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Iambic verse in different literary traditions

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Abstract: This paper is devoted to study how the metrical verse like iambic tetrameter can be realized in different literary traditions. The formation of iambic verse in the Early Modern Time in Europe and its spread to the East of the Continent is investigated. The interaction between meter and language in different literary traditions during this process is considered and the nature of the meter's implementation is determined. As a result of the transfer of iambic verse from one tradition to another, the highest degree of correspondence between meter and language is achieved. The utmost level of verse metricality was especially successfully embodied in the German and later also in the early Russian iambic poetry. However, the evolution and the further transfer of iamb on the East of the Continent significantly modifies the principles of interaction between metrical canon and language prosody.

Keywords: Dutch; English; Flemish; German; iamb; metrical verse; Russian and Ukrainian poetry

1 Early historical background

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries iambic versification was firmly established in several European poetry traditions. It first developed in England and then on the Continent, above all in Flanders and Brabant. The iamb was perceived there as a new form of metrical (syllabo-tonic) poetry, based directly on models from antiquity, in contrast to mediaeval purely syllabic or purely tonic versification. This metrical poetry with the synthesis of syllabism and tonicism imparted a

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distinct new tone to Renaissance literature.¹ The development of iambic verse signaled a break with the late Latin syllabic tradition, the preservation of which had been promoted by the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic liturgical songs were based on syllabic verse, whereas the rise of Protestantism in Southern Netherlands required a new poetic form.

This was needed from many points of view in order to create the new Church services called for by the Reformation. At this time there were many Flemish and Dutch translations of the Psalms into iambic verse. The use of iambic meters distinguished these translations from the Roman Catholic ones, which were in Latin syllabic verse, and turned the poets in a different direction, towards the ancient tradition. Despite the fact that the iamb developed earlier in England than on the Continent (the first iambic verses appeared in English poetry as early as in the fourteenth century in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer),² the impetus for its spread in Europe was given not by English but by Flemish and Dutch literature. This occurred at the end of the sixteenth and in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Flemish and Brabantian poets elaborated new forms of iambic verse which were later to serve as models for verse reform in other Protestant countries, in Northern Netherlands and later, in the 1620s–40s, in Germany. After the Thirty Years' War the Dutch models of iambic verse gave rise to the development of a new Protestant poetry in several Lutheran lands. The considerable authority of Dutch literature and culture in the seventeenth century enabled the spread of iambic versification to many European literatures. The main meters developed in the Netherlands and then exported to neighboring countries were the iambic tetrameter and hexameter. Here are examples of translations from the Psalms executed by the famous Brabantian scientist and poet Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde:

Almachtich Heer mijn Godt ghenadich Want du bist heer alleen den Boem van haere macht
 Op dy alleen hop' ic ghestadich, mits dyn genad'en gunst zal werden hooch geacht
 Dies help my Heer met stercker cracht den hoorn ons loffs end prys: want onsen schilt gemeene
 Uit aller mijn vervolghers macht.³ Bestaet in God den heer, die ons bewaert alleene...⁴

1 In that epoch, precisely the iamb becomes a symbol of Renaissance poetry in the Netherlands, as Albert Verwey noted in his preface to the works of van der Noot “Ja, de Jambe, dat was de Renaissance hier” [Yes, the iamb, that was the genuine Renaissance here] (van der Noot 1895: 4), translated by E. Kazartsev.

2 Then there was a relatively long interval, almost until the middle of the sixteenth century.

3 Marnix van Sint Aldegonde, De sevenste Psalm (Marnix van Sint Aldegonde 1580: Avijr). Hereinafter the spelling in the source is retained.

4 Marnix van Sint Aldegonde, Vervolg den LXXXIX Psalm (Marnix van Sint Aldegonde 1898: 126).

Note: hereinafter underlining is used to indicate strong positions in iambic lines, while stresses are highlighted in bold type.

The tetrameter, a short iambic line (see the left column), apparently originated from the Flemish and Dutch poetry of earlier times: in the literature of the Low Countries, iambic tetrameter verses first appeared as early as in the twelfth century. The long line, iambic hexameter (right column), was developed in the Netherlands later, at the end of sixteenth century, on the basis of the French Alexandrine (twelve-syllable verse), as a result of the gradual regularization of iambic alternation of frequently and rarely stressed positions.

It should be noted that the use of English iambic pentameter became a tradition on the European continent much later, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. The sole exceptions were early experiments with pentameter, also by Philips van Marnix, who was well acquainted with the English poetic tradition and tried to adopt it on the continent. These attempts remained only experiments and in his day were not continued in the literature of the Low Countries.

