5 Cadence. Section 6 offers his theory of the mechanism of English verse. Section 7 on the history of English versification is also of interest. Summary (curious and interesting), pp. 108-9. Mitford is a landmark in the history of English versification. (Fussell's treatment of Mitford (E34) is inconsistent and confused; he finds there both strict syllabism and "anti-syllabism" (pp. 33 and 150).)


Monboddo's tediously repetitive treatise shows the great promise of a rigorous distinction between quantity and accent, until one recognizes that by "accent" he means pitch, not stress—an "acute or grave" quality of the voice, as opposed to "loud or soft" or "long or short." The Classical Greek language he holds to have been regulated by this "accent," not quantity—"the antient accents are real notes of music, or variations of the tone, by which the voice is raised higher. . . ." Such "accents" he denies exist in modern English (p. 298 ff); we have changes of tone, well enough, "but upon words or sentences . . . not upon syllables," and they admit of no rule. Thus Monboddo can back into the truth: "in English, syllabical accents . . . are of a quite different kind from the antient accents; for there is no change of the tone in them; but the voice is only raised more, so as to be louder upon one syllable than another. . . . the music of our language [is] in this respect nothing better than the music of a
Chapter 5 on Quantity is sensible: M. refuses to acknowledge length by position, accepting only (1) vowels naturally long or (2) diphthongs. Classical verse is ordered on the basis of such quantities, but these are quite extraneous to English meter (pp. 325-26). English verse, "as a species of rhythm" requires "both louder and softer sounds . . . and these must return at equal intervals, or such as have some other ratio to one another, otherwise, there is no verse."

"There is however something more required to complete the verse; and that is, a certain number of syllables" (pp. 384-85). Added to this is only the "infinite variety" of quantity in English verse, and the definition is complete. The rest consists of approbation of Blank Verse and of Milton.


E603 Morgan, Bayard Quincy. "Compulsory Pattern in Poetry." PMLA 75 (1960): 634-35. Remarks, addenda, and demurrers to Wimsatt and Beardsley (E700), "to suggest that meter in English verse is not arbitrary, but to a large extent inherent in and created by the rhythmic and poetic nature of our language." Notably, he argues for spondees, finding in the line "To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark dock" that "each of the last three words makes a full metrical foot, and that no other reading is possible." Alexandrines are judged unwieldy and four-stressed pentameter lines "a contradiction in terms and impossible."

E604 Morton, Edward P. "A Method of Teaching Metrics." MLN 15 (1900): 97-101. There is a long synopsis also in PMLA 14 (1899): lx-lxi. The pedagogical sequence entails demonstrating: (1) that accent is the basis of meter, (2) the foot, (3) scansion of the iambic pentameter, (4) expressive metrical variation, (5) pausing and caesura-placement, (6) rhyme and couplet structure, (7) rewriting blank verse into couplets and vice versa, (8) stress verse, (9) the dynamics of stanza form, (10) alliteration, (11) other members and line-forms, (12) the Spenserian, (13) the sonnet, and finally (14) historical metrics.

E605 Motheré, J. "Quelques mots sur les théories du vers héroïque anglais et ses relations avec la versification française." Revue du l'enseignement des langues vivantes, 1886. Also rpt as an offprint at Le Havre, 1886. 54 pp. The subject of the essay is really English, though M. affirms that the two verse-systems are essentially identical. Beginning with a criticism of Witcomb and David Masson for accepting the doctrine of trisyllabic substitution, Motheré defends the principle of syllabism in English meter via contraction and elision. He distinguishes (semantic-syntactic) pause from (fixed metrical) caesura and recognizes the metrical principle of alternation in the placement of stresses.

E606 Nist, John. "The Word-Group Cadence: Basis of English Metrics." Linguistics, no. 6 (1964), pp. 73-82. Iconoclasm: the foot is not the basic unit in the meters of accentual languages. Outright audacity: the "word-group" or "cadence" is. "In English a cadence is that rhythmical pattern or accentual collocation which occurs between two accentualized major junctures. It is the basic unit of metrical structure." Simple myopia: the failure to distinguish between rhythm and meter.

sentences uniformly lack verbs. Nothing new here; two-thirds of the book is given to examples. A prefatory page lists ten early works on versification (Harvey to Bysshe) the author found in the Bodleian Library.

Hopeing to reverse the widening gap between literature and linguistics so apparent in versification, Pace suggests that the relation between traditional and structural metrics is exactly the same as that between meter and rhythm. Traditional metrics treats of “gross stress contrasts,” by reducing all the minute degrees of stressing to one binary opposition. Meter in these terms is little more than a highly simplified recognition pattern. Structural metrics, on the other hand, describes more degrees of stressing, pitch, juncture, and other linguistic features, and as it increases its specificity of description it approaches the limiting case of one single realization (performance). This is the wide and various domain of rhythmics. But though we say a poem has a meter we cannot say it has a rhythm; it actually has “a rhythm potential (all readings) and a rhythm core (the best readings).” Thus, a Trager-Smith notation of a poem’s rhythm core amounts to “a prescription for an ideal performance.” Intonational ambiguities (which pertain to rhythm not meter) might be retained unresolved but would be better normalized.

Contrast Pace’s relegation of intonation to the domain of rhythm with Crystal’s resolute inclusion of it in the domain of meter (E20).

An application of the theory of Nist (E606), wherein meter is subordinated to a more expansive conception of rhythmic structure which takes cognizance of syntax. The three levels or dimensions of analysis in their relation are: meter + prose cadence = poetic rhythm.

The tragedy of Thomas of Gloucester in the 1559 edition of the Mirror is clearly written in a four-stress line; in the 1578 edition, however, nineteen of the 203 lines have been inexplicably rewritten as iambic pentameters. See also Blenerhasset (E485) and the citation for the Mirror (E598).

Mainly on Latin and Greek; English is discussed passim after p. 125. Pemberton recognizes that accent regulates English verse but confidently assumes that accent lengthens the syllable so that it is effectively long, the rationale being musical. Any variation in stress placement causes the verse to "labor under a deficit" (Pemberton is strict to the point of severity), metrical variation is deplorable in general except for verse-paragraphing, and trochaic substitutions are a license “least offensive” in first position. Music is often mentioned by Pemberton as the rationale for a practice, e.g. not mixing measures. He praises Milton and Glover. The heavy influence of Bysshe is obvious, though Pemberton's definitions of metre and rhythmus are noteworthy historically.

Postgate attempts to formulate a rule for the number of stresses acceptable for a pentameter line to be deemed metrical—a minimum of three and a maximum of eight. Unfortunately, though, he will allow ictus to be filled by either quantity or stress. The other contributors haggle somewhat confusingly over peripheral issues. Sonnenschein muddles the waters with his phonetics and kymograph experiments, and there is talk of Persian meters in Tennyson.


