

*(For decades, I've been expanding on prosody, working against any restrictive definition, such as its most reductive equation with meter (with meter itself reduced to metronomic tedium and entombment). In my lifework of telling an entire story of prosody, having been dismissive of meter as well, I felt I had to turn and face the demeaned, the desiccation ... the cadaver. This isn't a defense of meter as integral to prosody, or recompense for the short shrift it's suffered. Rather it's an openness to our most ancient mediator of speech and song, a log of the extended, unexpected shock of meeting this self-imposed requirement, as well as an expression of gratitude for its windfall. We live in meter's shadow.)*

## AN UNDEMEANING OF METER : FREE METER (in 2 parts)

*"The angry things that have been said about our poetry have also been said about our time. They are both "confused," "chaotic," "violent," "obscure." Muriel Rukeyser*

*"Prajapati created the gods. Then, suffering in the form of death was created. The gods went to Prajapati and asked: Why did you create us if you were planning to create death after us? Prajapati answered: Compose the meters and make your home in them and you will be rid of this affliction." Jaiminiya Brahmana,1.283.*

*"La métrique est la théorie du rythme des imbeciles." Henri Meschonnic*

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read part 1 here:

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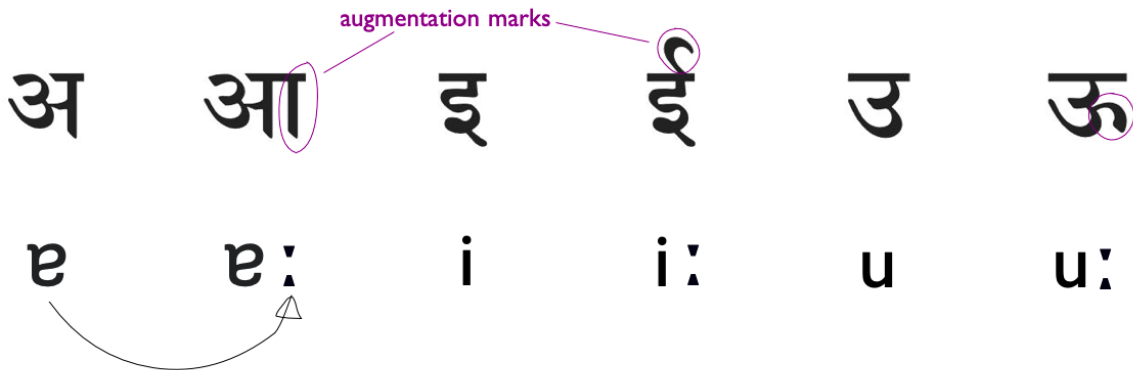
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THE METERS THEMSELVES (WE'RE THEIR GHOSTS)

—  
EMOTION !

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MIND = MUSE : HAVE IN MIND (BUT WHAT'S THAT?) "WHATEVER MANIFESTS IS PERFECT IN MY MIND." (SAMANTABHADRA)

**preview for Part 2, drawing on Sanskrit quantity & Alice Notley's *For the Ride***

What meters are made of. The elements: vowel, phoneme, foot, syllable, stress, pitch, time, word and so on, so long as you simply focus on their use (how they've been used and how you'll use them) without wondering what they actually are, that they are, or even whether they're real at all, you'll be fine. They're incomprehensible, otherwise; gloriously so, so originarily ordinary or ordinarily ordinary.



**The arché of meter: a contrastive durational binary that is:**

- 1 phonemic (determines meaning; the difference between short/long = word change)
- 2 homorganic and homophonic (same place of articulation, same sound, only short/long)
- 3 inherent feature of the language, commonly perceptible, baked in, i.e. = speech
- 4 the short vowel is the count (chronos protos) and the long vowel is twice the short
- 5 stable, orthographically consistent

(STRESS-PREDOMINANT LANGUAGES HAVE NO MARKED CHRONOS PROTOS)

— Meter is a binary system; what's binary in English is on/off STRESS, overriding long/short vowels; alliteration isolates one phone from all others.  
 — The components of stress are LOUDNESS and PITCH as well as DURATION (tending to coincide with greater length, but don't count on it).  
 — Quantitative (durational) languages also have, secondarily, stress and pitch, although only quantity is constitutive of the meter.  
 — Get elemental: 'meter' and 'foot' are carry-overs from archaic and classical prosody. Why wouldn't we just drop them and declare the infinite, indefinite spectrums of stress, pitch and duration (and their feature-sharing indivisibility)? Already happened. Apparently we're constitutionally contrastive.  
 — (For no-contrast, rhythmlessness, see dzogchen & La Monte Young)

**UR METER, ORIGINAL FREEDOM VS. CIVILITY? & I AM B**

Perhaps the ur-meter was isosyllabism itself (it's alleged that PIE had only one vowel, a sort of schwa (which we may be reverting to). Meter, which is to say, contrastive binarism, is modeled on words (speech) and not the inverse. The Great Interplay is: speech and making something special out of it (song, poem). What we call 'archaism' was then innovation.

Syllables with a long vowel/diphthong are long 'by nature.' Syllables with a short vowel followed by a conjunct consonant are long 'by position.' (There are, of course, complications and exceptions.)  
 Actually, the most fundamental binary in language is "vowel/consonant" (open or occluded airflow — can or can't form a syllable on its own); yet the 'segments' themselves aren't metrically constitutive; so the syllable arose to carry the beat.

