Nigel Fabb and Morris Halle (2008), *Meter in Poetry* Review

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This long-awaited joint book by the founder of generative metrics and a distinguished theorist is a major event in literary linguistics. In some respects the reader will not be disappointed. In addition to the familiar material already well covered in such sources as Gasparov (200X), F&H analyze a fascinating collection of metrical systems from world literature, some of them opened up here to formal analysis and theoretical discussion for the first time.

A core tenet of the work is that the defining feature of verse is not rhythm, but lineation. Rhythm emerges as a by-product of the processes that limit the length of lines, which build metrical constituents in a hierarchy of grid levels represented by bracketed asterisks. This reverses the traditional view be that lineation emerges from rhythm, which is constituted by hierarchy of binary units such as feet, dipods, hemistichs, and cola, each branching into at most two asymmetric (rising or falling) constituents. Dactyls, trimeters etc. arise when one daughter is unary. The issue of the primacy of rhythm versus lineation is thus rather murky. If counting must be done by rhythmic units,[1] and rhythmic units must be organized into hierarchies of binary constituents (or ternary ones, in F&H's theory), then counting and rhythm would seem to imply each other.

Rejecting the constraint-based template-matching approaches that have dominated generative metrics since Halle & Keyser (1966), F&H explore a resolutely processual approach. Grids of bracketed columns of asterisks are constructed bottom up, demarcating constituents analogous to feet, dipods, cola, although F&H reject these rhythmic units. At each grid level, the rules for inserting brackets are specified for whether the intervals are binary or ternary, whether the parse proceeds right to left or left to right, whether it begins at the edge, or one or two asterisks in, whether the constituents are separated by left or right parentheses, and whether the parse proceeds right to left or left to right. An alarming amount of descriptive leeway, perhaps, but most of these parameters have analogs in rule-based and constraint-based metrical phonology, with some interesting differences to which I return below.

In addition to rules that insert asterisks and brackets, F&H also posit meter-specific conditions, such as whether constituents can be, or must be, incomplete at one edge, and whether all syllables in the verse must be parsed or some can, or must, remain unparsed. This, then,

[1] A traditional view (accepted in F&H's earlier writings) is that French and other Romance languages have arrhytmic purely syllable-counting meters, but in Ch. 4 of this work (written by Carlos Piera) they are treated as iambic. According to F&H, some Hebrew psalms have hidden numerological meanings or are picture poems, giving rise to an approximate syllable count.

is a hybrid system with both rules and constraints. In phonology, such systems have been largely abandoned because of well-known weaknesses, including duplication between rules and constraints, overgeneration due to excessive richness, and formal problems with choreographing the interaction of rules and/constraints. F&H's metrical theory shares some of these weaknesses. Even when the content of their well-formedness conditions duplicates that of the operations which enforce them, the system expresses no formal relationship between them.

All but the simplest meters also require more arbitrary kinds of rules. They insert left or right brackets before the parsing begins, exclude certain syllables from the grid, and delete unwanted asterisks after the parsing is complete. Formally they seem quite unconstrained: for example, asterisk deletion at any grid level can be conditioned by the presence of an asterisk at any other grid level. The power and easy availability of these readjustment rules seriously compromises the theory, to the point of making it largely unfalsifiable. As often happens, an appealingly simple and intuitive idea (meter as bottom-up parsing) is undermined by a creaky apparatus of auxiliary devices needed to make it work.

This work is not easy to assess. F&H lay down their theory and analyses without argument, barely alluding to previous work and only occasionally considering even the alternatives that their own framework makes available. Only the chapter on Southern Romance, written by Carlos Piera, has a useful summary of the state of the art. The daunting task of evaluating F&H's theory and comparing it to others is in effect dumped in the lap of the reader. That makes it hard to say what contribution to metrics, if any, it makes. So far I have found nothing — no principle of metrical organization, no generalizations about a meter or body of verse, no analyses of particular poems — that cannot be expressed as well or better in formally cleaner strictly constraint-based frameworks. Indeed, for the better-known meters this has already been done, more perspicuously though less elaborately (sometimes in too many ways).

