

METRE VS RHYTHM: JOHN C. POPE READS SIEVERS

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Introduction

Today, John C. Pope is remembered mainly for his magisterial EETS edition *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, but in his own day he was also famous for his monograph *The Rhythm of Beowulf*.¹ And yet compared to Eduard Sievers's metrical theory, which has attracted—and continues to attract—much critical attention, Pope's work on Old English versification has in recent decades been explored by fewer scholars. In this chapter I will consider how Pope's scholarship may bring a new insight to the current dialogue on Old English prosody and Old English poetry in general. In order to contextualize his work on the subject, I will introduce new materials from the John Collins Pope Papers, an archival collection housed in the Manuscripts and Archives division of the Yale University Library. According to the library's online catalogue, these archival papers come in twenty-nine boxes, adding up to "29 linear feet" of materials. Of these, Boxes 1 through 8 contain Pope's correspondence; thereafter, one box is usually assigned to one topic: for example, Box 10, Writings—*The Oxford History of English Literature*; Box 11, "Sievers, Eduard"; Box 19, "Memorabilia"; and Box 20, "Menner, R. J."—a Yale professor who directed Pope's doctoral thesis. Boxes 21 to 28 are labeled as "Subject Files" consisting of "mixed materials."²

In the first main section of this chapter, I will provide a general introduction to the Pope Papers in order to show how the study of Old English poetry was his life-long commitment. Some attention will be paid to Box 11 of the Pope Papers, which contains research he conducted for his posthumous publication on the life and work of Eduard Sievers. In the section after that, I will consider Pope's interpretation of Eduard Sievers's metrical theory to argue that Pope's own theory of Old English versification was intended not to replace Sievers's metrical theory but instead to complement it for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the poetry. In the subsequent section, I will further discuss the relationship between Sievers's metrical theory and Pope's work on the rhythm of Old English poetry by using as a point of departure his note

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¹ John C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society, 259–60 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–1968). John C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942); 2nd rev. ed. (1966).

² John Collins Pope Papers, MS 1724, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, <https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/12/resources/3500>.

on a lecture on the subject preserved in his archive. In the final section, I will turn to some additional materials from the Pope Papers to consider briefly his larger theoretical framework, which encompasses English-language poetry at large.

John Collins Pope Papers

Before accessing the Pope Papers housed at Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library, I somehow imagined that I would find in this collection Pope's analyses of Ælfric's alliterative prose according to his own prosodical theory. To my surprise, however, what I found instead was folders and envelopes packed with papers showing the uncompromising research he had done for his EETS edition of the supplementary *Homilies of Ælfric*. As far as the archives can tell us, Pope kept his work on Ælfric separate from his work on the rhythm of Old English verse.³ In contrast, I saw file after file, notebook after notebook, of his analyses of *Beowulf* and other Old English poems, together with many other papers, note cards, and charts concerning poetic texts. The collection even contains Pope's well-used copy of Klaeber's edition of *Beowulf*, with its brown hard covers mended with layers of duct tape (Box 12, Pope Papers). In another box I saw a draft of a letter, dated to November 1, 1943, and addressed to Elliot V. K. Dobbie, concerning a short Old English poem known today as *Instructions for Christians*: "When your edition of the ANGLO-SAXON MINOR POEMS appeared recently," he wrote, "I half expected" to see this poem included "in the neighborhood of the 'Exhortation to Christian Living' on p. 67; but of course I understand why you left them out. They would certainly have added no luster to your volume." He also informed Dobbie that he had made a transcript of the poem from "my photostats, with the vague idea of arousing the interest of some graduate student or of tackling it myself."⁴

Pope's archive also shows that he was creative and at times playful. On a single sheet of typewritten paper from "circa 1928," Pope—then still a graduate student—provides a "transcript" of a poem titled "The Lay of Humptig, Son of Dumpt" (Box 23, Pope Papers).

³ In his EETS edition, however, Pope divides the alliterative portions of Ælfric's homilies into separate lines as it were in poetry. His edition has a substantial section on Ælfric's rhythmical prose (1: 105–36).

