



Prose Rhythm in English by A. C. Clark

Review by: J. W. Mackail

The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 3, Part 2 (1913), pp. 323-325

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

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when classical texts were most popular and most in danger of being spoilt. Here perhaps he might have noted the Hadrianic Latin renaissance, for which see Havet's *Manual de Critique verbale*, and he might have abridged his mediaeval sections. These latter, with their quotations from John of Salisbury and other interesting writers, form delightful reading, but their proper place is in a history of scholarship, and in Mr. Hall's narrative the outlines become a little blurred, and great figures, such as Alcuin, do not stand out enough; consequently the author does not quite succeed in bringing out the lessons he really wishes to deduce, namely that we must understand the times and circumstances in which manuscripts were produced, and must distinguish between texts of "grammarians" and texts of dilettanti. The chapters which follow, on recension and emendation, are particularly good and are excellently illustrated by parallels from English literature. No doubt, any one reader may miss some favourite point of his own; for instance, to the note on corruptions of numeral signs might be added the omission or perversion of *oo* and of *dec.* to *acc.*; or, still more, the important body of corruptions due to the misunderstandings of the Fleury use of a vertical line to represent a nasal, instead of the ordinary horizontal line. Perhaps even greater praise is due to the author's eighth and ninth chapters, which summarise the manuscript authorities for the text of the chief classical writers and tabulate the nomenclature of manuscripts. These two chapters alone would make the book indispensable for every classical library, public or private. Deficiencies and inaccuracies will no doubt be found by persons in the accounts of their own particular authors, as in the article "Livius" which needs much revision. The eighth chapter would be still more valuable if it included notices of the editions that have really and largely advanced our knowledge of the manuscripts. For example, for Livy, those issued by Froben in 1531 and in 1555, those of Drakenborch, Alschefski and Luchs.

In view of a second edition, one may add a few trifles: pp. 19, 63, 246, for Symmachus (and the Nicomachi) Seeck's edition in the M.G.H. should be consulted (e.g. for the death of Symmachus the date 402 is much more probable than 420 A.D.); p. 57, did Cicero really edit Lucretius? p. 157, add the advice to study a scribe's peculiar weaknesses and tendencies; p. 169 (Liv. iii, 35, 9), for "Vindobonensis" read "Veronensis"; p. 170, read "e prolis" for "prolis"; p. 308, Cusan MSS. in the B.M. (Harleiani) say "some Harleiani" or "e.g. Harleian Livy, i-viii, of the tenth century"; and for p. 247, it may be noticed that the Turin palimpsest perished in the fire.

W. C. F. WALTERS.

PROSE RHYTHM IN ENGLISH. By A. C. CLARK. 9 x 6, 19 pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913. 1s. 6d. n.

The subject of this very able and curious study was suggested to Professor Clark by reading Professor Saintsbury's *History of English Prose Rhythm*. On the whole question of prose rhythms, so far as they can be subjected to analysis and brought under rules, little less than a revolution has been brought by the recent discovery of the *cursor*, as worked out by N. Valois, Zielinski, and Mr. Clark himself. In particular, the enquiry was at once suggested whether, or how far, any analogous body of usage (for admittedly it would be usage only, but usage based on definite doctrine) can be found to exist in English prose; and if so, how far in the work of different writers at different periods it is found to follow, whether consciously or unconsciously, the accepted patterns of either classical or mediaeval Latin. In 1912 Mr. John Shelly pointed out that the English Prayer Book had many rhythms identical with those which the translators found in the Latin Missal and Breviary; and observed that the rhythms of the Prayer Book passed into current use, and undoubtedly exercised a considerable influence on the rhythmical treatment of English prose generally. It remains true that, in Mr. Saintsbury's

words, "the essence of prose rhythm lies in variety and divergence." But the very word divergence assumes a normal cadence which is diverged from; and two questions thus arise which are at least of much speculative interest, and may even, if resolved, have some effect on practice. The first is, can we trace in native English prose any dominant rhythm or set of rhythms? The second is, can we discover, in each of the recognised masters of English prose, any favourite cadences peculiar to him and constituting a definite factor in the complex quality of his writing which we call his style?

