

Approaches to verse theory in the works of Jaak Põldmäe*

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It is hard to imagine more versatile a scholar of poetry than Jaak Põldmäe (1942–1979). In the course of his short life (particularly short for a humanist scholar) he made a significant contribution to the development of various areas of verse theory and the dissemination of knowledge of poetics. Põldmäe paid equal attention to both the development of verse theory (see his works on the typology of metrical systems,¹ the theory and the typology of *vers libre*,² methodological problems in the description of poetic rhythm,³ rhyme and stanzaic structures⁴) and the description of empirical material used in case studies such as his research on the metric repertoires of Jaan Kärner and Lydia Koidula,⁵ the rhythm of Betti Alver's iambic tetrameter,⁶ and useful overviews of the metric repertoire and rhythm of Estonian verse, primarily those of syllabic-accentual meters.⁷ Põldmäe's book *Eesti värsiõpetus [Estonian Verse Theory]*⁸

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¹ Põldmäe 1970a.

² Põldmäe 1970b, 1975a and 1977a.

³ See, for example, Põldmäe 1975b (an earlier version of this article forms Chapter 3 in the author's candidate [PhD] dissertation Põldmäe 1971a), Põldmäe 1971b, 1971c, and Põldmäe, Remmel 1974.

⁴ Põldmäe 1974a; Põldmäe, Viitso 1970 and 1973.

⁵ Põldmäe 1970c and Appendix to Põldmäe 1971a; Põldmäe 1981.

⁶ Põldmäe 1971a, 1971b, and 1975b.

⁷ Põldmäe 1968, 1971a, and 1976a.

⁸ Põldmäe 1978.

was a remarkable event not only in Estonian poetics, but also in the general theory of verse. This book was to become Põldmäe's academic testament.⁹

Põldmäe's lectures and efforts to popularize verse studies deserve special mention. He regularly taught a special course on poetics at the Department of Estonian Philology of the Philological Faculty of Tartu University, which published some of his teaching materials.¹⁰ One of these publications, entitled *Klassikalisi luuletus- ja stroofivorme* [*Classical Poetic and Stanzaic Forms*],¹¹ is a valuable reference book which has no counterparts in other academic traditions. In addition, he directed the activities of the departmental Undergraduate Research Society and edited the publications of this society.¹² He was also a member of the editorial boards of several periodicals published by the University of Tartu Press (in particular, *Sign Systems Studies*).¹³ Põldmäe managed to become the founding editor of *Studia Metrica et Poetica*, the only periodical in the Soviet Union fully devoted to the issues of prosody and poetics.¹⁴ He edited the first two volumes, and prepared two others for publication.¹⁵

It is impossible to characterize all the various aspects of Jaak Põldmäe's academic activities and research in one short paper. We shall focus only on those issues that are of particular interest for general verse theory and therefore for the study of other poetic traditions besides Estonian. Some of these phenomena are similar in different poetic traditions, while others allow us to look at the particulars of Russian, German, English etc. verse in a broader context.

⁹ He did not, however, consider this book as his final statement. The book is primarily devoted to the systemic aspect of Estonian verse. Põldmäe intended to present the results of his more detailed and descriptive research (including the statistical data) in a book devoted to a historical evolution of Estonian verse. Nevertheless, even the significance of *Estonian Verse Theory* goes far beyond the problem described in its title. Published in Estonian, it is unfortunately available only to a relatively narrow circle of specialists. Therefore it is highly desirable to translate it (in its entirety or at least in part) into other languages, in particular into English and Russian. – Põldmäe often revised his own earlier formulations. In this article we use the latest wordings taken mainly from Põldmäe 1978.

¹⁰ Põldmäe 1974b, 1974c, and 1977b.

¹¹ Põldmäe 1974b.

¹² See, for example, Põldmäe (ed.) 1976a.

