

# Lexicality and the versification of Johann Heinrich Voß: Observations on prosodic feature analysis

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In human languages there is a natural tendency to emphasize in some way those words or syllables which carry the most semantic information. In Germanic languages, the so-called "content words" (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and some adverbs), which belong to lexical categories, bear in most instances a greater degree of stress than the essentially nonlexical "function-words" (such as prepositions, conjunctions, and determiners), which comprise grammatical categories. Occasionally, however, due to the historical development of the language, a conflict arises between its accentual patterns and its lexical structure, as in the following English and German sentences (in which lexical morphemes not bearing primary accent are printed in roman type):

- (1) *Jack fell 'down in the 'outfield.*  
*She is an 'outgoing person.*  
*Sie nahm 'Abschied und ging 'hin.*  
*Unter keinen 'Umständen werde ich 'zusagen.*

Such conflicts between the accentual and lexical structure of a language have significant consequences in verse, where these linguistic characteristics can conceivably occur in varying relations to the underlying abstract metrical pattern.

Of interest in this regard are the prosodic theories and the poetic practice of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century German poets and theorists, in particular that of Johann Heinrich Voß, a poet and prosodist who exerted considerable influence on his contemporaries. Voß has frequently been criticized by twentieth century German theorists and prosodists, as well as by some of his contemporaries, for attempting to impose Greek verse forms on the German language without sufficient regard for the natural accentual patterns of German. Andreas Heusler, for example, refers to Voß' imitations of the Classical hexameter line as "un-German" distortions which violate the linguistic givens of the German language (Heusler 1956, 3: 271).<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Kayser (1965: 86) uses the word "un-German" in referring to the spondees in the hexameters of Voß, Schlegel

and Platen, and agrees with Hensler that these poets infected German verse with what he called a foreign "spondee-sickness".<sup>2</sup> These criticisms, however, are based almost exclusively on accentual patterns (word and phrase accent), and rarely consider other linguistic features, such as word onset and lexically, which might also be distinctive in verse.

Within the framework of prosodic feature analysis, I shall examine the actual poetic practice of Johann Heinrich Voß more closely in an attempt to determine whether his lines of hexameter verse actually represent "un-German distortions" of the language, and if so, what constitutes these "distortions" and where they occur. In order to determine how Voß' poetic practice is related to the German verse tradition, his verse will be compared on occasion with that of his more famous contemporaries Klopstock, Goethe, and Hilderlin, as well as with some prosodic conventions previously established by German poets.

A discussion of Voß' poetic practice would be incomplete without an examination of his most important theoretical work on prosody, which bears the revealing title *Die Zeitmessung der deutschen Sprache*. This book, which first appeared in 1802 with a second edition in 1831, exerted a considerable influence on contemporary poets in Germany (Voß 1802). As the title of the work implies, Voß classifies the syllable types of German in terms of length rather than accent; he distinguishes three groups which he calls *lang*, *mittelzeitig*, and *kurz*. The second group is subdivided into types which he calls *fastlang*, *schwebend*, and *fastkurz*. This hierarchy is shown with examples below:

(2)	Syllable Type	Examples
	a. lang:	<i>Baum, blüth, klein</i>
	b. mittelzeitig:	
	(i) fastlang:	<i>-fach, -huf, -heit, -los, -schaft, -tum, -voll</i>
	(ii) schwebend:	<i>-bar, -sam, -sal, -in, -ing, -nis, -tel, -ten</i>
	(iii) fastkurz:	<i>an, auf, aus, bei, durch, und, auch, denn, so, daß, ich, du, er, man, sich, -ch, -ig, -isch, -lich, -ling, -tug</i>
	c. kurz:	<i>ein, der, die, das; so, zur; Otto, Ida, Dante, Mammes, Drittel, hülzern, Gehölz, zerwühlen, durchhau, umkreisen</i>

The examples which he gives for "long" syllables are all nouns, verbs or adjectives, and those which he refers to as "almost long" are primarily "heavy" derivational suffixes such as *-fach*, *-schaft*, *-tum*, and so forth.

The syllable types to which Voß assigned the label *schwebend* ("hovering" or "vacillating" contain suffixes spelled in *a*, *ei*, and *i*, and his "almost short" group contains monosyllabic prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns and "light" derivational suffixes spelled in *r* or *n*. Voß' examples for what he calls "short" syllables are mostly determiners, unstressed syllables of proper names and loan words, unstressed prefixes, and all syllables containing the reduced vowel "schwa".

