part 1

NOSTER

CHAUCERUS
The first booke of TROILVS and CRESEID.

1. The double sorrow of Troilos to tell.
   That was King Priamus Summer Troy,
   In looking how his brawne were told,
   From Clote to Clote, and after out of Troy,
   His purpose is, to that I part trop.

2. Thou Chephon, that help me for tempte
   These worstall Troilos, that happen as I write.

3. To thee, Telete, show Godesse of Time.
   These cruell force, spoiling ever in paine,
   Help me that am the frayshall instrument,
   That helpeth Loures, as I can complaine.

4. So well fit the dooth for to faine,
   A toyfull sight to have a joyfull face,
   And to a toyfull Tale a joyfull chesere.

5. For I that God of Loures servantes serve,
   He have to love for mine unlikely noise,
   Mayen for these, all should I therefore steere,
   His face am I to his helpere in berneheere.

   But nathelife, if this may done gladness
   To any Loure, and his cause arise,
   Have be my thanks, and mine be the trewskill.
How Many Chaucerians Does It Take to Count to Eleven?
The Meter of Kynaston’s 1635 Translation of *Troilus and Criseyde*

Among what are generally known as “curiosities” of Chaucerian reception history is the 1635 translation of the first two books of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* into Latin stanzas by Sir Francis Kynaston: *Amorum Troili et Creseidae libri duo priores Anglico-Latini* (Oxford, 1635; STC 5097). The Latin (printed in Italic) is on the left; the English (printed in black-letter) is on the right, in a manner familiar to budding and career Latinists from their experience with Loeb translations.

Kynaston completed, but never published, the remainder of the translation, and most of what anyone might want to know concerning the fate of this translation and Kynaston himself is now well-recorded. Spurgeon devotes several pages to Kynaston in *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion*, although her selections include only the commendatory verses praising Kynaston and nothing from his own introduction or translation. The translation was the subject of a dissertation by Judith M. Newton in 1967, and there have been several articles on Kynaston since (the most important and succinct is by Richard Beadle in 1990).¹ The 1635 text is now readily available on

EEBO, and the rest of the translation is published in a modern edition by Helmut Wolf (an edition less accessible for some of us than electronic or even material copies of the original book!) and in a hypertextual edition by Dana F. Sutton.²

The most basic issues posed by Kynaston’s work for Chaucerians are the quality of the translation and the nature of the verse. Here, I am concerned only with the second question, a question that seems to me the most basic and obvious of all: what verse form did Kynaston use? Surely the quality of translation (the concern of most Chaucerians) should depend on a clear answer to this question. I should say at the onset that the answer is (or should be) absurdly easy, and anyone with any knowledge of Latin verse and a few minutes of free time ought to be able to come up with it. Kynaston describes explicitly what he is doing; scholars quote his description and translate it correctly; and Kynaston does exactly what he says he will do. Yet for more than a century, those who studied this text have for some reason managed to ignore or repress all this (even their own explicit statements) and have instead offered what look to me like variations of the banalities taught us about versification in grade school: Kynaston, we are told repeatedly, despite what he explicitly claims, wrote accentual iambic pentameter. The fact that his verse cannot scan that way? That is apparently his problem, not ours.

How many Chaucerians does it take to count to eleven?

How can the narratives of professional Chaucerians be so much more powerful than the evidence on which they claim those are based?

That Chaucerians and neo-Latinists have reached an apparent consensus on the wrong answer to this simple question is no great scandal and, in and of itself, of no great import: Chaucerians do not need to know a great deal about European versification in order to perform their basic functions. What is amusing to me is that something (literary training?) has made Kynastonians (if such persons can be said to exist) unable to perceive something as obvious as I am going to point out here. What is even more interesting about the reception of Kynaston’s verse is that it seems to parallel a far more important issue in Chaucer studies concerning the description of Chaucer’s own meter.

I will deal with several questions below: first, what is the verse Kynaston uses and what does this tell us about the seventeenth-century perception of Chaucer’s verse? Let me state the case as directly as I can: on the specific question of the nature of Kynaston’s versification, Kynaston’s verse is what is called (not quite accurately) “isosyllabic verse”; it is a variant of the French and Italian models he cites. Scholars who claim otherwise (and that includes nearly all those referenced here) are mistaken. Second, and more important, are the inferences we can make as to what a learned seventeenth-century reader might have thought about Chaucer’s verse and what our own perception of his translation might mean for us. What does the now traditional misrepresentation of Kynaston’s verse imply about our own reception and prejudices concerning Chaucer’s versification?