¹³ *Sign Systems Studies* started as a series within the general framework of *Acta Universitatis Tartuensis*, and became an independent international journal in 1998. – *Ed.*

¹⁴ *Studia Metrica et Poetica* also started as a series of *Acta Universitatis Tartuensis*, and was revived in its present form in 2014. – *Ed.*

¹⁵ Põldmäe (ed.) 1976b and 1977; Talvet (ed.) 1981 and 1985.

The axioms of versification systems

Two tendencies are particularly conspicuous in the scholarly legacy of Jaak Põldmäe. Although partially counter-directed, they both represent commonly acknowledged trends in contemporary scientific methodology. One is a tendency toward pluralism, the emphasis on the possibility of alternative solutions, the desire to liberate verse theory from the dogmas of the “once and for all” accepted formulations; the other is a tendency toward maximum consistency, explicitness, and unambiguous description. At the same time, Põldmäe clearly (though not always explicitly) distinguishes between the area of axioms, on the one hand, and the area of conclusions and practical solutions, on the other. When we determine the axiomatic basis of a theory, the confrontations of ideas are fruitful, and the progress of knowledge is possible only through such confrontations. But after adopting a particular thesis as an axiom, we have to draw all the consequences with maximum consistency and completeness. Any inconsistency will lead to inadequate results of the research.

Addressing such an important and complicated problem as the typology of metrical systems in Estonian poetry, Põldmäe cites sympathetically the words of John Lotz, who pointed out that such typologies may be constructed in manifold ways (Põldmäe 1978: 84). In contrast to his predecessors, Põldmäe does not confine himself to compiling the list of versification systems which, in his opinion, are available in Estonian poetry, but clearly states the aims and principles of his taxonomy beforehand, and outlines the main theoretical propositions that this taxonomy is designed to implement.

Unlike all previous concepts, the typology of versification systems suggested by Põldmäe is constructed as a purely deductive calculus whose results are subsequently compared with the available poetic material. Such an approach ensures the uniformity of the criteria for the identification of metrical systems and the consistency of their description. Moreover, it becomes possible to describe not only those metrical systems that are manifested in poetic practice, but also those which are theoretically possible for the given poetic tradition.

An axiomatic approach to the phenomena of versification was proposed by Roman Jakobson and John Lotz, and exemplified by their description of the system of Mordovian folk verse as early as 1941 (see Jakobson, Lotz 1941).¹⁶ Independently of them, in the 1940s, Mikhail P. Shtokmar started (but did not finish) his work on the “Mendeleev table of versification systems”: he advanced in the same direction, though using more traditional terminology. In a paper

¹⁶ Cf. a revised English version: Jakobson, Lotz 1952. – *Ed.*

presented at the conference on mathematical methods in analyzing literature, poetry and the poetic language held in Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) on 23–27 September 1961, Vyacheslav V. Ivanov suggested the idea of using an axiomatic approach to deduce the features of possible metrical systems from the phonological features of the given language.¹⁷ Põldmäe's achievement was the implementation of this idea using, for the first time, a particular system of national (in his case, Estonian) verse in its entirety. He identified all possible metrical systems allowed by this approach.

Põldmäe was one of those verse theorists who maintain that versification is determined by the properties of a national language. However, unlike many other supporters of this thesis who conceive of only one metrical system pertaining to each given language (on the basis of an analysis, often superficial, of the prosodic structure of this language), he succeeded in demonstrating that, for example, eight different metrical systems are equally natural for the Estonian language. It should be noted at this point that Põldmäe's expertise in the prosody of the Estonian language was on a par to that of a professional linguist: he developed his own point of view on many controversial issues of Estonian prosody, and defended his positions in debates with other phonologists.¹⁸

Any typology of verse is based on the fact that speech is divided into syllables [...]. The number of syllables is an essential feature of the Estonian word because in Estonian the vowels of unstressed syllables are not reduced. The inflection of a word depends on the number of its syllables, and the rhythmic segmentation of a word depends not only on the prosodic characteristics of its syllables, but also on their number. This makes the Estonian syllable a psychologically relevant unit and creates the prerequisites for using the syllabic system in versification. (Põldmäe 1978: 84)

In addition to the perceptibility of the syllable, Estonian prosody is characterized by a relative independence of both stress and quantity (there are at least three degrees of length), which can also construct a versification system. As a result, the following versification systems are identified:

I. The *syllabic system*, in which the number of syllables in a verse line is regulated.

¹⁷ See an overview of Ivanov's paper in Zholkovskij 1962: 96 and Revzin 1962: 163. – Ed.

