

Introduction: The Failure of Meter

When he walked over the meadows
He was stifled and soothed by his own rhythm.
—T. S. Eliot, from “The Death of Saint Narcissus,”
The Waste Land (facsimile)

It is certain now (thanks in part to Mr. Saintsbury), as it has long been obvious, that the foot is immensely important in English prosody.
—Rupert Brooke, reviewing Ezra Pound’s *Personae* in *The Cambridge Review*

Modern Instability

I don’t believe in iambs. I am keenly interested in why people do or do not believe in iambs and why the proper way of measuring a verse is such a defensive issue for critics. Why have critics still not agreed upon one system of prosody for English verse? Why do most contemporary poets think that metrical poems are conservative or “old-fashioned”? Why is such a stigma attached to the word “meter”? And how, and why, has this suppressed narrative of metrical disagreement been crucial for both the formation and advance of English literary study in the twentieth century?

The Rise and Fall of Meter questions our assumption that “English meter” was and is a stable category. Metrical discourse flourished in the nineteenth century but it intensified toward the 1880s and into the early twentieth century. Why was there such an interest in defining English meter at the turn of the century? What was so important about establishing the history and meaning of English meter at that particular historical moment? Usually read as a transition between the Victorian and Modernist eras, the period between 1860 and 1930 is a crucial epoch in its own right, a moment in which the *New English Dictionary* and state-funded education defined and promoted ideas of Englishness through the use and measure of English language and literature. Within a changing religious and political climate, poets and prosodists turned to meter as an organizing principle—a possible means to order and stabilize

their relationship to the changing nation-state. But English meter presented the poet with an array of choices and associations that could be destabilizing as well; the myriad hybrid and new poetic forms (the verse-novel, the dramatic monologue) of the nineteenth century provide by virtue of their very existence clear evidence that poets saw poetic form as malleable and culturally contingent. At once bound to and always questioning literary tradition, poets brought their revisions and questions, experiments and conversations to bear on the shifting category that was called “Poetry” or “Verse” in the nineteenth century. Though I focus on the historical moment when our concept of “English meter” seems to stabilize, the main intervention of this book is to alter our assumptions about English meter as a stable concept, to ask what else “English” and “meter” meant, and might mean.

In 2006, I typed the word “versification” into the British Library’s online catalog. Amid the various records—over a hundred—were four citations for a journal titled *Versification*. I had found more evidence, I thought, of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about prosody, meter, and versification—what I call the “prosody wars.” I waited the rest of the afternoon for the librarian to pull up the library’s four issues. Unapologetic, the librarian replied that, of the four, two were “lost” and one was listed as “destroyed by the war.” She asked me to come back the next day, as they were still trying to track down the fourth issue. When I returned the following day another librarian kindly told me that the final issue of *Versification* in the online catalog had also been “destroyed by the war.” I don’t know why I was surprised; I was discovering, first-hand, that the war had materially erased bits of the archival record on which my research must rely, but such losses are, in fact, central to my argument. *The Rise and Fall of Meter* reveals the lost history of metrical debate and, via metrical debate, national definition, a history obscured both by war and by the narratives about meter that modernists invented in roughly the same period.¹ The minor poets editor Alfred Nutting published in his short-lived journal *Versification* (1891–92)² were no doubt judged according to some standard of “style and quality of composition,” but I argue in the following pages that the standards for English meter were different in different communities, and that the concept of English meter measured not only English poetry but English history and national identity as well.

The story of English poetry between 1860 and 1930 is one we know very well and not at all. The familiar series of pat narratives includes, in roughly chronological order, an individualist and decadent poetics, politicized and then derided after the Oscar Wilde trial; the reactionary jingoism of turn-of-the-century poets like Alfred Austin and Rudyard Kipling; and a pastoral neo-Romantic mode characterized by the now nearly forgotten but then best-selling Georgian poetry anthologies published between 1910 and 1922. Fin-de-siècle poetry was weak and whiny, patriotic verses were loud and brassy,

