

Ling 103
Language Structure and Verbal Art

Review of Metrical Variation

Full MWC (2nd version, modified from Youmans 1983)

A stressed syllable must appear in S position unless it:

a. follows a line- or phrase-boundary

| **Méwling** / and puk/ing in / the nur/se's arms
Appear / in per/son here / in court. / | **Síence.**

or

b. precedes a stronger stress within the same phrase and line
i.e. it is *not* the strongest stress in its phrase

Or the / **blind Gód** / that doth / me thus / amate
Commend / me to / my wife. / I'll **re/túrn cónsul**

or

c. is a monosyllabic word which follows a (sufficiently) stressed syllable in the same phrase and line

Why should / my **héart / thínk** that / a se/veral plot
Be thou / the **tènth / Múse,** ten / times more / in worth

or

d. is a monosyllabic word which is followed by a stressless function word which 'leans' on it structurally

Than are / **dréamt+ǒf** / in your / philo/sophy

Stylistic variants:

1. **Shelley:** Extends condition (c) to include polysyllabic words:

Forbáde / Shádow / to fall / from leaf / and stone

2. **Milton and Pope:** Restricts condition (c) to cases where word preceding the stressed monosyllable in W forms a phrase with the word preceding it that excludes the word following it.

Put differently, they require that there be *some* phrase ending in a stressed word and which ends immediately before the 'offending' stressed monosyllable in W.

Examples:

a. Structure acceptable to Milton and Pope:

[[pále ghósts] / stárt ...]

Potential Problem: *stárt* is a stressed monosyllable in W position

Phrases: *pále ghósts* (subject)
 pále ghósts stárt (subject + verb)

Not a phrase: *ghósts stárt*

Milton and Pope allow this because the word preceding *stárt*, i.e. *ghósts*, forms a phrase with the word to its left (*pále*), namely the subject phrase *pále ghósts*, and this phrase excludes *stárt*.

Put differently, there is *some phrase* — here *pále ghósts* — which ends immediately before the potentially problematic word *stárt*

b. Structure unacceptable to Milton and Pope:

[[thě [tènth / Múse ...]

Potential Problem: *Múse* is a stressed monosyllable in W position

Phrases: *tènth Múse*
 thě tènth Múse

Not a phrase: *thě tènth*

Since there is no phrase which ends immediately before the problematic word *Múse*, Pope and Milton do not accept this as metrical.

3. **Milton's** verse has a specific property that sets him apart from Shakespeare, Spenser and Pope.

A stressed syllable in a polysyllabic word is permitted in W position provided that the first syllable of the word is also in W position.

If each W S is a *foot* then this is equivalent to saying that the *left edge of the word in question must coincide with the left edge of a foot*.

Examples:

$\begin{array}{cccc} & x & & x & & x \\ x & & x) & x & & x) & x & & x) \end{array}$	{	$\begin{array}{cccc} & x & & x \\ x & & x) & x & & x) \end{array}$	PL 6.866
Burned after them to the	}	$\begin{array}{cccc} & x & & x \\ x & & x) & x & & x) \end{array}$	
		<i>bottomless</i> pit.	

$\begin{array}{cccc} x & & x & & x & & x & & x \\ x & & x) & x & & x) & x & & x) & x & & x) \end{array}$	{	$\begin{array}{cccc} x & & x & & x & & x & & x \\ x & & x) & x & & x) & x & & x) & x & & x) \end{array}$	PL 6.34
<i>Universal</i> reproach, far worse to bear	}		

4. Alexander Pope:

Meter characterized by extreme regularity. Aside from the restriction discussed under (2) above, Pope did not employ extrametrical syllables before a phrase break in the middle of the line, *nor at the end of the line*. Moreover, he allowed the stressed syllable of a polysyllabic content word to occur *only at the beginning of the line*, never in the middle of the line.

One way of conceptualizing part of Pope's restrictions is that his meter does not permit phrase breaks in the middle of the line to license any sort of special treatment of stress.

Summary

configuration	Spenser	Shakespeare	Milton	Pope	Shelley
line-initial <i>w</i>	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
line-medial, phrase-initial <i>w</i>	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
line-final extra syllable	yes*	yes	rare	no	yes
pre-caesura extra syllable	no	yes†	no	no	rare
MWC b (<i>Or the / blind Gód /...</i>)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
MWC b w/polysyllable (<i>retúrn / cónsul</i>)	rare	rare	(rare)**	no	rare
MWC c type 1 (<i>the tènth / Múse</i>)	yes	yes	no	no	yes
MWC c type 2 (<i>my héart / thínk</i>)	yes	yes	yes	rare	yes
MWC c w/polysyllable (<i>wild / róses</i>)	rare	no	(rare)	no	rare
MWC d (<i>are / dréamt+of</i>)	no?	yes	no	no	no?
left-edge exception (<i>bóttom/less pit</i>)	no	no	rare	no	no

* Spenser uses line final extrametrical syllables sparingly in the early books of FQ

† Shakespeare permits pre-caesura extra syllables in play dialogue, but not in poetry

**Technically Milton permits the *wild róses* and *retúrn cónsul* types through the left-edge exception that permits *bóttomless pit*, but examples of this type are very rare.

Tudor-era experiments with meter

Certain English poets of the 16th century such as **George Gascoigne (c. 1525-1577)** and **George Puttenham (1529-1590)** tried to formulate explicit theories of meter (not entirely successfully).

During this time of metrical experimentation two poets in particular — **Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)** and **Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (c. 1517-1547)** — are today known for a metrical style which departs significantly from the norm seen in Shakespeare and Spenser (inherited, ultimately, from Chaucer) and continued (with some variation) up to the 19th century.

A poem of Wyatt:

Luckes, my faire falcon, and your fellowes all,
How well **pleasaunt** yt were your libertie!
Ye not forsake **me** that faire might ye befall.
But they that sometyme lykt my companye,
Like lyse away from ded **bodies** thei crall:
Loe, what a profe in light adversytie!
But ye my birdes I swear by all your belles,
Ye be my fryndes, and so be but few elles.

In modern English spelling:

Lucks, my fair falcon, and your fellows all,
How well pleasant it were your liberty!
Ye not forsake me that fair might ye befall
But they that sometime liked my company,
Like lice away from dead bodies they crawl:
Lo, what a proof in light adversity!
But ye my birds I swear by all your bells,
Ye be my friends, and so be but few else.

Another poem of Wyatt:

Ø The longe **love**, | that in my thought doeth harbar ?
And in myn hert doeth kepe his residence,
Into my face | **preseth** with bolde pretence,
Ø And therin **campeth**, | **spredding** his baner. ?
Ø She that me **lerneth** | to love and suffre, ?
And will that my **trust** and lustes negligence
Be rayned by reason, | shame and reverence,
Ø With his hardiness | **taketh** displeasur. ?
Wherewithall, | unto the hertes **forrest** he fleith,
Leving his entreprise with payn and cry,
And ther him hideth | and not appereth. ?
What may I do | Ø when my maister fereth ?
But in the feld | with him to lyve and dye?
For goode is the **liff**, | ending faithfully.