⁴ Box 24, Pope Papers. The draft of Pope's letter to Dobbie concludes with comments on this most recent volume for the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (*The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, vol. 6 [New York: Columbia University Press, 1942]): "I haven't had time yet to make a thorough study of your edition of the MINOR POEMS, but it seems to me the most interesting and most carefully edited volume in the series. I think everyone will be grateful to have such a wide variety of poems brought together, and so many scattered commentaries on them digested." The Pope Papers also contains Pope's transcript of the poem with some added notes (Box 24). Pope apparently did not work on the poem further, because he believed that Dobbie had "found someone who is willing to edit it." The poem, however, was not published until 1964: James L. Rosier, "Instructions for Christians," *Anglia* 82 (1964): 4–22, with "Addenda" published in 1966 ("Addenda to 'Instructions for Christians,'" *Anglia* 84 (1966): 74). In his 1964 publication, Rosier briefly mentions Dobbie and his student who edited the poem as a Master's Thesis at Columbia University in 1945 (4n1).

The document begins with a description of “the manuscript,” stating that “the unique copy of this truly epic version of our Humpty Legend was brought to light by Sir Walter Scott, during his search for border ballads. It had been used in the binding of a MS. of Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, in the venerable library of Melrose Abbey.” The following is the opening passage of the poem as it is shown in the neatly typed-out “second edition, revised, 1969”:⁵

Hwæt, wē Dumptiges dolgīl micelne,
 Humptiges hlēoðorwīde hlynnan gefrūnon,
 hū hē stāncleoƿu stīgan cūðe.
 Hēah on wealle hildlata geseat,
 sorglēas sang þā, sægðe þæt hē wolde
 wunian mid walcnum; ac hine ƿyrd fornam.

[Listen, we have heard proclaimed the loud and foolish boasting of Humpty, son of Dumpty, how he could climb stone-cliffs. High on the wall sat the coward, then sang without sorrow, said that he wished to dwell among the clouds; but fate destroyed him.]⁶

In the untitled “original edition” from “*circa 1928*,” there is a footnote attached to *dolgilp* on 1b: “The derogatory tone used in speaking of our hero has suggested that the poem has some political significance, but all efforts to identify the Dumplings and their prince have failed. See U. O. Ummlaut, *Politische-historische Beziehungen des Angel-sächsischen Humpstlied.*”

Pope also rendered the Old High German heroic poem *Hildebrandslied* to Old English verse. The first six lines of his “Hildebrandeslēoð” read as follows:

Ic gehiēde þæt secgan
 þæt örettan āna mēttan,
 Hildebrand and Heaðubrand under hergum twām;
 sunu and fæder hira searu rihton,
 gearwodon hira gūþ-haman, gyrdon him hira sweordum,
 hæleþ, ofer hringas, þā hīe tō þære hilde ridon.⁷

[I have heard tell that warriors met in single combat, Hildebrand and Heaƿubrand, between two armies; son and father arranged their gear properly, prepared their battle-garments; the warriors girt their swords over their mail shirts, when they rode to the battle.]¹⁸

In the introductory note, Pope explains that he has “based this version on an earlier translation by F. P. Magoun ... but ha[s] substantially revised Magoun’s text to bring it more into line with more recent editions and to make it a more literal translation.”⁹

5 "The Lay of Humptig Son of Dumpt, divided and edited by J. C. P., New Haven" (Box 23, Pope Papers).

6 My translation.

7 “Hildebrandeslēoð” (Box 9, Pope Papers).

8 My translation. I have used Pope's "Supplementary Vocabulary and Notes," provided at the end of the document (Box 9, Pope Papers).

⁹ Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "A Note on Old West Germanic Poetic Unity," *Modern Philology* 43 (1945): 77–82. For a similar exercise made by John Mitchel Kemble in 1835, see my "The Newly-Found Kemble

After the publication of *The Rhythm of Beowulf* in 1942, Pope was widely recognized as one of the authorities on Old English prosody. According to Fred C. Robinson's obituary ("In Memoriam"), "[j]ust a few days before his death" on April 18, 1997, at the age of 93, "he completed an essay assessing the career and achievements of Eduard Sievers. This study consisting of 47 typescript pages" was published in the following year in a volume edited by Helen Damico under the title *Medieval Scholarship*.¹⁰ Approximately half a year prior to his death, Pope wrote to Damico (most likely on the occasion of sending her an earlier version of the manuscript for this essay): "Here at last is the essay on Sievers. I'm afraid you won't like it. It's too long and fussy, and my references to the bibliography are probably too elaborate." In the same letter Pope also describes a picture of Sievers, which he intended for Damico's volume: "It once belonged to a descendant by marriage of Sievers's daughter Nora ... The photo is full face, with a twinkle in the eye seen through his spectacles."¹¹

