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"Well-Staged Syllables": From Classical to Early Modern English Metres in Drama

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi

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Stephen Orgel*

True Order of Versifying: The Reform of Elizabethan Poetry

Abstract

For a few decades in the sixteenth century, attempts were made to refashion English verse, as the Romans had refashioned theirs, according to the quantitative system of Greek poetry. The project now seems totally out of touch with the nature of the language and thus doomed to failure, but devising a system of quantitative poetry in English was a project that major poets and critics took seriously. Sir Philip Sidney wrote a good deal of quantitative verse, and Spenser and Gabriel Harvey discussed it and exchanged examples. Abraham Fraunce wrote notably successful poetry in classical meters; the volumes were popular and sold well. The larger assumption behind the proposals for the reform of English poetry was that the 'barbarous' England of the time could be rectified by the application of classical rules. A return to the classics held out the promise of culture and civility – not only in poetry, of course, but poetry seemed a particularly clear example. Nobody thought the transformation would be easy; a hectoring and bullying tone is common throughout the discussion. But a good deal of energy in the Elizabethan age went into the devising of strategies for becoming the new ancients, strategies of translation and adaptation, and the invention of appropriately classical-sounding models for vernacular verse, the domestication of the classic.

Keywords: verse; classicism; prosody; post-classical Latin; English; pronunciation

For a few decades in the sixteenth century, attempts were made to refashion English verse, as the Romans had refashioned theirs, according to the quantitative system of Greek poetry. The project now seems misguided, totally out of touch with the nature of the language and thus doomed to failure, but devising a system of quantitative poetry in English was a project that major poets and critics took seriously. Roger Ascham, writing in the 1560s, in the course of a treatise on education, wrote: "our English tong, in auoyding barbarous ryming, may as well receive, right quantitie of sillables, and true order of versifying . . . as either Greek or Latin. . . ." (1571, h3*v*-h4*r*). The Earl of Surrey, inventing blank verse around 1540 for a translation of the *Aeneid*, had avoided barbarous rhyming, but had ignored right quantity of syllables. Blank verse has earned Surrey a distinguished place in English literary history, but his poetic experiment in fact was not a suc-

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cess: blank verse was found useful primarily by the dramatists, and in the rest of the sixteenth century the sole classical translation in blank verse was Marlowe's version of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, posthumously published in 1600, and not popular enough to warrant a second edition. Most classical translations were in couplets, initially in fourteeners, and subsequently, ubiquitously, in rhyming pentameter.

Sir Philip Sidney wrote a good deal of quantitative verse, and Edmund Spenser and Gabriel Harvey discussed it and exchanged examples. The larger assumption behind Ascham's and Harvey's proposals for the reform of English poetry was that the 'barbarous' England of the time could be rectified by the application of classical rules. A return to the classics held out the promise of culture and civility – not only in poetry, of course, but poetry seemed a particularly clear example. Nobody thought the transformation would be easy; a hectoring and bullying tone is common throughout the discussion. But a good deal of energy in the Elizabethan age went into the devising of strategies for becoming the new ancients – strategies of translation and adaptation – and into the invention of appropriately classical-sounding models for vernacular verse: the domestication of the classic.

Shakespeare never wrote quantitative hexameters, not even for the pedantic poets in *Love's Labour's Lost*, where they would certainly have been appropriate – perhaps his small Latin and less Greek did not extend so far, but even if they were not beyond his abilities, quantitative metrics were not adaptable to the spoken English of the stage. But much of his early work reflects the classicizing movement of the age, especially *The Comedy of Errors*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* (the last based on an English version of an Italian comedy that in turn was based on Plautus and Terence). He turned from plays to poetry in 1592-3, writing *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* while the theatres were closed because of plague. These works were addressed to an audience of readers who knew the classics, both Latin and English; they recall, in both their physical presentation and versification, recent editions of Ovid, Spenser, and Sidney. But they are more specifically addressed to a potential patron, through lavish dedications to the glamorous young Earl of Southampton.

