

## Editor's Introduction: Scansion

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I would like to start from an intuition.<sup>1</sup> This might seem an abuse of editorial privilege, and indeed might strike one as more generally tendentious: is an issue on 'scansion' the place for discussing one's intuitions at all? For a start, it contravenes quite brazenly the strict separation between description and performance, laid down most powerfully by John Hollander well over half a century ago. For Hollander, a 'descriptive' system of scansion

would aim at presenting schematically the whole 'musical' structure of a poem, whether this consists, in any particular case, of the prosodic features of the language in which it is written, the arrangement of elements completely foreign to that language (syllable counting in English verse for example), or even the arrangement of type on a page. A *performative* system of scansion, on the other hand, would present a series of rules governing a locutionary reading of a particular poem, before a real or implied audience. It would end up by *describing* not the poem itself, but the unstated canons of taste behind the rules. Performative systems of scansion, disguised as descriptive ones, have composed all but a few of the metrical studies of the past. Their subjectivity is far more treacherous than even that of reading poems into oscilloscopes and claiming that the image produced describes, or even *is*, the true poem.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My great thanks to Ewan Jones on his comments on an earlier draft of this introduction.

<sup>2</sup> John Hollander, 'The Music of Poetry', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 15 no. 2 (December 1956), pp. 232-44, pp. 238-39.

I must then start by asking my reader, and the contributors to this volume, to excuse some dabbling in treacherous subjectivity (albeit perhaps less treacherous for being so brazen).

The intuition in question concerns a line from Shakespeare's Sonnet XXX:

And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.

It is a line notorious amongst those who like to debate the status of the 'spondee' in English verse, where the issue concerns how we should scan the locutions 'old woes', 'new wail', and 'time's waste'. There is, of course, that more general question as to whether a term like 'spondee', implying equal weighting on both syllables of a foot, is actually of any explanatory use for a prosody like English, both insofar as it is a time-stressed rather than syllable-stressed language (and hence possessed of an accentual rather than quantitative prosody), and insofar the infinite relativity of stress seems to militate against our ever identifying two syllables as being weighted to exactly the same degree.<sup>3</sup> But this is not simply an issue for foot-substitution metrics—I am interested in how one might register and describe what is taking place in the line's metrical organisation. What follows does not make any great distinction between whether we notate the line thus—

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<sup>3</sup> See Fitzroy Pyle, 'Pyrrhic and Spondee: Speech Stress and Metrical Accent in English Five-Foot Iambic Verse Structure', *Hermathena* CVII (1968), pp. 49-74, and Catherine Addison, 'The Spondee, the Text, and the Reader', *Style* 39:2 (2005), pp. 153-74. And there is also, of course, that further question as to whether 'feet' are of any useful explanatory significance in English at all... As will be clear in the essays collected in this volume, the contributors have no consensus on the matter, and it seems prudent to leave it as an open question. On the relativity of stress, the account by Otto Jespersen still strikes me as exemplary: Jespersen scans a heroic line not as five feet, but ten relational positions which either rise or fall between them: a heroic line with a trochaic inversion would thus look as follows: a\b\ a/b\ a/b\ a/b\ a/b (Notes on Metre', from Otto Jespersen, *Selected Writings* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939), pp. 647-72, p. 656). His four-scale stress notation is often rather summarily dismissed, and yet he explains its heuristic use earlier in this lecture: 'in reality there are infinite gradations of stress, from the most penetrating scream to the faintest whisper; but in most instances it will be sufficient for our purposes to recognize four degrees' (p. 651). 'For our purposes' here means nothing more complex than: to clarify the relations in stress between a small handful of syllables (normally four) in a given cluster.

x   ?   ?   ?   ?   ?   x /   ?   /  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.

or thus—

w?   s?   s?   s?   s?   s?   s?  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.  
w   s   w   s   w   s   w   s   w   s

(aside the question marks, of course). Before getting any further it is also worth noting that I'm not worried that the line might not be an 'acceptable' iambic pentameter: as I understand it, it contravenes no correspondence rule regarding 'stress maxima' or 'lexical stress'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, my concern is not so much 'how do I/we scan this line?' as: 'what is it I/we do when I/we scan this line?'

