THE TROCHAIC TETRAMETER AND THE *VERSUS POPULARIS* IN LATIN

By W. B. SEDGWICK

IN discussing popular verse we may note, first, that speaking generally it is originally rhythmical rather than metrical, usually only becoming metrical under literary influence—as was probably the case in Greek and Latin; secondly, that it tends to be strongly accentual, being very often (and perhaps by origin) connected with dancing or rhythmical movement (spinning, grinding, &c.); and thirdly, that therefore the number of accents is more important than the number of syllables. These considerations are of almost universal application, many languages, indeed, never developing any precise metrical rules at all—as Old English and Hebrew.[1]

In Latin we get clear traces of three stages of development.

(1) As an example of the oldest form we may quote the old charm given by Varro against pains in the feet (to be repeated 'thrice nine times'):[2]

> Égo túi mémini,
> médere mêis pédibus:
> térra péstem tenéto,
> sálus híc manéto,
> ín mêis pédibus;

or, with the natural Latin tendency to homoeoteleuton carried farther (it is rather remarkable that *alliteration*, on the other hand, is by no means prominent in early popular verse):

> Pastóres te ínvenérunt,
> sine mánibus cóllegérunt,
> sine fóco cóxérunt,
> sine déntibus cómedérunt;

or, still more uncouth, the *Carmen Saliare*, e.g.

> quóme tónas, Leucésie, prae tét tremónti

(the rhythm of the *Carmen Arvale* is quite beyond reconstruction).

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[1] Cf. Quintilian, 9. 4. 114: 'poema nemo dubitaverit impetu quodam initio fusum, et aurium mensura et similiter decurrentium spatiorum observatione esse generatum; mox in eo repertos pedes.'

[2] Compare the 'triplicity' of the *Carmen Arvale*.

(2) The next step was the *Saturnian*, the only definite Italic rhythm uninfluenced by the Greek (as a matter of fact some metricians did derive it from the Greek). Even here the rules were so vague as to puzzle both ancient and modern scholars— Bassus said he could hardly find a normal line in the whole *Bellum Punicum*.[1]

The traditional scansion was quantitative, on Greek lines, i.e.

> dabúnt malúm Metélli | Naévió poétae

which led Macaulay to compare it (in the preface to the *Lays*) with

> The Queen was in the parlour | eating bread and honey.

It is now usual to postulate some sort of accentual scansion, which would give

> dábunt málum Metélli | Naévió poétae,

but there is no agreement in details among scholars. (It should be noted that the *Bellum Punicum* came at the *end* of the development of the Saturnian and that both it and Livius' *Odyssey* were written by men versed in Greek metre.)

Others who deny a stress-accent to Latin, while thrown back on a quantitative scansion, assume that it was chiefly a matter of pauses and word-length, depending on the Latin characteristic of 'initial intensity', i.e. the strongly marked pronunciation of the beginnings of words.[2]

It is, however, strange, if the Saturnian was the popular metre *par excellence* in early times, that not a single Saturnian of popular character has come down to us. The extant non-literary specimens are, except for the verse of Naevius against the Metelli and their reply, confined to inscriptions.

(3) By far the greater part of extant popular verses are in the *trochaic tetrameter*. Whether this metre in Latin is older than the time when Livius Andronicus adopted it from the Greek in his plays, it is hard to say: none of the old verses quoted in this metre looks much older than 200 B.C. It is, how-

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[1] In the same way, I suppose, as not a single fugue of Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* obeys all the rules of the text-books.

[2] Cf. P. Lejay, *Hist. Lat. Lit.*, pp. 162 ff. (Paris, Boivin, n.d.).

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ever, possible that popular trochaics may be embedded in the text of Plautus, as, for instance, the following against misers (*Tri.* 351; *cantari solet*):

> quód habĕs né habeás, et íllúc quod nón habes habeás, malum,
> quándoquidem nec tíbi bene esse póte pati neque álteri,

and *Cas.* 524 (*per volgus quod cantant*):

> cúm cibo cum quíqui facito ut véniant, quasi eant Sútrium

and *Cist.* 506 (*verbum vetus*):

> quód dedi datúm non vellem, quód relicuomst nón dabo.