Park Honan (2012) describes the young Southampton:

> Just before he turned twenty-one the young Cambridge graduate had the appeal of an androgynous icon and a potentially great patron. Sir Philip Sidney's death in 1586 had left room for a new inspirer, a symbol of high attainment in art and war. Southampton was manly enough to hope to fight in battle, but attractive enough to elicit delicate verses. Noting his attendance with the queen at Oxford, John Sanford in a Latin poem claimed that no one present was more comely, "though his mouth yet blooms with tender down" (*Apollinis et musarum euktika eidyllia*, 1592).

Shakespeare was seeking not only cash from Southampton, but also an entry into the world of aristocratic patrons and erudite readers. At the very least, this would have produced for him a less unstable audience than the public theatre spectators, with more clearly calculable tastes; at best it would have earned him a place in some noble household, with an annuity, which was the most desirable sort of patronal endowment. That was the kind of poet Shakespeare was trying to be. He was a little too early for Southampton, who at the age of nineteen was still the ward of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, whom he was shortly to offend deeply by refusing to marry Burghley's granddaughter. The consequences of this were considerable, both for the young man and for English poetry. Honan writes, "In resisting his guardian, the earl incurred more than Burghley's mere displeasure, since the law held that if a ward would not marry at his lord's request, on coming of age he must pay him what anyone would have given for the marriage. Southampton thus faced paying an enormous fine, said to be £5000, on turning twenty-one in October 1594" (Honan 2012).

Nevertheless, Southampton was already reputed to be a potential patron for aspiring poets – Thomas Nashe in 1594, the year Southampton came into his majority, praised him in precisely those terms: "A dere lover and cherisher you are, as well of the lovers of Poets, as of Poets themselves" (A2*v*). By 1598 John Florio, making him one of the dedicatees of *A Worlde of Wordes*, writes that "I have lived some yeeres" in his "paie and patronage" (a3*v*) – Florio was teaching Southampton Italian, and therefore was offering his patron access to more than English poetry. But, as Honan continues,

> Ironically, Southampton had little but enthusiasm to offer any poet. He hardly had funds to spare; he lived on a fixed allowance and faced paying a gigantic fine to Burghley, plus another vast sum to get his estates out of wardship. After he turned twenty-one in 1594, his need for money became desperate. In November of that year, he leased out part of Southampton House, and a few years later had to sell off five of his manors (Honan 2012)

In the search for patronage in 1593, Shakespeare's most immediate model was a poet who has essentially disappeared from literary history, Abraham Fraunce. Fraunce was attached to the household of *the Countess of Pembroke*, Sidney's sister, and in 1591 and 1592 published a group of pastorals and a long mythological poem with commentary called The Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch dedicated to and including a role for his patron the Countess. Fraunce grew up in Shropshire and was educated first at the Shrewsbury School, then at St. John's College, Cambridge, after which he studied law at Gray's Inn. He may have known Philip Sidney at Shrewsbury (Sidney was several years older), and Sidney became his patron while he was at Cambridge. Upon Sidney's death Sidney's sister Mary Herbert,

Countess of Pembroke, continued to sponsor him. After taking his law degree he returned to Shrewsbury, where he worked as a barrister in the Welsh prerogative court. The Pembrokes' patronage extended to his professional career: the earl recommended him for the position of Queen's Solicitor in the Welsh court (the recommendation was unsuccessful). And though Fraunce was not dependent for his income on his writing, it clearly constituted an important vocation for him, as it did for Sidney, the soldier-politician, who was also a poet, essayist and novelist.

Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia* names Fraunce, along with Sidney and Spenser, as the best poets for pastoral. *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch* is a large three-part compendium. The pastorals in the first two parts include translations of Tasso's Italian play *Aminta*, of Thomas Watson's Latin epic *Amyntas*, and of Virgil's second eclogue. These are all translated into quantitative hexameters. *Amyntas*, the heart of the volume, is a vast elegiac pastoral in which the shepherd Amyntas mourns the death of his beloved Phyllis over twelve days, at the rate of 100 lines per day. The third part of the collection consists of a retelling of stories from Ovid, including the Venus and Adonis story, interspersed with mythographic commentary.

For modern readers, Fraunce's hexameters in the aggregate are admittedly numbing; but contemporary critics cited him with admiration, and the translation of *Amyntas* was popular enough to go through five editions between 1587 and 1596. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* was eventually more popular, but for contemporary readers Fraunce's success is notable, the more so since the work is in quantitative meter. The patronage doubtless had something to do with the success: Sidney's sister evidently shared her brother's tastes, and some of his popularity evidently accrued to her. English quantitative verse represents a huge investment of time and intelligence, and a just evaluation must view it in its own cultural context. The best book on the subject, and still a richly rewarding survey, is Derek Attridge's *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres*, but even Attridge begins his study apologetically, by declaring the verse "patently weak" (1971, 2) and "by present standards, unquestionably bad" (1971, 3). Still, devising a system of quantitative poetry in English was a project that major poets and critics took seriously, and condescending to the past is not a useful way of understanding it. Fraunce's work was not, in the 1590s, unquestionably bad.

The most successful and admired classical translations of the latter half of the sixteenth century were Arthur Golding's Ovid and Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twine's Virgil; both are in fourteener couplets, and both went through many editions by the end of the century. The fourteener couplet was essentially a ballad measure, but it was also the verse adopted by

George Chapman for his translation of the *Iliad*, published in 1598. All these translators were serious classicists, and English fourteeners sounded right to them. It is tempting to suggest that for critics proposing the quantitative system, popular poetry was at fault precisely because it was popular. Was devising a new system a way of rendering poetry no longer immediately attractive, and thereby elite? The application of quantitative rules was a fairly late strategy in the classicization of English verse; and though the new poetic order was never widely adopted, for a few decades in the sixteenth century the effort did not seem quixotic. Fraunce's hexameters are in fact, even by modern standards, often supple and mellifluous:

> If that I mourne in woods, these woods seeme al to be mournyng,
> And broade-brauncht oake trees their upright topps to be bowing.
> Yf that I sigh or sob, this pine-tree straight by the shaking,
> This pearles [peerless] pine-tree for company seem's to be pyning,
> As though himself felt th'enduring pangs of *Amyntas*.
> (1591, H4*v*)

Sometimes adept poets even managed to have it both ways, producing a quantitative poem that also reads beautifully as an accentual poem in free verse:

> Constant *Penelope*, sends to thee carelesse *Ulisses*,
> write not againe, but come sweet mate thy selfe to revive mee.
> *Troy* wee doe much envie, wee desolate lost Ladies of *Greece*:
> Not *Priamus*, nor yet all *Troy* can us recompence make.
> Oh, that hee had when hee first tooke shipping to Lacedemon,
> that adulter I meane, had beene o'rewhelmed with waters:
> Then had I not lien now all alone, thus quivering for cold,
> nor used this complaint, nor have thought the day to bee so long.
> (Byrd 1588, E3*r*)

This is a song text set by William Byrd, the opening of Penelope's epistle to Ulysses, the first of Ovid's *Heroides*, translated by an anonymous poet into quantitative measures. This example is unique in Byrd's vast oeuvre: even when Byrd set Latin quantitative poems, he did not set them quantitatively. But Byrd understood the scansion perfectly, setting long syllables to half notes and short syllables to quarter notes. The music even corrects three errors in the metrics, and Byrd's amendment of the scansion is a tiny indication of how actively involved in the issue of poetic quantity English culture actually was at this time. The poem is always ascribed to Thomas Watson, because he was acquainted with Byrd and wrote at least one (nonquantitative) song text for him. But the attribution is surely incorrect: Watson was a thoroughly proficient classicist, who wrote much more Latin poetry than

English. He would not have made mistakes in composing hexameters. Byrd was more expert than his poet here (see Orgel 2015).