First of all: 'old woes new wail'. Here 'old' contrasts with 'new', implying 'lexical prominence' and hence demanding stress; and yet 'woe' and 'wail', as noun and verb, and as diphthongs, would also habitually be stressed in normal speech. Moreover, their alliteration generates an extra sonorous link, which in the discursive context of the poem also demands emphasis—Fitzroy Pyle calls this 'poetic prominence'.<sup>5</sup> Ditto the assonance in 'old woes' (and, slightly more understated, 'my ... time's'), or the convergence, in 'waste', of vowel and consonant elements from 'wail' and 'time's'. In this latter, it seems crucial that what is being wasted is 'time', not least given the sonnet's overall structure of 'When...', 'Then...', 'And then...', 'But if the while...'. Indeed, the contracted genitive structure of 'dear time's waste' almost ostentatiously indicates the condensation of syntax and sense in the verse line, where the demands of the line exacts of the verbal material, and extracts from the verbal material, further 'poetic prominence'.

Reading this line, then, I find myself drawn to seven stresses—or eight, if the further alliteration of 'with' in the second position grabs my attention sufficiently—and of these, each might be seen to demand the weighting of a

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<sup>4</sup> For an account of the model of iambic pentameter as governed by lexical stress rather than syllable stress, see Natalie Gerber's contribution to this volume.

<sup>5</sup> Pyle, 'Pyrrhic and Spondee', p. 54.

metrical beat. This is not simply an issue of ‘prominence’, be it ‘lexical’ or ‘poetic’. Readerly cognition is a whole body affair; scoring the line with auditory echoes creates emphasis not only in the ear, and with it some indeterminate sense of semantic linkage (or artistic motivation) between these noises, but also in lips, mouth, throat, which linger on, repeat and modify the shapes and breaths the words exact (perhaps the fact that I personally experience this even during silent reading implies that I have remained at some comparatively primitive stage of reading development; perhaps it provides just further evidence of the persistence of the infantile in our corporeal-affective responses to lyric, as Mutlu Konuk Blasing has proposed<sup>6</sup>). It is in part by inhabiting the mouth as it does that the line comes to be characterised by its slowing effects: notably the repeated /w/ phoneme of ‘new wail’ and the consonant cluster /mzw/ connecting ‘time’s waste’—the latter a dextrous instance of verbal mimesis, as ‘time’ becomes ‘lengthy’ as its waste is recollected and reenacted in the verse, something later mimicked in ‘death’s dateless night’ and ‘love’s long-since cancell’d woe’, as ‘death’s’ and ‘love’s’ retain not only the grammatical and metrical condensations of ‘time’s waste’, but also its paranomasia. In ‘Rhythm as continuum: grammar, speechsound and the invention of nature in Lorine Niedecker’s “Paeon to Place”’ (pp. 209-227), Andrew Eastman follows Pyle in outlining a poetic prominence irreducible to purely ‘informational terms’ (p. 209); with reference to Émile Benveniste and Henri Meschonnic, he takes such poetic prominence to signal the particular kind of discourse that a poem is. In Shakespeare’s line—and it is hardly alone in this regard—such prominence is registered not so much by dwelling on a ‘poetic function’, but through the muscular sensation of word-making. It thus differs from that other famed (quasi-?) ‘spondeic’ metrical pressure point from the sonnets, ‘Love is not love / That alters when it alteration finds’, whose extraordinary semantic and prosodic range has been so beautifully parsed by George T. Wright.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> George T. Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 85.

And yet: to register such slowing, to hear and voice the echo-chamber of this verse line—should this have any bearing on the scansion of the line as a *metrical description*? This is ostensibly a question regarding the relation between word/syllable stress, prosodic emphasis (either for semantic-expressive ends or out of physical necessity), and metrical weight. We will certainly give emphasis to both ‘new’ and ‘old’, ‘woe’ and ‘wail’; yet this does not entail that we endow them with the same metrical weight, or even register this weight in the same way. I personally find the relative stresses between ‘old’ and ‘woe’, ‘new’ and ‘wail’, to be marked not simply by accent, but by pitch, by length, by shifting intonation contours: ‘old’ and ‘new’ may attain higher pitch but ‘woes’ and ‘wail’ greater length, partly in order to place these two distinct, if interlinked, rhetorical parallels in concert.

