

**YALE STUDIES IN
ENGLISH, I. THE FOREIGN
SOURCES OF MODERN
ENGLISH VERSIFICATION**

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Yale Studies in English, I. The Foreign Sources of Modern English Versification by Charlton M. Lewis

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CHARLTON M. LEWIS

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YALE STUDIES IN ENGLISH

ALBERT S. COOK, EDITOR

I

THE FOREIGN SOURCES
OF
MODERN ENGLISH VERSIFICATION

BY
CHARLTON M. LEWIS, Ph.D.



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PREFACE.

IT was my original intention to offer a thesis on certain logical aspects of the theory of modern English verse, following lines suggested by Mayor's *Chapters on English Metre* and Bridges' *Milton's Prosody*. After considerable study, however, I found myself still in an embarrassing uncertainty as to several of the most fundamental questions involved, and it was clear that a preliminary investigation of the historical origin of our verse-forms was indispensable. All the topics most intimately involved in this investigation have already provoked separate discussion, but there has never been any satisfactory coördination of results; and the lack of just this has led to many hasty inferences. The purpose of this paper is to trace the main line of descent of our modern versification, from the classical quantitative verse and the Old English accentual verse, through the various forms that were cultivated in mediæval Latin, English and French.

To carry such an investigation into all the topics usually treated under the head of versification, would of course be impracticable within the ordinary limits of a doctor's thesis. I have therefore limited myself as narrowly as possible to one topic,—the one that seemed to me most essential. I have disregarded all questions as to stanza-form, rime, alliteration, euphony of vowels, and the like, and considered only the internal mechanical

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structure of the individual verse. Even here, to avoid complication, I have for the most part confined my attention to the two types of iambic verse which prevail so conspicuously in English poetry;—choosing those two types not only because they are of the greatest literary importance, but also because the story of their evolution illustrates, in the most clear and straight-forward way, the principles which seem to me to control the development of verse. Moreover, as to certain matters which seemed to have been already argued thoroughly enough by others, I have given only the barest possible statement of facts. This will be found especially true of the matters covered in the last chapter,—intrinsicly the most important part of the whole. Sievers seems almost to have said the last word about pure Old English versification, and Schipper, in observing the facts of Middle-English verse-development, has left nothing undone that was needed for my present purposes: and I have therefore contented myself, for the most part, with a brief and somewhat fragmentary review of their conclusions.

The terminology of the subject is very unsettled. I have used the words *arsis* and *thesis* in their original sense,—the former being marked in marching by raising the foot, the latter by setting it down. I have used the word *rhythm* in its ordinary sense, except where special reference to the so-called Latin "rhythms" is sufficiently indicated by the context, or by quotation-marks. The terms *iambic*, *trochaic*, etc., when applied to accentual verse, though not unobjectionable, are sanctioned by a fairly common usage, and are at least convenient. They are less illogical, too, than *rising* and *falling*, the best substitutes that have been proposed, for accent and inflection are by no means always coincident. I have not always been careful to distinguish between *metre* and *rhythm*, and I have used *line* and *verse* as synonyms, for it seems too late to struggle against the

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confusion into which these terms have fallen: and when convenience suggested it, I have not scrupled to speak of *feet* and *inversions* of feet, even in cases where I should be most reluctant to admit the scientific accuracy of the terms.

Finally, in the matter of orthography in the Latin and French extracts, I have generally followed without comment the editions from which I actually transcribed (as March and Bartsch); and I have not noted *variae lectiones*, which are of course numerous, except where they affected some question directly in issue.

New Haven, September 1897.

C. M. L.

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