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FROM TRADITIONAL PROSODY TO GRAMMETRICS

There are a few black holes at the outer limits of liter-
ary scholarship which attract critics with some myxterious
magnetism yet give a hard time to those who attempt penetra-
tion. Perhaps no other literary form has provoked such heat-
ed debates both among professionals and laymen as did - and
most certainly does - free verse. It has taken many decades
and victims of dogmatic intolerance in scholarship to learn
new prosodic approaches to free verse, ones which treat free
verse as an alternative with equal rights, as an artistic
possibility coexisting with metrical verse. We have lived
for the last 150 years in an age of stylistic pluralism,
where diverse norms of structure have prevailed.

Towards stylistic pluralism: shift of norms

Prosody, the study of versification, had, for a long time,
been one of the most narrowly developed disciplines of Eng-
lish literary scholarship. Prosodic practice followed a
rather habitual uniformity: its stability and orderliness
offered little excitement for the theorists beside a demand
for extreme refinement. For centuries, English poetry was
treated, rightly or not, as a rather monolithic body of pro-
sodic materials, whose metrics reflected little of its oth-
erwise colorful developments. Poetry from Chaucer to Tenny-
son was seen as the coming into power and culmination of one
prosodic paradigm, accentual-syllabism; this paradigm was so
seldom questioned and so sporadically broken that prosodists
simply ignored these attempts. They dismissed even the ac-
centualism of Anglo-Saxon poetry and of the alliterative re-
vival as inviable wildings. Thus, there seemed to be no rea-
son why chapters on, say, 15th century poetry's prosody

should fundamentally differ from the corresponding chapters appendixing 19th century poetry: they both described techniques of the reigning accentual-syllabic meter, with greater or lesser sophistication.

English prosody becomes intriguing when the prevailing paradigm, believed to have originated in Greek and Latin forms and thus to be absolute, is questioned, attacked and broken down by alternative prosodies not based on the accentual-syllabic paradigm. This confrontation of paradigms resulted not in the exclusive dominance of a new paradigm, similar in its 'absoluteness' to the reign of accentual-syllabism, but in a prosodic pluralism and the absence of one dominant period style. In 1797, Coleridge's 'Christabel' posed a serious threat to accentual-syllabism, introducing the then "new principle" of counting accents instead of syllables. The theoretical defense of this new principle was put down by Coleridge himself in the Preface some years after the second part of the poem had been written. Theoretical support followed Coleridge's conscious practice: in 1838, a non-practitioner, Edwin Guest wrote his History of English Rhythms, and attacked accentual-syllabism as the "rhythm of the foreigner", while treated accentualism as the principle of English poetry, the only heir to old English versification. In 1855 Walt Whitman shook the foundations of accent-and-syllable-counting regularity: his "barbaric yawp" counted accents, if anything, and replaced the traditional prosodic unit of the foot with higher prosodic and grammatical units: the line, the phrase and the sentence. At about the same time, on the other side of the Ocean, Gerard Manley Hopkins introduced revolutionary metrical, or, more precisely, nonmetrical, principles similar in their programmatic irregularity to those of Whitman. Hopkins developed his strong-stress paradigm over the twenty years between the 1860s and 1880s, inventing his heavy stress-based 'sprung rhythm'. Robert Bridges also attacked the binary foot-based

verse, but from two directions: influenced by his friend,
Hopkins, he experimented with heavy stresses, and also tried
out his own metrical innovation: syllabic meter that com-
pletely ignored the stressing of individual syllables. The
period between 1800 and 1910, but especially between 1855
and 1910, brought about a crisis in traditional English ver-
sification as the old norms of the accentual-syllabic para-
digm began to be seriously questioned. Imagism, Anglo-Ameri-
can modernism, instantaneously realized Romanticism's pros-
odic principles too: the explosion of forms announced by
modernism challenged the domination of one single prosodic
paradigm and proclaimed prosodic pluralism, forcing accen-
tual syllabism to back into the modest status of one alter-
native. With Imagism, the hierarchy of prosodic paradigms
slowly began to fade; beat verse based on optional stress,
syllabic poetry, free verse and prose poetry came to be
treated less and less as minority prosodies, undercurrent of
the accentual-syllabic paradigm, but as alternative paradigms
with equal rights in an age of prosodic pluralism.

It is interesting to observe how the study of versifica-
tion has related to practice. The prosodic innovations of
poets were followed only with considerable delay by prosodic
theories and apparatuses explaining and describing these
practices. In fact, the time-lag between practice and theory
has not ceased to exist until very recently, but was per-
haps most astonishing in the decades between the 1910s and
the 1950s, when practice was multifarious, yet theorists
dealt almost exclusively still with the old paradigm. George
Saintsbury's History of English Prosody seemed to be, in
1910, the last major contribution to the normative descrip-
tion of accentual-syllabism, but several lesser works con-
tinued to appear that exposed the same traditional view of
prosody. New Criticism added the works of John Crowe Ransom,
W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, I. A. Richardson and
Yvor Winters to this line of literary-critical metrics, but

could contribute nothing to the description of a pluralistic
prosodic scene. Linguistic metrics dealt mainly with the
phonology of metrics and prosody; the contributions of Otto
Jespersen, Roman Jakobson, George L. Trager and Henry Lee
Smith, Morris Halle and Samuel Jay Keyser are of extreme im-
portance, but, again, to traditional versification primarily.
In the 1950s, generative-transformational grammar brought a
new interest in syntax and, later, semantics: it offered an
apparatus adoptable to the study of alternative paradigms.
However, it anticipated poets to develop, from the Romantic
premises of the Coleridgean theory, Whitman's 'Preface',
Hopkins' innovative principles, an alternative, organic or
immanentist, prosodic theory capable accounting for the var-
ied techniques of prosodic pluralism. Thus, for example, Wil-
liam Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan or Allen
Ginsberg put down their workshops' directives towards a new
prosodic theory. It seems, we have reached a time when theory
can finally become synchronous with practice and a prosodic
theory can be set up that is capable of dealing with both the
older paradigm and the new alternatives in one unified the-
ory: one that dismisses neither the achievments of literary-
critical metrics, linguistic metrics nor those of the avant-
gardist prosodies.