As mentioned in Robinson's "In Memoriam," Pope's essay "Eduard Sievers" covers many aspects of the life and work of this prominent German scholar. The research that Pope conducted for his last work takes up one full box in the Pope Papers, and the documents included there clearly show that the scope of his research far exceeded that of the published essay. For instance, the essay briefly refers to Sievers's correspondence with Albert Cook, an American scholar whom Sievers mentored during his visit, in 1881 and 1882, to the University of Jena (where Sievers taught between 1871 and 1883) in order to acquire his doctorate based on the research he had previously conducted in England. While Pope spends a relatively short portion of his published essay on this correspondence, Box 11 of the archival collection contains Pope's transcriptions of Sievers's letters to Albert S. Cook.¹² To take his first letter as an example, Pope simply mentions in his essay that in this letter Sievers offers "to give him private instruction in some aspect of 'Anglo-Saxon' if he comes to Jena."¹³ But this letter, which is dated to October 17, 1881, as a whole reveals Sievers's generous and unassuming character, allowing us not only to understand the basis of the long-lasting correspondence between the two scholars but also to have a glimpse of the collegial atmosphere of Old English and early Germanic studies during the formative years of the discipline.¹⁴

Notebook and an Old English *Hildebrandslied*: A Mirror of the New Philology in the 1830s," *Poetica* 86 (2016): 87–106.

10 Fred C. Robinson, "In Memoriam: John Collins Pope (1904–1997)," *Old English Newsletter* 30.3 (1997): 8–9. Pope's essay was published a year after his death: John C. Pope, "Eduard Sievers (1850–1932)," in *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline, Volume 2: Literature and Philology*, ed. Helen Damico (New York: Garland, 1998), 177–99.

11 This draft of Pope's letter to Damico is dated to October 12, 1996 (Box 11, Pope Papers). Sievers's photo is printed on page ii of Damico's volume.

12 For archival details, see Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 197.

13 Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 181.

14 "Letter 1, to 'Professor Albert C. Cook'" (Box 11, Pope Papers).

Dear Sir,

I should be most happy to be of any service to you in case you decide on coming over to Jena; only I cannot promise you that you will find here what you require. First of all, the library is in a sad state as to Anglo-Saxon books; it would not afford the necessary help for literary studies in that department. However, I daresay you could have the books sent over from some other public library, in case you want them particularly, and the trouble and expense of getting them would be but small. I may also add, that I think that my own little collection together with what the University Library has, would do for grammatical studies, if they are not *too* special. —As to my seminar, I shall have to treat some easy Middle High German text, so it would scarcely be worth your time attending that course; in fact almost all the lectures I give here are meant for mere beginners, and all very elementary. However, if you decided on coming I think we might arrange a short Anglo-Saxon course on whatever subject you would like best (grammar, or texts, etc.), say two hours in the week. I am sorry not to be able to offer you more than about that time, but my own time is rather taken up at present, partly by literary engagement whose fulfilment I have been obliged to put off from year to year on account of bad health, partly by some extra official duties.

At all events I should be very glad if you could decide on paying your intended visit to Jena at once on coming over from England. We could then talk the whole subject over more satisfactorily than it could be done in a letter, and decide on what course it would be best for you to take.

Yours very sincerely

The rest of the correspondence transcribed by Pope shows that for many years following Cook's return to the United States, Sievers wrote him on various subjects including his work on Old English metre and grammar ("you see," he says in a letter from 1885, "I have not got rid of Anglo-Saxon yet").¹⁵

Pope on Sievers's *Altgermanische Metrik*

At the end of his essay on Sievers, Pope provides an assessment of his *Altgermanische Metrik* along with his earlier publications on the metre of Old English and Old Norse—a body of work that was "long regarded as fundamental authorities for students of Old Germanic alliterative verse."¹⁶ Generally speaking, Pope's theory of the rhythm of Old English poetry is so different from Sievers's metrical theory that the two systems may seem to have very little in common. But Pope's essay shows that he held *Altgermanische Metrik* in high esteem and had a very clear understanding of its system. To take Sievers's idea of "member" (*Glied*) as an example, Pope explains how this concept was necessary for Sievers to establish four-syllabic half-lines as a basis for Germanic metre:¹⁷

¹⁵ "Letter 6 (no. 5 to Cook), Tübingen, 7. März 85" (Box 11, Pope Papers).

¹⁶ Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 191.