Though he consistently speaks of "length" in setting up this hierarchy, his classification correlates to a considerable extent with the opposition between lexical and nonlexical categories in the language. Those syllable types which he labels "long" are all lexical categories (i. e., nouns, non-auxiliary verbs, or adjectival adverbs) and most of those which he labels "almost long" are either modal auxiliary verbs (e. g., *darf, kann, soll*) or "heavy" suffixes such as *-heit, -haft, -schaft, -tum*). An interesting historical characteristic of these so-called "heavy" suffixes is that they still existed as independent lexical categories (*heit, haft, scharf*, etc.) at least as recently as the Middle High German period, whereas the "light" suffixes (*-ig, -isch, -ich, -ling, -ung*, etc.) already lost whatever independence they may have had either before or during the Old High German period. With the possible exception of *-bar*, the syllable types which Voß classifies as "vacillating", "almost short" and "short" either lost their independence before the Middle High German period, or are not known to have ever existed as independent lexical units.<sup>3</sup>

Voß appears to be aware that the distinctions he draws in terms of length bear some correlation to the lexical history of the language, for he states that the length of "archaic root syllables" depends in part on the degree of their obsolescence:

Mittelzeitig sind die veralteten Stammsilben hinter Benennungen ... Ob sie zur Länge oder zur Kürze geneigter sein, das hängt theils vom Grade der Veraltung, theils von der Schwere der Buchstaben ab ... (Voß 1802: 54-55)

But he refers to these archaic root syllables only in passing, and as his title "Die Zeitmessung der deutschen Sprache" indicates, he views the prosodic function of words entirely in terms of the duration of each of their syllables. Thus, in Voß' terms, the second syllable of words such as *Kirschbäume, hingenen*, and *heillose* occurs in a metrically prominent position (hereafter labelled X) not because of its morphological or lexical characteristics, but rather because it is "longer" than the second syllable in words like *heilige, himmlische*, and *herrliche*, which occurs in a metrically nonprominent position (hereafter labelled o):

o	x	o	o	x	o	x
<i>Kirsch-bäu-me</i>				<i>hei- li- ge</i>		
<i>hin- geh- en</i>				<i>himn- li- sche</i>		
<i>heil- lo- se</i>				<i>herr- li- che</i>		

In fact, however, these distinctions are essentially lexical and morphological as well as accentual.

As a framework for this investigation I use a modified version of a theory of prosody originally proposed by Karl Magnuson and Frank G. Ryder (Magnuson and Ryder 1970: 789–820; 1971: 198–216; Magnuson 1974: 143–154). Applying the concept of complementary distribution to a large corpus of German iambic verse from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century, they identified a set of features which they found to be prosodically distinctive for German. These features either reinforce or disrupt the underlying metrical pattern, depending on their relation to it. In a “perfectly metrical” line of verse, all these prosodic features would reinforce the meter in every position. This hypothetical condition of absolute metricality, which represents the lowest level of verse structure, indicates for each feature what is normal or expected. In terms of the underlying meter, all prosodic features either “affirm” (reinforce) or “disaffirm” (disrupt) a given position of the meter. The prosodic feature STRESS, for example, which is assigned to all German monosyllabic nouns, main (i.e., nonauxiliary) verbs, adjectival adverbs, and to all syllables bearing primary word stress, reinforces or “affirms” the prominent positions of the meter and disrupts or “disaffirms” the nonprominent positions.

Fundamental to the study of verse structure, however, are not only the prosodic characteristics of individual syllables, but also the relationships between sequences of syllables. This fact was stated many years ago by Otto Jespersen, who observed that the stress level of a syllable can only be determined by comparison with a contiguous syllable:

Our ear does not really perceive stress relations with any degree of certainty except when the syllables concerned are contiguous. If two syllables are separated by a series of other syllables, it is extremely difficult even for the expert to tell which of them is the stronger ... What is decisive when words have to be used in verse is everywhere the surroundings: the metrical value of a syllable depends on what comes before and what follows after it. (Jespersen 1933: 249–274)