Among Pound's acidic dicta on the wretched state of verse, music, learning, and the world at large, the prosodist will find detaining observations on rhythmical variety in the Greek hexameter, the origin of the stanza, and syllable-values (both "original weights and durations" and those imposed on the syllable by others around it). Précis: "Prosody and melody are attained by the listening ear, not by an index of nomenclatures, or by learning that such and such a foot is called spondee. . . . you cannot hand out a receipt for making a Mozartian melody. . . . Hence the extreme boredom caused by the usual professional documentation on the aspiring thesis of prosody."


Puttenham's is the most extensive and important English treatise on verse-making, and also possibly the first; the latest editors present strong evidence of stratification in the text, the earliest draft of the Arte being written perhaps as early as 1569 and thus antedating both Ascham and Gascoigne. Puttenham made revisions steadily thereafter until the mid-Eighties, when there was a wholesale reworking of Book 3 and the last six chapters of Book 2. Thus the book was apparently twenty years in the making.

Book 2 on "Proportion" is the one for us; Book 1 treats matter; Book 3, figures. In the first twelve chapters of Book 2 we find an earlier Tudor view of metrics, in contrast to the later (considerably altered) views expressed in the last six chapters on classical meters. In the early conception, Puttenham describes Greek and Latin verse as having Meters in Feet, which he denies in the vulgar languages. English is ruled solely by Number (syllabic regularity) and Rime (also termed cadence, or concord of tunable sound). To the modern way of thinking these seem too insignificant criteria, and we are surprised to see Puttenham making much of Rime, especially, but that is our own tinted vision. He also speaks often of Accent, but ambiguously (p. 82 in Smith), seeming to mean by that term mostly pitch rather than stress; he also speaks of "motion and stir" and "times," but these too are hazy: "Meter and measure. . . [lie] with us in the number of syllables, which are comprehended in every verse, not regarding his feete. . . . by reason of the evident motion and stir which is perceived in the sounding of our words not always equal, for some ask longer, some shorter time to be uttered in." Thus Puttenham's (early) explanation for the inapplicability of classical versification rests on a (not very clear) argument about polysyllabicity vs. monosyllabicity; perhaps this is simply a confused realization that the times for producing English syllables are too infinitely graded to be classed either long or short. At one crucial point (p. 76 in Smith) Puttenham realizes that a line scans badly (weak iambic verge on dactylic) but cannot win his way to the right explanation. He does not
understand Accent very clearly nor certainly in the modern sense of the term but he does perceive a cutting difference in the vernacular and the classical versifications. The bulk of the Arte is given over to his famous illustrations of staffe (stanza, by which he means line-lengths plus rhyme-schemes, the rhymes exerting a band or binding force), both for ear and eye, with a long digression on kingship.

Chapter 13 and 18 (corrected numbering) do indeed "say otherwise" and "seem contradictory," but the reference to classical meters as "scholastical toys" suggests a tone not entirely serious. And the strategy Puttenham is suggesting is indeed a clever one, designed to solve a conceptual problem by semantic sleight-of-hand, or casuistry. All of the "auncient feete" may be introduced into convenient and agreeable use, "according with our ordinary times and pronunciation," by a simple means, which is "to allow every word polisillable one long time of necessitie, which should be where his sharp accent falls in our owne ydiome most aptly and naturally. . . ." In short, quantity will be abstracted to the sense of iactus and filled in the lines by stress rather than length. No Law of Position will be allowed for English, since Puttenham believes that its justification even in Latin rests on nothing but "bare tradition." Of "auncient feete" he will allow twelve. In a moment of candor, though, he can confess that "in very truth I thinke [my remarks] but vaine and superstitious obseruations nothing at all furthering the pleasant melody of our English meeter . . . and rather wish the continuance of our old manner of Poesie, scanning our verse by [count of] sillables rather than by feete. . . ." Finally, note the half-confused conception of "breaking" in chapter 18; this is a groping realization that the metrical value of English syllables depends on where they are deployed in the line, rather than inhering in the syllable per se by definition, as in classical verse. Thus the shifting of words one slot over in the line will "break" an iambic rhythm into a trochaic. Puttenham grasps, dimly, that rhythm reinforces meter most strongly when word- and foot-boundaries coincide, though he admits he does not know why (p. 138 in Smith; see also pp. 130-31).

Two supplementary studies which may be of interest:

E616 Knauf, David M. "George Puttenham's Theory of Natural and Artificial Discourse." Speech Monographs 34 (1967): 35-42; and

E618 Pyle, Fitzroy. "Pyrrhic and Spondee: Speech Stress and Metrical Accent in English Five-Foot Iambic Verse Structure." Hermathena, no. 107 (1968), pp. 49-74. A lively and astute argument with McAuley (E578), defending the existence of pyrrhic and spondaic feet in English meter. The question is by no means closed, and Pyle is dead on target to identify the crucial determinant as the question "how far does the metre actually influence our rendering of stress as we read?" A strong influence results in McAuley's account, a weaker one, Pyle's.

E619 -----. "The Rhythms of the English Heroic Line: An Essay in Empirical Analysis." Hermathena, no. 53 (1939), pp. 100-26. What are the minimum conditions required for a ten-syllable line to be perceived as "iambic," i.e. metrical? Some theorists have claimed that stresses on the fourth and sixth syllables of the decasyllabic line are sufficient, and Pyle shows that by shifting the whole line (and its stress-pattern) right or left under the metrical grid a fit can be obtained and the principle verified. The fourth or sixth position must be weighted, and if the eighth is weighted the tenth need not be, but if it is not then the ninth must be, in order to insure that a line will...
not be judged positively unmetrical, though for it to be judged positively metrical, more complex rules are required (pp. 122-24). (These are extended and simplified in Pyle's later study, above.) This study is to be placed with the other inductive studies - Mayor, Bridges, Young, and Tarlinskaja.

A pocket handbook.

In fact, all of Frost, "using a system based on lexical stress occurrence (as opposed to 'positional')." The abstract is terse and obscure.

Radavitch observes (correctly) that the traditional bivalent scansion system of metrics cannot express (or account for) certain kinds of information in the poetic line. (This observation raises the larger theoretical question of what kinds of features a metrical system should be designed to denote at all, though this question is unfortunately not explored here.) Radavitch then proposes an alternative scansion system with eight degrees of stress, indicated by numerical superscripts from 1 (weakest) to 8. (Note that this system doubles the members of each of the four categories in Trager-Smith.) He believes that "poetic stress" is a composite of four stresses: metrical, lexical, durational, and line-pattern. A middle section presents the differences between Music and Metrics (he is aware that the eight levels of the metric could correspond to the musical octave) and then applies the "numerical notation" to indicating pitch-patterns in musical lines (the confusions of this section are as instructive as its conclusions).
Two sections explore four kinds of "governing rules" or "grammars" of the poetic line: these are rules of language, poetry, the poet, and the line itself; violation produces "language syncopation" (otherwise known as metrical variation). Concluding analysis of Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar."
Altogether, the exposition and terminology seem luxuriant. It would seem that the few criteria for "poetic stress" are so broad as to nearly eliminate any consensus on a correct scansion of a line, given the eight degrees of stress. But the author believes that a computer could be programmed to perform scansion automatically.

