

**DISEÑO Y RITMO EN
THE WASTE LAND DE T. S. ELIOT**

**DESIGN AND RHYTHM IN
T. S. ELIOT'S THE WASTE LAND**

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Resumen: En este artículo se ofrece un detallado análisis estadístico de los versos de uno de los más prestigiosos poemas del siglo xx, *The Waste Land* de T. S. Eliot. Se sostiene que dicho poema habría de ser clasificado como de *verso libre acentual*, ya que los ritmos creados por el número y la disposición de los puntos de mayor intensidad, o *golpes acentuales*, son con mucho más regulares que los de la prosa inglesa. El modelo de dos longitudes de línea (*plantillas acentuales*) representa más del setenta por ciento de los versos del poema, que se divide en veinticuatro secuencias rítmicas marcadas por un *cambio de diseño*, cambio de plantilla y/o *reglas de correspondencia* (la amplitud de los intervalos entre los golpes acentuales).

Palabras clave: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Ezra Pound, ritmo, golpes acentuales e intervalos, polimetría, variedades de verso libre.

Abstract: This article offers a detailed statistical analysis of the lines in one of the twentieth century's most influential poems, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. It argues that the poem should be classified as *accentual free verse* because the rhythms created by

the number and disposition of stress peaks, or *beats*, in its lines are far more regular than those of English prose. The article shows that the poem is *polymetric*, like the English odes of earlier centuries, but Eliot's polymetry is compositional rather than systematic. Two line-lengths (accentual *templates*) account for more than 70 per cent of the lines in the poem, which divides into twenty-four rhythmic sequences marked by *design shift*, a change of template and/or *correspondence rules* (the size of the intervals between beats).

Key words: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Ezra Pound, accentual free verse, rhythm, beats and intervals, polymetry, varieties of free verse.

T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922) remains for today's critics 'one of the most important poems of the twentieth century' and 'a familiar touchstone of modern literature'¹. But it is debatable whether *The Waste Land* is a great poem: later in his life Eliot described it as little more than 'rhythmical grumbling'². Certainly Owen's *Futility*, which was contemporary with Eliot's first draft, expresses the same mood of despair more powerfully in a mere fourteen lines³. Moreover, *The Waste Land* is a poem that smells of two lamps: by the time his mentor Ezra Pound had finished work on it, Eliot's first draft had been reduced to half its length⁴. Whereas Owen's despair poem was an immediate response to real events, Eliot's was a laboured attempt at a modern Gray's *Elegy* to fit Pound's programme of poetic reform⁵. The importance of *The Waste Land* therefore rests not on its content, but on the influence its poetics has exerted on English poetry for the last ninety years; and the element of *The Waste Land*'s poetics that has proved most influential is its metre.

With this poem Pound and Eliot gave an impetus to experimental verse in English that eluded earlier innovators, such as

¹ BENNETT, Alan: 'Margate's Shrine to Eliot's Muse'. *The Guardian* (12 July 2009); and LOW, Valentine: 'Out of *The Waste Land*: Eliot Becomes Nation's Favourite Poet'. *The Times* (9 October 2009).

² See LEWIS, Pericles: *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. Cambridge: CUP, 2007, pp. 129-51.

³ OWEN, Wilfred (b. 1893, d. 1918); see *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis. London: Chatto & Windus, 1931, p. 58.

⁴ See ELIOT, T. S.: *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1971.

⁵ GRAY, Thomas (b. 1716, d. 1771); see *The Complete English Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. James Reeves. London: Heinemann 1973. For Eliot's poetic intention, see ALDINGTON, Richard: *Life for Life's Sake*. New York: Viking, 1941, p. 261.

Sidney, Blake, Whitman, and Hopkins⁶. The metre of *The Waste Land* is often described as *free verse*, but although Eliot cited the *vers libre* of Laforgue amongst his influences, he also described his lines as ‘stretching, contracting, and distorting’ regular English metres⁷. And, as I shall demonstrate, Eliot’s favourite line was clearly the metre of Webster’s dramas and of Bridges’s poem ‘London Snow’, which was published a full thirty years before *The Waste Land*⁸.

The aim of the present article is to identify and quantify the rhythms of Eliot’s ‘rhythmic grumbling’ and to show that his lines were far from free of metre. The article will begin by examining modern theories of poetic metre and rhythm and how they may be applied to Eliot’s poem and to free verse in general. It will then offer a line-by-line metrical and rhythmic analysis of Part I of Eliot’s poem, entitled ‘The Burial of the Dead’. The article will then provide a statistical synopsis of the entire poem before presenting its conclusions.

1. *The Principles of Free Verse*

Eliot’s is only one of many types of modern free verse, all of which are reactions against the regular verse that preceded them. And the free verse of every language is distinctive because it reacts to a variety of different regularities, some of them language specific⁹. But, however far authors of free-verse texts distance them from traditional regularities, they cannot escape the feature that defines verse: the line¹⁰. Lineation gives the language of

⁶ SIDNEY, Sir Philip (b. 1554, d. 1586); see *Silver Poets of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Gerald Bullett. London: Dent, 1947, pp. 171-278. BLAKE, William (b. 1757, d. 1827): see *William Blake: A Selection of Letters and Poems*, ed. J. Bronowski. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958. WHITMAN, Walt (b. 1819, d. 1892); see *A Choice of Whitman’s Verse*, ed. Donald Hall. London: Faber & Faber, 1968. HOPKINS, Gerard Manley (b. 1844, d. 1849): see *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Selection*, ed. W. H. Gardner. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953.

⁷ See ELIOT, T. S.: ‘Introduction’, *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems* (1928). London: Faber & Faber, 1951, p. 8.

⁸ See BRIDGES, Robert (b. 1844, d. 1930): *The Poetical Works*. London: OUP, 1936, pp. 265-66.

⁹ See ALONSO, Amado: *Poesía y estilo de Pablo Neruda* (1951). Barcelona: Edhasa, 1979, pp. 85-87.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the status of the line, see VALESIO, Paolo: ‘On Poetics and Metrical Theory’. *Poetics*, 1971, 2, pp. 36-70 (pp. 50-55). ALLEN, W. Sidney: *Accent*

verse an extra layer of structure beyond syntax, and good lines are created not by chance but by design. Good lines contain the best words in the best order and free-verse gives poets an extra challenge: they must decide whether their next line should have the same design as the last. In theory they could use a different design for each line in the poem, but in practice the best poets very rarely do so, as the analysis that follows will help illustrate.

The term *verse design* has a precise definition in modern linguistics: it refers to a blueprint or *template* in the poet's mind and the set of rules (*correspondence rules*) that the poet observes in matching the language of actual lines (*verse instances*) to that template¹¹. Many regular English poems are like free verse in employing more than one design; one form, known as the *ode* and very popular between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, almost always used multiple verse designs. This use of multiple designs, termed *polymetry*, required a series of *design shifts*, and one of the most famous English odes, Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* (1697), contains a long series of such shifts¹². Other odes have only a few shifts that occur in the same place in each strophe. The polymetry of free verse differs from that of English odes in that the poet makes no attempt to regularise the occurrence of design shift. Nevertheless, as the analysis below confirms, the distribution of designs throughout most free verse poems is far from random.

As its name suggests, regular verse is distinguishable from prose not only by its line structure, but also by its rhythm, and in the last fifty years there has been a great deal of research into the subject of linguistic rhythm¹³. Rhythm is created when an event

and Rhythm: Prosodic Features of Latin and Greek: A Study in Theory and Reconstruction. Cambridge: CUP, 1973, p. 113. FABB, Nigel: *Language and Literary Structure: The Linguistic Analysis of Form in Verse and Narrative*. Cambridge: CUP, 2002, pp. 48-49.