and Georgian poets were a yawn. The movements associated with the experimental avant-garde, retroactively named “Modernism,” arrived as if to jolt, shock, and shake up old-fashioned, post-Tennysonian, post-Victorian poetry into something that could “respond to the scenario of . . . chaos.”³ Ezra Pound, in particular, challenged what Ira Nadel calls “the entrapment of poets by iambic pentameter.”⁴ In content but more importantly in form, the movements associated with the experimental avant-garde in the period before, during, and after the First World War changed the course of contemporary Anglophone poetry, loosening the “shackles of meter,”⁵ the ticktock of its regular metronome, unleashing freedom of expression and experimentation, while creating new polyphonic, polyglossial, polyrhythmic poems. This is the narrative we have been taught. Rebecca Beasley writes that T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound “revolutionized Anglo-American poetry, arguing that traditional poetic forms and themes could no longer encapsulate the experience of the modern world.”⁶ Pericles Lewis writes that “the victory of free verse over traditional meters” was “decisively won in English by Ezra Pound and his friends” and that “free verse abandoned traditional versification methods including meter, rhyme, and stanza forms; it often also violated standard syntax.”⁷ Even early historians of Modernism describe the break with tradition as cataclysmic, a “Great War”-sized upheaval of literary convention and tradition in the early twentieth century.⁸

These examples from Nadel, Beasley, and Lewis all promote the received view: modernists violated an established and stable tradition of English versification itself little concerned with experiment. I have culled these examples from teaching texts—pedagogical introductions written for beginning literature students. They provide clear narratives, but they leave out whole stories that, therefore, are never told, can never be brought to bear on either early free verse and its relation to forgotten metrical experiments, or on, say, the rhythmic intricacy and formal dexterity of poems written before the twentieth century in relation to metrical tradition. It is time for a more nuanced understanding of the history of form in English poetry. Even the language used to describe these traditional forms—“entrapment” and “encapsulate”—betrays the teleological attraction toward freedom and away from the repressive past. Indeed, the use of the word “standard” in “standard syntax” suggests that scholars think poets writing in the early twentieth century were reacting to ideas that had been fixed for so long as to become obsolete.

The narrative that Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane would call the “Great Divide” (“between past and present, art before and art now”⁹) is easy to teach and easy to understand¹⁰; it encourages students to think of poetry in terms of expression and persona, which is an inheritance from German romanticism and aesthetic theory and provides an abstract idea of literary genius. The version of twentieth-century English poetry in the literary history we teach is that modernist poetry is difficult; that difficulty, in content rather

than mere form, is what makes it interesting; that expression and allusion are key; and that meter is old-fashioned, outdated, and a marker of the past.¹¹ The narrative implicit in the “great divide” assumes that prior to the modernist break, meter had been a stable, constraining, and limiting institution in poetics.

The conventional narrative of English meter’s evolution from “regular” to “free” maps usefully onto ideas of progress and expansion, of empire as well as of social democracy; that is, the idea of breaking free from the “shackles” of meter is often understood in terms of the inevitable rise of the welfare state in England. It is also a narrative that was created and promoted in the nineteenth century—despite a diversity of metrical approaches prior to and during the period I discuss—in order to provide a unified concept of English meter for the quickly expanding literate masses and, later in the century, the expanding voting public in the new national school system. Though my focus is the late nineteenth century, I am in no way suggesting that this is the only moment in which metrical forms were called upon to do the work of the nation. However, I want to argue that our misconceptions about “English meters”—that is, reading English meter as a narrative of progress and evolution rather than a collection of competing metrical forms—emerge in the period between 1860 and 1930.

Most accounts of literary Modernism take Ezra Pound’s salvo in 1945, “to break the pentameter, that was the first heaven” (1.55),¹² as a reaction against the formal strictures of the Victorian era. But what if our understanding of the pentameter depends inaccurately on the modernist’s simplified narrative of the nineteenth century? *The Rise and Fall of Meter* follows a neglected but major narrative about poetry, education, and national identity in a time when concepts of meter took on significant cultural weight: I begin just before the Reform Act of 1867, a key moment in Britain’s history that established English literary education in grammar (and eventually secondary) schools, and I end with the beginnings of New Criticism in 1930. I read metrical experiments from this formative period in terms of a series of revised ideas about poetic education: what poetry means privately and publicly in the national imagination, and how meter is at once intrinsic and extrinsic to a formal reading of a poem. The result is a conception of meter that stands for a host of evolving cultural concerns, including class mobility, imperialism, masculinity, labor, education, the role of classical and philological institutions, freedom, patriotism, national identification, and high art versus low art.