To discuss the second of these matters will involve my own view of the nature of Chaucer’s versification. I realize my views on this subject (either what Chaucer’s verse “is” or how it is to be described) are not shared by many Chaucerians and I won’t try to persuade them here. I freely admit that, blinded as I am by my own theories, I find support for them nearly everywhere. My errors on a subject as complex as Chaucer’s versification,
however, are less surprising to me than are the errors of others on something as simple and uncontroversial as Kynaston.3

Descriptions of Kynaston’s Verse

I begin with the first few lines of Kynaston’s translation:

Dolorem *Troili* duplicem narrare,
Qui Priami Regis Trojae fuit gnatus,
Vt primum illi contigit amare,
Vt miser, felix, & infortunatus
Erat, decessum ante sum conatus.
Tisiphone, fer opem recensere
Hos versus, qui, dum scribo, visi flere.

Te invoco, & numen tuum infestum,
Dira crudelis, dolens semper paenis
… (lines 1–9)

A reasonable, but not entirely accurate translation of this might be the following:

The double sorrow of Troilus to tellen,
That was King Priamus Sonne of Troy,
In loving, how his Aventures fellen,
From Woe to Wele, and after out of Joy,
My purpose is, er that I part froy.
Thou Thesiphone, thou helpe me for tendite
Theis wofull Verses, that wepen as I write.

To thee I clepe, thou Goddesse of Torment,
Thou cruell furie, sorowing ever in paine,
…

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Anyone looking at this can see that Kynaston’s Latin is a line-by-line translation maintaining the rhyme scheme of his original: the rhyme royale stanza familiar from contemporary French poets. What Latinists will also see almost immediately is that Kynaston’s verse is not in classical Latin. Classical Latin verse is structured according to the quantity of syllables, not their accent. And Kynaston’s lines are not written in any of the common quantitative models for lines of this length, not in classical iambic senarii, and not in various forms of, say, Latin hendecasyllables. Such classical verse forms posed no problems for Kynaston and his contemporaries: several of the commendatory verses in Kynaston’s own book were composed in quantitative hendecasyllables. What modern Latinists seem to conclude from this, however, is that therefore it is written in accentual verse—a style of Latin versification that developed during the Middle Ages. But Kynaston’s verse will not scan according to accentual principles either (or only will do so by the invocation of an unreasonable number of exceptions—try line 1 in the second stanza above). Anyone whose Latin is good enough to see that quantitative principles do not apply ought to be able to see that accentual principles do not apply either.4

The foundational principle behind Kynaston’s verse is simple: these are eleven-syllable lines with a terminal accent on syllable 10. There is no need to provide visual scansion of the lines above: place an accent on the penultimate syllable; there will be one unaccented syllable following it and nine preceding

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4 I should concede here that in versification, it is always possible to see any verse as a variant of any metrical system or template, just as in textual criticism any text can be seen as a variant of any base text, even “Mary Had a Little Lamb”; see my The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality, and Bibliographical Method (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 115–24. For example, line 1 in stanza two above could be scanned, with arbitrary elisions, as an accentual trochaic pentameter: TE in VOC et NU men TU min FES tum; perhaps an iambic one with trochaic inversions in the first two feet: TE in VO co et NU men TU min FES tum; or as an quadrimeter: T’ inVO c’ et NUmen TU min FES tum. Such exercises can be a source of intellectual amusement, but they say very little about the verse form itself.
it (you may have to invoke sometimes inconsistent rules of elision, as you would in Latin, French, Italian or even English, that is, dropping a terminal vowel when the following word begins in one). They are modelled after well-known and uncontroversial rules regarding French and Italian verse (see note 22 below). This is precisely how Kynaston describes them in his brief Preface “Candido Lectori …”:

Cumque haec mecum meditarer, ecce novum scriendi genus animum subit, iisdem enim syllabarum numeris, eadem metri methodo, consimilibusque Heptenariis vti, & rythmos etiam Prototypi, & ultimarum syllabarum symphoniam (quantum fieri potuit) exprimere decrevi.

[And as I was considering all these things (how to clothe Chaucer in Latin etc.), a new kind of writing occurred to me: to use the same number of syllables, and the same meter, and the same seven-line stanzas, and I decided to express the rhythms of the original and the rhyme of the last syllable insofar as it was possible.]

Kynaston claims this is a “new form of writing.” There is nothing here about accentual rhythms. There is nothing here about feet. Nothing about iambs in any sense. And when Kynaston later uses the word “pentameter,” that has nothing to do with what English speakers mean by that term; it refers rather to the second line of a classical elegiac couplet. The term “iambic pentameter,” commonly and incorrectly used to describe this verse, thus finds no support in anything Kynaston says here.