Again, the second example quoted page 96 is not far from regular trochaics, while the following, as given by the manuscripts is still nearer:

> néque huic mórbo cáput créscat | aút si créverít, tabéscat,

and these, at least in their original form, must be far earlier than Plautus.

At all events the metre proved well adapted to the Latin language, and so we find that Plautus, who of all writers fitted his verse most closely to the natural cadence of conversational Latin, actually uses more trochaic tetrameters than iambic trimeters; whereas of Terence, who is by no means so successful in his metres, Quintilian expresses the opinion that his plays would have had *plus gratiae si intra trimetros constitisset*. And so Lucilius, when he started to write his free-and-easy conversational satires, naturally turned to the trochaic tetrameter, and only afterwards adopted the hexameter, which had been long naturalized at Rome. Perhaps some readers may express a wish that he too *intra tetrametros constitisset*.

By availing oneself of the licences introduced by Latin dramatists it was easy, in a rhythm so conformable to the natural fall of the sentence, to write trochaics in which verse ictus and spoken accent at least roughly coincided. By accent Latin is still more trochaic than by quantity, and verses like the old charm:

> nóvom vétus vínum bíbo nóvo véteri mórbo médeor

probably sounded like trochaics to their users.

At all events the trochaic tetrameter came to be employed for all sorts of popular uses, such as riddles, proverbs, games, and Fescennine verses, sung for instance by the soldiers at triumphs.

To the *riddle* of Petronius (ch. 58) *qui de nobis longe venio, late venio, solve me*, we may probably add Plautus, *Men.* 403 f. (of a ship):

> saepe tritam, saepe fixam, saepe excussam malleo;
> quasi supellex pellionis, palus palo proximust.

For *proverbs* we may cite one quoted by Cicero in his despondency (*Fam.* 7. 34; *vetus est*):

> ubi non sis qui fueris, non est cur velis ⟨iam⟩ vivere.

Others are—

> clítellae bovĭ súnt impositae: pláne non est nóstrum onus
>   (Cic. *Att.* 5. 15, Ammian. 16. 5; *vetus illud proverbium*)
> quási si messor pér messim unum quémque spicum cólligat
>   (Festus; *versus antiquus*)
> nĭl cum fidibus gráculo est, nihĭl cum amaracinó sui
>   (Gell. *Praef.* 19; *vetus adagium:* cf. Lucr. 6. 973)
> Consus consilio, Mars duello, Lar est compito potens.
> ibi pastores ludos faciunt coriis Consualia
>   (Referring to ἀσκωλιασμός: Varro *ap.* Non. 21; *versus vetus*).

The following *children's verses* referred to by Horace (*Ep.* 1. 1. 59 f. *A.P.* 417) and restored by Lucian Müller from the scholiast:

> rex eris si recte facies, si non facies, non eris;
> habeat scabiem quisquis ad me venerit novissimus,

were parodied by Caesar's soldiers:

> plecteris si recte facies, si non facies, rex eris.

Other *soldiers' verses* are:

> urbani, servate uxores, moechum calvum adducimus.—
> ecce Caesar nunc triumphat qui subegit Gallias;
> Nicomedes non triumphat qui subegit Caesarem.—
> de germanis, non de Gallis, duo triumphant consules.[1]—
> disce, miles, militare; Galba est, non Gaetulicus.—

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[1] Lepidus and Plancus, who had their brothers proscribed, Vell. Pat. 2. 67. 4.