I want to reiterate that “meter” in the nineteenth century meant different things to different communities, as well as to different poets, and that a poet’s use of meter almost always implied a concept of the community and the nation. By stabilizing, attempting to define, or grappling with their use of meter, poets and prosodists were often attempting to define, transform, or intervene in an aspect of national culture. Throughout the book, the concept of “meter”

emerges as a way for poets to mediate between various publics, broadly conceived. For instance, a poet could use a new metrical system to teach an audience to read differently: Gerard Manley Hopkins's sprung rhythm hearkened back to what he understood to be an Anglo-Saxon strong-stress meter more accurately representative of the speech dialects he wanted to preserve—even as he was equally committed to preserving another history of English only visible in written text. Matthew Arnold's obsession with translations of Homer in dactylic hexameter attempted to create a "new national meter"¹³ that, as Yopie Prins has argued, could graft classical ideals onto English society through metrical translation. Poets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries understood the nuances and possibilities of English meter in relation to broader cultural forms.¹⁴ And yet, just as poets and prosodists were invested in these attempts to create new or adequate meters for England, so too were they aware of the increasing anxiety over meter's failure to provide an accessible form of national identification.

The proliferation of prosodic theories in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects a similar anxiety on the part of prosodists and pedagogues to establish a system of meter that could reflect the greatness of English poetry and adequately measure the English language. On the one hand, pedagogic necessity solidified one idea of meter as a stable, readable pattern that moves, sometimes unchangingly, through the periods of English literature; within this tradition we read formal ruptures as expressive and quibble over metrical feet. On the other hand, our fixed attention to this established, foot-based scansion has obscured a vast body of writing about other possibilities for English prosody concurrent with the institutionalization of English studies. We should not take meter's meaning for granted as merely the measure of the line; rather, it operates as a powerful discourse that interacts with and influences discourses about national culture. This book reveals a variety of interrelated metrical cultures at the turn of the twentieth century that have shaped our current understandings, and misunderstandings, about the aesthetics and politics of poetic form.

Metrical Communities

It is the premise of this book that the literary movements around the time of the First World War, along with the national, pedagogical, and political movements in the period leading up to it, essentially erased a vast history of debates about versification in English. These debates, for which evidence exists despite their long tenure in the shadows of history, are the grounds for my claim that poets did not always approach meter as a stable category. Poets and prosodists grappled with, argued over, and attempted to standardize, alter, or disrupt concepts of "English meter" throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the same era during which English meter became irrevocably as-

sociated with English national culture. The proliferation of metrical discourse from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century is vast and nuanced, and teasing out all of the various approaches to meter and their historical contingencies cannot be the main task of this project. Controversies about English metrical form involved many of the major poets of the period. These controversies (evident in reviews and in histories of the period) included but were not limited to the resurgent interest in Anglo-Saxon meters (the accentual experiments of Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and revivals of Scottish meters (the Habbie stanza of Allan Ramsay and Robert Burns); the importance and influence of elocutionary science (William Wordsworth); the rise of the Spasmodic poets (Alexander Smith and Sydney Dobell), the perceived threat to English poetry from the Spasmodics, and the consequent renationalization of the ballad meter (W. H. Aytoun); the increased interest in translating metrical forms from other languages (Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Bridges, Thomas Hardy, etc.); the use of syntax and dramatic monologue to modulate rhythm (Robert Browning); the translation of metrical forms from classical verses (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, A. Mary F. Robinson, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Algernon Swinburne, Matthew Arnold); arguments about the propriety of rhyme's role and the possibility of slant rhyme (Elizabeth Barrett Browning); arguments over the proper way to understand meters of the canonical poets (Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton); the revision and reclassification of the sonnet sequence (Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Meredith); the revival of Skeltonic meters and hybrid metrical forms (Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning); the attempt to replicate classical quantities in English verse which, in many ways, resulted in the great hexameter debate; the emergence of and confusion over Walt Whitman's free verse; the ballad revival; the idea of musical notation to scan poetry repopularized by Sidney Lanier; the proliferation of and attempts to standardize hymn meters; the scientific study of phonology and its effects on metrical theory; the list goes on and on. Treatises, handbooks, introductions to writing poetry, and linguistic accounts of meter increased so much by the end of the nineteenth century that T. S. Omond, George Saintsbury, and Jakob Schipper all published competing histories of metrical theory in an attempt to account for the surge in interest. This book is not an attempt to account for all of these prosodic discourses, but I am aware, as the poets and prosodists I discuss were aware, that this vast field is the background of the prosody wars I will describe.