¹⁷ For a full index of key technical terms used in this chapter and volume, readers should consult the Glossary of Metrical Terms in the Appendices.

except for anacrusis, Sievers was able to show that the four-syllable verses were the basic pattern for almost all the longer verses by postulating that each verse had four “members” (*Glieder*) rather than four syllables. Extra syllables were accounted for in two ways: either by the frequent “resolution” (*Auglösung*) of a lift or half-lift into a short syllable and an unstressed sequel ... or by the designation of additional unstressed syllables in unbroken sequence as forming the unstressed member demanded by the type.¹⁸

In this section of the essay, Pope further uses Type A as an example to demonstrate the effectiveness of Sievers’s four-member system. This most common of his five metrical types includes seemingly very different half-lines, such as “lange ahte” (*Beowulf* 31b) and “sealde þam þe he wolde” (*Beowulf* 3055b). Even though the former half-line consists of only four syllables and the latter of as many as seven, both can be rendered to the metrical pattern for Type A: just as the *-e* in *lange* in the former comprises the second member of the verse (that is, the first “x” of the pattern $\angle x \mid \angle x$), the unstressed sequence of syllables “-de þam þe he” in the latter verse “counts as a single member” in the same position. “In this way,” Pope concludes, “Sievers was able to reduce almost every normal verse to four members ... Thus all five types, from A to E, each with one or more subtypes, could be reduced to an intelligible order.”¹⁹

We have seen how Pope’s essay offers a succinct descriptive summary of *Altgermanische Metrik*, showing his appreciation of Sievers’s metrical system. But this very observation prompts us to ask our next question: if Pope was aware that Sievers’s theory was both elegant and powerful, why did he develop a theory of his own? The key, I believe, is the verb “to reduce” used twice in this context. Sievers’s system is elegant and powerful, because it can “reduce almost every normal verse to four members” and allows all five types, “from A to E,” to be “reduced to an intelligible order” (my emphasis). But this astonishingly efficient theory has tended to retain us within this abstract system, rather than encouraging us to broaden our attention to other aspects of Old English verse.

Pope’s view on the overall purpose of the study of the subject is expressed in the opening of the introductory chapter of his monograph *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, which he dedicated to Menner:

Metrical studies of ancient poetry have at least two immediate aims, the establishment of the text and the recovery of the pleasure inherent in verse. We have gained much if we can feel reasonably certain that the words are the poet’s own, but unless we know also the rhythm to which he set them, half their glory has departed.²⁰

Pope here argues that the first purpose of studying metre is to reconstruct poetic texts at a reasonable level of certainty, based on the evidence preserved in the manuscript. In his essay, Pope traces the development of Sievers’s work on metre during the 1880s and 1890s in order to acknowledge the magnitude of his contribution to this branch of prosodical study. Even years before the publication of *Altgermanische Metrik*, he used

¹⁸ Pope, “Eduard Sievers,” 192.

¹⁹ Pope, “Eduard Sievers,” 192–93. *Beowulf* quotations above are taken from Klaeber 4.

²⁰ Pope, *Rhythm of Beowulf*, 2nd rev. ed., 3.

"the syllabic structure of the normal verses in *Beowulf*" to recognize "editorial false quantities of vowels, mistakes in lineation, and manuscript spellings for which more metrically regular variants could be postulated." Subsequently, he not only "called attention to many such linguistic improvements" but also "extended them to other Old English poems, and even ... other Old Germanic alliterative verse." And last, he published *Altgermanische Metrik* to bring "his five-type system to its final refinement, concluding with a complete list of all his types and subtypes, ... as needed for the whole range of West Germanic and the most traditional portion of North-Germanic alliterative verse." In this sense, his monograph of 1893 marks the apex of his metrical work, casting, ever since, an enormous influence "on many of our Old Germanic texts, especially the text of *Beowulf*."²¹