Despite the clear discontinuity in the development of syllabo-tonic verse in English and in continental poetry, the writers from the Netherlands paid attention to English verse: many English poets were translated into Dutch and published in Amsterdam. It must be said that English and Dutch iambic verse differed not only in the use of pentameter, as opposed to tetrameter and hexameter, but also due to a higher degree of “purity” in the iambic cadence of the latter.

At that time the iambic tetrameter also appeared in English poetry, but it was rare. Its origin is not very clear. Conceivably, it may have developed independently, without any Continental influence, although at some point this influence may have been perceptible. Here is an example of English iambic tetrameter by Christopher Marlowe from the end of the sixteenth century:

Come live with me and be my love,
 And we will all the pleasures prove
 That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.⁵

It will be noticed that already in this famous tetrameter stanza there is a reduction of the first weak position in the last line, so that it looks like a trochee. Such “metric games” are quite characteristic of the early English iamb, distinguishing it from the stricter metrical verse on the Continent.

⁵ Marlowe, *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (Marlowe 2006: 157).

2 English and continental iambic verse

Generally, the form of iambic verse that developed initially in the Netherlands and then in Germany was characterized by a more exact metrical structure than in England and by relatively minor rhythmical deviations (Kazartsev 2015). One could say that Continental iambic verse (*our term, E. K.*) rejected a fair number of the “liberties” permissible in English verse.

I am referring to the liberties in meter and rhythm that are widespread in English poetry. The former are variations in the syllable count per line, caused, for instance, by truncating the initial weak position, and, sometimes, by extending the final position, as in the following example of an early iamb by Chaucer:

For he hedde geten him yet no *benefice*
 Ne was so wordly for to have office
 For him was levere have at his beddes heed
Twenty books clad in blak or reed...⁶

In the first line of this passage, the word *benefice* extends the last metrical foot by one syllable, and in the last line, because of *twenty*, on the contrary, the first metrical foot is truncated: the upbeat is missing.

Variations in the syllable count of English iambic verse occur even in the middle of lines, as a result of inserting or omitting a syllable next to a strong position. This characteristic of English verse has persisted throughout the centuries:

O wild *West* Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
 Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red
 Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed...

In the last line of the first stanza of the “Ode to the West Wind”, Percy Shelley allows for a widening of the first strong position, so that the first metrical foot – when fully pronounced – becomes an amphibrach. This type of “violation” appears as such when held against the abstract scheme of the metrical pattern. However, English verses permit quite a bit of freedom in rhythm and prosody: for instance, stress omissions on ictuses, which can result in pyrrhics. This occurs in the same line of Shelley’s poem, where the indefinite article *an* is in a strong position (see above).

⁶ Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*. General Prologue, lines 291–294.

A typical case of rhythmic license in English iambs is the widespread weighting of metrical weak positions with stressed one-syllable lexical words. In the same excerpt from Shelley's poem the word *West* in the first line is in the second weak position. As a result, three strong stresses follow in succession: "O wild West Wind..." A similar weighting occurs with the word *dark* in the fourth weak position of the second stanza's last line. These cases of rhythmical liberties (pyrrhics and spondees) are common phenomena, occurring in other poetic traditions, though not as frequently. However, the most important and, to some extent, specifically English prosodic liberty is the shifting of metrical stress: that is, placing the accented syllable of polysyllabic words in a metrical weak position, so that the stress is shifted from a strong to a weak position, as, for instance, at the beginning of the second stanza above.⁷ Shelley put the stressed syllable of the disyllabic word *yellow* into the first weak position of the iambic line, and the metrical strong position is unstressed. Similar cases of antimetrical accentuation are found quite often in John Donne's poetry:

That Inland Sea *having* discovered well,
 A cellar-gulf, where one might sail to Hell
 From Heidelberg, thou longed'st to see; and thou
 This book, *greater* than all, producest now...⁸

Twice here we observe a right-to-left shift of metrical stress, quite typical for English iambic verse. In the first line, the stressed syllable of the word *having* is in a weak position, while the strong position is occupied by the unstressed suffix *-ing*. The fourth line offers an even more interesting example, in which the stress on the word *greater* falls in a weak metrical position, the following strong position being unstressed. The second example is also interesting because, unlike in the previous one, the stress shift appears in a lexical word. The semantic impact of the word *greater* is thereby underscored and amplified through counter-metrical accentuation, a stress shift.⁹

A left-to-right stress shift is also allowable in English iambic verse, though it is found much less frequently, chiefly in dramas, and placed in the seams between metrical feet, as, for instance, in the following excerpt from Shakespeare's text. Here, because of the stress on the word *divine*, the metrical accent is shifted from the first strong position to the next weak position, that is, in fact, to another metric foot:

⁷ Regarding different types of counter-metrical accent shifts in early iambic verse see my earlier publication (Kazartsev 2008).