Popular, but not military is:

> Salve Roma, salve patria, salvus est Germanicus
>
> (Suet. *Cal.* 6)

Further verses of a Fescennine nature are:

> postquam Crassus carbo factus, Carbo crassus factus est
>
> (time of Sulla)

and on a parvenu who had falsely claimed equestrian rank (time of Augustus):

> áliud scriptum habét Sarmentus, áliud populus vóluerat:
> digna dignis; sic Sarmentus habeat crassas compedes;
> rustici, ne nihil agatis, aliquis Sarmentum alliget.[1]

To our small stock of popular trochaics collected from literary sources, we may add the direct evidence of the *wall-scratchings of Pompeii* (in *C.I.L.* iv), which at least provide enough to indicate how numerous such trochaics must have been:

> némo est bellus nísi qui amavit múlierem adulescéntulus (1883)
> si vales non multum curo; si perieris, gaudeo (1593)
> pupa, quae bella es, tibi me misit qui tuus est: vale (1234)[2]

On *tombstones* we usually find more literary metres, but the following is worth quoting:

> dum vixi, bibi libenter: bibite vos qui vivitis
>
> (*C.I.L.* vi. 18131)

It is possible that other popular trochaics may still lurk, perhaps in a slightly corrupt form, in the works of late authors. For instance the following, quoted by Martianus Capella as an example of *polysigma*, 'Sosia in solario soleas sarciebat suas', judging from the word-order is in verse: the addition of *sibi* after *solario* would give a tetrameter.

I have elsewhere suggested that the proverb twice quoted by St. Augustine 'quantum habebis, tantus eris: frange lunam et fac fortunam' was originally a tetrameter, with characteristic rhyme: 'frange lunam, fac fortunam; quantum habebis, tanti eris.' Possibly some may be restored from the Greek—e.g. Plutarch, *Cato Minor*, 73, αὔριον Κάτων βαλίζει μετὰ τριάκονθ'

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[1] I have not ventured to include the verses on Aurelian, 'mille mille mille (mille mille) decollavimus ... tantum vini habet nemo quantum fudit sanguinis' as the restoration is most uncertain. [2] Add 1830, 1899, 1939.

ἡμέρας, may have been 'Cras Cato deambulabit post tricesimum diem', but the other two trochaics do not readily go into Latin, and all three may have been Greek originally.

We see, then, that the metre was truly a popular metre, in a sense in which the dactylic metres, and the iambic trimeter never were.[1] It is not surprising, then, that the literary revivalists of the second century (the school of Fronto), with their predilection for the popular, should have given it literary form. Of this revived trochaic the best-known specimen is the *Pervigilium Veneris* with its haunting refrain:

> cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet.

We notice at once that while, like the popular verses, it is strongly accentual, it is, unlike them, smooth and placid, allowing few resolved feet. The same applies to the charming poem of Tiberianus, Count of Africa in the fourth century:

> amnis ibat inter arva, valle fusus frigida,
> luce ridens calculorum, flore pictus herbido . . .[2]

But the most noteworthy practitioner of the metre is Florus, who wrote under Hadrian, and may have written the *Pervigilium Veneris*, as Wernsdorf suggested. Numbers 245 to 252 of Riese's *Anth. Latina* (1st ed.) are by him. I quote two poems:

> quando ponebam novellas arbores mali et piri,
> cortici summae notavi nomen ardoris mei.
> nulla fit exinde finis vel quies cupidinis;
> crescit arbor, gliscit ardor: ramus implet litteras.
>
> consules fiunt quotannis et novi proconsules;
> solus aut rex aut poeta non quotannis nascitur.

Trochaics were also written by Nemesianus, Commodian, and Fulgentius—all Africans: the Anthology itself is of African origin. (There is also a feeble epigram in this metre, *Anthol.* 291.)

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[1] Can we conclude on the strength of the verses 'nón té peto, píscém, peto; quíd mé fugis, Gálle' (the chant of the *mirmillo* in the arena), and 'quém nón pudet, ét nón rubet, nón ést homo séd rópio' (in abuse of Pompey), that the Sotadean also was a popular verse? The metre may have become familiar from the music of the low 'Ionic' dancers (see e.g. Plaut. *St.* 769). Note that accentually both are ordinary trochaics (the former syncopated).