This book charts three interconnected and concurrent narratives that run from roughly the end of the eighteenth century to just after the First World War. The first narrative arc takes up English pedagogy's dream of English literature as a civilizing force. English literature, and the rhythms and meters of English poetry in particular, could, according to this narrative, civilize the newly enfranchised English masses and elevate the vernacular, infusing it with the same status as the classical languages. This pedagogical narrative is inextricably

cably bound to the rise of the working classes and to the English empire, as is legible in Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Education", which directly concerned the teaching of English in India but was obliquely involved with the development of local educational authorities in Ireland. The idea that English prosody could civilize the masses, both at home and abroad, is articulated again and again, from rhetorical treatises and grammar books in the eighteenth century to Matthew Arnold's writing about education and civilization in school reports and essays to Henry Newbolt's work in the English Association as the editor of the 1921 report, *The Teaching of English in England*.

I am interested not only in the inherent patriotism of these educational discourses, but in the way the discourse moves from a dream of pedagogical practice to an increasing insistence on the naturalness of the English language and meter. Nineteenth-century scholars who were trained in the classics wanted to translate the prestige- and character-building discipline of the classical languages into English poetics. As the century progressed and as the realities of state-funded education set in, the discourse of character-building discipline shifted toward a naturalized concept of English rhythm: the belief that the mechanics of English prosody (as a poetic reading practice, and not, in the late nineteenth century, as pronunciation) was inherent and common to all English speakers, irrespective of what or how they had been taught. Increasingly, these corporeal and phenomenological aspects of English meter displaced the goal that the school system could instill a kind of English national character in the pupil. Rather, school texts and curricular reform toward the beginning of the twentieth century increasingly insisted that the teaching of English poetry should bring out characteristics the English pupil already possessed, inherently, in his or her body.¹⁵

The belief that English meter was somehow inherent in English bodies surfaced in the rhetoric of eighteenth-century prosodic treatises (as well as even earlier treatises). But this concept of English meter's innateness—along with an increasing investment in the innateness of English accent, in particular, as opposed to the measured time of a line in either syllables or quantity—was far more characteristic of the late nineteenth century, when standards for English pronunciation had been more widely adopted. This investment in the innate ability to feel English rhythm, furthermore, persists in scholarship today, continuing to disguise and distort the complexity of meter and rhythm. And despite their consolidation and wide dissemination in popular English grammar books toward the end of the nineteenth century, these ideas about the "nature" of English rhythm were widely contested, debated, and called into question outside of the state-funded classroom.

The second overarching narrative of this book more specifically concerns the discourses of "the learned," and both influences and complicates the idealization and naturalization of innate rhythm as "English" meter I outline above. Even before the late nineteenth century, when state educational institutions

were “expected to inculcate in the nation’s children a proper sense of patriotic moral responsibility,”¹⁶ I argue, the uneven and contested development of standards for English as a discipline created varied possibilities for collective English national identities with relation to English history, English language teaching, and histories of English literature. As we know from the work of scholars like Gillian Beer, Linda Dowling, and Lynda Mugglestone, the nineteenth-century rise of the discipline of phonology and the compilation of the *New English Dictionary* generated conflicting discourses about fixing standards to spoken English sounds (a debate I take up further in the following chapters).¹⁷ Eighteenth-century rhetoricians and elocutionists were already concerned with the standardization of the English language, and Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary* promoted and popularized the potentially civilizing powers of the English language a century before the *New English Dictionary*. The epigraph to the sixteenth English edition of Lindley Murray’s *English Grammar* (1809) is taken from Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric* and demonstrates the civilizing importance of ordered language: “they who are learning to compose and arrange their sentences with accuracy and order, are learning, at the same time, to think with accuracy and order.”¹⁸ This dream of an ordered language and an ordered mind expanded into a dream of ordered meters and an ordered nation in the nineteenth century, and it was this hope, I claim, that generated many of the disagreements and debates about the grammatical study of prosody, versification, and meter within nineteenth-century teaching texts and among prosodists and poets. That is, although one system for English meter was ideologically popularized in the early twentieth century, the anxiety about the “rise of English” and the rise of the English working classes who required civilizing both stirred up the need for a stable system for English meter and generated the educational conditions to impose it. If the terrain of English language study was already uncertain, it follows that the study of English prosody, particularly the rules for versification and meter, was on uncertain ground as well. Even the most educated critics are tempted to gloss over the difficulty of defining meter in order to present a unified English meter for the twentieth-century English student-subject.