When read against Pope's goal for the study of verse stated in *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, however, his evaluation of Sievers's metrical work, laudatory as it may be, turns out to be of somewhat limited scope, because it pertains only to the first of the "two immediate aims" of the study. Sievers has certainly helped us establish the text of a given Old Germanic poem to "feel reasonably certain that the words are the poet's own," but we would still be missing "half their glory," if we did not know "the rhythm to which he set them" and thus recover "the pleasure inherent in verse."²² As Pope points out, however, Sievers eventually became aware of the importance of rhythm and other aspects of performance. In fact, already in the 1890s, while Sievers was bringing his metrical work to completion, he was, Pope explains, already "focus[ing] his attention on the rhythms and intonations implicit in literary texts, ancient and modern," so that he might explore "fresh fields."²³ Interestingly, Pope's essay on Sievers devotes a sizable portion to his controversial theory known as *Schallanalyse*, which "dominate[d] the last years of his life."²⁴ Even in his own days, however, Sievers's theory of *Schallanalyse* had "a mixed reception," and it did not "long survive its inventor."²⁵ There seems to have been a good reason for it. Compared to his metrical work, *Schallanalyse* is far less systematic in its pursuit of the concept of "curve," a pattern of speech sounds allegedly inherent in each individual. In case of his analysis of *King Lear*, for instance, Sievers detected different curves in the text and attributed this Shakespearean tragedy to "three principal authors," convinced as he was that "everyone is born with a curve that never changes throughout life."²⁶ In a draft version of the essay preserved in the Yale archives (Box 11), Pope

21 Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 193.

22 Pope, *Rhythm of Beowulf*, 2nd rev. ed., 3.

23 Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 184.

24 Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 184. Pope briefly mentions *Schallanalyse* in *The Rhythm of Beowulf* (2nd rev. ed., 14–15).

25 Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 186 and 189.

26 Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 188. Pope also points out that Sievers was unable to recognize "Ælfric's distinctive 'rhythmical prose'" in his Old English translation of the Ely Privilege (Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 187). For this subject, see further John C. Pope, "Ælfric and the Old English Version of the Ely Privilege," in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971),

refers to *Schallanalyse* as a “notoriously subjective system of analysis” and concludes a paragraph with the remark: “[m]ost of the work of this later period is of greater interest for the psychological development of the man than for what can be regarded as its enduring contribution to literary and linguistic knowledge, medieval or modern.” Pope has however crossed out this passage in the draft; and in the published essay he uses a remark by another scholar, Gerold Ungeheuer, as a verdict on *Schallanalyse*: “As a scholarly method of research it must be rejected, being in every way subjective. It cannot be generally applied, nor generally communicated, nor generally learnt.”²⁷

I believe that Ungeheuer’s assessment of *Schallanalyse*, which Pope quotes in his essay, gives us a clue for understanding the purpose of his own work on the rhythm of Old English poetry: namely, to offer a “scholarly method of research” on the sounds of verse that could be, unlike *Schallanalyse*, generally applied, generally communicated, and generally learned. Not unlike *Schallanalyse*, however, Pope’s work on poetic rhythm was intended to be applied not just to early medieval alliterative verse but to *all* English verse. As mentioned earlier, the Pope Papers include numerous musical notebooks analysing various verses according to his system of notation. And these analyses are not limited to *Beowulf* and other Old English poems, for Pope also analysed verses by Shakespeare, John Donne, Milton, Tennyson, Robert Frost, among others.

Pope on the Rhythm of Old English Poetry

Pope’s essay on Sievers concludes with a brief summary of the reception of his work on metre and points out that “the major studies of Old English verse form ... have been influenced, often strongly, by Sievers.”²⁸ Pope also acknowledges that he belongs to a group of scholars who “have differed sharply from Sievers in their interpretation of the basic rhythm of the verse” and especially that of Sievers’s “foot division of types B and C.” Pope further traces Sievers’s response to this particular problem: he “recognized the rhythmic difficulty and tried to overcome it” by introducing a certain subtype of stress; “[b]ut this solution,” Pope concludes, “disregards the fundamental sovereignty of the traditionally stressed alliterating syllables and has not found favor.”²⁹ In *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, Pope provides a response to Sievers in many places. In the chapter “Previous Theories,” for instance, he closely analyses Sievers’s metrical theory, emphasizing the

85–113. As cited by Pope, see also Eduard Sievers, *Metrische Studien*, 7 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1901–19): 4: 588.

²⁷ Pope, “Eduard Sievers,” 189, quoting from Gerold Ungeheuer, “Die Schallanalyse von Sievers,” *Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung* 31 (1964): 97–124 at 124. In the article Ungeheuer continues, however: *Schallanalyse* “should not be neglected, even though the method of ‘Schallanalyse’ is discredited. It is suggested that the ‘Schallanalyse’ can only be replaced by the test methods of psychological phonetics” (Ungeheuer, “Die Schallanalyse von Sievers”).

²⁸ Pope, “Eduard Sievers,” 194.

²⁹ Pope, “Eduard Sievers,” 193.