   With acknowledging prosodic pluralism, the prosodist's
task has been multiplied: prosody has now to account for the
alternative paradigms as well, but in such a way that the
new measures be treated not as sporadic attempts at anti-par-
adigms, but as ones constituting a continuity of alternatives
necessarily leading to prosodic pluralism.

   ### Literary-critical approaches to prosody
   George Saintsbury's three volume History first appeared
in 1910, at a time when the deepening crisis of English ver-
sification might have become more apparent. From our point
of view, the most interesting chapters are those dealing

with the prosodies not falling into the accentual-syllabic
paradigm. Saintsbury describes Anglo-Saxon verse as a metri-
cally unsuccessful body of poetry: "Anglo-Saxon poetry is
moribund if not actually defunct" (Saintsbury 1910/I: 73).
It had, he claims, "sensibly died down" (I: 25) in such a
way that its principles had "passed into the composition of
rhythmical prose" (I: 25); "the rhythm of Anglo-Saxon poetry
is a sort of half-prose recitative" (I: 73). Saintsbury con-
siders alliterative poetry similarly unmetrical (I: 73); he
regards alliteration as not constituting measure (I: 100),
treats the whole movement of the alliterative revival as
retrograde (I: 110).

Saintsbury is similarly sceptic about Coleridge's achieve-
ment without even understanding it. He tops his misunder-
standing of Coleridge's programmatic accentualism with a pre-
scriptive attitude: "I dislike and disallow the accentual
hexameter" (III: 398).

Hopkins gets one paragraph among 'Some More Dead Poets';
two pages are devoted to Whitman, stating that most of Whit-
man's lines are "prose pure and simple" (III: 491).

Throughout the chapters devoted to non-accentual-syllabic
poetry, Saintsbury quarrels with Guest, the proponent of ac-
centualism.

It is rather ironic that a prosodist writing in 1910
should be so explicit and prescriptively on the side of ac-
centual-syllabism and should file a scholarly case against
accentualism. It is especially ironic if we consider Ezra
Pound's and T. S. Eliot's practice of the time: Pound had
already written his Personae and filled it with Anglo-Saxon
echoes, lines dismembered according to accentual weight and
often on the basis of alliteration; in the 1900s and 1910s
Eliot published stress-based pieces in The Harvard Advocate,
completed his Prufrock in 1911 and wrote his 'Reflections on
Vers Libre' in 1917. Reviewing the Prufrock piece and the
Vers Libre article, Pound remarked: 'he [Eliot] wrote as if

all metres were measured by accent" (Pound 1917/1954: 421).

It is indeed unfortunate that Saintsbury was so little aware of the prosodic practices of his own time; it is hard to believe that he was a contemporyry of Pound, Eliot and the Imagists. The second edition of History contained no re- visions of his prosodic views, although by 1923 the Imagists had published their anthologies, Eliot had come out with The Waste Land, Pound had put out several of his books contain- ing his Anglo-Saxon and Chinese 'translations', the first of his Cantos, and had also made a 'pact' with Walt Whitman. The most influential prosody handbook for decades to come completely ignored recent and contemporary developments in poetry. Thus, he dismissed those prosodic attempts which ig- nored the binary unit of the foot as ones being unable to create order: they fail, he claimed, to give the impression of authoritative regularity. Saintsbury limits metrical reg- ularity to accentual-syllabism, assigns exclusive prosodic significance to meter and, in a normative and prescriptive manner, treats meter as an objective principle of authority.

For decades after Saintsbury's classic, prosodic criti- cism was confined to the study of the prevailing prosodic paradigm, accentual-syllabism. T.S. Omond's English Metrists (1921) drew an equation between meter and accentual-syl- labism, dismissing, for example, Hopkins' scandalous inven- tions as completely unimportant: "I cannot believe that [his] poems deserve or will receive attention from even the most determined seeker after novelties" (263). Paul F. Baum (1922), Lascelles Abercombie (1929), George Stewart (1930), Pallister Barkas (1934) all seemed to bury their heads in the sand when they failed to notice that English versifica- tion was going through an unprecedent prosodic crisis: there ceased to be a dominant metrical form in the emerging pluralism of prosodic systems.

These prosody handbooks of the 1910s, '20s and '30s pro- vided a kind of 'evidence' for the more theoretically ori- ented writings with which New Criticism would contribute to

prosodic criticism. I. A. Richards' Principles of Literary
Criticism first appeared as early as 1924, but its tenets
concerning prosody (put forth in the chapter 'Rhythm and
metre') remained unquestioned by New Criciticsm for several
decades. Here Richards defines rhythm as the "texture of ex-
pectations, satisfactions, disappointments, surprisals,
which the sequence of syllables bring about" (Richards
1924/1979: 71), while meter is a "specialized form of rhythm"
(74). The trouble with this distinction - from the point of
view of the plurality of prosodies - is that Richards derives
rhythmical and metrical effects exclusively from syllabic
regularity, but dismisses the possibility that rhythm and
meter might interact with other prosodic devices or with
grammatical units of higher order than the syllable. Thus he
theoretically excludes the possibility of alternative proso-
dies, yet it is exactly this interaction that the alternative
prosodies of the time made use of.