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5 All lines in the above passage can be scanned this way, with the possible exception of line 8 (does Kynaston count tuum as one syllable?). He does not appear to use elision elsewhere in these lines. I concede of course, as do others arguing for different metrical schemes, that Kynaston uses elision inconsistently, and also makes many apparent mistakes, e.g., Book 2, lines 1818–19:

   Immo, inquit Troilus, diis propitiis faciam
   Epistola a Pandaro ad illum datur.
The consensus (an inaccurate one) on Kynaston’s verse form is slow in developing. Thomas Lounsbury in his *Studies in Chaucer* (1892) simply quotes what Kynaston says: “It had the same number of lines in the stanza; the same number of syllables in the line.” This statement is correct, but I cannot tell from Lounsbury’s extensive and amusing discussion whether he understands Kynaston’s “ridiculous” meter or not, or whether he has any interest in understanding it. Falconer Madan in 1895 describes the verse-form as “a singular rhythmical rhyming meter, essentially decasyllabic iambics.” The qualifications “singular” and “essentially” (meaning here “not really”) suggest Madan realized that this verse was not strictly accentual, despite what he seems to claim.


That it may be possible...to establish an apparent concordat between accent and quantity, by selecting words which satisfy both systems, nobody can deny. It may be as legitimate a poetic amusement as any other prosodic tour de force — as pantoums and emperières à triple couronne, as poetical bellows and altars, as anagrams and lipograms and acrostics, as Sir Francis Kynaston’s Latin rhyme-royal (to which it is very close) or Dr. King’s Greek-gibberish macaronics.

He discusses Kynaston again in *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, in his introductory notes to Kynaston’s English poem *Leoline and Syndaris*:

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[Kynaston’s] ultra-eccentric enterprise of translating *Troilus* into Latin rhyme royal, a venture in which he at least showed that he had thoroughly saturated himself with the rhythm…. There is a great charm, and also a not small lesson, in the way in which Latin, not too classically treated, adapts itself to modern measures.⁹

I believe Saintsbury is saying that Kynaston combines the principles of quantity and accent in *Troilus*, but the reference here is too casual to conclude much. Note the evasion “not too classically treated.”¹⁰ Note further the assumption that Chaucer’s “rhythm” is unproblematic. I don’t think it could be reasonably claimed that in 1910 this was the case, nor that a hundred years later we still share Saintsbury’s confidence.

Saintsbury, Lounsbury, and Madan were all good turn-of-the-century Latinists—good enough to see that Kynaston’s verse would not scan either by the principles of quantity or by strict principles of accent. But the qualifications and evasions in their descriptions are not found in the pronouncements of later scholars who speak with much more confidence on the nature of this verse. Judith Newton, in her 1967 dissertation, correctly translates the passage quoted above from Kynaston’s preface: “a new kind of writing occurred to me, namely to use the same number of syllables, the same metrical patterns, and the same seven-line stanzas.”¹¹ But a paragraph later she writes: “By writing in accentual, riming verse, instead of unrimed quantitative lines, Kynaston was endangering the success of his enterprise.” And a few pages later: “[Kynaston] recognized Chaucer’s meter as decasyllabic. The Latin would have to conform to the English

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¹⁰ Saintsbury is committed to the “foot” as a basic unit of verse, as noted by Alan T. Gaylord, *Introduction to Essays on the Art of Chaucer’s Verse* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7. But any foot-based system in my view makes Kynaston’s verse unsannable.

¹¹ Newton, “Chaucer’s Troilus,” 90.
pentameter pattern.”12 (The adjectives “decasyllabic” and “pentameter” are not synonyms.)

James W. Binns (1990) says specifically that the verse is neither quantitative nor rhythmic (that is, based on accent). But paradoxically, the fact that the verse does not conform to accentual principles seems to be evidence that it does:

At first the result is somewhat disconcerting. The lines appear to have no shape in quantitative terms, nor do they seem to have any apparent rhythmic structure. The number of syllables (11, i.e., an attempt to reproduce the Chaucerian pentameter in a Latin guise) is however fairly constant, and if the lines are read with the strong iambic rhythm of the original in mind, they work fairly well.13

This is an interesting statement: even a late-twentieth-century scholar who recognizes the principle of the verse (eleven-syllable lines) is unable to resist superadding “iambic rhythm” and “pentameter.” The same logical leaps are found in Dana A. Sutton’s recent hypertextual edition. Sutton quotes the Binns statement above, then adds:

Each verse indeed contains eleven syllables, but these have nothing to do with classical hendecasyllables. They are based on stress accentuation, and are more accurately described (in English metrical terminology) as iambic pentameters with feminine endings….Kynaston’s rhyming stress-verses manage to impart an appropriately Chaucerian feeling….14

Lawrence V. Ryan in 1987 goes further, referring to Kynaston’s stanzas as “senarit” (which he glosses, as “rime-royal stanzas”; I’m not certain what he means by this, since a “senarius” is a

12 Ibid., 90, 94.
14 Sutton, Introduction, Amorum Troili.
line in six feet, not a stanza in seven lines). He claims that Kynaston’s verse is “an equivalent of English accentual iambic pentameter in rhymed seven-line stanzas,” adding with some condescension: “to attempt to reproduce the same metrical scheme in Latin, however, was indeed a novel enterprise.”