But I’d like to ask one further, somewhat counterintuitive question: does the placing of a word with lexical-poetic-physical prominence in a ‘weak’ position—such as ‘time’s’—in fact *increase* our prosodic emphasis, and the word’s expressive power? As noted, the locution ‘dear time’s waste’ draws together different strata of time—rhythmic, narrative, syntactical—and crucial to this is the compression of ‘time’s’ into the weak position, setting in motion a dialectic of containment and release. Think of Donne’s celebrated ‘As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend’, from the Sonnet ‘Batter my heart’, where the weak position of ‘breathe’ coincides both with its unexpected metaphorical register, and with its consonantal density, long vowel, and syntactic caesura. Just to call this ‘three consecutive beats’ seems to miss out the particular condensation on the word ‘breathe’, and with it a central feature of the line’s unsettling beauty. The peculiar prosodic weight of ‘time’s’, and ‘breathe’, arises in no small part from their being *denied* weight by their metrical position, a denial rendered as it were aporetically audible within the texture of the verse as a whole. Does explaining the aberrance of the line by way of an elegant foot substitution (to spondee or to trochee), or establishing its acceptability according to correspondence rules, not risk defusing the dialectic through which the lines attain such force? To ‘scan’ the line of verse seems to have taken us a long way from simply providing ‘a scansion’.

But perhaps such talk of dialectic and aporia is precipitate—even inappropriate. In the new entry for Scansion in the 2012 edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of*

*Poetry and Poetics*, Timothy Steele issues the following caveat about what scansion should hope to achieve:

in scanning Eng. verse, we determine whether a syllable is metrically accented solely by comparing it with the other syllable or syllables in the foot in which it appears. We do not weigh it against all the other syllables in the line or poem. Nor do we concern ourselves with whether the foot's accented syllable is much heavier than its unaccented syllable or syllables or only a little heavier. Though such nuances will affect and enliven the specific rhythm of the spoken line, scansion cannot, with its simple descriptive tools, register their continual and shifting complexities.<sup>8</sup>

This reads like a warning to speculative prosody: do not expect the crude tools of scansion to help much with the delicate business of attending to poetic nuance. As Richard Cureton puts it in *Rhythmic Phrasing in English Verse*, metre is 'one-dimensional' whereas rhythm is 'multidimensional'. Might it not be wiser then to clip the wings of scansion and look elsewhere if we are to do justice to the complexities of the poem's overall rhythmic texture? This, I take it, is the conclusion that Cureton takes: the system developed in *Rhythmic Phrasing* attends not simply to metre, but also to other dimensions of phrasing, namely grouping and prolongation; indeed in this volume (pp. 51-107) he provides an analysis of William Carlos Williams's 'To a Solitary Disciple' which pushes his insight even further, drawing out the temporal implications of its rhetorics as well as its prosody—forms of address, tropes, figures. I do wonder, however, if I'm ready to accept so strict a separation between these different dimensions of rhythm. When 'time's' attains its aporetic metrical weighing, it *distends* its metrical position, but in doing so distends outwards from the one-dimensional frame of weak-strong binarism:<sup>9</sup> it sets in motion rhythmic vectors that are not subsequently reducible to

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<sup>8</sup> Roland Greene et al (eds.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Fourth Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1259-63, p. 1261.

<sup>9</sup> I have offered a more concerted speculative account of such distension in 'Distending the rhythmic knot', *Palimpsestes* 27 (2014 forthcoming). The term itself I borrow from Michel Deguy (himself borrowing it from St Augustine), in 'L'infini et sa diction, ou de la diérèse': La pause ... introduit la *distensio animi*, ou temps, dans la substance phonique de ce métronome qu'est une phrase rythmée, ou vers, et en fin de compte un poème, par où le temps passe, prend figure de

binary stress, but that does not mean that such vectors are not engendered by the deployment of binary stress.