New Criticists remain consistent in their prosodic views,
giving overt preference to traditional accentual-syllabic
meters. In a relatively late but important article Wimsatt
and Beardsley state that they have "no novel view to pro-
claim" (Wimsatt-Beardsley 1959/1979: 148), that is, they
re-establish the importance of the traditional English syl-
lable-stress meter. In their defense of the accentual-syl-
labic paradigm, they argue against the 'linguistic' and the
'musical' views of meter, the "two deviations from ... good
sense in metrics" (148).

The abstract nature of meter is emphasized throughout
(note the subtitle of the article, 'An Exercise in Abstrac-
tion'). According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, meter is consti-
tuted by abstract theoretical entities and can wholly be de-
scribed by abstraction: meter "inheres in aspects of the
language that can be abstracted with considerable precision"
(157). This stress on the abstractness of meter becomes ex-
tremely dangerous in its implications for two reasons:
/i/ it diminishes the relevance of oral performance and in-

dividual interpretation, and /ii/ isolates meter from sense.

The distinction between 'anstract' and 'actualized' en-
tails an artificial division between the written and the
oral modes of poetry, between poetic and ordinary language.
The distinctions wax cold: they will divide the abstract
from the concrete, the poetic from the ordinary; they set up
a scale of values which will ultimately give priority to a
poetry which is 'poetical' because of its abstract prosodic
nature: it employs the traditional accentual-syllabic para-
digm. With a normative presupposition, Wimsatt and Beardsley
state that meter, that is, the accentual-syllabic, will im-
prove any poem. "Perhaps," they go on, "this suggests a rea-
son why the greatest English poetry (Chaucher, Shakespeare,
Milton, Pope, Wordswoth) has after all been written in the
more artful syllable-stress meter" (170).

Beside the normative assumption, the main deficiency of
traditional literary-critical metrics lies in its resistance
to dealing with meter as an organic phenomenon. Traditional
metrists disallowed that other prosodic devices beside meter
should exist. The primacy they assigned to abstract meter
prevented them from treating poetic syntax, sentencing, and
contextualization as principles which might interact with
meter in creating prosodic 'order'. Linguistic metrics and
free verse prosodic practice had to come in order to alter
this traditional attitude.

Formal-linguistic prosody

For decades linguistic prosody had remained a complemen-
tary discipline to literary-critical metrics: it contributed
mostly to the study of traditional English meters. Prosody-
oriented linguists such as Jespersen, Jakobson, Trager and
Smith, Halle and Keyser set up intricate theories for a sys-
tem of meters where one paradigm dominated, that which lit-
erary metrists from Saintsbury to Wimsatt declared to be the
paradigm of English versification, the accentual-syllabic.

The paradigm debate that was going on in contemporary pros-
odic practice did not receive much attention from linguists
either; the linguistics-based apparatus was just as little
designed for dealing with prosodic pluralism as was George
Saintsbury's, for example.

 With its programmatic language experiments, European mod-
ernism of the 1910s and '20s drew the attention of early
structuralist linguistics toward literature, literary lan-
guage. Russian Formalism, where the theory of versification
was perhaps the most fruitful field, did not treat meter and
rhythm as regularities structuring only the phonetic and pho-
nemic strata of poetic language, but rather as structural
properties operative on all levels. Unfortunately, the for-
malist doctrines of Eichenbaum, Shklovsky, Tomashevsky, Ja-
kobson and Tynyanov, designed to handle East-European avant-
garde prosodies, were not integrated into the prosodic de-
scription of English and American versifiaction. Russian
Formalist ideas were isolated from the West, and it was not
until Roman Jakobson had emigrated that structuralist lin-
guistics fertilized.- in variants which were already some-
what far from Russian Formalism proper - Anglo-American pros-
ody.

 Roman Jakobson contributed to the study of poetic lan-
guage mainly with his later theoretical writings; his ear-
lier pieces dealt with Slavic literature. Already in 1921 he
defined poetry as an "utterance oriented toward the mode of
expression", that is, he claimed that in poetic speech the
communicative function is reduced to a minimum (Jakobson
1921, quoted in Erlich 1965/1981: 183). The immanent laws of-
poetry derive from its distinct function and poetry becomes
an autonomous human endeavor. The Gestalt-Qualität permeating
all levels of poetic language makes poetry a complex, inte-
grated structure, distinct in its orderliness from ordinary
discourse (Jakobson 1933, quoted by Erlich 1965/1981: 198-199).
Later, Jakobson derived this orderliness from the nature of

poetic function, which he defined as one projecting "the
principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the
axis of combination" (Jakobson 1960/1975: 358). In Jakobson's
theory, then, the principle of similarity or equivalence is
superimposed upon contiguity, and thus parallelism and sym-
metry become the basic manifestations of the poetic function.
Literariness is the "transformation of a verbal act into a
poetic work", where a "system of devices brings about such a
transformation" (Jakobson 1980: 23).

Jakobson's structuralist poetics has been extremely help-
ful to the study of poetries employing devices; it has become
indispensable to the formalization of parallelistic and sym-
metrical structures. But free verse and the prose poem have
called into question the exclusive literariness of the po-
etic device, by working with traditionally 'non-significant'
prosodic elements too (Jakobson 1923); they have relied not
only on the metaphorical but also on the contiguous arrange-
ment of prosodic and grammatical units. Poetic practice de-
mands an extension of Jakobson's tenets.

John Lotz was the first to offer a general theory of
structuralist metrics (Lotz 1942). He suggested that the
study of meter consisted of two sections: study of the lin-
guistic (phonological and syntactic) constituents of meter
and the study of the metric "superstructure". Some other
phonological and syntactic features are "additive-
variative factors" (cf. Jakobson's "non-significant ele-
ments"), since they are not necessarily used for metric pur-
poses. On the other hand, the "basic-constitutive factors"
have "metric relevancy" (Lotz 1060/1975). Lotz's typology is
tight, and holds - as it was intended to hold - for numeri-
cally ordered verse. Liberal and organic prosodies cannot ac-
cept the notion of metric superstructure, a super-added
structure, since it implies a fragmentation and hierarchy of
the metrical element.

