

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-44581-9 - Chapters on: English Metre: Second Edition
Edited by Joseph B. Mayor
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CHAPTERS
ON
ENGLISH METRE.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-44581-9 - Chapters on: English Metre: Second Edition
Edited by Joseph B. Mayor
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-44581-9 - Chapters on: English Metre: Second Edition
Edited by Joseph B. Mayor
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CHAPTERS ON

ENGLISH METRE

BY

JOSEPH B. MAYOR, M.A.

HONORARY FELLOW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

SECOND EDITION

REVISED AND ENLARGED.

CAMBRIDGE:
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.
1901

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-44581-9 - Chapters on: English Metre: Second Edition
Edited by Joseph B. Mayor
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107445819

© Cambridge University Press 1901

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1901

First paperback edition 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-44581-9 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-44581-9 - Chapters on: English Metre: Second Edition
Edited by Joseph B. Mayor
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

My attention was first drawn to the exact study of English prosody many years ago in lecturing on Shakespeare to classes both male and female. As a rule I found those who attended the classes devoid of any but the vaguest idea of metre; and I knew of no book which I could recommend to them as giving an entirely satisfactory account of the matter, the books of the highest authority seeming to me to start from assumptions which were inconsistent with the practice of English poets from the time of Shakespeare downwards. I endeavoured to point out these inconsistencies and, at the same time, to give the outline of what I thought to be a truer system, in three papers, which were read before the London Philological Society between the years 1874 and 1877. The substance of those papers, greatly modified and expanded, appears in the chapters which follow, numbered I. to V. VIII. XI.; the remaining chapters are altogether new.

My own views have naturally undergone some change in the interval which has elapsed since the first paper was written. For instance, I have now no doubt (see examples from Shelley in p. 242) that we must recognize the substitution of tribrachs for iambs in English blank verse, a point which was still an

open question to me when pp. 71 and 75 were written. I am now less disposed to agree with Dr Abbott in his attempt to explain away Shakespeare's trisyllabic feet by the process of slurring, than I was when I wrote my paper on *Macbeth* (pp. 174 foll.). On the other hand, I have given in p. 200 the reasons which have finally decided me to adopt Dr Abbott's, rather than Mr A. J. Ellis's view, in reference to the feminine caesura, of which I had spoken doubtfully in my earlier paper. As far as I know, these are the only points in which any difference of view will be found; should there be any others, a reference to the Index will at once enable the reader to compare together all that is said on any given subject.

There is another matter on which I should like to add a word to what is stated in the text. Prof. H. Sidgwick, who has most kindly looked over some of the proof-sheets, suggests, in reference to the chapter on Metrical Metamorphosis, that it would be well to make it more clear to the reader, that it is not a mere verbal question, whether, for instance, a line should be called an iambic with initial truncation or a trochaic with final truncation; and asks me how I would propose to answer "the real and interesting aesthetic question, whether the type (i.e. the normal line) so far predominates in the reader's mind, that he feels the particular line (which departs from the normal line) rather as a variant than as a distinct change of type." To this I would reply (1) that my chief aim will be accomplished, if I can get my readers to observe the different metrical effects of the lines which they read, and to describe them in clear and definite terms, and that this will not be interfered with, even though we should allow of alternative expressions for the same fact; (2) that a certain number of variants have now become established, as it were, by universal consent, such as the feminine iambic and truncated

PREFACE.

vii

trochaic; (3) that when a question arises about the scansion of a line which cannot be referred to any such recognized subclass, it is not ordinarily a matter of indifference which of two possible explanations we shall adopt, but that we have first to compare such a line with the other lines of the poem in which it occurs, and see whether we can discover any similar irregularities, as for instance in regard to Milton's use of the double trochee (p. 38); and must reject any theory which will not suit all such irregular lines. (See the discussion in pp. 86, 87, 92 on the metre of *Christabel*.) (4) that in cases where nothing can be absolutely decided from a comparison of the rest of the poem or of other similar poems, the choice between two possible explanations of a verse must in the last resort rest with the educated taste of the reader. It is not enough simply that the ear should be naturally sensitive to the harmonies of sound; the ear must have been accustomed to the particular metre or rhythm, or it will not be able to appreciate it rightly. No doubt it is possible that, even so, differently constituted minds and ears may be differently affected by the same break or change in the rhythm. In such a case I should be inclined to say with Horne Tooke 'truth is what each man troweth'; the accurate explanation will be that which accurately expresses each man's own feeling of the rhythm of the line.