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Against the prohibition on performative scansions masquerading as descriptions, we might then heed Simon Jarvis's contention:

To scan a line of verse is not to describe the properties of an object. It is, instead, to make a diagram of a performance, of an interpretation, and of an experience. If a scansion of a line of verse does not in some way record some salient elements of some particular performance, vocalized or silent, of that line, it is contentless, an aprioristic fantasy. But no diagram of a performance, of an interpretation, or of an experience can be adequate to them.<sup>10</sup>

Jarvis would refuse the bad choice between two positivisms: an 'idealist' scansion that purports to offer an a priori account of a poem's prosodic structure, untouched by individual performance, and the 'empiricist' scansion which would claim to have described how the poem 'actually' sounds. It is crucial in this regard that 'performance' entails not just 'experience' but 'interpretation': in choosing how to voice (be it aloud or silent) the poem, we are engaged not only in its phonic patterning but its modes of meaning. This shifts the ways in which we 'interpret' metre, something articulated with characteristic elegance and generosity by Clive Scott. Metrics, as he phrases it, 'releases us into scansion, into reading the rhythm

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mesure ... Dans la cadence rythmique ... l'infini prend une mesure. Le vers est ce défilé où l'infini prend finition et le fini s'infinetise. Le vers est cette chose ayant sa limitation métrée qui est travaillé par la distension, l'extensibilité – expans-i-on de chose infinie' [The pause... introduces the *distensio animi*, or time, into the phonic substance of that metronome which is a rhythmic phrase, or verse line, and ultimately a poem, through which time has passed, takes the figure of a measure. ... In a rhythmic cadence ... the infinite assumes a measure. Verse is that path in which the infinite attains a finish and the finite becomes infinite. Verse is that whose metered limitation is worked through by distension, extensibility—expans-i-on of what is infinite]. In *Choses de la poésie et affaire culturelle* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), pp. 21-32, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Jarvis, 'For a Poetics of Verse', PMLA 125.4 (2010), pp. 931-35, p. 933. Similarly, when Derek Attridge formulates his 'realisation rules' in *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, he stipulates that they are 'intended to reflect the perceptual realities of performance rather than the abstract realities of competence' (London: Longman, 1982, p. 161).

which is partly the text's and partly our own'.<sup>11</sup> The 'interpretation' of metre is not straight away a hermeneutics; syncopations, accelerations and the like are not immediately conceived as under-scoring/-mining [*delete as appropriate*] a 'sense' which is somehow autonomously 'there'; to interpret is, rather, to follow performance cues, to balance the demands of the text and the rhythmic repertoire we bring to it. To use a well-worn analogy, this resembles more the interpretation of the vocal or instrumental musician than the interpretation of the exegete.

Yet Scott is also reminding us of the kind of attentiveness that scansion can engage, and indeed energise. In his 'How to write *that* poem: Notes on Scansion and Timing in Elizabeth Bishop's poetry' (pp. 15-50), Eric Lindstrom observes that scansion is often treated simply as a 'student's task' (p. 15; more on students' tasks later); for Scott it is not a 'task' at all, but a privilege: a *pleasure*. Scott envisages scansion not as the search for a 'correct' notation of any one line of verse, but as a negotiation—a kind of rhythmic transaction—between reader and text. Its pleasures are sociable, as well as sensuous. This is taken further by Vidyan Ravinthiran in 'The Blank Verse Moo of Wallace Stevens' (pp. 108-30) when he models scansion on the subjective universality that characterises the Kantian judgement of taste: we impute to other readers an ear similar to our own, and each judgement depends implicitly upon its communicability, even if not the objective validity of subsuming a particular under a concept. Such insights imply one further observation, crucial for my own experience of line 4 from Sonnet XXX: that a constant negotiation with the text, and with one's fellow readers, is constantly re-negotiation. Sometimes it will seem more important to me that this line marks the passage from old to new (perhaps because of a keener anticipation of the 'moan' which 'I *new* pay as if not paid before'), whereas on other occasions I will be drawn to the poem's working of /ei/ and /æʊ/ diphthongs (also audible in 'moan' and 'pay'). The scansion becomes not a completed description of stress, but rather a series of performative and interpretive choices: to scan a poem is not to construct a finished product, it is a process of reading and re-reading, of listening, voicing, in order to activate ever anew the sensorium that metre opens up. When choosing