Two of the most influential prosodic theories set up by
linguists for the meters of English are, perhaps, the Trager-

Smith and the Halle-Keyser hypotheses, respective applications of descriptive and transformational grammars. The work of George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith (1951) is not a direct metrical study, but rather a detailed taxonomy of the stress-system of English, emphasizing graduality instead of binary oppositions. They define stress as the indication or result of "the presence of phonemic entities" (35). Its relative strength, they claim, depends not merely on degrees of loudness, length and prominence, but can vary according to the placement of (phonemic) juncture and the levels of (phonetic) pitch. This hypothesis distinguishes between weak stress and three kinds of strong stresses (primary, secondary and tertiary), thus it allows for multiple readings, where individual performances may also influence the distribution of stresses.

Just as generative-transformational grammar revolutionized 20th century linguistics, the generative metrics of Morris Halle and Samual J. Keywer introduced a new era to the study of versification. In 'Chaucer and the Study of Prosody' (1966), they expounded a prosodic theory based on generative phonology. They provided a 'grammar' for Chaucer's metrical competence, established the rules which generated the metrical, and only metrical, lines of Chaucer. Instead of the traditional foot-based description, Halle and Keyser describe the iambic pentameter line in terms of ten positions occupied by stressed and unstressed syllables.

In English Stress (1971), Halle and Keyser further elaborate their metrical theory. Here they extend their research to both English stress-based meters, the strong-stress and the syllable-stress paradigms. On the basis of generative phonology, they give the rules of the stress-system of Modern English as it evolved from Old English.

The greatest merit of the Halle-Keyser (Halle-Keyser 1971: 169) hypothesis lies in being valid for meters other than the the iambic pentameter. It gives the most satisfactory ex-

planation of the stress rules of English, and provides the
principles of all regular English meters. Neither can free
verse prosody do without it, since Halle and Keyser offer
rules for the English language. This tight grammar of stress
and prosody is pioneering in another respect too: the rules
are set up in such a way that they do not rely exclusively on
phonological factors, but, for the first time in prosody,
syntactic considerations are also involved (note that gener-
ative phonology developed after generative syntax). The no-
tion of the stress maximum is of extreme relevance for two
reasons: (i) it embodies the interplay of phonological, lex-
ical and syntactic forces (according to the revised and final
definition of the stress maximum, it depends on the distance
of syntactic junctures too); (ii) as a contextual-linguistic
and not a metrical notion, its placement is independent of
whether an abstract metrical pattern exists or not.

The most important discovery of the generative phonology
of Noam-Chomsky and Morris Halle (1968) was that English
stress distribution was, to a large extent, predictable. Hal-
le and Keyser applied these predictable regularities as "cor-
respondence rules" between the phonological properties of
word sequences and the abstract pattern of meter.

Linguistic prosody promises to correct several errors of
literary metrics. Linguistics has provided the possiblity of
'scientific' exactness; its generative-transformational
background allows that morphonology, syntax and semantics be
integral parts of prosody. The technical apparatus is given;
it is up to prosodists to apply it to both metered poetries
and open forms.

The alternative paradigms:
organic and immanentist prossodies
The dates of 1797, 1855 and 1910 are significant in the
history of English prosody because they mark three waves of
'minority' prosodies undercurrent of the predominant ac-

centual-syllabism: the Romantic, post-Romantic and avant-
garde alternatives. Academic prosodies, the literary and the
linguistic ones, were either incapable of dealing with these
new paradigms or simply ignored them: their formal schemata
was designed for traditional poetries written according to
laws, rules, norms. However, prosodic pluralism brought
about by the presence of alternative prosodies was bound to
have a pluralizing effect on the science or theory of versi-
fication too: side by side with traditional prosodic frame-
works, an organicist prosodic approach also emerged, whose
task was to deal with the anti-paradigms rooted in the phys-
iology of speech and language as an organism.

With respect to poetic technique and prosody especially,
it was S.T. Coleridge who gave the Romantic foundations of
modern poetics. He wrote the first part of 'Christabel' in
1797; this poem enacted the principles of radical metrics,
based not on accentual-syllabism but on pure stressing, un-
known for centuries in English poetry. Its regularity is
perceived by the ear of the reader or oral performer, and
not by its relation to an abstract pattern independent of
the particular poem.

In Biographia Literaria Coleridge distinguishes between
"form as proceeding" and "shape as superinduced". This or-
ganicist hypothesis, taken over from Schelling, has its pros-
odic implications too: Coleridge's organicism violates the
accepted standards of the dominant accentual-syllabic form:
"shape as superinduced", Coleridge points out, "is either the
death or the imprisonment of the thing" (Coleridge 1907/1969,
II: 262). For the Romantic poet, the abstract pattern of.
metered poetry, "shape as superinduced," regulates the poetic
text, but trammels and restricts it at the same time: meter
becomes a hindrance to creativity. Organic form, "form as
proceeding," is, according to Coleridge, "its self-witnessing
and self-effected sphere of agency" (262); thus, the poet's
task is not to adhere to the norms and devices or rhymed-and-

metered poetry, but to develop a form that is "malleable"
to the meaning of each poem. Organic form denounces the nor-
mative devices of poetry and proclaims sincerity of technique.

