6
Style

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There is a simple story to be told about the styles of English verse in the sixteenth century, one already current by its final decades. The story has three parts: a crude and awkward beginning, a middle phase of increasing technical competence, and the golden age of the later Elizabethans, when England at last produced poets to rival the eloquence of antiquity.[1] John Skelton, George Gascoigne, and Sir Philip Sidney can stand for each stage, and together they make a fine case: Skelton, a 'sharp satirist, but with more railing and scoffery than became a poet laureate'; Gascoigne, admirable for 'a good meter and . . . a plentiful vein'; Sidney, whose figurative language is so 'excellently well handled' (Puttenham, *Art*, 150, 151, 329).[2] These judgements are George Puttenham's, from his *Art of English Poesy* (1589). The arrangement suits a strong habit of modern thought (indebted especially to the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel) according to which the career of style is progressive, three-phased, and tracks the movement of history in all its forms, social and political as well as artistic.[3]

There is no question but that this story can help a reader find her way through the century and allow for a rough guess about the placement of any given poem. But it will miss many byways, byways that may have looked, at the time, like royal roads. The concept of style itself, so complex and so contradictory, is to blame. On the one hand, style is a highly technical department of the art of rhetoric. It was identified particularly with the figures of speech, the schemes and tropes that could be used to dress language up or down, adjusting the level of style from high to middle to low. A well-trained schoolboy had a dictionary of countless figures—metaphor, isocolon, and many others to be encountered here—at his fingertips.[4] On the other hand, 'style' can also be used in the period to refer to the idiosyncratic accomplishment of a particular writer. Perhaps there are 'as many styles [*genera dicendi*] as there are orators', the Roman rhetorician Cicero had mused, and his remark was much repeated (Cicero, *De Oratore*, 3.34, *On the Orator*, 29).[5] This style is voice,

[1] C. S. Lewis tells such a story in his still-influential *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954).

[2] George Puttenham, in Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (eds), *The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition* (Ithaca, NY, 2007).

[3] E. H. Gombrich offers an excellent survey, 'Style', in David L. Sills (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 17 vols. (New York, 1968), 15.352–361. George Kubler, in *The Shape of Time* (New Haven, CT, 2008), offers a critical account of the tradition of historical phases.

[4] The most influential account is to be found in Cicero's *Orator*, 20–4, in G. L. Hendrickson and H. M. Hubbell (trans.), *Brutus. Orator* (Cambridge, MA, 1939), 319–21. For a modern analysis, see Wilbur Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700* (New York, 1961), 66–137; and Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric* (Oxford, 2011), 15–32. David Riggs gives an excellent description of what this training meant for schoolboys in *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York, 2004), 25–77.

[5] Cicero, in H. Rackham (trans.), *On the Orator: Book 3. On Fate. Stoic Paradoxes. Divisions of Oratory* (Cambridge, MA, 1942). See also Baldassare Castiglione, in Thomas Hoby (trans.), *The Book of the Courtier* (London, 1561), sig. G3. Carlo Ginzburg discusses the relation between the two Ciceronian accounts in 'Style: Inclusion and Exclusion', in Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (trans.), *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York, 2001), 109–38.

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distinctive and possibly beyond the reach of art; a writer's style 'peradventure cannot easily alter into any other', as Puttenham puts it (Puttenham, *Art*, 233).[6]

Style, then, can be technical and learnable, or it can be personal and stubborn. It can also be fashionable and sociable, reflecting the shifting affinities and advantages of life in city and court. John Hoskins, author of 'Directions for Speech and Style' (*c* 1599), observes half-abashedly, 'I have used and outworn several styles since I was first Fellow of New College, and am yet able to bear the fashion of [the] writing company' (Hoskins, 'Directions', 39).[7] And then again, style can have the hoped-for constancy of a nation, an idiom fit for heroic origins, important events, and prophecies of empire. To observe this coincidence—style as an art, as a signature, as an index of season and faction, and as the durable idiom of Englishness—is to recognise how complex are style's interactions with history. However powerful the progressive narrative may be, any number of particular poems will elude it, whether the precocious blank verse of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, or the wilful archaisms of Edmund Spenser. Any given poem will itself contain reminiscences of many different times, as Shakespeare's new-fangled rhythms contend with his, sometimes old-fashioned, syntactic preferences.[8] A poem is less a point on a timeline than a crumpled handkerchief, the present-day philosopher Michel Serres' figure for the polytemporal object, folded irregularly in on itself so that pasts, presents, and futures make unpredictable contact.[9]

My procedure here will be to tell that old story again, but to tell it from underneath, or better, to tell it from the shifting vantages of several petering byways, the failed experiments of the age. The sixteenth century is rife with dead-end styles, more or less self-conscious, more or less ambitious proposals for setting the course of English poetry, proposals that found few or no takers. I will consider Thomas Wyatt's broken lines, and Gascoigne's sing-song poulter's measure; the quantitative metre of Richard Stanyhurst's *Aeneid*, and Christopher Marlowe's strong couplets; even Edmund Spenser's archaisms. Together they are the negative image of what has lasted best, the versatile pentameter bequeathed by Sidney and Shakespeare to the next century. Even those poems that seem to be most sure-footed in their march towards present-day tastes emerged from a rich matrix of thwarted possibility.

Wyatt's Rhythms

Wyatt is a curious starting place for such an inquiry. His style is very much with us: his prestige amongst critics has grown steadily over the last seventy or so years, and he has been a model for twentieth-century poets as diverse as Thom Gunn and Frank O'Hara. His reputation was already secure by the time Puttenham identified him, along with Surrey, as 'the first reformers of our English meter and style' (Puttenham, *Art*, 140). The modern and early modern judgements, however, turn out to be based upon different texts, and opposite schemes of value. Consider, first, a sample of the Wyatt that Puttenham praised, the sestet of the sonnet that begins, 'Avising the bright beams'. The source is the much-reprinted 1557

[6] Puttenham's discussion of style in the fifth chapter of his third book is the most thorough in the period.

[7] John Hoskins, in Hoyt H. Hudson (ed.), *Directions for Speech and Style* (Princeton, NJ, 1935).

[8] Jonathan Hope discusses the persistence of the periphrastic 'do' and other old-fashioned devices in Shakespeare's work in *The Authorship of Shakespeare's Plays: A Socio-Linguistic Study* (Cambridge, 1994), 11–26.

[9] Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, in Roxanne Lapidus (trans.), *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 60–1.

compilation of courtly poems, *Songs and Sonnets*, better known today as Tottel's Miscellany, after its editor, Richard Tottel:

> In such extremity thus is he brought:
> Frozen now cold, and now he stands in flame:
> Twixt woe and wealth: betwixt earnest and game:
> With seldom glad, and many a divers thought:
> In sore repentance of his hardiness,
> Of such a root lo cometh fruit fruitless.
>
> (Wyatt, 'Avising the bright beams', *Tottel's Miscellany*, poem 56, lines 9–14)[10]

There is much in these lines that was new to English poetry in the 1530s. Wyatt was amongst the first to translate Francis Petrarch, and 'Avising', a free rendering of *Rime* 173, carries over such favourite Petrarchan schemes of eloquence as isocolon (parallel structures like 'woe and wealth . . . earnest and game') and antithesis ('cold . . . flame'). Wyatt had served on embassy in Italy for Henry VIII, and his borrowings from the Italians were many. The diction, however, is sturdy Anglo-Saxon, more plain John Skelton ('For though my ryme be ragged, / Tattered and jagged . . . Yf ye take well therwith, / It hath in it some pyth' (Skelton, 'Collyn Clout', lines 53–4, 57–8, in *Complete Poems*, 248)) than the last century's aureate John Lydgate ('enlumined with many curious flower / Of rhetoric, to make us comprehend' (Lydgate, *Lydgate's Troy*, 3.7)).[11] Wyatt's humanist rhetorical training is in evidence, but as Thomas M. Greene puts it, he 'systematically reduced the tones of Petrarch's highly ornamented surface'.[12]

