

# EDGAR ALLAN POE

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ESSAYS AND REVIEWS

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## *The Rationale of Verse\**

THE WORD "Verse" is here used not in its strict or primitive sense, but as the term most convenient for expressing generally and without pedantry all that is involved in the consideration of rhythm, rhyme, metre, and versification.

There is, perhaps, no topic in polite literature which has been more pertinaciously discussed, and there is certainly not one about which so much inaccuracy, confusion, misconception, misrepresentation, mystification, and downright ignorance on all sides, can be fairly said to exist. Were the topic really difficult, or did it lie, even, in the cloud-land of metaphysics, where the doubt-vapors may be made to assume any and every shape at the will or at the fancy of the gazer, we should have less reason to wonder at all this contradiction and perplexity; but in fact the subject is exceedingly simple; one tenth of it, possibly, may be called ethical; nine tenths, however, appertain to the mathematics; and the whole is included within the limits of the commonest common sense.

"But, if this is the case, how," it will be asked, "can so much misunderstanding have arisen? Is it conceivable that a thousand profound scholars, investigating so very simple a matter for centuries, have not been able to place it in the fullest light, at least, of which it is susceptible?" These queries, I confess, are not easily answered:—at all events a satisfactory reply to them might cost more trouble than would, if properly considered, the whole *vexata questio* to which they have reference. Nevertheless, there is little difficulty or danger in suggesting that the "thousand profound scholars" *may* have failed, first because they were scholars, secondly because they were profound, and thirdly because they were a thousand—the impotency of the scholarship and profundity having been thus multiplied a thousand fold. I am serious in these suggestions; for, first again, there is something in "scholarship" which seduces us into blind worship of Bacon's Idol of the Theatre—into irrational deference to antiquity; secondly, the

\*Some few passages of this article appeared, about four years ago, in "The Pioneer," a monthly Magazine published by J. R. Lowell and R. Carter. Although an excellent work it had a *very* limited circulation.

proper "profundity" is rarely profound—it is the nature of Truth in general, as of some ores in particular, to be richest when most superficial; thirdly, the clearest subject may be overclouded by mere superabundance of talk. In chemistry, the best way of separating two bodies is to add a third; in speculation, fact often agrees with fact and argument with argument, until an additional well-meaning fact or argument sets every thing by the ears. In one case out of a hundred a point is excessively discussed because it is obscure; in the ninety-nine remaining it is obscure because excessively discussed. When a topic is thus circumstanced, the readiest mode of investigating it is to forget that any previous investigation has been attempted.

But, in fact, while much has been written on the Greek and Latin rhythms, and even on the Hebrew, little effort has been made at examining that of any of the modern tongues. As regards the English, comparatively nothing has been done. It may be said, indeed, that we are without a treatise on our own verse. In our ordinary grammars and in our works on rhetoric or prosody in general, may be found occasional chapters, it is true, which have the heading, "Versification," but these are, in all instances, exceedingly meagre. They pretend to no analysis; they propose nothing like system; they make no attempt at even rule; every thing depends upon "authority." They are confined, in fact, to mere exemplification of the supposed varieties of English feet and English lines;—although in no work with which I am acquainted are these feet correctly given or these lines detailed in anything like their full extent. Yet what has been mentioned is all—if we except the occasional introduction of some pedagogue-ism, such as this, borrowed from the Greek Prosodies:—"When a syllable is wanting, the verse is said to be catalectic; when the measure is exact, the line is acatalectic; when there is a redundant syllable it forms hypermeter." Now whether a line be termed catalectic or acatalectic is, perhaps, a point of no vital importance;—it is even possible that the student may be able to decide, promptly, when the *a* should be employed and when omitted, yet be incognizant, at the same time, of *all* that is worth knowing in regard to the structure of verse.

A leading defect in each of our treatises, (if treatises they can be called,) is the confining the subject to mere *Versification*, while Verse in general, with the understanding given to the term in the heading of this paper, is the real question at issue. Nor am I aware of even one of our Grammars which so much as properly defines the word versification itself. "Versification," says a work now before me, of which the accuracy is far more than usual—the "English Grammar" of Goold Brown—"Versification is the art of arranging words into lines of correspondent length, so as to produce harmony by the regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity." The commencement of this definition might apply, indeed, to the *art* of versification, but not to versification itself. Versification is not the art of arranging &c., but the actual arranging—a distinction too obvious to need comment. The error here is identical with one which has been too long permitted to disgrace the initial page of every one of our school grammars. I allude to the definitions of English Grammar itself. "English Grammar," it is said, "is the art of speaking and writing the English language correctly." This phraseology, or something essentially similar, is employed, I believe, by Bacon, Miller, Fisk, Greenleaf, Ingersoll, Kirkland, Cooper, Flint, Pue, Comly, and many others. These gentlemen, it is presumed, adopted it without examination from Murray, who derived it from Lily, (whose work was "*quam solam Regia Majestas in omnibus scholis docendam præcipit*,") and who appropriated it without acknowledgment, but with some unimportant modification, from the Latin Grammar of Leonicensus. It may be shown, however, that this definition, so complacently received, is not, and cannot be, a proper definition of English Grammar. A definition is that which so describes its object as to distinguish it from all others:—it is no definition of any one thing if its terms are applicable to any one other. But if it be asked—"What is the design—the end—the aim of English Grammar?" our obvious answer is, "The art of speaking and writing the English language correctly:"—that is to say, we must use the precise words employed as the definition of English Grammar itself. But the object to be obtained by any means is, assuredly, not the means. English Grammar and the end contemplated by English Grammar, are two matters

sufficiently distinct; nor can the one be more reasonably regarded as the other than a fishing-hook as a fish. The definition, therefore, which is applicable in the latter instance, *cannot*, in the former, be true. Grammar in general is the analysis of language; English Grammar of the English.

But to return to Versification as defined in our extract above. "It is the art," says this extract, "of arranging words into lines of *correspondent length*." Not so:—a correspondence in the length of lines is by no means essential. Pindaric odes are, surely, instances of versification, yet these compositions are noted for extreme diversity in the length of their lines.

The arrangement is moreover said to be for the purpose of producing "*harmony* by the regular alternation," &c. But *harmony* is not the sole aim—not even the principal one. In the construction of verse, *melody* should never be left out of view; yet this is a point which all our Prosodies have most unaccountably forborne to touch. Reasoned rules on this topic should form a portion of all systems of rhythm.

"So as to produce harmony," says the definition, "by the *regular alternation*," &c. A *regular* alternation, as described, forms no part of any principle of versification. The arrangement of spondees and dactyls, for example, in the Greek hexameter, is an arrangement which may be termed *at random*. At least it is arbitrary. Without interference with the line as a whole, a dactyl may be substituted for a spondee, or the converse, at any point other than the ultimate and penultimate feet, of which the former is always a spondee, the latter nearly always a dactyl. Here, it is clear, we have no "*regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity*."

"So as to produce harmony," proceeds the definition, "by the regular alternation of *syllables differing in quantity*,"—in other words by the alternation of long and short syllables; for in rhythm all syllables are necessarily either short or long. But not only do I deny the necessity of any *regularity* in the succession of feet and, by consequence, of syllables, but dispute the essentiality of any *alternation*, regular or irregular, of syllables long and short. Our author, observe, is now engaged in a definition of versification in general, not of English versification in particular. But the Greek and Latin metres abound in the spondee and pyrrhic—the former consisting of

two long syllables; the latter of two short; and there are innumerable instances of the immediate succession of many spondees and many pyrrhics.

Here is a passage from Silius Italicus:

Fallis te mensas inter quod credis inermem  
 Tot bellis quæsita viro, tot cædibus armat  
 Majestas eterna ducem: si admoveris ora  
 Cannas et Trebium ante oculos Trasymenaque busta,  
 Et Pauli stare ingentem miraberis umbram.

Making the elisions demanded by the classic Prosodies, we should scan these Hexameters thus:

Fállis | tē mēn | sās īn | tēr qūod | crēdis īn | ērmēm |  
 Tōt bēl | līs qūæ | sītā vī | rō tōt | cædībūs | ārmāt |  
 Mājēs | tās ē | tērnā dū | cēm s'ād | mōvērīs | ōrā |  
 Cānnās | ēt Trēbī' | ānt'ōcū | lōs Trāsý | mēnāqūe | būstā  
 ēt Pāu | lī stā | r'ingēn | tēm mī | rābērīs | ūmbrām |

It will be seen that, in the first and last of these lines, we have only two short syllables in thirteen, with an uninterrupted succession of no less than *nine* long syllables. But how are we to reconcile all this with a definition of versification which describes it as "the art of arranging words into lines of correspondent length so as to produce harmony by the *regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity?*"

It may be urged, however, that our prosodist's *intention* was to speak of the English metres alone, and that, by omitting all mention of the spondee and pyrrhic, he has virtually avowed their exclusion from our rhythms. A grammarian is never excusable on the ground of good intentions. We demand from him, if from any one, rigorous precision of style. But grant the design. Let us admit that our author, following the example of all authors on English Prosody, has, in defining versification at large, intended a definition merely of the English. All these prosodists, we will say, reject the spondee and pyrrhic. Still all admit the iambus, which consists of a short syllable followed by a long; the trochee, which is the converse of the iambus; the dactyl, formed of one long syllable

ble followed by two short; and the anapæst—two short succeeded by a long. The spondee is improperly rejected, as I shall presently show. The pyrrhic is rightfully dismissed. Its existence in either ancient or modern rhythm is purely chimerical, and the insisting on so perplexing a nonentity as a foot of *two short* syllables, affords, perhaps, the best evidence of the gross irrationality and subservience to authority which characterize our Prosody. In the meantime the acknowledged dactyl and anapæst are enough to sustain my proposition about the "alternation," &c., without reference to feet which are assumed to exist in the Greek and Latin metres alone: for an anapæst and a dactyl may meet in the same line; when of course we shall have an uninterrupted succession of four short syllables. The meeting of these two feet, to be sure, is an accident not contemplated in the definition now discussed; for this definition, in demanding a "regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity," insists on a regular succession of similar *feet*. But here is an example:

Sing tō mē | Isābēlle.

This is the opening line of a little ballad now before me, which proceeds in the same rhythm—a peculiarly beautiful one. More than all this:—English lines are often well composed, entirely, of a regular succession of syllables *all of the same quantity*:—the first lines, for instance, of the following quatrain by Arthur C. Cox:

*March! march! march!*  
 Making sounds as they tread,  
 Ho! ho! how they step,  
 Going down to the dead!

The line italicized is formed of three cæsuras. The cæsura, of which I have much to say hereafter, is rejected by the English Prosodies and grossly misrepresented in the classic. It is a perfect foot—the most important in all verse—and consists of a single *long* syllable; *but the length of this syllable varies*.

It has thus been made evident that there is *not one* point of the definition in question which does not involve an error.

And for anything more satisfactory or more intelligible we shall look in vain to any published treatise on the topic.