Broadly speaking, my study’s second narrative traces the way that concepts of “native” and “foreign,” or “inside” and “outside,” are written and rewritten into the various attempts to establish English versification among the discourses of the learned. As Paul Fussell explains, “the association of verse structure with the political ideas of its makers”¹⁹ has been at work since the very first definitions of meter in English. For instance, Fussell explains that

[t]he idea of progress, a notion implicit in many of the most characteristic intellectual tendencies of the Renaissance, is intimately connected with the development and codification of what the Restoration hailed as the New Prosody. The outcome of the civil war had represented, to

most of the literate, a triumph of the forces of irregularity, and the wits who returned from France upon the restoration of Charles II were not slow to infuse poetic and prosodic theory with the political-social concept of progressive refinement and to exhibit a consciousness of a very recent victory over barbarity, disharmony, and regularity.²⁰

According to Fussell, the Augustan verse line measured strictly by quantity and not by accent rose to prevalence through the influence of both ancient and French prosody. Though I do not propose to agree or disagree with Fussell's theory of quantity and verse origins here, I am interested in his alignment of prosodic order with national order—that is, strict prosodic rules meant a smoothly functioning, civilized literary and national culture. Likewise, just as the eighteenth century turned away from these meters, he argues, “a literary generation terrified by the French Revolution and its repercussions on the British political scene instinctively saw in the rise of a more free and varied prosody a lurking and sinister Jacobism.”²¹ For Fussell, metrical innovations could and should be read as culturally contingent. But Fussell missteps when he claims “the study of versification gradually came to seem of less importance” at the end of the eighteenth century as it “took refuge in the university and learned society.” On the contrary, the idea that “prosody,” as both pronunciation of the language and as the study of versification, could stabilize and define English national identity so permeated nineteenth-century English culture that it became almost illegible in its ubiquity. The project of “naturalizing” certain concepts of English prosody succeeded so thoroughly by the early twentieth century that we, like Fussell, understand these issues as resolved before the rise of Modernism, rather than splitting, as in fact they did, into a series of related discourses, each of them dynamic and historically contingent.

For example, the discourses surrounding the development of linguistic science and the project of national definition through historical narrative both influence the way we now understand prosody as both pronunciation and versification. These more complicated discourses of the learned were in turn retranslated toward the end of the nineteenth century back into the school system, framed (somewhat inversely) as a battle between the foreignness of classical, or “other” meters and the indigenously Anglo-Saxon. Whereas at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon was associated with working-class regionalism, by the end of the century it stood for a somewhat sweepingly unified concept of English national character that permeated even the classically educated upper classes. The dream of the schools (the civilizing aspects of English education) and the discourses of the learned (meter and prosody as part of a larger historical narrative for England) combined by necessity after the passage of the late nineteenth-century Education Acts. Meant to civilize the working classes in much the same way that Macaulay wanted to

civilize Indian subjects earlier in the century, the “Poor Man’s classics” of English literature were called upon as forces for social good, and English meter played a surprisingly prominent role in the debates about the quality of English literary education as a replacement for the classics.