In Germanic languages, metered verse regularizes a tendency in the languages themselves toward an alternation of prominent and non-promi-

nent features. This principle of alternation states that whenever a prosodic feature of the verbal material occurs in a nonaffirming relation to the meter, that same feature must occur in the immediately following position (where it affirms the meter). It may be formalized as follows:<sup>4</sup>

$$(3) \quad [F] \rightarrow [F_1] / [F_1] \text{ ———}$$

The brackets enclose a metrical position, and F represents any feature or cluster of features within that position. The subscript 1 indicates that the nonaffirming feature and the immediately following affirming feature are identical. The feature or cluster of features to the right of the diagonal slash always disaffirms the meter and must therefore be followed (in the position represented by the horizontal line) by at least one affirming feature. Any feature or feature cluster to the left of the arrow also disaffirms the meter. The arrow means that the syllable to its left must at least contain the feature or feature cluster to its immediate right. The latter always affirms the meter. The slash means “in the environment”. Thus the rule in (3) states that any feature which occurs in a nonaffirming relation to the meter must be followed in the next metrical position by that same feature (where it affirms the meter).

In an attempt to determine the manner in which both accent and lexically function in the poetry of Johann Heinrich Voß, we shall examine his long hexameter poem *Luisse*, first published in 1795, as well as a collection of eighteen *Idylls* written between 1774 and 1802 (Voß [1969]). These poems consist predominantly of Classical hexameter verse, as well as a few lines written in other meters. The metrical pattern for the Classical hexameter line is shown in (4). Each line contains six metrically prominent positions, which are always monosyllabic, alternating with six metrically non-prominent positions, the first four of which may be either monosyllabic or disyllabic. In the hexameters of most poets, the fifth nonprominent position must be disyllabic,<sup>5</sup> and the sixth nonprominent position is always monosyllabic:

$$(4) \quad \begin{array}{cccccccc} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 & 12 \\ x & o & (o) & x & o & (o) & x & o & (o) & x & o & o & x & o \end{array}$$

In the pattern, the odd numbers represent prominent positions of the meter and the even numbers represent nonprominent positions. In the latter, the parentheses enclose an optional second syllable. The linguistic realization of this metrical pattern is illustrated by the following lines from Voß’ *Idylls*:

(5a) x 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 x 0 0 x 0  
*Plötzlich rief aus dem Bette mit leiser Stimme die Mutter*

x 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 x 0 x 0 0  
*Hell die Decke von Licht, und die Wang' in rosigen  
 Schimmer*

(5b) x 0 x 0 0 x 0 x 0 x 0 0  
*Laß dein Hütchen nur schief. Kühl wehls in dem  
 Schatten der Pappel*

x 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0  
*Freies Werk schafft Segen und Fröhlichkeit! Michel, du  
 bringest*

Earlier it was observed that accented or stressed syllables affirm the prominent positions of the meter and disrupt the nonprominent positions. In (5a) the stressed syllables affirm the meter, fulfilling the expectations of the reader/listener in all positions: all x-positions contain the feature +STRESS (abbreviated [+ST], where the square brackets represent a metrical position) while all o-positions lack this feature and are therefore -STRESS (abbreviated [-ST]). In (5b), however, the stressed syllables *kühl* and *schafft* occur in o-positions and therefore disrupt or "disaffirm" the meter. Here the presence of the nonaffirming feature +STRESS in an o-position places certain constraints on the actualization of the immediately following x-position. This temporary disruption of the metrical pattern can be compensated for by a prosodic rule which stipulates that the immediately following position must affirm the meter:

(6) [F] → x[+ST] / o[+ST] \_\_\_\_\_

This rule states that any occurrence of +STRESS in an o-position must be followed by +STRESS (i.e., the same feature) in the immediately following x-position. Implicit in this rule is the assumption that stressed syllables affirm the meter when they occur in prominent positions and disrupt it when they occur in nonprominent positions.