Further, however, Mr. Clark points out that while Cicero recognised, and indeed laid down, certain rules for prose cadences, and while analysis shows in his own prose a marked dominance of those cadences which he recommends, he has no coherent theory and no systematic practice: and also that the authoritative rules for the *cursus* laid down by the Roman Curia in the middle ages and obediently followed by the mediaeval writers had the result that the "rich variety of cadences" characteristic of classical Latin prose was lost, the three prescribed forms of the *cursus planus*, *cursus tardus*, and *cursus velox*, "like Aaron's rod, swallowed up their competitors, and prose composition became stereotyped."

Now here it has to be borne in mind that while Latin was in the middle ages an universal language and, as we might say, a second mother-tongue, it was nevertheless a language not native, but laboriously acquired; and rules for its use could be, as they were, acquired with it. But when the actual mother-tongue began to be employed for the production of what was conscious literature, its treatment could not be subjected to rhythmical rules alien from its own genius, nor to any rules at all which were not liable to be broken through by the direct transmission of thought into language. As regards the first of these points, Mr. Clark calls attention to the statement laid down by Mr. Saintsbury, that in Old English the structure of any continuous piece of natural language is fundamentally and predominantly trochaic. As regards the second, it has to be borne carefully in mind that an English writer, in writing English, is handling a substance which is fluid, and not, as Latin was to all mediaeval writers, rigid.

Mr. Clark goes on, quoting in substance from Mr. Saintsbury, as follows: "In Middle English the 'trochaic tyranny' was mitigated by the disuse of inflection and the introduction of a mere polysyllabic vocabulary. This process begins with Chaucer, and is consummated by the writers of the Prayer Book and the Authorised Version"—for the Authorised Version it would be historically more correct to say Coverdale, for in Coverdale's version the rhythms of what may be called 'Bible English' are already fully developed—"who had Latin models before them. The rhythm of Middle English is composite, partly native and partly Latin."

He continues: "This is an observation of the highest importance, and suggests a method of attacking the problem which is, so far as I know, new. It is briefly this. If we take passages which are accepted by the best judges as perfect, and mark those rhythms which are Latin in character, the probability is that the residue, and especially those effects which are wholly alien to the Latin system, are native. We are dealing with two quantities, one of which is known. This being so, we ought to be able to discover something about the unknown quantity."

Following out this suggestion, Mr. Clark proceeds to analyse a number of passages of conspicuous excellence in English prose masters from the early fifteenth century down to the present day. This makes a fascinating study, which may be pursued indefinitely. It is particularly interesting to notice the marked dominance of Latin rhythms in authors of such wholly disparate style as Gibbon, Macaulay, and Newman. But the enquiry, if carried too far into detail, may easily become the pursuit of an *ignis fatuus*. This criticism may be made on the article on "English prose numbers," based on Mr. Clark's study, which Professor Elton contributed to the last volume of *Essays and Studies* by Members of the English Association. Analysis may readily run wild; and at best it is of little help towards practice. The study of prose rhythms may enable us to detect one reason among others why a particular piece of prose is bad; but that will only be if we knew it to be bad already: and it will never enable any one to write prose well.

The upshot of Mr. Clark's investigation cannot be put more briefly or clearly than in his own words :

"The three forms of the *cursum* came into English from Latin and from the Romance languages. When Latin words were naturalised, they brought with them the cadences in which the genius of the Latin tongue found best expression. The introduction of such words was largely due to their occurrence in the liturgy of the church, and to their consequent adoption by the authors of the Prayer Book and the translators of the Bible. These cadences, however, were modified when they became Anglicised, owing to the lack of polysyllables. The English *cursum* presses monosyllables into its service with the result that, although the scheme of accentuation is the same, the caesuras are more numerous and more varied. No attempt was made to make the *cursum* universal. The native elements were combined with the exotic. The rhythm of English is mixed, like the nation itself, and the mixture constitutes its charm."

J. W. MACKAIL.

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