⁸ Donne J. Upon Mr. Thomas Coryat's Crudities (Donne 1971: 173).

⁹ Marina Tarlinskaja calls such cases "rhythmical italics" (Tarlinskaja 2014: 29–30, 270).

As having sense of beauty, do omit
 Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
 The divine Desdemona.

What is she?¹⁰

It is necessary to point out that the previous line *Their mortal natures, letting go safely by* is also metrical “incorrect” because of the disyllabic word *safely* which occupies an iambic weak position where usually one syllable would appear. Thus, we have here not only a shift of the stress, but also an extension of the metrical position and, generally, an expansion of the syllabic content of iambic pentameter. These examples let us see that English verse very often permits various kinds of counter-metrical accentuation.

Unlike the English, the Continental iamb adhered to the metrical scheme more strictly, maintaining a consistent syllable count per line. Differences in syllable count could appear only as a result of the conventional alternation of lines with masculine and feminine clausulas (± 1 syllable). Gradually, the strong, or “heavy” stress shift found in English poetry became unacceptable. However, in early Brabantian iambs, for example, by Marnix, we can find some types of shifting metrical accent stress similar to those in the English iamb:

Ick wil Gods goetheyt groot lofsingen dach end nacht
 End kondigen syn trow van geslacht tot geslácht.
 want ick seg't voor gewis, dat zyn gnad' is gestichtet
 Eewig end onbeweeget. Syn waerheyt die verlichtet...¹¹

In the second line of this fragment the word *geslácht* ‘generation’ is used twice. First it appears with a very unusual left-to-right stress shift, as was the case with *divine* in Shakespeare’s pentameter (see above). Then the same word is used normally with the stress on the metrical strong position. In a later edition of this Psalm Marnix changes the text so that the shift of the metrical stress disappears:

Ick wil Gods gunst altoos lofsingen onbeswaert,
 End maecken sijne trow van stam tot stam vermaert:
 Want ick segt, end 'tis waer, dat sijne gunst genadig
 In eewigheyt gesticht, blijft even seer gestadig...¹²

The further development of iambic verse in the Netherlands imposed a ban on metrical accent shifts, and poets during the Golden Age of Dutch literature avoided

¹⁰ Shakespeare, *Othello* (Shakespeare 1807: 1052).

¹¹ Marnix, Den LXXXIX Psalm (Marnix van Sint Aldegonde 1576).

¹² Marnix, Vervolg den LXXXIX Psalm (Marnix van Sint Aldegonde 1898).

them entirely. However, some light forms of stress shifting were also possible in later Dutch poetry. This light reaccentuation occurs in words with two stresses: for instance, in compound words or verbs with stressed (separable) prefixes, when the main stress falls on a weak position and the secondary stress on the next strong position, as in the following passage from Joos van den Vondel's about Dutch shipping:

Doe Draeck en Candisch vast nieuwwerelden ontdeckten,
Om 'sWerelts ommeloop haer vleugelen uytreckten...¹³

In the first line the main stress in the compound *nieuwwerelden* 'new worlds' falls on a weak position. At the same time, the strong position is also stressed (*-wer*), but this stress is weaker than that on *nieuw-*. In the second case the same occurs with the verb *uytreckten* 'stretch out', where the strong stress falling on the prefix *uyt-* is realized in a weak position and the weak stress on *-reckt* is realized in a strong position. This "light" type of stress shift, with a stressed weak position and a realized strong position (though by a weaker stress), is a fixture of Dutch poetry (Kazartsev 2017: 25). It is necessary to note that the strong and light forms of stress shift in early Flemish and Dutch iambs are most often in long lines, in iambic hexameter rather than tetrameter. Possibly this is connected with the genesis of the meter: it comes from the French twelve-syllable verse, in which there were no metrical periods (feet) and accents were not ordered.

Among German poets, despite the rather frequent occurrence of words with two stresses, any stress shift was prohibited. The exceptions to this are early works by Martin Opitz, written, obviously, under the influence of Dutch verse (Kazartsev 2017: 28). Opitz himself, in his more mature works, and his successors, such as Paul Fleming, Simon Dach, Angelus Silesius, Andreas Gryphius, and others, almost entirely avoid any shift of metrical accent, strong or light.