The following lines represent more complex actualizations of the Classical hexameter line than those given in (5):

(7) x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0  
*Jesus der große Prophet, kommt in die Gräber hernieder*  
 (Klopstock, *Der Messias* II)

x 0 x 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0  
*Lahn gebäut! Sehn will er vergnügt, wie die Welt sich  
 verändert*  
 (Voß, *Idyllen*)

x 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0  
*Und die künft'ge Gefahr hielt nicht die grimme  
 Wit auf*  
 (Goethe, *Hermann und Dorothea* VI)

x 0 x 0 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0 x 0 0  
*Also sagt' ich und jetzt kehrt' ich an den Rhein, in die  
 Heimath*  
 (Hölderlin (1951: 81))

In each of these lines, a stressed syllable in a nonprominent position (o[+ST]) is followed by an unstressed syllable in a prominent position (x[-ST]); thus each contains a violation of the prosodic rule given in (6). Lines such as the following, however, which also contain the sequence o[+ST] x[-ST], do not occur in German hexameter verse:

(8) x x x 0 x x  
 \*Also sagt' ich und jetzt kehren wir zum Rhein, in die  
 Heimath

The occurrence of the sequence *kehrt' ich* and the absence of the sequence *kehren* in the metrical relation o-x can be accounted for in terms of word boundaries: *ich* begins a new word, while *-ren* is a noninitial syllable. This reflects the fact that not only stress, but also word boundaries determine whether certain sequences may occur in o-x in German hexameter verse. By adding word onset [WO] as a prosodic feature to the rule given in (6), it can be rewritten as follows:

(9) x[-ST] → [+WO] / o[+ST] \_\_\_\_\_

This rule states that, after a stressed syllable in an o-position, any unstressed syllable in the following x-position must also be word-initial (i.e.,

must be [+WO]). This rule allows occurring sequences like *kehr' ich* and excludes non-occurring sequences like *kehren* from the metrical relation o-x.

There is, however, a disyllabic word-type in which the initial stressed syllable does occur occasionally in o-x in German hexameter verse. Examples are given below:

(10)

o x

*Oft um Mitternacht wehklagt die behende Lippe*  
(Klopstock "Die künftige Geliebte")

o x

*Legete, daß auch der Junker verstört aussah in dem*  
Kirchstuhl  
(Voß, *Idyllen*)

o x

*Selbst hinging nach Paris und bald den schrecklichen*  
Tod fand  
(Goethe, *Hermann und Dorothea* IV)

o x

*All' die gesammelte Kraft aufflammt in üppigen Frühling*  
(Hölderlin, "Der Wanderer")

In the hexameter verse of most German poets, such disyllabic "metrical inversions" (i.e., the sequence [ +ST] x[-ST, -WO]) occur much less frequently than monosyllabic inversions (i.e., [ +ST] x[-ST, +WO]). When they do occur, however, the second syllable is always lexical, i.e., it is a syllable (such as *klagt, sah, ging* in *wehklagt, aussah, hinging*) which occurs as an independent word in the German lexicon. When these lexical syllables occur as unstressed elements of compound words (*hinging, 'aus-sah, etc.*) they still have the potential to be used in German hexameter verse as if they were stress-bearing lexical monosyllables; in words such as *gehen, heilig, himmlisch*, on the other hand, the unstressed nonlexical syllables do not have this potential.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that, even though stress is the primary factor, both word boundaries and lexicality play secondary and tertiary roles in the prosodic systems of most German poets.

The occurrence of verse lines of the type given in (10) can be accounted for by incorporating lexicality as a prosodic feature into the o-x rule:

(11)  $x[-ST, -WO] \rightarrow [+LX] / \text{ }_o[+ST]$  \_\_\_\_\_

This rule states that, after a stressed syllable in an o-position, any unstressed, noninitial syllable in the immediately following x-position must be lexical [+LX].

In the context of these rules of prosody it is instructive to compare the poetic practice of Johann Heinrich Voß with that of some of his contemporaries. Table 1 gives the frequency and distribution of two types of o-x sequences in hexameter verse by Klopstock, Voß, Goethe, and Hölderlin. The first and second rows for each poet represent respectively sequences of the types *kommt in* and *Wohnet*. As previously mentioned, the second syllable of the latter sequence ([ +ST] x[-ST, -WO]) is always lexical in German hexameter verse.<sup>7</sup>

For Klopstock, Goethe, and Hölderlin, the frequencies of these two prosodic sequences in o-x are what we might expect: those of the type *kommt in* (stressed lexical monosyllable + unstressed nonlexical monosyllable) occur much more frequently than those of the type *Wohnet*, reflect-