So general and so total a failure can be referred only to radical misconception. In fact the English Prosodists have blindly followed the pedants. These latter, like *les moutons de Panurge*, have been occupied in incessant tumbling into ditches, for the excellent reason that their leaders have so tumbled before. The Iliad, being taken as a starting point, was made to stand in stead of Nature and common sense. Upon this poem, in place of facts and deduction from fact, or from natural law, were built systems of feet, metres, rhythms, rules,—rules that contradict each other every five minutes, and for nearly all of which there may be found twice as many exceptions as examples. If any one has a fancy to be thoroughly confounded—to see how far the infatuation of what is termed “classical scholarship” can lead a book-worm in the manufacture of darkness out of sunshine, let him turn over, for a few moments, any one of the German Greek Prosodies. The only thing clearly made out in them is a very magnificent contempt for Leibnitz’s principle of “a sufficient reason.”

To divert attention from the real matter in hand by any farther reference to these works, is unnecessary, and would be weak. I cannot call to mind, at this moment, one essential particular of information that is to be gleaned from them; and I will drop them here with merely this one observation: that, employing from among the numerous “*ancient*” feet the spondee, the trochee, the iambus, the anapæst, the dactyl, and the cæsura alone, I will engage to scan *correctly* any of the Horatian rhythms, or any true rhythm that human ingenuity can conceive. And this excess of chimerical feet is, perhaps, the very least of the scholastic supererogations. *Ex uno disce omnia*. The fact is that *Quantity* is a point in whose investigation the lumber of mere learning may be dispensed with, if ever in any. Its appreciation is universal. It appertains to no region, nor race, nor æra in especial. To melody and to harmony the Greeks hearkened with ears precisely similar to those which we employ for similar purposes at present; and I should not be condemned for heresy in asserting that a pendulum at Athens would have vibrated much after the same fashion as does a pendulum in the city of Penn.

*Verse* originates in the human enjoyment of equality, fitness. To this enjoyment, also, all the moods of verse—rhythm, metre, stanza, rhyme, alliteration, the *refrain*, and other analogous effects—are to be referred. As there are some readers who habitually confound rhythm and metre, it may be as well here to say that the former concerns the *character* of feet (that is, the arrangements of syllables) while the latter has to do with the *number* of these feet. Thus by “a dactylic *rhythm*” we express a sequence of dactyls. By “a dactylic *hexameter*” we imply a line or measure consisting of six of these dactyls.

To return to *equality*. Its idea embraces those of similarity, proportion, identity, repetition, and adaptation or fitness. It might not be very difficult to go even behind the idea of equality, and show both how and why it is that the human nature takes pleasure in it, but such an investigation would, for any purpose now in view, be supererogatory. It is sufficient that the *fact* is undeniable—the fact that man derives enjoyment from his perception of equality. Let us examine a crystal. We are at once interested by the equality between the sides and between the angles of one of its faces: the equality of the sides pleases us; that of the angles doubles the pleasure. On bringing to view a second face in all respects similar to the first, this pleasure seems to be squared; on bringing to view a third it appears to be cubed, and so on. I have no doubt, indeed, that the delight experienced, if measurable, would be found to have exact mathematical relations such as I suggest; that is to say, as far as a certain point, beyond which there would be a decrease in similar relations.

The perception of pleasure in the equality of *sounds* is the principle of *Music*. Unpractised ears can appreciate only simple equalities, such as are found in ballad airs. While comparing one simple sound with another they are too much occupied to be capable of comparing the equality subsisting between these two simple sounds, taken conjointly, and two other similar simple sounds taken conjointly. Practised ears, on the other hand, appreciate both equalities at the same instant—although it is absurd to suppose that both are *heard* at the same instant. One is heard and appreciated from itself: the other is heard by the memory; and the instant glides into

and is confounded with the secondary, appreciation. Highly cultivated musical taste in this manner enjoys not only these double equalities, all appreciated at once, but takes pleasurable cognizance, through memory, of equalities the members of which occur at intervals so great that the uncultivated taste loses them altogether. That this latter can properly estimate or decide on the merits of what is called scientific music, is of course impossible. But scientific music has no claim to intrinsic excellence—it is fit for scientific ears alone. In its excess it is the triumph of the *physique* over the *morale* of music. The sentiment is overwhelmed by the sense. On the whole, the advocates of the simpler melody and harmony have infinitely the best of the argument;—although there has been very little of real argument on the subject.

In *verse*, which cannot be better designated than as an inferior or less capable Music, there is, happily, little chance for complexity. Its rigidly simple character not even Science—not even Pedantry can greatly pervert.

The rudiment of verse may, possibly, be found in the *spondee*. The very germ of a thought seeking satisfaction in equality of sound, would result in the construction of words of two syllables, equally accented. In corroboration of this idea we find that spondees most abound in the most ancient tongues. The second step we can easily suppose to be the comparison, that is to say, the collocation, of two spondees—of two words composed each of a spondee. The third step would be the juxta-position of three of these words. By this time the perception of monotone would induce farther consideration: and thus arises what Leigh Hunt so flounders in discussing under the title of “The *Principle* of Variety in Uniformity.” Of course there is no principle in the case—nor in maintaining it. The “Uniformity” is the principle:—the “Variety” is but the principle’s natural safeguard from self-destruction by excess of self. “Uniformity,” besides, is the very worst word that could have been chosen for the expression of the *general* idea at which it aims.

The perception of monotone having given rise to an attempt at its relief, the first thought in this new direction would be that of collating two or more words formed each of two syllables differently accented (that is to say, short and

long) but having the same order in each word:—in other terms, of collating two or more iam-buses, or two or more trochees. And here let me pause to assert that more pitiable nonsense has been written on the topic of *long* and *short* syllables than on any other subject under the sun. In general, a syllable is long or short, just as it is difficult or easy of enunciation. The *natural* long syllables are those encumbered—the *natural* short ones are those *unencumbered*, with consonants; all the rest is mere artificiality and jargon. The Latin Prosodies have a rule that “a vowel before two consonants is long.” This rule is deduced from “authority”—that is, from the observation that vowels so circumstanced, in the ancient poems, are always in syllables long by the laws of scansion. The philosophy of the rule is untouched, and lies simply in the physical difficulty of giving voice to such syllables—of performing the lingual evolutions necessary for their utterance. Of course, it is not the *vowel* that is long (although the rule says so) but the syllable of which the vowel is a part. It will be seen that the length of a syllable, depending on the facility or difficulty of its enunciation, must have great variation in various syllables; but for the purposes of verse we suppose a long syllable equal to two short ones:—and the natural deviation from this relativeness we correct in perusal. The more closely our long syllables approach this relation with our short ones, the better, *ceteris paribus*, will be our verse: but if the relation does not exist of itself, we force it by emphasis, which can, of course, make any syllable as long as desired;—or, by an effort we can pronounce with unnatural brevity a syllable that is naturally too long. *Accented* syllables are of course always long—but, where *unencumbered* with consonants, must be classed among the *unnaturally* long. Mere custom has declared that we shall accent them—that is to say, dwell upon them; but no inevitable lingual difficulty forces us to do so. In fine, every long syllable must of its own accord occupy in its utterance, or must be *made* to occupy, precisely the time demanded for two short ones. The only exception to this rule is found in the *cæsura*—of which more anon.

The success of the experiment with the trochees or iam-buses (the one would have suggested the other) must have

led to a trial of dactyls or anapæsts—natural dactyls or anapæsts—dactylic or anapæstic *words*. And now some degree of complexity has been attained. There is an appreciation, first, of the equality between the several dactyls, or anapæsts, and, secondly, of that between the long syllable and the two short conjointly. But here it may be said that step after step would have been taken, in continuation of this routine, until all the feet of the Greek Prosodies became exhausted. Not so:—these remaining feet have no existence except in the brains of the scholiasts. It is needless to imagine men inventing these things, and folly to explain how and why they invented them, until it shall be first shown that they are actually invented. All other “feet” than those which I have specified, are, if not impossible at first view, merely combinations of the specified; and, although this assertion is rigidly true, I will, to avoid misunderstanding, put it in a somewhat different shape. I will say, then, that at present I am aware of no *rhythm*—nor do I believe that any one can be constructed—which, in its last analysis, will not be found to consist altogether of the feet I have mentioned, either existing in their individual and obvious condition, or interwoven with each other in accordance with simple natural laws which I will endeavor to point out hereafter.

We have now gone so far as to suppose men constructing indefinite sequences of spondaic, iambic, trochaic, dactylic, or anapæstic words. In *extending* these sequences, they would be again arrested by the sense of monotone. A succession of spondees would *immediately* have displeased; one of iambuses or of trochees, on account of the variety included within the foot itself, would have taken longer to displease; one of dactyls or anapæsts still longer: but even the last if extended very far, must have become wearisome. The idea, first, of curtailing, and, secondly, of defining the length of a sequence, would thus at once have arisen. Here then is the *line*, or verse proper.\* The principle of equality being constantly

\*Verse, from the Latin *vertere*, to turn, is so called on account of the turning or recommencement of the series of feet. Thus a verse, strictly speaking, is a line. In this sense, however, I have preferred using the latter word alone; employing the former in the general acceptation given it in the heading of this paper.

at the bottom of the whole process, lines would naturally be made, in the first instance, equal in the number of their feet; in the second instance there would be variation in the mere number; one line would be twice as long as another; then one would be some less obvious multiple of another; then still less obvious proportions would be adopted:—nevertheless there would be *proportion*, that is to say a phase of equality, still.

Lines being once introduced, the necessity of distinctly defining these lines *to the ear*, (as yet written verse does not exist,) would lead to a scrutiny of their capabilities *at their terminations*:—and now would spring up the idea of equality in sound between the final syllables—in other words, of *rhyme*. First, it would be used only in the iambic, anapæstic, and spondaic rhythms, (granting that the latter had not been thrown aside, long since, on account of its tameness;) because in these rhythms the concluding syllable, being long, could best sustain the necessary protraction of the voice. No great while could elapse, however, before the effect, found pleasant as well as useful, would be applied to the two remaining rhythms. But as the chief force of rhyme must lie in the accented syllable, the attempt to create rhyme at all in these two remaining rhythms, the trochaic and dactylic, would necessarily result in double and triple rhymes, such as *beauty* with *duty* (trochaic) and *beautiful* with *dutiful* (dactylic.)

It must be observed that in suggesting these processes I assign them no date; nor do I even insist upon their order. Rhyme is supposed to be of modern origin, and were this proved, my positions remain untouched. I may say, however, in passing, that several instances of rhyme occur in the “Clouds” of Aristophanes, and that the Roman poets occasionally employ it. There is an effective species of ancient rhyming which has never descended to the moderns; that in which the ultimate and penultimate syllables rhyme with each other. For example:

Parturiunt montes et nascitur ridiculus *mus*.

and again—

Litoreis ingens inventa sub ilici *bus sus*.

The terminations of Hebrew verse, (as far as understood,) show no signs of rhyme; but what thinking person can doubt that it did actually exist? That men have so obstinately and blindly insisted, *in general*, even up to the present day, in confining rhyme to the *ends* of lines, when its effect is even better applicable elsewhere, intimates, in my opinion, the sense of some *necessity* in the connexion of the end with the rhyme—hints that the origin of rhyme lay in a necessity which connected it with the end—shows that neither mere accident nor mere fancy gave rise to the connexion—points, in a word, at the very necessity which I have suggested, (that of some mode of defining lines *to the ear*,) as the true origin of rhyme. Admit this and we throw the origin far back in the night of Time—beyond the origin of written verse.