German iambic verse is the best example of Continental syllabo-tonicism with an emphatic, very pronounced cadence of strong and weak positions. The prosodic realization of ictuses becomes more nuanced, in part because differing degrees of stress fall on rhythm-forming elements—chiefly with the help of semi-stressed syllables (secondary stresses) in compound words and in verbs with separable prefixes. Omissions of metrical stresses occur rarely, although omissions on the last ictus are allowed to a certain extent, as in this fragment of iambic tetrameter by Andreas Gryphius:

13 Vondel, Hymnus ofte Lofzang over de Wijd-Beroemde Scheepvaart de Vereenigde Nederlanden (van den Vondel 1927).

Wo sind die Wunder der Geschöppf
 Die schöne Seelenräuberinnen?
 Ich spüre nichts, als grause Köpff
 Und werde keiner Zierath innen!¹⁴

In the second line the stress on the last strong position is omitted because of the suffix of the long word *Seelenräuberinnen*. It is interesting that this word has two stresses: the first falls on the first syllable *See*, while the second falls on the third syllable *räu*. At the same time, the first stress is stronger than the second, and they are both realized in metrically strong positions. That is, formally, both positions are filled with stressed syllables, but, nevertheless, they are realized differently. Such nuances of rhythm were actively used by German poets. Maintaining the accuracy of iambic alternation, they, at the same time, diversified the meter by softening the fully stressed (monotonic) character of its lines. In the following stanza from Gryphius' poem one can distinctly hear clearly-defined, fully-stressed iambic lines:

Ach todten! Ach, was lern ich hier!
 Was bin ich, und was werd ich werden!
 Was fühl und trag ich doch an mir,
 Als leichten staub und wenig erden!
 Wie lange wird mein cörper stehn!
 Wie bald werd ich die jahre schliessen!
 Wie bald die welt zum abschied grüssen
 Und as der zeiten schrancken gehn!¹⁵

Here there are only two fairly common deviations from the meter: in the second and last lines. In the first case the metrical stress is omitted because of the conjunction *und*; in the second case, because of the preposition *aus*. This iamb where all ictuses are realized, except for rare omissions of the metrical stresses, is typical for German versification. Analysis of Dutch and German iambs in comparison with English verse shows that the syllabo-tonic “model” that developed on the Continent differed from that in England. It was distinguished, on the one hand, by a more precise metrical structure and, on the other hand, by considerably more rigid rules regarding the relationship between meter and language.

The development of iambic verse and its spread over Europe was accompanied by a process of clarification, by the gradual elimination of the pronounced violations of the metrical scheme that were peculiar to English and early Flemish-Brabantian

¹⁴ Andreae Gryphii gedanken über den kirch-hof und ruhe-stände der verstorbenen (Gryphius 1657).

¹⁵ Gryphius (1657).

syllabotonicism. The poets tried to observe the syllable count per line strictly, they did not allow the truncation of weak positions, and they rejected any kind of stress shift.

3 The spread of iambic verse

Gradually, metrical verse spread over all of northern Europe, developing mainly in Protestant lands, initially in Silesia, East Prussia, and Riga, as well as in Denmark and Sweden. On the whole, a stricter type of syllabo-tonic versification arose on the Continent. As we have already noted, German poetry can be considered as the apex of such versification.

Amidst the significant changes that took place in Northeastern Europe in the aftermath of the Great Northern War, Russia entered the sphere of Baltic culture. Russia's expansion to the Baltic Sea and the construction of a new capital on the Neva River led to direct interaction between Russian culture and, in particular, the German-speaking cultures of the southern and eastern shores of the Baltic. This cultural contact is known to have played a decisive role in the development and formation of a new Russian Empire. Moreover, it had a significant impact on the development of Russian literature: in particular, it gave impulse to the reforms in Russian versification introduced by Mikhail Lomonosov.

In studies devoted to the dissemination of iambic verse throughout Europe, the fact that Russian poetry adopted iambic verse earlier than, for instance, Polish or even Czech has been seen as somewhat of an aberration, given that scholars noted the gradual spread of syllabotonicism from West to East (Gasparov 1996: 209). Accordingly, metrical verse, emanating from German poetry, should have first influenced Czech verse, then Polish, and finally Russian. It is well known, after all, that in the seventeenth century Russia adopted literary forms of versification from Poland. How could it have happened that in the eighteenth century Russian writers start implementing modern forms of versification prior to their West Slavic neighbors, while iambs begin to appear in Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Bulgarian poetry under the direct influence of Russian verse?