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<sup>11</sup> Clive Scott, *The Poetics of French Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 2.

how to voice the poem, but also when determining more abstractly and 'schematically' its 'musical structure', we must hear this structure through the totality of its intertexture—and hear it *dynamically*.

Scansion in this regard draws us into dimensions of rhythmicity that extend beyond the supposedly narrow issue of the notation of metre. This is not to say that notation is irrelevant: Cureton's minute analysis of William Carlos Williams shows precisely how a highly sophisticated notational system may describe the different dimensions of rhythm taking place, conceiving of 'To a Solitary Disciple' as a singular temporal performance—or, more precisely, a work that contains (in both senses of the word) plural energies and temporalities. Cureton's analysis thus offers the possibility of an enlarged scansion, one necessarily bound up in the poem's broader metaphysics—and also in a metaphysics of reading, just as it does in Ravinthiran's account of scansion as subjective and yet aspiring to some form of universality. It was a young Elizabeth Bishop who described Stevens's blank verse as 'mooing', as a means of articulating, and sharing, her ambivalent æsthetic response to the 1936 collection *Owl's Clover*, yet Ravinthiran appropriates the term in order to isolate a particular feature of Stevens's verse practice, and in particular the way the verse reflects on its own communicability: a tone which is at once hectoring and slightly bathetic, which demands assent and yet presupposes disagreement, and which sets up its address to its reader(s) through a deep insistence on the blank verse line as its vehicle for communication. For Lindstrom also, Bishop is a crucial figure for bringing together the sensoria of poetic technique and of shared subjectivity. When Bishop conceives of rhythm as 'timing', initially in her student essays on Hopkins, subsequently in both her own verse and her correspondence, what is at issue is not merely the way we intuit and register rhythm, but also whether certain topics and materials require from a poet 'a measure of silence', a 'measure' at once ethical and prosodic (pp. 45-46). The measuring of silence, one might say, is also crucial to the questions Gerber poses for generative metrics: if an account of metre is grounded so fundamentally on linguistic rules, then how can we explain the metrical weighting of pauses or other paralinguistic effects that cannot be grasped simply in terms of word-stress. If, as Gerber argues, generative metrics frees us from the tendency to speak of metrical

effects continually through recourse to metaphor and by identifying individual motivated instances of sound under-scoring/-mining [*delete as appropriate*] sense, then it still needs to develop, on the basis of its insights, a more sophisticated and sympathetic account of the relation between rhythm and effect, rhythm and meaning.

One possible way of understand these relations is, of course, *historical*, and Gerber demonstrates how the diagnostic insights of generative metrics can allow us to see what was possible for one poet at one moment but not for another at another—and in particular offers an explanation of what characterises twentieth century blank verse from earlier incarnations. Ben Glaser's 'Milton in Time' (pp. 169-85), charting the reception of Milton's controversial double trochaic inversions (what Hopkins admired so much as 'counterpointed metre'), takes a different route: he demonstrates not only how the ear changes as both critical and poetic practice configure for it shifting limits, but also how affiliation with Milton has over time had thematic significance as well as fitting into literary-historical debates about English prosody. So, for Hopkins to identify with Milton is at some level for him to encounter the prosodic difficulty of grasping God's immanence in human language, and recognise in Milton (in spite of their so different theologies) a similar questioning, one which exacts a similar plasticity of stress, a similar confrontation with the pentameter line. Similarly, T. S. Eliot's reevaluation of Milton between 1936 and 1947 coincides with his recognition of Milton's gestures of 'self-legislation' and 'freedom' in his singular verse practice. And yet, Glaser further argues, Milton's own exercise of verse 'freedom' cannot be understood merely iconically, but must continually be grasped in terms of his 'precise manipulations of syllable and stress' (p. 185)—and it is with Milton's versification that Eliot still refuses to engage.