¹¹ The terms *verse design*, *verse instance*, and *delivery instance* (a particular performance of a line) are more precise than the traditional *metre* and *line*, which confuse three separate concepts. A concise analysis of the basic features of verse design can be found in HANSON, Kristin, & KIPARSKY, Paul: 'A Parametric Theory of Poetic Meter'. *Language*, 1996, 72, pp. 287-335.

¹² DRYDEN, John (b. 1631, d. 1700); see *The Poems of John Dryden, volume 4*, ed. Paul Hammond & D. Hopkins. London: Longman, 2005.

¹³ See, for example, HAYES, Bruce: *Metrical Stress Theory: Principles and Case Studies*.

is repeated in time and poets have always made use of several types of rhythm in their verse¹⁴. The most obvious poetic rhythm is the repetition of phonological events such as syllables, stresses, and changes in pitch, which are perceived by the human ear (*phonic rhythm*). This type of rhythm has been dominant in the history of versifying and has often been associated with another rhythm, also phonic, where the repeated event is a group of lines (*strophic rhythm*). A different type of rhythm occurs when the repeated event is an element of meaning (*semantic rhythm*). Yet another type of rhythm occurs when the repeated event is grammatical (*syntactic rhythm*). And finally one type of rhythm unites the phonic and semantic: it occurs when the repeated event is a particular word (*lexical rhythm*)¹⁵.

Some lines of verse combine phonic, semantic, syntactic, and lexical rhythms; Porter's lyric 'Let's Do It' contains many lines on the model of 'Birds do it; bees do it'¹⁶. This line contains internal repetitions of a semantic event (the creatures perform the same act), a syntactic event (the subject-verb-object structure), a lexical event (the words 'do it'), and two phonic events (an alliteration and the accentual pattern of three syllables of diminishing stress). It is the last of these types of rhythm that makes the line a perfect fit for the music, and which strikes the audience most forcibly when the words are recited aloud.

As long as verse was composed for public recitation, the phonic rhythms it contained were dominant, and it was these that poets regularised: verse designs were essentially phonic designs. As Jakobson pointed out in the early days of modern linguistic metrics, verse has traditionally been based on 'recurring figures of sound'¹⁷. But by the closing years of the nineteenth century poetry-reading habits had changed and most people encountered verse on the page. Poets could now design their lines

Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995.

¹⁴ See CHATMAN, Seymour: *A Theory of Meter*. The Hague: Mouton, p. 29.

¹⁵ See UTRERA TORREMOCHA, María Victoria: *Estructura y teoría del verso libre*. Madrid: CSIC, 2010, pp. 145-71, especially p. 167.

¹⁶ 'Let's Do It' was composed in 1928 for the musical *Paris*, by PORTER, Cole (b. 1891, d. 1964); see www.lyricsbox.com/cole-porter-lyrics.

¹⁷ See JAKOBSON, Roman: 'Linguistics and Poetics', in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. Boston: MIT Press, 1960, pp. 350-77 (pp. 364-65).

to be seen rather than heard, and for the first time verse that eschewed acoustic line markers, such as rhyme and regular metre, was truly viable¹⁸. The poets of most Western languages soon took advantage of this and verse for the eye became a feature of many twentieth century poems¹⁹. The change in reading habits also meant that non-phonetic rhythms could become the focus of verse design.

Later in his life Eliot seemed to recognise the importance of these other types of rhythm, but at the time he wrote *The Waste Land* his narrow view of rhythm led Pound to protest that Eliot could only envisage rhythms based upon accent²⁰. Today some critics argue that 'free verse proper' is based largely upon non-phonetic rhythms, but most of the examples they give contain clear and attractive phonic rhythms as well²¹. This may be the result of the poets' slipping subconsciously into regularities that are not the prime intention of their versifying. The analysis that follows will begin by identifying the phonic rhythms in *The Waste Land*, and then proceed to examine some obvious examples of its non-phonetic rhythms, before comparing the importance of the two to Eliot's verse craft.

2. Analytical Methods

Eliot named the Jacobean dramatist John Webster as a major influence on his 'distorting' of regular metres, but Webster's innovation was only to take one of Shakespeare's dramatic practices to new lengths²². Both poets modified the recently rediscovered iambic pentameter in order to make the lines of their

¹⁸ See ATTRIDGE, Derek: 'Poetry Unbound: Observations on "Free Verse"'. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1987, 73, pp. 353-74.

¹⁹ For visually patterned poems, see THOMAS, Dylan (b. 1914, d. 1953): 'Vision and Prayer', in *Collected Poems 1934-52*. London: J. M. Dent, 1971, pp. 129-40. For poems with lines of so many syllables that they can be counted only visually, see MOORE, Marianne (b. 1887, d. 1972): *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*. New York: Macmillan, 1967.

²⁰ See POUND, Ezra: 'T. S. Eliot', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1971, p. 421. For a discussion of Eliot's change of stance, see UTRERA TORREMOCHA, María Victoria: *Estructura y teoría del verso libre*, cit., pp. 191-92.

²¹ See HOBBSBAUM, Philip: *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form*. London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 111-20.

²² See DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History of English Metre*. Oxford: Legenda, 2008, pp. 142-46.

plays sound more like normal speech. They did this by varying the size of the intervals between stress peaks to make their lines less iambic. Such intervals contain between zero and three syllables in normal speech, but in iambic verse they are usually restricted to a single syllable. In Webster's dramas this restriction is waived so often that many passages of his verse are wildly anisyllabic²³. Versification is above all else something that poets do, as the words *poet* and *maker* remind us, and it is important to link how we scan, or *deconstruct*, Webster's (and Eliot's) lines with how the poet constructed them.

It took English poets about 500 years to learn how to count syllables, and they eventually did this in a way quite unlike that of the French poets from whom they borrowed the practice²⁴. Competent English poets can construct ten-syllable lines instantly and intuitively by construing them as five pairs of syllables, and English-speaking audiences have learned to perceive them in the same way²⁵. But until this technique was mastered English poets counted peaks of stress in their lines, from the Old English poets to Langland, and from Lydgate to Skelton²⁶.

²³ WEBSTER, John (b. ?1578, d. ?1632); see *The Complete Works of John Webster*, ed. F. L. Lucas, 4 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1927.

²⁴ For a description of how syllable timing helps French poets to count intuitively, see CORNULIER, Benoît de: *Art poétique: notions et problèmes de métrique*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1995, pp 111-15. For the case that stress timing foiled English poets' attempts to count syllables in the French way, see DUFFELL, Martin J.: 'Some Phonological Features of Insular French: A Reconstruction', in *Studies on Ibero-Romance Linguistics Dedicated to Ralph Penny*, ed. Roger Wright & Peter Ricketts. Newark: St Juan de la Cuesta, 2005, pp. 103-25. For an account of how Chaucer and Gower first introduced isosyllabism in England, see DUFFELL, Martin J., & BILLY, Dominique: 'From Decasyllable to Pentameter: John Gower's Contribution to English Metrics'. *Chaucer Review*, 2003-04, 38, pp. 383-401. For the case that Middle English poets counted syllables, but manuscript copyists' errors hid this from their audiences, see DUGGAN, Hoyt: 'Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors: Meditations on Textual Criticism and Metrics', in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. C. B. McCully & J. J. Anderson. Cambridge: CUP, 1996, pp. 219-37.

²⁵ See DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, *cit.*, pp 81-92. For a brief account of how to pair syllables in English, see FRY, Stephen: *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within*. London: Hutchinson, 2005, pp. 10-11. For a sophisticated metrical analysis based on paired syllables, see WRIGHT, George T.: *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988.