Table 1. Positional distribution of the sequence [ +ST] x[-ST] in German hexameter verse

	o-x sequences						Total	Lines	Ratio
	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11				
Klopstock, <i>Messias</i> I and II (1799 edition)									
of +ST] x[-ST, +WO]	7	4	6	2	0	19	1617	0.0116	
of +ST] x[-ST, -WO]	1	1	0	2	0	4	1617	0.0025	
Voß, <i>Laise</i> I, II, III (1795)									
of +ST] x[-ST, +WO]	1	1	0	1	0	3	1766	0.0017	
of +ST] x[-ST, -WO]	6	17	18	7	0	48	1766	0.0272	
Goethe, <i>Hermann und Dorothea</i> (1797)									
of +ST] x[-ST, +WO]	0	0	4	1	0	5	2034	0.0025	
of +ST] x[-ST, -WO]	1	0	0	0	0	1	2034	0.0005	
Hölderlin, <i>Gedichte</i> (1796-1805)									
of +ST] x[-ST, +WO]	1	2	7	0	0	10	967	0.0103	
of +ST] x[-ST, -WO]	0	1	4	0	0	5	967	0.0052	

Examples:

of +ST] x[-ST, +WO]: *Kommt in, ging von*

of +ST] x[-ST, -WO]: *Wohnet, hinging*

(+WO = word-initial syllable; -WO = non-initial syllable)

ing the fact that word-initial syllables tend to affirm the meter in x-positions, while noninitial syllables tend to disrupt it. In the hexameter lines of Voß, however, exactly the opposite is the case: sequences of the type *Wehnut* have a high frequency of occurrence that is far out of proportion to that of the type *kommt in*. This disproportionality is a result of Voß' attempt to create in German the effect of a classical spondee (two successive long syllables in Greek and Latin versification) by placing words which he considered to consist of two "long" syllables in the metrical relation o-x. As we have seen, the German syllable types which he considered "long" ("lang" and "fastlang" in his terminology) are essentially lexical. Since there are relatively few disyllabic words of the type *Jahr-zehnt* or *voll-zieht* in German (in which an initial unstressed syllable is also lexical), Voß turned to the more frequently occurring compounds of the type *hinging*, *Festtag*, *Sturmacht*. It is this attempt to recreate the spondee in German which led Andreas Heuser to coin terms like *Spondeenjagd*, *Spondeensucht*, *Spondeenkrankheit*, and *falsche Spondeen* in referring to the hexameters of Voß, A. W. Schlegel, Platen, and others.

There is another type of compound word which occurs not only in hexameter verse, but also in other meters used by German poets, namely trisyllabic words consisting of two stressed root morphemes followed by one or more inflectional morphemes. Examples are given in (12):

## (12) a. Classical hexameter lines:

o x o

*Ringsum durch den unendlichen Raun nachahmend  
ergiebet*

(Klopstock, *Messias* I)

o x o o

*Seiner Luise zur Lust, hausväterlich prangend im Schlafrock  
(Voß, Luise I)*

o x o

*Aber Mamma, sanftlächelnd der wohlbekanntem Erzählung  
(Voß, Luise I)*

o x o

*Keine Spur nachlassend von seiner lebendigen Wirkung  
(Goethe, *Hermann und Dorothea* III)*

o x o

*Rollt der König den Blick: irrlächelnd über den Ausgang  
(Hölderlin, "Der Archipelagus")*

## b. Iambic verse:

o x o

*Dein Wort in mir arglistig zu verschren  
(Gryphius, "Auf den Sonntag...")*

o x o

*Als Diamante spielt und ohn' Aufhören brennt  
(Gryphius, "An die Sternen")*

o x o x

*Und Körper, die die Kraft gleichfallender Gewichter  
(Gryphius, "Auf seinen Geburtstag")*

o x o

*Wie viel andächtig schwärmen leichter, als  
(Lessing, *Nathan der Weise* I,2)*

o x o

*Mich besser kennt. — Schatzmeister bin ich bei  
(Nathan I,3)*

o x o

*Vorteile, die das Volk nicht kennt, kennst du.  
(Nathan III,5)*

o x o

*Annuitig Tall: du immergrüner Hain!  
(Goethe, "Ilmenau")*

o x o

*Ihr Kinder, glaubt: ohnmächtig bleibt der Wille  
(Goethe, *Sonette* XIV)*

Words of this type (*nachahmend*, *aufhören*), which are quite common in German iambic verse since the seventeenth century, almost always begin in an o-position, despite the fact that the stress level of the second syllable is less than that of the first. In contrast to disyllabic compounds (*Annuit*, *aufhört*), these compounds are consistently used by German poets from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries *as if* they consisted of two separate words (e.g., *nach lassend*, *sanft lächelnd*, *gleich fallend*). They are accepted by the o-x rule given in (6), since the second syllable, which bears a greater degree of stress than the third syllable, is [+ST] in the binary feature system. Voß and other German poets used these trisyllabic compounds, as well as disyllabic compounds, to create "spondees" in Classical meters.