The difference between monosyllabic English and polysyllabic Latin, with its preponderance of words having feminine endings, made it impractical for Kynaston to try to generate in the latter tongue decasyllabic iambic lines. His solution was to settle upon hendecasyllables containing five regular iambic stresses, effected by elisions and by frequent compression of certain types of disyllables into monosyllables or diphthongs, and justified upon the authority of such modern vernacular “classics” as Ariosto and Tasso.

It is enough to note that this is absolutely incorrect, and Ryan unwittingly misrepresents in this short selection versification principles and practices of at least three languages.

Richard Beadle, in an otherwise excellent article of 1990, is a bit more circumspect: “The unusual but careful imitation of the rhyme scheme, and the ear for the rhythm of the original are strong clues.” Here, as in nearly all these scholars, Chaucer rhythms (whatever those are) are characterized as unproblematic.

Wolf in his 1997 dissertation correctly translates Kynaston’s passage above, as did Newton in 1967: “diezelle Zahl der Silben, dieselbe Art von Metrum, die gleichen siebenzeiligen Strophen und den Endreim zu verwenden” [in orderto use the same number of syllables, the same type of meter, the same seven-line strophes, and the endrhyrne]. Yet his conclusion does not follow this: “Ohne Zweifel ist die Übersetzung ganz nach dem akzentu-

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16 Ibid., 291.
17 Ibid., 291–92.
18 Beadle, “The Virtuoso’s Troilus,” 213.
19 Wolf, Sir Francis Kynastons Übersetzung, 114.
ierenden Prinzip gestaltet” [Without question, the translation is designed according to accentual principles]. Kynaston is said to see Chaucer’s verse precisely as do twentieth-century Chaucerians, even though Kynaston himself gives no hint as to this prescient insight: “Chaucers Vers ist für Kynaston aus fünffüssigen Iamben gebildet” [Chaucer’s verse is for Kynaston constructed from iambs in five feet].

By the late twentieth century, the hesitations of Saintsbury, Lounsbury, and Madan are nowhere to be found. Qualifications give way to certainties. And nowhere is there any indication in any of this, as far as I can tell, that there is any question at all about the verse Chaucer used, no controversy whatsoever about “the rhythms of the original.” The fact, of course, is that at no point in the history of Chaucer reception has his verse form or the rhythms overlaid on that form been uncontroversial.

That Kynaston is said to perceive exactly what we perceive (the “rhythms of the original”) should cause suspicion. How could he have done this, since our views on Chaucer’s meter (a product of late nineteenth-century Chaucerians) were not shared by anyone in the seventeenth century? Even Tyrwhitt’s statements on meter in his 1774 edition, which modern Chaucerians claim to be the foundation for proper understanding of Chaucerian verse, are nearly 150 years away.

Kynaston and the Principles of Romance Verse

Most of what is said about Kynaston’s versification is inaccurate. Kynaston’s lines are not written in iambic pentameter (whatever that is); they cannot be scanned by quantity and only tortuously by accent. They are modelled after what Kynaston saw in Italian

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20 Ibid., 115, 116. Wolf ends his brief section on meter with another invocation of the mysterious Latin word senarius (also used by Ryan), whose resonance likely blinds his readers to the fact that the statement in which it occurs is completely inaccurate: “Kynastons Vers ist also ein katalektischer iambischer Senar” (116). A catalectic iambic senarius is a verse of six-feet of iambs lacking the final syllable. It has nothing to do with Kynaston’s verse.
and French verse and what he may well have seen in Chaucer’s verse: seven-line stanzas, in rhyme royale, with lines of eleven syllables in length and a terminal accent in syllable 10 (anyone can apply this simple rule to his verse, although see qualifications above in footnotes 4 and 5). This is exactly how Kynaston describes them, and every scholar who has described and analyzed this verse has of course referred to the same passages in Kynaston’s Preface.

Visum est mihi consultissimum, illum nova lingua donare, & novato rythmi & carminis genere decorare

[It seemed to me best to provide that in a new tongue and to decorate it in a new type of rhythm and song.]

Non me praeterit, quanto facilius mihi fuisset authoris verba & sensus vulgaribus Latinis Hexametris & Pentametris reddidisse: sed cum recorder quod celeberrimi Torquati Tassi, atque elegantissimi Ludovici Ariosti opera (ut Gallos & Iberos taceam) hoc metri genere vere nobili & Enharmonico sint composita, & quod haec septennaria compositio non tantum Italis, sed & Anglis, Gallis, immo omnibus sit in deliciis, utpote melos quod aurem mirifico modulamine mulceat & delectet: Tentare mihi visum, quid Lingua Latina posset, & experiri, num grata forent carmina Idiomate Romano pacta & concinnata, quae in linguis derivativis & modernis, tantam obtinuerunt per tot secula sequiora existimationem.