²⁶ LANGLAND, William (b. ?1330, d. ?1386); see *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Ploughman*, ed. W.W. Skeat. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869. LYDGATE,

They learned to do this from childhood: English nursery rhymes, proverbs, and folk ballads work this way. And in every century some English poets have composed some poems where the greatest regularity is in the number of stress peaks²⁷. This raises the question of how best to scan such verse, and modern linguistics offers two major alternatives: the *generative* and the *rhythmic* methods; and it is worth weighing their respective merits for the present article's task.

Generative theory has developed largely from a series of studies of an isosyllabic metre imported into English from the European mainland in the late Middle Ages: the iambic pentameter of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton²⁸. Several writers have attempted to extend the generative hypotheses to a broader range of metres; successfully in the case of the Italian *endecasillabo* and *sprung rhythm*, unsuccessfully in the case of Old English epic metre, and modern English triple-time metres (those where two syllables regularly divide peaks in stress)²⁹. Moreover, different generative metrists offer conflicting accounts of English metres that are systematically anisosyllabic; and most generative metrists insist that free verse is not metrical and ignore the principles that govern it³⁰. All these factors indicate that

John (b. ?1370, d. 1449); see *John Lydgate: Poems*, ed. John Norton Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966. SKELTON, John (b. ?1460, d. 1529); see *The Complete Works of John Skelton, Laureate*, ed. Philip Henderson. London: Dent, 1931.

²⁷ See DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, *cit.*, pp. 56-71.

²⁸ See HALLE, Morris, & KEYSER, Samuel J.: 'Chaucer and the Study of Prosody'. *College English*, 1966-67, 28, pp. 187-219. KIPARSKY, Paul: 'The Linguistic Structure of English Verse'. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 1977, 8, pp. 189-247. HANSON, Kristin: 'Prosodic Constituents of Poetic Meter', in *Proceedings of the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 13. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1995, pp. 62-77.

²⁹ For the Italian *endecasillabo*, see HANSON, Kristin: 'From Dante to Pinsky: A Theoretical Perspective on the English Iambic Pentameter'. *Rivista Linguistica*, 1996, 9, pp. 53-97. For *sprung rhythm*, see KIPARSKY, Paul: 'Sprung Rhythm', in *Poetics and Phonology, I: Rhythm and Meter*, ed. Paul Kiparsky & Gilbert Youmans. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1989, pp. 305-40. For Old English epic metre, see FABB, Nigel, & HALLE, Morris: *Meter in Poetry: A New Theory*. Cambridge: CUP, 2008, pp. 263-67. For triple-time verse, see HANSON, Kristin, & KIPARSKY, Paul: 'A Parametric Theory of Poetic Meter', *cit.*, p. 300, n. 21.

³⁰ For disagreements between generative metrists, see n54 below. For the dismissal of free verse, see FABB, Nigel, & HALLE, Morris: *Meter in Poetry*, *cit.*, p. 3. For a critique of Fabb & Halle's position, see DUFFELL, Martin J.: 'The Principles of Free Verse in English'. *Rhythmica*, 2011, 8, pp. 7-35.

generative theory is not really suitable for this article's purpose.

Another type of modern linguistic metrics, however, is ideally suited to the study of native anisosyllabic English metres. Derek Attridge's rhythmic theory of English metre (1982) argued that the rhythms of English poetry are based on a series of alternating *beats* and *offbeats* (rather like the *downbeats* and *upbeats* of music)³¹. Beats correspond to peaks of stress in verse instances and offbeats to the syllables between peaks. At that time he argued that offbeats vary in size between zero and two syllables, and he described them as *single* (one syllable), *double* (two), or *implied* (zero). He further postulated that isosyllabic English metres (unlike native metres) achieve their regularity by balancing every double offbeat in the line by an implied offbeat. This last aspect of Attridge's theory raises some doubts: offbeat-size balancing sounds a cumbersome process compared with counting pairs of syllables. But, since Webster's and Eliot's lines are anisosyllabic, these doubts do not affect the appropriateness of rhythmic theory to the present article.

Attridge's theory was paralleled and, indeed, foreshadowed in the work of a number of distinguished modern Russian metrists³². They used terms derived from Classical prosody, *ictic syllables* and *inter-ictic intervals*, for Attridge's beats and offbeats, and very conveniently coined concise terms for the types of metre that allow variation in interval/offbeat size. Those terms may be Anglicised into *dolniks* (metres where the intervals vary from zero to two syllables) and *taktoviks* (metres allowing larger intervals)³³. Since Attridge has adopted the term *dolnik* in his

³¹ See ATTRIDGE, Derek: *The Rhythms of English Poetry*. London: Longman, 1982. This theory is updated and illustrated in CARPER, Thomas, & ATTRIDGE, Derek: *Meter and Meaning: An Introduction to the Rhythms of English Poetry*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

³² One of the earliest and most important Russian works on comparative metrics to have been translated into English is TOMASHEVSKY, Boris V.: *O stikhe*. Leningrad: Priboy, 1929.

³³ For the *dol'nik* see ZHIRMUNSKY, Viktor M.: *Introduction to Metrics: The Theory of Verse*, tr. C. F. Brown, ed. Edward Stankiewicz & W. N. Vickery. The Hague: Mouton, 1966, pp. 195-208. TARLINSKAJA, Marina: *English Verse: Theory and History*. The Hague: Mouton, 1976, p. 92. For the *taktovik* see GASPAROV, Mijail L.: *A History of European Versification*, tr. G. S. Smith & Marina Tarlinskaja, ed. G. S. Smith & L. Holford-Strevens. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 275.

most recent work, I shall do so likewise³⁴. In this article I shall refer to the stress peaks and troughs of free verse by the hybrid terms *beats* and *intervals*, and I shall describe both verse designs and verse instances as *three-beat dolniks (D3)*, *four-beat (D4)*, *five-beat (D5)*, etc.

Attridge has so far not extended his theory to free verse or adopted the Russian term for lines of free verse: *free dolniks*. Several researchers, however, have offered successful analyses of free verse in Russian, with the aid of the statistical techniques typical of the best Russian metrics. Because free verse is polymetric, such analysis must contain an audit of all the verse designs employed; and because the rhythms of free verse are intermediate between those of regular verse and prose it must use the rhythms of prose as a statistical control (a technique known as *probability modelling*)³⁵. In this article I shall attempt to make use of the Russian metrists' techniques and add a number of simplifications and refinements of my own, particularly in the field of notation. But first I must address the question of how to subdivide Eliot's text for the purpose of metrical analysis.

3. Poem Design and Subdivision of the Text

As a result of Eliot and Pound's collaborative editing, *The Waste Land's* overall metrical structure (its *poem design* in the terms of modern metrics) post-dates its many verse designs. Some poem designs have always been more complex than others (compare Tennyson's poems *Maud*, with its varied strophes, and *In Memoriam*, with its consistent quatrains). Free verse, however, offered Eliot the opportunity to employ unlimited shifts of verse design and arrange unspecified groups of lines in

³⁴ See ATTRIDGE, Derek: 'The Case of the English Dolnik, or, How Not to Introduce Prosody'. *Poetics Today*, to appear. Note that Tarlinksaja abandoned the term *dolnik* for James O. Bailey's *strict stress-meter* in her later work; this last term is confusing because *strong-stress metre* has long been used to describe a specific Middle English metre; see KENNEDY, Ruth: 'Strong-stress Metre in Fourteen-Line Stanza Forms'. *Parergon*, 2000, 18.1, pp. 127-56.

³⁵ For an example of free verse analysis, see SMITH, G. S.: 'Verse Form and Function in Marina Tsvetaeva's *Tsar-devitsa*'. *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 2000, NS 33, pp. 108-33. For probability modelling, see GASPAROV, Mijail L.: 'A Probability Model of Verse (English, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese)', tr. Marina Tarlinkaja. *Style*, 1987, 21, pp. 322-58.

numerous ways. It is therefore not surprising that *The Waste Land* has a very complex poem design, a metrical shape not to be confused with the poem's subdivision into five parts, which is largely semantic. In the edition of *The Waste Land* that I have chosen for analysis (Eliot 1974) the texts of four of the poems' parts are divided typographically: Parts I and II into four sections, Part III into thirteen, and Part V into eight³⁶.