I have given my book the title of *Chapters on Metre* in order to show that it makes no pretence to completeness. I have not attempted to deal, otherwise than incidentally, either with the aesthetic or the historic side of metrical investigation. I have barely touched on such matters as alliteration and rhyme: I have not ventured to pronounce an opinion as to the origin and early history of our metres. What I have endeavoured to do is to ascertain by a process of induction the more general laws of

our modern metre, and to test the results on a variety of instances. I wish very much that some competent scholar would take up that historical side of the question which I have left untouched. To mention only one part of it, I do not know where to find a really careful investigation of the growth of accentual Latin verse. It would have been admirably done by the ever-to-be-lamented Munro, if he had chosen to turn his attention to it. I remember hearing long ago a paper read by him before the Cambridge Philosophical Society, in which he drew attention to the importance of the accent as colouring the rhythm even of the quantitative verse of the Augustan age. Thus he contrasted the rude sing-song of the soldiers at Caesar's triumph,

Ecce Caesar nunc triumphat qui subegit Gallias,

where the verbal accent corresponds throughout with the stress of the quantitative metre, and such a line as that of Virgil,

Itáliam fáto prófugus Lavinia venit,

where the poet studiously opposes the accent to the metre.

What may be the earliest specimen of pure accentual verse in Latin I am unable to say. We are told by Christ (*Metrik der Griechen und Römer*, p. 402) that Ritschl considered the mill-song of the Lesbian women (*ἄλει, μύλα, ἄλει*) to be an early example of accentual metre in Greek. In Latin the *Instructiones* of the barbarous Com modianus (flourished about the middle of the third century) is usually named as the first specimen of accentual verse, but his metre is almost as indifferent to accent as it is to quantity. The example quoted by Dr Donaldson in his Latin Grammar is a poem on two of the Diocletian martyrs commencing

Dúae quaedam réferuntur Rómae natae féminae.

PREFACE.

ix

Whatever may be the date of the earliest existing specimen, there can be no doubt that the feeling for quantity had long before died out among all but the learned few, and that such verses for instance as the irregular Phalaecians addressed to Alexander Severus (Lamprid. c. 38) would be ordinarily read as accentual iambs corresponding to the hendecasyllabic of modern Italian, our own 5-foot feminine.

*Pulchrum | quod vi|des es|se nos|trum re|gem
 Quem Sy|rum te|tulit | propa|go pul|chrum,
 Vena|tus fa|cit et | lepus | come|sus
 De quo | contin|uum | capit | lepo|rem.*

Hence I am unable to place implicit confidence in the assertion of Zarncke, that the origin of this metre cannot be traced further back than the Romance poets¹.

In conclusion I have to return my hearty thanks to Mr A. J. Ellis for allowing me to make free use of various papers on metre, to Dr Furnival and Prof. Paul Meyer of Paris for much helpful information, and to Mr Roby and Prof. Sidgwick for valuable criticisms and suggestions.

October 1886.

¹ 'Der fünfßüssige Iambus, als Zehnsilbler oder Eilfsilbler erscheinend, ist nicht vom Alterthume uns überliefert...Als selbstständiger Rhythmus erscheint der Vers nirgends (i.e. neither in Latin nor in Greek),' p. 3. See below Appendix A.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-44581-9 - Chapters on: English Metre: Second Edition
Edited by Joseph B. Mayor
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Note to the Second Edition.

The second Edition has been revised throughout and enlarged by the addition of a Chapter on the Metrical Systems of Dr Skeat and Mr Robert Bridges, originally addressed to the Philological Society; a Chapter on Shelley's Metre, originally read before the Shelley Society; and a Chapter on the English Hexameter, which appears here for the first time.