But to resume. The amount of complexity I have now supposed to be attained is very considerable. Various systems of equalization are appreciated at once (or nearly so) in their respective values and in the value of each system with reference to all the others. As our present *ultimatum* of complexity we have arrived at triple-rhymed, natural-dactylic lines, existing proportionally as well as equally with regard to other triple-rhymed, natural-dactylic lines. For example:

Virginal Lilian, rigidly, humbly dutiful;  
 Saintlily, lowlily,  
 Thrillingly, holily  
 Beautiful!

Here we appreciate, first, the absolute equality between the long syllable of each dactyl and the two short conjointly; secondly, the absolute equality between each dactyl and any other dactyl—in other words, among all the dactyls; thirdly, the absolute equality between the two middle lines; fourthly, the absolute equality between the first line and all the others taken conjointly; fifthly, the absolute equality between the two last syllables of the respective words “dutiful” and “beautiful;” sixthly, the absolute equality between the two last syllables of the respective words “lowlily” and “holily;” seventhly, the proximate equality between the first syllable of “dutiful” and the first syllable of “beautiful;” eighthly, the

proximate equality between the first syllable of “lowlily” and that of “holily;” ninthly, the proportional equality, (that of five to one,) between the first line and each of its members, the dactyls; tenthly, the proportional equality, (that of two to one,) between each of the middle lines and its members, the dactyls; eleventhly, the proportional equality between the first line and each of the two middle—that of five to two; twelfthly, the proportional equality between the first line and the last—that of five to one; thirteenthly, the proportional equality between each of the middle lines and the last—that of two to one; lastly, the proportional equality, as concerns number, between all the lines, taken collectively, and any individual line—that of four to one.

The consideration of this last equality would give birth immediately to the idea of *stanza*\*—that is to say, the insulation of lines into equal or obviously proportional masses. In its primitive, (which was also its best,) form, the stanza would most probably have had absolute unity. In other words, the removal of any one of its lines would have rendered it imperfect; as in the case above, where if the last line, for example, be taken away, there is left no rhyme to the “dutiful” of the first. Modern stanza is excessively loose, and where so, ineffective as a matter of course.

Now, although in the deliberate written statement which I have here given of these various systems of equalities, there seems to be an infinity of complexity—so much that it is hard to conceive the mind taking cognizance of them all in the brief period occupied by the perusal or recital of the stanza—yet the difficulty is in fact apparent only when we will it to become so. Any one fond of mental experiment may satisfy himself, by trial, that, in listening to the lines, he does actually, (although with a seeming unconsciousness, on account of the rapid evolutions of sensation,) recognize and instantaneously appreciate, (more or less intensely as his ear is cultivated,) each and all of the equalizations detailed. The pleasure received, or receivable, has very much such progressive increase, and in very nearly such mathematical relations, as those which I have suggested in the case of the crystal.

\*A stanza is often vulgarly, and with gross impropriety, called a *verse*.



It will be observed that I speak of merely a proximate equality between the first syllable of "dutiful" and that of "beautiful;" and it may be asked why we cannot imagine the earliest rhymes to have had absolute instead of proximate equality of sound. But absolute equality would have involved the use of identical words; and it is the duplicate sameness or monotony—that of sense as well as that of sound—which would have caused these rhymes to be rejected in the very first instance.

The narrowness of the limits within which verse composed of natural feet alone, must necessarily have been confined, would have led, after a *very* brief interval, to the trial and immediate adoption of artificial feet—that is to say of feet *not* constituted each of a single word, but two or even three words; or of parts of words. These feet would be intermingled with natural ones. For example:

ǎ brēath | cǎn māke | thēm ās | ǎ brēath | hās mǎde.

This is an iambic line in which each iambus is formed of two words. Again:

Thē ūn | ĭmā | gīnā | blē mīght | ǒf Jōve. |

This is an iambic line in which the first foot is formed of a word and a part of a word; the second and third of parts taken from the body or interior of a word; the fourth of a part and a whole; the fifth of two complete words. There are no *natural* feet in either lines. Again:

Cǎn ĭt bē | fānciēd thāt | Dēity | ēvēr vīn | dīctīvely |  
Mǎde ĭn hīs | ĭmagē ā | mǎnnīkīn | mērely tō | mǎddēn ĭt? |

These are two dactylic lines in which we find natural feet, ("Deity," "mannikin;") feet composed of two words ("fancied that," "image a," "merely to," "madden it;") feet composed of three words ("can it be," "made in his;") a foot composed of a part of a word ("dictively;") and a foot composed of a word and a part of a word ("ever vin.")

And now, in our supposititious progress, we have gone so

far as to exhaust all the *essentialities* of verse. What follows may, strictly speaking, be recorded as embellishment merely—but even in this embellishment, the rudimental sense of *equality* would have been the never-ceasing impulse. It would, for example, be simply in seeking farther administration to this sense that men would come, in time, to think of the *refrain*, or burden, where, at the closes of the several stanzas of a poem, one word or phrase is *repeated*; and of alliteration, in whose simplest form a consonant is *repeated* in the commencements of various words. This effect would be extended so as to embrace repetitions both of vowels and of consonants, in the bodies as well as in the beginnings of words; and, at a later period, would be made to infringe on the province of rhyme, by the introduction of general similarity of sound between whole feet occurring in the body of a line:—all of which modifications I have exemplified in the line above,

Made in his image a *mannikin* merely to *madden* it.

Farther cultivation would improve also the *refrain* by relieving its monotone in slightly varying the phrase at each repetition, or, (as I have attempted to do in "The Raven,") in retaining the phrase and varying its application—although this latter point is not strictly a rhythmical effect *alone*. Finally, poets when fairly wearied with following precedent—following it the more closely the less they perceived it in company with Reason—would adventure so far as to indulge in positive rhyme at other points than the ends of lines. First, they would put it in the middle of the line; then at some point where the multiple would be less obvious; then alarmed at their own audacity, they would undo all their work by cutting these lines in two. And here is the fruitful source of the infinity of "short metre," by which modern poetry, if not distinguished, is at least disgraced. It would require a high degree, indeed, both of cultivation and of courage, on the part of any versifier, to enable him to place his rhymes—and let them remain—at unquestionably their best position, that of unusual and *unanticipated* intervals.

On account of the stupidity of some people, or, (if talent

be a more respectable word,) on account of their talent for misconception—I think it necessary to add here, first, that I believe the “processes” above detailed to be nearly if not accurately those which *did* occur in the gradual creation of what we now call verse; secondly, that, although I so believe, I yet urge neither the assumed fact nor my belief in it, as a part of the true proposition of this paper; thirdly, that in regard to the aim of this paper, it is of no consequence whether these processes did occur either in the order I have assigned them, or at all; my design being simply, in presenting a general type of what such processes *might* have been and *must* have resembled, to help *them*, the “some people,” to an easy understanding of what I have farther to say on the topic of Verse.

There is one point which, in my summary of the processes, I have purposely forbore to touch; because this point, being the most important of all, on account of the immensity of error usually involved in its consideration, would have led me into a series of detail inconsistent with the object of a summary.

Every reader of verse must have observed how seldom it happens that even any one line proceeds uniformly with a succession, such as I have supposed, of absolutely equal feet; that is to say, with a succession of iamboes only, or of trochees only, or of dactyls only, or of anapæsts only, or of spondee only. Even in the most musical lines we find the succession interrupted. The iambic pentameters of Pope, for example, will be found on examination, frequently varied by trochees in the beginning, or by (what seem to be) anapæsts in the body, of the line.

ōh thōu | whātē | vēr tī | tlē pleāse | thīne eār |  
 Dēan Drā | piēr Bīck | ērstāff | ōr Gūl | īvēr |  
 Whēthēr | thōu choōse | Cērvān | tēs' sē | riōūs āir |  
 ōr lāugh | ānd shāke | īn Rāb | ēlāis' eā | sy chāir. |

Were any one weak enough to refer to the Prosodies for a solution of the difficulty here, he would find it *solved* as usual by a *rule*, stating the fact, (or what it, the rule, supposes to be the fact,) but without the slightest attempt at the *rationale*. “By a *synæresis* of the two short syllables,” say the books, “an

anapæst may sometimes be employed for an iambus, or a dactyl for a trochee. . . . In the beginning of a line a trochee is often used for an iambus.”

*Blending* is the plain English for *synæresis*—but there should be *no* blending; neither is an anapæst *ever* employed for an iambus, or a dactyl for a trochee. These feet differ in time; and *no* feet so differing can ever be legitimately used in the same line. An anapæst is equal to four short syllables—an iambus only to three. Dactyls and trochees hold the same relation. The principle of *equality*, in verse, admits, it is true, of variation at certain points, for the relief of monotone, as I have already shown, but the point of *time* is that point which, being the rudimental one, must never be tampered with at all.

To explain:—In farther efforts for the relief of monotone than those to which I have alluded in the summary, men soon came to see that there was no absolute necessity for adhering to the precise number of syllables, provided the time required for the whole foot was preserved inviolate. They saw, for instance, that in such a line as

ōr lāugh | ānd shāke | īn Rāb | ēlāis' eā | sy chāir, |

the equalization of the three syllables *elais ea* with the two syllables composing any of the other feet, could be readily effected by pronouncing the two syllable *elais* in double quick time. By pronouncing each of the syllables *e* and *lais* twice as rapidly as the syllable *sy*, or the syllable *in*, or any other short syllable, they could bring the two of them, taken together, to the length, that is to say to the time, of any one short syllable. This consideration enabled them to effect the agreeable variation of three syllables in place of the uniform two. And variation was the object—variation to the ear. What sense is there, then, in supposing this object rendered null by the *blending* of the two syllables so as to render them, in absolute effect, one? Of course, there must be *no* blending. Each syllable must be pronounced as distinctly as possible, (or the variation is lost,) but with twice the rapidity in which the ordinary short syllable is enunciated. That the syllables *elais ea* do not compose an *anapast* is evident, and the signs ( ~ ~ ) of their

accentuation are erroneous. The foot might be written thus (---) the inverted crescents expressing double quick time; and might be called a bastard iambus.

Here is a trochaic line:

Sēe thē | dēlicāte | fōotēd | rēin-deēr. |

The prosodies—that is to say the most considerate of them—would here decide that “*delicate*” is a dactyl used in place of a trochee, and would refer to what they call their “rule,” for justification. Others, varying the stupidity, would insist upon a Procrustean adjustment thus (del’cate)—an adjustment recommended to all such words as *silvery*, *murmuring*, etc., which, it is said, should be not only pronounced, but written *silv’ry*, *murm’ring*, and so on, whenever they find themselves in trochaic predicament. I have only to say that “*delicate*,” when circumstanced as above, is neither a dactyl nor a dactyl’s equivalent; that I would suggest for it this (---) accentuation; that I think it as well to call it a bastard trochee; and that all words, at all events, should be written and pronounced *in full*, and as nearly as possible as nature intended them.