For the purpose of my analysis, however, I have divided the poem into twenty-four *metrical sequences*, each defined by a change in either the template (the dominant number of beats per line) or the rhythm (the size of the intervals between beats). The lines forming each sequence are given in Table III below, together with their defining metrical features. Some of these sequences coincide with a typographical section, but some sections contain several sequences, and sometimes a sequence doesn't end with a typographical boundary. To avoid confusion I shall denote typographical sections by arabic numerals and metrical sequences by letters of the alphabet.

4. Notation and Scansion

In my examples I shall underline all the syllables in the line that correspond to beats, and I shall give the *strong syllables* of polysyllabic words (those with primary stress) in bold typeface so as to emphasise their priority in becoming beats. Monosyllables may also be strongly stressed (because of their importance to a phrase), but these will only be underlined. Whenever two strongly stressed syllables occur consecutively either they both become beats (with a zero interval between them, marked in my scansion by a dash), or the stress of one is subordinated to that of the other (indicated by my underlining). I shall also map the rhythmic profile of each line digitally, using the arabic numerals *I* (upper case) and *o* (lower), and marking the final peak in each line with its ordinal number³⁷. To indicate what Attridge terms

³⁶ ELIOT, T. S.: *Collected Poems*. London: Faber & Faber, 1974, pp. 63-79.

³⁷ Binary digits have the advantage of not being language-specific; they were first employed in the earliest Arabic work on metrics (*ʿArūd*), which dates from the second half of the eighth century AD; see GIBB, Hamilton, et al.: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. I. Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 667-77.

ictus promotion (an atonic monosyllable or secondary stress becoming a beat) I shall use a 0 (upper case). This notation avoids the subscript or superscript symbols and pyramids that plague most types of scansion.

I demonstrate my method here on the two lines that open Thomas Gray's *Elegy in a Country Chuchyard*:

The **plough**man **hom**ewards **plods** his **wear**y way 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 5
 And **leaves** the **world** to **dark**ness **and** to **me**. 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 5

The strong syllables of polysyllabic words provide four of the beats in these lines, stressed monosyllables provide five, and the atonic monosyllable *and*, which lies between two other unstressed syllables, provides the tenth. A single syllable precedes each beat: the line initial ones are termed single-syllable *anacruses*; the remainder are single-syllable intervals.

5. Scansion and Analysis of Part I

'The Burial of the Dead' is divided typographically into four sections; the theme of the first section is the passage of time (ll. 1 – 18); the second begins by describing a bleak landscape (ll. 19 – 30), and closes by trying unsuccessfully to capture the essence of human love (ll. 31 – 42); the third deals with the problem of free will (ll. 43 – 59); and the fourth with the inevitability of death (ll. 60 – 76). The first section of Part I (ll. 1 – 18) has a dominant design of four beats (*D4*): twelve of its eighteen lines (67 per cent) correspond to this design. The remainder are positioned so as to open, close, or relieve sequences of lines with the dominant design. Although a single template dominates the whole of the first section, changes in rhythm divide the text into three distinct metrical sequences.

Sequence A (ll. 1 – 7)

April is the **crue**llest **month**, **bre**eding 1 0 0 0 1 0 1 – 5 0
Lilacs out of the **dead** **land**, **mi**xing 1 0 0 0 0 1 – 1 – 5 0

Memory and **Des**ire, **stir**ring 1 0 0 0 1 – 4 0
Dull roots with **spring** **rain**. 1 – 1 0 1 – 4
Winter kept us **warm**, **cover**ing 1 0 1 0 1 – 4 0

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

1 0 0 1 0 1 – 4 0
0 1 0 1 0 1 – 4 0

Analysis

Ezra Pound encouraged Eliot to rebel against the orthodoxy of the strict (isosyllabic) English iambic pentameter and he urged Eliot to cut many of the first draft's regular lines. The first line of *The Waste Land* as it was published in 1922 stood originally at the top of page 2 of Eliot's first draft; this change meant that the poem opened in a distinctive metre of Eliot's own invention. But it was typical of Eliot's mode of innovation that he built his new line from very ancient ones. Although the opening line refers to Chaucer's favourite April, its metre is derived from that of the native English ballad, and in particular the famous ballad opening: '**Summer is a-coming in // Lou-de sing cuckoo**'³⁸. Eliot takes the first (four-beat) dolnik of this ballad and adds a trochee, giving a rhythmic profile *1 0 0 0 1 0 1 – 5 0* with a shocking clash of stresses. He then employs the same design for line 2 of the poem and introduces the *weak* (post-tonic) rhyme in '-ing', which runs through the opening sequence and finally becomes full rhyme in 'breeding / feeding'.

For line 3 Eliot takes the three-beat dolnik of the old ballad's even-numbered lines and adds the same stress-clash and trochee: *1 0 0 0 1 – 4 0*. And for line 4 he uses another four-beat line, with stress clashes but no final, rhyming trochee, before reprising the design of line 3 in lines 5, 6, and 7. The last line's final trochee lacks the weak rhyme, signalling the close of the sequence in the same way that Old English epic poets signalled their lines' ends by refraining from alliteration³⁹. The opening sequence, with its two *D5* and five *D4* lines is crafted with consummate skill and introduces the two rhythmic structures (four- and five-beat) that have dominated English verse, and which will dominate Eliot's poem⁴⁰.

³⁸ This poem is the first in *The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1950*, ed. Helen Gardner. Oxford: OUP, 1972.

³⁹ See WRENN, C. L., & BOLTON, W. F: 'Introduction', *Beowulf*. Exeter: The University, 1988, p. 55.

⁴⁰ See DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, *cit.*, pp. 51-175.

Sequence B (ll. 8 – 11)

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
1 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 6

With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
o o 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 5
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten, *o o o 0 1 0 1 0 0 4 0 0*
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour. *o 1 - 1 0 0 1 0 0 4*

Analysis

Eliot, like summer, surprises us here with a radical design shift. He does so with a *D6* line that includes four alliterations, followed by a *D5* and two *D4* lines. This quatrain is predominantly in triple time, contrasting with the duple-time (mostly trochaic) opening. In these four lines only six of the fifteen intervals contain a single syllable, and while there is one single-syllable anacrusis there is no feminine ending.

Sequence C (ll. 12 – 18)

Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
o o 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 - 6

And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's
o 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 4 0
 My cousin's, he took me out on a sled, *o 1 0 0 1 0 0 0 4*
 And I was frightened. He said, Marie, *o 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 4*
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went. *o 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 4*
 In the mountains, there you feel free. *o o 1 0 1 0 1 - 4*

I read, much of the night, and go south in winter.
o 1 - 1 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 5 0

Analysis

Eliot opens this section with a *D6* (in German) and ends it with a *D5*; these two lines enclose five *D4*s. This sequence contains a more even mixture of single, double, and zero intervals. In this sequence Eliot introduces the first of the many 'voices' that flit in and out of the poem, that of a Central European member of the leisure class who clearly finds her life boring. Among the non-phonetic rhythms of the first section of Part I is the semantic

rhythm of the seasons, which appears in both sequences A and C, and the syntactic rhythm of the final participles in sequence A. There is also a subtle phonic rhythm in sequence C, where the reducing line length mimics the semantic rhythm of the descending sled: the five *D5*s have 12, 10, 9, 9, and 8 syllables.

The second section of Part I (ll. 19 – 42) contains two separate themes: the bleak landscape and the refuges from it offered by art and love. Each of these themes is matched by a phonic sequence.

