Metre (poetry)

In poetry, metre (meter in American English) is the basic rhythmic structure of a verse or lines in verse. Many traditional verse forms prescribe a specific verse metre, or a certain set of metres alternating in a particular order. The study of metres and forms of versification is known as prosody. (Within linguistics, "prosody" is used in a more general sense that includes not only poetical metre but also the rhythmic aspects of prose, whether formal or informal, which vary from language to language, and sometimes between poetic traditions.)

Qualitative vs. quantitative metre

The metre of much poetry of the Western world and elsewhere is based on particular patterns of syllables of particular types. The familiar type of metre in English-language poetry is called qualitative metre, with stressed syllables coming at regular intervals (e.g. in iambic pentameter, typically every even-numbered syllable). Many Romance languages use a scheme that is somewhat similar but where the position of only one particular stressed syllable (e.g. the last) needs to be fixed. The metre of the old Germanic poetry of languages such as Old Norse and Old English was radically different, but still was based on stress patterns.

Many classical languages, however, use a different scheme known as quantitative metre, where patterns are based on syllable weight rather than stress. In dactylic hexameter of Classical Latin and Classical Greek, for example, each of the six feet making up the line was either a dactyl (long-short-short) or spondee (long-long), where a long syllable was literally one that took longer to pronounce than a short syllable: specifically, a syllable consisting of a long vowel or diphthong or followed by two consonants. The stress pattern of the words made no difference to the metre.

A number of other ancient languages also used quantitative metre, such as Sanskrit and Classical Arabic (but not Biblical Hebrew).

Feet

In many Western classical poetic traditions, the metre of a verse can be described as a sequence of feet, each foot being a specific sequence of syllable types — such as relatively unstressed/stressed (the norm for English poetry) or long/short (as in most classical Latin and Greek poetry).

Iambic pentameter, a common meter in English poetry, is based on a normative sequence of five iambic feet or iambbs, each consisting of a relatively unstressed syllable (here represented with "x" above the syllable) followed by a relatively stressed one (here represented with "/" above the syllable) — "da-DUM" = "x /" :

```
x  /  x  /  x  /  x  /  x /
```

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,

```
x  /  x  /  x  /  x  /  x /
```

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

This approach to analyzing and classifying metres originates from ancient Greek tragedians and poets such as Homer, Pindar, Hesiod, and Sappho.

Note that some metres have an overall rhythmic pattern to the line that cannot easily be described using feet. This occurs in Sanskrit poetry; see Vedic metre and Sanskrit metre). (Although this poetry is in fact specified using feet, each "foot" is more or less equivalent to an entire line.) However, it also occurs in some Western metres, such as the hendecasyllable favoured by Catullus, which can be described as:

```
x  x  -  u  u  -  u  -  u  -
```

(where "/" = long, "u" = short, and "x x" can be realized as "/ - u" or "- -" or "u -")
Half-lines

In place of using feet, alliterative verse of old Germanic languages such as Old English and Old Norse divided each line into two half-lines. Each half-line had to follow one of five or so patterns, each of which defined a sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables, typically with two stressed syllables per line. Unlike typical Western poetry, however, the number of unstressed syllables could vary somewhat. For example, the common pattern "DUM-da-DUM-da" could allow between one and five unstressed syllables between the two stresses.

The following is a famous example, taken from The Battle of Maldon:

\[Hige\text{ }sceal\text{ }be\text{ }heardra,\text{ }\|\text{ }heorte\text{ }be\text{ }cenre,\]
\[måd\text{ }sceal\text{ }be\text{ }måre,\text{ }\|\text{ }swå\text{ }iffe\text{ }mågen\text{ }lytlað\]

("Will must be the harder, courage the bolder,
spirit must be the more, as our might lessens.")

In the quoted section, the stressed syllables have been underlined. (Normally, the stressed syllable must be long if followed by another syllable in a word. However, by a rule known as syllable resolution, two short syllables in a single word are considered equal to a single long syllable. Hence, sometimes two syllables have been underlined, as in hige and magen.) The first three half-lines have the type A pattern "DUM-da-(da-)DUM-da", while the last one has the type C pattern "da-(da-da-)DUM-DUM-da", with parentheses indicating optional unstressed syllables that have been inserted. Note also the pervasive pattern of alliteration, where the first and/or second stress alliterate with the third, but not with the fourth.