I cannot send forth this new edition without paying a last tribute to my old friend Prof. Henry Sidgwick, to whom I am deeply indebted not only for the interest which he took in my metrical studies, but also, far more, for the very great assistance I received from him during the last year of his life in preparing for the Press the Second Part of the *Exploratio Philosophica* of our common friend, John Grote, who was also his own predecessor in the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge.

Hort gone, Seeley gone, Sidgwick gone—to me and to many others, how dimmed is the glory of the Cambridge that we knew!

οἷη περ φύλλων γενεῇ τοιήδε καὶ ἀνδρῶν.

October 1901.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| A scientific treatment of the subject of metre is possible and is desirable. Scientific analysis must be kept apart from historical research and aesthetical criticism. Distinction between prose and verse. Use of classical terms in reference to English metre defended. Scansion by feet the basis of scientific analysis. Principles of metrical classification. Questions which the metrist has to answer | 1—11 |

CHAPTER II.

Antiquarian A-priorism.

| | |
|--|-------|
| Dr Guest's metrical system is based on the assumption that our modern verse should conform to the laws of Anglo-Saxon metre. His normal iambic line, with its two sections and its fixed pauses, is not recognized by our greatest poets, who place their stops where they like, and substitute freely trochees, pyrrhics, spondees and trisyllabic feet for the iamb. Dr Guest's theory compels him to condemn what is universally approved and approve what is universally condemned | 12—33 |
|--|-------|

CHAPTER III.

Logical A-priorism.

| | |
|---|-------|
| Dr Abbott starts with the true normal line, but is slow to see how it is modified and varied in the practice of the poets. Through his unwillingness to admit that other feet can be substituted for the iamb he is driven to disyllabize monosyllables, to lay stress on unaccented syllables, and to allow of extra-metrical syllables in almost any part of the line | 34—46 |
|---|-------|

CHAPTER IV.

Aesthetic Intuitivism.

| | PAGE |
|---|-------|
| Mr J. A. Symonds despairs of metrical analysis and would substitute an aesthetic analysis in its place. His various inconsistencies. His challenge to scan certain lines accepted | 47—53 |

CHAPTER V.

Natural or A-posteriori System.

| | |
|---|-------|
| Mr A. J. Ellis recognizes that the normal heroic line is rare in practice; that the number of syllables is often greater than ten, and the number of accents generally less, but sometimes more, than five. The stress denoted by the accent is not always the same. Illustrations from Milton and Byron. For the purpose of full analysis Mr Ellis distinguishes nine degrees of force, length, pitch, weight, and silence, giving altogether forty-five varieties of stress, and exemplifies these in some verses of his own. Limit of variation from the normal weak-strong (iambic) foot. Further illustrations from Milton. Criticisms on Mr Ellis's remarks, especially in reference to the limit of substitution of other feet for the iamb. Mr Masson finds pyrrhic, trochee, spondee, anapaest, dactyl, tribrach, cretic, amphibrach, antibacchius in Milton. His instances of the last four disputed. Mr Keightley on Milton's obligations to Italian verse, especially as regards certain uses of the trochee, and the hypermetric syllable at the caesura | 54—77 |
|---|-------|

CHAPTER VI.

Metrical Metamorphosis.

| | |
|---|-------|
| Difficulty of determining the metre of separate lines apart from the poems to which they belong. This arises partly from substitution of one foot for another, partly from the addition of a hypermetrical syllable, at the end in the case of iambic and anapaestic metres, at the beginning in the case of trochaic and dactylic; partly from initial truncation in iambic and anapaestic, and from final truncation in trochaic and dactylic metres. More rarely we find examples of internal truncation. It is owing to this principle of metamorphosis that four-foot iambic and trochaic metres so readily pass into one another, and that anapaestic lines are sometimes mistaken for amphibrachic. Metres may also be disguised by an unmetrical division of the lines. Symbols used for scansion | 78—95 |
|---|-------|

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

xiii

CHAPTER VII.