“damaging” results it has caused on the study of the effect of verse “on the ear.” “To Sievers’ theory may be attributed,” he explains, “many an infelicitous, clumsily rhythmized performance that could yet call itself faithful to the original.”³⁰ In the chapter “The New Theory,” Pope organizes his argument around Sievers’s controversial treatment of Types B and C. But in the “Preface” to the second revised edition of his monograph, he expresses a somewhat different view: “I have overemphasized my disagreement with Sievers and so failed to convey my deep and abiding respect for his work ... I have felt with increasing conviction that a firm grasp of his analysis of the five types is essential for an understanding of the finer points of my interpretation.”³¹

It seems that Pope’s response to Sievers’s metrical theory shifted over the decades. We find Pope’s view on the subject more than a decade after this last remark in an archival document titled “Old English—Talk on the Rhythm of *Beowulf*” (Box 23). This single typewritten sheet has a penciled memo on its top right corner that reads “1979 Apr[il] 3—Fred’s class,” suggesting that this was probably a note prepared for a lecture given to Fred Robinson’s Old English class towards the end of the academic year, when students had already completed an introductory Old English course and read a good portion of *Beowulf*. Despite its title and occasion, this lecture undertakes to place Old English versification within the history of English-language literature. According to the note, the lecture began with a section called “Meter and rhythm,” in which Pope was to present examples of iambic pentameter so as to “illustrate some of its rhythmic varieties.” The purpose of this opening section was evidently to establish that English poets from later periods followed a prescribed form (such as iambic pentameter) but still used acceptable “rhythmical varieties” within this metrical framework.

In contrast, we have no direct evidence to prove that this was the case with early medieval English poets (“[f]or Old English, both meter and rhythm are conjectural”). In order to consider the speculative nature of Old English prosody, the lecture, according to the note, at this point moves on to Sievers’s five metrical types. Pope at once accepts that there is an “[o]rder within each type.” But he asks the crucial question: “is there an inclusive order” in the five types as a whole? His answer is: “[m]any things suggest that there should be.” In a hand-written draft of the lecture note, Pope offers a slightly more detailed account of what is meant by “many things” here: namely, “common, basic features that suggest [an] inclusive order” (Box 23). In the lecture note Pope identifies three features with which Sievers constructed his inclusive metrical system: (1) “[s]trict alliterative rules”; (2) a “[d]ifference between long and short syllables when stressed”; and (3) a “[d]ifference in allowable number of syllables in certain positions and between verses that have minimum stress and those that have maximum.” In order to illustrate this inclusivity, Pope prepared on a separate sheet a list of half-lines of varying lengths (to be written out “on the board”) arranged according to Sievers’s metrical types.

30 Pope, *Rhythm of Beowulf*, 2nd rev. ed., 7.

31 Pope, *Rhythm of Beowulf*, 2nd rev. ed., xv.

The lecture note makes it clear that Pope established the reliability of Sievers's metrical system in an early section of his lecture so that he could proceed to discuss the question of rhythm. In the opening part of his *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, as we recall, Pope identifies one of the aims of the study of a literary tradition from the past to be "the recovery of the pleasure inherent in verse" by finding "the rhythm to which [the poet] set his words." Seen in this light, Sievers's metrical theory, however inclusive, may be said to flatten the art of Old English poetry by reducing the vast variety of half-lines to no more than five patterns and in the process directing our attention away from the (very likely) possibility that Old English poets, too, used acceptable rhythmical varieties within the metrical system they followed. According to the note, Pope provided various half-lines in this part of the lecture in order to contrast between Sievers's five metrical types and his own rhythmical measures. He then asked the question: "What is gained?"—that is, what new insight might be gained by superimposing his theory of Old English verse rhythm onto Sievers's theory of Old English metre. Here I use the word "superimposed," because I believe that Pope's theory of rhythm is by and large not incompatible with Sievers's metrical theory. Pope's archive contains numerous sheets showing his scansion of individual half-lines first according to Sievers's five types and then according to his own system. As Robinson states, Pope "accepted by and large the five-type scansion explained by Sievers." Or to put it slightly differently, Pope used Sievers's metrical theory as a starting point for his own theory of rhythm.³²

The lecture note further provides three answers to the question "what is gained" from this comparison:

1. Every syllable has its place in the scheme.
2. Within the *order* thus perceived there is room for expressive variation.
3. The rests themselves occur where pauses are appropriate and thus add to the expressiveness of the passage.³³

We notice that all of these points are meant to enhance our understanding of Old English verse at the performative level. As for the first point, Pope's rhythmical theory is intended to make us mindful of the presence of all syllables—including unstressed syllables—in each and every half-line, rather than reducing some of them to one member within a metrical scheme. As for the second point, pertaining to certain "room for expressive variation" (that is, within Sievers's metrical framework), Pope uses a slightly different expression in the hand-written draft: a "[r]egulated variety allows varied expression." As for the third point, namely, the effect of rests or pauses to be found in the rhythm of half-lines, this draft version reads: "Rests provide natural rhetorical pauses."