The rhetorical patterning is strong, then, if stiff, and the diction native and plain. What of the metre? The rhythm of a poem, its conformity or resistance to a metrical scheme, has always been closely identified with questions of style; it is at once technical and bodily, thought and felt. Observe the iambic movement of the lines above, the steady succession of two-syllable feet in a rising rhythm, unstressed syllable then stressed (-/), and then compare the original version, below. It comes from the Egerton manuscript, which has the authority of Wyatt's own hand but did not see print until 1815:

> Thus is it in such extremity brought:
> In frozen thought now, and now it standeth in flame,
> 'Twixt misery and wealth, 'twixt earnest and game,
> But few glad and many a diverse thought,
> With sore repentance of his hardiness.
> Of such a root cometh fruit fruitless.
>
> (Wyatt, 'Avising the bright beams', lines 9–14, *Complete Poems*, 81)[13]

[10] Richard Tottel (ed.), in Amanda Holton and Tom MacFaul (eds), *Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others* (Harmondsworth, 2011).

[11] John Skelton, in John Scattergood (ed.), *The Complete English Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1983); John Lydgate, in Henry Bergen (ed.), *Lydgate's Troy Book* (London, 1906–35). On diction see Veré L. Rubel, *Poetic Diction in the English Renaissance from Skelton through Spenser* (New York, 1961).

[12] Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven, CT, 1982), 256.

[13] Wyatt, in R. A. Rebholz (ed.), *The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1978).

These lines are much rougher. Tottel's agenda as an editor was primarily to smooth them into a regular iambic pentameter. The awkward double stress of 'Bŭt féw glád' becomes the fluent 'Wĭth séldŏm glád'; 'Ĭn frózĕn thóught nŏw', awkwardly trailing an unstressed syllable before the mid-line pause of the caesura, becomes 'Frózĕn nŏw cóld'. (That initial trochee [/-], reversing the iamb to make a stressed-unstressed foot, is already by 1557 a variation used for emphasis without threatening the metrical contract with the reader).[14] Wyatt could write strings of iambs when he wanted, as his many tetrameter songs demonstrate. He did not want to here. Prosodists have gone to great lengths to describe the tolerances of his pentameter, but it may be most economical to say that a line of five iambs was for him a resource—he could use it for effect—without being a standard.[15] 'Of such a root cometh fruit fruitless' refuses fluency, whether we take it as a show of terse, proverbial authority, or a spasm of despair.

That is to say that Wyatt writes expressive rhythms. His range of variation asks to be taken as a measure of shifting mood. The canonical contrast is with Surrey, who was the scion of one of the most powerful families of the old nobility. Surrey, the younger man by fourteen years, admired Wyatt, and celebrated his plain-style authority in three elegies: 'A hand that taught what might be said in rhyme', he wrote in one, 'That reft Chaucer the glory of his wit' (Surrey, 'W. resteth here', lines 13–14, *Poems*, 27).[16] His own poems, however, which get top billing in the Miscellany, set the standard of regularity to which Tottel would make the older poet conform:

> This having said, she left me all in tears,
> And minding much to speak; but she was gone,
> And subtly fled into the weightless air.
> Thrice wrought I with my arms t'accoll her neck,
> Thrice did my hands' vain hold th'image escape,
> Like nimble winds and like the flying dream.
>
> (Surrey, *The Aeneid, Book Two*, lines 1051–6, *Poems*, 62–3)

These lines are taken from Surrey's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the moment when Aeneas must relinquish the ghost of his wife Creusa. They are in blank verse, which would not be common in non-dramatic poetry for almost another century. Their basic prosody, however, became characteristic of the mid-century pentameter in English, with its steady iambs, end-stopped lines, and a caesura that falls reliably after the fourth or sixth syllables. Likewise, the Anglo-Saxon diction. It had a national significance for both poets, but for Surrey it made a case for the ancient liberties of the landed aristocracy. Where he sounds French—the borrowing of *accoller*, to embrace, and the French accent of 'ĭmáge'—he writes as a soldier who had fought for England's claim to Calais. Surrey's biographer William Sessions emphasises his ambition to establish a heroic norm for English verse, a verse not locally

[14] The phrase 'metrical contract' is used by John Hollander to describe how a poem sets the terms by which its tolerances and transgressions may be judged; see his chapter entitled 'Romantic Verse Form and the Metrical Contract', in *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (Oxford, 1975), esp. 188–9.

[15] For a resourceful attempt to define the range of rhythmic possibility in Wyatt's line, and to set it in the context of the century's verse, see George T. Wright, *Shakespeare's Metrical Art* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 20–37.

[16] Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in Emrys Jones (ed.), *Poems* (Oxford, 1964).

expressive—not subject to the turbulence of changing emotion—but in the large, expressive of the linguistic confidence of a great nation.[17]

Surrey's voice carries. It is the rhythmically volatile Wyatt, forever sacrificing rule to feeling, who is a dead end. When the expressive power of the pentameter opens up again, later in the century, it is not on account of any revival of his influence. His rhythmically inchoate urgency would wait almost three centuries to be heard beyond the circle of manuscripts in which the poems first travelled. Meanwhile, Tottel's anthology was reprinted eleven times in the next thirty years. The collection answered to a wide curiosity about court life, especially amongst minor gentry and an expanding literate middle class in London; Tottel offered his readers 'those works which the ungentle hoarders up of such treasure have heretofore envied thee' (Tottel, Preface, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 3). The same preface dedicates the work 'to the honour of the English tongue, and for profit of the studious of English eloquence' (Tottel, Preface, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 3)—his readers, he knew, saw eloquence as a path to influence—and it contains epigrams and elegies alongside the love lyrics, and moralising imitations of the Roman poet Horace as well. Sonnets are prominent, as is Chaucerian rhyme royal (*ababbcc*) and Italian *ottava rima* (*abababcc*), and the long lines of poulter's measure (about which more below). Perhaps the most important legacy, as Stephen May has argued, was sheer regularity, of the prosody and of the rhetorical structures that were disciplined to an end-stopped line and stable caesura.[18] 'I exhort the unlearned', writes Tottel, 'by reading to learn to be more skilful' (Tottel, Preface, *Tottel's Miscellany*, 3). English verse could be a skill, one practised to the honour of the nation and the national tongue.

Gascoigne's Long Lines

Skill was a cardinal virtue for Gascoigne. When he came to record his reflections on English verse, in his 'Certain Notes of Instruction' (1575), he modestly promised 'to set down my simple skill in such simple manner as I have used' (Gascoigne, *Hundreth*, 454).[19] That skill—which Gascoigne makes available to any reader—is on display throughout his *Posies*, the volume in which 'Certain Notes' appeared. Here is a typical sestet, the final six lines of a sonnet on the theme '*Audaces fortuna iuuat*' [fortune favours the bold]:

> If dread of drenching waves or fear of fire,
> Had stayed the wandering Prince amid his race,
> Ascanius then, the fruit of his desire,
> In Lavine Land had not possessed place.
> But true it is, where lots doe light by chance,
> There Fortune helps the boldest to advance.
>
> (Gascoigne, 'If yielding fear', lines 9–14, *Hundreth*, 275)

[17] 'The freedom and flexibility of a language for Tudor "noble hearts" had been consciously designed by the young earl', writes Sessions in *Henry Howard, the Poet Earl of Surrey: A Life* (Oxford, 1999), 260. As Susanne Woods puts it in *Natural Emphasis: English Versification from Chaucer to Dryden* (San Marino, 1984), 'Wyatt was an experimenter, Surrey an inventor' (72).

