

**A HANDBOOK OF  
POETICS FOR STUDENTS  
OF ENGLISH VERSE**

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A Handbook of Poetics for Students of English Verse by Francis B. Gummere

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# HANDBOOK OF POETICS

FOR

Students of English Verse.

BY

FRANCIS B. GUMMERE, PH.D.,  
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN HAVERFORD COLLEGE.



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## PREFACE.

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THIS book is published in the belief that many teachers have felt the lack of a concise and systematic statement of the principles of poetry. Such text-books are taught with good result in German schools, and are intended to simplify, not to complicate, the study of literature. The greater part of the literature taught in our schools and colleges is in verse; but, in too many cases, the scholar studies poems without having acquired any definite and compact knowledge of the science of poetry. This "Handbook of Poetics" is meant to aid the teacher in laying so necessary a foundation.

The author has tried to take a judicious position between exploded systems on one hand, and, on the other, those promising but not yet established theories of the latest writers on Poetics—especially in the matter of Versification—which, brilliant and often enticing, have nevertheless failed so far to win general assent. Effort has been made to be accurate without being pedantic, and to avoid the bareness of the primer as well as the too abundant detail of the treatise.

Whether this effort has been successful or not, must be tried by a practical test,—by the judgment, not—as King James puts it—of “ignorants obdurde,” nor of “curious folks,” nor even of “learned men, quha thinks thame onelie wyis,” but rather of “the docile bairns of knowledge.”

The *examples* are by no means intended to be exhaustive. Many obvious ones, as the Olney Hymns or the Dunciad or the Epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke, are omitted for the same reason which Cato gave for the absence of his statue from the forum. The pupil should collect his own examples as far as he can; and every scrap of verse which he reads should be subjected to a close analysis as regards its meaning, its style, its rhythm. This study of the science of poetry is altogether distinct from the art of rhetoric: the two should be carefully held apart.

Of the many books consulted, Wackernagel's Lectures on *Poetik*, and the works on *Metre* by Child, Schipper, Ellis, and Ten Brink, may be named as especially helpful. The article on “Poetry” in the last volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* did not come to hand in time to be of use even in the revision of the proof-sheets.

F. B. G.

NEW BEDFORD, 7 September, 1885.

## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

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THE belief that this little manual would be of use in the study of English poetry has been strengthened by the welcome it has received from many of our best scholars. In this second edition only such corrections are made in the text as seem needed for the clear statement of facts. Attention must here be called, however, to a slight inaccuracy in the first paragraph on p. 11: the myths about Beowa arose, it is true, before the fifth century; but the legendary and historical basis of the epic of *Beowulf* belongs to the end of the sixth century (*cf.* Wülker, *Grundriss zur Gesch. der Ags. Litt.* p. 306). As the paragraph is worded it does not seem to agree with what is said on p. 13. — Again, in speaking of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (p. 32), I have unaccountably forgotten to mention that sort of poem known as *Flyting*, of which the piece in question is the first specimen found in English verse, though it is not strictly identical with later *Flytings*, — such as that between Dunbar and Kennedy. Both forms, however, are undoubtedly borrowed from the old French



*jeu-parti* (cf. Bartsch, *Chrestom.* 343 f.) in which two poets take opposite sides of a question; and which, in its turn, Wackernagel refers to the influence of the Vergilian eclogue. This pastoral flavor, however, hardly justifies Mr. Stopford Brooke in calling the delightful but noisy dialogue an Idyll.

In Paul and Braune's *Beiträge*, Vol. IX, Professor Kluge has recently treated the history of rime in Germanic verse, and has sought to establish certain rules and tests important for the study of Anglo-Saxon metres. His general results still further strengthen the assertion, made on p. 145 of this book, that rime is a natural product of the accentual system; that beginning-rime is for a while sole factor in binding together the halves of a verse; but that end-rime is necessarily developed from the same impulse, increasing with the distance from such early works as *Beowulf*. Kluge thus adds end-rime to the tests of later composition. In regard to beginning-rime itself (151 ff.), it is perhaps well to add a caution about its use in modern verse. Beginning-rime, or alliteration, is detected by the ear, not by the eye (cf. *Eng. Stud.* VIII, 390), as is evident if we compare 'king: knave' with 'right: wrong'; and further, it counts chiefly in accented syllables, though (cf. p. 153) there is a sort of subordinate alliteration. In Swinburne's lines —

A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes :  
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long,

we see the force of the second rule. No real beginning-rime exists in the first verse; it does in the second (*hate: whole*). Of course, the first has subordinate beginning-rimes as well as assonance; but the fact that it contains no real alliteration needs to be insisted on, were it only to counteract the influence of such thoughtless assertions as are found in some of our standard histories of English Literature, — *e.g.* that alliteration consists in “words beginning with the same letter.” — The controversy in regard to Middle-English word-accent is still very active, but the whole subject is here practically untouched, as it seemed out of place in a book of this kind. The description of the *King Horn* metre is, therefore, meant merely as the most general information possible, and will not bear a critical analysis. Meanwhile, Schipper’s recent remarks in the current volume of *Englische Studien*, 184 ff., seem very sensible. His views were set forth in his *Englische Metrik*: an attack upon them by Wissmann will be found in the *Anglia*, V, 466 ff.; and there are many other voices which have been raised in this dispute. A brief statement of the question will be found in *The Nation*, 1882, Oct. 12th. But these special matters of

controversy belong outside the proper limits of a text-book.

Lastly, teachers will permit the suggestion that where a class has some knowledge of French, it would be profitable to bring out the excellence of our own rhythm by comparing it with the metres of French verse. Rules and examples helpful for this exercise will be found in T. de Banville's *Petit Traité de Poésie Française*, Paris, 1881.

F. B. G.

NEW BEDFORD, 21 January, 1886.