Sequence D (ll. 19 – 30)

What are the roots that clutch, what **branches** grow 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 5
 Out of this **stony** **rubbish**? Son of man, 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 5
 You **cannot** say, or guess, for you know **only** 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 5 0

A heap of **broken** **images**, where the sun beats, 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 1 – 6
 And the dead tree gives no **shelter**, the **cricket** no **relief**, 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 6
 And the dry stone no sound of **water**. **Only** 0 0 1 – 1 0 1 0 1 0 5 0
 There is **shadow** **under** this red rock, 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 4
 (Come in under the **shadow** of this red rock), 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 4
 And I will show you **something** **different** from **either** 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 5 0

Your **shadow** at morning **striding** **behind** you 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 4 0
 Or your **shadow** at evening **rising** to meet you; 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 4 0
 I will show you fear in a **handful** of **dust**. 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 4

Analysis

Three five-beat lines (*D5*s) open this sequence and three four-beat lines close it; between them a six-beat couplet is followed by a quatrain with the pattern *D5 – D4 – – D4 – D5*. The *D5*s in this sequence show a predominance of duple time, like Shakespeare's dramatic pentameters, the *D4*s a predominance of triple time, like many traditional ballads. The sequence is thus a blend of the two most important metres in the language. In my tables I shall label it polymetric, but it actually has two dominant designs, evenly balanced. Note the lexical rhythm in this sequence,

where the words *under*, *shadow*, *this*, *red*, and *rock* are repeated in consecutive lines.

Sequence E (ll. 31 – 42)

<i>Frisch weht der Wind</i>	<i>o 1 o 2</i>
<i>Der Heimat zu</i>	<i>o 1 o 2</i>
<i>Mein Irisch Kind</i>	<i>o 1 o 2</i>
<i>Wo weilest du?</i>	<i>o 1 o 2</i>

'You gave me H ycinths f irst a year ago;	<i>o 1 o 1 o o 1 o 1 o 5</i>
They called me the h ycin th girl.'	<i>o 1 o o 1 o 3</i>

– Yet w hen we came b ack, l ate, from the h ycin th g arden,	<i>o 1 o o 1 – 1 o o 1 o o 5 o</i>
---	------------------------------------

Your a rms full, and your h air w et, I c ould not	<i>o 1 – 1 o o 1 – 1 o 5 o</i>
S peak, and my e yes f ailed, I was n either	<i>1 o o 1 – 1 o o 4 o</i>
L iving nor d ead and I knew n othing,	<i>1 o o 1 o 1 o 4 o</i>
L ooking i n into the h ear t of l ight, the s ilence	<i>1 o 1 o o 1 o 1 o 5 o</i>

<i>Oed' und leer das Meer</i>	<i>1 o 1 o 3</i>
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Analysis

The semantic burden of this sequence is that love is either opera or aphasia (which for Eliot at that time it probably was) and the voices that Eliot introduces into it are those of lovers. The sequence opens, however, with a quatrain of *D2s* from Wagner's lyrics for *Tristan und Isolde*. Eliot imports many famous lines from literature into this poem, often in other languages⁴¹. This device of quoting fragments of much-loved literary texts helps convey the sense of cultural collapse that many in Eliot's generation felt. Pound shared this feeling and elaborated it in his poem 'E.P. Ode pour l'élection de son sepulcre' (1920)⁴².

Sequence E of Eliot's poem lacks a dominant design and is truly polymetric: it contains six design shifts in twelve lines (of which four are *D2s*, two *D3s*, two *D4s*, and four *D5s*).

The third section of Part I (ll. 43 – 59) probes the question of

⁴¹ The sources of Eliot's borrowed lines are given in the notes appended to the poem; I shall comment only upon their scansion.

⁴² See POUND, Ezra: *Selected Poems*, ed. T. S. Eliot. London: Faber & Faber, 1954, p. 173-76.

free will and predestination with the aid of the Tarot pack. The narrator's card returns in Part IV of the poem.

Sequence F (ll. 43 – 59)

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante, 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 5
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless 1 0 1 - 1 - 1 0 0 5
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe, 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 5 0
 With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she, 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 - 1 0 5
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor, 0 1 - 1 0 1 0 1 0 5 0
 (Those are the pearls that were his eyes. Look!) 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 - 5

Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 0 5 0
 The lady of situations. 0 1 0 0 1 0 3 0

Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel, 1 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 5
 And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card, 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 - 5
 Which is blank, is something he carries on his back, 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 5

Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 5
 The Hanged Man. Fear death by water. 0 1 - 1 - 1 - 1 0 5 0
 I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring. 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 5
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs Equitone, 1 0 1 0 0 1 - 1 0 5 0 0
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself: 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 5
One must be so careful these days. 1 - 1 0 1 - 1 0 5 0

Analysis

The voice introduced in this section is that of a clairvoyante whose colloquial delivery is captured in the lines' rhythms. In sequence G Eliot returns to his favourite *D5* design for sixteen of the seventeen lines; the only design shift (to a *D3*) occurs after the seventh *D5*. Eliot carefully excludes strict iambic pentameters from the *D5* lines in this sequence, going well beyond his model Webster in this. There are three lines of special metrical interest in this subsection:

'Here is Belladonna, the lady of the rocks' (l. 49) has a trisyllabic final interval, unless 'lady-of' is made disyllabic by synaephepa.

'The Hanged Man. Fear Death by water' (l. 55) has three consecutive zero intervals.

'One must be so careful these days' (l. 59) invites alternative

scansions, but the one given here has the colloquial note that the platitude suggests.

There are also alliterative rhythms in this section: on 'wisest woman // wicked pack' (ll. 45-46), 'forbidden...find' (l. 54), and 'round in a ring' (l. 56).

The final section of Part I (ll. 60–76) consists of a single rhythmic sequence broken only by the entry of new character. It is the most derivative section of the poem: many of its lines are translations of, or references to, famous texts in English and other languages. The section describes the London in which Eliot worked in morbid terms and is full of images of death.

Sequence G (ll. 60–76)

Unreal City, o l o 2 o

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, l o o l - l o o l o 5
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, o l o l o l o l o 5 o
 I had not thought death had undone so many. o l o l - l o o l o 5 o
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, l - l o o l o 0 o 5
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. o l o l o l o l o 5
 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street, o o o l o 0 o l o 5
 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours o l o l o l o l o 5
 With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine. o o l - l o o l o l o 5
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!
l o o l o l o l o l o 6 o
 'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae! l o o 0 o 0 o l o 5 o
 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden o l o l o l o 0 o 5 o
 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? l o o l o l o o l o 5
 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? o l o l o l o l o 5
 'O keep the dog far hence, that's friend to men, o l o l o l o l o 5
 'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again! o 0 o l o l o 0 o 5
 'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable - mon frère.'
l o o l - o l o o l - o o 5 -

Analysis

This rhythmic sequence is pure Jacobean drama, even though it opens with a translation of a line by Baudelaire. Besides the opening *D2* the only other design shift in the sequence is the *D6* in line 69, which seems to be a deliberate attempt by Eliot to add variety and break up what would otherwise have been an

extremely regular five-beat passage. In contrast to the *D5s* of sequence F, nine of the *D5s* in sequence G are strict iambic pentameters (60 per cent), a proportion found in many passages of *The Duchess of Malfi*. In sequence G Eliot uses one full rhyme ('street / feet') and one full repetition ('many' x 2); this occasional use of rhyme is also a feature of the dramatic pentameter. Three of the irregular *D5s* are of special metrical interest:

'With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine' (l. 68) has an effective mimesis in the stress clash providing its first two beats', and after the early disyllabic interval the line closes with the iambic regularity of a clock.

'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae' (l. 70) contains ictus promotions as its second and third beats; non-initial consecutive promotions are rare in strict iambic pentameters⁴³.

