The Tempo of Greek Polysyllables — a Response

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In a recent note[1]), Professor West repeats the view that he had advanced elsewhere[2]), that the 'paradox' that 'in those types of Greek verse which admit resolution . . . there is a strong tendency for resolved positions to be occupied by the two intial syllables of a word containing three or more' can be explained by assuming that 'the first syllables of a long word tended to be uttered more rapidly than the last'. He then goes on to suggest that the same hypothesis, 'in particular as it applies to the ends of words' will resolve two other 'paradoxes'. Apart from the sentence, 'Assume a very slight *ritardo* on final syllables, and all else is explained', he offers no account as to how precisely his hypothesis is to be applied to his 'paradoxes' and it is my intention here to show that there are real difficulties in trying to do so.

His second 'paradox' is that 'the avoidance of word-end between the two shorts of a resolved position, and after a long syllable in certain anceps positions, implies that word-end is a factor which adds length to the preceding syllable'. As he goes on to explain, this is a paradox for him because he accepts the view, most recently and most fully advanced by Professor Allen[3]), that 'all words within the metrical period are in prosodic sandhi, irrespective of syntactical breaks . . . a final consonant forms a syllable with an initial vowel . . .'; on this view, of course, there can be no pause between words. I have tried to assemble elsewhere a series of arguments for disputing this basis assumption[4]), and I should be happy to add Professor West's 'paradox' to the other difficulties collected there. Here, however, I intend only to explore whether the 'hypothesis' can explain the 'paradox', accepting, for the sake of argument, his basic assumption on 'prosodic sandhi'.

If we consider the three elements of Professor West's explanation together, that 'first syllables of a long word tended to be uttered more rapidly than the last', that we should consider this hypothesis

[1]) *Gl* 55 (1977) 159–60.

[2]) *Gn* 48 (1976) 7.

[3]) W. Sidney Allen, *Accent and Rhythm*, Cambridge, 1973, 50–56, Professor West has changed his position on this point. Formerly (*Gl* 48 (1970) 187), he regarded a final short vowel + ν, ϱ, σ as *shorter* than a final short open vowel followed by initial ν, ϱ, σ. See my previous remarks, (*Gl* 52 (1974) 228, n. 22).

[4]) *Gl* 52 (1974) 218–31.

'in particular as it applies to the ends of words' and that we should 'assume a very slight *ritardo* on final syllables' the only possible conclusion is that Professor West believes that Greek speakers began each word comparatively fast and then either slowed down steadily until they reached the beginning of the next word or reached a 'normal' speed in the middle of the word which they maintained until, on the last syllable, they decelerated yet again. Such a account is certainly consistent with Professor West's first 'paradox', the preference for the resolved syllables to be occupied by the first two syllables of longer words; the notion is that two resolved syllables should be especially short so that between them they do not amount to more than the one long they are representing. Unhappily, Professor West's view would suggest that the longest possible pair of short syllables would be the last two of a long word where the speaker would be decelerating on both syllables (or, alternatively, pronouncing one 'normally' and the other slowly). It is, of course, true that such an arrangement is rare, but it is nothing like so uncommon as word division between the two shorts which, on Professor West's view, would consist of one slow syllable and one fast one. Accordingly, a break between words still seems the most plausible explanation for the phenomenon described.

Professor West's third 'paradox' concerns accentuation. 'The recession of the accent in Greek is limited by distance from the end of the word. The ε in ἐάγη for example, cannot be accented because it is too far from the end. But the ε in ἔαγα can be and is accented. Why does . . . ⏑ – count as longer than . . . – ⏑ for this purpose?' Most might reply that it is not true that recession is limited by distance from the end of the word but by the quantity of the final syllable[5]); here again, however, the intention is only to relate Professor West's hypothesis to his 'paradox', a task that bristles with difficulties. At first sight, the hypothesis is useless since

[5]) Alternatively, it is possible to follow Professor Allen whose formulation of the rule is not wholly dissimilar to that of Professor West: 'Not more than one mora may follow the contonation.' But Professor Allen also believes that an oxytone involves disyllabic contonation with a high pitch on the syllable accented and a glide on the following syllable. Accordingly, for Professor Allen, the accent on ἔαγα terminates with the glide that continues throughout the long second syllable, leaving only one mora at the end, while in the case of ἐάγη the accent terminates at the end of the word, leaving no mora. In the forbidden ἔαγη however, the oxytone would terminate with a glide on the second syllable, leaving a long syllable, or two mora, after it. (*Accent and Rhythm*, pp. 234–37). Professor West rejects this analysis

it would appear to apply equally and without distinction to both words. The notion, advanced in response to the first 'paradox', that there was something peculiarly fast about two short syllables opening a word would suggest that the last two syllables of a word shaped ⏑⏑– counted shorter than the last two of a word shaped ⏑–⏑ which is the precise opposite of what Professor West needs to show. I am, accordingly, driven to the view that Professor West assumes his deceleration at the ends of words has a multiplier effect, so that it has a disproportionately high effect on a final long syllable. Suppose we assume the 'normal' value of a short syllable to be 1 and of a long syllable 2, and suppose we assume that penultimate syllables are pronounced either with a deceleration which multiplies their length by x or 'normally', and that final syllables are pronounced with a deceleration which multiples by $x + y$. Then, assuming deceleration on both syllables, final ⏑– would give a value of $1x + 2(x + y) = 3x + 2y$, whereas –⏑ would give a value of only $2x + 1(x + y) = 3x + y$. In the case of 'normal' pronunciation of the penult the respective values would be $1 + 2(x + y)$ as against $2 + 1(x + y)$ which would give the same result for any deceleration value (i.e. more than 1) of $x + y$. If that is Professor West's meaning, he has certainly chosen to present it in an obscure way. One is, furthermore, entitled to wonder how plausible it is that speakers decelerated in the way described. The real paradox is that, according to Professor West, *κατέαγα* is proparoxytone because of the comparative speed of its final syllables whereas the same word renders *τάλαινα κατέαγα, πάτερ* an impossible start to an iambic trimeter because of the comparative slowness of its final syllables.

It is, indeed, important to observe that, in Greek, the rules that determine quantity in verse are not the same as those that obtain in the rules of accentuation. Ponder, for instance, *ἄνθρωποι σαύρα* as against *ἀνθρώποις αὖρα* where the accentual rule, but not the metre, is affected by the point of word division. In the case of *ἔλυες αὖραν* and *ἔλυες σαύραν* however, the rules for accentuation are unaffected though the metrical analysis is. Analogies between metrical rules and accentual rules should, accordingly, be approached with caution[6]).

(*Gn* 48 (1976) 5) but it is not necessary to find Professor Allen convincing to be dissatisfied with the critique of Professor West.

[6]) An earlier version of this note was read by my friend and colleague, Mr. K. Dowden: this version owes much to his suggestions.