The historicity of scansion is also crucial to the two contributions which treat non-metrical work: Ben Etherington's on Edward Brathwaite and Eastman's on Lorine Niedecker. In 'Cellular Scansion: Creolization as Poetic Practice in Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage*' (pp. 186-208), Etherington builds on Simon Jarvis's claim 'the metrical line is the compositional cell of the long poem' (cited p. 186), to ask what kinds of 'cell' might organise the rhythmic vectors of long poems which,

although committed to some kind of rhythmic measuring, are not 'metrical'. Etherington's 'cellular scansion' is radically attuned to the singularity of the long poem in question: rather than imposing a terminology upon the poem from outside, he draws immanently out of the poem's own vocabulary his terms to 'scan' the 'cells' which provide the basic materials the poem works with, on, and through. This means, moreover, that the verbal materials that make up the cell in some sense *generate* their subsequent prosodic deployment. If on the one hand such use of 'generative' seems far removed from the Chomskyan model of grammar underpinning 'generative metrics' (Brathwaite is not motivated by constructing well-formed pentameters—nor, for that matter, is Etherington hoping to formalise his cellular scansion into widely applicable rules), then the parallels between Etherington's and Gerber's essays are fascinating. Both refuse the sound-sense dualism through a focus on verbal rather than phonic material—as Gerber demonstrates, the 'iambic pentameter' line is based on the phonological and morphosyntactic properties of English, an arrangement of words, and not of syllables, and so no scansion can treat syllables in isolation from the meaningful dynamics of the line—and both attempt to grasp poetic rhythms from out of such materials. Eastman too grasps rhythm in terms of verbal material—specifically the materials of *discourse*: lived language rather than phonological and morphosyntactic rules. Niedecker's use of phonemic echo in 'Paean to Place' is thus both a form of patterning that draws together its central thematic motifs, and a means of grasping one's physical situatedness within such a place. But also, such echo cannot for Eastman be understood as purely sonorous: rather it engages recurrent metrical and syntactic forms, notably two-beat lines with sprung rhythm which are formed out of chains of prepositional phrases. If 'poetic prominence' attains its markedness by means of its stylised divergence from spoken discourse (even whilst playing on the rhythms of such discourse), then it becomes a discourse of its own. That is to say, it forges a 'network of relations between words which, as rhythm, specifies Niedecker's language' (p. 226).

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One final thought. It is a commonplace in programmatic statements on metrics to end with a meditation on the difficulties of teaching metre to undergraduates. Most accounts fall into what I call the ‘Aren’t students cloth-eared philistines’ genre of criticism. The classic of its type remains the lament that closes Wimsatt and Beardsley’s ‘The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction’:

A student in a seminar presided over by one of the present writers was stumped... in scanning a line at the blackboard and refused to put the stress mark anywhere at all. ‘I don’t see how to show the interaction between the meter and the sense’. As if by scanning he *could* show the interaction. As if the meter itself could be the interaction between itself and something else. This interest in tension, or interaction, is excellent. But how can there be a tension without two things to be in tension?<sup>12</sup>

It’s safe to say teaching methods have changed somewhat since the late 1950s, and I suspect I’m not the only person who, reading this, identifies with the perplexed, Bartlebyish student-cum-object-of-ridicule, rather than the infuriated New Critic brandishing chalk and sarcasm. The argument that Wimsatt and Beardsley are ultimately putting forward might seem to be one of pedagogical heuristics (down with woolly liberalism at high school!) rather than actual claims about how metre functions—

The probability is that the student of average gifts, if he has never at an stage of his schoolroom education been required or allowed to whang out the meter, is not aware that it is there and hence has very little notion of what the teacher means by the tensions (p. 169)

