

TEACHING ENGLISH VERSE PRACTICE THROUGH ITS HISTORICAL ORIGINS

JAMES MATTHEW WILSON
VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

In this workshop, we will review the rationales behind different pedagogies of verse composition and consider their virtues, before considering two practical modes of instruction. We will review my own college-level practice of teaching versification as a craft tied to classical rhetoric, and a mode of instruction still in development that guides students through the literary tradition and natural emergence of English verse writing into the iambic pentameter line. By tracing the slow movement from the hard stress of Anglo-Saxon accentual meter to the eventual arrival into stability of the subtle and flexible iambic line, students will learn to think about meter in a way that accords clearly with both the natural features of modern English and the familiar features of popular music and hymns, whose melody and rhythm can prepare them better to hear rhythms informed by meter.

I. The most authoritative contemporary metrical poets (new formalists) approach prosody in one of three ways: As element in cultural narrative; as dimension of classical rhetoric; and as originating in song.

Meter as Corollary of Classical Rhetoric

The (new formalist) poet and critic Timothy Steele has demonstrated with brio that poetic meter is best understood in relation to classical rhetoric as a further refinement of speech rhythm into a pleasing order and measurement. Meter must be understood as an analytic abstraction from speech rhythm. The quintessential line in English is the iambic pentameter, whose “boundless” flexibility does not belie its audibility as a form and source of rhetorical order. Prosody and rhetoric (especially the use of figures of speech: scheme and trope) both weigh us with a heavy equipment that allows for a light and fleet-footed mastery of expression.

Timothy Steele, *All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing: An Explanation of Meter and Versification*. Ohio University Press, 1999.

Timothy Steele, *Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt against Meter*. University of Arkansas Press, 1990.

Stephen Adams, *Poetic Designs: An Introduction to Meters, Verse Forms, and Figures of Speech*. Broadview Press, 1997.

James McAuley, *Versification: A Short Introduction*. Michigan State University Press, 1966.

James Matthew Wilson, *The Fortunes of Poetry in an Age of Unmaking*. Wiseblood Books, 2015.

Meter as the Music of Speech

Steele's colleague, Dana Gioia, has indicated by his poetic practice that both metrical verse and free verse stands in close derivation from music. Thinking of poetry as words for music, or intrinsically related to music, leads to a focus on the iambic tetrameter line, whose form is sensibly close to that of popular music and hymns. According to this understanding of meter, we view the tetrameter line (in all its variations) as the crossroads between music and prosody, leading to more complex musical expression one way, and to the pentameter line on the other. A clear focus on four-stress rhythms thus allows one to hear poetry with ease and also to sense its ongoing relation to the musical. Gioia's criticism and practice is mostly suggestive; the other sources here take his insight as a principle for the study of prosody

Dana Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter? Essays on Poetry and American Culture*. Graywolf Press, 1992 (2002).

See in particular the title essay, "Notes on the New Formalism," and "The Poet in the Age of Prose."

Dana Gioia, "Accentual Verse." (<http://danagioia.com/essays/writing-and-reading/accentual-verse/>)

Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

David Caplan, *Poetic Form: An Introduction*. Pearson/Longman, 2007.

Meter as Mnemosyne: Natural Expression of Collective Memory

The polymathic poet Frederick Turner has explored theories of the origins of poetic form in terms of anthropology and neuroscience. Most of his observations stand at some remove from the basic questions of how to understand, teach, or practice English meter, but they offer helpful material for reflection about the historical centrality of the art form and help us to think of the conventions of meter in close relation to the conventions of ritual and story-telling found in all cultures. He helps us to consider both the naturalness of meter to us as human beings (as opposed to the structure of language, as in Steele) and as story-tellers.

Frederick Turner, *Natural Classicism: Essays on Literature and Science*. Paragon House, 1985.

Frederick Turner, *Epic: Form, Content, and History*. Routledge, 2012.

Frederick Turner, "Lyric and the Content of Poetry." *Think Journal* 5.2 (Spring 2015): 69-82.

II. My instruction in prosody in university teaching attempts to synthesize the three, but with the classical-rhetoric theory as primary. The governing concern is to explain the primacy of the iambic pentameter line. Syllabus follows.

