***The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860–1930*. By Meredith Martin. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012. 274 pp.**

At the turn of the twentieth century, Robert Bridges made newspaper headlines with *Milton's Prosody* for attempting to renovate England's increasingly simplified notions of meter by justifying the supposed inconsistencies in John Milton's verse. Bridges, Meredith Martin's unlikely hero, was on the wrong side of history after nearly two centuries in which the "cultural dream of a nation intimately civilized by poetic form" narrowed English prosody to the "simple poetic meters" of the nationalist "military metrical complex" (144). Yet Martin now excavates over a century of public discourse about prosody, the "nearly unexplored archives of the thousands of schoolmasters . . . linguists, prosodists, and poets who weighed in on the question of English meter" (45), to revive Bridges's effort to historicize prosody as a "dynamic cultural category and a generative discourse rather than a static, ahistorical form" (14). Martin extends the study of prosody beyond formalism with two seminal questions: "When poets were inventing or experimenting with prosodic systems, with what else, in addition to the measure of the line, were they wrestling? Why was the question of English meter even a question?" (204). She answers that meter underpinned but also contested a nationalistic, Arnoldian civilizing project, so that ultimately the discourse of meter remained thoroughly riven by internal differences and skepticism. The crisis of meter reveals a crisis in the national self-image.

Both this book and Martin's work developing the *Princeton Prosody Archive, 1750–1923* open new horizons for historical poetics and prosody. The field, led by Max Cavitch, Jason Hall, Anne Jamison, Yopie Prins, and Jason Rudy, has focused largely on the diversity and broad cultural valences of nineteenth-century meter; Martin's is at once the most historically capacious work to date and the one that goes the farthest toward proving not only the utility of a historically attuned prosody for the study of poetry but the necessity of the field to both formalism and cultural studies.

The Rise and Fall of Meter uncovers both the "lost history of metrical debate" and the active "suppression" of disagreement by twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism, beginning with the two-handed engine of George Saintsbury's monumental *History of English Prosody* and modernism (1). Confronting the "Great Divide narrative," which "assumes that prior to the modernist break, meter had been a stable, constraining, and limiting institution" (4), Martin locates persistent instability in practices of versification subsequently stabilized by twentieth-century poets and critics. We learn in chapters on verse histories of England that English meter—the strained visual marks or "stigmas" in Gerard Manley Hopkins's sprung rhythm, the pedagogical disciplining of the English ear, and the mixed therapy and

trauma of meter in World War I poetry—is the unfulfilled promise of national unity. Once we recognize how prosodists and poets turned to meter to "define, transform, or intervene in an aspect of national culture" (4), the diverse premodernist history of meter becomes legible (if never quite scannable). Indeed, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century study of versification was, like the study of pronunciation, "so permeated" by the idea of unified national identity as to become "illegible in its unity" (9).

Martin's skepticism about prosodic description notwithstanding, her book is at its best in close readings of poems whose metrical allusions, permutations, and allegories have been critically bypassed. Chapter 5, on wartime versification and meter's therapeutic use at Craiglockhart Military Hospital, is especially valuable because it provides a new context for both lesser-known war poetry and canonical works like Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est." Therapy at Craiglockhart, both manifested and parodied in the patients' magazine, the *Hydra* (1917–18), promoted metrical composition to help "manage . . . time" in the lives of traumatized soldiers (162). Meter could promote recovery by reordering mental chaos and reintroducing soldiers to the coordinated canon of English verse. Owen's simultaneous debt to and distrust of English meter become the central narrative of "Dulce et Decorum Est." The poem's form mirrors its opening salvo, men and meter "bent double" in two reflecting, intertwined sonnets. The second sonnet largely recovers its "pacing" after the disrupted iambs of the first fourteen lines, but Martin reads this as automatized footslog rather than salvation via military discipline. The prosody speaks order where the speaker cannot, marking in stresses a "bittersweet triumph of steady, controlled pacing" that belies "anxiety about the way that pacing and time significantly prevent the poem from 'telling' its own formal absurdities" and about the writer's own "inability to tell, pace, measure, or order experience" (175). The poem's famous "lie"—"dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori"—becomes the false promise of meter or, rather, its mercurial success in effecting recovery while remaining "a constant reminder of the tyrannies of historical order" (176).