¹⁸ See, for example, Põldmäe 1975c.

II. The *prosodic systems*, in which the arrangement of syllables characterized by a particular prosodic feature in a verse line (but not the total number of syllables) is regulated.

- a) *The quantitative system*. The alternation of long and short vowels in a verse line is regulated.
- b) *The accentual system*. The arrangement of those syllables in a verse line on which the primary stress is placed is regulated.¹⁹
- c) *The accentual-quantitative system*. Both the arrangement of the syllables on which the primary stress is placed and the alternation of long and short vowels in a verse line are regulated.

III. The *syllabic-prosodic systems*, in which both the arrangement of syllables characterized by a particular prosodic feature and the total number of syllables in a verse line are regulated.

- a) *The syllabic-accentual system*. Both the arrangement of the syllables on which the primary stress is placed and the total number of syllables in a verse line are regulated. Moreover, a change in the number of primary stresses in a verse line causes a change in the number of syllables.
- b) *The syllabic-quantitative system*. Both the number of syllables and the alternation of long and short vowels in a verse line are regulated.
- c) *The quantitative-syllabic-accentual system*. [Three parameters] are regulated: the arrangement of the syllables on which the primary stress is placed, the total number of syllables in a verse line, and the alternation of long and short vowels.

IV. *Free verse*. Neither the number of syllables or stresses in a verse line nor the alternation of long and short vowels are regulated. In addition to the differences in syntax, grammar, and vocabulary, this type of verse differs from prose in special rhythmic-intonational segmentation. (Pöldmäe 1978: 84–85)

Notably, although these versification systems were deduced in a speculative way, they are all found in Estonian poetic practice.

Predictably, Pöldmäe's approach not only proved its efficiency for the analysis of Estonian verse, but also served as a model for similar studies in

¹⁹ In Estonian, not only the primary stress but also the secondary stress is phonologically relevant.

other national poetic traditions. Boris Egorov modified Põldmäe's method and suggested a calculus of Russian versification systems (see Egorov 1973). Vyacheslav Shapovalov made an attempt at the application of this method to the analysis of Kyrgyz verse (see Shapovalov 1975).

One of the most important prescriptions governing contemporary scientific research, is verifiability, or rather falsifiability (Popper 1959: 41–42).²⁰ Unfalsifiable statements are of minimal value to scientific knowledge: they are either too trivial or too general or too vague. Põldmäe always aimed at the maximum falsifiability of his results: his argumentation is consistent and clear, his formulations are characterized by a precision bordering on polemical sharpness. Therefore, it is not surprising that Põldmäe's works did not always meet enthusiastic responses. Sometimes he had to defend his point of view in vigorous debates.

Põldmäe's typology of versification systems also invites some questions. To pass them over in silence would be uncongenial to the spirit of his works.