[I am not unaware how much easier it would have been to render the author’s sense in ordinary Latin elegiac couplets. But when I remembered that Tasso and Ariosto (not to mention Spanish and French works) wrote in this kind of meter and that this seven-line stanza has been popular among Italians, English, and French it occurred to me to see what Latin could do … in these same types of meters.]
He ends this preface with a reference to those who would condemn his verses as “Leonine” (rhyming accentual verse). That is, he condemns those who would describe his verse as late twentieth-century scholars do. Anyone so asinine, he says, obviously cannot distinguish the modulation of Neo-Latinists from the faecutinos (dreg-like) rhythms of the monks. That bears repeating: the descriptions we find of Kynaston’s verse in the twentieth century may be right; Kynaston himself, however, claims not only that those descriptions are wrong, but that those scholars who promote them are not competent to discuss the issue.

These statements do not seem to me to be ambiguous. Kynaston speaks of writing in a “new kind of song,” and by this, he means not in a conventional Latin meter. He is translating Chaucer by using “the same number of syllables.” He is not writing in quantitative verse (as every scholar recognizes) or rhymed accentual verse (as most scholars claim). He is, rather, following the precedent in verse by Ariosto, Tasso and in other romance languages. That is what he says. And most of his lines can be easily scanned accordingly. All you need is the ability to count.

French and Italian verse is based on what is called isosyllabism: the foundational structure is determined by the number of syllables per line, where syllables are all of equal weight or value (regardless of quantity or accent). To this foundation are added rules regarding accent: line length is determined by the placement of a terminal accent. In both French decasyllables and Italian hendecasyllables, that accent occurs on syllable #10.

The development of the two languages is such that the nature of this line changes. In French, words tended to drop unaccented final syllables. Thus, many lines in French that we describe as decasyllables do in fact have ten syllables; others have eleven and are characterized as having feminine endings and rhymes (and a number of rules can be added regarding the deployment

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21 I am not denying that some license needs to be allowed for the definition of what a syllable is and how elision is to be handled, and I suppose those who claim that his verse is iambic could argue that similar license would produce the five-foot iambic verse they see here.
of these types of rhymes). In Italian, these unaccented syllables are more persistent; the most common words retain a syllable after the final tonic accent, with the result that the most common line of this form in Italian has eleven syllables (the answer to the question “how many syllables does an Italian hendecasyllable contain?” is thus “from ten to twelve”).

Most French decasyllables (and all Alexandrines) have a fixed caesura, one that is regularly deployed in each poem. Italian does not have such a rule, despite some claims to the contrary. And of course there are rules regarding elision and even what constitutes a syllable. There are in addition a number of conventions that apply to the deployment of accents or phrase breaks, but these do not affect the basic structure of a line (the difference between what might be called legal and illegal lines).

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And there is nothing in either verse form that corresponds to our notion of a “foot,” a basic unit in most discussions of Chaucer’s verse, including those cited here.

What makes Kynaston’s verse “strange” and “curious” is not that he attempts to represent Chaucerian verse in Latin iambic pentameter, which he does not, but rather that he writes in Latin according to rules that apply to French or Italian verse. I doubt he is the only neo-Latinist to have done this, but I know of no other examples, and Kynaston, claiming this form is “new,” does not cite any. It is worth noting here that this is a completely artificial way of writing Latin in the seventeenth or any other century. Kynaston’s contemporaries had no difficulty in composing Latin according to standard classical meters (hexameters or hendecasyllables); the only reason I can imagine for Kynaston to compose in a non-classical meter (rhymed stanzas composed of isosyllabic lines modelled on Italian) would be that that was the form he saw in his original. Why else would he have done this? Kynaston’s lines contain eleven syllables, as do the majority of lines in Ariosto and Tasso, and as do all French decasyllabic lines with feminine endings. And most, if not all of Kynaston’s lines have a terminal accent on syllable 10, just as do all Italian hendecasyllables and all French decasyllables. Why would he have labored with this artificial form if he felt Chaucer had done something else?