Caesurae

Another component of a verse's metre are the caesurae (literally, cuts), which are not pauses but compulsory word boundaries which occur after a particular syllabic position in every line of a poem. In Latin and Greek poetry, a caesura is a break within a foot caused by the end of a word.

For example, in the verse below, each odd line has a caesura (shown by a slash /) after the fourth syllable (daily, her, won'dring, mother) while each even line is without a caesura:

Daily, daily, / sing to Mary,
Sing my soul her praises due:
All her feasts, her / actions honour,
With the heart's devotion true.
Now in won'dring / contemplation,
Be her majesty confess'd;
Call her Mother / call her Virgin,
Happy Mother, Virgin blest.

A caesura would split the word "devotion" in the fourth line or the word "majesty" in the sixth line.

Metric variations

Poems with a well-defined overall metric pattern often have a few lines that violate that pattern. A common variation is the inversion of a foot, which turns an iamb ("da-DUM") into a trochee ("DUM-da"). Another common variation is a headless verse, which lacks the first syllable of the first foot. Yet a third variation is catalexis, where the end of a line is shortened by a foot, or two or part thereof - an example of this is at the end of each verse in Keats' 'La Belle Dame sans Merci':

And on thy cheeks a fading rose (4 feet)
Metre (poetry)

Fast wethereth too (2 feet)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foot type</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Stress pattern</th>
<th>Syllable count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iamb</td>
<td>Iambic</td>
<td>Unstressed + Stressed</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trochee</td>
<td>Trochaic</td>
<td>Stressed + Unstressed</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spondee</td>
<td>Spondaic</td>
<td>Stressed + Stressed</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anapest</td>
<td>Anapastic</td>
<td>Unstressed + Unstressed + Stressed</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dactyl</td>
<td>Dactylic</td>
<td>Stressed + Unstressed + Unstressed</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphibrah</td>
<td>Amphibrachic</td>
<td>Unstressed + Stressed + Unstressed</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrrhic</td>
<td>Pyrrhic</td>
<td>Unstressed + Unstressed</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cummings Study Guides[1]

If there is one foot, it's called monometer; two feet, dimeter; three is trimeter; four is tetramer; five is pentamer; six is hexamer, seven is heptamer and eight is octamer. For example, if the feet are iambs, and if there are five feet to a line, then it's called iambic pentameter.[1] If the feet are primarily dactyls and there are six to a line, then it's dactylic hexameter.[1]

Metre in various languages

Sanskrit

Classical Sanskrit and Vedic Sanskrit use metres for most ancient treatises that are set to verse. Prominent Vedic metres include Gayatri, Ushnik, Anushatupa, Brhati, Pankti, Tristubh and Jagati. The basic metre for epic verse is the Sloka. Sanskrit metre is quantitative, similar in general principles to classical Greek and Latin metre. The Bhagavad Gita is mainly written in anustupa (with some vasanta-tilaka sections) interspersed with some Tristubh. For example, when Krishna reveals his divinity to Arjuna the metre changes to Tristubh. Tristubh is the most prevalent metre of the ancient Rigveda, accounting for roughly 40% of its verses.

Greek and Latin

The metrical "feet" in the classical languages were based on the length of time taken to pronounce each syllable, which were categorized according to their weight as either "long" syllables or "short" syllables (indicated as daa and duh below). These are also called "heavy" and "light" syllables, respectively, to distinguish from long and short vowels. The foot is often compared to a musical measure and the long and short syllables to whole notes and half notes. In English poetry, feet are determined by emphasis rather than length, with stressed and unstressed syllables serving the same function as long and short syllables in classical metre.

The basic unit in Greek and Latin prosody is a mora, which is defined as a single short syllable. A long syllable is equivalent to two morae. A long syllable contains either a long vowel, a diphthong, or a short vowel followed by two or more consonants. Various rules of elision sometimes prevent a grammatical syllable from making a full syllable, and certain other lengthening and shortening rules (such as correption) can create long or short syllables in contexts where one would expect the opposite.

