

**THE RHYTHM OF PROSE: AN
EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION
OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE IN
THE SENSE OF RHYTHM**

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The rhythm of prose: an experimental investigation of individual difference in the sense of rhythm by William Morrison Patterson

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WILLIAM MORRISON PATTERSON

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AN EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE IN
THE SENSE OF RHYTHM

BY

WILLIAM MORRISON PATTERSON, Ph.D.

INSTRUCTOR IN ENGLISH IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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D. M. P.
M. R. L. P.

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This Monograph has been approved by the Department of English and Comparative Literature in Columbia University as a contribution to knowledge worthy of publication.

A. H. THORNDIKE,
Executive Officer.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

WHAT is prose and what is verse? Aristotle and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Cicero and Quintilian, Professor Saintsbury and Professor Sievers, have all tried to tell us. No one yet, however, seems to be quite sure. Free verse and "poetic prose" are the disturbing ghosts which interpose their ambiguous outlines in the way of a decision. But, apart from this, is it any wonder that the student who dips, or, more boldly, dives into the inevitable chapter on rhythm to be found in current musical hand-books, rhetorics, treatises about versification, etc., emerges mystified, when so little account is taken of individual difference in what is one of the most "individually different" of human experiences? Rhythm is tangled up with our sense of time and our sense of intensity, both of which are not only tricky, but multifarious. Nothing is more preposterous, therefore, than that an author, the organization of whose temporal impressions is confessedly vague, should undertake to present to humanity at large a comprehensive and final statement of the art of versification. His own particular code might easily be read with interest as a document, but could hardly be expected to serve as a universal guide. On the other hand, it would be equally misleading for the experiences of an aggressively rhythmic individual, with a relatively accurate sense of temporal values, strong motor reactions, and subtle powers of discrimination in pitch and stress, to be set forth as if they were thoroughly usual. The psychologists have long since recognized that rhythm is the result of a complex process, whose operation can never be reduced to any one short formula.