[18] Steven W. May argues that the most influential poems in Tottel 'exemplified a largely rhetorical art anchored in rhythmic expression and rhyme' and were dependent on 'a limited range of schemes and tropes', including anaphora and isocolon, in 'Popularizing Courtly Poetry: Tottel's Miscellany and its Progeny', in Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485–1603* (Oxford, 2009), 418–33, 428.

[19] George Gascoigne, in G. W. Pigman III (ed.), *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (Oxford, 2000).

The if–then structure that describes Aeneas's boldness reprises praise of Caesar and Menelaus, respectively, in the preceding two quatrains; the sententious motto falls comfortably in the couplet. The iambic movement is steady throughout, the lines are end-stopped, and there is a reliable caesura after the fourth syllable. In managing the accent Gascoigne is unafraid of monosyllables, typically working in a sturdy Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, the plain style for which modern critics in the line of Yvor Winters have so celebrated him. As Winters puts it, Gascoigne offers 'feeling restrained to the minimum required by the subject . . . the poet being interested in his rhetoric as a means of stating his matter as economically as possible, and not, as are the Petrarchans, in the pleasures of rhetoric for its own sake'.[20] Variations in the iambic movement are accordingly rare—there are none here—and when they occur, they are almost always inversions (trochee for iamb) at the beginning of the line or after the caesura, which can serve to mark structural units or turns in argument. These are the tolerances of the standard mid-century line, of which Tottel's Surrey was first sponsor. The sonnet is an admirably controlled performance, almost an exercise, both formal and moral. It at once projects and fulfils the criteria of its own success.

Indeed, it is as an exercise that the poem is presented, the first of five that Gascoigne claims that he was asked to undertake to gain readmission to the study of law at the Inns of Court. (The skeleton of such school exercises can be detected behind some of the most accomplished sonnets of Sidney and Shakespeare, the working out of a set theme, the unpacking of a *sententia*; rhetoric was still the master discipline of these poets' education, and poetry would be a long time yet cutting ties). Gascoigne performs his humanist facility with the Classical topoi, or commonplaces, of courage, as well as his skill in verse. Notwithstanding the stoical self-reliance of his plain style, however, the royal court shaped his work at least as much as the classroom did. His poems are preoccupied with display and surveillance, the rivalrous triangulations of authority and desire that became so characteristic of Elizabeth's 'courtly makers'. His prose fiction, 'The Adventures of Master F. J.', is full of such games. The characters are constantly exchanging seductive and competitive verse, and the narrator is constantly evaluating it: 'This sonnet was highly commended', 'this is but rough meter', 'these verses are more in number than do stand with contentation of some judgments' (Gascoigne, *Hundreth*, 156, 162, 160). Gascoigne played these games in life, too, or tried. He printed the first collection of his writings, *A Hundreth Sundry Flowers* (1573), as a kind of successor to Tottel, a miscellany supposedly assembled by a secretive, unscrupulous editor. But in this self-occluding, self-fashioning gambit—and in the scandalous content of 'F. J.', which was printed in the same volume—he seems to have gone too far. The *Flowers* was withdrawn from circulation, and a whiff of scandal still clings to it. The *Posies* was published with a chastened apology for 'sundry wanton speeches and lascivious phrases' and a plea for renewed favour (Gascoigne, *Hundreth*, 359).

Gascoigne went too far formally, too, at least for his posterity. The lines in 'F. J.' accused of being 'more in number' are written in a verse called poulter's measure:

> And when she saw by proof, the pith of my good will,
> She took in worth this simple song, for want of better skill.
> And as my just deserts, her gentle hart did move,
> She was content to answer thus: I am content to love.
>
> (Gascoigne, 'In prime of lusty years', lines 41–4
> sequential numbering, *Hundreth*, 160)

[20] Yvor Winters, 'The Sixteenth-Century Lyric in England: A Critical and Historical Reinterpretation', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, 53.5 (1939), 262.

Poulter's measure, with its alternating lines of six and seven two-syllable feet, is so named, as Gascoigne explains in his 'Certain Notes', for the grocer who offers extra eggs for buying in bulk, 'xii for one dozen and xiiii for another' (Gascoigne, *Hundreth*, 461). Thirty-five of the 111 poems in *Posies* are in this form, and Gascoigne adopted it at a time when it seemed a plausible heir to the Classical hexameter. Thomas Phaer had published the first seven books of his *Aeneid* in fourteeners (fourteen syllable lines, usually comprised of seven iambic feet) in 1558, and Arthur Golding's complete *Metamorphoses* followed nine years later:

> Of shapes transformed to bodies strange, I purpose to entreat,
> Ye gods vouchsafe (for you are they that wrought this wondrous feat)
> To further this mine enterprise. And from the world begun,
> Grant that my verse may to my time, his course directly run.
>
> (Golding, *Metamorphoses*, Book 1, lines 1–4, *Golding Translation*, 3)[21]

Golding does a creditable job ennobling these long lines, but they suffer from a vulnerability that no skill could reliably control: the tendency of each to split in two, presenting to the ear not as a continuous utterance, but as the sing-song of a ballad stanza, or of the ubiquitous Sternhold and Hopkins *Psalter*, which rang in the ears of every parish churchgoer:

> O holy, holy, holy Lord,
> Of Sabbath Lord the God,
> Through heaven and earth thy praise is spread,
> and glory all abroad.
>
> (Sternhold and Hopkins, *Te Deum*, 'We praise thee, God', lines 9–12, *Whole Book*, sig. A4^{v})[22]

Just a few years later, in his *Arcadia*, Sidney would use such rhythms to make fun of the daughter of a country rube: 'What length of verse can serve brave Mopsa's good to show, / Whose virtues strange, and virtues such, as no man may them know?' (Sidney, 'What length of verse', lines 1–2, *Old Arcadia*, 30).[23] No poet was more committed than Gascoigne to this length of verse, but it proved, like his career in court, a dead end, its Classical ambitions undermined by its grocer's cadence.[24]

Might the same be said of Gascoigne's plain style? To Winters' ear, plainness was the true path, and his investment in its sturdy virtues stopped his ears to some of Gascoigne's vicissitudes and embarrassments (and indeed, his debts to Petrarch). To C. S. Lewis's ear, plainness was the signature of the mid-century 'drab age'.[25] The most celebrated poets of the succeeding decades, Sidney and Spenser, would let the plain style lie mostly fallow. But it had a Roman pedigree, in Seneca's essays and Horace's odes, and it held an honoured place

[21] Arthur Golding (trans.), in John Frederick Nims (ed.), *Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation, 1567* (New York, 1965).

[22] Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, *The whole book of Psalms collected into English metre by T[homas] Sternhold, J[ohn] Hopkins, and others* (London, 1562).

[23] Sir Philip Sidney, in Jean Robertson (ed.), *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)* (Oxford, 1973).

[24] Lucy Munro has a sensitive discussion of the demands of the line in *Archaic Style in English Literature, 1590–1674* (Cambridge, 2013), 145–6. See also Woods, *Natural Emphasis*, 115.

