

**A BRIEF EXTRACT OF A
NEW ENGLISH PROSODY
BASED UPON THE LAWS
OF ENGLISH RHYTHM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649271504

A Brief Extract of a New English Prosody Based Upon the Laws of English Rhythm by Mark H. Liddell

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MARK H. LIDDELL

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A NEW ENGLISH PROSODY

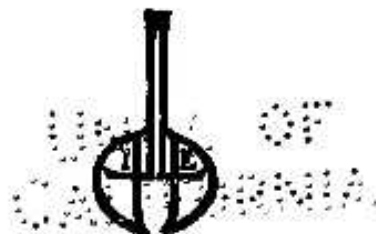
BASED UPON

THE LAWS OF ENGLISH RHYTHM

BY

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LAFAYETTE INDIANA

1914

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TO MY
ANNUAL

MURPHEY-BIVINS CO. PRESS
LAFAYETTE, INDIANA

PREFACE

Our traditional Prosody comes to us from the Grammarians of the Renaissance; they received it from their Classic predecessors. The Classic Grammarians naturally based their Prosody upon Quantity, since the length or shortness of the successive syllables obviously determined the form of Latin and Greek verse. The system was briefly as follows:

When successive long or short syllables were arranged in definite groupings 'measured off' by the total time value of each group, the result was metre (metrum). These groups were given special names—'trochaei', 'iambi', 'dactyli', etc. When the groups followed one another in certain series, like bars of music they produced

ERRATA.

- P. 10, line 19, for 5R read 4R.
- P. 23, line 20, for *principal* read *principle*.
- P. 32, lines 12, 13, 14 should follow footnote.
- P. 33, line 4, for *ErxF* read *EcxF*.
- P. 38, line 10, for *man* read *wax*.
- P. 42, line 18, for *That* read *What*.

syllables regardless of their time values.

The psychic effect of a rhythm regulated by time variation is quite different from that produced by a rhythm whose regulating element is intensity variation. But overlooking this difference for the nonce, the fact that Classic prosody recognized only two differentia for the syllables of a verse, viz. their "long" or their "short" quantity and noted them by only two marks, the makron and the breve, makes it impossible for us to use the Classic notation for English Prosody, which must recognize at least six differentia of syllable variation and should have a correspondingly adequate notation.

If Classic Latin had had six different standard syllable lengths and a sign for each, by assuming that metrical

rhythm and stress rhythm were in effect the same we might transfer the machinery of Latin Prosody to the notation of our English verse. It would only be our psychology that was at fault: our prosody would still be practical. But to attempt to note all the subtle variations of an English verse by combinations of the makron and the breve is like attempting to note a singing scale by two letters. If we should term all the tones below *fa* "low" and note them by the letter *x*, and all the tones above *fa* "high" and note them by the letter *y*, we should have a song notation precisely like that we now use for English poetry. To one who knew it beforehand a series of these *x*'s and *y*'s might vaguely suggest the form of a musical melody; but he could not study song with such a system of notation, however he might be able to sing in spite of it. Nor can we study English poetry by means of the Classic system of prosody.

For this foreign prosody will do no more than note the number of rhythm waves in a line of English verse and their general character as rising or falling, single or double. All the lines of a poem like *Paradise Lost* will thus appear to be practically the same, and we can only talk about the splendid organ music of Milton's verses without being able to describe in our notation the rhythmic details of a single one of them.

Under such circumstances it is hardly to be wondered that English poetry makes but weak appeal to the modern reader who does not happen to have a strong native feeling for speech rhythm.

It has therefore seemed to me worth while, even from a mere practical point of view, to attempt the formulation of a new method for the scansion of our English poetry. In 1902 I published the fundamental principles of such a system, basing them as well as I could upon the scientific facts revealed by the modern study of English Historical Grammar. Since then I have elaborated the work

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into a science of English Prosody; but owing to present conditions of scholarship in this country I have been unable to find a publisher for the book.

The laws of English Sense Stress upon which the system is based have, however, proved useful and practical in teaching College Classes; I have therefore published them myself in an inexpensive form that they might be available for those teachers who cared to make use of them.

It is not possible in the brief compass of a pamphlet like this to explain either the psychology or the historical development of an Art so subtle as is that of our English Poetry. So I must ask for the present that this part of the work be taken on faith and the whole matter tried out upon a purely practical basis. I think the Laws will be sufficiently evident from the verses cited under each at least to constitute a working hypothesis for the practical study of modern English verse—something like Sievers's Five Type Theory of Old English verse.

The fruit of such study will depend very largely upon the enthusiasm and good sense of the teacher. If he can make his students realize that English verse is not a mere formal procession of syllables, but an exceedingly delicate and subtle turning of the common elements of our everyday thinking modes to the finer uses of Art by fusing with them beautiful proportions of form and feeling—if he sets out to do this with intelligence and discernment he will find, I think, in the following laws, complicated as they may at first sight appear, a practical means of associating the forms of poetry with normal thinking processes.

As these laws are here stated for the first time I shall be glad to receive from the teachers who use them any suggestions looking to the improvement of their phrasing or any notes of verses from classic English poetry which they do not seem to cover.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY,
FEBRUARY, 1914.

MARK H. LIDDELL.

*"O! the one life, within us and abroad,
Which nests all nations, and becomes its soul,*

* * * * *

Rhythm is all thought, and joyance everywhere."

--COLERIDGE, *The Aeolian Harp.*

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS.

Stress in language may be roughly defined as a strain of the attention produced by certain units in a continuous series of syllables which taken together form a realized meaning. The syllable-series may form a single word and the realized meaning be a single concept; or it may form a group of words and the realized meaning be a concept series. In the former case we have **Word-Stress**, in the latter **Sense-Stress**. When the word is spoken **word-stress** produces **Accent**: we have no name for the effect of **sense-stress** upon spoken English. When the sense-stress of a word is raised above its normal level we call the effect **Emphasis**.*

When **sense-stress** is given to the syllables of a polysyllabic word which already has **word-stress** the **sense-stress** of the whole word is given to its separate syllables in proportion to their **word-stress**.

There are six recognizable grades of **sense-stress** in English. They may be arranged as an ascending scale. The lowest point of this scale is the **word-stress** necessary to preserve the sonant element of a syllable in the form of the obscure vowel which we have in the last syllable of "father," or in the article "a." The highest point is the stress given to the most important notion in a continuous word series forming a predication.

***Emphasis** does not often appear in English verse.