About eleven years ago, there appeared in “The American Monthly Magazine,” (then edited, I believe, by Mess. Hoffman and Benjamin,) a review of Mr. Willis’ Poems; the critic putting forth his strength, or his weakness, in an endeavor to show that the poet was either absurdly affected, or grossly ignorant of the laws of verse; the accusation being based altogether on the fact that Mr. W. made occasional use of this very word “*delicate*,” and other similar words, in “the Heroic measure which every one knew consisted of feet of two syllables.” Mr. W. has often, for example, such lines as

That binds him to a woman’s *delicate* love—  
In the gay sunshine, *reverent* in the storm—  
With its *invisible* fingers my loose hair.

Here, of course, the feet *licate love*, *verent in*, and *sible fin*, are bastard iambuses; are *not* anapæsts; and are *not* improperly used. Their employment, on the contrary, by Mr. Willis is but one of the innumerable instances he has given of keen sensi-

bility in all those matters of taste which may be classed under the general head of *fanciful embellishment*.

It is also about eleven years ago, if I am not mistaken, since Mr. Horne, (of England,) the author of “Orion,” one of the noblest epics in any language, thought it necessary to preface his “Chaucer Modernized” by a very long and evidently a very elaborate essay, of which the greater portion was occupied in a discussion of the seemingly anomalous foot of which we have been speaking. Mr. Horne upholds Chaucer in its frequent use; maintains his superiority, *on account* of his so frequently using it, over all English versifiers; and, indignantly repelling the common idea of those who make verse on their fingers—that the superfluous syllable is a roughness and an error—very chivalrously makes battle for it as “a grace.” That a grace it *is*, there can be no doubt; and what I complain of is, that the author of the most happily versified long poem in existence, should have been under the necessity of discussing this grace merely *as* a grace, through forty or fifty vague pages, solely because of his inability to show *how* and *why* it is a grace—by which showing the question would have been settled in an instant.

About the trochee used for an iambus, as we see it in the beginning of the line,

Whēthēr thou choose Cervantes’ serious air,

there is little that need be said. It brings me to the general proposition that, in all rhythms, the prevalent or distinctive feet may be varied at will, and nearly at random, by the *occasional* introduction of equivalent feet—that is to say, feet the sum of whose syllabic times is equal to the sum of the syllabic times of the distinctive feet. Thus the trochee, *whēthēr*, is equal, in the sum of the times of its syllables, to the iambus, *thōu choōse*, in the sum of the times of *its* syllables; each foot being, in time, equal to three short syllables. Good versifiers who happen to be, also, good poets, contrive to relieve the monotone of a series of feet, by the use of equivalent feet only at rare intervals, and at such points of their subject as seem in accordance with the *startling* character of the variation. Nothing of this care is seen in the line quoted above—although

Pope has some fine instances of the duplicate effect. Where vehemence is to be strongly expressed, I am not sure that we should be wrong in venturing on *two consecutive* equivalent feet—although I cannot say that I have ever known the adventure made, except in the following passage, which occurs in “Al Aaraaf,” a boyish poem, written by myself when a boy. I am referring to the sudden and rapid advent of a star:

Dim was its little disk, and angel eyes  
Alone could see the phantom in the skies,  
Whēn first thē phāntōm’s cōurse wās fōund tō bē  
*Hēadlōng hithērward* o’er the starry sea.

In the “general proposition” above, I speak of the *occasional* introduction of equivalent feet. It sometimes happens that unskilful versifiers, without knowing what they do, or why they do it, introduce so many “variations” as to exceed in number the “distinctive” feet; when the ear becomes at once baulked by the *bouleversement* of the rhythm. Too many trochees, for example, inserted in an iambic rhythm, would convert the latter to a trochaic. I may note here, that, in all cases, the rhythm designed should be commenced and continued, *without* variation, until the ear has had full time to comprehend what *is* the rhythm. In violation of a rule so obviously founded in common sense, many even of our best poets, do not scruple to begin an iambic rhythm with a trochee, or the converse; or a dactylic with an anapæst, or the converse; and so on.

A somewhat less objectionable error, although still a decided one, is that of commencing a rhythm, not with a different equivalent foot, but with a “bastard” foot of the rhythm intended. For example:

Māny ā | thōught will | cōme tō | mēmōry. |

Here *many a* is what I have explained to be a bastard trochee, and to be understood should be accented with inverted crescents. It is objectionable solely on account of its position as the *opening* foot of a trochaic rhythm. *Memory*, similarly ac-

cented, is also a bastard trochee, but *unobjectionable*, although by no means demanded.

The farther illustration of this point will enable me to take an important step.

One of our finest poets, Mr. Christopher Pease Cranch, begins a very beautiful poem thus:

Many are the thoughts that come to me  
In my lonely musing;  
And they drift so strange and swift  
There’s no time for choosing  
Which to follow; for to leave  
Any, seems a losing.

“A losing” to Mr. Cranch, of course—but this *en passant*. It will be seen here that the intention is trochaic;—although we do *not* see this intention by the opening foot, as we should do—or even by the opening line. Reading the whole stanza, however, we perceive the trochaic rhythm as the general design, and so, after some reflection, we divide the first line thus:

Many are the | thōughts thāt | cōme tō | me. |

Thus scanned, the line will seem musical. It *is*—highly so. And it is because there is no end to instances of just such lines of apparently incomprehensible music, that Coleridge thought proper to invent his nonsensical *system* of what he calls “scanning by accents”—as if “scanning by accents” were anything more than a phrase. Whenever “Christabel” is really *not rough*, it can be as readily scanned by the true *laws* (not the supposititious *rules*) of verse, as can the simplest pentameter of Pope; and where it *is* rough (*passim*) these same laws will enable any one of common sense to show *why* it is rough and to point out, instantaneously, the remedy for the roughness.

*A* reads and re-reads a certain line, and pronounces it false in rhythm—unmusical. *B*, however, reads it *to A*, and *A* is at once struck with the perfection of the rhythm, and wonders at his dulness in not “catching” it before. Henceforward

he admits the line to be musical. *B*, triumphant, asserts that, to be sure, the line is musical—for it is the work of Coleridge—and that it is *A* who is *not*; the fault being in *A*'s false reading. Now here *A* is right and *B* wrong. *That* rhythm is erroneous, (at some point or other more or less obvious,) which *any* ordinary reader *can*, without design, read improperly. It is the business of the poet so to construct his line that the intention *must* be caught *at once*. Even when men have precisely the same understanding of a sentence, they differ and often widely, in their modes of enunciating it. Any one who has taken the trouble to examine the topic of emphasis, (by which I here mean not *accent* of particular syllables, but the dwelling on entire words,) must have seen that men emphasize in the most singularly arbitrary manner. There are certain large classes of people, for example, who persist in emphasizing their monosyllables. Little uniformity of emphasis prevails; because the thing itself—the idea, emphasis,—is referable to no natural—at least to no well comprehended and therefore uniform law. Beyond a very narrow and vague limit, the whole matter is conventionality. And if we differ in emphasis even when we agree in comprehension, how much more so in the former when in the latter too! Apart, however, from the consideration of natural disagreement, is it not clear that, by tripping here and mouthing there, any sequence of words may be twisted into any species of rhythm? But are we thence to deduce that all sequences of words are rhythmical in a rational understanding of the term?—for this is the deduction, precisely to which the *reductio ad absurdum* will, in the end, bring all the propositions of Coleridge. Out of a hundred readers of “Christabel,” fifty will be able to make nothing of its rhythm, while forty-nine of the remaining fifty will, with some ado, fancy they comprehend it, after the fourth or fifth perusal. The one out of the whole hundred who shall both comprehend and admire it at first sight—must be an unaccountably clever person—and I am by far too modest to assume, for a moment, that that very clever person is myself.

In illustration of what is here advanced I cannot do better than quote a poem:

Pease porridge hot—pease porridge cold—  
Pease porridge in the pot—nine days old.

Now those of my readers who have never *heard* this poem pronounced according to the nursery conventionality, will find its rhythm as obscure as an explanatory note; while those who *have* heard it, will divide it thus, declare it musical, and wonder how there can be any doubt about it.

Pease | porridge | hot | pease | porridge | cold |  
Pease | porridge | in the | pot | nine | days | old. |

The chief thing in the way of this species of rhythm, is the necessity which it imposes upon the poet of travelling in constant company with his compositions, so as to be ready at a moment's notice, to avail himself of a well understood poetical license—that of reading aloud one's own doggerel.

In Mr. Cranch's line,

Many are the | thoughts that | come to | me, |

the general error of which I speak is, of course, very partially exemplified, and the purpose for which, chiefly, I cite it, lies yet further on in our topic.

The two divisions (*thoughts that*) and (*come to*) are ordinary trochees. Of the last division (*me*) we will talk hereafter. The first division (many are the) would be thus accented by the Greek Prosodies (māny āre thē) and would be called by them αστρολογος. The Latin books would style the foot *Pæon Primus*, and both Greek and Latin would swear that it was composed of a trochee and what they term a pyrrhic—that is to say a foot of two *short* syllables—a thing that *cannot be*, as I shall presently show.

But now, there is an obvious difficulty. The *astrologos*, according to the Prosodies' own showing, is equal to *five* short syllables, and the trochee to *three*—yet, in the line quoted, these two feet are equal. They occupy *precisely* the same time. In fact, the whole music of the line depends upon their being *made* to occupy the same time. The Prosodies then, have

demonstrated what all mathematicians have stupidly failed in demonstrating—that three and five are one and the same thing.

After what I have already said, however, about the bastard trochee and the bastard iambus, no one can have any trouble in understanding that *many are the* is of similar character. It is merely a bolder variation than usual from the routine of trochees, and introduces to the bastard trochee one additional syllable. But this syllable is not *short*. That is, it is not short in the sense of “*short*” as applied to the final syllable of the ordinary trochee, where the word means merely *the half of long*.

In this case (that of the additional syllable) “short,” if used at all, must be used in the sense of *the sixth of long*. And all the three final syllables can be called *short* only with the same understanding of the term. The three together are equal only to the one short syllable (whose place they supply) of the ordinary trochee. It follows that there is no sense in thus (˘) accenting these syllables. We must devise for them some new character which shall denote the sixth of long. Let it be (◡)—the crescent placed with the curve to the left. The whole foot (māný aré thé) might be called a *quick trochee*.

We come now to the final division (*me*) of Mr. Cranch’s line. It is clear that this foot, short as it appears, is fully equal in time to each of the preceding. It is in fact the *cæsura*—the foot which, in the beginning of this paper, I called the most important in all verse. Its chief office is that of pause or termination; and here—at the end of a line—its use is easy, because there is no danger of misapprehending its value. We pause on it, by a seeming necessity, just so long as it has taken us to pronounce the preceding feet, whether iambus, trochees, dactyls or anapæsts. It is thus a *variable foot*, and, with some care, may be well introduced into the body of a line, as in a little poem of great beauty by Mrs. Welby:

I have | a lit | tle step | sōñ | of on | ly three | years old. |

Here we dwell on the *cæsura*, *son*, just as long as it requires

us to pronounce either of the preceding or succeeding iam-busses. Its value, therefore, in this line, is that of three short syllables. In the following dactylic line its value is that of four short syllables.

Pale as a | lily was | Emily | Gray.

I have accented the *cæsura* with a (◡) by way of expressing this variability of value.

