

/FRED NEWTON SCOTT AND PROSE RHYTHM/

by

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Fred Newton Scott and Prose Rhythm

The domestic cow . . . varies its utterance to meet the varying needs of the social situation. The voice of the cow has four tones, or lows. Three of these are communications, namely, the alarmed or distressed low of her affection when her calf is taken away, the call of hunger, and the frenzied bawl to her kin on smelling blood--the cry of the clan. But the fourth tone is different. It is 'a long sonorous volley, expressive of a kind of unrest, a vague longing.'

While the passage above may seem more appropriate for a study of animal psychology or bovine communication, it is part of Scott's argument for determining the fundamental difference between prose and poetry, an argument which would provide the basis for his theory of prose scansion. On a more general level, the passage illustrates Scott's comprehensive view of rhetoric and his willingness to venture beyond the traditional boundaries of rhetoric.

Scott's comprehensive view of rhetoric is evident in his study of style, the third canon of rhetoric (although he does not draw further on cows for support). One contribution he

made to the study of style, as it was taught in the universities, was his exploration of prose rhythm. His definition of poetry and prose, his scansion of prose, and his dispute with Otto Jespersen regarding the accentual patterns of isolable rhythm groups, all illustrate Scott's boldness to view prose rhythm from an original angle, with support from such related disciplines as experimental psychology, linguistics, and sociology. But Scott did not break from the past. He displayed a continual concern for what is fundamental in the language and in the nature of human beings. For these reasons, Albert R. Kitzhaber, comparing Fred Newton Scott to A. S. Hill, Barrett Wendell, and John Genung, all influential figures in the teaching of rhetoric and composition in the second half of the nineteenth century, wrote that "Scott alone could be called an original thinker" (113).

Scott was born in Terre Haute, Indiana on August 20, 1860. He was educated at home until the Indiana Normal School (now Indiana State University) opened, and then, at age ten, he attended the college's training school. Sometime in 1878 or 1879, he moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, apparently to become secretary to Dr. J. H. Kellogg of the Battle Creek Sanatorium. In 1880, after earning a Battle Creek diploma, he began his studies at the University of Michigan. He completed his B.A. in 1884, his M.A. in 1888, and his Ph. D. in 1889. In 1890, he was promoted to assistant professor; in 1896, to junior (associate) professor; in 1901, to professor. In 1903, he became the