Clearly, the notion of syllabo-tonic versification spreading from West to East does not stand up to scrutiny. Rather, it spread in a different manner, from North to South. Whereas the Netherlands and Germany played key roles in the dissemination of new metrical poetry in Northern Europe, the migration of iambic verse from North to South occurred through the influence of Russian literature. Russia's expansion to the Baltic Sea, the founding of a new cultural center in St. Petersburg, as well as interaction between the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg and German universities, fostered an environment conducive to importing new forms

of versification into Russian literature. Their advent and dissemination in Russia significantly influenced the composition of Polish iambic verse in the works of Adam Mickiewicz, of Ukrainian iambic verse in the works of Taras Shevchenko, and subsequently of Belorussian, Bulgarian, and, to some extent, Serbian metrical verse.

Thus, “Russian civilization”, having reached the shores of the Baltic, was drawn into the cultural activity taking place at that time in one of the most culturally progressive regions of Europe. Russia’s expansion created a distinct bridge between Russian and German culture, which in the eighteenth century played a significant role in the emergence of a new Russian poetry. Subsequently, by way of the Russian “pipeline”, these literary forms were adopted by other Slavic nations. The spreading of syllabotonicism in this manner, however, resulted in certain deviations from the Continental model, which had been based, first and foremost, on German verse. Continental iambic verse, with its distinctly emphasized meter, which in the German tradition was upheld largely on the authority of examples from antiquity, turned out to be difficult to sustain, given the strict, canonical rules of metrical composition. Russian and Ukrainian verse “slipped away” from the rigorous framework of the German (Continental) model and took on a completely different form, although this did not happen straightaway.

4 “Metrical” and “rhythmical” verse

Initially the situation had been different: the German type of verse had considerable authority. Its influence dominated in the Baltic region. It should be noted that Russian poets chose the Continental (not the English) model of iambic versification. This model could be called “metrical” verse, in which metrically correct lines predominate (which was characteristic of both Dutch and German iambs). The verse reformer Mikhail Lomonosov (middle of the eighteenth century) introduced precisely the Continental type of iamb into the Russian poetic tradition by following German examples. The British “rhythmical” iambic verse was not initially adopted in Russia.

The metrical verse, with which Lomonosov was well acquainted because of his close connection to the German tradition, gave him the idea of composing “pure” iambic lines.¹⁶ This notion was formulated in his first theoretical work, the “Letter

¹⁶ This premise is supported by the view of Zhirmunsky, who assumed that Lomonosov could not have gotten the idea of composing iambic lines that are not pure from the theory or from the practice of German poets (Zhirmunsky 1968: 16–17). However, Taranovsky put forth a different thesis: that the practice of German poets included a number of pyrrhics and spondees, and

on the rules of Russian versification”, written in Germany in 1739: “Pure iambic lines are difficult to compose; however, rising slowly, they increase the nobility, splendor, and loftiness of the subject matter. There is no better use for them than solemn odes” (Lomonosov 1986: 470).¹⁷ Lomonosov thus affirms that the iamb belongs to high poetry.

It should be noted that these observations by the young Russian poet are preceded by a discussion of the undesirability of mixing metrical feet: “In free verse I very rarely use trochees instead of iambs and iambs instead of trochees, and even when I do so, it is only because of great need or lack of time, for they are completely adverse to each other” (Lomonosov 1986: 470). Lomonosov also explains what he means by “free verse”: “I call that verse irregular and free in which instead of an iamb or a trochee one can use a pyrrhic” (Lomonosov 1986: 470).

Therefore, the aspiration to pure iambic verse to which Lomonosov refers in 1739 seems primarily to entail not mixing metrical feet: iambs with trochees (including the prohibition of mixing iambic and trochaic lines in the same text) as well as iambs with pyrrhics. Though Lomonosov advises other poets to avoid pyrrhic lines, in his own practice he was not always able to do this. To maintain such prosodic regularity is truly a difficult task. Before Lomonosov, nobody had tried to achieve this. Neither among his German nor his Dutch predecessors can one find “ideal” iambic verse.

For poets of the Netherlands, the most important thing was to avoid strong stress shifts (of the English type) and to establish a prevalence of fully stressed verses over those that are not fully stressed. For them, this represented metrical purity. In this respect, the German poets went further. They essentially raised the proportion of fully stressed lines, compared with their Dutch predecessors, and put a strict ban on stress shifts of any type.