I observed, just now, that there could be no such foot as one of two short syllables. What we start from in the very beginning of all idea on the topic of verse, is quantity, *length*. Thus when we enunciate an independent syllable it is long, as a matter of course. If we enunciate two, dwelling on both equally, we express equality in the enumeration, or length, and have a right to call them two long syllables. If we dwell on one more than the other, we have also a right to call one short, because it is short in relation to the other. But if we dwell on both equally and with a tripping voice, saying to ourselves here are two short syllables, the query might well be asked of us—“in relation to what are they short?” Shortness is but the negation of length. To say, then, that two syllables, placed independently of any other syllable, are short, is merely to say that they have no positive length, or enunciation—in other words that they are no syllables—that they do not exist at all. And if, persisting, we add anything about their equality, we are merely floundering in the idea of an identical equation, where,  $x$  being equal to  $x$ , nothing is shown to be equal to zero. In a word we can form no conception of a pyrrhic as of an independent foot. It is a mere chimera bred in the mad fancy of a pedant.

From what I have said about the equalization of the several feet of a *line*, it must not be deduced that any *necessity* for equality in time exists between the rhythm of *several* lines. A poem, or even a stanza, may begin with iam-busses, in the first line, and proceed with anapæsts in the second, or even with the less accordant dactyls, as in the opening of quite a pretty specimen of verse by Miss Mary A. S. Aldrich:

The wa | ter li | ly sleeps | in pride |  
 Dōwn in thē | dēpths ōf thē | āzūre | lake. |

Here *azure* is a spondee, equivalent to a dactyl; *lake* a cæsuræ.

I shall now best proceed in quoting the initial lines of Byron's "Bride of Abydos:"

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle  
 Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime—  
 Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle  
 Now melt into softness, now madden to crime?  
 Know ye the land of the cedar and vine,  
 Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine,  
 And the light wings of Zephyr, oppressed with perfume,  
 Wax faint o'er the gardens of Gul in their bloom?  
 Where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit  
 And the voice of the nightingale never is mute—  
 Where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine,  
 And all save the spirit of man is divine?  
 'Tis the land of the East—'tis the land of the Sun—  
 Can he smile on such deeds as his children have done?  
 Oh, wild as the accents of lovers' farewell  
 Are the hearts that they bear and the tales that they tell.

Now the flow of these lines, (as times go,) is very sweet and musical. They have been often admired, and justly—as times go—that is to say, it is a rare thing to find better versification of its kind. And where verse is pleasant to the ear, it is silly to find fault with it because it refuses to be scanned. Yet I have heard men, professing to be scholars, who made no scruple of abusing these lines of Byron's on the ground that they were musical in spite of *all law*. Other gentlemen, *not* scholars, abused "all law" for the same reason:—and it occurred neither to the one party nor to the other that the law about which they were disputing might possibly be no law at all—an ass of a law in the skin of a lion.

The Grammars said something about dactylic lines, and it was easily seen that *these* lines were at least meant for dactylic. The first one was, therefore, thus divided:

Knōw yē thē | lānd whēre thē | cyprēss ānd | myrtle. |

The concluding foot was a mystery; but the Prosodies said something about the dactylic "measure" calling now and then for a double rhyme; and the court of enquiry were content to rest in the double rhyme, without exactly perceiving what a double rhyme had to do with the question of an irregular foot. Quitting the first line, the second was thus scanned:

Arē ēmblēms | ōf deēds thāt | āre dōne in | thēir clīme. |

It was immediately seen, however, that *this* would not do:—it was at war with the whole emphasis of the reading. It could not be supposed that Byron, or any one in his senses, intended to place stress upon such monosyllables as "are," "of," and "their," nor could "their clime," collated with "to crime," in the corresponding line below, be fairly twisted into anything like a "double rhyme," so as to bring everything within the category of the Grammars. But farther these Grammars spoke not. The inquirers, therefore, in spite of their sense of harmony in the lines, when considered without reference to scansion, fell back upon the idea that the "Are" was a blunder—an excess for which the poet should be sent to Coventry—and, striking it out, they scanned the remainder of the line as follows:

—ēmblēms ōf | deēds thāt āre | dōne in thēir | clīme. |

This answered pretty well; but the Grammars admitted no such foot as a foot of one syllable; and besides the rhythm was dactylic. In despair, the books are well searched, however, and at last the investigators are gratified by a full solution of the riddle in the profound "Observation" quoted in the beginning of this article:—"When a syllable is wanting, the verse is said to be catalectic; when the measure is exact, the line is acatalectic; when there is a redundant syllable it forms hypermeter." This is enough. The anomalous line is pronounced to be catalectic at the head and to form hypermeter at the tail:—and so on, and so on; it being soon dis-

covered that nearly all the remaining lines are in a similar predicament, and that what flows so smoothly to the ear, although so roughly to the eye, is, after all, a mere jumble of catalecticism, acatalecticism, and hypermeter—not to say worse.

Now, had this court of inquiry been in possession of even the shadow of the *philosophy* of Verse, they would have had no trouble in reconciling this oil and water of the eye and ear, by merely scanning the passage without reference to lines, and, continuously, thus:

Know ye the | land where the | cypress and | myrtle Are |  
 emblems of | deeds that are | done in their | clime Where  
 the | rage of the | vulture the | love of the | turtle Now |  
 melt into | softness now | madden to | *crime* | Know ye  
 the | land of the | cedar and | vine Where the | flowers ever  
 | blossom the | beams ever | shine Where the | light wings  
 of | Zephyr op | pressed by per | *fume Wax* | faint o'er the  
 | gardens of | Gul in their | bloom Where the | citron and  
 | olive are | fairest of | fruit And the | voice of the | night-  
 ingale | never is | mute Where the | virgins are | soft as the  
 | roses they | *twine And* | all save the | spirit of | man is di  
 | vine 'Tis the | land of the | East 'tis the | clime of the |  
 Sun Can he | smile on such | deeds as his | children have |  
*done Oh* | wild as the | accents of | lovers' fare | well Are  
 the | hearts that they | bear and the | tales that they | *tell*.

Here "crime" and "tell" (italicized) are cæsuras, each having the value of a dactyl, four short syllables; while "fume Wax," "twine and," and "done Oh," are spondees which, of course, being composed of two long syllables, are also equal to four short, and are the dactyl's natural equivalent. The nicety of Byron's ear has led him into a succession of feet which, with two trivial exceptions as regards melody, are absolutely accurate—a very rare occurrence this in dactylic or anapæstic rhythms. The exceptions are found in the spondee "*twine And*" and the dactyl, "*smile on such*." Both feet are false in point of melody. In "*twine And*," to make out the rhythm, we must force "*And*" into a length which it will not naturally bear. We are called on to sacrifice either the proper length of

the syllable as demanded by its position as a member of a spondee, or the customary accentuation of the word in conversation. There is no hesitation, and should be none. We at once give up the sound for the sense; and the rhythm is imperfect. In this instance it is *very* slightly so;—not one person in ten thousand could, by ear, detect the inaccuracy. But the *perfection* of verse, as regards melody, consists in its *never* demanding any such sacrifice as is here demanded. The rhythmical must agree, *thoroughly*, with the reading flow. This perfection has in no instance been attained—but is unquestionably attainable. "*Smile on such*," the dactyl, is incorrect, because "*such*," from the character of the two consonants *ch*, cannot *easily* be enunciated in the ordinary time of a short syllable, which its position declares that it is. Almost every reader will be able to appreciate the slight difficulty here; and yet the error is by no means so important as that of the "*And*" in the spondee. By dexterity we *may* pronounce "*such*" in the true time; but the attempt to remedy the rhythmical deficiency of the *And* by drawing it out, merely aggravates the offence against natural enunciation, by directing attention to the offence.

My main object, however, in quoting these lines, is to show that, in spite of the Prosodies, the length of a line is entirely an arbitrary matter. We might divide the commencement of Byron's poem thus:

Know ye the | land where the. |

or thus:

Know ye the | land where the | cypress and. |

or thus:

Know ye the | land where the | cypress and | myrtle are. |

or thus:

Know ye the | land where the | cypress and | myrtle are |  
 emblems of. |



In short we may give it any division we please, and the lines will be good—provided we have at least *two* feet in a line. As in mathematics two units are required to form number, so rhythm, (from the Greek αριθμος, number,) demands for its formation at least two feet. Beyond doubt, we often see such lines as

Know ye the—  
Land where the—

lines of one foot; and our Prosodies admit such; but with impropriety; for common sense would dictate that every so obvious division of a poem as is made by a line, should include within itself all that is necessary for its own comprehension; but in a line of one foot we can have no appreciation of *rhythm*, which depends upon the equality between *two* or more pulsations. The false lines, consisting sometimes of a single cæsura, which are seen in mock Pindaric odes, are of course “rhythmical” only in connection with some other line; and it is this want of independent rhythm which adapts them to the purposes of burlesque alone. Their effect is that of incongruity (the principle of mirth;) for they intrude the blankness of prose amid the harmony of verse.

My second object in quoting Byron’s lines, was that of showing how absurd it often is to cite a single line from amid the body of a poem, for the purpose of instancing the perfection or imperfection of the line’s rhythm. Were we to see by itself

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle,

we might justly condemn it as defective in the final foot, which is equal to only three, instead of being equal to four, short syllables.

In the foot (*flowers ever*) we shall find a further exemplification of the principle in the bastard iambus, bastard trochee, and quick trochee, as I have been at some pains in describing these feet above. All the Prosodies on English verse would insist upon making an elision in “flowers,” thus (flow’rs,) but this is nonsense. In the quick trochee (many are the) occurring in Mr. Cranch’s *trochaic* line, we had to equalize the time of the three syllables (*ny, are, the,*) to that of the one *short*

syllable whose position they usurp. Accordingly each of these syllables is equal to the third of a short syllable, that is to say, the *sixth of a long*. But in Byron’s *dactylic* rhythm, we have to equalize the time of the three syllables (*ers, ev, er,*) to that of the one *long* syllable whose position they usurp or, (which is the same thing,) of the *two short*. Therefore the value of each of the syllables (*ers, ev, and er*) is the *third of a long*. We enunciate them with only half the rapidity we employ in enunciating the three final syllables of the quick trochee—which latter is a rare foot. The “*flowers ever,*” on the contrary, is as common in the dactylic rhythm as is the *bastard* trochee in the trochaic, or the bastard iambus in the iambic. We may as well accent it with the curve of the crescent to the right, and call it a *bastard dactyl*. A *bastard anapast*, whose nature I now need be at no trouble in explaining, will of course occur, now and then, in an anapæstic rhythm.

In order to avoid any chance of that confusion which is apt to be introduced in an essay of this kind by too sudden and radical an alteration of the conventionalities to which the reader has been accustomed, I have thought it right to suggest for the accent marks of the bastard trochee, bastard iambus, etc., etc., certain characters which, in merely varying the direction of the ordinary short accent (˘) should imply, what is the fact, that the feet themselves are not *new* feet, in any proper sense, but simply modifications of the feet, respectively, from which they derive their names. Thus a bastard iambus is, in its essentiality, that is to say, in its time, an iambus. The variation lies only in the *distribution* of this time. The time, for example, occupied by the one short (or *half of long*) syllable, in the ordinary iambus, is, in the bastard, spread equally over two syllables, which are accordingly the *fourth of long*.