³² Robinson, "In Memoriam," 8. In his essay on Sievers (194), Pope points out that Thomas Cable takes a similar strategy in his *The Meter and Melody of Beowulf* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

³³ Emphasis in the original. The hand-written draft of the lecture provides a fourth answer: "A *continuous* rhythm for sentence and paragraph" (emphasis in the original).

Robinson's "In Memoriam" offers a clear account of why Pope developed a theory of the rhythm of Old English poetry: in his efforts "to determine what the poetry sounded like when the *scop* performed it," he became "[c]onvinced that if the verses were to sound harmoniously at all, they must be isochronous"—that is, each half-line should take the same amount of time to perform.³⁴ In his lecture note, Pope states that "each of the normal verses" should be read "according to the time and structure required for two measures of quadruple time—basically |♩♩♩♩|♩♩♩♩| with free substitution."³⁵ It is well known that Pope's theory of isochrony has not met with general acceptance; but, as he explains in his lecture note, he did not use this concept in a mechanical sense:

This doesn't mean that the time has to be kept rigidly. It means that the theoretically rigid time has to be *approximated* nearly enough to enable a listener to recognize it as the underlining principle of order. [Musicians in the modern era follow a mathematically precise score, but they do this in an approximate way.]

Today musical notation is often associated with Pope's theory of rhythm, but this practice was often followed by scholars from his generation.³⁶ Furthermore, Pope applied various musical concepts to explain the performance of Old English verse. In his essay on Sievers, for instance, he explains "one or two prefatory syllables of anacrusis"—a regular irregularity in Sievers's metrical theory—as features "sometimes resembling grace notes in music."³⁷

Pope on Verse, Metre, Rhythm

In this final section, I will briefly discuss a larger theoretical context in which Pope developed his work on Old English poetic rhythm. According to Robinson, Pope was influenced by general theoretical works on rhythm available at the time, such as Sidney Lanier's *The Science of English Verse* (1880) and William Thompson's *The Rhythm of Speech* (1923). In his monograph, Pope dedicates a large portion to Sievers and other scholars who have written on early Germanic metre, but he does not provide a comparable discussion on scholars, like Lenier and Thompson, who worked on rhythm and other aspects of performance of verse. This was rather unfortunate, because, as Robinson informs us, Pope "assumed that those evaluating his book would read those works before judging his own theory. Some of the scholars who rejected his theory did so, he suspected, because they had not first familiarized themselves with these foundational works that underlay his study."³⁸

³⁴ Robinson, "In Memoriam," 8.

³⁵ It is probably because of Pope's principle of isochrony for his theory of the rhythm of Old English verse that he did not include Ælfric's alliterative composition (often called "rhythmical prose") as part of his work on rhythm, even though he lineates alliterative portions of Ælfric's homilies in his EETS edition.

³⁶ On this point, see the next section.

³⁷ Pope, "Eduard Sievers," 192. Robinson mentions that, Pope "studied piano from an early age ... and loved music throughout his life" ("In Memoriam," 8).

³⁸ Robinson, "In Memoriam," 9.

There are, however, a number of documents in the Pope Papers that explain his theory of rhythm. Though mostly undated, their contents seem to be in general agreement with each other, suggesting that Pope maintained a certain general theory of rhythm throughout his long career. We may, for instance, learn about Pope's encounter with Lanier's work from a four-page document kept in a folder titled "Aspects of English Verse Rhythm," a talk that he gave at a gathering of a club at Yale University on October 17, 1990 (Box 9). This hand-written paper, with the title "May it please the Club," begins with an account of Old English studies in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, when scholars were trying "to make out how the Old English *Beowulf* might have sounded." They were, Pope explains, all in agreement with grammatical and metrical aspects of Old English poetry, such as "[t]he pronunciation of individual words, the accentual and syllabic structure of verses, the carefully placed alliterations that bound together the pair of verses we call a line, not to mention the grammatical rules and the syntax that governed phrase and clause." In contrast, "scholars disagreed about how the seeming irregularities in the syllabic structure of the verses could be accommodated to anything like a basic, consistent rhythmic scheme." Because of this disagreement, "not many scholars ventured to read the poem aloud, and those who did failed to agree with each other or to produce readings that were both consistently rhythmical and true to the linguistic and semantic features of the verses."