The assertion that any type of versification is necessarily based on syllable count leads to certain difficulties, particularly in the description of accentual verse. The Russian tradition of verse studies initiated by Aleksandr Vostokov assumes that the main prosodic unit in tonic (accentual) verse is not the stressed syllable but the "phonetic word," i. e. a set of syllables united by the main stress (or, in Vostokov's terminology, "the prosodic period").²¹ This approach has some advantages, e. g. in the interpretation of "extra-metrical" stresses in accentual verse. It is not a coincidence, then, that the typology of Põldmäe's accentual verse is somewhat different from the taxonomy accepted in Russian verse theory (see, for example, Gasparov 1974: 16–17, 220–221, 398–400).²² Põldmäe distinguished the following types of accentual verse:

(1) the stress-meter²³ (corresponding to the Russian *dolnik* with a predominant trisyllabic metrical period) of three varieties: dactyls, amphibrachoids, and anapests;

²⁰ An explicit reference to Popper is absent from the original Russian publication of this article. – *Ed.*

²¹ See Vostokov 1817: 105–107. Similarly, Mikhail Gasparov introduced the term "metrical word" to describe a phrase governed by one metrical stress (Gasparov 1974: 145). – *Ed.*

²² For a critical assessment of Gasparov's concept of accentual verse see Lotman 1995: 330–334. – *Ed.*

²³ Estonian: *rõhkur*; Russian: *udarnik*.

(2) the *dolnik* with a predominant disyllabic metrical period,²⁴ of two varieties: trochais and iambids (in Põldmäe's earlier publications these varieties were not differentiated and were both called "tactoids");

(3) the paeanid (earlier called the "accentoid"), corresponding to the Russian *taktovik*;

(4) the phrase-meter²⁵ (earlier called the "syntagmoid"), corresponding to Russian accentual verse properly (*aktsentnyj stikh*).

This taxonomy, quite interesting in its design and consistently developed, appears to be more "syllabic-accentual" in comparison with its Russian counterpart: the initial syllabic-accentual metric forms are discernible through accentual meters. A terminological shift may also be noted: Gasparov's "dolnik" becomes Põldmäe's "tactoid", Gasparov's "taktovik" becomes Põldmäe's "accentoid", and both metrical forms are unconditionally qualified as varieties of accentual verse. Classifying the varieties of tonic verse presents certain difficulties for Russian verse theory as well. Despite obvious accomplishments, there are still issues that have yet to be resolved.

A purely negative definition of free verse cannot be considered sufficient. The reference to "special rhythmic-intonational segmentation" does not explain much because one does not know what determines this segmentation. Põldmäe did not support Ain Kaalep's attempt to approach *vers libre* in terms of its syntactic organization,²⁶ which means that Põldmäe rejected any possibility of either syntactically organized prosody or any kind of prosody based on anything but syllabification.

Põldmäe was well aware of this imperfection. In order to improve it he proposed a very attractive theory and typology of free verse.

Typology of free verse

Põldmäe expressed his concept of free verse in the following propositions:

1. *Vers libre* is poetic speech, not prosaic speech. Therefore [...] in the study of *vers libre* it is necessary to use the concepts of verse theory, applying them in accordance with the systemic features of free verse [...].

²⁴ In order to denote this type of the *dolnik* verse Põldmäe used the term *paisur* (from the Estonian *paisuma* 'to expand, to swell').

²⁵ Estonian: *lausur*; Russian: *frazovik*.

²⁶ Cf. Kaalep 1959; Põldmäe 1976b: 332–335.

2. A consideration of the rhythm of *vers libre* should start from the rhythmical impulse which embraces the whole text: the accidental patterns of individual verse lines [...] should not be perceived as a system.²⁷ *Vers libre* is not an exception from this rule: some verse lines in a tactoid can also fit the pattern of the syllabic-accentual trochee, dactyl etc., but this does not affect the recognition of the poem's meter. [...]

3. As far as *vers libre* is concerned, there is no reason to speak of ictuses and non-ictuses, arses and theses.²⁸ However, even in *vers libre* the beginning of the verse line and its ending perform special functions in comparison with the nucleus of the verse line. [...] In the typology of *vers libre*, the correspondences between those segments of verse lines which take part in the creation of the general rhythmical impulse of the poem can be taken into account.

4. [...] A *vers libre* poem can be a combination of segments of free verse of different types. Therefore, a distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous free verse might be fruitful; the latter consists of different homogeneous parts.²⁹

5. [...] Free verse can be “stricter” [a little less free] and “looser” [a little more free].