This curriculum follows Steele in establishing the iambic pentameter line as the paradigmatic one in English and builds its conception of meter and stanza around that paradigm. It also seeks to give central place to the lyric poem but to qualify or pluralize that centrality, so students work on epigrams, variations on the lyric, the ballad conceived as song, and close the semester with forays into the narrative mode.

HUMANITIES 2900-002
THE ART OF VERSE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY, GRAMMAR, AND PRACTICE OF POETRY

Fall 2016
T/Th 2:30-3:45
Garey B10



Professor
Dr. James Matthew Wilson
SAC 476
Office Hours: T/H 10-12:30am
Or by appointment
james.m.wilson@villanova.edu

One will be literate, then, only when one produces something literate and does so in a literate way, that is, in accordance with the art of writing within oneself.
—Aristotle

What does it mean to be literate? The medieval poet, Dante Alighieri, referred to his craft—the writing of verses—simply as “grammar.” Samuel Johnson, in the eighteenth century, included prosody as one of the four elements of grammar one must know if one were to be literate. As if commemorating a decline from the ages of Dante and Johnson, the contemporary poet Brad Leithauser has claimed that “metrical illiteracy is, for the poet, functional illiteracy.” All these testimonies suggest that the genuinely literate person is one who has mastered language so as to be able to practice the art of poetry. This is a course designed to give you the tools and knowledge of literacy in Johnson’s venerable sense. We will study, and seek to write, beautiful poems that demonstrate the powers of the reflective imagination as it realizes itself through the discipline and competence of well-wrought, measured, language.

In our time together, you will be introduced to the elements of prosody, and will try your hand at composing poems in different meters, stanzaic forms, and genres. We shall read exemplary poems in different forms from the English language tradition; consider the theoretical, cultural, and historical implications of versification; and become familiar with the conventions of verse craft. Such readings will help you to become comfortable with the art of composition in rhyme and meter, so that the focus of the course may fall more productively on the writing of original poems, and on learning to perform poems with vitality and skill.

Students will be asked to write and revise twelve poems (or small batches of poems) during the semester, and to memorize and perform four (three from the tradition and one of their own). Students will also discuss each other’s work in sporadic workshops and demonstrate competence with the terminology essential to prosody.

GOALS

Poetic Traditions and Theories. Poetry occupies a revered but marginal place in our age. We shall seek to become familiar with some of the central poems of our language and to learn the craft of verse from them. We shall also consider contemporary and traditional poetic theory (the philosophy of poetry) in order to arrive at a better understanding of the nature and historical practice of verse.

Prosody, Craft, and Invention. The central ambition of this course is to help students become proficient regarding prosody (the art of versification), and to become sufficiently comfortable in its practice that they can begin writing inventive poems in a variety of conventional forms and genres.

The Speech of Poetry in Performance. Prosody insistently reminds us of the natural relationship of written and spoken language. Students will learn to recite poems with sensitivity to tone, syntax, and measure, and will cultivate the art of memory, by performing poems for their classmates.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Gioia, Dana. *Poetry as Enchantment* (Wiseblood Books, no ISBN)

Gwynn, R.S. *Poetry: A Pocket Anthology* (Penguin Academic 9780205101986).

Steele, Timothy. *All The Fun's in How You Say a Thing* (Ohio UP 978-0821412602).

Wilson, James Matthew, ed. *The Art of Verse Course Pack* (noted as CP on calendar)

OPTIONAL TEXT

Wilson, James Matthew. *The Fortunes of Poetry in an Age of Unmaking* (Wiseblood Books 978-0692556931)

ASSIGNMENTS

During the semester, students will draft twelve poems (or small batches of poems) and revise them for submission in the form of a chapbook (prefaced by a 1000 word critical introduction) at the conclusion of the course. Students will also demonstrate a competency regarding prosodic terms and scansion, and will perform four poems (including a performance before the whole class at the end of the semester). See the Grading Matrix for a precise breakdown of the assignments, and the course calendar for due dates.