Two recent Metrical Systems.

| | PAGE |
|---|--------|
| 'Milton's Prosody' by Mr R. Bridges. His account of the earlier metre of Paradise Lost, and of the later metres of Paradise Regained and Samson. Objections to his use of the word elision and to his scanning of the choruses in Samson. His doctrine of the Miltonic 'fictions.' His principle, that metre is determined by the number of stresses irrespective of the number of syllables, tested by his own dramas, 'The Feast of Bacchus' and 'Nero.' Dr Skeat's accent groups, 'Tone,' 'Ascent,' 'Cadence,' 'Extension.' His classification of the varieties of the five-foot iambic line is arbitrary and incomplete. He considers that the amphibrach is the only trisyllabic foot used in English, denying the use both of the dactyl and the anapaest | 96—120 |

CHAPTER VIII.

Naming and Classification of Metres. Illustrations from Tennyson.

Examples of trochaic verses, truncated, complete, and hypermetrical, varying in length from two to eight feet. Substitution of iambs or dactyls for trochees. How the different trochaic lines are combined in poems. Iambic metres, truncated, complete, and hypermetrical, varying in length from two to seven feet. Substitution of trochee, anapaest, and dactyl for iamb. How the different iambic lines are combined in poems. Anapaestic metres, truncated, complete, and hypermetrical, varying in length from one foot to eight feet. Verses divided into sections with occasional internal truncation. Substitution of iamb for anapaest. How the different anapaestic lines are combined in poems. Difficulty of distinguishing between truncated anapaestic and truncated dactylic. Dactylic metres rare. Poems in mixed metres, regular or irregular; e.g. trochaic and iambic, iambic and anapaestic, trochaic and dactylic. Classical metres, hendecasyllabic and alcaic 121—145

CHAPTER IX.

Naming and Classification of Metres. Illustrations from the Hymn-book.

Explanation of the metrical terminology of the Hymn-book. Iambic stanzas of four lines classed according to the length of the lines, with special varieties noted. Iambic stanzas of more than four lines similarly classed. Trochaic, dactylic, and anapaestic stanzas similarly divided and classed. Mixed metres: iambic and trochaic, iambic and dactylic, iambic and anapaestic, trochaic and dactylic, trochaic and anapaestic. A riddle 146—156

CHAPTER X.

Blank Verse of Surrey and Marlowe.

| | PAGE |
|--|---------|
| Harshness of Surrey's rhythm. He freely admits a trochee or anapaest in any foot, and has often two trochees or anapaests in succession. His commonest pause is after the 4th syllable, but we also find a pause after the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 9th syllables, and he not unfrequently omits either the middle or final pause or both. Pauses which divide the feet have a harsh effect when the preceding syllable is accented. Uses feminine ending, broken lines and Alexandrines. Gascoyne's rule as to iambic metre. Marlowe more regular in accentuation than Surrey. Sometimes begins with a monosyllabic foot. Unusual pronunciation of proper names. Corrupt lines. He occasionally disyllabizes monosyllables, especially those which contain an <i>r</i> or <i>l</i> . Anapaests are common in any part of the line. Dactyls occur in the 1st and 4th feet. Trochees are common in the 1st foot, and in the 2nd and 3rd after a stop, but otherwise rarer than in Surrey. His pauses are usually at the end of the line and after the 4th or 6th syllable, but he also has the harsh dividing pause after an inverted accent | 157—167 |

CHAPTER XI.

Shakespeare's Blank Verse. Macbeth.

| | |
|---|---------|
| Syllabic variation of metre (1) by way of defect, in fragmentary and defective lines. Instances of the former in rapid dialogue, and also at the beginning, middle, and end of longer speeches. The latter may be explained by change of pronunciation, or by a significant pause, or by intentional lengthening of a long syllable. Syllabic variation (2) by way of excess, in extra-metrical syllables at the end of the line or after the caesura, or by superfluous syllables, sometimes elided or slurred, sometimes forming trisyllabic feet, or Alexandrine verses. Accentual variation by substitution of pyrrhic, spondee or trochee. Mr Ellis refuses to admit the Common Section, seeing no reason for completing Shakespeare's short lines. He considers that the recognition of the trisyllabic foot renders unnecessary the assumption of slurring, as well as of an extra-metrical syllable in the middle of the line | 168—193 |
|---|---------|

CHAPTER XII.

