

**CHAPTERS ON
ALLITERATIVE VERSE:
A DISSERTATION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649479023

Chapters on Alliterative Verse: a Dissertation by John Lawrence

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JOHN LAWRENCE

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GENERAL

CHAPTERS

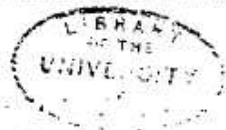
ON

ALLITERATIVE VERSE

BY

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A DISSERTATION

IN CANDIDATURE FOR THE DEGREE OF D. LIT. (LOND.)

ACCEPTED BY THE EXAMINERS DEC. 1892

LONDON: HENRY FROWDE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS WAREHOUSE
AMEN CORNER, E.C.

1893

Price Three Shillings and Sixpence
net

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GENERAL

Reich

Oxford

HORACE HART, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PREFACE.

THE dissertation herewith submitted for approval varies very much from my original design, which was to have written a critical review of recent German treatises on the subject of alliterative verse.

In January last, whilst engaged upon this task, my attention was drawn to certain unusual metrical points which I had noted in Cod. Junius XI in the summer of 1889, thinking them at the time simple errors on the part of the scribe, but which I now saw to be an invaluable clue to the construction of the half-verse. Following this out, by the aid of Prof. Möller's work on alliterative poetry (*Zur alt. Alliterationspoesie*), I was soon led to the conclusion, stated in Chap. I. p. 30, that the half-verse is constructed on the same plan as the whole verse, that as the latter is divided into two sections by a cæsura, each of which may begin either with an accented, or an unaccented syllable, so is the former. Unfortunately, my notes were confined to the *Exodus* and *Daniel* poems, and it was impossible for me, as I was then stationed at Prague, to consult the MS. further. This circumstance, and the knowledge that during the present year we might expect another article on *Metrik* from Prof. Sievers (to be published in Paul's *Grundriss*) led me to abandon my plan of dealing with the whole subject of alliterative verse-structure, and eventually I decided, until I should return to England,

to confine my attention to the laws of alliteration simply, using as my chief guide the admirable treatise by Rieger : *Die Alt- und Angelsächsische Verskunst*.

Here again, however, I found it impossible to pursue a straight course. The question of crossed alliteration first encountered me. Like other people I had accepted Frucht's calculation as probably decisive. It turned out to be based on false premises. I had therefore to undertake an investigation of my own, and this cost me more weeks of labour than I quite care to confess. When it was at length concluded a fresh subject for research presented itself in the shape of vowel alliteration. I began this with no thought of examining more than *Piers Plowman*, with a view to finding in what respect, if any, its vowel alliteration differed from that of *Béowulf*. I was led on to examine a number of other alliterative poems of the fourteenth century. For myself the work has been very instructive. I can only hope that it will turn out of some use to others also. The tables which I have drawn up will, at any rate, provide a key to the construction of the verses in these poems where it is most difficult to determine. This digression employed me, with two short intervals, until the end of August.

Meanwhile, in July, I had returned to England and made the collation which is given in Chap. I. I found the *Genesis* even richer in exceptional pointing than I had expected, and am sorry that the discussion of vowel alliteration has left me so little time for working up my materials.

The instances in which ordinary points have been omitted in the MS. have had to be left unconsidered.

It is possible that many of these are not due simply to neglect and would, if examined, yield fresh light upon the scribe's theory of O.E. verse. The results given in Chap. I are however sufficient to show what this was in the main. Among the conflicting theories which now hold the field it

agrees most with Prof. Möller's, the simplest and most easily applied of all.

The true rhythm of the Old English verse is not a matter of mere antiquarian interest. Until it is understood the development of English prose-rhythm cannot be properly explained. Probably we shall have to wait some time yet before anything like unity of opinion can exist upon the subject. We have yet to hear what answer Prof. Sievers can make to his various critics, and to receive a more extended treatment from his pen than that contained in *P.B.B.* x, xii, and xiii. My own conviction, however, is that truth lies on the side of Prof. Möller, to whom our Junius scribe now comes as an ally. I would fain hope that my own attempt 'to copy fair what time hath blurr'd' may give some fresh stimulus to the already awakening interest in O.E. verse-lore, and in particular may call increased attention to Prof. Möller's treatise, which even in Germany has been too much neglected.

JOHN LAWRENCE.

6, RILLBANK TERRACE, EDINBURGH,
September 21, 1892.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since the above was written several months have elapsed, during which I have kept the type of these 'chapters' standing in the hope of giving them a thorough revision before publication.

Circumstances have hitherto conspired to hinder this being done, and I am unwilling longer to delay sending them forth. The chapter on Crossed Alliteration has received some changes, and a few foot-notes (indicated by an asterisk) have been added here and there.

In the interval the 'more extended treatment' by Prof. Sievers has appeared in the shape of his *Allgermanische Metrik* (Halle, November 1892) but without, as far as I can see, much affecting the position of the rival theories.

My own discussion of Prof. Sievers's system begins, rather abruptly, on p. 27 below.

TARN HOUSE, ILLKLEY,
April 8, 1893.

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