To give a flavor of F&H's approach, I review their analyses of Arabic meter and of Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm. They show how F&H rigorously apply the principles of their theory and provide explicit derivations of the examples they discuss, but also reveal the two main weaknesses of their work, that they limit themselves to data that their theory can handle, and that their theory imposes unsatisfactory analyses even on some of that data.

Following al-Khalil of Basra (8th c.) Arabic verse is taken to be built from feet with a Strong position and one or (in most meters) two Weak positions. Strong positions ("Pegs") are realized as quantitative iambs ⏑–, Weak positions ("Cords") by heavy, light, or anceps syllables, depending on the meter. The common *xafīf* meter is built from amphibrachs (WSW). In each foot, the first W is anceps, and the second W is heavy. The S of al-Khalil's "circle 4" meters (*xafīf, ramal, mujtaṡ, madīd)*) undergoes anaclasis from ⏑– to –⏑ in alternate feet. So a three-foot *xafīf* hemistich has the form (1a) (with positions numbered for convenience). F&H present it as (1b) (caution: on p. 196 *xafīf* is mislabeled as long *ramal*, and long *ramal* as *xafīf*.)

(1) a. $\overset{1}{\times}\ \overset{2}{\breve{}}\ \underline{\overset{3}{}}\ \overset{4}{\times}\ \mid\ \overset{5}{\times}\ \underline{\overset{6}{}}\ \overset{7}{\breve{}}\ \overset{8}{\times}\ \mid\ \overset{9}{\times}\ \overset{10}{\breve{}}\ \underline{\overset{11}{}}\ \overset{12}{\times}$

b. $\overset{1}{\times}\ \overset{2}{\breve{}}\ \underline{\overset{3}{}}\ \underline{\overset{4}{}}\ \overset{5}{\times}\ \underline{\overset{6}{}}\ \overset{7}{\breve{}}\ \underline{\overset{8}{}}\ \overset{9}{\times}\ \overset{10}{\breve{}}\ \underline{\overset{11}{}}\ \underline{\overset{12}{}}$

Meters like *xafīf* pose three problems for F&H. First, their theory excludes amphibrachs, for ternary groupings must be left-headed or right-headed at all grid levels. The workaround is to treat amphibrachic lines as dactylic lines (SWW) which have an added unparsed syllable at the beginning (symbolized by Δ, p. 190)) and which lack a syllable at the end. The leftmost syllable's projection is deleted (symbolized by Δ, p. 190)) and the remainder is then parsed bottom up as shown in (2).

(2) – ⏑ – – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ – –

Δ(* *(* *(* *(* *(* *(*	grid level 0, left to right
(* (* (* (* (* *(	grid level 1, right to left
(* (* (*	grid level 2, right to left
(* * (	grid level 3, right to left
*	grid level 4

This is unsatisfactory because it doesn't explain why the extra initial syllable and the missing final syllable go hand in hand in all complete (non-catalectic) amphibrachic meters. A better alternative would be to treat them as binary (WS, with branching S), as in Prince (1989), but it is not clear whether F&H's framework allows it.

The second problem is anaclasis, the inversion of ⏑–) to –⏑ in the second foot. For Classical Arabic meter, F&H propose the condition that a prominent syllable (a syllable projecting to gridline 2) must be heavy. Anaclasis causes the seventh syllable in *xafīf* to violate this condition, as (2) shows. A rule introduced on p. 193 deletes the gridline asterisk of light syllables that project to gridline 4. But the seventh syllable in (**??**) does not project to gridline 4. F&H's idea is that it first *becomes* the head of the verse and then gets its gridline 0 asterisk deleted. The rule that makes it a head, otherwise unmotivated, is: "delete the Gridline 2 projection of the head of a verse if followed by another asterisk on Gridline 3" (p. 195). It shifts the head position to its right-hand gridmate, and the newly created head's gridline 0 asterisk is then replaced by Δ . So the full derivation of (2) goes like this:

The generalization that the ictus of alternate feet is anaclastic in *xafīf* and related meters seems simple enough. Why does the theory express it in such a complicated and uninsightful way?