—but, of course, it is not: it is a metaphysics. Firstly, the poem is presented as an object; secondly, the ‘tensions’ are taken to be of hermeneutic rather than aesthetic value. And finally, to define the poem as an object of knowledge rests on a dualism to which no serious, attuned engagement with a poem’s soundworld ever will testify. To grasp metrical effect in terms of ‘tension’ is, as they themselves point

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<sup>12</sup> W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, ‘The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction’, in Harvey Gross (ed.), *The Structure of Verse* (New York: ECCO Press, 1979), pp. 147-72, p. 167. First published in PMLA 74 (1959).

out, to assume the radical separation of metre from performance in advance. It is to say, positivistically and aprioristically, that there is *a metre* in relation to which all other prosodic detail is 'in tension'.

And as well as being a metaphysics, it is a politics. It seems more important for the 'student of average gifts' to be able to complete a scansion exercise than it is for them to *like poetry*; more important that this student accept the authority of a tradition whose historicity is the source of almost no critical agreement, and the authority of a teacher who incarnates this tradition in the classroom (whilst taking a polemical stance on this tradition in their own contributions to the PMLA), than it is that they might hear something of this poem's prosodic excitement in their own ear, so that they might *want* to open themselves to this tradition—and grasp this tradition as ongoing, as continuous with, well, them. Compare Wimsatt and Beardsley to Lindstrom's description of his own prosodic education in the current volume to see the value of the technically 'incorrect' but aesthetically attuned reading. What Lindstrom is pointing towards is the crucial distinction between a narrow conception of metrical accuracy, and an initiation into verse aesthetics.

My own experience as a teacher bears out Lindstrom's brief observations. Teaching Sonnet XXX to first year undergraduates, one cannot help but be struck by the difficulty they feel with the first line, which is not easily reconciled with the 'correct' phrasing of de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM (nor obviously 'in tension' with it either):

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:

It is only in lines two and three that we ascertain a recognisable 'pentameter' pattern, and so the students often feel, in hindsight, as if they ought to correct their reading of the initial line, which they will invariably have endowed it a quasi-triple measure (**When** to the **sessions** of **sweet**), and will indeed interrupt their reading to go back and re-read, in accordance this time with how the line is nominally *meant* to sound. Intimidating kids is not a good way of getting them to

learn; indeed it shuts them off from trusting the language, and thereby hearing the line's music, which charts, precisely, the gradual establishment of the heroic line over the course of the first quatrain.

But I'd go further: what this quatrain performs in its own establishment of a heroic line can be read as an allegory for its reader's initiation into metre as æsthetic *Bildung*. Of the opening line, I said that the measure students gravitated towards was *quasi*-triple: the point is not that Shakespeare is writing dactyls here (heck, why not a trochaic inversion in the first foot, and a pyrrhic followed by a spondee—the so-called 'double-iamb' or 'ionic minor'—in the third and fourth feet?), but that the performance of the poem creates clusters of two unstresses/upbeats followed by a heavy stress/beat, and then pulls against this in the final three words, 'sweet silent thought'. The second line is slowed particularly by the elongated 'things' in the ninth position (both lexically and physically), and the third line demands either a contraction or a 'moraic trochee' for 'many a', yet we sense the establishment of pattern, and it is this sense which provides the context for the prosodic thickening of line four. This fourth line is wonderful to teach because it quite simply does not allow one's mouth in any simple way to whang out a pentameter: you keep on getting stuck on consonants and waylaid by diphthongs. But by the same token, this metrical context to a large extent engenders the physical sensation of its excess over metre: by starting with an attentiveness not to metre *per se* but to how we hear and voice the words, we are drawn into the techniques that manipulate our hearing and voicing, and as a result come to hear and voice anew. One moves, as it were, from the æsthetic to the technical, and then back to a far more intensified sense of verse æsthetics—indeed, to start by whanging out the metre risks closing off those precise effects that make verse technique so endlessly fascinating. Clive Scott's talk of being 'released into scansion' now sounds not simply like a phenomenology of reading, but an ethics of pedagogy.

In teaching metre as in scanning verse oneself, perhaps an intuition is quite a good place to start after all.