[2] Both poems are in the anthologies of Dr. Mackail and Mr. Garrod.

But while literary triflers were making of the metre a pretty toy, Christianity was shaping it into the triumph-song of the church militant.[1] It is no mere coincidence that the most striking examples should be again connected with Africa. Augustine's *Carmen Abecedarium adv. Donatistas* shows its popular character (*a*) by its rough scansion and neglect of quantity (very like Commodian), (*b*) by a rough assonance, (*c*) like the *Pervigilium Veneris*, by the use of a refrain (hypopsalma), in this case every twelve lines.[2] The acrostic arrangement, on the other hand, was a mnemonic device no doubt suggested by the acrostic psalms (e.g. 119). Augustine tells us he deliberately made the poem unliterary, as it was intended for community-singing in the open air: he wrote *non aliquo carminis genere* to avoid *verba vulgo minus usitata*.

Prudentius' hymn (*Cath.* ix) written about the same time, though much used as a Christian hymn in the Middle Ages (and later) is much more literary, and, of course, metrically flawless, while the verse is more powerful than that of the *Pervigilium*. I quote lines 109–11:

> te senes et te iuventus, parvulorum te chorus,
> turba matrum virginumque, simplices puellulae,
> voce concordes pudicis perstrepant concentibus.

But the noblest of all triumphal hymns was written by Venantius Fortunatus under barbarian rule in Gaul at the end of the sixth century, when the Roman Empire was nothing but a memory and Roman literature in danger of complete extinction:

> pange, lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis,
> et super crucis tropaeo dic triumphum nobilem,

imitated, one might almost say parodied, by Thomas Aquinas in the Corpus Christi hymn:

> Pange, lingua gloriosi | corporis mysterium.

(now with rhyme, *ab*, *ab*).

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[1] Not that the soldiers' rough Fescennines could be fairly called a triumph-song. It is fanciful to suggest a connexion between this metre and the triumph of the Church; for instance, *Apparebit repentina* is no triumph-song but a very early and close parallel to the *Dies Irae*.

[2] The refrain, as usually printed, 'omnes qui gaudetis de pace, modo verum iudicate', has neither rhythm nor metre. I would cut out the unnecessary *de*.

This ends the history of the trochaic tetrameter as an integral verse in Latin. But it contained the germ of a far wider development. The metre, besides its strong accentual tendency, was marked in Latin by two further characteristics:

(1) There had always been a tendency towards rhyme, or rather, homoeoteleuton; for example, Plaut. *Ps.* 955 *ut transvorsus, extravorsus*, 683 *stulti haud scimus, frustra ut simus*, 686 *in labore atque in dolore*, 695 *scis amorem, scis laborem*, and many other places in Plautus; *Perv. Ven.* 24 *deque gemmis deque flammis*; Florus, *l.c.*, *crescit arbor, gliscit ardor; Test Porc.* l. 19 (Haupt) *de Tebeste usque ad Tergeste: liget sibi collo de reste.* (Cf. Lorenz: *Pseudolus*, Pref., pp. 39 f., 163; Usener, *Kl. Schriften*, ii. 256.)

(2) The verse had a strong diaeresis, naturally splitting into two halves, i.e. $- \cup - \cup - \cup - \cup$ and $- \cup - \cup - \cup -$. The first half was not infrequently used separately, as in the interchange of verses between Hadrian and Florus:

ego nolo Caesar esse,	ego nolo Florus esse,
ambulare per Britannos,	ambulare per tabernas,
latitare per (Batavos),	latitare per popinas,
Scythicas pati pruinas.	culices pati rotundos.