In Russian poetry metrical purity was chiefly understood as not mixing iambs and trochees. In addition, replacing iambs with pyrrhics was to be avoided. As a result, an aspiration toward fully stressed verses emerged. Lomonosov, however, apparently understood the difficulty of such a task from the very beginning. Already in his first iambic ode written in Germany he allowed himself quite a few pyrrhics. They appeared not through oversight, as some scholars have thought, and not because, as Zhirmunsky supposed, the text of this ode was later revised. There are reasons to believe that the pyrrhics in the Khotin Ode were there from the beginning

Lomonosov could have adopted them from German poetry (Taranovsky 1975: 31). At the same time Taranovsky wrote that German verse contains 25% pyrrhic lines (Taranovsky 1975: 32). However, that is not a lot compared to the mature Russian iamb. Already in Lomonosov’s later tetrameters their frequency reaches 78% (see our diagram below).

¹⁷ Hereinafter translated by E. Kazartsev.

and that their number even exceeded the average number of pyrrhics in canonical examples of Continental iambic verse. The observed deviations were apparently related to the particularities of composing the first Russian iambic verses, which developed at the crossroads of two different languages and cultures.¹⁸

Eventually, in Russian verse the pyrrhics caused by stress omissions on ictuses became more widespread as compared to Dutch or German verse. Among Russian poets, the frequency of pyrrhics could reach 75%, while in German iambic verse the maximum frequency of omitted metrical stresses rarely exceeded 30%. Moreover, in some works by Lomonosov, there are cases of stress shift not allowed in either Continental verse or in the classical Russian iamb of later periods.¹⁹

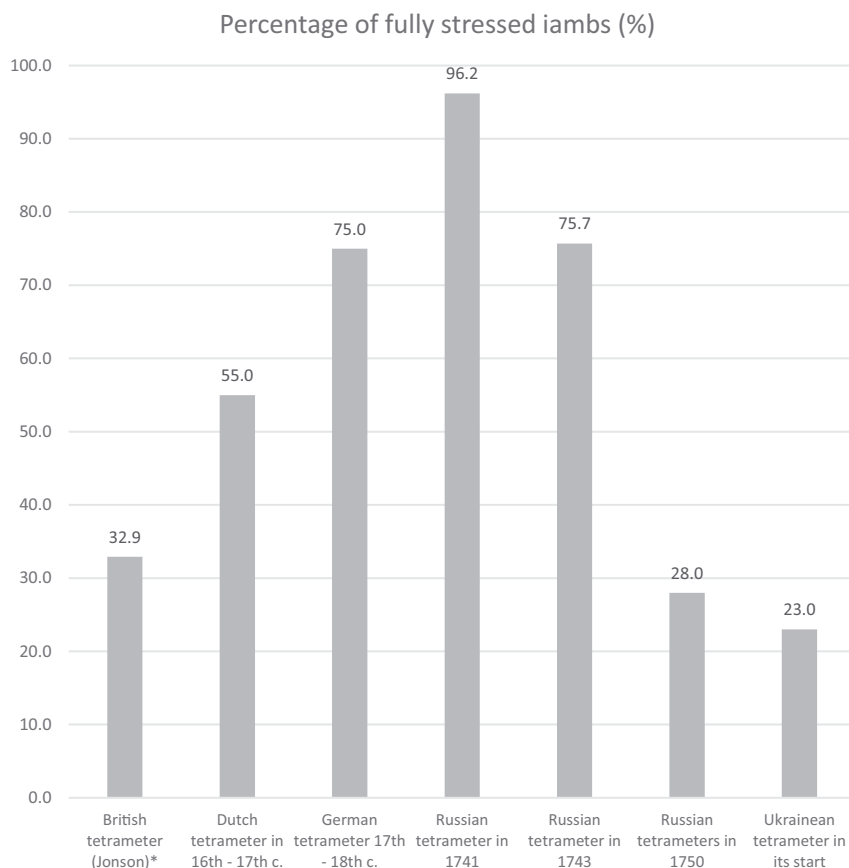
It is interesting to note that Lomonosov's odes of 1743 proved to come closest to the Continental type of iambic verse. It is also noteworthy that precisely in the same year, another Russian poet, Alexandr Sumarokov, apparently also tried to compose iambic verses in accordance with the rhythmical norms of the Continental model (Kazartsev 2013: 395–396). Later, however, both Lomonosov and Sumarokov practically ceased to rely on Continental models and developed a less restrictive form of iambic verse. The tendency of Russian poets to emphasize the meter rhythmically, going back to the Continental tradition, soon weakened.