But this fact—the fact of the essentiality, or whole time, of the foot being unchanged, is now so fully before the reader, that I may venture to propose, finally, an accentuation which shall answer the real purpose—that is to say what should be the real purpose of all accentuation—the purpose of expressing to the eye the exact relative value of every syllable employed in Verse.

I have already shown that enunciation, or *length*, is the point from which we start. In other words, we begin with a

*long syllable.* This then is our unit; and there will be no need of accenting it at all. An unaccented syllable, in a system of accentuation, is to be regarded always as a long syllable. Thus a spondee would be without accent. In an iambus, the first syllable being "short," or the *half* of long, should be accented with a small 2, placed *beneath* the syllable; the last syllable, being long, should be unaccented;—the whole would be thus (control.) In a trochee, these accents would be merely con-

versed, thus (manly.) In a dactyl, each of the two final syllables, being the half of long, should, also, be accented with a small 2 beneath the syllable; and the first syllable left unaccented, the whole would be thus (happiness.) In an anapæst

we should converse the dactyl thus, (in the land.) In the bastard dactyl, each of the three concluding syllables being the *third* of long, should be accented with a small 3 beneath the syllable, and the whole foot would stand thus, (flowers ever.)

In the bastard anapæst we should converse the bastard dactyl thus, (in the rebound.) In the bastard iambus, each of the two initial syllables, being the fourth of long, should be accented, below, with a small 4; the whole foot would be thus, (in the

rain.) In the bastard trochee, we should converse the bastard iambus thus, (many a.) In the quick trochee, each of the three

concluding syllables, being the *sixth* of long, should be accented, below, with a small 6; the whole foot would be thus, (many are the.) The quick iambus is not yet created, and most

probably never will be; for it would be excessively useless, awkward, and liable to misconception—as I have already shown that even the quick trochee is:—but, should it appear, we must accent it by conversing the quick trochee. The *cæsura*, being variable in length, but always *longer than "long,"* should be accented, *above*, with a number expressing the length, or value, of the distinctive foot of the rhythm in which it occurs. Thus a *cæsura*, occurring in a spondaic rhythm, would be accented with a small 2 above the syllable,

or, rather, foot. Occurring in a dactylic or anapæstic rhythm, we also accent it with the 2, above the foot. Occurring in an iambic rhythm, however, it must be accented, above, with 1½; for this is the relative value of the iambus. Occurring in the trochaic rhythm, we give it, of course, the same accentuation. For the complex 1½, however, it would be advisable to substitute the simpler expression  $\frac{3}{2}$  which amounts to the same thing.

In this system of accentuation Mr. Cranch's lines, quoted above, would thus be written:

Many are the | thoughts that | come to | me  
<sub>6 6 6 2 2</sub>

In my | lonely | musing, |  
<sub>2 2 2</sub>

And they | drift so | strange and | swift  
<sub>2 2 2 3</sub>

There's no | time for | choosing |  
<sub>2 2 2</sub>

Which to | follow, | for to | leave  
<sub>2 2 2 3</sub>

Any, | seems a | losing. |  
<sub>2 2 2</sub>

In the ordinary system the accentuation would be thus:

Māny arē thē | thōughts thāt | cōme tō | mē |  
 In my | lōnely | mūsing, |  
 ānd thēy | drift sō | strānge ānd | swīft |  
 Therē's nō | timē fōr | choōsing |  
 Whīch tō | fōllōw, | fōr tō | lēave  
 āny, | seēms ā | lōsing. |

It must first be observed, here, that I do not grant this to be the "ordinary" *scansion*. On the contrary, I never yet met the man who had the faintest comprehension of the true scanning of these lines, or of such as these. But granting this to be the mode in which our Prosodies would divide the feet, they would accentuate the syllables as just above.

Now, let any reasonable person compare the two modes.

The first advantage seen in my mode is that of simplicity—of time, labor, and ink saved. Counting the fractions as *two* accents, even, there will be found only *twenty-six* accents to the stanza. In the common accentuation there are *forty-one*. But admit that all this is a trifle, which it is *not*, and let us proceed to points of importance. Does the common accentuation express the truth, in particular, in general, or in any regard? Is it consistent with itself? Does it convey either to the ignorant or to the scholar a just conception of the rhythm of the lines? Each of these questions must be answered in the negative. The crescents, being precisely similar, must be understood as expressing, all of them, one and the same thing; and so all prosodies have always understood them and wished them to be understood. They express, indeed, “short”—but this word has all kinds of meanings. It serves to represent (the reader is left to guess *when*) sometimes the half, sometimes the third, sometimes the fourth, and sometimes the sixth, of “long”—while “long” itself, in the books, is left undefined and undescribed. On the other hand, the horizontal accent, it may be said, expresses sufficiently well, and unvaryingly, the syllables which are meant to be long. It does nothing of the kind. This horizontal accent is placed over the *cæsura* (wherever, as in the Latin Prosodies, the *cæsura* is recognized) as well as over the ordinary long syllable, and implies anything and everything, just as the crescent. But grant that it does express the ordinary long syllables, (leaving the *cæsura* out of question,) have I not given the identical expression, by not employing any expression at all? In a word, while the Prosodies, with a certain number of accents, express *precisely nothing whatever*, I, with scarcely half the number, have expressed everything which, in a system of accentuation, demands expression. In glancing at my mode in the lines of Mr. Cranch, it will be seen that it conveys not only the exact relation of the syllables and feet, among themselves, in those particular lines, but their precise value in relation to any other existing or conceivable feet or syllables, in any existing or conceivable system of rhythm.

The object of what we call *scansion* is the distinct making of the rhythmical flow. Scansion without accents or perpendicular lines between the feet—that is to say scansion *by* the

voice only—is scansion *to* the ear only; and all very good in its way. The written scansion addresses the ear through the eye. In either case the object is the distinct making of the rhythmical, musical, or reading flow. There *can* be no other object and there is none. Of course, then, the scansion and the reading flow should go hand in hand. The former must agree with the latter. The former represents and expresses the latter; and is good or bad as it truly or falsely represents and expresses it. If by the written scansion of a line we are not enabled to perceive any rhythm or music in the line, then either the line is unrhythmical or the scansion false. Apply all this to the English lines which we have quoted, at various points, in the course of this article. It will be found that the scansion exactly conveys the rhythm, and thus thoroughly fulfils the only purpose for which scansion is required.

But let the scansion *of the schools* be applied to the Greek and Latin verse, and what result do we find?—that the verse is one thing and the scansion quite another. The ancient verse, *read* aloud, is in general musical, and occasionally *very* musical. *Scanned* by the Prosodial rules we can, for the most part, make nothing of it whatever. In the case of the English verse, the more emphatically we dwell on the divisions between the feet, the more distinct is our perception of the kind of rhythm intended. In the case of the Greek and Latin, the more we dwell the *less* distinct is this perception. To make this clear by an example:

Mæcenæ, atavis edite regibus,  
 O, et præsidium et dulce decus meum,  
 Sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum  
 Collegisse juvat, metaque fervidis  
 Evitata rotis, palmaque nobilis  
 Terrarum dominos evehit ad Deos.

Now in *reading* these lines, there is scarcely one person in a thousand who, if even ignorant of Latin, will not immediately feel and appreciate their flow—their music. A prosodist, however, informs the public that the *scansion* runs thus:

Mæce | nas ata | vis | edite | regibus |  
 O, et | præsiði? | et | dulce de | cus meum |  
 Sunt quos | curricu | lo | pulver' O | lympticum |  
 Colle | gisse ju | vat | metaque | fervidis |  
 Evi | tata ro | tis | palmaque | nobilis |  
 Terra | rum domi | nos | evehit | ad Deos. |

Now I do not deny that we get a *certain sort* of music from the lines if we read them according to this scansion, but I wish to call attention to the fact that this scansion and the certain sort of music which grows out of it, are entirely at war not only with the reading flow which any ordinary person would naturally give the lines, but with the reading flow universally given them, and never denied them, by even the most obstinate and stolid of scholars.

And now these questions are forced upon us—"Why exists this discrepancy between the modern verse with its scansion, and the ancient verse with its scansion?"—"Why, in the former case, are there agreement and representation, while in the latter there is neither the one nor the other?" or, to come to the point,—“How are we to reconcile the ancient verse with the scholastic scansion of it?” This absolutely necessary conciliation—shall we bring it about by supposing the scholastic scansion wrong because the ancient verse is right, or by maintaining that the ancient verse is wrong because the scholastic scansion is not to be gainsaid?

Were we to adopt the latter mode of arranging the difficulty, we might, in some measure, at least simplify the expression of the arrangement by putting it thus—Because the pedants have no eyes, therefore the old poets had no ears.

“But,” say the gentlemen without the eyes, “the scholastic scansion, although certainly not handed down to us in form from the old poets themselves (the gentlemen without the ears,) is nevertheless deduced, Baconially, from certain facts which are supplied us by careful observation of the old poems.”

And let us illustrate this strong position by an example from an American poet—who must be a poet of some eminence, or he will not answer the purpose. Let us take Mr. Alfred B. Street. I remember these two lines of his:

His sinuous path, by blazes, wound  
 Among trunks grouped in myriads round.

With the *sense* of these lines I have nothing to do. When a poet is in a “fine phrensy” he may as well imagine a large forest as a small one—and “by blazes!” is *not* intended for an oath. My concern is with the rhythm, which is iambic.

Now let us suppose that, a thousand years hence, when the “American language” is dead, a learned prosodist should be deducing from “careful observation” of our best poets, a system of scansion for our poetry. And let us suppose that this prosodist had so little dependence in the generality and immutability of the laws of Nature, as to assume in the outset, that, because we lived a thousand years before his time and made use of steam-engines instead of mesmeric balloons, we must therefore have had a *very* singular fashion of mouthing our vowels, and altogether of hudsonizing our verse. And let us suppose that with these and other fundamental propositions carefully put away in his brain, he should arrive at the line,

Among | trunks grouped | in my | riads round.

Finding it in an obviously iambic rhythm, he would divide it as above, and observing that “trunks” made the first member of an iambus, he would call it short, as Mr. Street intended it to be. Now farther:—if instead of admitting the possibility that Mr. Street, (who by that time would be called Street simply, just as we say Homer)—that Mr. Street might have been in the habit of writing carelessly, as the poets of the prosodist’s own era did, and as all poets will do (on account of being geniuses)—instead of admitting this, suppose the learned scholar should make a “rule” and put it in a book, to the effect that, in the American verse, the vowel *u*, *when found embedded among nine consonants*, was *short*. What, under such circumstances, would the sensible people of the scholar’s day have a right not only to think, but to say of that scholar?—why, that he was “a fool,—by blazes!”

I have put an extreme case, but it strikes at the root of the error. The “rules” are grounded in “authority”—and this “authority”—can any one tell us what it means? or can any one

suggest anything that it may *not* mean? Is it not clear that the "scholar" above referred to, might as readily have deduced from authority a totally false system as a partially true one? To deduce from authority a consistent prosody of the ancient metres would indeed have been within the limits of the barest possibility; and the task has *not* been accomplished, for the reason that it demands a species of ratiocination altogether out of keeping with the brain of a bookworm. A rigid scrutiny will show that the very few "rules" which have not as many exceptions as examples, are those which have, by accident, their true bases not in authority, but in the omniprevalent laws of syllabification; such, for example, as the rule which declares a vowel before two consonants to be long.