6. Rhyme cannot distinguish between free and “non-free” verse. [...] The role of the rhyme in the classification of *vers libre* is the same as in the characterization of the rhythm of other metrical systems.

7. [...] The sound orchestration and rhyme can be considered optional parameters in the typology of free verse.

8. A typology of free verse should obviously be based on its most common features. These should either be constant in all systems of verse or change in a similar way in different systems of verse. (Põldmäe 1978: 169–172)³⁰

²⁷ The author wages hidden polemics with Aleksandr Zhovtis, who defined *vers libre* as a verse formed by optional repetitions (see, for example, Zhovtis 1966).

²⁸ In Põldmäe's terminology, “ictuses” and “non-ictuses” refer to the metrically strong and *resp.* metrically weak positions in a versification system based on the tonic (accentual) principle, whereas “arses” and “theses” refer to the same positions in a versification system based on the quantitative principle.

²⁹ Therefore the phenomenon of polymetrisism is generalized: polymetric patterns can also be found within the scope of free verse.

³⁰ The presentation of the same topic in Põldmäe 1977: 85–90 is somewhat different.

Pöldmäe's classification of Estonian *vers libre* is constructed as a system of binary distinctive features:

1. Homogeneous *vs.* heterogeneous.
2. Short *vs.* long.³¹
3. With a large dispersion *vs.* with a small dispersion.³²
4. Metric *vs.* dimetric:
 - a) with regular variation *vs.* with irregular variation;
 - b) with regularly structured nuclear part of the verse line *vs.* with irregularly structured nuclear part of the verse line;
 - c) with regular anacruses *vs.* with irregular anacruses;
 - d) with regular clausulae *vs.* with irregular clausulae;
5. Rhymed *vs.* blank [unrhymed];
6. Orchestrated *vs.* non-orchestrated. (Pöldmäe 1978: 172)³³

Perhaps not all the aforementioned solutions are indisputable, and not all the features of free verse are equally relevant (Pöldmäe himself emphasized the preliminary character of this typology). The effectiveness of Pöldmäe's approach will be validated by future descriptive studies of Estonian *vers libre*. He outlined the program of these studies but was not granted enough time to implement it.

For the time being, we would like to point to some fundamental features of Pöldmäe's approach which, in our opinion, show significant progress in comparison with more traditional views on the nature of *vers libre*.

First, the very idea of a typology of free verse implies a rejection of the widespread view of *vers libre* as a rhythmically amorphous form.

³¹ The border between short verse and long verse is the threshold of 8–9 syllables which corresponds to an average length of a phrase in speech. This also applies to Russian verse, as Boris Yarkho demonstrated (see Lapshina, Romanovich, Yarkho 1934: 26).

³² The value of dispersion is calculated as the ratio of the standard dispersion and the mean number of syllables in a verse line. The standard dispersion (S) is determined by the formula:

$$S = \sqrt{\frac{(x - \bar{x})}{2k - 1}},$$

where x is the length of the given verse line, \bar{x} is the mean length of the verse line, and k is the number of verse lines (Pöldmäe 1978: 173). If the standard dispersion exceeds the mean length of the verse line by more than 25%, then the dispersion is considered large, otherwise it is considered small. Although Pöldmäe determined the length of the verse line by the number of its syllables, it is evident that it is possible and worthwhile to determine the value of the dispersion by the number of stresses.

³³ In Pöldmäe 1977: 93, yet another feature is added: "strophoidal *vs.* astrophic".

Second, free verse is viewed in connection with other versification systems, and the features on which its typology is based are not invented *ad hoc* – they are relevant to other versification systems as well.³⁴ Põldmäe mentioned the possibility of verse forms which are transitional to *vers libre* (in total, “between eight [versification] systems there exist 28 transitional [...] forms”³⁵).