'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable – mon frère' (l. 76) contains another quotation from Baudelaire, this time in the original French. The *alexandrin*, of course, does not derive its rhythm from a series of beats provided mostly by word stress, but from the temporal equivalents of its two hemistichs: a phrasal stress closes each colon of six syllables⁴⁴. Eliot obtains his five beats by prefixing the English word 'You' to Baudelaire's line and by making beats of the strong syllables of 'hypocrite' and 'semblable'⁴⁵. Many Americans mistakenly reintroduce the lost word stress into modern French in this way. This line is one of a number in the poem where Eliot transforms one metre into another by relatively small changes. Here Baudelaire's twelve syllables (I have marked *e-muets* with hyphens) become five English beats⁴⁶.

⁴³ See DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, *cit.*, pp. 170 & 220.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁵ Only phrase-final syllables are stressed in modern French; see EWERT, Alfred: *The French Language*. London: Faber & Faber, 1943, p. 47. By the end of the nineteenth century some French poets were beginning to introduce a third phrasal stress into their *alexandrins*, giving them a tripartite structure; see DOMINICY Marc: 'On the Metre and Prosody of French 12-Syllable Verse', in *Foundations of Verse*, ed. M. Grimaux, special issue of *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 10, 1992, pp. 157-81 (p. 192). This line of Baudelaire's has a third phrasal stress on 'semblable'.

⁴⁶ Although final schwa (*e-muet*) is no longer pronounced in modern French it is counted as a syllable in French metrics; professional performers of lines mark *e-muets* with a sufficient pause to maintain the temporal regularity of the line-final stresses; see CORNULIER, Benoît de: *Art poétique*, *cit.*, p. 115.

6. Metrical Analysis of the Whole Poem

The metrical features of Eliot's poem analysed in detail above can be quantified for Part I and for the whole poem. An audit of the templates (based on the number of beats) found in each of the typographical sections of Part I appears in Table I, below; figures for Parts II-V and the whole poem, appear in Table II for comparison. In contrast, the audit of the rhythms of the poem (based on the size of intervals) that appears in Table III gives figures by metrical sequences. Table III is the direct source of most of my conclusions.

TABLE I: SUMMARY OF TEMPLATES in Part I 'The Burial of the Dead'

Section	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	TOTAL
1	0	0	12	4	2	18
2	4	2	7	9	2	24
3	0	1	0	16	0	17
4	1	0	0	15	1	17
TOTAL	5	3	19	44	5	76
(%)	(7)	(4)	(25)	(58)	(7)	(100)

*The D5 total includes 13 strict iambic pentameters (30%).

TABLE II: SUMMARY OF TEMPLATES in *The Waste Land*

Part	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7/8	TOTAL
I	0	5	3	19	44	5	0	76
II	4	3	8	15	57	7	2	96
III	5	26	11	14	77	6	0	139
IV	0	3	1	1	4	1	0	10
V	6	12	7	35	45	5	1	111
TOTAL	15	49	30	84	227*	24	3	432
(%)	(3)	(11)	(7)	(19)	(53)	(6)	(1)	(100)

* The D5 total includes 100 strict iambic pentameters (44%).

These tables show that metrically Part I is fairly typical of the whole poem; the chief differences between Part I and the poem as a whole are the result of Part III having far more D2s than any other part, and a much higher proportion (64%) of iambic pentameters among its D5s.

TABLE III: SUMMARY OF TEMPLATES AND RHYTHMS in
The Waste Land

Part	Seq.	(Lines)	Number	Length	Dominant* % Intervals			Favoured
					0	1	2	
I	A	(1–7)	7	D4	39	52	9	Clash
	B	(8–11)	4	D4	7	40	53	Triple
	C	(12–18)	7	D4	13	50	33	None
	D	(19–30)	12	P	4	67	29	None
	E	(31–42)	12	P	13	53	33	None
	F	(43–59)	17	D5	19	58	22	Clash
	G	(60–76)	17	D5	6	77	17	Duple
II	H	(77–114)	38	D5	3	83	14	Duple
	I	(115–38)	24	P	11	62	27	None
	J	(139–60)	22	D5	7	66	27	None
	K	(161–72)	12	P	7	60	33	None
III	L	(173–98)	26	D5	3	82	15	Duple
	M	(199–206)	8	P	12	87	0	Duple
	N	(207–65)	59	D5	1	88	11	Duple
	O	(266–89)	24	D2	7	85	7	Duple
	P	(290–311)	22	P	7	64	29	None
	IV	Q	(312–21)	10	P	0	75	25
V	R	(322–45)	24	D5	7	75	18	Duple
	S	(346–58)	13	P	1	74	25	Duple
	T	(359–65)	7	D5	14	57	29	None
	U	(366–84)	19	P	3	67	30	None
	V	(385–99)	15	D4	20	59	21	Clash
	W	(400–16)	17	D4	7	49	44	Triple
	X	(417–32)	16	P	5	72	23	Duple

*Dominant length is here defined as accounting for at least 50 per cent of lines.
Favoured rhythm is here defined as occurring significantly more often than in prose.

Statistical Significance of % Intervals in Table III

The technique of *probability modelling* involves scanning long passages of prose in order to discover its normal rhythmic balance. The frequency with which each size of interval occurs in English prose is as follows⁴⁷:

⁴⁷ See TARLINSKAJA, Marina: *Strict Stress-Meter in English Poetry Compared with German and Russian*. Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Press, 1993, p. 46.

Duple time (single-syllable intervals): 60 per cent
 Triple time (disyllabic intervals): 34 per cent
 Stress clash (zero intervals): 5 per cent

As noted above, Russian metrists have a term for verse with intervals of up to three syllables the *taktovik*. English, however, is a language with strong secondary stress, and where three syllables intervene between major stress peaks in English the middle syllable becomes a minor peak in delivery⁴⁸. In modern English verse this middle syllable is usually promoted to a beat, but on a few occasions Eliot, like Webster, seems to allow an interval of three syllables between beats; they represent barely 1 per cent of all intervals in the poem.

Because the number of intervals in each of Eliot's sequences is relatively small (compared with the many thousands of intervals in the prose controls), a statistical technique must be employed to compare the percentages of each interval size in the above table. That technique is termed calculating *sampling error* according to a mathematical formula⁴⁹. Using that technique here I have calculated that sampling error in all the sequences above is close to 10 per cent. Hence my definitions for favoured rhythms: favouring duple time means filling at least $60 + 10 = 70$ per cent of intervals with a single syllable, (or with three syllables of which the second is can be promoted); favouring triple time means filling at least $34 + 10 = 44$ per cent with two syllables; favouring stress clash means allowing at least $5 + 10 = 15$ per cent zero intervals. Figures that meet this definition (given in red in Table III) define *Favoured Rhythm* in the last column of Table III.

⁴⁸ The English language's preference for making every fourth syllable a major peak is termed *eurhythm*; see HOGG, Richard, & McCULLY, C. B.: *Metrical Phonology: A Course Book*. Cambridge: CUP, 1987, pp. 148-55.

⁴⁹ For details of how sampling error may be applied to metrics, see DUFFELL, Martin J.: 'The Italian Line in English after Chaucer'. *Language and Literature*, 2002, 11.4, pp. 291-305, p. 302, n. 15.

7. Conclusions

Sequences

As Table III shows, the opening of a new metrical sequence is marked by a change in either the dominant template or the favoured rhythm. These changes occur most frequently at what became the opening of the published poem, where an eighteen-line passage dominated by *D4s* divides into three sequences with different favoured rhythms. And, when Eliot at last allows the *D5* to dominate, he postpones the point where it becomes strongly iambic. But from the beginning of Part II more than half the sequences favour duple-time rhythm, suggesting that Eliot found it increasingly difficult to convey his message in lines that were radical departures from the English iambic canons.