All poems should be submitted in hardcopy and via email (I will normally make comments via email). On days you are assigned to workshop a poem, please bring sufficient hardcopies for everyone to have one.

GRADING MATRIX	POINTS
Poem 1 Stichomythic Talk	2
Poem 2a Lyric Paraphrase	1
Poem 2b Blank "Trans"	2
Poem 3 Epigrams	5
Prosody Test	5
Poem 4 & 5 T/H Couplets	5
Poems 6 & 7 Ball. & Quat.	5
Poem 8 Eng Sonnet	5
Poem 9 Nonce Sonnet	5
Poem 10 Fixed Form Lyric	5
Poem 11 "Exp" Stanza	5
Poem 12 Nar, Mon, Let	5
Performance 1	5
Performance 2	5
Performance 3	5
Performance 4	5
Revision Chapbook	15
<u>Active Engagement.</u>	<u>15</u>
TOTAL	100

Student **Active Engagement** constitutes 15 points in the final grade, and will be graded in terms of evidently prepared engagement in class discussion, including occasional informal presentations. As a rule of thumb, only those students who contribute every day and give evidence they have given serious intellectual consideration to the readings will receive a full grade of 15 points; students who do not speak at all should expect to receive 0 points. Most students, naturally, will fall between these two extremes.

POLICIES

All assignments submitted for a grade must be typed, **stapled** (if appropriate), and formatted neatly according to guidelines provided by the professor.

Students are expected to **attend** every class session and to participate in class discussion every day as well. In keeping with typical Villanova standards, students are granted 4 unexcused absences if necessary; any absences beyond that may result in failure of the course, as is University policy for freshmen students. Any absences *may* affect the final active engagement grade.

The University Excused Absence policy is as follows: "Excused absences for all students include the following: approved athletic participation or participation in approved academic events; official university business; approved field trips; certified serious illness; death in the immediate family; or approved placement activities. An absence card, available from the

Office of the Dean of the student's college, must be completed and presented to the Dean with appropriate documentation. This should be done before the absence, if possible, but at any rate no later than 4:30 p.m. on the day the student returns to classes. Excused absences allow the student to make up tests and do not count toward a failure in the course for first year students. Absence from class does not release the student from work assigned" (<http://www.villanova.edu/vpaa/office/student-services/policies/attendance.htm>).

Students are advised to note the course's **late policy**. I regularly grant extensions on assignments, if they are requested in advance of the due date. Papers submitted late without my consent will automatically lose 10% of the assignment's point value. Papers submitted more than a few days late will not be given credit.

Academic Integrity: Students will be expected to adhere to the most rigorous standards of academic integrity. For the first offense, students who plagiarize or cheat on any assignment will receive either an F for the assignment or an F for the course (depending on the

seriousness), and a letter will be filed with the student's dean and with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. A second offense either in this course or in any other course at Villanova will result in dismissal from the university with a permanent indication of the reason for dismissal on the student's transcript. For further details on Villanova's code for academic integrity, please see <http://www.vpaa.villanova.edu/academicintegrity/> for further details. Please note that downloading essays or parts of essays or websites is a violation of academic integrity. It is also relatively easy to detect in a class of this size. If you are at all uncertain about your use of a source or the need for citation, please contact me.

Disabilities and Learning Support: It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability please contact me after class or during office hours and make arrangements to register with the Learning Support Office by contacting 610-519-5636 or at nancy.mott@villanova.edu as soon as possible. Registration is needed in order to receive accommodations.

Classroom Decorum Policies: Aside from **arriving on time and leaving only at the end of class** (save by special arrangement), I expect students to act toward one another and toward the professor with the kind of respect and attention befitting such a privileged and even sacred place. They should not disturb the class by gathering their belongings prematurely. They should be attentive to the words of their fellows. They should engage actively in discussion of the assigned material, and seek to express themselves in refined and thoughtful speech. They should act in such a way as to reaffirm routinely the common and therefore communal exploration of faith and reason that any intellectual activity brings about. All **cellular phones** or other such devices must be silenced and put away prior to the start of class. As importantly, **laptop computers** and **tablets** may **not** be used in the classroom during class time (for specific reasons, I may occasionally make exception to this policy). *Any violation of these last protocols will result in the student's being marked absent (unexcused) and receiving no participation points for the class session.*