I see three reasons. First, the bottom-up parsing procedure cannot distinguish odd- and even-numbered feet at gridlevel 1, so they must be parsed alike. The higher-level asterisks which condition anaclasis are not visible there. Therefore anaclasis must be a reajustment which deletes asterisks in the completed parse.

Another reason is that F&H's conditions are inviolable. Unlike OT constraints (or rules in a theory that incorporates some kind of Elsewhere Condition) they cannot be limited by special conditions applying in narrower contexts. The general constraint that requires prominent syllables to be heavy cannot be superseded by a special constraint which requires the opposite in a subset of contexts. There is no way of saying directly that the second feet in *Xafīf* are special in having a trochaic peaks. Instead, the representation must be manipulated in a stipulative way to make it conform to the general constraint that requires iambic peaks.

"the Peg is ⏑– , but in alternate feet of circle 4 meters it is –⏑".

The third reason is methodological solipsism. F&H show with admirable clarity how their analyses work and how they fit into their theory, but not how the analyses support the theory, or fail to support it. The theory is laid down but not argued for. The complexity of derivations like (**??**) should have invited consideration of alternatives, such as Prince's (1989), a simpler and more explanatory analysis which also covers more data. F&H's framework cannot accommodate this alternative as it stands. But why can't it be appropriately revised to capture its insights?

The neglect of important regularities, especially the distribution of syllable weight of Weak positions (Cords), causes the rules to overgenerate in most meters.[2] Because of F&H's ambiguous use of the symbol ×, readers unfamiliar with Arabic metrics may not become aware of this. In the first, fifth, and ninth position of (1b) it marks an anceps position, i.e. one which may be heavy or light in different lines of the same poem. In the fourth, eighth, and twelfth position of (1) it marks a syllable which is regularly heavy.[3] It also stands for positions which are heavy or light in different variants of the meter, but must be fixed as one or the other in every line of a poem (e.g. the second, sixth, and tenth positions of *rajaz*, p. 189, 202).

No theory can be expected to explain everything. On the contrary, "it is necessary to select and discard, to concentrate on facts that seem to have some bearing on such explanatory principles as we can devise, ignoring much else in the hope that it will ultimately be explained by deeper theories or perhaps on quite different grounds" (Chomsky 1977: 21). F&H have chosen to discard the regularities govening syllable weight in Cords, but they should have at least mentioned them, especially since previous theories claim to explain them (Prince 1989).

Where Arabic pushes quantitative meters to the limit, Hopkins' equally intricate Sprung Rhythm is its counterpart among stress-based meters. F&H examine *The Windhover* and conclude that Sprung Rhythm is a "loose" iambic meter (contrary to Hopkins himself, who claimed that it is "as strict as the other rhythm"). They define a loose meter as a meter in which, a right parenthesis is inserted on Gridline 0 after an asterisk projecting from a maximum, where a maximum is "the syllable bearing the word stress…, except when it is immediately preceded or followed in the same line by a syllable carrying greater stress" (p. 68-69). They say that Hopkins' variety is even looser in that it allows syllables to be not projected, that is, represented by the empty position Δ at gridlevel 0 (p. 85-86).

But what complex metrical system yields all its secrets in 14 lines?

Their analysis goes awry in four lines of the *The Windhover*. It parses line 3 as

[2]For similar reasons, the analysis also undergenerates in some of them. F&H's template of the *mutad* $\bar{a}$*rik* meter (p. 202) shows only the trisyllabic ×⏑–, but omits the disyllabic –– feet which are prohibited by F&H's condition (3), though they actually occur in all positions (Wright 1951, Stoetzer 1986: 108).