Indeed, the way English meter would be taught in schools or would be readable or understandable to a reading public informs this entire project, but especially the third narrative, which could be called “metrical communities.” The most popular form of English meter borrowed its terminology (iamb and trochees, spondees and dactyls) from the classical languages, so it had a cachet, elite knowledge—the terms for metrical feet were Greek but had become English via Latin; like Latin grammars, the prestige of classical education might have clung to these words. On the other hand, despite their familiar associations, these terms were also suspect—Why use foreign names for something English? Why scan verses according to the classical system at all? Many of the debates toward the end of the century were staged somehow as a battle between those who clung to the conventions of classical foot-scansion versus those who wanted to reform English meter for the new English students. Though some of this discourse never made it into the schools, many of the most revolutionary systems for English meter were proposed with school use in mind. Robert Bridges’s best-selling *Milton’s Prosody*, despite its highly technical nature, was in its original form an introductory preface to a school edition of *Paradise Lost*. Many of the tensions surrounding linguistic nationalism and the metrical history of England—where it should begin, whether it should be accentual (natural) or scanned according to a classical system and therefore by “feet” (learned, associated with the classical languages and a classical idea of England)—were thrown into stark relief with the rise of the English education system. What new English reading community would form in the place of the classically educated elite? I claim that poets, especially, believed that poems—and their forms—could not only speak to different communities, but could also help create, shape, and sustain them. But we, today, have lost the sense that the decision to define, promote, or defend a certain system of English meter in English literary study was, and is, akin to other forms of dogma. That is, we accept the naturalness of the iamb as a fact, whereas linguistic scholarship has never supported the pedagogical practice of taking the “iamb” (or “trochee,” etc.) for granted as accurate and stable in English. When we accept the “Englishness” of the iamb we forget to acknowledge or question the national and class ideologies that made it so.

Meter as Culture

The misreading of multiple metrical cultures as a homogenous, stable whole haunts the linguistic and literary critical climate to this day, creating an artificial division between aesthetics and politics that this book hopes to repair. The

book's argument is presented in three parts, made up of two chapters each. Each part includes a discussion of the poet and prosodist Robert Bridges, whose life (1844–1930) and work spans the time period I cover; he is in many ways the book's protagonist. In the first two chapters I describe the multiple, competing models of English meter in the nineteenth century. Chapter 1, "The History of Meter," provides the book's historical and methodological framework. Despite the modernist characterization of Victorian tradition as unified and steadfast, the various approaches to Victorian meter in English histories, grammars, and metrical studies reveal ideologically charged histories of English culture, often presented as Roman or Anglo-Saxon. Gerard Manley Hopkins was himself a mediator between various metrical discourses and theories. As a Catholic priest who taught the classics and an English poet who attempted to valorize the material history of the English language in his syntax and through his use of sprung rhythm, Hopkins is a test case for the personal and national ideologies of English meter. Chapter 2, "The Stigma of Meter," resituates Hopkins, whose name has become synonymous with metrical experiment, within the prosodic, philological, and theological debates of his time. Hopkins's commitment to defining accent and stress in English was a critical turning point in his thinking about his identity as a Catholic and as an Englishman; in 1887 he wrote to Robert Bridges and Coventry Patmore that "a great poem in English is like a great battle won for England."²² Rather than read Hopkins's experiments as anachronistic, I argue that his attempt to create a new English meter was a particularly Victorian engagement with poetic form, national identity, and the English language. Broader movements in comparative philology (particularly those associated with scholars such as Max Müller and Richard Chevenix Trench) influenced Hopkins's attempts to reconcile the history of English and the materiality of meter with his Catholic beliefs. Alongside Coventry Patmore's "Essay on English Metrical Law," Hopkins's attempt to find the "true" meaning of accent in English shows how metrical questions were a matter of both personal and national salvation. I thus use Hopkins to prove that even the most obscure and alienated-seeming poet must be read as part of the broader debate about what meter can do for the quickly changing nation. Hopkins's successes and failures, I conclude, anticipate later attempts to examine the constituent parts of meter and the English language.

Chapters 3 and 4 describe the institutionalization of "English meter" in both elite and mass cultural contexts, showing how and why one model for English meter emerged as representative for early twentieth-century national culture through the work of Hopkins, Bridges, George Saintsbury, Matthew Arnold, and Henry Newbolt. Many aspects of the popular concept of "meter" that emerged in the prewar period had little to do with "meter" (as the measure of a verse-line) at all. The patriotic representation of poetry in the state-funded schools promoted a distinction between "Verse" and "Poetry"