[25] Lewis, *English Literature*, 222–71.

amongst the rhetoricians: 'the low kind', as Sir Thomas Wilson put it in his 1553 *Art of Rhetoric*, 'when we use no metaphors, nor translated words, nor yet use any amplifications, but go plainly to work, and speak altogether in common words' (Wilson, *Art*, sig. z2).[26] It had a future, too, in Ben Jonson's neoclassicism, and the austere high Protestantism of the later Fulke Greville. Gascoigne's 'Certain Notes' makes for something like a plain-style manifesto, urging the poet to avoid strange or obsolete words, 'unless the theme do give just occasion', and to 'frame your style to perspicuity and to be sensible' (Gascoigne, *Hundreth*, 459). At his best, he makes a good case for the plain poet's limits, chosen or not:

> He cannot climb as other catchers can,
> To lead a charge before himself be led,
> He cannot spoil the simple sakeles* man, **innocent*
> Which is content to feed him with his bread.
> (Gascoigne, 'Gascoigne's Woodmanship', lines 73–6, *Hundreth*, 314)

The lines are from the famous 'Gascoigne's Woodmanship', a petition-poem to a would-be patron in which the poet rehearses the incapacities that secure his virtue. Here, he is a soldier who can neither bring himself to break rank to seize glory, nor to take advantage of the poor man who helps him. There remain critics today who regard this starker idiom, with its debt to Wyatt's stripped-down and cynical satires, and to Horace, and Skelton, as the strongest verse of the period. It is not, but it survives in the mouths of dissidents like the irascible Kent in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, calling out the excesses of a higher style.[27] Its workmanlike skill is a counter to an age of increasing virtuosity, and even Sidney's muse urges him, at moments, towards the willed authenticity of a plainer idiom: 'look in thy heart and write!' (Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 1, line 14, *Poems*, 165).[28]

Stanyhurst's Quantities

Speaking of excesses:

> Now manhood and garbroyls* I chant, and martial horror. **disturbance, tumult*
> I blaze thee* captain first from Troy city repairing, **the*
> Like wand'ring pilgrim too* famosed* Italy trudging, **to *famoused*
> And coast of Lavyn: soused with tempestuous hurlwind*, **whirlwind*
> On land and sailing, by God's predestinate order.
> (Stanyhurst, *First Four Books*, sig. B3)[29]

[26] Sir Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric* (London, 1553).

[27] 'I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly', says Kent of himself: see William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1.4.29–30, in Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare*, third edition (New York, 2016), 2506.

[28] Sir Philip Sidney, in William A. Ringler, Jr (ed.), *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford, 1962).

[29] Richard Stanyhurst, *The First Four Books of Virgil His Aeneis* (Leiden, 1582). See also the discussion of this passage in Chapters 3 and 15 in this volume.

Through the consonant-clotted wilderness of these lines, something familiar might be made out; indeed, very familiar: the opening lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*. 'Lo now of Mars, and dreadful wars I sing . . . and of the man of Troy', Thomas Phaer had written, plainly enough, a few years before (Phaer, *Whole XII Books*, sig. A1);[30] and before that, there was the pellucid blank verse of Surrey's version of Books 2 and 4. 'Manhood and garbroyls' comes from a 1582 translation by the Irish antiquary-alchemist Richard Stanyhurst. Its strangeness is by no means fully accounted for by comment on the metre, but metre is a place to start, for at the heart of Stanyhurst's experiment was his determination to organise his lines according to syllable quantity.[31] 'Good God what a fry of such *wooden rhythmers* doth swarm in stationers' shops', he protests in his dedicatory letter, decrying the stress-based versification of his contemporaries. 'The readiest way therefore to flap these drones from the sweet scenting hives of *Poetry*, is for the learned to apply themselves wholly . . . to the true making of verses in such wise as the *Greeks* and *Latins*' (Stanyhurst, dedicatory letter 'To the Right Honourable . . . Lord Baron of Dunsany', *First Four Books*, sig. A4^{v}). He insisted, that is, on observing not light and grave accent, as Gascoigne called them, but rather long and short syllables, a measure his age accepted as the prosodic basis of the Classical languages.[32]

Some of Stanyhurst's most celebrated contemporaries lent their authority to experiments in quantitative metre. One of the surviving manuscripts of Sidney's *Old Arcadia* gives the 'rules observed in these English measured verses', that syllables could be long by vowel quantity, a long vowel or a diphthong 'such as have a double sound', or by position, when a vowel is followed by two consonants (Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, 80). The over-educated pseudo-shepherds of Sidney's pastoral romance sing several songs in quantities, as Cleophila does here:

> But yet well I do find each man most wise in his own case.
> None can speak of a wound with skill, if he have not a wound felt.
> Great to thee my estate seems, thy estate is blest by my judgement:
> And yet neither of us great or blest deemeth his own self.
> (Sidney, 'Lady, reserved by the heavens', lines 70–3, *Poems*, 31)

The ear listening for patterns of stress will be baffled; there is no predictable alignment of accent with the long syllables of the quantitative hexameters. Sidney likely took his first interest in such experiments during his travels on the Continent, where he would have encountered several such classicising projects in French and Italian. His standing as a charismatic authority back home in England is attested in an exchange of letters, printed in 1580, between Edmund Spenser and the Cambridge scholar Gabriel Harvey. Masters Sidney and Edward Dyer, Spenser wrote, had 'prescribed certain laws and rules of quantities of English syllables for English verse . . . and drawn me to their faction'. But Spenser is uneasy with Harvey's willingness to let quantities override stress, pronouncing 'cárpĕntĕr' as 'cărpéntĕr' simply on account of the two consonants before the first *e*. 'Why, a Gods name,

[30] Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne (trans.). *The Whole Twelve Books of the Aeneids of Virgil* (London, 1573).

[31] Scansion can depend on spelling, which is why words such as 'thee' (i.e., 'the') and 'too' (i.e., 'to') have been glossed in the quotation.

[32] Gascoigne in fact identifies three kinds of accent, and refers to them at first as long, short, and indifferent, but from then on calls them grave and light, and considers their pitch as well as their length: 'the grave accent is drawn out or elevated, and makes that syllable long whereupon it is placed: the light accent is depressed or snatched up, and makes that syllable short upon the which it lights' (Gascoigne, *Hundreth*, 456).

may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language', he asks—why not let the custom of spoken English govern our English speech, and reserve quantities for our verse (Spenser, *Three Letters*, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 1.98–9)?[33] The conflict opens a breach between the classicising and nationalist impulses, which would not, in the end, favour quantities.[34] Harvey seems to have believed that following the Classical rules properly would ensure a harmony of the systems. Spenser knew better, and that may be why he never actually wrote quantitative verse.

There are scholars, notably Derek Attridge, who assert that long and short syllables on the Classical model have always been an 'intellectual apprehension, not an aural one' in English, an unhearable transposition of rules fundamentally unsuited to a stress-based tradition.[35] Still, the dream of English quantities did not die with the publication of Spenser's emphatically accentual, unfailingly regular *Faerie Queene*. Sidney's sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, translated eight of her Psalms 'in imitation of the Greek and Latin lyrics', and though she conceded that 'our language is not suited so well for it', she makes some effective embassies between the two, as in the loose accentual tetrameter audible here:

> Ás tŏ th'ĕtérnăl óftĕn ĭn ánguĭshĕs
> Éarst hăve Ĭ cállĕd névĕr ŭnánswĕred
> Ăgáin Ĭ cáll, ăgáin Ĭ cállĭng
> Dóubt nŏt ăgáin tŏ rĕcéive ăn ánswĕr.
>
> (Sidney Herbert, Psalm 120, lines 1–4, *Renaissance Women Poets*, 162)[36]

These beautiful lines are a world of sophistication away from Sternhold and Hopkins, but still evocative of the ballad stanza. Equally accomplished in this vein is the poet and musician Thomas Campion, whose *Observations in the Art of English Poesy* (1602) contains several poems that gracefully reconcile quantity and stress. Attridge offers the following quantitative scansion of 'Rose-Cheeked Laura':

> Rŏse-cheéked | *Lăurá*, | cŏme,
> Sĭng thŏu | smoŏthlý | wĭth thý | bĕautiĕs
> Sĭlĕnt | mŭsíc, | ĕithér | ŏthĕr
> Sweĕtlý | grăcĭng.
>
> (Campion, 'Rose-Cheeked Laura', lines 1–4, *Works*, 310)[37]

It is no accident that some of the most effective marriages of accent and quantity happened in song; Campion's musical setting allows him a second language to express the duration of syllables. 'The ear is a rational sense', he proclaims in his *Observations* (Campion, *Works*, 294), and the poet's work is to organise the double constraint of 'natural emphasis'

[33] Edmund Spenser, *Three proper and witty, familiar letters* (1580), in G. Gregory Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1904).