The majority of sequences have a dominant template, but polymetric sequences are scattered throughout the poem. Sequences where *D5* or *D2* lines dominate tend to be longer, and sequences where *D4* lines dominate tend to be shortest of all, as the following subsidiary table shows.

Dominant Templates by Sequence

<i>Template</i>	<i>Sequences</i>	<i>Av. Length</i>
<i>D5</i>	8	26
<i>D4</i>	5	10
<i>D2</i>	1	24
Polymetric	10	15

The average sequence is eighteen lines in length; the two longest sequences are 59 and 38 lines; both have a dominant *D5* template and a duple-time rhythm; *D5* lines favouring duple time also appear in sequences with no dominant template or prevailing rhythm. Even in sequences with no dominant template consecutive lines often share the same template.

Templates

Details of the frequency with which each line length occurs in the whole poem are given in Table II, which shows that the *D5* is clearly Eliot's favourite template, accounting for 53 per cent

of all instances. The *D5* design gives us both the strict iambic pentameters of Milton and of Shakespeare's sonnets and the less regular lines of the Jacobean dramatic pentameters. The differences between Eliot's *D5*s in this poem and those of Webster will be examined in detail under the heading 'Rhythms' below.

The *D4* is *The Waste Land*'s second most common template, accounting for 19 per cent of verse instances. The *D4* is a less complex line than the *D5*: it has a single structure, which shows most clearly in the non-linear analysis of generative metrics: the *D4* subdivides into two cola, which subdivide into two feet, which subdivide into two contrasting positions⁵⁰. By comparison, the *D5* has two alternative structures, because it subdivides into two unequal cola, and every line has either 2 + 3 or 3 + 2 feet; this variety doubtless helped the iambic pentameter to supplant the native *D4* as the English metrical canon. English folk-verse often achieves rhythmic variety by mingling *D3*s with *D4*s, so much so that Attridge describes such *D3*s as lines with an *unrealised* beat⁵¹. In *The Waste Land*, however, Eliot rarely combines *D4*s with *D3*s: the latter are more often coupled with *D5*s or *D6*s.

There is one particularly ingenious type of *D4* that Eliot cultivated: a ten-syllable line that by a slight distortion has four beats instead of five. For example, if Eliot had made his Levantine seaman a *Philistine*, he would have produced a strict iambic pentameter in line 312; but instead he made him a *Phoenician*, thus converting the line's ten syllables into a *D4*, one with an alliterative pattern that links the deceased sailor with the Old English *Seafarer*⁵².

⁵⁰ See HAYES, Bruce: 'The Prosodic Hierarchy in Poetic Metre', in *Poetics and Phonology*, ed. Paul Kiparsky & Gilbert Youmans, *cit.*, pp. 201-60. Generative metrists agree that the structure of verse is hierarchical, not linear, but they are divided between those who favour a *top-down* and those who prefer a *bottom-up* analysis. Hayes, Kiparsky, and Hanson are among the former; Fabb and Halle are among the latter.

⁵¹ See ATTRIDGE, Derek, *The Rhythms*, *cit.*, pp. 84-96.

⁵² For this poem, see HAMER, Richard, ed. & trans.: *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse*. London: Faber & Faber, 1970, pp. 186-91. For a review of modern theories of Old English epic metre, see STOCKWELL, Robert P., & MINKOVA, Donka: 'The Prosody of *Beowulf*', in a *'Beowulf' Handbook*, ed. Robert Bjork & John D. Niles. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997, pp. 55-83.

Phlebas the Phoenician, a **fort**night dead

1 0 0 1 0 0 1 0 4

This line is a 4D, like the lines that open Pound's poem 'E. P. ode pour l'élection de son sepulcre', composed at about the same time:

For three years, out of key with his time,
 He strove to resuscitate the dead art
 Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'
 In the old sense. Wrong from the start

o 1 - 1 0 0 1 0 0 4
 o 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 4
 o 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 4
 o o 1 - 1 - 1 0 0 4

Eliot's line has a trisyllabic interval and Pound's have three stress clashes, but what links them is that Eliot's line 312, like lines 2 and 3 of Pound's poem, has exactly ten syllables. Later poets who combined such decasyllabic 4Ds with iambic pentameters included W. H. Auden and Seamus Heaney⁵³.

The only other template that dominates a sequence in Eliot's poem is the D2.

The ultra-short line in English has a long but undistinguished history. It is the metre of nursery rhymes ('Jack and Jill // Went up the hill') and proverbs ('Red at night // Shepherds' delight')⁵⁴. Eliot also includes D1s in *The Waste Land* and even lines consisting of a single syllable. The ultra-short line was adopted by a number of major twentieth-century poets, most notably by William Carlos Williams and Seamus Heaney⁵⁵. Here again it is possible to detect Eliot's influence.

The D6 design accounts for almost 6 per cent of all lines in *The Waste Land*, and Eliot's D6s are usually iambic in rhythm. They are also usually isolated (they trim or punctuate sequences of shorter lines), and are thus like the hexameters (almost 1,000 of them) Shakespeare inserted in his plays⁵⁶. The D7s in the poem serve the same functions, but its longest line (426) can be seen as a combination of two D4s:

London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, Falling down.

1 0 1 0 1 0 4
 1 0 1 - 1 0 4

⁵³ See DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, cit., pp. 220, 235, & 253.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 206 & 236.

⁵⁶ See WRIGHT, George T.: *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*, cit., pp. 292-95.

This is a quote from a nursery rhyme usually laid out as two lines of *long measure*; the location mentioned is, of course, very relevant to Eliot's poem, and its falling (trochaic) rhythm is very appropriate to the apocalyptic section in which it occurs.

Eliot packs *The Waste Land* with quotations, and some sections of the poem resemble a collage of other poets' lines. Again Eliot created a vogue: whereas in nineteenth-century poets who wanted to show off added a Classical epigraph (or even a title), twentieth-century poets seeking to dignify their labours included quotations (preferably in a foreign language) in their text.

Rhythms

The number of sequences in the poem in which there is a prevailing rhythm (size of interval) is shown in the following subsidiary table, along with the number where the rhythmic balance differs little from that of prose.

<i>Favoured Rhythms</i>			
<i>Rhythm</i>	<i>Sequences</i>	<i>Lines</i>	<i>Av. Lines</i>
Duple	10	235	24
Triple	2	21	11
Clash	3	39	13
None	9	137	15

These figures show that almost half the poem's sequences and more than half its lines have a significantly higher proportion of duple time than English prose. Eliot, however, delays (by sixty lines) the introduction of duple-time *D5s*. Once they are introduced, sequences of duple-time *D5s* pervade the remainder of the poem.

As noted above, these sequences contain both lines that meet the definition of the iambic pentameter and those that do not, the latter following a long tradition that runs from Lydgate, through Skelton and Wyatt, and into Jacobean drama⁵⁷. Table II shows

⁵⁷ For Lydgate and Skelton see n26 above and DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History, cit.*, pp. 102-04 & 112-13. For the case that Wyatt's longer line is the modern flexible pentameter, see REBHOLZ, R. A.: 'A Note on Wyatt's Metres', in WYATT, Thomas: *The Complete Poems*, ed. R. A. Rebholz. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978, pp. 44-55.

that 44 per cent of Eliot's *D5s* are strict iambic pentameters, which can be compared with the 62 per cent of lines in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (1613-14)⁵⁸. Eliot's *D5s* are clearly more irregular than Webster's but are undoubtedly based on the same design (five beats and intervals ranging from zero to two syllables).