Most importantly, the analysis of the rhythm of free verse ceases to be a matter of the researcher’s intuition. The use of an explicit analytical procedure allows for the replacement of intuitive knowledge with scientific knowledge.

Approaches to syllabic-accentual rhythm

Põldmäe was never interested in the problems of verse theory as such, but only insofar as their solution could contribute to a more accurate and adequate description of actual poetic material. No matter how significant the results of his theoretical investigations, they were of secondary interest for him: he believed that the development of analytical tools should not overshadow the results of the analysis.

The description of the rhythmic phenomena of Estonian verse was always among Põldmäe’s main goals. Using the type of stochastic-statistical analysis that had been successfully developed and applied by Russian verse theorists for several decades, he studied various forms of Estonian verse, primarily that of twentieth-century poetry: accentual and quantitative-accentual verse³⁶ as well as syllabic-accentual verse. The rhythm of syllabic-accentual poems written between 1917 and 1940 was subject to the most detailed examination. (About 70% of texts and verse lines composed at that time were written using syllabic-accentual meters.) Põldmäe paid particular attention to the most frequent meter of that period, iambic tetrameter. Both the method of analysis and its results are highly instructive.

³⁴ A similar approach to Russian free verse was proposed by Vadim Baevs kij (1972), although his typology is based on completely different features.

³⁵ Põldmäe 1971b: 9. The later formulation is even stronger: “Between any two versification systems there lays an unlimited number of poems of the ‘transitional metrical forms’ type that differ in terms of their quantitative indicators. Moreover, a transition from one feature to another is not discrete, but continuous” (Põldmäe 1977: 91).

³⁶ The results of this research were published only partially (see Põldmäe 1969a and 1969b). In the last years of his life the scholar studied various forms of Estonian hexameter, primarily quantitative hexameter.

One of the main difficulties encountered in the analysis of rhythm is the difference in the intensity of stresses. The need to explicate these differences was pointed out more than once, in particular, by Viktor Zhirmunskij (1925: ch. 3). However, in practical statistical calculations scholars usually limit themselves to a conventional division of syllables into two categories, stressed and unstressed, because the use of more differentiated rhythmic transcriptions (as in Kolmogorov, Prokhorov 1968) makes counting difficult. Quantitative measuring of the intensity of stresses (as in Baevskij 1966 and 1967) impede – or, according to Põldmäe, exclude – the application of “typological characteristics” (Põldmäe 1971b: 4) because of the incomparability and incommensurability of syllable strengths in languages with different prosodic structures.

In order to solve this problem, Põldmäe proposed an ingenious and effective method. The verse rhythm is described on different levels (at least two): on the level of metrical variations and the level of rhythmic variations. To quote:

The rhythm analysis based on metric variations corresponds to the phonological analysis of words outside their context. (Põldmäe 1971b: 27–28)

This type of analysis corresponds chiefly to traditional analysis, the only difference being that it leaves much less room for arbitrariness thanks to the explicit criterion of stressability: the syllables are divided into stressed and unstressed.

In the analysis of rhythmic variations, differences in the intensity of stresses are taken into account.³⁷ A comparison of these empirical results with each other and with theoretically calculated probabilities allowed Põldmäe to discover “the law of weighting” and “the centrifuge principle” in the rhythm of Estonian syllabic-accentual verse.

According to “the law of weighting” the intensity of stress increases toward the end of the verse line, toward the end of a group of verse lines united by the same rhyme, and at the absolute end of the stanza.

“The centrifuge principle” is particularly fascinating. It results from the collision of “the law of weighting” with the tendency toward a decrease in the overall percentage of stresses at the end of the verse line, which was revealed in the analysis of the metrical variations. In other words, there are fewer stresses at the end of the verse line, but they are more intense there. Obviously, without

³⁷ The method for determining the intensity of stress is close to the one suggested in Tarlinskaja 1967. The difference is that the stress in an Estonian word also depends on the length of the stressed syllable.

the “double counting” of the metrical variations and the rhythmic variations, the discovery of “the centrifuge principle” would not have been possible.³⁸

The discovery and systematization of such principles as “the law of weighting” and “the centrifuge principle” are of great importance for the typological studies of poetic rhythm. Such studies promise to become an important new branch of comparative prosody in the nearest future.