In a word, the gross confusion and antagonism of the scholastic prosody, as well as its marked inapplicability to the reading flow of the rhythms it pretends to illustrate, are attributable, first to the utter absence of natural principle as a guide in the investigations which have been undertaken by inadequate men; and secondly to the neglect of the obvious consideration that the ancient poems, which have been the *criteria* throughout, were the work of men who must have written as loosely, and with as little definitive system, as ourselves.

Were Horace alive to day, he would divide for us his first Ode thus, and "make great eyes" when assured by the prosodists that he had no business to make any such division:

Mæcenas | atavis | edite | regibus |  
           2 2   2 2   2 2   2 2  
 O et præ | sidium et | dulce de | cus meum |  
           2 2   3 3 3   2 2   2 2  
 Sunt quos cur | riculo | pulverem O | lympicum |  
           2 2   2 2   3 3 3   2 2  
 Collegisse | juvat | metaque | fervidis |  
           3 3 3   2 2   2 2  
 Evitata | rotis | palmaque | nobilis |  
           3 3 3   2 2   2 2  
 Terrarum | dominos | evehit | ad Deos. |  
           2 2   2 2   2 2   2 2

Read by this scansion, the flow is preserved; and the more we dwell on the divisions, the more the intended rhythm becomes apparent. Moreover, the feet have all the same time; while, in the scholastic scansion, trochees—admitted tro-

chees—are absurdly employed as equivalents to spondees and dactyls. The books declare, for instance, that *Colle*, which begins the fourth line, is a trochee, and seem to be gloriously unconscious that to put a trochee in apposition with a longer foot, is to violate the inviolable principle of all music, *time*.

It will be said, however, by "some people" that I have no business to make a dactyl out of such obviously long syllables as *sunt, quos, cur*. Certainly I have no business to do so. I *never* do so. And Horace should not have done so. But he did. Mr. Bryant and Mr. Longfellow do the same thing every day. And merely because these gentlemen, now and then, forget themselves in this way, it would be hard if some future prosodist should insist upon twisting the "Thanatopsis," or the "Spanish Student," into a jumble of trochees, spondees, and dactyls.

It may be said, also, by some other people that in the word *decus*, I have succeeded no better than the books, in making the scansion agree with the reading flow; and that *decus* was not pronounced *decus*. I reply that there can be no doubt of the word having been pronounced, in this case, *decus*. It must be observed that the Latin *case*, or variation of a noun in its terminating syllables, caused the Romans—*must* have caused them to pay greater attention to the termination of a noun than to its commencement, or than we do to the terminations of our nouns. The end of the Latin word established that relation of the word with other words, which we establish by prepositions. Therefore, it would seem infinitely less odd to them than it does to us, to dwell at any time, for any slight purpose, abnormally, on a terminating syllable. In verse this license, scarcely a license, would be frequently admitted. These ideas unlock the secret of such lines as the

Litoreis ingens inventa sub ilicibus suis,

and the

Parturiunt montes nascetur ridiculus mus,

which I quoted, some time ago, while speaking of rhyme.

As regards the prosodial elisions, such as that of *rem* before *O*, in *pulverem Olympicum*, it is really difficult to understand

how so dismally silly a notion could have entered the brain even of a pedant. Were it demanded of me why the books cut off one *vowel* before another, I might say—it is, perhaps, because the books think that, since a bad reader is so apt to slide the one vowel into the other at any rate, it is just as well to print them *ready-slided*. But in the case of the terminating *m*, which is the most readily pronounced of all consonants, (as the infantile *mama* will testify,) and the most impossible to cheat the ear of by any system of sliding—in the case of the *m*, I should be driven to reply that, to the best of my belief, the prosodists did the thing, because they had a fancy for doing it, and wished to see how funny it would look after it was done. The thinking reader will perceive that, from the great facility with which *em* may be enunciated, it is admirably suited to form one of the rapid short syllables in the bastard dactyl (pulverem O)—but because the books had no conception of a bastard dactyl, they knocked it in the head at once—by cutting off its tail.

Let me now give a specimen of the true scansion of another Horatian measure; embodying an instance of proper elision.

Integer | vitæ | scelerisque | purus |  
           2 2           3 3 3  
 Non eget | Mauri | jaculis ne | que arcu |  
           2 2           3 3 3  
 Nec vene | natis | gravida sa | gittis,  
           2 2           3 3 3  
           Fusce, pha | retra.  
                   2 2

Here the regular recurrence of the bastard iambus, gives great animation to the rhythm. The *e* before the *a* in *que arcu* is, almost of sheer necessity, cut off—that is to say, run into the *a* so as to preserve the spondee. But even this license it would have been better not to take.

Had I space, nothing would afford me greater pleasure than to proceed with the scansion of *all* the ancient rhythms, and to show how easily, by the help of common sense, the intended music of each and all can be rendered instantaneously apparent. But I have already overstepped my limits, and must bring this paper to an end.

It will never do, however, to omit all mention of the heroic hexameter.

I began the “processes” by a suggestion of the spondee as the first step towards verse. But the innate monotony of the spondee has caused its disappearance, as the basis of rhythm, from all modern poetry. We *may* say, indeed, that the French heroic—the most wretchedly monotonous verse in existence—is, to all intents and purposes, spondaic. But it is not designedly spondaic—and if the French were ever to examine it at all, they would no doubt pronounce it iambic. It must be observed that the French language is strangely peculiar in this point—that *it is without accentuation and consequently without verse*. The genius of the people, rather than the structure of the tongue, declares that their words are, for the most part, enunciated with an uniform dwelling on each syllable. For example, *we* say “*syllabification*.” A Frenchman would say *syl-la-bi-fi-ca-ti-on*; dwelling on no one of the syllables with any noticeable particularity. Here again I put an extreme case, in order to be well understood; but the general fact is as I give it—that comparatively, the French have *no* accentuation. And there can be nothing worth the name of verse, without. Therefore, the French have no verse worth the name—which is the fact, put in sufficiently plain terms. Their iambic rhythm so superabounds in absolute spondees as to warrant me in calling its basis spondaic; but French is the *only* modern tongue which has any rhythm with such basis; and even in the French, it is, as I have said, unintentional.

Admitting, however, the validity of my suggestion that the spondee was the first approach to verse, we should expect to find, first, natural spondees, (words each forming just a spondee,) most abundant in the most ancient languages, and, secondly, we should expect to find spondees forming the basis of the most ancient rhythms. These expectations are in both cases confirmed.

Of the Greek hexameter, the intentional basis is spondaic. The dactyls are the *variation* of the theme. It will be observed that there is no absolute certainty about *their* points of interposition. The penultimate foot, it is true, is usually a dactyl; but not uniformly so; while the ultimate, on which the ear *lingers* is always a spondee. Even that the penultimate is usu-

ally a dactyl may be clearly referred to the necessity of winding up with the *distinctive* spondee. In corroboration of this idea, again, we should look to find the penultimate spondee most usual in the most ancient verse; and, accordingly, we find it more frequent in the Greek than in the Latin hexameter.

But besides all this, spondees are not only more prevalent in the heroic hexameter than dactyls, but occur to such an extent as is even unpleasant to modern ears, on account of monotony. What the modern chiefly appreciates and admires in the Greek hexameter is the *melody of the abundant vowel sounds*. The Latin hexameters *really* please very few moderns—although so many pretend to fall into ecstasies about them. In the hexameters quoted, several pages ago, from Silius Italicus, the preponderance of the spondee is strikingly manifest. Besides the natural spondees of the Greek and Latin, numerous artificial ones arise in the verse of these tongues on account of the tendency which *case* has to throw full accentuation on terminal syllables; and the preponderance of the spondee is farther ensured by the comparative infrequency of the small prepositions which *we* have to serve us *instead* of case, and also the absence of the diminutive auxiliary verbs with which *we* have to eke out the expression of our primary ones. These are the monosyllables whose abundance serve to stamp the poetic genius of a language as tripping or dactylic.

Now paying no attention to these facts, Sir Philip Sidney, Professor Longfellow, and innumerable other persons more or less modern, have busied themselves in constructing what they supposed to be “English hexameters on the model of the Greek.” The only difficulty was that (even leaving out of question the melodious masses of vowel,) these gentlemen never could get their English hexameters to *sound* Greek. Did they *look* Greek?—that should have been the query; and the reply might have led to a solution of the riddle. In placing a copy of ancient hexameters side by side with a copy (in similar type) of such hexameters as Professor Longfellow, or Professor Felton, or the Frogpondian Professors collectively, are in the shameful practice of composing “on the model of the Greek,” it will be seen that the latter (hexameters, not profes-

sors) are about one third longer *to the eye*, on an average, than the former. The more abundant dactyls make the difference. And it is the greater number of spondees in the Greek than in the English—in the ancient than in the modern tongue—which has caused it to fall out that while these eminent scholars were groping about in the dark for a Greek hexameter, which is a spondaic rhythm varied now and then by dactyls, they merely stumbled, to the lasting scandal of scholarship, over something which, on account of its long-leggedness, we may as well term a Feltonian hexameter, and which is a dactylic rhythm, interrupted, rarely, by artificial spondees which are no spondees at all, and which are curiously thrown in by the heels at all kinds of improper and impertinent points.

Here is a specimen of the Longfellowian hexameter.

Also the | church with | in was a | dorned for | this was the |  
 season |  
 In which the | young their | parents' | hope and the | loved  
 ones of | Heaven |  
 Should at the | foot of the | altar re | new the | vows of their  
 | baptism |  
 Therefore each | nook and | corner was | swept and | cleaned  
 and the | dust was |  
 Blown from the | walls and | ceiling and | from the | oil-  
 painted benches. |

Mr. Longfellow is a man of imagination—but *can* he imagine that any individual, with a proper understanding of the danger of lock-jaw, would make the attempt of twisting his mouth into the shape necessary for the emission of such spondees as “parents,” or such dactyls as “cleaned and the” and “loved ones of?” “Baptism” is by no means a bad spondee—perhaps because it happens to be a dactyl;—of all the rest, however, I am dreadfully ashamed.

But these feet—dactyls and spondees, all together,—should thus be put at once into their proper position:

“Also, the church within was adorned; for this was the season in which the young, their parents’ hope, and the loved ones of Heaven, should, at the feet of the altar, renew the

vows of their baptism. Therefore, each nook and corner was swept and cleaned; and the dust was blown from the walls and ceiling, and from the oil-painted benches.”

There!—that is respectable prose; and it will incur no danger of ever getting its character ruined by any body’s mistaking it for verse.

But even when we let these modern hexameters go, as Greek, and merely hold them fast in their proper character of Longfellowian, or Feltonian, or Frogpondian, we must still condemn them as having been committed in a radical misconception of the philosophy of verse. The spondee, as I observed, is the *theme* of the Greek line. Most of the ancient hexameters *begin* with spondees, for the reason that the spondee *is* the theme; and the ear is filled with it as with a burden. Now the Feltonian dactyls have, in the same way, dactyls for the theme, and most of them begin with dactyls—which is all very proper if not very Greek—but, unhappily, the one point at which they *are* very Greek is that point, precisely, at which they should be nothing but Feltonian. They always *close* with what is meant for a spondee. To be consistently silly, they should die off in a dactyl.