that mirrored the earlier distinction between English and classical poetry. Chapter 3, “The Institution of Meter,” begins with a discussion of metrical mastery, outlining the way that Bridges’s intervention in his best-selling treatise *Milton’s Prosody* expanded and popularized the theories that he and Hopkins discussed together. I show how Bridges and Saintsbury were jostling for position during the height of the prosody wars between 1900 and 1910 and how their successes and failures characterize, for better or for worse, much of our contemporary thinking about early twentieth-century prosody. Author of the three-volume *History of English Prosody* (1906–10), Saintsbury was a prime mover in both the foundation of English literary study and the institutionalization of the “foot” as the primary measure of English poetry. Infused with Edwardian-era military rhetoric, Saintsbury’s foot marched to a particularly English rhythm, which he traced through the ages with wit and martial vigor. Chapter 4, “The Discipline of Meter,” looks closely at the rise of state-funded English education to uncover the disciplinary role that poetry, in particular, played. Matthew Arnold and other educational theorists tried to replicate the character-building aspects of classical education in the state-funded classroom, employing pedagogical models that relied on rote memorization. I show how the naturalization of English “meter” was a crucial part of the English literary curriculum. I put “meter” in quotation marks, because the “meter” that emerges in the state-funded classroom has little to do with the prosody wars going on outside its walls. Arnold’s cultural metrics, in which poetry by Shakespeare, for instance, will subtly and intimately transform a student into a good citizen, is replaced by a patriotic pedagogy wherein verses written in rousing rhythms are taught as a naturally felt English “beat.” By 1907, half of the state-funded schools recited patriotic poems en masse for “Empire Day,” and the students were encouraged to feel the rhythms of verses in their bodies. I suggest that poet and educational theorist Henry Newbolt’s figure of the “drum” performed a naturalized rhythm that brought England together as a collective. The collective mass identification with (and proliferation of) patriotic verses created an even sharper divide between the high and low, elite and mass, private and public cultures of poetry in the early twentieth century.

This divide deepened during the soldier poetry boom of the First World War. The final two chapters, 5 and 6, show how the pressure to conform to one model of English meter and English national identification produced fractures in the poetic-national identity of soldier poets in particular and, more broadly, reactionary misunderstandings about English metrical cultures for poets associated with the modernist avant-garde. In this final section, I examine poems and prose by Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Robert Bridges, and Alice Meynell. Building on my argument in previous chapters that Victorian meters were dynamic

and not at all stable, I argue in chapter 5 that the modernist account of meter at the turn of the twentieth century was a selective history, conflating the militaristic meters that had taken hold of English national culture with “English meter” tout court. The thousands of soldiers and women poets on the home front who wrote poems during the First World War were engaged in a larger national metrical project, and yet the merit and meaning of these poems has been largely ignored. Chapter 5, “The Trauma of Meter,” shows how metrical poetry was used as an allegory for order, and examines in particular the metrical cultures of the Craiglockhart War Hospital. Reading early psychological and sociological theories by W.H.R. Rivers and Arthur Brock, I relate how treatments for shell shock included writing metrical poetry. Poems written in or inspired by time in the hospital, as well as the letters and articles published in the hospital magazine *The Hydra*, show how soldiers turned to writing as therapy. My readings illustrate how poets reconfigured metrical form as an artificial yet necessary order, one to which their identities as English soldiers and subjects were bound. Unlike the formal ruptures of experimental Modernism, these poems bitterly accept the arbitrary nature of all forms of order, be they mental, military, or metrical. I recontextualize First World War poets as the products of Edwardian and Georgian metrical culture and as sites for reinterpreting the nuances of meter’s narrative in the early twentieth century. The fact that these poems occupy a middle ground between the aesthetic and the political, bridging the divide that the school system helped foster between “poetry” and “verse,” complicates the stability of each category.