Shakespeare's Blank Verse. Hamlet.

| | |
|---|--|
| Examples of pyrrhic, spondee and trochee in all parts of the line. Feminine ending used more frequently in the less poetical passages. The extra syllable is often a monosyllable. The admission of the | |
|---|--|

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

XV

| | PAGE |
|---|---------|
| trissyllabic foot will not account for all the cases of feminine caesura. | |
| Anapaests are found in all the feet, dactyls rarely except in the first. | |
| Doubt as to the existence of Alexandrines in Hamlet. Remarks on defective and fragmentary lines | 194—205 |

CHAPTER XIII.

Modern Blank Verse. Tennyson and Browning.

Comparison of Milton, Tennyson and Browning in regard to the position of the pauses, the use of the feminine ending, and the substitution of other feet for the iamb. A favourite effect of Tennyson's is where the word ends on the short syllable of the iamb, giving a general trochaic or feminine rhythm. Double trochee occurs occasionally in Tennyson, and often in Browning. Examples of trissyllabic feet, tribrach as well as anapaest and dactyl. Peculiar effect of pause after inverted accent. Appropriateness of rhythm to the thought. Unstopped lines. Other examples of unusual rhythm. Excellences and defects of Browning's rhythm 206—218

CHAPTER XIV.

Shelley's Metre.

His text very corrupt. Classification of his poems under four heads, Iambic, Trochaic, Anapaestic, Dactylic. Licenses as to Pause, Extra-metrical Syllables, Truncation, introduction of trissyllabic feet into disyllabic metre, Inversion of Accent, Excess or Defect in the number of Accents, spondee, cretic, bacchius, molossus, pyrrhic, tribrach, Resolution of monosyllables, coalescence of disyllables. Aesthetic effect of these variations. Peculiarities of Shelley's rhymes. Stanzaic irregularities. Alliteration. Traces of the influence of Southey, Pope, Wordsworth, Milton, Shakespeare, Coleridge. Comparison between the utterances of Beatrice in the Cenci and Cassandra in the Agamemnon. Emendations of some of Shelley's lines . . . 219—259

CHAPTER XV.

The English Hexameter.

Development of the Elizabethan hexameter. Discussion as to whether it should be governed by quantity or accent. Earlier trial of the hexameter in other countries. Disuse of the English hexameter after the 16th century. Its reappearance at the end of the 18th in imitation of Voss and Goethe. How it differs from the hexameter of the ancients. Hexameters of Coleridge, Southey, Hookham Frere,

| | PAGE |
|--|---------|
| Longfellow, Whewell, Clough. Merits and defects of the latter: his unfortunate experiment in the quantitative hexameter. The best English hexameters are those by Hawtrey and Kingsley. Matthew Arnold and Tennyson on the Hexameter. Later examples by Calverley and T. Ashe. Mr W. J. Stone's defence of the quantitative hexameter. Examples of the Pentameter by Whewell and Clough and Mr W. Watson | 260—293 |

APPENDIX A.

| | |
|---|---------|
| Mr H. Nicol and Prof. Paul Meyer on the Old French decasyllabic metre. Abstract of Zarncke's essay on the 5-foot iambus of Lessing and Schiller | 294—301 |
|---|---------|

APPENDIX B.

| | |
|--|---------|
| Technical Terms of Greek and Roman Prosody | 302—304 |
| INDEX | 305—308 |

Corrigenda.

- p. 71, ll. 21, 22, transfer 'bacchius' and 'anti-bacchius'.
 p. 157, l. 14, for 'p. 53' read 'p. 51'.
 p. 191, l. 23, omit bracket after 'dev'lish'.
 p. 228, l. 4 up, for 'iambic' read 'iamb'.