GRADING SCALE	
GRADE	PERCENTAGE
A+	98-100
A	93-97
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR

DATE	READINGS AND CLASS DISCUSSION	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
H Aug 25	<i>What is the Art of Verse?</i> Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i> ; Cunningham "For My Contemporaries"; Davis "Preferences"; Winters, "Time and the Garden" (CP)	
T Aug 30	<i>Introduction to Meter I.</i> Steele, "Introduction" (1-23); Frost, "Home Burial" (186); Larkin, "The Whitsun Weddings" (262)	
H Sep 1	<i>Introduction to Meter II.</i> Steele, "Metrical Norm and Rhythmical Modulation" (27-51); Jonson, "On My First Son" (75); Pound, "Portrait d'une Femme" (202)	
T Sep 6	<i>How to Measure a Poem.</i> Steele, "Scansion and Metrical Variation" (52-93); Hardy, "Neutral Tones" (168); Hardy, "The Ruined Maid" (168)	
H Sep 8	<i>What is the Spirit of Poetry?</i> Dryden, "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" (86); Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar" (192); Wilbur, "The Writer" (258); Heaney, "Digging" (325); Salter, "Welcome to Hiroshima" (390).	

- T Sep 13** *What Can Lyrics Do?* Wyatt, “They Flee from Me” (60); Coleridge, “Frost at Midnight” (111); Arnold, “Dover Beach” (157); Owen, “Dulce et Decorum Est” (222); Auden, “*Musée des Beaux Arts*” (235); Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish” (239).
- H Sep 15** *The Power of the Poem.* Gioia, *Poetry as Enchantment*; Yeats, “The Song of Wandering Angus” (178); Robinson, “Richard Cory” (181); Davis, “A Monorhyme for the Shower” (353); Gioia, “Planting a Sequoia” (369) Poem 1: Stichomythic Talk Poem
- T Sep 20** *How to Modulate Meter.* Steele, “Additional Sources of Rhythmical Modulation” (94-115); Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (176); Yeats, “The Second Coming” (178)
- H Sep 22** *The Flexibility of Elision.* Steele, “The Story of Elision” (116-150); Donne, “Holy Sonnet 14” (72) Poem 2a: Lyric Paraphrase
- T Sep 27** *Introduction to Rhyme.* Steele, “Rhyme” (175-199); Bradstreet, “The Author to Her Book” (83); Housman, “Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff . . .” (173); Jonson, “A Fit of Rhyme against Rhyme” (CP). Poem 2b: Blank Verse
“Translation”
Workshop (2):
- H Sep 29** *The Epigram.* Middleton, “Cut Stone: The Epigram in English”; Selections from the Elizabethan epigrammatists, Jonson, Cunningham, and Steele (CP) Scansion Test (in class)
- T Oct 4** *Rhyme’s Reason.* Wimsatt, “One Relation of Rhyme to Reason” (153-166, CP); Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress” (85); Pope, from “An Essay on Criticism” (90)
- H Oct 6** *Poetry, Speech, and Performance.* Fenton, “The Raised Voice of Poetry” (35-38); Yezzi, “Sound and Sensibility” (1-8); Winters, “The Audible Reading of Poetry” (129-146); McAuley, “The Actual Line of Spoken Verse” (45-49) (all CP) Poem 3: Epigrams
Workshop (2):
- FALL BREAK**
- T Oct 18** *The Facility of the Couplet.* Winters “The Heroic Couplet and Its Rivals” (134-143, CP); Swift, “A Description of a City Shower” (87); Winters, “The Journey” and “A Vision” (CP); Gunn “Terminal” (294) Performance I (small group, my office)
- H Oct 20** *Introduction to Stanzas.* Steele, “Stanzas” (200-220). Donne, “The Flea” (71); Hardy, “Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?” (165); Wilbur, “For C.” (257); Martin, “E.S.L.” (343).
- T Oct 25** *The Ballad and Common Meter.* Anonymous, “Sir Patrick Spens” (58); Blake, “The Tyger” (99); Burns, “John Barleycorn” (100); Keats, “La Belle Dame sans Merci” (121); Dickinson, “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” (159); “Villanova Alma Mater” (CP) Poems 4 and 5: Tetrameter and Heroic Couplets
Workshop (2):
- H Oct 27** *Other Quatrains.* Gray, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (92); Frost, “The Need of Being Versed in Country Things” (189); Auden, “As I Walked Out One Evening” (233).