Chapter 6, “The Before- and After-life of Meter,” turns once more to Robert Bridges, whose death in 1930 marks the end of the book. He did not believe that English meter could be adequately represented by only one system, nor did he believe that the four systems he mastered exhausted its possibilities. He struggled with the pedagogic necessities of his time, founding the Society for Pure English, participating as poet laureate in the national metrical project during the First World War by writing for the war office, and editing the popular anthology of verse, *The Spirit of Man*. Bridges’s late career poem “Poor Poll” engages with the modernist polyglossia and the rise of free verse (particularly Eliot’s *The Waste Land*) by presenting an English prosody accessible to both high and popular audiences. It was Pound’s eventual dismissal of Bridges that guaranteed his obsolescence: I argue that Pound’s changing reactions to Robert Bridges over the course of Pound’s career betray an anxiety about meter’s role in poetic mastery, as well as an attempt to control the narrative of English meter. Along with the English men of letters that are prominent in my argument, women poets played an important role in shaping English metrical culture at the turn of the century and before. A thorough examination of women’s education, poetess poetry, and the gendering of classical meters and classicism must lie beyond the scope of this study. I nonetheless end with a reading of

Alice Meynell's poems, "The English Metres" and "The Laws of Verse," calling for a reexamination of metrical cultures that have been effaced from our literary history.

A Note on Historical Prosody

Since the late 1990s, scholars like Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow, Max Cavitch, Linda K. Hughes, and Anne Jamison, to name a few, have shown the ways that the poetics of Victorian poetry, in particular, were engaged with many of the same concerns as twentieth-century poetry: recuperations of history and abandonment of tradition, engagement with both elitist and populist forms of literature, and attempts to make sense of the chaos of modernity.²³ Part of the impetus behind this reevaluation and recontextualization of meter as a mediating cultural category and as a contested discourse is to think through the ways that "meter" becomes a nexus between two very similar sets of concerns for two very dissimilar sets of poets. To one set of poets, meter represents a standard that could and should be broken; to another, meter needs to become a standard, but isn't quite. What if meter "moved," not only with its pathos, but also changed as a dynamic cultural category and a generative discourse rather than a static, ahistorical form into which content might be molded, or emotion fixed and calmed?

In addition to these questions, I ask why and how our contemporary associations with the word "meter" became fixed in the nineteenth century. How did meter permeate discussions of religion, education, psychology, and disciplinary formation in general? What does "meter" mean if we refuse to take for granted that our traditional understanding of iambs and trochees is an artificial, cultural construct? Scholars have been reading metrical form as an allegory of order or, as Caroline Levine has demonstrated, as a collision of incompatible forms.²⁴ Form, then, becomes a kind of trope and this troping of form has become a staple of much neoformalist criticism, with exciting and interesting results that have taught us much about the various contexts for poetry in the nineteenth century. Though work on English meter by critics such as Derek Attridge (*The Rhythms of English Poetry*, 1982) and Timothy Steele (*Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt Against Meter*, 1990) has been invaluable, I am not attempting to replicate their work by putting forth a new theory of meter, nor am I attempting to explain why or how certain theories may have failed. Moving beyond Fussell's *Theory of Prosody in Eighteenth-Century England* (1954) or O. B. Hardison's *Prosody and Purpose in the English Renaissance* (1989), *The Rise and Fall of Meter* focuses on multiple theories of prosody and their purpose in late nineteenth-century England, asking why and how meter was on the minds of so many poets in a time of national insecurity, and how this insecurity and instability are inherent, now, in any definition or discussion of meter in English. Single author studies, like

Dennis Taylor's *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody* (1988), A. A. Markley's *Stateliest Measures: Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome* (2004),²⁵ as well as much work on Gerard Manley Hopkins, show how metrical theory may have been dynamic over time for a particular writer; however, few of these works are concerned with the way that meter, as a discourse, was deeply imbedded in cultural politics and the institutions of the state.

The politics of poetic form have been key to many reconsiderations of nineteenth-century poetry, including Isobel Armstrong's foundational *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, Politics* (1993); over the past decade critics such as Susan Wolfson, Herbert Tucker, Yopie Prins, Simon Jarvis, and Angela Leighton have each, in very different ways, called for a historical reexamination of nineteenth-century English meter. Recent books by Jason Rudy (*Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*, 2009) and Kirstie Blair (*Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, 2006) argue that rhythm was imagined as physically expressive for Victorians, and Catherine Robson's *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (2012) presents a cultural history of memorization in arguing that we have lost a physical connection to poetry as pedagogic methodologies have changed. To add to these fine contributions and to encourage a historically responsible reading of a crucial and yet overlooked period, this book makes several interlinking claims about the concept of meter, its rise and fall, and the way that meter as a cultural category is inextricably tied to ideas of national identity in England in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.