Nevertheless, Russian verse established the rule that the last strong position should be stressed. This rule was observed by poets almost without exception. In this respect, Russian iambic verse proved to be less “flexible” than Continental verse, in which the stress on the last ictus was not obligatory. Thus, Russian verse preserved certain features of the Continental model: strict syllable counts as well as the absence of stress shift and any augmentation or truncation. In addition, it introduced a more rigorous rule regarding the stress on the last strong position. This was a purely Russian feature that expressed an aspiration toward the regularization (clarification) of iambic verse, toward greater precision in its prosodic realization.

Along with this, being an heir to Continental and, first and foremost, German iambs, Russian verse allowed for greater freedom in the use of pyrrhics. On the whole, after 1745 one cannot find many fully stressed lines in Russian poetry. The following diagram shows the development of European verse in terms of the use of “pure” iambic lines.

18 For more on this, see my article (Kazartsev 2013: 384–387).

19 On the basis of research data, we can say that stress shift in Russian as opposed to European verse entailed a different interrelationship between meter and language. For example, in English or Dutch iambs, if the stress in a polysyllabic word fell on a weak position, it, as a rule, stayed there. Thus, the meter was violated and language superseded meter. In the Russian iamb, under the same conditions, meter apparently superseded language, and the word changed its accentuation by a shift of the stress to the strong position, thus obeying the meter.



*According to J. Bailey (Bailey 1975: 33).

This diagram schematizes the development and subsequent decline of the “pure” (fully stressed) tetrameter.²⁰ It shows how, in the process of migrating from one literary tradition to another, requirements for the prosodic realization of iambic meter gradually became more rigorous. In the English tetrameter of the period being studied, the percentage of fully stressed lines was not stable; it oscillated, in some cases reaching 50%, in other cases sinking below 33%. In this respect, Dutch verse was more stable: on the average fully stressed lines occurred approximately 55% of the time. As already stated, in German verse the frequency of

²⁰ Calculated in Prosimetron-System devised by Kazartsev during the project supported by Russian Science Foundation (RSF).

such lines reached 75%. Lomonosov's odes of 1741 set a record of sorts, with the frequency exceeding 96%. Later, in 1743, the frequency of fully stressed lines decreased practically to the level of German verse: 75.7%. Then, in the second half of the 1740s, and particularly at the beginning of the 1750s, the liberation begins: the use of fully stressed lines in Russian verse approaches that of the freer English iambic verse: the frequency of pure iambic lines (without pyrrhics) sinks to around 30%. Conversely, the number of pyrrhic lines increases: to 70% and more.

It must be said that the traditional opinion that Russian classical verse contains many pyrrhics, because Russian words are longer than in German or English, does not stand up to criticism. Our calculations show that the average word length in Russian prose of the eighteenth century is 2.9 syllables. The average word length in German is 2.6 syllables. Thus, Russian words are in fact somewhat longer than in German. The average word length in Dutch, however, is even shorter: 2.5 syllables. Consequently, Dutch iambic verse should contain more fully stressed lines than the German, but, as we know, this is not the case. Dutch iambic verse is much freer in its use of pyrrhics. It is also known that English words are even shorter: their average length oscillates between 2.3 and 2.4 syllables. However, English iambic verse quite often demonstrates the same degree of freedom in the realization of pyrrhic lines as Russian iambic verse.

Evidently, such differences cannot be explained simply on the basis of the linguistic material, in terms of word length. They must be explained in terms of the conditions and mechanisms that fostered the development of iambic verse and established stable norms for selecting pyrrhic words, that is, words that begin or end with multiple unstressed syllables. What determines the frequency with which poets choose such words? Quite possibly certain general poetic attitudes of the epoch may have influenced their prosodic choices. In the Netherlands iambic verse was deemed sufficiently pure so long as it contained a slight predominance (55%) of fully stressed lines. Obviously, German poets tried to strengthen the iambic cadence, and, for them, iambic verse was truly iambic if it contained not a slight, but a rather significant predominance of such "pure" lines: up to 75% and sometimes even more. Initially, Russian iambic verse tried, to a certain extent, to follow the German model but, apparently, could not sustain such an effort and developed a different stable norm regarding the proportion of "pure" and pyrrhic lines, which became a kind of threshold for identifying the verse as iambic. It is interesting that this proportion in Russian tetrameter is close to that in the English iamb from the "pre-Continental" period.