T Nov 1	<i>The English Sonnet.</i> Fussell, “Conventions and the Individual Talent” (188-198, CP); Shakespeare, “Sonnet 29” and “Sonnet 73” (66); Keats “Bright Star” (121); Millay, “If I Should Learn in Some Quite Casual Way” (220); Nemerov, “Primer for the Daily Round” (255)	Poems 6 and 7: Tabloid Ballad and Quatrain Song Workshop:
H Nov 3	<i>The Italian Sonnet.</i> Milton, “How Soon Hath Time” (81); Wordsworth, “Nuns Fret Not” (104); Frost, “Design” (185); Millay, “What Lips My Lips Have Kissed” (221)	Workshop:
T Nov 8	<i>Spenserian and Nonce Sonnets.</i> Spenser, “Amoretti: Sonnet 75” (61); Shelly, “Ode to the West Wind” (117); Yeats, “Leda and the Swan” (176); Jarman, “After Disappointment” (380); Ernest Hilbert, “Domestic Situation” (406)	Performance 2 (small group, my office)
H Nov 10	<i>Other Fixed Forms.</i> Hecht, “The Book of Yolek”; Bishop, “Sestina” (CP); Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask” (183); Thomas “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (246); Disch, “Ballade of the New God” (328)	Poems 8 and 9: English and Nonce Sonnet Workshop (2):
T Nov 15	<i>Accentual, Syllabic, and Imitation-Classical Versifications.</i> Steele, “Alternative Modes of Versification” (246-278); Moore, “The Fish” (209); Wilbur, “Junk” (255); Steele, “Sapphics Against Anger” (365)	Workshop (2):
H Nov 17	<i>Outside the Lyric: Dramatic Verse.</i> Turner “Lyric and the Content of Poetry” (CP); Tennyson, “Ulysses” (142); Eliot, “Journey of the Magi” (212); Kennedy, “In a Prominent Bar in Secaucus One Day” (295)	Poem 10: Fixed Form Lyric Workshop:
T Nov 22	<i>Dramatic Monologues on Classical Themes.</i> Salemi, “Laocoön in Hades”; “Jove’s Apologia to Juno For His Infidelity”; Stallings, “Hades Welcomes His Bride”; “Eurydice Reveals Her Strength” (CP)	
H Nov 24	NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING RECESS	
T Nov 29	<i>Outside the Lyric: the Verse Letter and Essay.</i> Drayton, “To Henry Reynolds, of Poets and Posey” (CP); Juster, “Letter to Auden” (CP); Pinkerton, “Crossing the Pedregal” (CP).	Poem 11: “Expressive” Stanza Lyric Workshop:
H Dec 1	<i>Outside the Lyric: The Narrative Poem.</i> Lake, “Inspectors” (14-18 CP); Gioia, “Haunted” (35-42 CP)	Performance 3 (small group, my office)
T Dec 6	Poem 12 Workshops	Poem 12: Verse Narrative, Monologue, or Letter
H Dec 8	Poem 12 Workshops	
H Dec 15	FINAL EXAM PERIOD (2:30-5:00)	Chapbook Due Performance 4 (large group)

III. For younger students, an approach that follows the actual historical morphology of meter within the English language literary tradition may make for more effective instruction. It will, in principle, be rooted in their most "primitive" experiences of rhythm and will allow them to practice composing at the various temporal stages of prosodic development so as to see how the flexibility of the iambic pentameter line emerges from experience of the virtues and limitations of early metrical conventions. Students should learn to write one or more lines (as appropriate) of each "stage" of the emergent metrical conventions; offering them a prompt may be helpful, for which the examples below may prove useful. Special attention should be given to the early stages culminating in the composition of at least one ballad quatrain.