Since Kynaston identifies the model of his verse as the verse of Tasso and Ariosto, it is difficult to see why scholars claim he writes in any other form. Those who have studied Kynaston seriously either have no familiarity with French or Italian verse (although that seems hard to accept, given some of the names here), or they are perhaps thrown off by Kynaston’s word “Decasyllabon,” which refers to a line type (“decasyllabic”) not to a specific number of syllables in each line (“ten”); these are of course two different things. Perhaps too they are simply unable to get past the banalities of the ordinary ways of describing English verse (iambic pentameter), and read constantly as Binns advises “with the strong iambic rhythm of the original in
mind”—a clear case, I think, of *petitio principii*. If you are an English speaker and you look at a French decasyllable, you will quickly begin to “hear” a distinct iambic pattern (due to conventional accents on syllables 4 and 10) even though the rules of versification do not call for such a pattern. From there, it is a short, but inaccurate step to assume that what we see or hear in any verse written according to these rules (whether in English or French) is in fact a flexible form of iambic pentameter; and that error happily conforms to what most of us were taught in grade school.

**Implications for Chaucerian Metrics**

To begin, I must make a concession. While my brief analysis of Italian and French verse is uncontroversial and its application to Kynaston fairly straightforward, where I differ from most Chaucerians is in my extension of these principles to Chaucer and even to other writers in English such as Alexander Pope. I could well be wrong here; but I will note that my own analysis of Chaucer’s verse or even Pope’s verse under these simple and basic principles does work, and I find few if any exceptions. If, on the other hand, you analyse any of this verse as accented iambic pentameter (whether Kynaston’s, Chaucer’s, or Pope’s), you

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25 It should be noted that Binns’s regularly quoted statement, “If the lines are read with the strong iambic rhythm of the original in mind, they work fairly well” (*Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England*, 253), is equivalent to saying that Kynaston’s verses “are not iambic” (which is true); it also claims without argument that Chaucer’s verses are iambic (which in my opinion is false).

26 Syllable 4 in most lines receives a tonic accent (exceptions involve what is called “lyric caesura” where the line break occurs after an unstressed syllable 4); syllable 10 invariably does. This in and of itself produces a real or illusory iambic rhythm. For French metricians, such “rhythm” is certainly a real, albeit variable feature of poetry. But it is part of what I have called style, not part of the versification system (Minkova’s “metrical template”). See, e.g., Dane, *The Long and the Short of It*, 13, and the discussion in Mazaleyrat, *Elements de métrique française*, chap. 4, “Composants du Rythme,” 109–40.
will find exceptions or deviations from the pattern in the vast majority of lines, exceptions that subsequently might be considered marks of the Poet’s skill and (somewhat illogically) further evidence of the existence of the form or template that this same evidence shows the Poet violates. I am of course not denying iambic rhythms in Chaucer. I am only saying that such rhythms are not the basis of his versification, that is, not part of what Minkova and Stockwell refer to as his “metrical template.” The analysis of such verse as iambic pentameter is far more complex than what is required, and the intricacies that result (whether of Chaucer’s or your own making) are matters of style, not matters of basic versification.

Chaucer, like Kynaston, has not always written in iambic pentameter, and I am here referring not to the thing (how or what Chaucer wrote), but to the description of the thing (how Chaucerians have described what he wrote). Iambic pentameter is, as far as Chaucer is concerned, a modern phenomenon, not a medieval one. Even if Chaucer did write in iambic pentameter (that is, even if modern Chaucerians are correct), Kynaston in the seventeenth century would have had no knowledge of that and no reason to suspect it. Chaucer’s “iambic pentameter” is a late-nineteenth-century discovery (or invention).

The modern consensus on Chaucer’s verse, if it can be said to be a consensus at all, begins more than a century after Kynaston wrote, with Tyrwhitt’s “Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer” in his edition of 1775.\(^{27}\)

The correctness and harmony of an English verse depends entirely upon its being composed of a certain number of syllables, and its having the accents of the syllables properly placed.\(^ {28}\)


\(^{28}\) Ibid., 4:88.
By the late nineteenth century, there are several competing analyses, most based on the notion that Chaucer wrote in some form of iambic accentual verse, that is, the emphasis is not on Tyrwhitt’s “certain number of syllables,” but rather “its having the accents of the syllables properly placed.” The most important of these is probably by Skeat, although the details of his analysis in my view are only marginally intelligible. The often cited analysis by Halle and Keyser in 1966 also assumes an accentual base, and there are many recent variants. Even recent studies by Duffell, Stockwell, and Minkova emphasizing the close formal and historical relation between Chaucer and the French and Italian predecessors he used as models, place themselves within an unbroken tradition going back to Skeat and Ten Brink. When push comes to shove, Chaucer wrote iambic pentameter, or, as characterized in Duffel, “the” iambic pentameter. What is described as the “metrical template” for Chaucer’s verse is what we have all, at some point in our education, been taught: five feet of iambics.