Follows Spindler (E663). Twenty chapters on verseforms - e.g. Alliterative Verse, Blank Verse, Couplets, 7-line Stanzas, Sonnets, Odes - with each chapter organized historically. An introduction to metrical forms, somewhat overbalanced toward stanza (156 pages of 185), but offering clear and orderly information on English meters for the German student.


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The exposition on logical structure vs. local texture (pp. 885-86 in Adams) is familiar and valuable; at the very end (p. 890), Ransom turns to reiterate his theory of meter as "pure design" quite divested of any content or "meaning" of the poem.

Ransom delineates four kinds of transactions between meter and sense in poetry: there is the "abstract meter with a simple repetitive rhythm," the "pure vocables," but at times this metrical pattern "must accommodate itself to the logical pattern of the words," and if at that point "some brilliant and perspicuous prose rhythm" can be found to overlay the simple meter, then the poet will have achieved a "counterpoint . . . the very special aural beauty of a metered work." But at the same time "the meaningful or signifying patterns of the words intend to be fully logical," but when the meter interferes, other words will have to be found. This might seem a shortcoming, "but often we feel that the greatest glory of the poem turns on its individual phrases when they conflict with but accommodate themselves to the meter. They will have come to their present form after much trial and error; and the successive versions will have been tested for their substantive brilliance as well as for their capacity for making oral counterpoint."

See especially pp. 241-43 on the "music" of meter versus the meaning in poetry--"music" being the regular sequence of orderly, steady, "fixed" units. Ransom's belief that these is a stratum of verbal music below that of verbal meaning in poetry is not fully articulated at its most crucial point--the explanation of how the metrical music affects us or conveys meaning to us in its own right--but he suggests here that meters "confer upon the delivery of poetry the sense of a ritualistic occasion." A sacramental function, in short.

Ransom devotes the preponderance of the essay to an approving estimate of the new linguistic approach to metrics (although he is concerned to confine the 4-level system to speech-rhythm, preserving the binary system for meter), but he also offers observations upon the proper reading of verse, the ionic foot (he will admit it, in place of pyrrhic + spondee), and the metrical system as theology. Quotably, "the rhythm is the marriage of the meter and the language."

A discursive essay, generally concerning the "interaction between the sense and music" or "argument and rhythm" of poetry. Ransom cites four "coordinations" or mutual adjustments of the two realms to each other in the composition of a poem and concludes with remarks on Gross (E38), rejecting the notion that a rhythmic form divested of words can express meaning.
Beginning at section 4 Ransom sets forth his famous diremption of the poetic object into "the meters and the meaning," describing the mutual interactions and concessions of these two forces during the composition of a poem in a diagram showing Determinate and Indeterminate Meaning and Determinate and Indeterminate Sound. Examples follow: the pressure of the meter affecting the sense of lines in Wordsworth, Pope, Milton, and Marvell, and the pressure of the meaning bearing down on the meter in Shakespeare and Donne.

Nothing better on the relation of meter and meaning has been written in this century.

E630  -----. "Why Critics Don't Go Mad." Kenyon Review 14 (1952): 331-39; rpt in his Beating the Bushes. New York: New Directions, 1972. pp. 157-69. Near the end of this review essay on Milton's poetry, Ransom takes Cleanth Brooks's suggestion that Milton's language was essentially Metaphysical rather than Spenserian as an occasion for thoughts on Meter: "It is depressing when a reader tells us how very 'natural' the meters seem. For it would then be as if the meters, or the poetic understanding which thought it was respecting the meters, were ceasing to function, and the meters did not know their own importance. Meters activated, as they are when the metaphysicals use them, seem at first to be restrictive, and obstructive, upon the flow of language, but actually they are what makes the phrases shine."

A student's manual. Two kinds of accent--pitch and stress--are noted, with three degrees, though for metrical purposes only two are distinguished. Quantity may be short, long, or prolate, and though there are quantitative meters in the world's languages (Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin), English is not one of them.

A grammar; chapters 5-6 treat Quantity, chapters 7-9, Accent, and chapters 10-12, metrics. Rice is insistent that "the heroic measure is not confined to a certain number of syllables," and, criticizing Say (E646), Mason (E584-86), and Dr. Johnson (E563), he allows that "though the accent doth sometimes supply the Place of Time, in forming the Quantity, yet . . . it cannot do so to the exclusion of Time, without destroying the Propriety, Beauty, and . . . Harmony of the Numbers." In short, he conceives meter as comprising both Accent and Time. Elision is horrid.

A student's manual. Premises: "some learned writers would persuade us, that our verses are composed of iambs, trochees, spondees, pyrrhics, dactyls, &c, or a mechanical arrangement of long and short syllables. [He has Foster (M67) in mind.] This notion has involved the subject in darkness and perplexity . . . . [I have] considered the English versification as founded . . . on a certain order and succession of accented and unaccented syllables." That position is notable given its date, but otherwise the book has many eccentricities and warrants little interest.

though apparently he only intends his analysis to apply to Projective Verse. He writes rules to convert linguistic strings into abstract Stress Symbols, then rules to show how such sequences may be combined and how phrasal-stress patterns are adjusted when discrete phrases or words are marshalled together into meter, and finally rules to show when such sequences will be metrically admissible. He retains the concept of the metrical foot. His categories of "stress-fixed" and "stress-shifting" metrical schemas sound like echoes of Chatman's "meter-fixed" and "meter-fixing" (E713), but one other distinction he makes is I think original and important: "for homomorphic metric schemes the conception of the foot break is prior to the conception of the line break, and the line breaks will respect the foot breaks. For non-homomorphic metric schemes, on the other hand, the line break is prior to the foot break and scansion can only occur once the line is determined." This merits "unpacking," as the philosophers say.

A capsule history and exposition of the redoubtable Saintsbury system. An old Brit, we see, will uphold to the very end his Native Principles, in this case Equivalence, against the forces of Darkness- -here, bathetically, Syllable Counting.

Speaking of the theory and method which lay behind his three-volume History of English Prosody (A8), Saintsbury himself observed:

My object was not to construct an a priori theory of prosody at all, but to examine the prosodic substance of English poetry as a whole, and to discover, if possible, in what way it was constructed. I found... that a system of syllabic equivalence and substitution composing, and equating or contrasting, different prosodic units for which I kept the old traditional name of feet pervaded the whole of it... Into the origin and nature, as distinguished from the contrasted value and arrangement, of long and short syllables I did not enter, beyond pointing out that neither accent, nor stress, nor except in a purely differential sense, quantity, would account for it satisfactorily. By differential, I mean that things of one kind were short, and those of another long, with an occasional faculty of change usually called commonness. And there was an end to it. (Some Recent Studies (E643))

Such a statement of principles- -it is a relatively accurate self-assessment- -is dismaying, to say the least. As a serious method for intellectual inquiry, it seems to simply disdain all rational, orderly, self-conscious method. The judgment of it given by T. S. Omond (himself an opinionated but nevertheless a scrupulously fair critic) is not extreme:

I think most readers of his volumes will share my surprise at the resolute way in which their author declines to discuss the phenomena which he chronicles... He talks of "long" and "short" syllables, without saying what they mean, and says he might as well have called them "abracadabra and abraxas." His scansion is a glorious higgledy-piggledy of iambics and trochees, or dactyls and anapests, without any clue as to how these can be interchangeable. He not only does not know how feet are constituted, but he resolutely refuses to inquire. He is really reckless use of the terms "long" and "short" with deliberate avoidance of their meaning leads him into terrible pitfalls when he comes to deal with quantitative verse. ... Matchless as an historian of our verse, as an analyst he is not only nought but wishes to be so.
No adequate account of our verse-structure is to be found in these otherwise admirable volumes. (A5, pp. 250-51)

It may be said, then, by way of synopsis, that whenever Saintsbury found himself in a tight place, and forced to explain himself fairly clearly, he always (forgive me) took to his feet. His metrical treatise adopts, wholesale, almost shamelessly, the old classical terminology of Longs and Shorts, and the scanning of verse in feet. For the study of classical verse, this apparatus had already been in use for over two millennia before Saintsbury's time, though as applied to the versification of English it had been a demonstrable source of confusion--and generally discredited--for over three centuries when Saintsbury took it up so fiercely. His theory treats its constituents, Quantity and the Foot, as utter abstractions, mere counters, not requiring the slightest natural explanation. "'Does length,' some people ask, 'really mean "duration of time" in pronouncing?' This question, and others, seem to the present writer unnecessary." So it is not vowel-length that determines quantity, nor will Saintsbury allow any Law of Position. His Foot Theory will have nothing to do with any Temporalist notions either, as witnesses his critique of Lanier (A8, vol. iii, pp. 493-97). Yet at the same time he confesses "of the isochronous interval" that "I believe in it myself, though I prefer to economise letters and call it a 'foot,'" (III, 439-40), and he does accept the concepts of the monosyllabic foot and the metrical pause, indeed to the point of allowing feet entirely filled by pauses, which in any syllable- and stress-counting metric is impossible. But the Accentualists suffer worse at his hands than any of the rest: "a man who goes by feet can never really go by accent . . . the pure accentual system is totally inadequate. . . . to rule accent altogether out of English prosody would be, to me, absurd. You must keep it in its place, and take care that that place is a minor or subsidiary one" (iii, 515, 496). However, a close inspection of Saintsbury's pronouncements on the accentual theory of meter suggests that he thought it counted stresses but not syllables; he seems to have had the misconception that stress-metrists believe all English verse to be merely accentual verse rather than accentual-syllabic verse. If so, that would indeed be a flagrant misprision, but not so flagrant as the one that Saintsbury commits in scanning the Old English and ballad meters as foot verse. He mistakes foot verse for stress verse and stress verse for the footed.

Saintsbury rejects, then, both timing and stressing, though he misconceives, I think, both theories to some degree, while at the same time accepting some aspects of both theories. He was not one to be bound by the chains of consistency; But finally there can be, I believe, no middle ground. The two theories cannot be reconciled on the same plane. And on such a criterion, and even with all his evident ambivalences, Saintsbury must be said to scan mainly by stresses.

In Saintsbury's defense, however, two things may be said. First his conception of Equivalence (Substitution) is a necessary and vital part of any coherent theory of meter (Saintsbury himself thought elision "hideous"). Trochaic substitutions in the fifth feet of iambic lines are unquestionably verboten. Second, the Foot Theory becomes vastly more attractive if we interpret Saintsbury's length or quantity to mean metrical itus. The concept of itus is a very respectable one these days, and not any the less so for its not being very well understood. It is in fact true that the itus in English verse can be filled by any of a number of phonetic features--stressing, change of pitch, duration, timbre, any unusual feature of articulation. Since the phonetic basis of metrics still remains obscure in its fine details, we are in one sense no further along than Saintsbury was, and if we thought he knew what he was doing we might think him wise to refuse all pat and premature answers.

It is for such reasons as those above that the first Book in the Historical
Manual is essentially worthless, since it is there that Saintsbury presents his system. The second and third Books, however, presenting (respectively) the history of the poets' verse-technique and the metrists' theories, are admirably succinct. The fourth and last Book of "Auxilliary Apparatus" contains an unfortunately dogmatic Glossary and a too-brief bibliography, but it also contains two other resources nowhere else available: a list of major English poets, summarizing the prosodic achievements of each, and a list of major English verseforms, explaining the origin of each. Altogether, the design, scope, and convenience of the Historical Manual make it a useful work even yet, and after proper exhortations of caution, one can still recommend it to advanced undergraduates.

E637 -----. A History of English Criticism: Being the English Chapters of "A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe." Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1911; 2nd ed. "revised, adapted, and supplemented," 1925; rpt 1949. Saintsbury's one-volume history of criticism, with observations and remarks passim on prosody. He is especially close on Wordsworth and Coleridge (an entire chapter, one of eight, and the longest in the book). None of his opinions on prosodists seems altered significantly from those in the History of English Prosody (A8) or elsewhere. See especially his remarks beginning on pages 40, 273, 318, 504, and 511. See also his earlier:

E638 -----, ed. Loci Critici. Boston and London: Ginn and Co., 1903, 1931. This is Saintsbury's earlier anthology of literary criticism, with useful introduction and notes to the excerpts.


E643 -----. "Some Recent Studies in English Prosody." Proceedings of the British Academy 9 (1919): 79-89; also published separately as an offprint by Oxford University Press in 1920. Saintsbury reviews four recent developments: (1) attempts at quantitative verse, (2) vers libre, (3) "Mechanics," or phonetic-laboratory analyses of verse, and (4) "Musicians," the school of metrists who emphasize time. All four are disparaged, as one would expect--the first as impossible, the second as feeble in result, the third as irrelevant, and the fourth as misguided into taking literally what is only analogy.
A short pamphlet denying that syllables are indivisible and claiming that, phonetically at least, syllabic divisions are quite other than what we are told at school they are. An eccentricity.

Of the latter, three. Saul cites two--application of classical nomenclature to scansion and pursuit of the musical analogy to verse. The third is this article, if he really believes "all speculation on metrics is essentially absurd."

Say's position in the evolution of eighteenth-century metrical theory is a transitional one: he is very intent to preserve all the old trappings of Quantity in his metric, yet he admits the legitimacy of the substitute Accent, and he denotes syllables by musical notes as well. He defines the foot as "so many sounds as may be united together in One Movement"; "they are distinguish'd by different Names, according to the different Quantity or Disposition of the TIME in which we pronounce 'em, or the Stress of the Voice that is laid upon 'em." The equivocal or persists throughout. The syllables "Of Harmony," for example, "if we regard the Time only, [are] two Pyrrhicus's, but the Former, [of these is] distinguish'd by a strong Accent, which gives it, to an English Ear, the Force of an Iambick." He allows six elementary feet (spondee and tribrach), excluding the pyrrhic; its "Defect of Time is, in some measure, supply'd by a Stronger or Weaker Accent." The Appendix to the Postscript is noteworthy for the antipathy to elision that it expresses--a commonplace for a century thereafter-- and for a couplet, contrived to illustrate the equality of timing in the lines despite variances in count of syllables, which become something close to a touchstone in the later prosodic literature.
Say shows some indebtedness to Pemberton (E611), but he is important historically for his stiff resistance to strict syllable-counting ("Smooth and Unvaried Uniformity of Numbers") and his early approval of metrical expressiveness. Fussell's rapturous estimation of Say (E34, pp. 111-17) is, however, an over-reading. Both the temporal and the accentual theories of English meter are embraced by Say.