The most important Classical metre is the dactylic hexameter, the metre of Homer and Virgil. This form uses verses of six feet. The word dactyl comes from the Greek word daktylos meaning finger, since there is one long part followed by two short stretches.[2] The first four feet are dactyls (daa-duh-duh), but can be spondees (daa-daa). The fifth foot is almost always a dactyl. The sixth foot is either a spondee or a trochee (daa-duh). The initial syllable of either foot is called the ictus, the basic "beat" of the verse. There is usually a caesura after the ictus of the third foot. The opening line of the Aeneid is a typical line of dactylic hexameter:
Armă vî | rumquĕ că | nō, Troi | ae quī | prīmŭs āb | ōrīs
("I sing of arms and the man, who first from the shores of Troy...")

In this example, the first and second feet are dactyls; their first syllables, "Ar" and "rum" respectively, contain short vowels, but count as long because the vowels are both followed by two consonants. The third and fourth feet are spondees, the first of which is divided by the main caesura of the verse. The fifth foot is a dactyl, as is nearly always the case. The final foot is a spondee.

The dactylic hexameter was imitated in English by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem *Evangeline*:

*This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,*
*Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,*
*Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,*
*Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.*

Notice how the first line:

*This is the | for-est pri | me-val. The | mur-muring | pines and the | hem-locks*

Follows this pattern:

*dum diddy | dum diddy | dum diddy | dum diddy | dum diddy | dum dum*

Also important in Greek and Latin poetry is the dactylic pentameter. This was a line of verse, made up of two equal parts, each of which contains two dactyls followed by a long syllable, which counts as a half foot. In this way, the number of feet amounts to five in total. Spondees can take the place of the dactyls in the first half, but never in the second. The long syllable at the close of the first half of the verse always ends a word, giving rise to a caesura.

Dactylic pentameter is never used in isolation. Rather, a line of dactylic pentameter follows a line of dactylic hexameter in the elegiac distich or elegiac couplet, a form of verse that was used for the composition of elegies and other tragic and solemn verse in the Greek and Latin world, as well as love poetry that was sometimes light and cheerful. An example from Ovid's *Tristia*:

*Vergĭlĭ | um vī | dī tan | tum, nĕc ā | māră Tĭ | bullō*
*Tempŭs ā | mīcĭtĭ | ae || fātă dĕ | dērĕ mĕ | ae.*

("I saw only Vergil, greedy Fate gave Tibullus no time for me.")

The Greeks and Romans also used a number of lyric metres, which were typically used for shorter poems than elegiacs or hexameter. In Aeolic verse, one important line was called the hendecasyllable, a line of eleven syllables. This metre was used most often in the Sapphic stanza, named after the Greek poet Sappho, who wrote many of her poems in the form. A hendecasyllabic is a line with a never-varying structure: two trochees, followed by a dactyl, then two more trochees. In the Sapphic stanza, three hendecasyllabics are followed by an "Adonic" line, made up of a dactyl and a trochee. This is the form of Catullus 51 (itself an homage to Sappho 31):

*Iḷlĕ | mī pār | essĕ dĕ | ā vĭ | dētūr;*
*iḷḷĕ, | sē fās l est, sūpĕ | rārĕ l divōs,*
*qūĭ sĕ | dēns ad | versūs î | dentĭ | dem tē*
*spectāt ēt | audĭt*

("He seems to me to be like a god; if it is permitted, he seems above the gods, he who sitting across from you gazes at you and listens to you.")

The Sapphic stanza was imitated in English by Algernon Charles Swinburne in a poem he simply called *Sapphics*:

*Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,*
*Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled*
*Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;*
Saw the reluctant...

**Classical Arabic**

The metrical system of Classical Arabic poetry, like those of classical Greek and Latin, is based on the weight of syllables classified as either "long" or "short".