Thus far discussion of the hexameter verse of Voß and his contemporaries has been limited to the metrical sequence o-x. But this represents

only part of the metrical structure of the Classical hexameter. The other parts of this structure are the sequences x-o and, in disyllabic nonprominent positions, the sequence o-o. German poets frequently attempted to create spondees in x-o, for example in imitation of the "fernata" in the "anceps" syllable at the end of the line:

(13)

*Seelenruh, und Ernst, und Erbarmung, als er vor Gott stand*  
(Klopstock, *Messias* I)

x o  
x o

*Hie! der redliche Pfarrer von Grünau heiter ein Gastmahl*  
(Voß, *Luise* I)

x o

*Trieb nach Paris zu gehn, dahin, wo er Kerker und Tod fand*  
(Goethe, *Herrmann und Dorothea* IX)

*Friedsam geht aus dem Walde der Hirsch ans freundliche Taglicht*  
(Hölderlin, "Der Wanderer")

The final syllable in these lines, though it does not bear primary stress, is in each case an independent lexical item which bears more semantic "weight" than nonlexical unstressed syllables.

The following lines illustrate some of the ways in which poets attempted to create the effect of two "long" syllables in the metrical relation x-o in various positions of the hexameter line:

(14)

*Schimmern sie, Vorbilder der gottversöhnten Gemeinen!*  
(Klopstock, *Der Messias* I)

x o

*Und braunkolbiges Ried; Seeltien jezo durchrauscht' er,*  
*Die gelb blühten und weiß, breitblättrig; jezo den Vorgrund*  
(Voß, *Luise* I)

*Denn kennt jemand den Herrn, so kann er ihm leichter genug tun*  
(Goethe, *Herrmann und Dorothea* VIII)

*Die hochherzig ein Mädchen vollbrachte, die treffliche Jungfrau*  
(Goethe, *Herrmann und Dorothea* VI)

These x-o sequences are essentially of two types: (1) those which consist of two [+ST] syllables (e.g., *Ried; See-, weiß, breit-*) and (2) those consisting of a [-ST] syllable followed by a [+ST] syllable (e.g., *und braun-, die gelb*). In terms of the stress levels of these sequences, the first

([+ST][+ST]) creates the effect of a "spondee" in German. It is questionable, however, whether the second sequence ([-ST][+ST]) should be considered a "spondee" at all, since the first (non-lexical) syllable is clearly unstressed. Consider the following stress rule:

(15) [F] → <sub>o</sub>[-ST] / <sub>x</sub>[-ST] —

This rule accepts sequences of the first type (*weiß, breit-, Kindl hell, Nachtschuf, Tal geht*), as in the following lines:

(16)

*Schützt vor der blendenden Lampe das Kindl hell glänzet die*  
*Windel* (Voß, "Das erste Gefühl")

x o

*Die Nacht schuf tausend Ungeheuer*  
(Goethe, "Willkommen und Abschied", iambic tetrameter line)

x o

*Als wir nun aber den Weg, der quer durchs Tal geht, erreichten*  
(Goethe, *Herrmann und Dorothea*)

and rejects sequences of the second type (*und braun-, die gelb*).

When the sequence x[-ST]o[+ST] does occur, however, it is usually followed by a compensatory stressed syllable in the immediately following prominent position. This stressed syllable helps to re-establish the meter after the disruption of metrical equilibrium in the two preceding positions of the line:

(17)

*Die gelb blühten ...*  
*Die hochherzig ...*

x o x

With regard to these sequences, it is instructive to compare the poetic practice of Voß with that of Klopstock, Goethe, and Hölderlin. Table 2 shows the frequency and distribution of violations of the x-o rule given in (15) in the hexameters of these four writers. For each poet these x-o sequences are classified into two types: those which are followed by the metrically affirming feature x[+ST], and those followed by the nonaffirming feature x[-ST].