It was in this rather frustrating situation that Pope was first introduced to Lanier's *The Science of English Verse* by "a fellow instructor in English."³⁹ In the talk, Pope recollects his initial reaction: "I found the book exciting and at the same time irritating"—exciting, because "Lanier's use of musical notation to describe the rhythms of spoken verse seemed right and helpful," and irritating, because "his notation of particular verses"—especially Old and Middle English alliterative verse—"often seemed wrong," as he wrote the book before Sievers and other German scholars established the metrical principles for the poetry. Pope was nonetheless inspired by Lanier's suggestion as to "what could be done by beating time to a reading of verse, ancient or modern, and recording in a musical or comparably structured notation what particular rhythm one had produced." Having been "enlightened by his theory and his example," Pope then "spent a whole summer feverishly testing rhythms in modern verse." The script for this talk ends with a brief reference to Thompson: soon after being introduced to Lanier's work, Pope "discovered that the most elaborate and copiously illustrated analysis of verse rhythm was that of William Thompson, a Scottish schoolmaster whose massive book *The Rhythm of Speech* was published in 1923."⁴⁰ Pope's hand-written script fades off at this point, and the rest of his talk seems to have been dedicated to illustrations of verse rhythms with materials taken from modern poetry (for this mixed audience), since the folder for the talk contains a number of sheets with such titles as "Varied

39 Sidney Lanier, *The Science of English Verse* (New York: Scribner, 1880).

40 William Thompson, *The Rhythm of Speech* (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson, 1923).

measure-structure in Iambic Pentameter,” “Trochaic Substitution,” and “Conflicts of Meter and Sense: Possible resolution by elevated pitch,” together with the entire poem of John Mansfield’s “Cargoes.” All of these illustrations come with his analyses of individual verse lines with musical notation.

While it is not the aim of this essay to analyse Pope’s general theory of rhythm, I would like to end with a brief discussion of an undated two-page document titled “Verse-Rhythm” (Box 9, Pope Papers), which includes sections on rhythm and metre, respectively. In the section on rhythm, Pope maintains that not every rhythm belongs to the study of verse. In “the broadest sense,” he writes, rhythm “may be defined as orderliness of motion”; but “[m]ore narrowly, when applied to a particular utterance, it may refer to the unique order of the utterance.” That is to say, “every utterance has *a* rhythm, meaning only that it has a unique (and therefore inimitable and unintelligible) order” (emphasis in the original). As such, unique orders belong to individual persons’ individual performances. In other words, “[u]nique order, though they may be usefully studied in the Laboratory as physical foundations for our sensations and concepts, must be subjected to human sense of orderliness.” To put it differently, specialists in poetics do not investigate “a rhythm” but instead “rhythm,” that is, “an intelligible (orderly) order which the utterance more or less closely approximates,” and which they can apprehend as “an intelligible order to which both the original utterance and any imitation can be referred as a norm.” In the section on verse, Pope identifies metre as “a special handling of rhythm” and its “indispensable feature” as “the single verse or line—a group of words short enough to be spoken in a single breath (though often not so spoken).” Nevertheless, metre is not an abstract and mechanical concept, because a group of words in a given line of verse are “so chosen that a trained speaker will produce a single rhythm pattern, or one of a few slight variations of such a pattern.” In short, both rhythm and metre are essential components of verse, and neither can exist without the other.

In this chapter, I considered John Pope’s interpretation of Sievers’s metrical theory with the hope that we may begin to explore possibilities for a new approach to Old English poetry by recognizing the importance of balancing what Pope calls “two immediate aims” for the study of poetry from the past. If recent interest in sound theory may be an indication, rhythm and sound of verse may be becoming of greater interest to scholars in various fields including literature, language, music, and cognitive psychology. Just as Sievers’s metrical theory offered Pope an entry point for his exploration of the sound and rhythm of alliterative poetry, we may perhaps gain a deeper insight into the study of alliterative metre by considering questions that have been asked by Pope and other scholars who have considered performative aspects of the Old English poetic art.⁴¹

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