In fact, the quantitative rules allowed for considerable latitude: given the lack of standardization of spelling in English, many syllables could be rendered long or short by varying the orthography. Moreover, since it was rarely clear in what sense an English syllable could be called long or short, the rules were always a work in progress, and different poets applied them differently. The recent critic Sharon Schuman writes, "The whole system of classical Latin prosody must have been tremendously attractive to the English versifiers, flexible as it was (allowing them to escape the confinements of jog-trot doggerel), yet based on simple, consistent rules of vowel quantity and position" (1977, 339). Clearly there is some tendentiousness here (the escape from "jog-trot doggerel" was an escape from the prosody of Golding's Ovid and Chapman's *Iliad*) and the "simple, consistent rules of vowel quantity" were not so simple and consistent that they precluded continual debates about vowel quantity – about what constituted a short or long syllable in English. But it must be true that the system itself was attractive precisely because it was a system, setting up rules for composition and evaluation, and because these were derived from classical precedent.

The crucial element in classicizing English poetry, however, was the abandonment of rhyme, and it was this that eventually produced the greatest resistance. Samuel Daniel, defending traditional English poetry against the strictures of Thomas Campion, considers the quantitative system essentially an irrelevance:

> For we are tolde how that our measures goe wrong, all Ryming is grosse, vulgare, barbarous . . . We could well have allowed of his numbers had he not disgraced our Ryme; which both Custome and Nature doth most powerfully defend: Custome that is before all Law, Nature that is aboue all Arte. (1904: 357, 359)

"We could well have allowed of his numbers had he not disgraced our Ryme": the metrical system is not worth arguing about; rhyme is the issue. Rhyme was the crucial badge of barbarism, the essential departure from the classical ideal. Thus, Francis Meres, having compared Chaucer with Homer and declared him "the god of English poets," nevertheless singles out *Piers Plowman* as the one truly Homeric English poem: "As *Homer* was the first that adorned the Greek tongue with true quantity, so *Piers Plowman* was the first that observed the true quantitie of our verse without the curiositie of Rime" (1598, 279*r-v*). That the poem is claimed to observe "true quantity" indicates how vague the sense of quantity in English could be. It is certainly arguable that Phaer's and Golding's fourteeners achieve a kind of prosodic "quantity," a supple and varied verse rhythm that is obviously not al-

ien either to the English language or to the ballad measure within which they are working. The claim that the verse of *Piers Plowman* respects quantity is surely incorrect, but to Meres in 1598, the absence of rhyme was the key element.

By 1619 Ben Jonson could tell William Drummond "That Abraham Fraunce in his English hexameters was a fool" (2012b, 362) – a fool to write English hexameters; clearly they were still being read in 1619. As for rhyme, according to Drummond Jonson considered couplets "the bravest sort of verses", and "detesteth" all other rhymes – "cross-rhymes [alternating rhymes, abab etc.] and stanzas . . . were all forced" (359). Nevetheless, Jonson himself wrote both cross-rhymed and stanzaic poetry: it was quantitative verse that this classicist never wrote. Nevertheless, in *The English Grammar* (published posthumously in 1641) he declared his support for adapting the quantitative system to English verse, but for what one might call patriotic rather than poetic reasons:

> Not that I would have the vulgar and practised way of making abolished and abdicated, (being both sweet and delightful, and much taking the ear) but to the end our tongue may be made equal to those of the renowned countries, Italy and Greece, touching this particular. (Jonson 2012a)

Metrical quantity in English verse was determined by a very loose system, especially loose since the prosody was only imperfectly controlled by pronunciation. Thomas Campion confronts the issue directly:

> Above all the accent of our words is diligently to be observ'd, for chiefely by the accent in any language the true value of the sillables is to be measured. Neither can I remember any impediment except position that can alter the accent of any sillable in our English verse. For though we accent the second [syllable] of Trumpington short, yet is it naturally long, and so of necessity must be held of every composer. Wherefore the first rule that is to be observed is the nature of the accent, which we must ever follow.
> (1904, 351-2)

This passage argues that accentuation in English is always to be observed, but not in the case of the long-by-position rule (a vowel followed by two consonants is long), which in fact determines a large percentage of the cases in English (for example the -ing ending of participles, which are long by position, but invariably short and unaccented in speech). In these cases, as in the case of "Trumpington", poetry and English are two different languages. What can "yet is it naturally long" mean – are the rules of Latin scansion rules of nature? The most serious problem in Campion's system, however, is that accent or stress is conflated with quantity – the assumption is that stressed syllables are always long, which is certainly not the

case. By the sixteenth century the contradiction was inherent in the whole project of adapting a quantitative verse system to English.

Spenser too worries the issue of stress and quantity, using as his example the word *carpenter*, "the middle sillable, being used shorte in speech, when it shall be read long in Verse." He continues, "For why, a Gods name, may not we, as else the Greekes, have the kingdome of oure owne Language, and measure our Accentes by the sounde, reserving the Quantitie to the Verse?" (1904, 98-9). The claim is that we may do as we like – the language is ours – and "reserving the Quantitie to the Verse" means that English in verse is not English as it is spoken (where the word would have to be pronounced, impossibly, with two long, which for Spenser means stressed, syllables, *càrpènter*). Quantity in verse is a purely visual matter, to be read and not pronounced aloud. Poetry is a different language. The point is emphasized by the pedagogical handbooks' insistence that Latin verse, on which the system of English quantity was based, be read as prose, with no attempt to sound out the quantities.

A notable translation of Virgil into quantitative English was Richard Stanyhurst's *Aeneid*, published in Leiden in 1582. Here is a passage from it:

> I blaze thee captayne first from Troy cittye repairing,
> Lyke wandring pilgrim too famosed Italie trudging,
> And coast of Lavyn: soust wyth tempestuus hurlwynd,
> On land and sayling, bi Gods predestinat order:
> But chiefe through Junoes long fostred deadlye revengement.
> (1582, b3*r*)

If you count this out you can see that it really is quantitative, though there was some fiddling with the spelling to make it work – 'cittye' has to have a double t to make the i long, 'to' has a double o to make it long, 'by' is spelled 'bi' to make it short, and so forth. Stanyhurst's orthography is eccentric even by Elizabethan standards. For the London edition of the next year the publisher regularized the spelling, thus defeating the quantitative scheme (he either missed the point, or didn't care); but to remake poetry, it was necessary to remake the language. The book was admired by specialists, but was not reissued.

Despite its commercial failure, however, Stanyhurst's *Aeneid* was a literary *cause célébre*, prompting a number of hostile responses over the next decade. I am here summarizing my account of the matter in my book *Wit's Treasury*. Thomas Nashe took the translation seriously enough to launch a vitriolic attack on Stanyhurst for presuming to compete with Phaer's *Aeneid*, which for Nashe is an English classic. In fact, Stanyhurst in his preface is full of praise for Phaer's translation; he offers his version as an example of what English verse would be if it were properly classical, following

Ascham's and Harvey's precepts. Nevertheless, the verse of Stanyhurst's *Aeneid* was declared by Nashe to be "hexameter furie," and he parodied it in the preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*:

> Then did he make, heavens vault to rebounde with rounce robble hobble
> Of ruffe raffe roaring, with thwick thwack thurlery bouncing.
> (1589, A1*r*)

This is obviously overstated for effect, but in fact, not by much. Here is Stanyhurst on Vulcan's forge, a passage from Book 8 appended to the translation of the first four books:

> Under is a kennel, wheare Chymneys fyrye be scorching
> Of *Cyclopan* tosters, with rent rocks chamferye sharded,
> Lowd dub a dub tabering with frapping rip rap of *Aetna*.
> (1582, O1*v*-O2*r*)

Nashe's ridicule is part of an invidious comparison with Phaer's fourteeners, which are declared magnificent. Phaer is the norm, and Stanyhurst is accused of malice in presuming to displace him. Judging from the parody, the animus is directed not at Stanyhurst's quantitative system, but at his alliteration and especially what Nashe takes to be the rhythmical overaccentuation of the verse, what he calls elsewhere "foule lumbring boystrous wallowing measures" (1593, G3*r*). Indeed, one of the problems with quantitative verse in English is negotiating the stresses – English is an accentual language (so is Latin, but in Latin stress and quantity are generally not in conflict). It is not even clear that Nashe understood that the hexameters were quantitative.

Stanyhurst's meter was still a live issue at the turn of the century – here is the satirist John Hall in 1599:

> Another scorns the home-spun thred of rimes,
> Match'd with the loftie feete of elder times:
> Giue me the numbred verse that *Virgill* sung,
> And *Virgill* selfe shall speake the English toung:
> *Manhood and garboiles shall he chaunt* with changed feete
> And head-strong *Dactils* making Music meete.
> The nimble *Dactils* striuing to out-go
> The drawling *Spondees* pacing it below.
> The lingring Spondees, labouring to delay,
> The breath-lesse Dactils with a sodaine stay.
> Who euer saw a Colte wanton and wilde,
> Yoakt with a slow-foote Oxe on fallow field?
> Can right areed how handsomely besets
> Dull Spondees with the English Dactilets?

Hall then echoes Nashe's strictures on Stanyhurst's rhythmical excesses, and adds a couplet attacking his neologisms:

> If *Jove* speake English in a thundring cloud,
> *Thwick thwack*, and *Riffe raffe*, rores he out aloud.
> Fie on the forged mint that did create
> New coyne of words never articulate.
> (13-14)

Clearly Hall notices a good deal more than Nashe, and it is only in hindsight that he seems to be beating a dead horse – Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, promoting the quantitative system and attacking the use of rhyme, was published in 1602, and was answered in 1603 by Samuel Daniel's *Defence of Ryme*.

Stanyhurst's own account of his poetic revisionism is both defensive and accurate about the problems it raises. He is fully aware that the Latin rules are not really adaptable to English; he observes, moreover, that they are not even fully adaptable to Latin:

> For in as much as thee Latins haue not been authors of theese verses [i.e., were not the originators of the rules], but traced in thee steps of thee Greekes, why should we with thee stringes of thee Latin rules cramp oure tongue more than the Latins doe fetter theyre speeche, as yt were wyth thee chaynes of thee Greeke preceptes. Also that nature wyl not permit us too fashion oure wordes in all poinctes correspondent too thee Latinistes, may easely appeere in suche termes as we borrow of theym. For example: the first of *Breuiter*, is short, thee first of *briefly* wyth vs must bee long.
> (1582, B1*r*)

But Stanyhurst's revisionism went well beyond the quantitative scheme. He came from an old and influential Anglo-Irish family, and grew up in Dublin. He believed that the English spoken by the old Anglo-Irish was a purer form of the language than Elizabethan English, close to the English of Chaucer (it preserves, he says, "the dregs of the old Chaucer English"), without the modern mixture of continental tongues – this, of course, ignores the large French component of Chaucer's English. Both his eccentric spelling in prose and the diction of the Virgil translation, including its occasional egregious alliteration, were presumably designed as a version of the English he grew up with, an attempt to restore the old language. Stanyhurst even characterizes the *Aeneid* as "a *Canterbury tale*," because, through impeccable language and versification, it "dooth labour, in telling . . . too ferret owt thee secretes of *Nature*" (1582, A2*r*-*v*). However farfetched

the comparison, Chaucer is the benchmark. This produced some startling effects. Here is Dido bewailing the fact that no child had been born of her love of Aeneas:

> . . . yf yeet soom progenye from me
> Had crawld, by the fatherd, yf a cockney-dandiprat hopthumb,
> Prittye lad Aeneas, in my court, wantoned, ere thow
> Took'st this filthye fleing, that thee with physnomye lyckned,
> I ne then had reckned my self for desolat ouwtcaste.
> (L3*v*)

Nashe was a capricious critic, to say the least, but he was in this case a literary barometer. Phaer and Twine's *Aeneid* was in no danger from Stanyhurst's, which was admired only by scholars; but the violent defence of the modern classic registers a real sense of panic. The sound of verse, the sense of what was good verse, the canons of taste, were all changing very rapidly. The change was part of a large cultural shift, from normative poets like William Higgins, John Heywood, and George Gascoigne to normative poets like Ben Jonson, Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and especially Christopher Marlowe – think of Marlowe's contempt, at the same moment, for "jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits" in the prologue to *Tamburlaine*. Marlowe is rejecting the prosody of popular drama such as *Cambises*, but that was also the prosody of Golding and Phaer, and was shortly to be the prosody of Chapman's *Iliad*. What Nashe deplores is the institution of a new 'classical'.

As Attridge points out, quantitative metrics were problematic even in post-classical Latin: "by the fifth century A.D. a change had taken place in the pronunciation of Latin" so that "the quantities on which Latin verse was based ceased to be a property of the spoken language and had to be learned for the purpose of scanning and writing poetry in classical metres" (1974, 21). Moreover, quantity simply became stress, as it is for Campion: Attridge writes that an English schoolboy learning Latin prosody would have assumed "that 'long' meant 'stressed' and 'short' meant 'unstressed', since this would be the obvious difference between the two kinds of syllable, and he would know of nothing which might contradict this assumption" (47).

Furthermore, the pronunciation of Latin varied widely throughout Europe, and there were violent arguments about it in England. Thus Latin orations, verse, academic drama, and indeed, conversation sounded different depending on the location – even if the locations were Oxford and Cambridge. The common claim that Latin was a universal language throughout Renaissance Europe does not take enough into account. Joseph Scaliger found English speakers' pronunciation of Latin so incomprehensi-

ble that he assumed they were speaking English to him (Attridge 1974, 23); similarly, Erasmus reports that a Frenchman addressing a speech in Latin to the Emperor Maximilian was thought to be speaking French; the accent of a German following him was ridiculed, and the Danish visitor "sounded like a Scotsman" (Allen 1965, 107). Philip Sidney, employing Latin on his diplomatic missions, was told by Hubert Languet that his Latin sounded provincial; by the same token, the French pronunciation Languet used was considered by Erasmus to be the worst in Europe. These were obviously not problems with the written language; but spoken and written Latin were everywhere only imperfectly related, and spoken Latin was not invariably comprehensible.

Attridge remarks that it is only recently that the spoken language has taken precedence over the written language and writing has been considered a transcription of speech. "The present-day linguist's assumption that the written language is merely a representation of, and therefore secondary to, the spoken language would have puzzled an Elizabethan grammarian, not so much because he felt that the reverse was true, but because he did not make any clear distinction". And "[Walter] Ong stresses that it is only recently that the written form has ceased to be regarded as more basic to a language than the spoken form" (1974, 54). But even more clearly in English than in Latin, by the sixteenth century spelling had not kept pace with pronunciation, and the written language had long ceased to be an adequate guide to speech. When Hamlet urges the visiting actors to "Speak the speech . . . as I pronounced it to you" (3.2.1-2) he is concerned with principles of declamation, but he also testifies to the disjunction between the written text and the way it is spoken. In a nation of regional accents and dialects that disjunction was inevitable; but it was positively institutionalized in the schemes promoting English quantitative verse.

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