For all four poets, these data show a clear tendency for the hexameter line to regain metrical equilibrium immediately after a violation of the x-o rule. They also show that this rule is violated much more frequently by Voß than any of the other poets considered. As expected, these violations

Table 2. Frequency and positional distribution of the sequence x[-ST] o [+ST] in German hexameter verse

	x-o Sequences						Total Lines	Ratio
	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12		
Klopstock, <i>Messias</i> I and II (1799 edition)								
x[-ST] o [+ST] x [+ST]	24	8	4	10	1	0	47	1617 0.029
x[-ST] o [+ST] x[-ST]	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	1617 0.002
Voß, <i>Luise</i> I, II, III (1795)								
x[-ST] o [+ST] x [+ST]	62	14	17	12	0	0	105	1766 0.059
x[-ST] o [+ST] x[-ST]	3	4	0	2	0	0	9	1766 0.005
Goethe, <i>Hermann und Dorothea</i> (1797)								
x[-ST] o [+ST] x [+ST]	18	1	1	1	0	0	21	2034 0.010
x[-ST] o [+ST] x[-ST]	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2034 0.001
Hölderlin, <i>Gedichte</i> (1796-18050)								
x[-ST] o [+ST] x [+ST]	3	2	1	7	0	0	13	967 0.013
x[-ST] o [+ST] x[-ST]	0	2	5	0	0	0	7	967 0.007

Examples:

x[-ST] o [+ST] x [+ST] - *Als voll* (wurde), *die gelb* (blühen), *die hoch*(herzig) *mit lehr*(-  
reichem)

x[-ST] o [+ST] x[-ST] - *Die vor*(längst), *dann nimmt* sie

occur most frequently at the beginning of the line (positions 1-2), decrease in the middle (positions 2-3, 5-6, 7-8) and do not occur at all at the end of the line (positions 9-10, 11-12). This reflects a general tendency characteristic of all meters in the German verse tradition: disruptions of the meter occur most frequently at the onset of the verse line, and are filtered out toward the end, as metrical equilibrium is regained and the line thereby stabilized.

In 62 of the x-o-x sequences in positions 1-3 in Voß' *Luise*, the violation of the x-o stress rule is followed by a stressed syllable, while only 3 are followed by an unstressed syllable. No less than 53 of these 62 lines are of the following type:

(18) x o x o

*Mit lehrreichem Gespräch zu erfreun, und mancher Erzählung*  
(*Luise* I)

The other nine lines are of the type:

(19) x o x o

*Wann heiß werden die Tag, und die blühende Bohne betäuber*  
(*Luise* I)

It is the overabundance of sequences such as these which Andreas Heusler criticizes as "one of the sickest distortions which one can demand from Germanic linguistic material" (Heusler 1968; 3: 271). In a reference to Voß' previously mentioned *Zeitmessung der deutschen Sprache*, Heusler points out the faulty reasoning which led poets such as Voß, A. W. Schlegel, and Platen to use such sequences in their misguided attempts to recreate the Classical spondee in German:

Voß setzt den langlebigen Irrtum auf den Thron: das bloße 'Accentuiren' sei eine kindliche Rohheit gewesen: nun gelte es, der deutschen Kunst das Längemessen beizubringen. Jede Silbe hat ihr Zeitmaß. Danach addiert man die Silben eines Taktes; zusammen müssen sie die richtige Summe geben. Ist die gehobene Silbe zu kurz, muß die gesenkte um so länger sein: : *der hoch* : (donnernde) ist ein möglicher Hexametertakt, denn *hoch* bringt ein, was *der* zu wenig hat. (In Wahrheit: einer kräftigen Senkung kann sich auch die schwächere Hebung überordnen. Was man sogleich als Widersinn erkennnt.) (Heusler 1968, 3: 85)

Note that the problem here is not with words of the type *lehrreichem* per se — as assumed by Wolfgang Kayser (1965: 86, 313)<sup>8</sup> — but rather with the metrical sequence x-o, a sequence which, in both German and English verse, is much more highly constrained than o-x. It is above all the violations of the x-o rule given in (15) which represent severe distortions of the German language.