A dense, critically informed, historical survey.

This primer merited (?) a notice in Englische Studien 36 (1906): 408-9.

Part 1 gives a historical sketch, Middle English to the present; Part 2 treats forms. A modern approach, and very well informed.

It is a pity that this essay has not been more widely published: as a student’s introduction it states in six pages what many handbooks cover less coherently in two hundred. Noting the presence and functions of time in rhythm, still Shapiro scans by stress and substitution. Even more valuable, though, is the careful separation of traditional, metered verse from our contemporary forms, since the prosody of the former is only bewildering to the student in the face of the latter.

Sheridan opposes application of all foreign metrical systems to English: it has neither the strict syllabism of the French nor the quantities of the classical meters. He is emphatic about the accentual basis of English meter: the English poet "need not pay the least attention to quantity." He even believes that accent regulates quantity in English, as did so many grammarians, but with a twist: in Sheridan's view the accent may fall on either the vowel or the consonant of an English syllable: if on the former, then the vowel is lengthened, as is the syllable, but if on the latter, then the syllable is shortened. This idea he reiterates in all four of his treatises.metrical feet he thinks "correspond to bars in music," though he does not press the analogy and in fact keeps its members distinct. He allows eight feet, four disyllabic and four trisyllabic, giving them such names as "third trisyllabic," etc.; the monosyllabic foot ("syllabic iambus") is also allowed. Wooden regularity in meter is deplored, and trochaic, pyrrhic, and spondaic substitutions are allowed for variety. Strict regularity of stress in verse is of course proper, as it is in music, but is superseded by the demands of Variety and Expression.

It is Sheridan's unique theory of accent which allows him to hold that English verse has both that which the classical verse had, and more--i.e., that our verse has feet formed on both quantity and accent: "we are not only allowed the use of all the ancient poetic feet..." but we have duplicates of each, agreeing in movement, though differing in measure, and which make different impressions on the ear, an opulence peculiar to our language, and which may be the source of a boundless variety." But this bivalent system eventually leads to disaster, as Sheridan is forced to revert to the classical terminology for the quantitative feet while employing his own for the accentual feet, simultaneously; the double system becomes a double bind. The whole thing is clearly unsupportable, though Sheridan ploughs ahead manfully. Sheridan may have developed his theory as early as 1762 (cf. his Lectures on Elocution and Dissertation of that date).

Especially the section "Of the Recitation of Poetic Numbers" at the end. The substance of this account is very similar to that in all Sheridan's earlier ones: he urges again his idea that the stress in English syllables may fall either on the vowel or on the consonant. He also urges that in the recitation of verse the lengthened vowel be held strictly twice the duration of the short vowel.

There are stray remarks on versification passim ("the greatest part of poets have appareled their poetical inventions in that numbrous kind of writing which is called verse--indeed but appareled, verse being but an ornament and no cause
to poetry... One may be a poet without versing, and a versifier without poetry"), but Sidney only faces the issue squarely near the end. Though he had tried his hand at quantitative verses in the Arcadia, the mood for experimentation soon dissolved in the face of the prosodic realities of making verse in English: "Now, of versifying there are two sorts, the one Ancient, the other Modern: The Ancient marked the quantity of each syllable... the Modern observing only number (with some regard of the accent); the chief life of it stands in that like sounding of the words, which we call Ryme... New, for the ryme, though we do not observe quantity, yet we observe the accent very precisely." See also:


See criticism by Mayor (E592, Chapter 7). This half-buried and nearly-forgotten essay merits further work: Skeat was a distinguished scholar, and his metrical system presented here (taken from the 1888 Accent and Rhythm perhaps by J. Blake (E484)) is intriguing. He dismisses the concept of "foot" as a vestige of a foreign metric and argues instead that the metrical unit in English is a clustering of weak syllables around each stress. The groups he allows are: Tone (I), Accent (É I), Cadence (I É), and Extension (É É). (Reasons are given for excluding other possibilities). These four types produce sixteen possible forms of five-stress (and also four-stress) lines. The principle for defining these metrical units is clearly morphemic-syntactic, and one is left to wonder what other principle might be preferable. What is lost here, one sees, is the counterpointing of metrical units against word- and phrase-boundaries. But then again some descriptive adequacy is gained.


A primer of grammar, prosody, orthography, pronunciation, etc., with Glossary. Pages 16-73 treat versification--Smith has a penchant for the old Greek nomenclature.


Recognizing "the distinction between rhythm and metre... the forced adjustment of natural speech rhythm to foreign metre within the English verse line," Sorensen employs a double scansion system; meter is based on accent, while rhythm is found to be composed of rhythm, the clusters of "syllables adhering to a major speech accentuation." By photographing oscilloscope patterns, he is able to identify thirty-two types of rhythm. Analysis of the first two scenes in Hamlet.


Not seen. Cited in NUC as located at the Library of Congress, but lost.

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The text is a small, diachronically organized anthology. See the Introduction, pp. 10-62: "Of English verse the constituent parts are feet and pauses. All feet . . . can consist of but two or three syllables." Besides the three common feet, he allows five others: dactylic, pyrrhic, spondaic, amphibrachic, and tribrachic. This Introduction was reprinted at Paris in 1852 as

E662  Traité de versification anglaise.


A student's handbook of metrical and stanzaic forms, each chapter of which takes its illustrations from one major British poet. Scans by stresses alone.


Exegesis of the seven laws of stress verse formulated by Bridges in the chapter he appended to the 1901 edition of Milton's Prosody, followed by thorough analysis of three of his poems in that meter. The most interesting aspect of Bridges' whole theory is that he marks the feet of stress verse according to phrasal boundaries, since the stresses are said to control their proclitics and enclitics.


Applies the method of La Drière (E570) to Eliot.


An eloquent meditation on the relations of the abstract metrical form and the natural rhythm of stresses, based on very close inspection of some lines by Milton. The point: "the interaction between meter and [rhythmic] context which is already sufficiently created to be there . . . and between meter and the context in the dynamic process of becoming context." In short, "the meter figures twice." See John Crowe Ransom's summary comments at E627.


Stein begins with an explicit assumption that iambic lines are composed of feet; the, "what is important is not which syllables can carry the ictus under what semantic readings."

The Elizabethan usage of the auxilliary do is examined. Generative metrics is dismissed; temporalist metrics requires modification--the concept of isochrony must be modified, even though it "cannot in any reasonable way be used to describe certain varieties of iambic pentameter." From a very large sample of lines, a Paradigm is constructed for all the possible variations in the line which will not destroy the meter.