[34] The classic treatment of this exchange is Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), 19–62.

[35] Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge, 1974), 76.

[36] Mary Sidney Herbert, in Danielle Clarke (ed.), *Renaissance Women Poets: Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer* (London, 2000). Woods discusses Sidney's innovations in *Natural Emphasis*, 172. The accentual marks are my own.

[37] Thomas Campion, in Walter R. Davis (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Campion* (New York, 1970); scanned in Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables*, 226.

(Gascoigne's phrase again; see *Hundreth*, 456) and syllable length such that they fall together, a marriage of nature and art.

Sidney's and Campion's accomplishment is nonetheless acknowledged to be rare. Stanyhurst's egregious example makes patent some of the problems that beset the ever-incipient, never triumphant quantitative movement. His indefatigably Anglo-Saxon diction—or Anglo-Irish, perhaps; he wrote the section on Ireland's history in Holinshed's *Chronicles*—is a nativist overcompensation for his Classical scansions. The almost Joycean crimes of diction are compounded by the idiosyncratic spelling, by which he cheats short vowels into long or vice versa, doubling an *o* and dropping a *u*, for example, in 'too famosed Italie trudging'. Campion deplores such tactics ('the sound of [the syllables] in a verse is to be valued, and not their letters' (Campion, *Works*, 352)), but most quantitative practitioners, Sidney included, found them difficult to resist. The classicising criticism of rhyme may have had some influence on the development of blank verse as a heroic line. But in the later sixteenth century, blank verse, notwithstanding Surrey's early example, was almost exclusively a phenomenon of the stage, where it was dramatic naturalism, rather than classicism, that drove its growth. Quantities were little heard in English by the end of the century, if heard they ever were.

Marlowe's Mighty Couplets

Rhyme, meanwhile, flourished. Tottel's Miscellany had established a durable repertoire of forms. The next most popular verse anthology of the Tudor period, *A Mirror for Magistrates*, first published in 1559, featured nineteen monitory lives in rhyme royal (*ababbcc*), and added more with each of its subsequent six editions. Rhyme royal was identified with Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and its use in the *Mirror* represented a sober repurposing of his poem of courtly love, one that advertised a debt to native tradition. (The *Mirror*'s verse is often disparaged, and indeed, much of it has Gascoigne's propriety, without his ingenuity; for just that reason, it made an important contribution to setting the norms of the iambic pentameter). Pentameter couplets were less commonplace, but they were the form of choice for Christopher Marlowe, when, likely as a student at Cambridge, he tried his hand at translating the Roman poet Ovid's *Amores*. The result was a countercultural exercise in several ways. The following lines are from Elegy 1.4, in which Ovid explains to his mistress how, if she must dine in public with her husband, she can send him reassuring signs across the table:

> If ought of me thou speak'st in inward thought,
> Let thy soft finger to thy ear be brought.
> When I (my light) do or say ought that please thee,
> Turn round thy gold ring, as it were to ease thee.
> (Marlowe, Elegy 1.4, lines 23–6, *Complete Works*, 1.17)[38]

Marlowe embraces the wry erotic connoisseurship of his original. If the Petrarchism of so many contemporaries figured a tragically conflicted consciousness, Ovid offered him a

[38] Christopher Marlowe, in Roma Gill, et al. (eds), *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1987–98).

self-effacing, self-amused wit.[39] The verse is steady and end-stopped; most couplets are complete sentences, bounded specimens of the poet's intelligence. There is, in this forceful regularity and strong rhetorical patterning (*when*, *then*; *when*, *then*), a foreshadowing of what Jonson would call the 'mighty line' of Marlowe's early dramas (Jonson, 'To draw no envy', line 30, *Ben Jonson*, 8.391).[40] Sensual divagations notwithstanding, it has the sound of self-certainty. What it does not sound like—and where the limits of its influence may best be recognised; where its dead end may be measured—is the verse of Philip Sidney.

We have already glimpsed, in the deference Spenser pays to rumours of Sidney's quantitative experiments, the latter's prestige as an arbiter of poetic taste. By the time Marlowe was at university, Sidney had already written *Astrophil and Stella* and the first version of his *Arcadia*; they circulated in manuscript, but narrowly, and Marlowe—notwithstanding some tenuous connections to the Sidney circle—was unlikely to have read them before they were printed at the beginning of the next decade, in 1591 and 1590, respectively. Sidney's sonnet sequence asserts its distance from Petrarch, and also from Ovid:

> Some lovers speak when they their Muses entertain,
> Of hopes begot by fear, of wot not what desires:
> Of force of heavenly beams, infusing hellish pain:
> Of living deaths, dear wounds, fair storms and freezing fires:
> Some one his song in *Jove*, and *Jove*'s strange tales attires,
> Bordered with bulls and swans, powdered with golden rain:
> Another humbler wit to shepherd's pipe retires,
> Yet hiding royal blood full oft in rural vein.
>
> (Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 6, lines 1–8, *Poems*, 167)

Some lovers, says Astrophil, but not me. In his scorn for Petrarchan paradox and Ovidian metamorphosis, there is a sketch of the fashions of lyric poetry *c* 1580; fashions from which his creator, writing a sonnet sequence after Petrarch, and a pastoral romance of virtuosic gender transformation after Ovid, hardly disentangled himself. The sonnet ends, however, with an effort to re-found Astrophil's loyalties in a language of diplomacy and statecraft. 'But think that all the map of my state I display, / When trembling voice brings forth that I do *Stella* love' (Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 6, lines 13–14, *Poems*, 168). The statesman's role was one for which Sidney's superb humanist training (at Shrewsbury School and Christ Church, Oxford) and wide travel equipped him impeccably. But his career was full of miscalculations, including a reckless broadside against the prospect of a French marriage for Queen Elizabeth. Other sonnets describe his unease in court, and its culture of rhetorical performance:

> Because I oft in dark abstracted guise,
> Seem most alone in greatest company,
> With dearth of words, or answers quite awry,
> To them that would make speech of speech arise.
>
> (Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 27, lines 1–4, *Poems*, 178)

[39] On Ovid's currency amongst London poets, and for an excellent account of the sociability of literary influence generally, see Daniel D. Moss, *The Ovidian Vogue: Literary Fashion and Imitative Practice in Late Elizabethan England* (Toronto, 2014).

[40] Ben Jonson, in C. H. Herford, and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds), *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1925–52).

The lover Astrophil is the avatar of a well-born young man whose fluent gifts and fine intelligence were forever balked by his circumstances. Sidney was no George Gascoigne—his every misstep had a special grace, or so, at least, he had the grace to represent it—but his exceptional sensitivity to the matrix of power, sexuality, worldliness, and learning at court never secured him a durable place there. His example, which only gained in lustre after his death in battle in 1586, nonetheless, or therefore, had for his contemporaries an inimitable charisma.