It is hard to say whether these are accentual trochaics or ionics with anaclasis (as in Catullus 63).[1]

If we combine the divided line with rhyme we get the fully developed medieval hymn. First the rhyme is occasional, then obligatory, culminating in the elaborate scheme of:

Jesse proles | quibus doles | leva moles | scelerum;
mater solis | carens dolis | lux in polis | siderum.

(Daniel, *Thes. Hymn*, 4. 235).

This, however, was too difficult, and the more common type is:

stabat mater dolorosa | iuxta crucem lacrymosa | dum pendebat filius;
cuius animam gementem | contristatam et dolentem | pertransivit gladius.

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[1] They would tend to read as trochaics, like late Greek ionics, e.g. Gregory Nazianzen's ἄτερ ἀρχῆς ἀπέραντον, or, with anaclasis, μεσονυκτίαις ποθ' ὥραις (*Anacreontea*): compare the lilt of the student's song *Clementine*.

This rhymes *aac*, *bbc*. We also get *aaac*, *bbbc*, or *aabbe*, *ccdde*, or simply *aa*, *bb*, or *aaa*, *bbb*, &c.[1]

Instead of hymns, however, I will quote from the *Carmina Burana*:

> exiit diluculo | rustica puella
> cum grege, cum baculo | cum lana novella
> (the same *rhymes* are then repeated).
> ecce gratum et optatum | ver reducit gaudia
> purpuratum floret pratum | sol serenat omnia.—
> bibit hera, bibit herus | bibit miles, bibit clerus,
> bibit ille, bibit illa | bibit servus cum ancilla.—
> meum est propositum | in taberna mori,
> ubi vina proxima | morientis ori;
> ut dicant cum venerint | angelorum chori
> 'Deus sit propitius huïc potatori'.

This last metre, from its frequent use in student songs, has obtained the name of Goliardic.

But by this time the vernacular languages of Europe were perfecting their own lyric forms, usually in close association with Latin—in fact many manuscripts contain both Latin and vernacular words to the same tune—while we are often told of churchmen adapting sacred words to secular tunes. No uncommon thing this in the history of the Church, but just about the twelfth century the practice became of vast importance in the development of European lyric. Whether the influence was mutual or one-sided, and if the latter, by which side it was exercised, it is hard to say. My belief is that the decisive factor was the gradual predominance of the strongly rhythmical *music* of the people over the traditional formless *music* of the Church. This gave form and definition to rhythms which, though they had lost quantity, had scarcely ever hitherto become quite reconciled to accent. The new music would force this decisive step, and incidentally force the vague and unsatisfying homoeoteleuton into definite rhyme.

Whatever the precise steps, there can be little doubt that most of our commoner metres have developed from classical, through medieval Latin. In this development the trochaic

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[1] That the various metres actually were developed by extension and curtailment is shown by medieval text-books, e.g. Eberhard's *Laborintus*.

tetrameter, divided, curtailed, extended, has had a large share
—though it is obvious that it would tend to assume an iambic
form in most modern languages, where sentences usually begin
with an unaccented syllable.[1]

It would be interesting if we could prove that the *versus
politicus* of Byzantine and modern Greece was descended from
the trochaic tetrameter, but as far as I know the evidence is
rather slender. The verse quoted by Plutarch as sung by the
Athenian γεφυρισταί in allusion to Sulla's hideously spotted
face:

συκάμινόν ἐσθ' ὁ Σύλλας ἀλφίτῳ πεπασμένον

is certainly trochaic. The choice of the metre may have been
due to its Roman associations, yet the trochaic tetrameter
in Greek is as old as Archilochus, and was common both in
tragedy and comedy (Attic and particularly Dorian) to accom-
pany energetic action or violent emotion.[2] If we assume, how-
ever, as there is reason to believe, that in vulgar Greek the
accent was already by this time becoming a stress-accent, many
singers might have felt an iambic rhythm, in which case we
have here the first *versus politicus* (i.e. an accentual iambic
tetrameter catalectic).[3]

Even in languages which have no affinity with any verse-
technique derived from the Greek, there is often a certain
approximation to the trochaic tetrameter. When Longfellow
tried to reproduce in *Hiawatha* the rhythmical movement of the
Kalevala, he had recourse to a long series of trochaic dimeters.
When Milman and, later, Romesh Dutt wish to give the effect
of the long Sanskrit *sloka* they fall back on the trochaic tetra-
meter. The Old Irish *Seadna*, on the other hand, may quite
well be derived from the Latin metre (W. P. Ker, *The Dark
Ages* (1911), p. 321, n. 2).