An introductory student's manual: Strunk distinguishes rhythm from meter and
accepts the foot, though somewhat freely (allowing up to four syllables).
Chapter 3, "The Line and the Foot," is of interest; the rest is conventional.

A surprisingly expansive yet readable introduction to English versification for French students, a book which avoids tedious technicalities on the one hand yet also avoids the temptations of impressionism on the other. Suhamy explicitly divides meter from rhythm, devoting a separate chapter to each, followed by (among others) chapters on the alliterative, syllabic, accentual, and quantitative meters in English. The general conception of verse set forth is double: the sounds function both rhetorically and rhythmically (as incantation) at once. See pp. 23, 41-42 for some interesting speculations on the regularity of the breath-units underneath irregular phrasing, and a formulation: Thought : Breath = Rhythm : Sound.

It would be a disparagement to call this book simply a primer: it has the great advantage of being utterly candid about its principles. It lucidly separates the stress-metered verse of English from the length-metering of Greek and Latin, acknowledging Omond's views of "duple time," and mentioning other systems of scansion as well. And its attention (three major sections of four) rests squarely on meter, unlike so many others.

An important essay, despite its location: Taglicht quarrels with Wimsatt & Beardsley and others over the degree of abstraction that meter achieves over the phonological features that it organizes. His position is that an auditor can hear the meter in a proper poetic recitation, but that "by no process of abstraction . . . does it seem possible to arrive at the traditional metrical foot." The relevance of a given phonological feature for meter is not a matter of either-or [this is the received opinion] but of degree, so that a "scale of delicacy" is possible in analysis: the patterning of a feature may or may not be included in metrical analysis depending on what degree of description is desired. The terms "meter" and "rhythm" are nearly useless by now; "architectonic rhythm" and "pictorial rhythm" would be better. Syllables in English bear stress (here, "rhythmical stress"), "accent" (intonational prominence), and "tone" (pitch)--making up four degrees of prominence altogether. A metrical analysis discriminating all four varieties turns out to be (based on the examples here) remarkably delicate.

I believe it was C. S. Lewis, in his essay on "M etre," who first articulated the modern disparagement of inductive studies of meter. Tarlinskaja's massive study should put that ghost finally to rest. Surpassing the work of O mond, Bridges, Smith, Stewart, Chatman, Halle-Keyser, and Tsur in both scope and detail, EVTH is the most extensive and most important study of English verse-structure produced in this century. Like the earlier analyses of Mayor, Bridges, and Young, Tarlinskaja's analysis is inductive, but unlike theirs her 230 pages
of discussion and conclusions are based on a computer-assisted inventory of over 100,000 lines of verse from the 13th to the 19th centuries, the results of the analysis being displayed in 103 pages of statistical tables and charts. Hence, EVTH is truly the first work on English meter which we can legitimately acknowledge as both comprehensive in scope and based on a thorough examination of the evidence. It treats all three principal English metrical systems, the syllabo-tonic (accentual-syllabic), tonic (accentual), and free verse, specifically the dramatic and non-dramatic iambic pentameter, the iambic and trochaic tetrameter, four-stress meter (esp. ternary), and mixed forms—the mixed syllabo-tonic/tonic and the mixed syllabo-tonic/syllabic.

In Tarlinskaja’s theory, metrical position or ictus is distinguished from linguistic stress, the strong position (ictus) being filled by (a mandatory) one syllable and the weak position (non ictus) by (a permissible) one to two syllables. The concept of the metrical foot is affirmed and the five commonest meters are admitted: iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, and amphibrachic. Anacrusis is also noted. Meter is defined as “the alternation of ictuses and non-ictuses in a certain sequence, regardless of the phenomenon which serves as the basis of this alternation.” In a given meter each of these two positions in the sequence, each of these two positions in the sequence will be one of two types: ictuses are either obligatorily stressed or predominantly stressed; nonictuses are either obligatorily unstressed or predominantly unstressed.

For each meter investigated Tarlinskaja develops a complex statistical profile of the accentual and syllabic variations, identifying the metrical norm, the deviations, (acceptable or anomalous) from that norm, and the metrical threshold at the far edge of deviation where the meter becomes some other meter or nonmeter. Chapters 1-3 treat premetrical problems, viz., the accentual structure of Middle and Early Modern English; Tarlinskaja affirms the existence of “doublets” and investigates the surprisingly high percentage (80 %) of monosyllables in English verse. Chapter 4 treats Middle English rhymed verse, chapter 5, the iambic and trochaic tetrameter, which weakened in their syllabic structure in an early stage to become four-stress verse (Tarlinskaja adopts the term for the Russian form of this meter, the “dol'nik”), both binary and ternary. Chapters 6 and 7 treat the dramatic vs. the non-dramatic iambic pentameter, and the final chapter, the odd hybrid verseform of Donne’s Satyres. Four Appendices treat some curious and intriguing problems in comparative versification.

This is a seminal monograph, full of a wealth of information by no means yet fully mined. It should also demonstrate to anyone not yet apprised of the fact that it is not the English who are pioneering the study of verse in this century. The study is based on ten years of previous research:


In order to examine the realizations and simplifications of linguistic stress-patterns in meter, Tarlinskaja differentiates "the concepts of 'phrasal stress' and 'verbal stress' [i.e. lexical stress]," emphasizing and exploring the former. "The degree of phrasal stress of the syllable is determined first of all by semantic and grammatical (chiefly syntactic) factors. A scanion system is proposed for phrasal stress with three degrees ("strong phrasal stress, secondary stress, and lack of stress"), each degree having also two subdegrees, with different symbols for occurrences in ictic and nonctic positions in the line (making twelve in all). (The system is adapted from G. P. Torsuev.) Lengthy statistical analyses of the English iambic pentameter line follow.


E678 ------. "Meter and Rhythm of Pre-Chaucerian R hyed Verse." Linguistics, no. 121 (1974), pp. 65-87. Original Russian version appeared in V oprosy jazykoznanija 3 (1971): 73-88. Glossing Lehmann (L457), Tarlinskaja explains the shift from OE stress-verse to the accentual-syllabic verse of ME in terms of changes in the phonological and syntactic structure of the language. Statistical analyses of King Horn against six other ME poems and some ModE ones reveals their accentual, syllabic, and metrical structure. These patterns turn out to be "diffused," i.e. not clear-cut, but in general the ME line contained eight syllables, three to four stresses (almost equally distributed), and four ictuses. (King Horn has six, two to three, and three.) A considerable number of other specific features are also analyzed statistically. Conclusion: though ME poetry shows mixed and transitional forms, it mainly displays "an accentual-syllabic character."


E683 ------. "The Syllabic Structure and Meter of English Verse From the Thirteenth Through the Nineteenth Century." Language and Style 6 (1973): 249-72. The article is about evenly divided between analyses of Stress Verse and Syllable-Stress (accentual-syllabic) Verse. In the first half (drawn in part from E678), Tarlinskaja examines the Middle English rhymed verse of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially King Horn and four other poems. Tabular data is presented on N umber of Syllables per line, N umber of Stresses, N umber of Ictus Positions, Lines with Iambic beginnings, and Disyllabic occupancy of nonictic positions (the loosening of the accentual-syllabic pattern). Lines missing a syllable at the caesura also seem characteristic of the period. The second half of the essay examines M odern English verse with respect to syllabic variation (mono- or di-syllabic in nonictic positions) in Donne, Pope, Shelley, and Byron. Donne is found to be the poet closest to...
the pure accentual pattern, with more syllabic variation than his successors.