The Waste Land succeeded in reviving the Jacobean dramatic pentameter's fortunes. In the course of the twentieth century it has come to rival the strict iambic pentameter in popularity worldwide: major poets who have employed it extensively include W. H. Auden in Europe, Wallace Stevens in the USA, and A. D. Hope in Australasia⁵⁹. Different modern metrists have labelled this design 'the flexible pentameter', 'the loose iambic pentameter', and even 'free blank verse'⁶⁰.

In his edition of Webster's plays F. L. Lucas raised the question of how far this metre could depart from iambic regularity and still be distinguishable from prose. He argued that in Webster's early plays he gradually increased the irregularity until the non-iambic lines reached 50 per cent of total, before reducing it again in his later plays⁶¹. The above analysis reveals that Eliot went beyond this level of irregularity in *The Waste Land*, but it does suggest that Eliot observed other limits. Of the poem's 227 *D5s*, 100 meet the definition of iambic pentameter given by parametric theory and a further 53 have only one interval of other than one syllable; 63 have more than one non-iambic interval, and 11 are irregular only in having two syllables in anacrusis. The limit of Eliot's irregularity seems to be reached in the few lines that have three double intervals like line 372:

Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air 1 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0 5

⁵⁸ The statistics presented here for the *Duchess of Malfi* are from DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, *cit.*, pp. 144-46 & 241-42.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 202-04, 224-25, & 235-36.

⁶⁰ Eliot's metre is a *loose iambic meter* to FABB, Nigel, & HALLE, Morris: *Meter in Poetry*, *cit.*, pp. 90-92, and *free blank verse* to HOBBSBAUM, Philip: *Metre*, *cit.*, p. 95. Some writers describe the *flexible pentameter* in terms of five *variable feet*; see WILLIAMS, W. C.: 'Free Verse', in *Selected Essays* (1954). New York: New Directions, 1969, p. 289.

⁶¹ See LUCAS's comments in Webster, vol. IV, p. 251, n. 11.

It seems reasonable to conclude from this that Eliot hesitated to include a line of pure triple time in his *D5s*. The figures given above also indicate that Eliot often used stress clash as an alternative way of escaping iambic regularity.

Eliot allows triple time to prevail in only two sequences of the poem, and one of those (B) is very short indeed, offering a brief respite from the duple time and stress clashes that have preceded it. Regularising triple time, which promotes 34 per cent of the prose norm, always appears more artificial than regularising duple, which promotes 60 per cent. Triple time in large doses is funny, and is fittingly the medium of humorous verse like the limerick; Eliot, appropriately, keeps a tight rein on triple time in this poem⁶².

It is, however, in the twenty-four lines of sequence O, most of which are *D2s*, that duple time is most insistent, 85 per cent of the sequence's intervals containing a single syllable. Most of the metrical variety in sequence O is provided by three other features: only half of the anacruses contain a single syllable; several other line lengths punctuate the passage; and there are no fewer than seven full rhymes in the twenty-four lines.

Non-Phonic Rhythms

There are many examples of non-ponic rhythms in *The Waste Land* but they are always closely bound within the web of phonic rhythms: they do not occur in isolation. Many of Eliot's non-ponic rhythms are inseparable from particularly apt phonic rhythms; I give here five of many examples:

- (i) The syntactic rhythm of present participles in sequence A is also a series of accentual trochees.
- (ii) The semantic rhythm of slow collapse in l. 426 is accentuated by the line's trochees and stress clashes.

⁶² The *limerick*, which first appeared around 1820, is predominantly in triple time and employs the strophe design of English nursery rhymes like 'The Grand Old Duke of York', a quatrain with lines of 3, 3, 4, 3 beats. The limerick injects an internal rhyme into the third line of the strophe, which combines with the triple time to give the poem a jaunty air. An iambic version of this form was briefly popular in serious poetry of the mid-sixteenth century; it was laid out as couplet of 6 + 6 and 8 + 6 syllables, and became known as *poulterers' measure*, see DUFFELL, Martin J.: *A New History*, *cit.*, pp. 123-24 & p. 238, n.1.

- (iii) At the Augustinian close of Part III, when Eliot indulges in extreme lexical repetition (of ‘burning’ and ‘O Lord Thou pluckest me out’), he also produces a diminuendo rhythmic effect by making his four lines *D4*, *D3*, *D2*, and *D1*, respectively; and the quatrain encloses two lines with rising rhythm within two lines with falling rhythm.
- (iv) The lexical and syntactic rhythms of the poem’s last line are accompanied by phonic rhythms: there are three Sanskrit imperatives and three repetitions of the word *shantih*, but the line is also made up of a triple-time *D3* plus a duple-time *D3*.
- (v) The first half of that final line reprises an earlier lexical rhythm: ‘Da // *datta*’, ‘Da // *dayadhvam*’, ‘Da // *damyate*’. These words appear at intervals in Part V, but even on their first occurrence these words cannot be divorced from the figures of sound they incorporate, alliteration, and the shock of a monosyllabic line.

Such non-phonic rhythms were, of course, present in the regular verse of previous centuries: for example, the semantic, syntactic, and lexical repetitions in lines 123-24 of Gray’s *Elegy*:

He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,
He gained from Heav’n (t’was all he wished), a friend.

Such rhythms were drowned out by the more obtrusive phonic rhythms of regular verse. Only with the advent of free verse, and its move towards the irregular phonic rhythms of prose, could non-phonic rhythms appear sufficient in themselves. But this type of free verse, ‘free verse proper’, was not within Eliot’s remit in 1922. At that date rhythm for Eliot was essentially phonic, rather as his friend Pound complained.

Summary

In *The Waste Land* Eliot set out to compose accentual verse that would be less regular and more varied than any previously composed in Modern English. Readers could recognise Eliot’s lines as verse because he gave most passages of the poem a dominant accentual rhythm relieved by occasional design shifts;

in some passages, however, he made design shift the salient feature. Such wildly polymetric passages set an example for subsequent poets, who departed from accentual regularity altogether and developed other, non-ponic types of rhythm in their lines. As a result the twentieth century saw the introduction of many different types of free verse, of which some have proved a fertile medium for poetry. The dictionary definition of *poetry* is 'literary work in which a special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and thoughts by distinctive style and rhythm'. Certainly, the style and rhythm of *The Waste Land* gave a special intensity to Eliot's despair, and to his thoughts as they desperately sought consolation.

Unfortunately, the polymetric passages of *The Waste Land* also offered a model for lazy people to chop up prose and serve it as verse. Such compositions lacked the features that define poetry: special intensity in the expression of feelings and thoughts, and distinctive style and rhythm. As Steele notes, millions of indiscriminating readers soon assumed that writing free verse was something anyone could do, like washing dishes⁶³. Eliot was thus horrified when he learned that in the USA schoolchildren were being taught to compose free verse⁶⁴. Later he stated bitterly that 'a great deal of bad prose has been written under the name of free verse'⁶⁵. Pound, too, was soon fulminating against free verse that was 'as prolix and verbose' as the worst regular verse⁶⁶.

The problem was, and remains, that bad free verse is easy to write but difficult to detect, so writers can chop up and serve even the most banal prose as free verse. This problem is compounded by the fact that the general public often confuses *verse* with *poetry*, which culminated ironically in a volume of chopped-up prose becoming one of the best-selling poetry titles of the twenty-first century⁶⁷. The way back from this confusion

⁶³ See STEELE, Timothy: *Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt against Meter*. Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1990, p. 283.

⁶⁴ ELIOT, T. S.: 'The Music of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets*. London: Faber & Faber, 1957, pp. 26-38 (p. 37).

⁶⁵ See STEELE, Timothy: *Missing Measures*, *cit.*, p. 66.

⁶⁶ See POUND, *Literary Essays*, 3, *cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁷ See SEELY, Hart, ed.: *Pieces of Intelligence: The Existential Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

between good verse and bad prose must surely lie in the systematic study of landmark poems like *The Waste Land*.