[1] Some of the oldest Spanish and Provençal verse, however, is of a decidedly
trochaic character.
[2] Possibly it was associated with Dionysus (cf. Archil., *Frag.* 77): at any rate
Aristotle tells us it was the original metre of tragedy, which would be non-liter-
ary in origin.
[3] The verses on the Emperor Mauricius quoted in Krumbacher, *Byz. Lit.*[2]
p. 792, similarly waver between iambic and trochaic. Of the *versus politicus*
Eustathius actually says σῴζεται ὁ τροχαϊκὸς ῥύθμος.

All this is natural enough. Trochaic series are bound to occur in the verse of any people which has a feeling for rhythm or metre. The trochaic tetrameter, which is simply a combination of an acatalectic and a catalectic dimeter (what is called in our hymn-books '8787 trochaic') is the most satisfying combination. It is not surprising that it has enjoyed such a long and widespread popularity.

SCHOOLBOYS ON THE WALL

FOREMOST among the legacies left us by the Roman invader is the Great Wall of Hadrian flung across that narrow neck of England between Wallsend and Bowness-on-Solway. Yet how many of us have seen this unique treasure, the greatest of our national monuments? No longer is it the exclusive property of the scholar and the archaeologist, but is, to-day, the Mecca of a world-wide pilgrimage of travellers, spurred on by an interest in the relics of a bygone age. The advent of the motor-bus has brought it within the reach of all, yet if you wish to see the Wall at its best you must walk. The most convenient starting-point for any tour is Newcastle, which can be reached by rail, road, and sea. Those starting from London are recommended to taste the delights of a sea journey up the eastern coast of England. A motor-bus takes the traveller from Newcastle to Corbridge, an old Roman town. From there, a pleasant walk through Hexham will take him to Haydon Bridge, a quaint little Saxon town, nestling in the valley of the South Tyne. With this as his head-quarters for a week, he may explore the adjacent sections of the Wall, especially the forts at Chesters and Housesteads, and by way of variety ramble over the bleached dun-coloured Northumbrian moors and up the wooded valleys of the Tyne and Allen, amid the most glorious scenery that is to be found in the country. Then on the road again to Haltwhistle or Brampton. From these centres he can visit the forts of Aesica and Amboglanna and strike right into the heart of the Pennine Chain. By then he will have seen the most interesting section of the Wall, but, if time permits, a stay at Alston, the highest market-town in England, will well reward the visitor. Here he may gaze at the remains of the Roman camp of Whitley, and walk along the Roman 'Maiden Way' over Cross Fell, arriving once more at the Wall at Amboglanna. As he wanders down the quaint cobbled streets of Alston, with their stone staircases and the 'Romeo and Juliet' balcony, he treads the same road as the Tyneside moss-trooper of old as he clattered out across the moors to harry the Scot.

Now as to cost. The return fare by the steamers of the Tyne and Tees Shipping Company, from London to Newcastle, is 32s. 6d. Another 10s. will cover all motor-bus expenses. Comfortable 'digs' at farm-houses and cottages are abundant and generally cost about 30s. a week for three persons. It is most convenient to buy your own food, as meal-times on walking-tours are somewhat irregular.

The writer and two friends made the trip last summer and all expenses, including a 10s. day trip to the Lakes from Alston, did not exceed £6 10s. each. Quite reasonable for a three weeks' holiday, is it not?