Some of that charisma traded on the old aristocratic paradigm of manuscript circulation, the ungentle poem-hoarding of the gentlemen, as Tottel had described it, but by the early 1590s, a few years after his death, his poems—*Astrophil and Stella*'s sonnets and songs and the many poetic kinds embedded in *Arcadia*—could be had in print:

> 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 languished grace,
> To me that feel the like, thy state descries.
> Then ev'n of fellowship, O Moon, tell me
> Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?
> Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
> Do they above love to be loved, and yet
> Those Lovers scorn whom that Love doth possess?
> Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?
>
> (Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 31, *Poems*, 180)

This thirty-first sonnet of *Astrophil* handles the new skill in sonneteering with finely calibrated negligence. The enjambment is uncommonly open, but the units of quatrain and sestet, both syntactic and rhetorical, are strictly kept; meanwhile the caesura moves freely, and the complicated chain of speech acts—apostrophe, question, interjection, qualification—interrupts the lines repeatedly. The several sententiae are forceful but also incredulous, self-querying ('Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?'). Most strikingly, rhythm and syntax acquire a new degree of expressiveness, which is to say, careful variations are in constant dialogue with argument. Rhythm: consider the justly famous languor of 'how sad steps'. And syntax: how the predominance of end-stopped lines gives way to a tangle of self-qualifying dependencies, before a final, summary question, terse and anguished, occupies the final line. With his prosody, as with his humanist Ovid or his courtly manners, Sidney's boundary-testing declares his virtuosity without ever quite declaring his independence.

It is this expressive latitude more than anything that Sidney bequeaths to the sonneteers and poets who follow him in the last decades of the century, and arguably to the dramatists as well. It is also, again, what most distinguishes him from the strong couplets of Marlowe's *Elegies* (his translation of Ovid's *Amores*). Metrical performances like Sidney's invite endless attention to local effects; those like Marlowe's ask instead to be considered *grosso modo*, as a choice of significant ways to speak. Let the couplet-bound line of the *Elegies*—the first printing of which was banned in 1599 for lasciviousness—stand as another unfollowed road.

Unfollowed, in the event, even by Marlowe. In the years of his playwriting career his dramatic verse modulated from the mighty line of *Tamburlaine* towards the more expressive intricacy of *Edward II*. At the end of his short, turbulent life, he was at work on his epyllion *Hero and Leander*, which used the couplet to very different effect. Here is the moment when Leander arrives at Hero's bedside, after swimming the cold Hellespont to reach her:

> She trembling strove, this strife of hers (like that
> Which made the world) another world begat,
> Of unknown joy. Treason was in her thought,
> And cunningly to yield her self she sought.
> (Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, lines 775–8, *Complete Works*, 1.208)

The poem's polymorphous eroticism (Neptune's caress of the swimming Leander is amongst its glories) and its playful, urbane, complicit cynicism are pure Marlowe. The verse, highly enjambed and self-interrupting, is written into a world that had by then received the poems of Philip Sidney.

Spenser's Archaisms

Sidney did not live to read Marlowe in return, but he did pass judgement on the early poetry of Edmund Spenser, in particular the anonymously published *Shepheardes Calender* (1579). It is 'worthy the reading', he declared in the *Defence of Poesy* (composed *c* 1579–81, published 1595), but '[t]hat same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow' (Sidney, *Defence*, 112).[41] The later sixteenth century was a moment of acute sensitivity to the historicity of style. Humanist editors of both Classical and sacred texts argued closely about historical convention and anachronism, and there was a corresponding debate about how the English vocabulary ought to grow. On the one hand, many humanists advocated for the Classical languages (with attendant dangers of 'inkhornism', of which Sidney was keenly aware: his preposterous schoolmaster Rombus, in the pastoral drama *The Lady of May*, is ridiculed for proclaiming himself 'gravidated with child, till I have indoctrinated your plumbeous cerebrosities' (Sidney, *The Lady of May*, lines 24–5, *Miscellaneous Prose*, 27)). On the other, there was a call to return to native roots, and to Chaucer in particular; the 'well of English vndefyled', as Spenser called him, the once-and-future source of a national lexicon (Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 4.2.32).[42]

The *Calender* declares itself for Chaucer's diction from the opening lines, which introduce the lament of young Colin Clout, an adolescent stand-in for the poet:

> A shepeheards boye (no better doe him call)
> when Winters wastful spight was almost spent,
> All in a sunneshine day, as did befall,
> Led forth his flock, that had bene long ypent.

[41] Sir Philip Sidney, in Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (eds), *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford, 1973).
[42] Edmund Spenser, in A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Faerie Queene*, revised second edition (Harlow, 2007).

So faynt they woxe, and feeble in the folde,
That now vnnethes their feete could them vphold.
(Spenser, *Januarye*, lines 1–6, *Shorter Poems*, 35)[43]

The sixain stanza (sometimes called the 'Venus and Adonis stanza', after Shakespeare's poem of 1593) is a Continental form, descended from *ottava rima* and the Petrarchan *canzone*, but the vocabulary is squarely Anglo-Saxon, and there are a number of notably archaic words: 'woxe', a strong perfect form of 'wax', to grow; 'vnnethes', for 'hardly'; and the archaic perfect-tense prefix *-y*, 'ypent', so common in Chaucer. '[A]ncient solemn words are a great ornament', declares E. K.'s epistle to the anonymously published volume ('E. K.', 'Epistle', lines 48–9, *Shorter Poems*, 26), citing Livy and Sallust but turning humanist esteem for the past away from Rome, towards Chaucer's London. The preference is partly guided by religious politics, the Protestant claim for the true ancientness of reformed doctrine; partly by a closely entangled nationalism, at the moment when Elizabeth was entertaining marriage to the French Duc d'Alençon, and forward Protestants—Sidney amongst them—were taking great risks to dissuade her. *The Shepheardes Calender* has amongst all its intricate purposes a warning against marrying foreigners.

Diction, then, does a great deal of work. The *Calender* invokes northern dialects at moments, and dips from time to time into truly rustic language—'Albee forswonck and forswatt I am' (Spenser, *Aprill*, line 99, *Shorter Poems*, 63)—but mostly it is committed to the versatility of its renovated archaism.[44] What of its rhythms? The pentameter might appear to be Chaucerian, too, but not so: the sixteenth century no longer pronounced final *-e*, so Chaucer's lines were mostly heard as a loose tetrameter. The line of five iambs is of Spenser's own moment, and the choice of historical lineage, native or Classical, attends its fate in the poem. Colin, the shepherd boy who falls in love with a shepherdess who scorns his 'rurall musick' (Spenser, *Januarye*, line 64, *Shorter Poems*, 37), has learned to sing pentameter sixains, and even a sestina. His shepherd friends, by contrast, are more likely to sing tetrameter, as when Perigot and Willye trade lines of a roundelay:

Perigot. It fell vpon a holly eue,
Willye. hey ho hollidaye,
Per. When holly fathers wont to shrieue*: **hear confessions*
Wil. now gynneth this roundelay.
(Spenser, *August*, lines 53–6, *Shorter Poems*, 109)

We have seen song allied with quantities in Mary Sidney Herbert and Thomas Campion, her pious offering and his courtly ornament. A high-style tetrameter could be pressed into service for elegy, as with the lament for Philip Sidney that opens the 1593 miscellany *The Phoenix Nest*: 'The sky, like glass of watchet [pale blue] hue, / Reflected Phoebus's golden hair' ('As then, no wind at all there blew', lines 3–4, *Phoenix Nest*, sig. B1).[45] Still, the four-stress line is bound to the popular ballad, the measure that threatens to undermine the pretensions of poulter's measure and the fourteener. So the poet-soldier Thomas Churchyard's 'A Tale of a Friar and a Shoemaker's Wife'—'This friar was fat and full of flesh, /

[43] Spenser, in Richard A. McCabe (ed.), *The Shorter Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1999).
[44] On regional dialect in poetry of the period, see Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings* (London, 1996).
[45] R. S. (ed.), *The Phoenix Nest* (London, 1593).