Different traditions in Estonian versification

Different metrical systems in Estonian poetry are something more than differently organized phonetic material: they embody and materialize semantic and cultural-historical differences. At the same time, they all form a certain unity – the unity of Estonian national versification. How do different traditions in a national versification interact? What are the semantic differences between the meters belonging to different versification systems? These complicated issues of contemporary poetics are particularly relevant for studies of Estonian poetry in view of the rich potential of Estonian prosody and a cultural situation that favours the development of diverse poetic forms. In the last years of his life Põldmäe worked intensively on these problems. Unfortunately, he did not have time to present the results of these studies as an integral picture. It is still possible that the relevant materials are preserved in his archive. But even the fragments found in his published works are very impressive; particularly interesting are Põldmäe 1971a, 1974b and 1978.

For Estonian poetry, as well as for many other modern European literatures, two problems are especially significant: the relationship between literary and folk versification, and the ways of rendering the particulars of classical versification using the means available in Estonian versification. These problems are typologically related: unlike Estonian literary verse of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, both the versification of Greek and Latin antiquity and the versification of Estonian folk poetry are, in one way or another, based on the quantitative principle.

The study of the relationship between Estonian folk verse and Estonian literary verse is largely hindered by an insufficient knowledge of the former. The traditional interpretation of the so-called runic (or alliterative) verse as

³⁸ An analysis of Russian syllabic-accentual rhythm (Gasparov 1977; 1980 [1977]) does not reveal any such tendencies. Evidently, the “constant” stress on the last ictus of a Russian verse line excludes any possible similarity to “the centrifuge principle”.

a quantitative trochaic tetrameter (the approach had been borrowed from Finnish folklore studies) seems, at best, insufficient because the quantity rules governing the verse of Estonian folksongs are very different from those used in classical versification, which is most familiar to the European poetic consciousness, or those used in the *‘arūd*. In Estonian folksongs the strong (i. e. metrically long) positions cannot be occupied by stressed short syllables and the weak (i. e. metrically short) positions cannot be occupied by stressed long syllables, whereas the unstressed syllables (either long or short) may be found in any position, in the same way as the metrically long and metrically short positions may fall on either stressed or unstressed syllables. However, Põldmäe demonstrated that such a description does not explain all features of runic verse and cannot be deemed adequate.

In contrast to the traditional interpretation of runic verse as metrically and prosodically homogeneous, Põldmäe developed its typology and showed the difference between folk verse and literary runic verse, including “pseudo-runic” verse. In particular, he managed to establish the territorial differentiation of runic verse: the South Estonian (more accentual) type differs from the North Estonian (more quantitative) type to an even larger extent than the latter differs from the Finnish type. Põldmäe also planned to undertake a statistical survey of folk verse. Bringing this project to fruition should be recognized as the most important task of Estonian poetics today.

Estonian folk verse greatly influenced the development of literary verse. Moreover, the nature of this influence was largely determined by the poetological concepts prevailing at the time.

Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century it was generally believed that runic verse was composed in (syllabic-)accentual trochaic tetrameter. Hence trochaic tetrameter was regarded as the most appropriate meter for Estonian literary poetry.

The majority of Estonian poems composed between 1883 and 1905 were written in trochaic tetrameters grouped in quatrains.

The reason for such uniformity was, among other factors, Jaan Bergmann’s prescriptive article “The Art of Poetry”, in which the trochee is identified as the original Estonian meter, and the author openly states that the ideal form of Estonian verse is a quatrain consisting of four-ictus trochaic lines. (Põldmäe 1971b: 17)

A more faithful imitation of runic verse invented at that time was “pseudo-runic” verse, in which the accentual rhythm of folk verse was reproduced, but its quantitative structure was not taken into account. This verse was interpreted

as a four-foot trochee (trochaic tetrameter) “animated” by dactyls. The popularity of this verse form was promoted by Jaan Bergmann in the article mentioned above and the authority of the poetic practice of F. R. Kreutzwald.