A short syllable contains a short vowel with no following consonants. For example, the word *kataba*, which syllabifies as *ka-ta-ba*, contains three short vowels. A long syllable contains either a long vowel, or a short vowel followed by a consonant as is the case in the word *maktūbun* which syllabifies as *mak-tū-bun*. These are the only syllable types possible in Arabic phonology which, by and large, does not allow a syllable to end in more than one consonant or a consonant to occur in the same syllable after a long vowel. In other words, with very few exceptions, syllables of the type -āk- or -akr- are not found in classical Arabic.

Each verse consists of a certain number of metrical feet (*tafā`īl* or *ajzāʾ*) and a certain combination of possible feet constitutes a metre (*baḥr*).

The traditional Arabic practice for writing out a poem's metre is to use a concatenation of various derivations of the verbal root *F-`-L* (ُفْعَل). Thus, the following hemistich

*qifā nabi min dhikrā habībin wamanzīl*

Would be traditionally scanned as

*Fa`ūlun mafā`īlun fa`ūlun mafā`ilun*

Which, according to the system more current in the west, can be represented as:

_u-- u--- u-- u-u-

**The Arabic Metres**

Classical Arabic has sixteen established metres. Though each of them allows for a certain amount of variation, their basic patterns are as follows, using ".-" for a long syllable, "u" for a short one, "x" for a syllable that can be long or short and "o" for a position that can either contain one long or two shorts:

The Ṭawīl (الطويل):

_u-x u-x- u-x u-u-

The Madīd (المديد):

_xu—xu- xu-

The Basīṭ (البسيط):

_x-u- xu- x-u- uu-

The Kāmil (الكامل):

_o-u- o-u- o-u-

The Wāfir (الوافر): 

_u-o- u-o- u--
Metre (poetry)

The Hajaz (الهجر):
\[ u-x u-x \]
فاعلين مفاعلين

The Rajaz (الرجز):
\[ x-u- x-u- x-u- \]
 مستفعلن مستفعلن مستفعلن

The Ramal (الرمعل):
\[ xu-xu-xu- \]
فاعلات فاعلات فاعل فاعل

The Sarī (السرعي):
\[ xxu- xxu- u- \]
مستفعلن فاعلات مستفعلن

The Munsariḥ (المسرحي):
\[ x-u- -x-u -uu- \]
مستفعلن فاعلات مستفعلن

The Khaffīf (الخفيف):
\[ xu-x-u- xu-xu-xu- \]
فاعلات فاعلات فاعل فاعل

The Muḍāri (المضارع):
\[ u-x x-u-- \]
فاعلات فاعلات

The Muqtaḍib (المقتضب):
\[ xu- u- uu- \]
فاعلات مستفعلن

The Mujtathth (المجتث):
\[ x-u- xu-xu-xu- \]
مستفعلن فاعلات فاعلات

The Mutadārik (المدارك):
\[ o- o- o- o- (Here, each "o" can also be "xu") \]
فاعل فاعل فاعل فاعل

The Mutaqārib (المتقارب):
\[ u-x u-x u-x u- \]
فعول فعال فعال فعال

Classical Chinese

Classical Chinese poetic metric may be divided into fixed and variable length line types, although the actual scansion of the metre is complicated by various factors, including linguistic changes and variations encountered in dealing with a tradition extending over a geographically extensive regional area for a continuous time period of over some two-and-a-half millennia. Beginning with the earlier recorded forms: the Classic of Poetry tends toward couplets of four-character lines; and, the Chuci tends toward a more variable line length. The Han poetry tended towards the variable line-length forms of the folk ballads and the Music Bureau yuefu. In the Jian’an, Six Dynasties, and Tang poetry, poetic metre based on fixed-length lines of five, seven, (or, more rarely six) characters/verbal units tended to predominate, generally in couplet/quatrain-based forms, of various total verse lengths. The Song poetry is specially
known for its use of the *ci*, using variable line lengths, but according to fairly strict limiting rules: these seem to be derived from specific musical song lyrics; thus they are known as fixed-rhythm forms. The Yuan poetry metres continued this practice with their *qu* forms, similarly fixed-rhythm forms based on now obscure or perhaps completely lost original examples (or, ur-types). Not that Classical Chinese poetry ever lost the use of the *shi* forms, with their metrical patterns found in the (old style) *gushi* and the regulated verse forms of the *lushi* or *jintishi*. The regulated verse forms also prescribed patterns based upon linguistic tonality. The use of caesura is important in regard to the metrical analysis of Classical Chinese poetry forms.