A jolly merry knave' (Churchyard, *First part of Churchyard's chips*, 84)[46]—or Nicholas Breton's 'Who can live in heart so glad / As the merry country lad?' (Breton, 'Who can live in heart so glad', lines 1–2, *Works*, 1.n.p).[47] Breton turned the line's populism towards political satire, in the long poem that insists 'That service is no heritage' (Breton, *Works*, 1.n. p); Timothy Kendall uses it to similar purpose translating Thomas More's epigrams, 'The king each subject counts his child, / The tyrant each his slave' (quoted in Kendall, *Flowers*, sig. R5).[48] It is native, strong in stress-rhythm, and always rhymed; it is connected to the past, not the Classical past, but a rustic Englishness; aristocrats may sing it to the lute, but the people, like Perigot and Willye, have a stubborn claim to it.

No poem is more sensitive to this ongoing argument between pentameter and the tetrameter than *The Shepheardes Calender*. Derek Attridge puts the dispute in the broadest context: pentameter 'is the only simple metrical form of manageable length which escapes the elementary four-beat rhythm, with its insistence . . . and its close relationship with the world of ballad and song'.[49] Escape is just what Colin seeks, the shepherd's lad who inhabits pastoral not as his home, but as the first stage of the *rota Virgiliana*, that Virgilian career wheel that will carry him on to epic.[50] His song celebrating Eliza, in the *Aprill* eclogue, is written in canzone stanzas rhymed *ababccddc*, with lines varying in length from pentameter to dimeter and a final tetrameter. The pentameter lines are acts of mature praise. As the song proceeds, however, they begin to waver, and by the ninth stanza's middle couplet they strain to realise five iambs, but subside easily into a loose tetrameter: 'Wánts nŏt ă fóurth grăce, tŏ máke thĕ dăunce éuĕn? / Lét thăt rówme tŏ my Lády bĕ yéuĕn' (Spenser, *Aprill*, lines 113–14, *Shorter Poems*, 64). Colin's praise is an effort to represent and perhaps to fashion an Elizabeth whose debts and loyalties are native, and it cants therefore towards song; but he remains torn between his ambition for a higher style, with its long lines and long words, and allegiance to a plainer native idiom.

The Shepheardes Calender, then, is a contest of styles at once social and historical, essaying new possibilities for the nation, and the self, by mixing old and new words and rhythms. It is a vivid dramatisation of how dynamics of affinity and aversion range across a field of stylistic possibility as broad as the geography of Europe and as deep, and various, as its pasts.[51] What is so striking about Spenser's subsequent career is that while his commitment to archaism endures, his metrical experiments, and his dalliance with song, do not. *The Faerie Queene* has a versatile stanza, but its iambs are the most unflagging of any great poem in the language:

> A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
> Ycladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
> Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,

[46] Thomas Churchyard, *The first part of Churchyard's chips, containing twelve several labours* (London, 1575).
[47] Nicholas Breton, from *The Passionate Shepherd* (1604), in A. B. Grossart (ed.), *The Works in Verse and Prose of Nicholas Breton*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1879).
[48] Timothy Kendall, *Flowers of Epigrams* (London, 1577).
[49] Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London, 1982), 124. I describe this back-and-forth between the four- and five-beat lines at greater length in 'Spenser's Metrics', in Richard A. McCabe (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, 2010), 385–402.
[50] For more on the *rota Virgiliana* and its place in the poetic career, see Chapter 9 in this volume.
[51] Lucy Munro's *Archaic Style* is the best survey of the poetics of archaism in Spenser's aftermath. See also Hannah Crawforth, *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge, 2013), especially 19–63; and Catherine Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* (Philadelphia, PA, 2014). Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood's *Anachronic Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA, 2010) gives a valuable account of the complexities of the period's sense of history in style.

The cruell markes of many' a bloudy fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield:
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full iolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.
(Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 1.1.1)

Here at the very beginning of the poem are many of the powers of the nine-line stanza (*ababbcbcc*) that would ever after bear his name. The surprising *bb* couplet that arises in the middle is propitious for second thought or double take; the final hexameter, after eight pentameters, is balanced, often sententious, and teases the reader of the endless poem with recurring dreams of closure. Through the first five lines, it recalls Chaucer's rhyme royal, but its final stretch to six feet declares for epic. (David Wilson-Okamura considers the stanza's resources to be Spenser's alternative to the flexibility of the Classical, quantitative line he never wrote).[52] So much of what is distinctive about Spenser's poetry is forsaken by his successors, his archaism, his allegory, his strict metrics. He is neither metaphysical, nor baroque, nor neoclassical, all modes that would flower in the seventeenth century. *The Faerie Queene* nonetheless endures, an engrossing moral fiction, one that secures immortality, and sacrifices influence, in sounding so much older than it is.

Drayton's Hexameters

Which is not to say that Spenser is forsaken entirely. One of the few poets of the period who still attracts the adjective 'Spenserian' is Michael Drayton. His magnum opus of the next century, the hexameter epic *Poly-Olbion*, would show many debts to *The Faerie Queene*, including a commitment to the Arthurian past and a habit of personification learned from Spenser's allegory. But as early as 1593, long before *Poly-Olbion* saw print, Drayton had already placed his bets. *Idea: The Shepherd's Garland* is an imitation of the *Calender*, nine eclogues strewn with archaisms. A year later he wrote a short sonnet sequence, *Idea's Mirror: Amours in Quatorzains*. Here is the sestet of sonnet 32:

My hope becomes a friend to my desire,
My heart embraceth love, love doth embrace my heart,
My life a Phoenix is in my soul's fire,
From thence (they vow) they never will depart.
Desire, my love, my soul, my hope, my heart, my life,
With tears, sighs, and disdain, shall have immortal strife.
(Drayton, 'Amour 32', lines 9–14, *Works*, 1.114)[53]

The rhetorical patterning is ostentatious, with the elements of hope, desire, the heart, love, life, and soul disposed across three lines of lament, then concentrated in a virtuoso single line. The device is called *correlatio*, and it was a favourite of Spenser's in his own sonnet

[52] David Wilson-Okamura, *Spenser's International Style* (Cambridge, 2013), 42. On the stanza itself, see Jeff Dolven, 'The Method of Spenser's Stanza', *Spenser Studies*, 19 (2004), 17–25.
[53] Michael Drayton, in J. William Hebel (ed.), *Works*, corrected edition, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1961).

sequence, the *Amoretti* (1595).[54] Also Spenserian is the juxtaposition of pentameter and hexameter lines. Above, however, the hexameters are scattered without evident pattern, in the second, fifth, and sixth lines of the sestet. Inspection of other sonnets in the sequence reveals more of these interpolated hexameters, also in no systematic order.

Drayton's contemporary Samuel Daniel would never do such a thing. He, more than any other poet of the period, is the man left standing untouched by my catalogue of futureless styles. If Drayton is Spenserian, Daniel is unmistakably Sidneian: twenty-eight of the sonnets published in 1592, under the title *Delia*, first saw print the year before, appended to a version of *Astrophil and Stella*. That pirated book was withdrawn, but Daniel's relationship to the Sidney circle, as a young up-and-comer on the London literary scene, was apparently undamaged. *Delia* was dedicated to Mary Sidney Herbert, and Daniel later described her house at Wilton as his 'best school' (Daniel, *Complete Works*, 1.xvi).[55] He would go on, like Drayton, to work in the genre of history, with his *Civil Wars*, but his sonnets were his most enduring success. 'Thou canst not die whilst any zeal abound', begins one, apologising to his Laura that he makes such a poor Petrarch:

> But I may add one feather to thy fame,
> To help her flight throughout the fairest isle.
> And if my pen could more enlarge thy name,
> Then should'st thou live in an immortal style.
> For though that Laura better limned be,
> Suffice, thou shalt be loved as well as she.
>
> (Daniel, *Delia*, sonnet 43, lines 9–14, *Complete Works*, 1.65)

Another sonneteer, William Shakespeare, would learn from these lines, as Daniel had learned from Sidney, learned his elegant iambs, his mobile but never vagrant caesurae, and his mix of praise and ever-so-subtle aggression. (The imperative 'suffice' is no gentle petition, and aggression, too, is a style).