The date of 1855 is perhaps the best known for its proso-
dic significance: the first edition of Leaves of Grass ap-
peared. Its 'Preface' announced a new kind of poetry, the
American. Whitman indeed launched an American tradition in-
dependent of the main line of British poetry, but with
roots in European Romanticism. He took over Schelling's and
Coleridge's organic theory through the mediation of the Amer-
ican Transcendentalists, and set up his own prosody on this
basis. The essence of Whitman's prosodic innovation lies in
establishing a non-syllabic periodicity depending on gram-
matical units higher than the phonological ones. His much-
treated parallelisms, linking prosody to the thought
rhythms of the Bible, consist in the coincidence of prosodic
and syntactic units: his rhythmic periods, lines, correspond
to logical and grammatical units, sentences, clauses and
phrases. His catalogues establish refined equivalences be-
cause they move on the two axes of selection and comination
at the same time: runs on the axis of selection produce a
semantic periodicity of an associational nature, hence his
thesaurus-like lists, while the movements on the axis of
combination provide regularities and variational possibili-
ties within syntactic periodicity. In his intricate play
with syntactic and semantic constants and variables, he em-
ploys both basic modes of verbal behavior, combination and
selection, which could not have had an equal share in metri-
cal poetry. Beside grammatical periodicity, Whitman's proso-
dy relies on an irregular heavy stressing; it is the natural
feeling of stress periodicity of the native speaker that
Whitman makes use of. Yet for Whitman, stress was not a pho-
nemic phenomenon (he had no ear for minor linguistic units
such as the syllable), but a lexical and phrasal one: his
hovering accent, as Sculley Bradley calls it (Bradley 1939:
444), does not fall sharply on one syllable but is equally

distributed along the whole lexical or syntactic unit, the
word or the syntactically related phrasal unit. In his po-
etry, double accents within syntactic boundaries are neut-
tralized and merge into one.

The metrical theory implicit in the 1855 'Preface'
states rhythm's dependence on higher grammatical-lexical,
syntactic or semantic-organizations. "Poetic quality is not
marshalled into rhyme or uniformity ... The rhyme and uni-
formity of perfect poems show the free growth of metical
laws ... The fluency and ornament of the finest poems ...
are not independent but dependent," he claims (Whitman
1855/1959: 415). The oppositions inherent in these state-
ments, 'marshal' vs. 'grow,' 'independent' vs. 'dependent,'
seem to pattern the Coleridgean distinction between "shape
as superinduced" and "form as proceeding." What is more im-
portant, neither Coleridge nor Whitman speaks of a distinc-
tion between shape and non-shape or law and lawlessness, but
rather they re-define the concepts of 'shape' and 'law'.
They both give a new dimension to the notion of order, and
show that form can remain form even when it is not pre-ex-
isting and abstractable.

Whitman was not, from the point of view of his prosody,
as much of a "solitary singer" as he thought himself to be.
He had his 'camerados' in Europe: Hopkins, Bridges and Mal-
larmé. Whitman and Hopkins led the Anglo-Americal paradigm
debate of the period between 1855 and 1910, which resulted
in the explosion of forms in the modernist era. This debate
went on between the Tennysonian model of rhyming accentual-
-syllabism and the alternative, programmatically irregular,
prosodic paradigms of Whitman, Hopkins and Bridges. The neat
distribution of the dominant elements of rhyme, accent- and
syllable-count of the traditional model was suddenly upset;
some elements were abandoned while others gained individual
prominence. Thus, for example, rhyme was conspicuously ab-
sent from Whitman's prosodic system, but was excessively
used by Hopkins in several forms. Stressing became a major

prosodic principle in Whitman's and Hopkins' poetry, while
'pure' syllable count regulated Robert Bridges' verse. The
shift of dominants that characterized this paradigm testing
can be described by the emergence of secondary metrical ele-
ments to primary importance. Thus, for example, rhyme and
syntactic parallelism belong not to the constitutive factors
of meter, but - according to John Lotz' classification - to
its additive-variative factors (Lotz 1960/1975). The extreme
prominence of rhyme-like effects (where "figure of grammar"
also blongs) in Hopkins and that of grammatical parallelisms
in both Whitman and Hopkins testify how secondary elements
of the Tennysonian paradigm become primary regulating prin-
ciples in the non-Tennysonian model.

Modernist and postmodernist poetries disseminated and in
a way institutionalized the prosodic alternative paradigm
that had appeared only sporadically on the 19th century
American literary scene. Modernist writing - Imagism in
Anglo-American poetry, Formalism in Russia or Surrealism in
Frace--demanded, in a neo-Romantic manner, that art be an act
of renewal, rediscovery, producing surprise by de-automatiz-
ing our way of seeing and also our reading process.

The prosodic innovation of Imagism consisted in ca-
denced free verse, where the term of Amy Lowell has its mu-
sical associations (cf. composition according to the "mu-
sical phrase"). Cadence is the coincidence of grammatical
and prosodic units; cadenced free verse is thus built of a
phrasal rhythm, of prosodically isochronous phrasal units.
Its greatest advantage is musical flexibility, Lowell claims:
"these delicate veriations of movement, or rhythm, if one
prefers that term, have always been possible to music, but
poetry had not power of expressing them until the introduc-
tion of cadenced free verse" (Lowell 1920: 139).

William Carlos Williams' "variable foot" creates a pe-
roidicity similar in certain ways to Whitman's phrasal
rhythm, Hopkins' sprung rhythm and Imagist free verse: they
are all heavily stressed and cadenced, that is, dependent on

the syntactic and semantic organizations of the poetic text;
they are all prosodies organic to grammar. There is no
strict-accentual and/or syllabic-numericity in Williams'
'foot'; it is a flexible, <u>relative</u>, unit following the mo-
bility of speech, hence its variability.

Charles Olson's postmodernist "projective verse" exhibits
a fidelity to the pulsations of physiological and psycholog-
ical events. Poetry is, in line with the Romantics, treated
in its strong connection with bodily processes, breath in
particular. Olson programmatically connects writing with the
physiology of speech, connects speech with action, mental
processes with biological-natural processes (Olson 1950/1966).