**Old English**

The metric system of Old English poetry was different from that of modern English, and more related to the verse forms of most of older Germanic languages. It used alliterative verse, a metrical pattern involving varied numbers of syllables but a fixed number (usually four) of strong stresses in each line. The unstressed syllables were relatively unimportant, but the caesurae played a major role in Old English poetry.\(^3\)

**Modern English**

Most English metre is classified according to the same system as Classical metre with an important difference. English is an accentual language, and therefore beats and offbeats (stressed and unstressed syllables) take the place of the long and short syllables of classical systems. In most English verse, the metre can be considered as a sort of back beat, against which natural speech rhythms vary expressively. The most common characteristic feet of English verse are the iamb in two syllables and the anapæst in three. (See Foot (prosody) for a complete list of the metrical feet and their names.)

**Metrical systems**

The number of metrical systems in English is not agreed upon.\(^4\) The four major types\(^5\) are: accentual verse, accentual-syllabic verse, syllabic verse and quantitative verse.\(^6\) The alliterative verse of Old English could also be added to this list, or included as a special type of accentual verse. Accentual verse focuses on the number of stresses in a line, while ignoring the number of offbeats and syllables; accentual-syllabic verse focuses on regulating both the number of stresses and the total number of syllables in a line; syllabic verse only counts the number of syllables in a line; quantitative verse regulates the patterns of long and short syllables (this sort of verse is often considered alien to English).\(^7\) It is to be noted, however, that the use of foreign metres in English is all but exceptional.\(^8\)

**Frequently-used Metres**

The most frequently encountered metre of English verse is the iambic pentameter, in which the metrical norm is five iambic feet per line, though metrical substitution is common and rhythmic variations practically inexhaustible. John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, most sonnets, and much else besides in English are written in iambic pentameter. Lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter are commonly known as blank verse.\(^9\) Blank verse in the English language is most famously represented in the plays of William Shakespeare and the great works of Milton, though Tennyson (*Ulysses*, *The Princess*) and Wordsworth (*The Prelude*) also make notable use of it.

A rhymed pair of lines of iambic pentameter make a heroic couplet,\(^10\) a verse form which was used so often in the eighteenth century that it is now used mostly for humorous effect (although see Pale Fire for a non-trivial case). The most famous writers of heroic couplets are Dryden and Pope.

Another important metre in English is the ballad metre, also called the "common metre", which is a four-line stanza, with two pairs of a line of iambic tetrameter followed by a line of iambic trimeter; the rhymes usually fall on the lines of trimeter, although in many instances the tetrameter also rhymes. This is the metre of most of the Border and Scots or English ballads. In hymnody it is called the "common metre", as it is the most common of the named hymn metres used to pair many hymn lyrics with melodies, such as *Amazing Grace*.\(^11\)
Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

Emily Dickinson is famous for her frequent use of ballad metre:
Great streets of silence led away
To neighborhoods of pause —
Here was no notice — no dissent —
No universe — no laws.

French

In French poetry, metre is determined solely by the number of syllables in a line, because it is considered as less important than rhymes. A silent 'e' counts as a syllable before a consonant, but is elided before a vowel (where h aspiré counts as a consonant). At the end of a line, the "e" remains unelided but is hypermetrical (outside the count of syllables, like a feminine ending in English verse), in that case, the rhyme is also called "feminine", whereas it is called "masculine" in the other cases.

The most frequently encountered metre in Classical French poetry is the alexandrine, composed of two hemistiches of six syllables each. Two famous alexandrines are

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë
(Jean Racine)

(Waterloo! Waterloo! Waterloo! Morne plaine!
(Victor Hugo)

Classical French poetry also had a complex set of rules for rhymes that goes beyond how words merely sound. These are usually taken into account when describing the metre of a poem.