E685 -----. "Verse--Prose--Meter." Linguistics, no. 129 (1974), pp. 63-86. A lengthy statistical analysis of samples from nearly all the major English poets reveals the location of the limen between Metrical and Unmetrical in the poetic line. At what point does iambic verse become non-metrical? If more than 5% of the lines have disyllables in a weak (nonictic) position; if more than 25% lack stresses in nonictic positions; if more than 21% have stresses in nonictic positions. No more than 2% of the lines may have no more than 5 "non-typical" syllables. Overall, English iambic verse contains about 2% unmetrical lines. Conclusions apply to "non-dramatic Modern English iambic pentameter." The method used here synthesizes concepts from both traditional and generative metrics in order to locate the "marginal thresholds."


E687 Thompson, John. "Linguistic Structure and the Poetic Line." Poetics I (A16), pp. 167-76; rpt in Freeman (A22), pp. 336-46. A summary outline of the theory underlying The Founding of English Metre (E91), i.e., the three-level metrical paradigm comprises the abstract metrical pattern, the natural stress-patterns in the language, and the intermediate, "compromise," tensioned pattern--the line of poetry itself. The pattern in the meter imitates the sound pattern in the language itself, and the poetic line imitates the meter, thereby imitating--re-enacting, dramatizing--the structure of the language itself.

E688 -----. "Sir Philip and the Forsaken Iamb." Kenyon Review 20 (1958): 90-115. From the august, nearly rhapsodic tone of this piece I had almost thought it by Ransom; was it for him, at least? Thompson chides Stein for attributing to meter functions which are properly those of intonation, or performance; what meter is and does, utterly by itself, is not easy to see: the most one can say, Thompson concludes, is that "meter is nothing but an imitation of language... Imitation itself is the sufficient reason of meter. For what poetry imitates... is the structure of the language itself... Art comes to reality through artifice." Toward this end, T. shows that in Sidney's verse there are two attitudes toward meter: in the Arcadia, the linguistic stresses are matched precisely and supply to the metrical pattern; in Astrophel and Stella the correspondence is no less exacting, but "Sidney manages to combine a formal satisfaction of the metrical pattern with phrases whose stresses frequently violate that pattern." I.e., the meter so prevails over speech stresses which within their phrases so thwart it that nearly every syllable in the line is emphasized, giving a remarkable elevation to the whole throughout. Sidney's meter, then, is "supremely contrived," and it was his genius to see that two systems could...
interact while being kept separate.


An attempt to write metrical rules for some Alexandrines by Bridges, based on the rules for stress-shift that Bridges himself developed for the later Milton and Shakespeare. Then, generalizing, Trevelyan observes the widening breach between the syllabic- and the stress-meters, which traditionally have been welded together in English poetry.

In response, Sutton insists that English meter is based on number of feet and not number of syllables in the line; he also argues that Milton did not resort to elision to regularize the syllable-count in his lines. Coleman spurns this latter view.


A reduced history of English versification along the lines of Schipper and Kaluza, printed by offset from a typescript. The first half is historical, treating Old and Middle English verse through Chaucer; the second half is structural, surveying the commonest verseforms and devices. The bibliography is well informed.


Lamenting the fact that we have not yet achieved anything like "an orderly and comprehensive knowledge of the laws and principles of English verse," Van Dyke argues that the only method which will yield such a result will be entirely inductive; for a set of generally acceptable descriptive terms, also requisite, he suggests stress for "the points and emphasis which are really the structural factors of the verse," bar for that group of syllables bound together and dominated by the stress, and iambic, etc., for the patterns. Sound-organization also discussed.


Includes chapters on Blank Verse (Surrey through Arnold), Trochaic Meters, and Imitations of Classical Forms (Hexameters, Sapphics, and others).


The four commonest meters together with regular variations.


Saintsbury's (A8) judgment of Wadham was that "he really knows... nothing whatever about the subject" (vol. 3, pp. 440-42), but this is too severe. Wadham's book may not detain anyone's notice beyond one inspection because the weight of the book rests on an eccentric (hence irritating) new terminology for all the old familiar devices. For that, oblivion. Yet he can also lucidly separate the quantitative from the accentual prosodies, recognizing that the old, dogged effort of the grammarians to preserve the Latin system and force it onto English, by calling accented syllables long and unaccented short, caused irreparable harm and literally centuries of delay in the advance of clear thinking. That recognition is just, salutary, and valuable.
Watts, Isaac. "The Author's Preface" to his *Horae Lyricae*. Poems, Chiefly of the Lyric Kind. London, 1706, 1709, etc. Many editions. See esp. pp. ciii-civ, cix-cx. The Preface elaborates a pious defense of poetry against the charge of profanation, maintaining that verse may properly be used by the Christian pen to win souls away from baser attractions. Watts approves of sonnets, "the free and unconfined numbers of Pindar," Miltonic blank verse, heroic verse (couplets), and "the narrow metre of our Psalm translators" (ballad meter) as appropriate forms. He considers Milton too long in his periods, too "harsh and uneasy" in numbers, and too quaintly uncouth in diction. But couplets should have an equal "variety of cadence, comma, and period. . . . It degrades the excellency of the best versification when the lines run on by couplets, twenty together, just in the same place, and with the same pauses."

Webb, Daniel. *Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music*. London, 1769; rpt in his Miscellanies. London, 1802. See esp. pp. 63-132: pp. 63-70 treat imitative sound, 76-115 meter, 115-23 improvement of language and versification, and 124-32 poetry and music. Webb believes that English verse has quantity like the Greek, but for us "the quantities of syllables are but the variations of accent." English meter has feet (but not monosyllabic ones); the pentameter consists of "five feet, or ten syllables" and must end in an iamb, two trochees in a row being offensive. But Webb is strongly in favor of trisyllabic substitutions for expressive effect. (On this point Fussell in E34 contradicts himself glaringly--see pp. 28 and 130--even citing the same page in Webb.) His work offers a fresh view, unconstrained by conventionalities, and seems to have been an influential one. Reference: Omond (A5), pp. 64-67, though his page citations there are erroneous by one digit in the hundreds column. See also E1340.

Wesley, Samuel. *An Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry*. London: Charles Harper, 1700. A broadside poem of about 1100 lines with a Preface. Much talk of "Numbers" and "Quantity" throughout, as well as on Pause, though the following—

But little more of Quantity we know
Than what our Accent does and Custom show:
The Latin Fountains often we forsake,
As they the Greek; nay different Ages take
A different Path. Perfume and Envy now
We say, which Ages past would scarce allow.
If no Position make our Accent strong
Most Syllables are either short or long

--- suggests that the concept of quantity was purely conventional and the meter actually based on stress.