It can be said that Russian verse, in its initial stage, built on the experience of the Continental syllabo-tonic tradition, completely accepting this model of versification and perfecting it (Lomonosov's early iambic verse), but then, using this model as a point of departure, went in quite a different direction. Ultimately,

having completely overcome the influence of metrical (German) verse, the Russian iamb becomes rhythmical: as in English poetry, after a certain date (around the early 1750s), strict metrical criteria for composition are no longer present. See the diagram above: it shows the evolution of the iambic tetrameter in its three phases: ‘pre-Continental’ (English), ‘Continental’ (Dutch and German), and ‘post-Continental’ (Russian, Ukrainian).

Ukrainian verse, like Russian, developed a high level of freedom in realizing meter. The percentage of fully-stressed lines, as the diagram shows, is very close to that of Russian iambic verse. In the eighteenth-century only 23% of Ukrainian iambic tetrameter lines are fully stressed. Later, in the nineteenth century, the fully-stressed iambic lines total only 24 and 18%.²¹ But the Ukrainian iamb, unlike Russian, in certain cases also allowed shifts of metrical stress. This rather high level of rhythmical freedom to a large extent reflects the influence of Ukrainian folk poetry, as well as of Polish syllabic verse. In Ukrainian folk poetry stress shifts are often permitted, and in syllabic poetry the position of stresses in a line is relatively free. Clearly as a result of these influences, Ukrainian poets began to allow non-metrical accentuation in the newly adopted iambic verse, accepting this as a perfectly natural phenomenon: if the stress did not fall on a metrically strong position, shifting it was permissible. Consequently, in terms of freedom in realizing the meter, Ukrainian iambic verse went even further than Russian, reintroducing anaclastical accentuation.

One can safely say that, from the start, the Ukrainian iamb was not metrical, but rhythmical. This feature was reinforced by the range of genres in which the meter was utilized. Whereas in Russian poetry iambic verse was introduced as the meter of elevated genres, spiritual and triumphant odes, and heroic poems, in Ukraine it appears as the meter in comic and burlesque poetry. For this reason, purity in realizing the meter was not essential.

5 Conclusions

This study has shown that the same poetic meter may be realized differently in different nations. However, there are some general tendencies that can be observed over the course of its development and in the process of its transmission to other national traditions. For instance, it is obvious that the spread of syllabotonicism in the period from the end of the sixteenth century until the 1830s–40s was accompanied by a certain “purification” of the metrical model. One can see a tendency

²¹ According to the data of my student Arina Davydova.

toward a more regular and accurate realization of the iambic cadence: the transmission of the iamb from Dutch poetry to German was accompanied by a decrease of not fully stressed lines and by a ban on stress shifts. The same tendency essentially continued and became even stronger in the Russian tetrameter, during the earlier stages of its development.

Nevertheless, rather significant discrepancies are evident in the realization of a given meter as it develops in different literatures. For instance, while in German iambic verse so-called semi-stresses are important for rhythmical diversification, in Russian iambic verse this is achieved through omissions of metrical stress. However, the differences and similarities in the realization of meter do not depend only on the language. They may be dictated by the conditions under which a metrical system of versification originates, as well as by interactions with other literary traditions. Precisely such an interaction between Russian verse and the Continental tradition resulted in attempts to achieve the purest realization of iambic verse. Parting from this tradition resulted in greater freedom in the composition of verse, particularly freedom in the use of pyrrhics. This phenomenon testifies to a break with the Continental (first of all German) canon and marks the transition to a more natural “properly Russian” type of iambic verse. Ukrainian iambic verse, as we have seen, went even further in allowing more freedom in realizing the meter, which clearly brings it close to English verse.

This closeness is surely not coincidental, since in both cases a strong syllabic verse tradition was involved in the emergence of iambic verse. The development of English pentameter was based on French ten-syllable verse and only gradually acquired the structure of a more or less regularly alternating meter. Ukrainian poetry, as we know, was influenced by Polish syllabic verse. Evidently, iambic alternation in English and Ukrainian versification did not separate itself immediately or completely from pure syllabics.

Over the course of three or four centuries a cyclical framework is evident in the composition of iambic verse in European poetry: from its free realization among English poets in the sixteenth century and the first third of the seventeenth; to the more restricted forms of Flemish and Dutch verse and, ultimately, the maximally rigid German models of the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; next, in the early 1740s, Lomonosov’s experimentation with a more rigorous realization of iambic verse; then, in the second half of the 1740s and in the 1750s a gradual liberation of the iamb arises in Russian poetry; and finally Ukrainian verse of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attains a high degree of freedom in the realization of iambic meter.

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