Spanish

In Spanish poetry the metre is determined by the number of syllables the verse has. Still it is the phonetic accent in the last word of the verse that decides the final count of the line. If the accent of the final word is at the last syllable, then the poetic rule states that one syllable shall be added to the actual count of syllables in the said line, thus having a higher number of poetic syllables than the number of grammatical syllables. If the accent lies on the second to last syllable of the last word in the verse, then the final count of poetic syllables will be the same as the grammatical number of syllables. Furthermore, if the accent lies on the third to last syllable, then one syllable is subtracted from the actual count, having then less poetic syllables than grammatical syllables.

Spanish poetry uses poetic licenses, unique to Romance languages, to change the number of syllables by manipulating mainly the vowels in the line.

Regarding these poetic licenses one must consider three kinds of phenomena: (1) syneresis, (2) umlaut and (3) hiatus
1. Syneresis. It is the phenomenon that occurs when inside a word has two vowels together are generally not diphthong: poe-ta, loyal-ty.
2. Umlaut. It is the opposite phenomenon of syneresis because it consists of separate two vowels which are usually diphthong: su-to-see, ru-i-ing.
3. Hiatus. It is the opposite phenomenon to pronounce sinalefa separately because it consists of two vowels, although belonging to different words, they should act together for sinalefa: mu-si-tion of a-the. Normally in this example would be five syllables of poetry, but the poet used the hiatus for the six syllables that the rhythm of his verse needs. For example:

\[\text{Cuando salí de Collores,}\
\text{fue en una jaquita baya,}\
\text{por un sendero entre mayas,}\
\text{arropás de cundiamores...}\]

This stanza from Valle de Collores by Luis Llorens Torres, uses eight poetic syllables. Given that all words at the end of each line have their phonetic accent on the second to last syllables, no syllables in the final count is either added or subtracted. Still in the second and third verse the grammatical count of syllables is nine. Poetic licenses permit the union of two vowels that are next to each other but in different syllables and count them as one. "Fue en..." has actually two syllables, but applying this license both vowels unite and form only one, giving the final count of eight syllables. "Sendero entre..." has five grammatical syllables, but uniting the "o" from "sendero" and the first "e" from "entre", gives only four syllables, permitting it to have eight syllables in the verse as well. This license is called a synalepha (Spanish: sinalefa). There are many types of licenses, used either to add or subtract syllables, that may be applied when needed after taking in consideration the poetic rules of the last word. Yet all have in common that they only manipulate vowels that are close to each other and not interrupted by consonants.

Some common metres in Spanish verse are:

- **Septenary**: A line with seven poetic syllables
- **Octosyllable**: A line with eight poetic syllables. This metre is commonly used in romances, narrative poems similar to English ballads, and in most proverbs.
- **Hendecasyllable**: A line with eleven poetic syllables. This metre plays a similar role to pentameter in English verse. It is commonly used in sonnets, among other things.
- **Alexandrine**: A line consisting of fourteen syllables, commonly separated by two hemistiches of seven syllables each (In Anglo-Saxon or French contexts this term refers to twelve syllable lines, but not in the Spanish context).

### Italian

In Italian poetry, metre is determined solely by the position of the last accent in a line, the position of the other accents being however important for verse equilibrium. Syllables are enumerated with respect to a verse which ends with a paroxytone, so that a Septenary (having seven syllables) is defined as a verse whose last accent falls on the sixth syllable: it may so contain eight syllables (Ei fu. Siccome immobile) or just six (la terra al nunzio sta). Moreover, when a word ends with a vowel and the next one starts with a vowel, they are considered to be in the same syllable (synalepha): so Gli anni e i giorni consists of only four syllables ("Gli an" "ni e i" "gior" "ni").

Even-syllabic verses have a fixed stress pattern. Because of the mostly trochaic nature of the Italian language, verses with an even number of syllables are far easier to compose, and the Novenary is usually regarded as the most difficult verse.

Some common metres in Italian verse are:

- **Sexenary**: A line whose last stressed syllable is on the fifth, with a fixed stress on the second one as well (\textit{Al Re Travicello} / \textit{Piovuto ai ranocchi}, Giusti)
- **Septenary**: A line whose last stressed syllable is the sixth one.
- **Octosyllable**: A line whose last accent falls on the seventh syllable. More often than not, the secondary accents fall on the first, third and fifth syllable, especially in nursery rhymes for which this metre is particularly well-suited.
Hendecasyllable: A line whose last accent falls on the tenth syllable. It therefore usually consists of eleven syllables; there are various kinds of possible accentations. It is used in sonnets, in ottava rima, and in many other works. The Divine Comedy, in particular, is composed entirely of hendecasyllables, whose main stress pattern is 4th and 10th syllable.