Though any critic might scan Owen's poem or note its metrical puns, Martin makes viewing its metametrical meditation on wartime national culture possible. She shows how form, circulating in specific historical contexts, speaks both structurally and allegorically; her work opens new paths for the analysis of prosody in works published not only between 1860 and 1930 but also during other periods. In particular, it exposes (together with Timothy Steele's *Missing Measures*) the largely unaccounted prosodic foundation of early twentieth-century poetics, permitting us to resist the narrative of a modernist "break" and encouraging us to recognize that, despite the "trauma" of meter's dissipation as a hegemonic cultural force, traditional yet complex modes of versification persist well into the twentieth century. Following John Timberman Newcomb's *Would Poetry Disappear?* and Peter Howarth's

British Poetry in the Age of Modernism, we might revisit the fin de siècle and modernist moments to see how Stephen Crane, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Frost tarried with seemingly antiquated forms that modernism could no more reject than George Saintsbury could shore up. Martin's method will be equally useful for returning to previous literary epochs, particularly the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when lexicography, philology, and numerous "metrical histories" of England began to bind discourses of nationalism, colonialism, and poetics.

Inevitably, Martin remains vulnerable to those contingencies of scansion that she so thoroughly investigates. Rejecting the historical drive toward simplified prosodic systems, she finds in the "failure to achieve a definitive reading" and the "struggle to instruct the reader" not a cause for lament but a "heartening" basis for "the project of historical prosody" (205), yet her readings cannot escape the contingency of scansion and performance. Despite her exposition of localized, historical practices, Martin rarely conveys the (admittedly unstable) grounds of her own scansion. To my ear, it is unusual to claim that Ezra Pound's famous "To break the pentameter, that was the first heave" itself depends on pentameter (perhaps the five beats recall a ghost of form, but surely not iambs). Why not cite his injunction to write "nót in séquence òf a métronóme," which parodies its own metronomic rigidity (Pound 2004: 83–90)? This is a minor issue in an accomplished work, but it remains a methodological dilemma for historical prosody and criticism more generally. To what extent can we take into account the advances of linguistics (especially generative metrics and phonology) and formalist criticism? Can the analysis of the circulation and production of prosodic forms be convincing or pedagogically useful without naming (even ad hoc) principles of scansion? Can we develop a historicized version of the "poetics of repertoire" that Simon Jarvis (2010) calls for? In the final tally Martin's readings do depend on (and succeed because of) the locations of stress, the sudden appearance and rupture of classical schemas, or recognizable metrical patterning.

In desiring even tentative principles of scansion, one becomes Martin's object. This is Bridges's awkward position in his metametrical allegory "Poor Poll." In that poem, effectively illegible prior to her decipherment of allusions, classical metrical schemas, and historical circumstances, Martin finds an "elegy for the loss of a particular understanding of English meter and national culture" (189). The poem, which at once embodies and parodies Bridges's pedagogical investment in "the multiplicity of metrical forms," remains "too technical for the mass public or . . . too belated," given the death of classically oriented schooling (188). This may be the present fate of the past's polymetrical bequest, but Martin's work makes it possible for prosodic form to recirculate, to allegorize, to speak both its historical contingency and its twenty-first-century critical prospects.

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***Our Conrad: Constituting American Modernity*. By Peter Lancelot Mallios. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. xiv + 468 pp.**

Despite Joseph Conrad's admiration for James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain, and although his American friends included Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Ellen Glasgow, Conrad held himself suspiciously aloof from their nation. His firsthand experience of the United States was limited to a brief visit the year before he died, and his fiction portrays few American characters (they are mostly unappealing ones). Those simple facts led most scholars after World War II to assume Conrad's essential distance from the United States. A notable exception, strongly suggesting otherwise, was Robert Secor and Debra Moddelmog's annotated bibliography, *Joseph Conrad and American Writers* (1985). Now their suggestion is made conclusive by Peter Lancelot Mallios's massive excavation of the archival and contextual record. Conrad might as well have been a personal presence in the land. Mallios's claims, gathered from the writers and their environments, attest that we would be without the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Willa Cather, Richard Wright, and Robert Penn Warren (to name a few) if not for their authors' engagements with Conrad. Mallios's demonstration of Conrad's impact is made all the stronger by evidence that Conrad even influenced, in the World War I era and long after, US debates about race, immigration, Wilsonian democracy, and American internationalism. We are used to assigning Conrad a Polish English identity, complemented by associations with France and amounting to an altogether (albeit vaguely) transnational