The Historical Unfolding of English Prosodic Practice: Examples, Explanations, and Exercises

I) Anglo-Saxon Alliterative-Accentual Verse

Old English or Anglo-Saxon is an antecedent language to modern English and will seem completely alien to us, and yet our earliest English poetry may be said to come from this language. The conventions of Anglo-Saxon prosody are, in brief, four-stress lines; two stresses on either side of a clear caesura (medial pause within the line); and three of four of the stresses will be alliterated. Only the number of accents is counted; unstressed syllables in position and number are not regulated, though close reading of Old English verse shows a very restricted allowance of unaccented syllables, with five basic syllabic patterns covering most of the verse. What follows includes modern English translations of the form and imitations of it (Auden and Wilbur).

From *Beowulf* (Craig Williamson translation)

[/ / | / /]
Out of the darkness a shadow walker
[/ / / /]
Came writhing, sliding toward sleepers
Unware in the gabled hall—except for one
Who watched, waiting for the wraith.

From *The Seafarer* (Craig Williamson translation)

The man who lives joyful life on land,
Secure in the city, proud and passionate
In the company of friends, drinking wine,
Can never fathom how I wandered weary,
Sad and suffering, on the long sea-road.

From *Caedmon's Hymn* (Craig Williamson translation)

Now let us praise the Creator and Guardian
Of the heavenly kingdom, his power and purpose,
His mind and might, his wondrous works.
He shaped each miraculous beginning,
Each living creature, each earthly kind
He first made for the children of men
Heaven as a roof. Then our holy Shaper
Crafted middle-earth, a home for mankind:
Our God and guardian watching over us—
Eternal, almighty—our Lord and King.

It covers but not hides the sky.

From *Murder in the Cathedral* (T.S. Eliot)

[Second Knight:] Yet the King, out of his charity,
And urged on by your friends, offered clemency,
Made a pact of peace, and all dispute ended
Sent you back to your See as you demanded.

[Third Knight:] And burying memory of your transgressions
Restored your honours and your possessions.
All was granted for which you sued:
Yes how, I repeat, do you show your gratitude?

***Handy Dandy Jacky Spandy* (Mother Goose)**

Handy-dandy, Jacky Spandy
Loved plum cake and sugar candy.
He bought some at the grocery's shop
And pleased away went hop, hop, hop.

***If Wishes Were Horses* (Mother Goose)**

If wishes were horses
Beggars would ride;
If turnips were watches
I would wear one by my side

3) Rhyme and the emergence of the Ballad quatrain

It is easy to see the development of alliterative-accentual verse into an accentual rhymed verse like that of nursery rhymes. By the time this loosening occurred, rhyme had entered English poetic usage and in fact become the distinctive attribute of modern poetry (which was called "rhyme" specifically to distinguish its rhythm and "tinkling" end sounds from the classical "meter"). Accentual tetrameter becomes increasingly regular until the alternation of unaccented and accented syllables becomes systematic and we can speak in terms of the number of iambs (with an iamb being one unaccented followed by one accented syllable); when complemented by end rhyme, this four-footed rhymed stanza would become a paradigmatic measure for song writing. A range of quatrains whose names are often confused (common, short, poulter's, half, ballad, and long) and other short-lined rhyme stanzas begin to merge. Most of our songs are in long or ballad stanza, meaning either four iambs in every line or four in the odd and three in the even lines. Short lines enable one to idle ambiguously between accentual and accentual-syllabic versification. Students should try "clapping out" their own rough quatrains and then regularize them into iambs.

***To Mistress Anne* (John Skelton) [iambic dimeter]**

Mistress Anne,
I am your man,
As you may well espy.
If you will be
Content with me,
I am your man.

I have Sought Long (Sir Thomas Wyatt) [Long Meter]

But of your goodness, all your mind
Is that I should complain in vain.
this is the favor that I find:
Ye list to hear how I can plain.

Sir Patrick Spens (Anonymous) [Ballad Measure]

The king sits in Dunfermline town
Drinking the blude-red wine;
'O whare will I get a skeely skipper
To sail this new ship o' mine?'