**Ottoman Turkish**

In the Ottoman Turkish language, the structures of the poetic foot (تَفْعِيل tef'ile) and of poetic metre (وزن vezin) were indirectly borrowed from the Arabic poetic tradition through the medium of the Persian language.

Ottoman poetry, also known as Dîvân poetry, was generally written in quantitative, mora-timed metre. The moras, or syllables, are divided into three basic types:

- **Open, or light, syllables (اَصِّك hece)** consist of either a short vowel alone, or a consonant followed by a short vowel
  - Examples: ا-دام ("man"); زر-و ("summit, peak")
- **Closed, or heavy, syllables (اَكَالَه hece)** consist of either a long vowel alone, a consonant followed by a long vowel, or a short vowel followed by a consonant
  - Examples: أ-دام ("Adam"); کا-فر ("non-Muslim"); ا ("horse")
- **Lengthened, or superheavy, syllables (مَدِّلِي hece)** count as one closed plus one open syllable and consist of a vowel followed by a consonant cluster, or a long vowel followed by a consonant
  - Examples: كورك ("fur"); آب ("water")

In writing out a poem’s poetic metre, open syllables are symbolized by "." and closed syllables are symbolized by "–". From the different syllable types, a total of sixteen different types of poetic foot—the majority of which are either three or four syllables in length—are constructed, which are named and scanned as follows:

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These individual poetic feet are then combined in a number of different ways, most often with four feet per line, so as to give the poetic metre for a line of verse. Some of the most commonly used metres are the following:

- **"me fā′i lün / me fā′i lün / me fā′i lün / me fā′i lün"**
  - Ezelden şah-ı aş'kuñ bende-i fermānıyüz cānā
  - Maḥabbet mülkinüñ sulţān-ı ālī-şānıyüz cānā
  - Oh beloved, since the origin we have been the slaves of the shah of love
  - Oh beloved, we are the famed sultan of the heart's domain

—Bâkî (1526–1600)

- **"me fā i lün / fe i là tün / me fā i lün / fe i là tün"**
  - Haşâ′o nerkis-i şehlādadır sözümde degil
  - Eğerçi her süḥanim bī-bedel beġendiremem
  - Though I may fail to please with my matchless verse
  - The fault lies in those languid eyes and not my words

—Şeyh Gâlib (1757–1799)
Metre (poetry)

Bir şeker hand ile bezm-i şevâ cân ettiñ
beni
Nim şun peymâneyi sâki tamâm ettiñ beni

At the gathering of desire you made me a wine-cup with your sugar smile
Oh saki, give me only half a cup of wine, you've made me drunk enough

—Nedîm (1681?–1730)

• fe i là ṭün / fe i là ṭün / fe i là ṭün / fe i là ṭün / fe i là ṭün

Men ne hâcet ki klam derd-i dilüm yâra
ayân
Kamu derd-i dilümi yar bilâbdür bilâberman

What use in revealing my sickness of heart to my love
I know my love knows the whole of my sickness of heart

—Fuzûlî (1483?–1556)

• mef' â lün / me fâ i lü / me fâ i lü / fâ â lün

Şevḳuz ki dem-i bâlbül-i şeydâda
nihânuz
Hûnuz ki dîl-i ġonçe-i bâmûdûa nihânuz

We are desire hidden in the love-crazed call of the nightingale
We are blood hidden in the crimson heart of the unbloomed rose

—Neşâtî (?–1674)

Portuguese

Metres were extensively explored in Brazilian literature, notably during Parnassianism. The most notable ones were:

• Redondilha menor: composed of 5 syllables.
• Redondilha maior: composed of 7 syllables.
• Decasyllable (decassílabo): composed of 10 syllables. Mostly used in Parnassian sonnets.
  • Heroic (heróico): stresses on the sixth and tenth syllables.
  • Sapphic (sáfico): stresses on the fourth, eighth and tenth syllables.
  • Martelo: stresses on the third, sixth and tenth syllables.
  • Gaita galega or moîneira: stresses on the fourth, seventh and tenth syllables.
• Hendecasyllable (dodecassílabo): composed of 12 syllables.
• Alexandrine (alexandrino): divided into two hemistiches.
• Barbarian (bárbaro): composed of 13 or more syllables.
• Lucasian (lucasiano): composed of 16 syllables, divided into two hemistiches of 8 syllables each.

History

Further information: History of poetry

Metrical texts are first attested in early Indo-European languages. The earliest known unambiguously metrical texts, and at the same time the only metrical texts with a claim of dating to the Late Bronze Age, are the hymns of the Rigveda. That the texts of the Ancient Near East (Sumerian, Egyptian or Semitic) should not exhibit metre is surprising, and may be partly due to the nature of Bronze Age writing. There were, in fact, attempts to reconstruct metrical qualities of the poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible, e.g. by Gustav Bickell or Julius Ley, but they remained inconclusive (see Biblical poetry). Early Iron Age metrical poetry is found in the Iranian Avesta and in the Greek works attributed to Homer and Hesiod. Latin verse survives from the Old Latin period (ca. 2nd c. BC), in the Saturnian metre. Persian poetry arises in the Sassanid era. Tamil poetry of the early centuries AD may be the earliest known non-Indo-European
Medieval poetry was metrical without exception, spanning traditions as diverse as European Minnesang, Trouvère or Bardic poetry, Classical Persian and Sanskrit poetry, Tang dynasty Chinese poetry or the Japanese Nara period Man'yōshū. Renaissance and Early Modern poetry in Europe is characterized by a return to templates of Classical Antiquity, a tradition begun by Petrarca's generation and continued into the time of Shakespeare and Milton.

**Dissent**

Not all poets accept the idea that metre is a fundamental part of poetry. 20th-century American poets Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Robinson Jeffers, were poets who believed that metre was imposed into poetry by man and not a fundamental part of its nature. In an essay titled "Robinson Jeffers, & The Metric Fallacy" Dan Schneider echoes Jeffers' sentiments: "What if someone actually said to you that all music was composed of just 2 notes? Or if someone claimed that there were just 2 colors in creation? Now, ponder if such a thing were true. Imagine the clunkiness & mechanicality of such music. Think of the visual arts devoid of not just color, but sepia tones, & even shades of gray." Jeffers called his technique "rolling stresses".

Moore went even further than Jeffers, openly declaring her poetry was written in syllabic form, and wholly denying metre. These syllabic lines from her famous poem "Poetry" illustrate her contempt for metre, and other poetic tools (even the syllabic pattern of this poem does not remain perfectly consistent):

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nor is it valid
to discriminate against "business documents and
school-books": all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry
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Williams tried to form poetry whose subject matter was centered on the lives of common people. He came up with the concept of the variable foot. Williams spurned traditional metre in most of his poems, preferring what he called "colloquial idioms." Another poet that turned his back on traditional concepts of metre was Britain's Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins' major innovation was what he called sprung rhythm. He claimed most poetry was written in this older rhythmic structure inherited from the Norman side of the English literary heritage, based on repeating groups of two or three syllables, with the stressed syllable falling in the same place on each repetition. Sprung rhythm is structured around feet with a variable number of syllables, generally between one and four syllables per foot, with the stress always falling on the first syllable in a foot.

**Notes**


[11] The ballad metre commonality among a wide range of song lyrics allow words and music to be interchanged seamlessly between various songs, such as *Amazing Grace*, the *Ballad of Gilligan's Isle*, *House of the Rising Sun*, theme from the Mickey Mouse Club, and others.
Metre (poetry)

[16] "Leitfaden der Metrik der hebräischen Poesie", 1887
[18] Fereydoon Motamed La Métrique Dia Temporelle: Quantitative poetic metric analysis and pursuit of reasoning on aesthetics of linguistics and poetry in Indo-European languages.

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