Typologically, the pseudo-runic verse is a transitional form between the syllabic-accentual and the accentual (and/or syllabic) system. (Põldmäe 1978: 156)

In the early twentieth century the achievements of Estonian studies in phonetics enabled scholars to revise the theory of folk versification and demonstrate its quantitative nature. Accordingly, the literary imitations of runic verse began to take the quantitative principle into account (see the poems of Gustav Suits, Villem Grünthal-Ridala, August Annist, and others).

The history of Estonian imitations of classical Greek and Roman meters is worth noting. It repeats to a large extent the history of the literary imitations of runic verse but in some aspects it remains unique among other poetic traditions in Europe. As we know, in the vast majority of modern European poetic systems attempts were initially made to quantitatively reproduce the rhythm of classical verse. These attempts turned out to be unproductive, and subsequently the various forms of quantitative verse were replaced everywhere by various types of accentual and syllabic-accentual verse. Aage Kabell, a fine connoisseur of classical and medieval versification, called this process “Niederlage der Wissenschaft und Triumph der Barbarei” (Kabell 1960: 235).

In Estonian poetry the equivalents of classical forms evolved in the opposite direction: from the accentual principle to the quantitative principle. The first samples of Estonian imitations of classical meters followed either syllabic-accentual or accentual versification systems (this reflects to a great extent the influence of German and Russian translation practice). The most significant among them were translations and original poems by F. R. Faehlmann and Jaan Bergmann (the latter, in particular, translated five books of the *Odysey* and the *Batrachomyomachia*).

However, just as in the case of runic verse, in the early twentieth century scholars and translators discovered that in Estonian a more adequate rendition of classical verse was possible: a verse form based on the quantitative principle. Moreover, August Annist, for example, claimed that the quantitative principle used in imitation of classical verse should be the same as in folk verse. In actual practice, however, even in Annist’s works the quantitative principle of classical meters is quite unlike the one used in Estonian folksongs. It should be noted that most poets who used the quantitative principle in their imitations of runic verse also tried to use it, though differently, in their imitations of classical meters (examples are the works of Suits, Ridala and Annist).

Recently, different varieties of quantitative imitations of classical meters (belonging, in Põldmäe's classification, either to the quantitative or the quantitative-accentual or the quantitative-syllabic-accentual versification system) have enriched the metric repertoire of Estonian poetry. These forms are widely used both in translations and in original poems; here, Ain Kaalep has been especially active. According to Aage Kabell's typological periodization of the ways classical forms have been assimilated in European poetic systems, the contemporary stage of this process in Estonian poetry should be defined as "die Hohe Schule der Antikisierung" (Kabell 1960: 119).

* * *

Jaak Põldmäe's academic career was prematurely cut short. Many of his plans remained unfulfilled. Many hopes cherished by his colleagues and friends were not destined to be realized. However, what he accomplished is enough to ensure that his name will always be remembered in the history of poetics.

The true intellectual merit of a humanist scholar is often inseparable from his or her outstanding human qualities. This is absolutely true with respect to Jaak Põldmäe. Deeply devoted to scholarship, he was devoid of either academic selfishness or professional clannishness. He took as much joy in the success of his associates as in his own discoveries. He was very receptive to fresh insights and readily revised his own ideas when he came to deeper conclusions. As a reviewer and a participant in disputes and discussions he was noted for his open-mindedness and often provided invaluable assistance to his colleagues.

Every person is irreplaceable. It is impossible to find a substitute for Jaak Põldmäe, but it is possible and necessary to continue his work. This is the best possible monument to the memory of this exceptional scholar.

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