The Unquiet Grave (Anonymous) [Ballad Measure]

The wind doth blow today, my love,
And a few small drops of rain;
I never had but one true-love,
In cold grave she was lain.

4) The fourteener

One of the central concerns of practicing English poets was the apparent inferiority of the older Anglo-Saxon and the rhymed accentual verse to classical forebears' whose meter had a regularity and absolute value to its units (metrical feet) incommensurable with the loose and rough counting of stresses in each line. If some kind of comparison could be established between accentual rhythms and classical (quantitative) meters, there existed no classical parallel to the use of end rhyme. To overcome this sense of inferiority (because much simpler and more intuitive) technique, English poets began to lengthen their line in imitation of the stately meters of classical prosody. The effect was to take the ballad or poulter's measures and simply to combine four short lines into two long ones. The iambic meter and end rhymes remained intact, but one now had a much longer line that seemed as if it might serve as the modern equivalent of the ancient meters of epic.

From *The Metamorphoses* Book III (Arthur Golding translation) [Fourteener]

In Phaetons fable unto syght the Poet dooth expresse
The natures of ambition blynd, and youthfull wilfulnesse.
The end whereof is miserie, and bringeth at the last
Repentance when it is too late that all redresse is past.
And how the weaknesse and the want of wit in magistrate
Confoundeth both his common weale and eeke his owne estate.

From *The No Man Should Write But Such As Do Excel* (George Turberville) [Poulter's]

Should no man write, say you, but such as do excel?
This fond device of yours deserves a Bable and a Bell;

The one alone should do, or very few indeed:
For that in every Art there can but one alone exceed.

5) The emergence of a longer imitation-classical line blank line

The development from the rhymed accentual short lines we see in the nursery rhymes and the accentual-syllabic short lines of rhymed ballads into the fourteener is all but indiscernible, because we have a trick of typography rather than a development in verse practice. But it indicates an aspiration to draw the native rhythms of English into a form consonant with what the learned knew of classical Latin and Greek prosody. It is worth positing a kind of “missing link” between the fourteener and what would come later—purely for analytical purposes: an unrhymed, accentual-syllabic, heptameter (i.e. seven stresses). But this is, again, analytical rather than historical; unrhymed verse in English that is not alliterative emerges only after the meter has developed into blank accentual-syllabic pentameter. Here is what it might have looked like had poetry idled at such a stage.

***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (John Ridland translation)**

After the siege and the assault had been exhausted at Troy,
And the city had been broken to bits, and burnt to brands and ashes,
The man that wrought that tragedy, by means of his treasonous works,
Was brought to trial for treachery, truly the worst in the world.
(*This translates the passage given above*)

6) Early iambic pentameter

Geoffrey Chaucer seems to have invented a long line worthy of comparison with the classical meters, and one which was rhymed, but which marks a clear departure from the tetrameter base out of which English verse emerges: the iambic-pentameter couplet. Unfortunately, he did so just as Middle English was going through rapid development into what we recognize as Modern English. So, more than a century after Chaucer’s death, early sixteenth-century humanists reinvented the meter as part of their effort to discover a genuine modern English equivalent to classical prosody that avoided the rocking ballad rhythms still to be found in the fourteener (despite appearances). Thomas Wyatt’s early example is informative of a meter in development in part because it is highly irregular, as if the principles have not been worked out yet. George Gascoigne’s are informative, because they are far more regular than Wyatt’s, but renew the use of alliteration in order to point out the accents of the line. Barnabe Googe provides a regular example that has a certain stiffness to it as if the iambic-pentameter norm must be obeyed inflexibly because its principles have not become clear; his heavy caesuras after the second iamb also echo those of the earlier tetrameter accentual line.