32 See, e.g., Donka Minkova and Robert Stockwell, “The Partial Contact: Origins of English Pentameter Verse: The Anglicization of an Italian Model,” in Language Contact in the History of English, eds. Dieter Kastovsky and Arthur Mettinger (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 343. Minkova and Stockwell claim to be using as neutral terminology as possible (“Emendation,” 129–30), but there is nothing at all neutral about this terminology if what is at issue (as here) is whether Chaucer actually wrote in or imagined something we describe as defined by iambics, feet, and the counting of foot-units by accent.
My view on these matters is that to describe as a template a fully-formed system of verse (accentual iambic pentameter) that was only described by modern metricians when we have, at least in Chaucer’s translated works, a perfectly usable and workable alternative right before our eyes—the Italian (or French) models from which he borrowed stanza forms: this is absurd at worst, or historically misleading at best. In terms of the discussion above, Chaucer’s template is a form or variant of romance syllabic verse, which might be represented as follows (I represent syllable 4 as accented here, but there are of course qualifications):³³:

\[ x \ x \ x \ X \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ x \ X \ (x) \]

Accents are a part of this template; they are not something superadded from English. All that is left for Chaucer to do is insert the words. Whatever other patterns occur (or “seem to occur”—these may not be the same thing) are matters of rhythm or what can be classified as on the level of style.³⁴

The problem with invoking iambic pentameter in this discussion and particularly in asserting it as a template is that to do so assumes “this is what Chaucer had in mind” (something we of course do not know, nor would any metrician claim we do), or that such a form is the foundation for Chaucer’s verse. But it isn’t (at least, not in the strongest sense), as even the re-

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³³ Italian does not have this obligatory accent, and French decasyllables contemporary with Chaucer occasionally use what is called a “lyric caesura,” that is, an accented syllable 3, with caesura following syllable 4. See discussion in any basic work on romance metrics, e.g., all those cited in footnote 22 above.

³⁴ The distinction found in many English scholars between meter and rhythm is exactly that found in French metricians. The difference is that, say, scholars committed to iambic pentameter consider accentual rhythm part of the basic rules or foundational aspects of meter (without rhythm, there is no iambic pentameter); a French metrician considers this strictly a matter of style, since rhythm is not part of basic versification rules. See above, footnotes 24 and 26.
cent scholars cited here occasionally concede. The foundation, or less argumentatively “the origin,” for Chaucer’s verse in *Troilus* and in early poems modelled on French would seem to be what he found in his models, in the same way that his stanza forms are derived from those models. If the well-known and largely uncontroversial verse principles of the models that Chaucer imitated provide adequate descriptions of Chaucer’s meter (although not necessarily of his style or rhythm), why invoke anything else? That is, what point is there in projecting back through time either the descriptive notion of iambic pentameter, or worse, the *res ipsissima*? Our allegiance to this verse form has befuddled students for decades, who know perfectly well that the English verse they are looking at does not follow anything like what they are taught iambic pentameter “is.”

**Conclusion**

The conventional language of meter, for better or worse, has direct bearing on the way scholars have viewed Kynaston. But Kynaston and what could be called his reception also has some bearing on this apparent consensus. Although most of the details of the modern metrical consensus on Chaucer post-date Kynaston, those same details have been used to describe Kynaston’s verse. Kynaston, to Chaucerians, is a writer of iambic pentameter, which is also by implication the meter he somehow saw in Chaucer, just as we do. Yet as we know, the idea that Chaucer wrote accentual verse is late in arriving; why would we suppose Kynaston saw in Chaucer what it took two more centuries for professional Chaucerians to see? And why, if he did, was he silent about this? The answer, of course, is that Kynaston saw

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35 See, e.g., the occasional equivocation in Minkova and Stockwell, “Partial Contact,” 340, where the “basic template” is described as “syllable count.” Elsewhere in the same article, that template is said to be a form of iambic pentameter.

36 I note the pedagogic implications of this in *The Long and the Short of It*, 2–4, 118.
nothing of the kind, nor is he in any way “like us” in his perception and representation of Chaucerian verse.

The failure to understand Kynaston’s verse is not in and of itself of great import, although it does make high-toned stylistic analyses of his verse amusing: the “appropriate Chaucerian feeling,” the “strangeness” of his verses, their singularity, ingenuity, in addition to all the technical language thrown at it (elision, synezeosis, hiatus, *Taktumstellung*). My first thought confronting this was that the misunderstanding of basic principles of verse simply makes hash of all such sensitive and learned analyses. The fact that readers do not understand Chaucer’s verse, or Shakespeare’s, or Baudelaire’s does not in and of itself invalidate their descriptions of its poetic beauties and rhythms; scholarly analysis of such verse in arcane technical terms or in relation to an inexistent abstract model — that’s a different story.

Now, however, I think there may be more to this. Why do good scholars so often fail to see what is right in front of them?