That a truly Greek hexameter *cannot*, however, be readily composed in English, is a proposition which I am by no means inclined to admit. I think I could manage the point myself. For example:

Do tell! | when may we | hope to make | men of sense | out  
of the | Pundits |  
Born and brought | up with their | snouts deep | down in  
the | mud of the | Frog-pond?  
Why ask? | who ever | yet saw | money made | out of a | fat  
old—  
Jew, or | downright | upright | nutmegs | out of a | pine-  
knot? |

The proper spondee predominance is here preserved. Some of the dactyls are not so good as I could wish—but, upon the whole, the rhythm is very decent—to say nothing of its excellent sense.

*Southern Literary Messenger*, October–November 1848

## The Poetic Principle

IN SPEAKING of the Poetic Principle, I have no design to be either thorough or profound. While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By “minor poems” I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here, in the beginning, permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, “a long poem,” is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the “Paradise Lost” is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book—that is to say, commencing



- 10.5-10 "The dew . . . stone."] Wordsworth's "The Pet Lamb" (1800), with dashes added by Poe.
- 10.19-25 "Those who . . . title."] From the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.
- 10.25-27 Yet let . . . turkeys.] A series of playful allusions: Wordsworth wrote a work called "The Waggoner" (1819); the "sore toe" is a reference to *Oedipus* ("swollen foot"); Sophocles was called "the Attic Bee" (see A. W. Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* [1808], Lecture VII) and was said by Pliny (*Natural History*, XXXVII, 40) to have used a chorus of guinea fowls to lament the death of Meleager in one of his plays.
- 10.30-32 "que . . . nient."] "For the most part, most sects are right in what they advance, but not in what they deny." Quoted by Coleridge in Chapter II of the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) as from Leibnitz, *Trois Lettres à M. Remond de Mont-Mort* (1741).
- 11.2 Nyctanthes] Night-blooming jasmine.
- 11.8 Corcyra] Corfu, frequently renamed throughout history.
- 11.10 "Tres-volontiers,]" Very willingly.
- 12.3-4 No . . . gallows.] From Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, Part II (1664), I, 272ff.
- 13.3-5 examination . . . backwards?] In 1841, while Dickens' novel *Barnaby Rudge* was still appearing serially, Poe predicted who the murderer would be (see his reviews, pp. 218-44 of the present volume). Godwin's statement about writing *Caleb Williams* (1794) backwards occurs in the preface.
- 20.12 Aidenn] Muslim term for paradise, *Adn* (Eden).
- 26.1 *The Rationale of Verse*] This essay incorporates most of the shorter treatment, titled "Notes upon English Verse," published in *The Pioneer*, March 1843.
- 27.31-34 "When a . . . hypermeter."] Gould Brown, *The Institutes of English Grammar* (1833).
- 28.21-28 Bacon . . . Leonicensus.] This Bacon seems to have made an abridgment of Lindley Murray's influential *English Grammar: Comprehending the Principles and Rules of the English Language*; Alexander Miller, *A Concise Grammar of the Language* (1795); Allen Fisk, *Murray's English Grammar Simplified* (1822); Jeremiah Greenleaf, *Grammar Simplified; or, An Ocular Analysis of the English Language*, 10th ed. (1824); Charles M. Ingersoll, *Conversations on English Grammar*, 4th ed. (1824); Samuel Kirkham (for Kirkland), *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures*, 53rd ed. (1841); Joab Goldsmith Cooper, *An Abridgement of Murray's English Grammar* (1828); Abel Flint, *Murray's English Grammar Abridged* (1810); Hugh A. Pue, *A Grammar of the English Language* (1841); John Comly, *English Grammar*, 15th ed. (1826); William Lily, *Brevissima institutio, seu ratio grammatices cognoscendae, ad omnium puerorum utili-*

*taten prescripta; quam solam regia majestas in omnibus scholis docendam precipit* ["in all schools by royal injunction"] (1776); Omnibonus Leonicensus, *De octo partibus orationis* (1473).

30.5-9 Fallis . . . umbram.] From *Punica*, II, 342-46. "You are wrong if you believe he sits at table unarmed; / This lord is armed with the eternal greatness gained / From so many wars, so many slaughtered victims. / If you come close to him you will be astonished: / Cannae and Trebia will be before your eyes, the Trasimene graves / And Paulus' monstrous shade." (Translation by Anthony Kemp.)

31.20 a little ballad] By Henry B. Hirst; see Poe's review of his *The Coming of the Mammoth*, pp. 594-605.

32.5-6 *les moutons de Panurge*] The sheep of Panurge, a character in François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-52); this is a recurrent reference in Poe's criticism.

32.31-32 *Ex uno disce omnia.*] "From one thing learn all."

37.36 Parturiunt . . . mus.] "The laboring mountain gives birth to a ridiculous mouse." Horace, *Ars Poetica*, V, 139.

37.38 Litoreis . . . sus.] "You will find an immense sow under the oaks of the shore." Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, 390.

42.30-33 ðh thōu . . . chaïr.] Alexander Pope, 1st *Dunciad* (1728), 11.19-22.

47.5 Christopher Pease Cranch] Poe consistently misspelled the name of Christopher *Pearse* Cranch (1830-92).

47.7-12 Many are . . . losing.] "My Thoughts," printed in Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *Poets and Poetry of America* (1842) and Cranch's *Poems* (1844).

47.23-24 Coleridge . . . system] In his preface to "Christabel" (1816), Coleridge explains that the meter of the poem is "founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables"; four accents per line and any number of syllables from seven to twelve.

49.24 αστρολογος] An apparent error on Poe's part, derived from his misreading of Charles Anthon, *A System of Greek Prosody and Metre* (1842), where αστρολογος (astrologer) is used as an example of a word that scans as the foot called *paon primus*; αστρολογος, or *astrologos*, is not a term of Greek prosody.

61.28-33 Mæcenas . . . Deos.] Horace, *Odes*, I, 1. "Mæcenas, sprung from royal progenitors, / Oh, my protector and my dear glory, / There are those who delight in gathering / Olympic dust upon the racing-car, / Who cleared the turning-post with burning wheel. / Lords of earth, they carry to the gods / The celebrated palm." (Translation by Anthony Kemp.)

- 63.1-2 His sinuous . . . round.] "The Lost Hunter," printed in Griswold.
- 63.16 hudsonizing] A reference to Henry Norman Hudson, author of *Lectures on Shakspeare*, the second edition of which had just been published (1848).
- 66.21-24 Integer . . . retra.] Horace, *Odes*, I, 21. "He whose life is upright, purified / From guilt, needs no Moorish darts nor bow, / Nor quivers, Fuscus, full of / Poisonous arrows." (Translation by Anthony Kemp.)
- 66.25 bastard iambus] Here Poe seems to mean "bastard dactyl."
- 68.38 Felton . . . Frogpondian] Cornelius Conway Felton had defended Longfellow's "bastard" hexameters in the *North American Review*, 55 (1842), 114-44. "Frogpondian" is Poe's name for the Boston intelligentsia and Harvard professors, derived from the frogpond on the Boston Common, and apparently alluding to the tale of the frogs and the Log King in Aesop's *Fables*.
- 71.1 *The Poetic Principle*] In this essay Poe makes extensive use of his review of Longfellow's *Ballads and Other Poems* (1842). See pp. 679-96.
- 72.28-29 Lamartine . . . Pollock] The French poet Alphonse de Lamartine was notoriously prolix. Robert Pollock of Scotland was known for a long didactic, religious poem, *The Course of Time* (1827).
- 76.22-23 Pure . . . Sense.] The tripartite paradigm of Immanuel Kant, Introduction to *The Critique of Judgment* (1793).
- 80.23 Down] Cf. stanza 5 of the poem just quoted (79.26).
- 81.29 I know . . . see] In Bryant's *Poetical Works*, this line reads: "I know that no more should see."

## REVIEWS OF BRITISH AND CONTINENTAL AUTHORS

- 104.3 "Poacher"] See Poe's review, pp. 325-28.
- 105.21 "What Hecuba . . . Hecuba?"] *Hamlet*, II, 2.
- 105.32-33 "The Ghost of Cock-Lane,"] Sensational eighteenth-century ghost (first sighted in 1762), much debated in the London newspapers, including contributions from Dr. Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole, and Oliver Goldsmith.
- 116.4 Sir James Puckle] British moralist of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; Poe mentions him frequently.
- 118.33-35 Egyptian . . . Blitz] James Silk Buckingham was one of many who exploited popular interest in Egypt after Napoleon's armies opened it to European travel. Signor Antonio Blitz was a stage magician.

- 120.31 *niäseries*] Here and throughout, Poe uses the word in the sense of trivial or inadvertent foolishness.
- 127.3-4 "*spoudiotaton* . . . Aristotle.]" See note 7.7.
- 129.6-7 "De gustibus . . . disputandus;]" "Taste is not arguable."
- 129.13 Ambrosianians] An allusion to Christopher North's column, the "Noctes Ambrosianae," in *Blackwood's*, which featured esoteric satires written principally for the magazine's contributors, who wrote under various pseudonyms, like Ebony, Δ, and the Ettrick Shepherd.
- 133.12 Nat-Leeism] Nathaniel Lee, eighteenth-century British playwright noted for the extravagant imagery, frenzied action, and general morbidity of his tragedies, became insane and died in Bedlam at the age of forty-two.
- 139.8 *skolastikos*] A reference to the ancient scholar who demonstrated the value of his house to a prospective buyer by showing him a brick, the part absurdly representing the whole (synecdoche).
- 140.5-7 Lord . . . proportion.]" Francis Bacon, *Essays* (1597, 1612, 1625), No. 43, "Of Beauty," here slightly misquoted.
- 142.24-35 Scott . . . Smith] Scott's title is actually *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). The author of *Pelham* is Bulwer. Charlotte Dacre wrote sensational novels such as *Zafloya, the Moor* (1806) and *The Libertine* (1807) under a pseudonym, which gave rise to the appellation "the Rose Matilda School" of fiction. James Kirk Paulding, a New York writer, was a friend of Poe's. The writer of *Godolphin* is Bulwer. Michael and John Banim collaborated on a series of stories of Irish life, *Tales of the O'Hara Family* (1825-29). Thomas Hope, Edward John Trelawney, Thomas Moore, and Horace Smith were British writers of prose and metrical romances.
- 146.25 antique.] In the *Southern Literary Messenger* Poe introduced a long extract from the novel at this point. It is not included here.
- 161.26 *jurare* . . . *magistri*] "To swear allegiance to a master."
- 163.33 vindictive . . . Lockhart.] Literary warfare of the Scots and English magazines.
- 172.10-11 Wohl . . . ist!—] "Indeed, he is gone to where there is no more snow."
- 174.6-16 *Corinne* . . . l'amour.]" By Mme. de Staël. "Of all my faculties, the most powerful is suffering. I am born for happiness. My character is trusting, my imagination is gay; but pain excites in me an unknown impetuosity that can disturb my reason, or lead to death. I repeat to you again, treat me with care; gaiety, mobility only serve me outwardly: but there are abysses of sadness in my soul that I cannot resist unless I preserve myself from love."