American postmodernist poetics realized the ideas of
modernism in that it developed an open prosody relying on
linguistic features, relations and operations <u>immanent</u> in the
English language. Immanence, Charles Altieri's term (Altieri
1973), became the postmodernist synonym for organicism. In
the writings of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley
or Denise Levertov, immanent form is defined in its opposi-
tion to the traditional control of imposed form consisting
of a "set of rules that will bring the troubling plenitude
of experience 'within our power'" (Duncan 1973: 209). In
postmodernist 'composition by field,' on the other hand, the
language material, just as the poetic experience, is not to
be ordered, re-structured, by the interpretive mind of the
poet. Form is taken from language, and the poetic experience,
itself; it is realized through attention, humility, and open-
ness to the movements and values of language, when "movement
and association ... arise as an inner need" (Duncan 1973:
210). The poet should allow language itself to speak.

Technique as sincerity, this grand Romantic obsession, is
re-animated in this poetics by claiming the discovery of
form through attention to the objectism of words and to the
interacting forces inherent in language. The prosodic impli-
cations of this immanentist position touch the mode of
poetic syntax, <u>sentencing</u> in particular. Grammar functioned

as prosody for Whitman but in his poetry the sentence was
still a normative element displaying completeness. In post-
modernist writing, the sentence strives not towards complete-
ness but the wholeness of the context or the poetic situa-
tion. The new sentence becomes a mobile unit: it is the ac-
tive that generates thought. Syntactical boundaries may be
disrupted or blurred; syntactic units may hold several func-
tions at the same time, thus creating an usually complex web
of semantic relations. With the abolition of fixed, routine,
grammatical connections, individual words become more palpa-
ble, more object-like, and with their unfixed valencies they
act as nuclei of potentialities. While traditional prosodies
relied on accepted deviations from an imposed norm, on the
interaction between the regularity and irregularity of the
metric superstructure, the prosody of postmodernist poetics
is made complex through the interplay of continuity and dis-
continuity, coherence and incoherence, expectedness and un-
expectedness—all textual strategies inherent in the larger
verbal material.

Grammetrics: an ideal of prosody
Prosodic practice and the prosodic thinking of such seem
to have outpaced scholarly description. Prosodic pluralism,
avant-garde prosodies have no adequate explanation. Tradi-
tional literary metrics has remained obsessed with the still
widely employed accentual-syllabism, but ignored the other,
more upsetting manifestations of stylistic pluralism. Lin-
guistic prosodists, especially those trained on generative
grammar, have come closer to the possibilities of studying
the morpo-phonological, syntactic and semantic forces inter-
acting in verse, but concentrated mainly on metrical poetry,
and have not coupled description with exegesis. The im-
manentist prosody of the postmoderns was designed as an
apology of their own avant-garde practice and did not aspire
to a wider validity. These three territories of prosodic
thinking have not been brought to a synthesis for the pur-

pose of describing and explaining both metrical and non-
metrical poetry. Yet what is needed is a prosodic theory
that is capable of dealing with traditional and modern par-
adigms, one which uses a formal schemata of general appli-
cability. The first step toward such a generally applicable
prosodic theory is, I presume, the full acknowledgement of
the prosodic pluralism characterizing poetry in the English
language.

   The two-hundred year old tendency toward the liberation
of poetic forms cannot be ignored any more: literary prosody
has to undertake the exegesis of free verse and open poetry
too, and here it shall be fruitful to draw the lessons of
linguistic and organicist-immanentist prosodies. Proponents
of organicism and immanence deal with poetic material unsup-
ported by abstract and independent systems; what has to be
explained here (and can be, with the help of linguistics)
belongs to the territory mostly ignored by traditional pros-
odies: poetic morphology and syntax, sentencing, text-gram-
matical operations. Not that these grammatical strategies
had been missing completely from metered poetries, but,
rather, they were treated as of secondary importance, coming
only after the primary order of the metrical principle,
while little attention was given to how meter itself is mod-
ified by grammar. Yet the density that distinguishes poetry
from prose arises, on the level of form, not from the pres-
ence of abstractable patterns, but from a complex interplay
of prosodic and grammatical operations (for an interplay you
have to have two). The reason why I suggest that the descrip-
tion of free verse is the first step towards a unified theo-
ry of prosody is partly because it has not been done, partly,
and more importantly, because free verse exhibits certain
prosodic operations in an elementary, crude, form. Once the
non-metrical measures of open poetry are mapped out, ex-
plained and interpreted, this methodology can be incorporated
into the study of metered poetry--for its certain benefit.

The ideal prosodic approach seems to be what P. J. Wexler
has called the grammetrical one (Wexler 1964). The basic
postulate of grammetrics is that prosody is meaning and is
thus related to the movements of language in a more intimate
way than it was thought to be. Grammetrics examines the rela-
tionship between prosodic and grammatical units; it investi-
gates how the rank scales of the poem-stanza-line-foot, on
the one hand, and the sentence-clause-phrase-morpheme-syl-
lable, on the other, are correlated in poetry. In particular,
it focuses on the coincidence or non-coincidence of the two
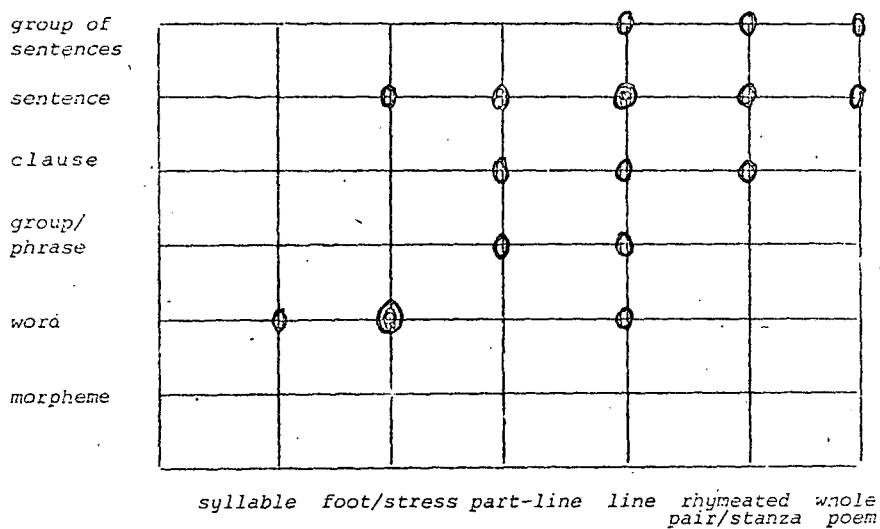most volatile units, the line and the sentence.