One explanation in the present case surely involves the decline in Latin skills that we all have experienced in relation to our nineteenth-century forebears. Kynaston’s once “strange” or “eccentric” lines grow more firmly “iambic” during the twentieth century (as fewer and fewer Latinists have the ability to read them) just as does Chaucer’s own verse. Another source might be the uncritical adoption of the binary model of Latin verse: Latin verse is either quantitative or accentual. 37 Thus, as soon as scholars determine that Kynaston’s verse is not quantitative (which even for amateur Latinists requires only a few minutes of frustration), the conclusion is that it must be accentual (even though Kynaston himself specifically denies this). This binary model of verse, whether applied to Kynaston’s Latin or to Chaucer’s English, excludes the form of meter with which

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Chaucer and Kynaston were most familiar (Italian and French verse, based on the principle of isosyllabism) and leads directly to the invocation of a type of verse that neither of them ever referred to. The great baggy monster of iambic pentameter, as I have elsewhere described it, simply cannot be expelled from the consciousness of modern English literary historians.

When Chaucer wrote *Book of the Duchess* or *Troilus*, he had directly before him or at least in his mind models in French and in Italian. He was imitating those models, just as Kynaston claims he was imitating Italian models in his translation. No one denies this. To translate what he saw, Kynaston rejected the obvious quantitative forms of verse that were available to him—hexameter, elegiacs, senarii, hendecasyllables—all of which any contemporary Latinist could have easily used in composition. He also rejected and ridiculed the very verse types he has been accused of writing: the “execrable Leonine verses of the monks” (Preface, “Candido Lectori …”). He invented instead a new form of writing Latin based on what he correctly saw in Tasso and which he may well (rightly or wrongly) have seen in Chaucer. The verse Chaucer used can in fact be described perfectly adequately using these models, that is, through the well-known and uncontroversial rules that apply to these French and Italian models. They may not give a complete account of Chaucer’s style, of course, but Chaucer’s lines, considered metrically, generally conform to them.

I conclude from this, however uncreatively, that Kynaston was right: that both Kynaston and Chaucer imitated the verse form used by the sources they were imitating, and that their verse can and should be most conveniently described according to the well-known and uncontroversial rules regarding these forms. After all, both borrowed non-English stanza forms (we don’t attempt to describe rhyme-royale stanzas modelled on the French as some perverse form of English heroic couplet); why wouldn’t they have imitated the versification form as well?

For Kynaston, this may be of little import. But for Chaucerians, more is at stake. Chaucerians who deny this are using some
version of the following logic, which I will state in as extreme form as I can:

1. Chaucer wanted to translate a work in foreign verse written according to the well-known rules of isosyllabic verse;
2. in the process, he invented a new form of accentual verse organized in five feet that had no precedent in English;
3. when he wrote in this unprecedented verse, it sadly but forgivably did not strictly follow the rules of this new form of accentual, foot-based verse that he invented, but was riddled with exceptions;
4. by a completely irrelevant and negligible working of chance, his verse just happened to follow, with far fewer exceptions, the well-known and widespread rules of the French and Italian verse he had before him; furthermore,
5. this is mere coincidence.

Now all this may well be true, although no Chaucerian would admit to thinking this. The way to finesse this logic might well be by invoking what appears to be an unchanging fixed universal — iambic pentameter — one with which we are all familiar. But that is step 2 in the logical process outlined here. I see no way of avoiding steps 3 through 5.

And why not go further? Since Kynaston is said to see in Chaucer the very form of iambic pentameter described in the late nineteenth century, why should Tyrwhitt be given credit for discovering this? (which he did not). Why isn’t “our Kynaston” credited with this insight more than a century earlier, even though he says nothing about it, nor can his translation be scanned accordingly?

Kynaston’s translation is thus an important critique of this implied logic. When Kynaston looked at Chaucer in the seventeenth century, well before the consensus had been formed that Chaucer, like so many other English writers past and present, wrote in iambic pentameter, what seemed most important to him were not the accents of Chaucer (whatever they may have been), but the simple matter of syllable count (neither of which,
of course, was perfectly represented in whatever printed book he used as his source—compare my transcription of his stanza 1 above with any modern edition). What is somewhat strange to me is that the much better informed and scholarly Chaucerians who followed him have proven unable or unwilling to see or consider this either in Kynaston’s own verse (where the principle is obvious) or in Chaucer (where of course it is more problematic). Perhaps we shouldn’t see a form of isosyllabism in either of them, and perhaps Chaucer did indeed invent iambic pentameter, with its “strong iambic rhythm,” just as we were taught that form in middle school. But the fact that at least some Chaucerians cannot see an alternative verse form when it is staring them right in the face and when they are told specifically by the author what they are looking at—this does not give me a great deal of faith in other Chaucerians’ ability to see it anywhere else.