[3]Wright (1951: 367) lists the following variants (see also Stoetzer 1986: 166).

a. ⏒⏑–– | ⏑–⏑– ‖ ⏒⏑–– | ⏑–⏑–
b. ⏒⏑–– | ⏑–⏑– ‖ ⏒⏑–– | ⏑––
c. ⏒⏑–– | ⏒–⏑– | ⏒⏑–– ‖ ⏒⏑–– | ⏑–⏑– | ⏔––
d. ⏒⏑–– | ⏒–⏑– | ⏒⏑–– ‖ ⏒⏑–– | ⏒–⏑– | ⏔–
e. ⏒⏑–– | ⏒–⏑– | ⏒⏑– ‖ ⏒⏑–– | ⏒–⏑– | ⏔–

The full form treated above is (c). In the dimeter forms (a, b), the second foot must begin with a heavy syllable; (d, e) are catalectic.

(3) In his ec sta sy! then off, off forth on swing

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* (*  *) (*  *   (*  *) (*  *) (*  *) (
      *      *       *      *      *
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This parse is wrong because Sprung Rhythm categorically excludes unstressed light syllables in weak positions (stress marks again from his own MSS.)

(4) a. Marga*rét*, are you grieving (*Barba*ra*. . .)

b. . . . Shôul*dér* and shánk (*moul*dy* and dámp

It is this constraint that Hopkins refers to when he says that Sprung Rhythm requires "great attention to quantity".

In contrast, Hopkins' iambic verse freely admits unstressed light syllables in weak positions.[4]

(5)
- Now Time's / Andro / me**da** / on this / rough rock
- . . . why must
  Dis**a**/ppointment / all I / endea/vour end?

The second problem is that the first syllables of sequences like *big wind* (l. 6), *shéer plód* (l. 12) and *gásh goóld-vermilion* must be Strong, but they cannot be Stress Maxima as F&H stipulate, because they are followed by stronger stresses.

F&H deal with the failure of their rules by claiming that Hopkins is "inconsistent in his use of the definition of maximum, switching from one definition to another within a text", and that he turns syllables into stress maxima *just by writing an accent on them* (p. 87, 89). Let's blame Hopkins for not following F&H's rules, and creating arbitrary stress maxima literally by a stroke of his pen! Quite a presumption, especially about a poet so obsessively concerned with the minutiae of metrical technique. In reality Sprung Rhythm is perfectly consistent and not based on stress maxima under *any* definition.

treatment of it suffers from the same problems.

Agree that meter vs. rhythm (p. 307, conterpoint) But not that

Kiparsky (1989) is descriptively accurate, though it falls far short of the standards that an explanatory theory should meet,[5].

A MORAIC TROCHEE consists of (1) a stressed syllable, (2) a heavy syllable, (3) two syllables belonging to the same word, of which the first is short and the second unstressed.

- A line consists of a fixed number of alternating strong and weak positions.
- A strong position contains a moraic trochee.

[4]Hopkins' beloved Miltonic inversions ("counterpoint"), as in (**??**)b, are excluded in Sprung Rhythm, for the reasons explained above.

[5]But see Hanson and Kiparsky 1996 for an effort to make theoretical sense of at least some of these desciptive generalizations

- A weak position contains at most one moraic trochee.
- An extrametrical weak position (an OUTRIDE) may occur at the end of a phrase.

It follows that a polysyllabic Weak position can contain (1) two syllables belonging to the same word, the first of them short, the second unstressed, or (2) two or more unstressed syllables that belong to different words. This is quite similar to the conditions referred to as RESOLUTION in Kiparsky (1977), which were there shown to define single occupancy also in Shakespeare's meter.

Here are some examples of resolution in Spring Rhythm. In weak positions: *-dom of, dapple-, in his* (l. 2), *of the, level, steady* (l. 3), *how he, upon the, of a* (l. 4), *in his, (ec)stasy* (l. 5). In strong positions: *heavens* (Hurrahing in Harvest, l. 6, *Heavengravel* (Loss of the Eurydice), *thoroughfare*. In adjacent strong and weak positions: *This very very day* (The Bugler's first Communion), *Shadowtackle* (Heraclitean Fire).

Of the rólling level úndernéath him steady áir, and stríding (*The Windhover*)