For example, the shortest-lined (octosyllabic), 3-line stanza of the Vedic Gayatri meter:



Comparison with Avestan poetry shows that the more ancient the verse, the less restrictive in terms of long/short alternation (free, blank verse). *Metrical* isosyllabism then appeared as a relatively free opening with a fixed-cadence with iambic tendency, creating at once the hemistichic structure: OPENING/BREAK/CADENCE. Late Vedic and Greek patterns became both more regulated and variable (i.e., complex). The most basic Aeolic, Gayatri-derived, meter is the glyconic, with the 3rd and 4th positions filled by a trochee, creating a 'double short' nucleus of the choriamb (— ∪ ∪ —) as the metrical rigidity moves leftward.



Two compound Aeolic meters are built upon the glyconic base. The **Greater Asclepiad** adds two choriambic feet to the basic meter. The **Greater Sapphic** extends the basic Sapphic ( — ∪ — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ) by inserting a choriambic foot :

≍ ≍ | — ∪ ∪ — | — ∪ ∪ — | — ∪ ∪ — | ∪ ≍  
 — ∪ — — — | ∪ ∪ — | — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ≍

(It is these two Aeolic meters, via Horace, that Alice Notley has tapped to form her epic book *For the Ride*.)

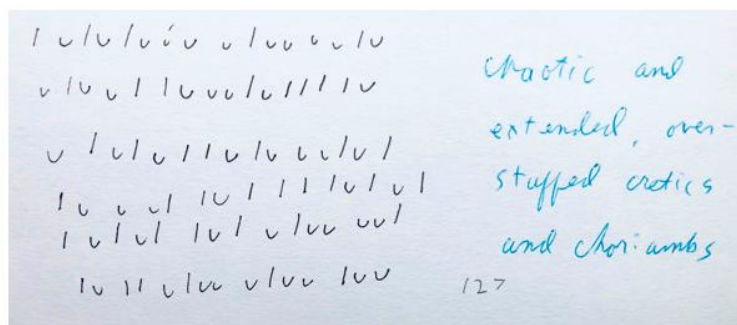
### FREE METER

Chaucer, shortly beforehand (via French, Italian, Latin Romance admixture) had laid the ground for 6 centuries of predominantly iambic pentameter English poetry. 2-hundred years later, the neoclassical, quantitative experiments of Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Harvey and then the ardent Thomas Campion, set English on its current course — the demonstrated futility of applying quantity to English syllables in the 16th century served to assure that English verse would be classically metered, albeit by substituting stress for duration.

The iamb is a survivor and an overlord. There are a few misconceptions involved. First, iambic absolutism (at least since Gascoigne if not *The Owl and the Nightengale*): that the iamb is the natural currency of English, allowing the greatest metric flexibility and variation without breaking the template. Second, that one need only discard or ignore iambic meter to free poetry. Lastly, that simplification may save us. (George Saintsbury: "The only safe and philosophical rule in prosody, as in other things, is not to multiply your entities.") Oh, also, ultimately, that poetry itself is music, gravest error of all.

Perhaps Alice Notley's writing (as in *For the Ride*) is the least iambic and least simple metrics English has ever known. Notley, writing on her process:

*"I wanted to write in a long line. I needed formal constraints because I didn't know what would happen. I get more information from voices if they speak in some form, so I decided to use two classical meters I was interested in, the Greater Asclepiad and the Greater Sapphic. They're interesting because they aren't consistent across the line, being composed of long, complex feet that differ from each other. The object throughout is to create a language with no gender references and in the present. The challenge of doing that causes zaniness—a quality I've always liked. Because everything becomes clumsy, then new."*








Ah, another observation: *The universe is created by giving. The ur language is the gift of who one is, that is one gives away one's self language. That is, one creates it, one giving it away, taking none. Give words, saving them, away . . . gave it all away, giving gone, the universe that I made, doesn't make sense the universe, linguistical utterance:*

*wavelengths from vocal cord, émetteur only exists as donor*

(nice and simple Swinburne choriambics, with inverted trochee/iamb opening and close):

Lōve, whăt | āiled thēe tō lēave | līfe thăt wās mādē | lōvelŷ wē thōught | wĭth lōve?

One's infused, says the One. Talk as one  
 thinks. Here road to the No talks for,  
 O prosodia mine. Not scientif, parts are  
 linguist. Create  
 univers from poetic subconscious,  
 submeasure, subchaos . . .  
 Oh that's love, friends of One. Thoughts  
 words zoom, keep up with zoo-  
 truncated.  
 Trunc to not break it up: unbreak the  
 mind, unagitate propos.  
 Nice hiatus now there: France's ped,  
 ghostly makes a ghost poem:

-  cretic
-  inverted cretic
-  glyconic
-  choriamb
-  recognizably repetitious

— from *For the Ride*



— metrical phrasings breaking the binary unit — chaotic and consistent caesuras — caesura-reinforced metrical phrasing — 16-syllabled carrierwave line settling into stanzas — altered syntax throws off usual stress patterns — chaotic and consistent cretic/choriamb interchange — not at all dead-on coincidence of Sapphics or Asclepiads though as close as one can come without killing the the composition — re-nucleating Aeolics — inverting the glyconic — tuning to, tuning through the Aeolics — furthest from iambics — partakes not in typical triple-beat —