Whitmore, Charles, E. "A Proposed Compromise in Metrics." *PMLA* 41 (1926): 1024-43. This empirical approach to (1) standard variations of the pentameter line, (2) "rising vs. "falling" rhythm, and (3) notation is indeed conciliatory, though slightly blurred. There is little to remark except for two points: the biological metaphor (elaborated on pp. 1025 and 1042) Whitmore applies to metrical theory is apt and fruitful, and his conception of "points of support" in the pentameter line [these seem to be the crucial lexical and rhetorical stresses in the line, quite variable in number] with scansion notation thereof [three points
of support on the second, sixth, and tenth syllables of a line would be notated 2-6-10) is, if not novel, still concisely expressed and useful.

Wimsatt, W. K., Jr. "On Scanning English Meters." Michigan Quarterly Review 5 (1966): 291-95. A review of Gross (E38); though Wimsatt is not especially excited to see a new statement of "the normal expressionist theory," yet he does admit its persuasiveness—he only wants more precision in description and explanation. So, too, Gross comes in for some chastisement for bardolatry of the moderns. Yet the two prosodists are in considerable agreement on the tenets of an accentual theory of meter, most of which Wimsatt sketches out. See, too, his very important observations on the "iambic?/trochaic?" problem [my term] at the end. There is much of Gross here, but more of Wimsatt.

Wimsatt, W. K., Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction." PMLA 74 (1959): 585-98. Rpt in Chatman and Levin (A21), pp. 91-114; in Gross (A23), pp. 150-67; abstracted in Seboek (A19), pp. 193-96. Followed by two very important exchange; see below. A landmark white paper in the history of English metrics: Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay is undertaken as an explicit restatement and defense of the traditional account of metrics against two newer systems, the structural-linguistic and the temporal-musical. The authors criticize Chatman for an "insufficient [pragmatic] concern for the normative fact of the poem's meter" over and above the level of linguistic features, and they criticize W hitehall for failing to differentiate the level of isochronism (rhythm) from the level of isoaccentualism and isosyllabism (meter). The Trager-Smith analysis "may be helpful" but it also "may be in excess of any strictly metrical need." But more generally, the objection to linguistic metrics is that "the poem is not to be identified with any particular performance of it, or any set of such performances . . . not everything which is true of some particular performance will be necessarily true of the poem. . . . A performance is an event, but the poem itself, if there is any poem, must be some kind of enduring object." Temporal metrics may be classed together with linguistic--since timing is a linguistic phenomenon--as equally (mistakenly) performance-oriented. And the problem with musical scansion is that it specifies time-values too precisely; it is directive rather than descriptive. Verse can indeed be isochronic, but do we know that it is invariably so?

Meter, however, inheres at "certain rudimentary levels of linguistic organization" where the only important feature is "relative degrees of stress . . . in certain positions." In the authors' view the two principles of English meter are not time and stress but rather stress-counting and syllable-counting; these produce the two chief metrical systems in English, stress verse and syllable-stress verse, relatives whose affinity is obvious but ancestry obscure. Northrop Frye was mistaken to identify the pentameter line as an overlay or higher level of the four-stress line. But it is the Relative Stress Principle--whereby the slack of one foot may be stronger than the stress of another, judgments being allowable only within the foot--that is the linchpin of English syllable-stress meter. (Wimsatt and Beardsley also accept the Allophonic Principle--the second of two equal impulses will be heard as louder--and its implication, the impossibility of pyrrhics and spondees.) Other metrical orderings are possible, such as the hierarchical multiples of "dipodic feet." The structural linguists, however, are right to focus on the matter of tension (the authors prefer to substitute the term "interplay" for the same idea), as in the promotion and supression of medial stresses so as to conform to the meter. The meter is one of the two poles generating that tension, and not the tension, or a result of the
tension. How do we know? "You can write a grammar of the meter. And if you cannot, there is no meter. But you cannot write a grammar of the meter's interaction with the sense, any more than you can write a grammar of the arrangement of metaphors. . . . the free and individual and unpredictable parts of the poetry. You can perceive them, and study them, and talk about them, but not write rules for them. The meter, like the grammar and the vocabulary, is subject to rules."

A retrospective, after two decades, may find some of the fine points of this essay decidedly blurry, and it may be surprised to notice a curious repetitiveness of structure, but these are mere quibbles against the solid mass of this seminal essay.

Naturally, the essay provoked sharp responses soon after: see the ensuing exchanges between Wimsatt and Beardsley and Joseph Hendren (E357) then Elias Schwartz (E328). See also B. Q. Morgan (E603).

(Written for or just after he returned from the Indiana Conference on Style in 1958; the Kenyon forum was 1956.)


E702 Wode, Henning. "Linguistische Grundlagen verslicher Strukturen im Englischen." Folia Linguistica 4 (1970): 372-92. A study of Stress-placement and Segmentation in verse. The author refuses to allow that meter promotes stresses or that emphatic stressing influences the line; he will allow only "normal stressing." On line-division or segmentation he asserts that poems on the linguistic level do not have lines; only if a literary text can be produced can a graphic segmentation analysis be made. What is to be the unit of verse must be stipulated by arbitrary convention from the literary point of view not from linguistic (i.e. oral) analysis. Segmentation is more often phonological than grammatical.


An experiment designed to test Chatman's theory that the heard stresses depend on the "pressuring" of the "metrical set" (E713). The conclusion falls against that theory, though there was no consensus among the subjects, who were asked to mark down which syllables they heard as stressed when a poem was read aloud to them. Notice in the tables of results how agreement among subjects falls off, progressively. Wode notes that none of the subjects ever marked an unstressed syllable as stressed due to "set," but judges also--albeit tentatively--that from the notations of the subjects no reliable information about the linguistic structure of the text can be gained. Areas for further clarification: time allowed, and the poetic expertise and social structure in the group of subjects. But note that Wode does not distinguish stress-verse from foot-verse.


E706  Young, F. E. Brett. Robert Bridges: A Critical Study. London: Martin Secker, 1914. Chapters 6, 7, and 11 present what is as much an original theory of versification as a study in Bridges, for it is indeed novel to maintain that neither Chaucer nor Milton wrote iambics, that the iambic pentameter is not accented on the even syllables, that Bridges misunderstands Milton's prosody in every way, that the whole of English versification is one long, gross "mistake." Young patiently explains to us that English verse is actually scanned by speech-cadences and simple isosyllabism of line, but concludes that the right road for poetry in the future is that of true quantitative hexameters.

E707  Young, Sir George. An English Prosody on Inductive Lines. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928. 279 pp. Too much neglected. Young's survey offers both theory and history of English meters in a more diminished form than Saintsbury or Schipper. He is firmly a "Stresser" (p. 86) and will hear nothing of isochrony; he explicitly separates the domains of rhythm and meter. Six chapters on theory treat the norm and its variations by "stress-shift," "defect of syllable," "extra syllable," and "mid-line primary variations." The remainder of the book traces the history of the "cinquepace" (pentameter) line in all its forms from Middle English to Tennyson, with chapters on Milton and "Shakespeare as a Metrist."