Daniel was also a great apologist for English rhyme, and by extension, for accents over quantities. His *Defence of Rhyme* (1603), written against Campion's *Observations*, offers a sympathetic account of the poetry of the Middle Ages, not just Chaucer, and an appreciation of the English measure, 'which custom, entertaining by the allowance of the ear, doth endenize [nativise] and make natural' (Daniel, *Complete Works*, 4.37–8). He was a reader of Montaigne, and a Montaignean shrug is almost audible when he writes that we are 'labouring ever to seem to be more than we are, or laying greater burthens upon our minds, then they are well able to bear, because we would not appear like other men' (Daniel, *Complete Works*, 4.44). His is just the sensibility to crystallise a period style, for he is historically comfortable—there is no pathos of distance from the classics here—and disinclined to rivalry, happy to bear Sidney's legacy.

Drayton, less so, but he was still a sufficiently sensitive, if not quite prompt enough student of his own age to cut the hexameters when he republished the sonnets in his 1605 *Poems*. Why did they disappear? From his work, and from the history of English poetry? Some part of the answer is Drayton's own lack of social capital: He had little luck,

[54] See, e.g., the first sonnet, where the trick is performed with 'Leaues, lines, and rymes' (Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, 388).

[55] Samuel Daniel, in Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose*, 5 vols. (London, 1885–96).

throughout his life, finding patronage, and there was no obvious practical advantage for a younger poet in sounding like him. It may also be that the long lines were too easy to mistake for error, at a moment when the rules still felt fragile. In a poetic climate of avid imitation, such negative results are telling, for we know the poems were read with an imitative eye, read with an appetite, and written to propose new possibilities, and yet Drayton's modest innovation went nowhere.

Donne Himself

This chapter began with a simple story, of the progress of English poetry over the sixteenth century from the rough metres of the opening decades, through a middle phase of technical achievement and consolidation, and on to the golden age whose presiding star is Sir Philip Sidney. It could end with Shakespeare's sonnets, which owe so much to Sidney, but are so intellectually and erotically polymorphous that they seem to cross beyond mastery; that are, like all his work, a baffling mix of nostalgia (sonnet sequences were well out of fashion by the time his were printed) and experiment. Or, it could end here:

> Stand still, and I will read to thee
> A lecture, love, in love's philosophy.
> Those three hours which we've spent,
> In walking here, two shadows went
> Along with us, which we ourselves produced;
> But, now the sun is just above our head,
> We do those shadows tread,
> And to brave clearness all things are reduced.
> So, while our infant love did grow,
> Disguises did, and shadows, flow
> From us and our care; but now 'tis not so.
> That love hath not attained the high'st degree,
> Which is still diligent lest others see.
>
> (Donne, 'A Lecture upon the Shadow', lines 1–13, *Complete Poems*, 205–6)[56]

John Donne's 'A Lecture upon the Shadow' was likely written sometime in the 1590s, perhaps along with his elegies and early satires while he was a student at Lincoln's Inn. Its canzone form is characteristic of the poems that would be collected, after his death, as *Songs and Sonnets*; it has their rough, expressive prosody, as in the unscannable ten syllables of 'From us, and our cares; but now 'tis not so'. It sounds like Donne in so many other ways, too. For example, the elaborate, intellectualised conceit-making that would later earn him the label 'metaphysical'. The two lovers have walked from morning to noon, their shadows shortening until they lie underfoot; physical description has the schematic clarity of a logical proof. Donne loves shadows, and also reflections, spheres, alchemical properties, and processes. If there is something lawyerly in the argument, as well as philosophical, it

[56] John Donne, in Robin Robbins (ed.), *The Complete Poems of John Donne* (Harlow, 2010).

would be one of many symptoms of his legal training. The half-convincing banishment of 'others' reminds us of a coterie audience just off stage.[57] And the poem is headed for a characteristic ending, as the two walk on, and the shadows reappear: 'Love is a growing, or full constant light, / And his first minute, after noon, is night' (Donne, 'A Lecture upon the Shadow', lines 25–6, *Complete Poems*, 207). So many of his poems puncture their lyricism with such wised-up sign-offs.

All this is John Donne, to be sure. Is it all his style? This survey has emphasised such features of style as the choice of forms, diction, and prosody, all domains traditional to the disciplines of rhetoric and poetics. Much of what is most striking in Donne is most visible, most audible, against the background of consolidating norms of prosody and lexicon. His thorny rhythms count for more against the achieved fluency of the decade, with Samuel Daniel just behind him. (Donne's friend Ben Jonson, no friend of Daniel's, thought Donne deserved hanging for not keeping of metre). His canzoni, too, are a significant choice, ultimately from Petrarch; his diction, though studded with technical terms from law or alchemy, is Anglo-Saxon, without ever being archaic. What of the sophisticated, knowing, sometimes cynical posture? Perhaps he gets it from Marlowe (different as Marlowe's metre may be), and perhaps from the homosocial banter of the Inns. His conceits, and his love of paradoxes and problems, share a legal precisianism. They also cast a flickering shadow of scholastic philosophy, and even hint at his family's history of Catholic allegiance.[58] Does he look backward, or forward? Home or abroad? Time's handkerchief, to return to Serres' image, is balled tight, and it could equally well be a crumpled map of Europe. *Imitatio* is the humanists' name for the schoolroom discipline of taking the past as a model, and it gave every Elizabethan schoolboy an education in the technical means of sounding like other writers, and other times. But it was at best a partial effort to master the unrulier, inescapably social, admiring, and rivalrous forms of imitation that inevitably shaped English verse, and that sampled so promiscuously and polemically from its histories. Donne's singularity must be placed within, and tested against, such a rich, extracurricular matrix of affinities and aversions.

It may still seem strange to end a survey of forsaken styles with Donne—stranger even than to begin with Wyatt, for if Wyatt's star has risen of late, Donne's has shone pre-eminent for the last century. Then again, there is a sense in which every good poet's style is a dead end. As much as Donne has taught the poets who have followed him, as often as he has been imitated since his poems began to be printed in the seventeenth century, he is still inimitable. Inimitable principally in his wilful departures from a period style, departures which, like any act of individual poetic self-assertion, risked and still risk being taken for miscalculation, error, or failure (as indeed they were, by Jonson amongst others). It may be possible to write a line that sounds like Donne. But that is quite different from writing a line that might be mistaken for Donne. Drayton's hexametric innovations were proposed for imitation, a show of his skill, and an opportunity for others. Donne's singularity is a triumph of style—individual style, neither techne, nor fashion, nor nation, though drawing on them all—over the judgement of skill. He would insist, later in his life, that his poems were perfectly deliberate, as deliberate as the sermons he gave at St. Paul's: no reader ever

[57] The classic account of Donne's coterie audience is Arthur Marotti's *John Donne: Coterie Poet* (Madison, WI, 1986).

[58] John Carey's study, *John Donne: Life, Mind, and Art* (London, 1990) is the most influential account of the influence of Donne's Catholic background on his poetry.

saw 'of mine, a hand, or an eye, or an affection, set down with so much study, and discipline, and labour of syllables' (Donne, *Letters*, 308).[59] But for all this study, discipline, and labour, what is distinctive in him invites no followers. Not very long before he wrote, such a performance would have been impossible. It was only by the end of the sixteenth century that English poetry was well enough defined to be so brilliantly undone.

[59] John Donne, in M. T. Hester (ed.), *Letters to Several Persons of Honour* (Delmar, NY, 1977).