From *They Flee from Me* (Thomas Wyatt)

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber. [irregular: broken-backed line with feminine ending]
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek [irregular: headless]
That now are wild, and do not remember [regular, but “wild” is disyllable, not elided]

From *The Passion of a Lover* (George Gascoigne)

Some say they find nor peace nor power to fight,
Which seemeth strange; but stranger is my state.
I dwell in dole, yet sojourn with delight;
Reposed in rest, yet wearied with debate.
For flat repulse might well appease my will,
But fancy fights to try my fortunes still

***Of Money* (Barnabe Googe)**

Give money me, take friendship whoso list,
For friends are gone, come once adversity,
When money yet remaineth safe in chest,
That quickly can thee bring from misery;
Fair face show friends when riches do abound;
Come time of proof, farewell, they must away;
Believe me well, they are not to be found
If God but send thee once a lowering day.
Gold never starts aside, but in distress,
Finds ways enough to ease thine heaviness.

7) Mature iambic pentameter (Sidney)

Over the course of the sixteenth century, the principles of the iambic pentameter line became evident to its practitioners, so that they came to see its natural flexibility and subtlety of expression. This in turn concealed its clear historical dependence on the more heavily stressed tetrameter accentual line. Instead of marking stresses by means of alliteration, caesurae, and a heavy alternation of syllables, the line came to appear all the more desirable as the movement from unstressed to stressed syllable was found to be audible even when merely relative or quiet. Sir Philip Sidney, born at the midpoint of that century of rapid metrical development is generally regarded as its classical master. Notice in both these sonnets the variability of caesura and light enjambment so that the speech rhythm comprehends without conforming to the units of iambs or lines. 31 is best known for its triumphant opening four syllables, which “climb” in stress and therefore demonstrate that iambic pentameter is fully liberated from the inflexibly heavy stress alternations necessary to make accentual meters evident.

***Astrophil and Stella 7* (Philip Sidney)**

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
In colour black why wrapt she beams so bright?
Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,
Frame daintiest lustre, mix'd of shades and light?
Or did she else that sober hue devise,
In object best to knit and strength our sight;
Lest, if no veil these brave gleams did disguise,
They, sunlike, should more dazzle than delight?
Or would she her miraculous power show,
That, whereas black seems beauty's contrary,
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?
Both so, and thus, she, minding Love should be
Plac'd ever there, gave him this mourning weed
To honour all their deaths who for her bleed.

***Astrophil and Stella 31* (Philip Sidney)**

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What, may it be that even in heav'nly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries!
Sure, if that long-with love-acquainted eyes

Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case,
 I read it in thy looks; thy languish'd grace
 To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.
 Then, ev'n of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
 Is constant love deem'd there but want of wit?
 Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
 Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet
 Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
 Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

8) Metrically conscious iambic pentameter

All the essential components in iambic pentameter are found in the early sixteenth century practitioners; all the techniques of modulation necessary for it to become the normative or paradigmatic line of English poetry are already present in Sidney. During Sidney's lifetime, blank (unrhymed) pentameter was coming to enjoy the flexible metrical expression Sidney mastered, but to do so with a consciousness that the absence of rhyme would make the form sound more classical to learned ears, but also conceal the integrity of the lines and the origins of the lines in the unmistakable rhythms of the early ballads. Shakespeare and Milton exemplify a mastery of the iambic pentameter capable of trusting the integrity of the metrical feet and lines to give order and form to their verse, while also emphasizing variety of caesurae and enjambment to create ever various sense, syntax, and rhythm out of the meter. There is a meter conscious of itself precisely because they can trust the line to remain audible even as the stress becomes more relative and natural pauses—especially at line ends—become more subtle. Notice these lines from Hamlet run just the length of Sidney's sonnets above, and yet how far they sound even from Sidney's suave rhythm. Milton's sense-variously-drawn out across the scaffold of his lines plays with caesura so that a phrase ending a line seems complete until we discover the grammatical sense falling away and leading us on to the next line, thus reinforcing the integrity of the line as a unit of sound even as it deceives us as a unit of sense and "hurls" us downward like Satan into the abyss.

From *Hamlet* (William Shakespeare)

To be, or not to be--that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
 And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep--
 No more--and by a sleep to say we end
 The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep--
 To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. There's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life.

From *Paradise Lost* Book I (John Milton)

Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe
Confounded though immortal: But his doom
Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:
At once as far as Angels kenn he views
The dismal Situation waste and wilde,
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:
Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd
For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd
In utter darkness, and thir portion set
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.