Donald Wesling is one of the most serious exponents of
grammetrics. In his earliest article dealing with grammetrics
(Wesling 1971) he investigates, on free-verse material, the
several possiblities of the interaction of grammar and meter.
He begins his analysis with Whitman's "explosion of syl-
lable-stress metrics" (167), but concentrates on the moderns
and postmoderns in greater detail. He examines Pound's dis-
membered lines veering "towards extremes, testing the limits
of variability in meter as in grammar" (166). Wesling treats
William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Robert Duncan,
Edward Dorn and Robert Creeley, poets who employ different
grammetrical strategies varying the coinciding units from
several sentences to a single syllable per line.

Wesling's forthcoming The Scissors of Meter (MS) offers the
first full-scale grammetrical theory. The apt title summarizes
the main argument of the book as the genitive phrase carries
the tension of an active-passive ambiguity in that it "holds
metering and sentencing in the same thought" (Preface). If
the concept of meaning includes rhythmic cognition too, then
prosody is meaning while at the same time meaning shapes
prosody. It is the ultimate task of grammetrics to describe
this intricate coalescence of sound and meaning, of meter
and grammar, of aesthetic and cognitive impulses.

Meter, Wesling suggest, is an abstraction, a formula, a
descriptive scheme, only outside the text, but within any

poem it ceases to be notational. Here meter has its positions
filled by the graphs of thinking, that is, by the relational
elements of language. Grammetrics studies how these relations
relate to meter. Grammetrics is an interpretive approach: it
deals with how technique 'means,' "expresses the relation-
ships between two systems, grammar and metrics, each con-
sisting of a set of rules that define the interactions among
these variables" /Part II, Ch. 'Elements of Grammetrical
Theory'/.

   Concrete grammetrical analysis begins with the description
of the intersection points of the two axes of grammar and
meter. Wesling gives six ranks on the grammatical and metri-
cal axes each: morpheme-word-phrase-clause-sentence-group of
sentences and syllables-foot-part-line-rhymeated of stanza-
-whole poem.

group of
sentences

sentence

clause

group/
phrase

word

morpheme

       syllable   foot/stress part-line   line   rhymeated   whole
                                                    pair/stanza poem

Naturally, not all intersection points are equally important
or even possible: there are sixteen scissoring points at
most, and they seem to be distributed along the two central
grammetrical coordinates of the word-foot and the sentence-
line coincidences. Indeed, the most prominent scissoring
points are where word meets foot and sentence meets line,
while the remaining fourteen are still productive and pos-
sible convergences.

The style of sentencing can be described with reference
to the typical, productive or possible scissoring points.
Grammetrical inspection becomes interpretive when it is re-
lated to the semantics of verse structure. The scissoring
points of a poem are described in terms of the three princi-
ples of linear arrangement, continuity vs. discontinuity;
equivalence vs. hierarchy; regularity vs. irregularity. After
determining the placement, frequency and the kind of these
scissorings (whether they make the text continuous or dis-
continuous, hierarchical or levelled, tending toward regu-
larity or irregularity), one has to translate grammetrical
data into hypotheses about the degree of coherence, expec-
tedness and intensity. Stylistic generalizations, inferences
about the semantic nature of the poetic text are made on the
basis of grammatical and prosodic-metrical analyses. Allow
me to give two examples.

With the rhythmic and semantic effects of lineation and
dismemberment, modernist poets refined the notion of the
enjambment. "Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and
then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning
of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless
you want a definite longish pause," Pound demanded in the
Imagist 'Credo' (Pound 1918/1954: 6). He was aware that at
the beginning of the line the "rhythm wave" rises, and made
extensive uses of it. In 'Canto 116,' for example, individ-
ual words are separated by indentation and thus gain
emphasis.

```
            again is all "paradiso"
                    a nice quiet paradise
                            over the shambles
            and some climbing
                    before the take-off,
            to "see again,"
            the verb is "see," not "walk on"
            i.e. it coheres all right
                            even if my notes do not
                                    cohere.
```

Lineation throws attention to the <u>particulars of language</u>;
this is the function of visuality in modernist prosody: to
move the line, and together with it, the reader's attention,
on the scales of continuity-discontinuity, expectancy and
surprise. The notion of the enjambment has become more com-
plex since now the ranks of grammatical units divided by
line breaks are rhythmically and semantically informative of
the poet's intention. Depending on where line scissors gram-
mar, the poet can vary the rhythmic and semantic weight of a
given unit. Lines ending with sentences create the impression
of natural speech; if lines cut clauses and phrases from each
other, the result is still close to the rhythm of speech,
although more hesitant and meditative speech. When line
breaks occur within phrases, cutting off function words from
full words, speech becomes discontinuous: interphrasal typog-
raphy de-automatizes our reading process. Here words are
isolated from their immediate grammatical surroundings and
gain a tactile quality similar to those of real objects.
Williams' 'Queen Anne's Lace' employs all gradations of the
enjambment, thus refines not only the poem's rhythm, but
also its meaning.

Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth--nor   interphrasal: Prep/NP
so remote a thing. It is a field   interphrasal: Conj/NP
of the wild carrot taking   interphrasal: with NP$_{Gen}$
the field by force; the grass   phrasal: VP/NP
does not raise above it.   phrasal: NP/VP
Here is no question of whiteness,   sentential
white as can be, with a purple mole   clausal: constituent S/Cl
at the center of each flower.   phrasal: NP/PP
Each flower is a hand's span   sentential
of her whiteness. Wherever   interphrasal:within NP$_{Gen}$
his hand has lain there is   phrasal: AdvP/NP
a tiny purple blemish. Each part   interphrasal: VP/NP
is a blossom under his touch   phrasal: NP/VP
to which the fibres of her being   clausal: NP/CL
stem one by one, each to its end,   phrasal: NP/VP
until the whole field is a   sentential: const. S(const.S)
white desire, empty, a single stem,   interphrasal: Art/N
a cluster, flower by flower,   phrasal: NP/NP
a pious wish to whiteness gone over-   phrasal: NP/NP
or nothing.   phrasal: NP/NP

In the context of such a poem, where out of 21 lines 15 end
with sentences, clauses or phrases, the typography of the
remaining 6 seems to be surprising. Sentential, clausal and
phrasal lineation reveal a greater or lesser coincidence of
grammar and prosody, or, we could even say, a greater or
lesser subordination of grammar to prosody. Interprasal
lineation, where prosody violates grammar, points to the
key-words of the poem and as such has the same function as
rhyme does in that they both direct and control attention.
Thus, words emphasized by interphrasal enjambment are:
anemone petals, so remote a thing, of the white carrot, of
her whiteness, a tiny purple blemish, white desire. The
last line also gets extra emphasis not only because it is

the closure, but also because the phrasal division is punc-
tuated by the dash at the line ending. These seven key-
phrases /anemone petals, so remote a thing, of the wild
carrot, of her whiteness, a tiny purple blemish, white desire,
or nothing/ indeed pin down or outline the message of the
whole poem, again in a metonymical order. Of course, only a
variation of the degrees of enjambment can create prosodic
excitement and can punctuate the poem semantically; had Wil-
liams ended all his lines on unkinetic particles, typography
would have lost its attention and rhythm controlling func-
tion.

   "When rhythm renounces the support of abstract and inde-
pendent systems--meter or isochrony--," Charles O. Hartman
points out, "the basic principle of the line emerges and
takes absolute control" (Hartman 1980: 92). Indeed, the cen-
trality of the line in modernist nonmetrical prosody is
clear; it derives from being allowed to serve as the meeting
ground of grammatical and prosodic processes. The shifting
relations between syntax and lineation create a tension
between continuity and discontinuity, thus providing each
line with unexpected prosodic and semantic information.
Williams' poem 'By the Road to the Contagious Hospital' is a
fine example for the dynamism of grammatical and prosodic
forces generating a semantic effect.

        By the road to the contagious hospital
        under the surge of the blue
        mottled clouds driven from the
        northeast--a cold wind. Beyond, the
        waste of broad, muddy fields
        brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

        patches of standing water
        the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines--

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches--

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind--

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf

One by one objects are defined--
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance--Still, the profound change

has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken

With an abundant use of preposition in the four opening
stanzas /by, to, under, from, beyond, along, under/, Williams
provides the poem with an initial energy and at the same time
expresses the vigour and dynamism of nature in spring. The
miltiplicity of prepositions implies that spring is not con-
sidered as an abstraction or a symbol, but as a concrete
entity, as as such demands function words with the implicit
feature of concreteness and locality. In the prespositions
Williams found such an equivalent series of linguistic ges-
tures for spring which expresses dynamism and concreteness
at the same time.

    After some prose passages, 'The Contagious Hospital' is
the first poem in the volume Spring and All; it is a strong
upbeat providing the poetic impulse and setting for a whole
series of texts. As such an exposition, its lead is all the
more important. The drive and swing (or 'spring') of the
first stanzas is attained by means other than prepositional
abundance too: the grammetrics of phrasal and interphrasal
enjambments creates the impression of syntactic continuity.
Seven lines begin by tying up the syntactically loose ends
of previous lines (blue / mottled; the / northeast; the /
waste; fallen / patches; reddish / purplish; twiggy / stuff;
sluggish / dazed). Also, the first verb only occurs at the
end of the 15th line, the first point of rest both gram-
matically and prosodically. From this point, the poem seems
to calm down somewhat. The train of images is maintained to
follow a sequential order, but the shifts are both less
frequent and less abrupt. The multiplicity of spring is not
detailed as was in the first stanzas, but is mentioned by
the collective pronoun, "they"; the items are not presented
individually, rather their general movement, growing, awak-
ening, is depicted. The poem moves to a more universal
-scale-- "it" might refer to pregnancy, new life, spring and
totality--, without yet becoming abstract: images remain at
the particularity of the grass and the carrot leaf. Typog-
raphy is still used to create semantic effects by locating
key-words and key-images in initial and final line posi-
tions. As often in Williams' poetry, the poem is about the
process of how things are born: continuous syntax follows
the movement of discovery, while discontinuous typography
marks the ultimate stages of this process, articulating the
particulars as the perceptible results of spring's awakening.
"No idea but in things!"
    Although free verse, open poetry and the prose poem de-
mand a different approach from metered poetry, grammetrics
is not restricted to the study of metrical verse only. Here
grammetrics does not describe and interpret the interfer-

ences of grammar and meter, but those of grammar and the measures of nonmetrical prosodies. Grammetrics is the first prosodic theory that applies the same apparatus and methodology for the description and exegesis of both metered and non-metrical/measured verse, that is capable of handling poetries of any formal tightness. As such, grammetrics seems to exhaust the possibilities of prosody. It is just about the most the prosodiest can do, although it is no more than he has to.

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