Any discussion of German hexameter verse would be incomplete without including the disyllabic o-positions and the kinds of verbal material which may or may not occur there. These positions are marked by roman type in the following lines, which illustrate various possibilities:

(20) x o x o o x o o x o o x o o x o o x o

*Sing, unsterbliche Seele, der sündigen Menschen Erlösung*  
(Klopstock, *Messias* I)

*Sorglos saß nach dem Mahle der Greis fort, sich und die andern*  
(Voß, *Luise* I)

*Unrat sich häuлет und Unrat auf allen Gassen herumliegt ...*

*Künftig die Vaterstadt selbst, so klein sie auch sei zu verziern*  
(Goethe, *Hermann und Dorothea* III)





While Klopstock, Goethe and even Hölderlin could have accommodated the third and fourth syllables of the word

x o o x  
*Johannisbeerstrauch*

in a disyllabic o-position, Voß felt constrained to eliminate the third syllable so that the lexical syllable *-beer-* would occur in a monosyllabic o-position. For Voß, the rules governing disyllabic o-positions therefore have the following highly restrictive form:

$$(25) \quad \begin{array}{l} [F] \rightarrow -ST, -LX]_o / ]_o[F] \text{ —} \\ [F] \rightarrow ]_o[-ST, -LX / \text{ —} ]_o[F]_o \end{array}$$

The approach to meter and language outlined here reveals clear prosodic differences in the poetic practice of the late eighteenth century poets Klopstock, Voß, Goethe, and Hölderlin. It also demonstrates the importance of distinguishing "iambic" and "trochaic" sequences (o-x and x-o), as well as the "dactylic" sequences in disyllabic o-positions (o-o). The poems analyzed show that a characteristic of iambic and trochaic verse in Germanic languages also holds for hexameter verse: the metrical sequence x-o is much more highly constrained than the sequence o-x. The frequent "weak spots" in the prosodic system of Johann Heinrich Voß — what Heusler refers to as distortions and a painful outrage against the German mother tongue — are almost all violations of the rule which stipulates what kind of verbal material may occur in x-o sequences. The data also show that the hexameters of Voß, in contrast to those of the other poets, are less constrained by the stress rules of the language, but more highly governed by its lexical structure.

### Notes

1. Heusler writes as follows about the hexameters of Voß, A. W. Schlegel, and Platen:
 

Wie in der Ode, so hat man im Hexameter unter dem Schutze des kräftigen Spondeus die tonschwache vorgeneigte Silbe (die letzte von ihrem Kolongipfel) in die Hebung befördert: eine der übelsten Verzerrungen, die man germanischem Sprachstoffe zuzunuten kann: *mit fuchspelze verbrämt; zum einträchtigen Tanz; als voll wurde das Jahr, aber es hat Knechtschaft! usw. ...*" (1956: 271).

Im Versbau äußert sich Vossens Strenge zumeist darin, daß er — v und — für eine im Deutschen nachahmbare Zweifelt hält und daraus die Folgen zieht bis zu schmerzlicher Kränkung der Muttersprache (1956: 215).
2. Kayser makes the following comment about the spondees of Voß, A. W. Schlegel and Platen: "Ihre Spondeen klingen uns undeutsch, und Heusler hat das Wort von der 'Spondeenkrankheit' geprägt, die durch sie in die deutschen Verse gekommen sei" (1986: 86).

3. For a more detailed discussion of the distinctions between these two suffix-types, see Chisholm (1973: 27–38).
4. With some modifications, I follow here the approach to poetic meter first proposed by Magnusson and Ryder 1970.
5. The fifth non-prominent position is occasionally monosyllabic in the hexameters of Klopstock and Voß.
6. Elsewhere (Chisholm 1973) I have shown that in German poetic practice from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, the "cut-off point" for this potential is the Middle High German period: unstressed derivational suffixes which still existed as independent words in Middle High German (e.g., *heit*, *haft*) can occur in an x-position in words like *Freiheit*, *herzhafft*.
7. In German iambic verse, on the other hand, there are occasional exceptions to this rule, particularly in the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke.
8. Kayser fails to distinguish the severity of the disruption of the meter in the following x-o-x sequences:
 

x	o	x
(1) <i>die Freiheit</i>	[-ST][+ST][-ST] — most disruptive	
(2) <i>noch weghalten</i>	[-ST][+ST][+ST] — disruptive	
(3) <i>Raub darstelle</i>	[+ST][+ST][+ST] — only mildly disruptive	

9. The figures for the first four poets are based on the same corpus as Tables 1 and 2. The figures for Brecht are based on the 379 hexameter lines in his uncompleted poem *Das Manifest*.

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