

## Week 4: Meter & Rhyme

### Meter

- Other than its message, the meter of a hymn is its most critical feature
    - Texts and tunes need to share the same meter to be sung together
    - Even a small departure from the regular meter becomes obvious when sung
  - Meter in English poetry is derived from classical Greek and Latin poetry
    - The ancient Greek language has no accents, so meter used “long” and “short” syllables
    - Languages like English use “strong” and “weak” syllables based on the stress of the words
    - Typically × represents weak syllables and / strong syllables
    - Syllables are divided into groups of two or three, called “feet”, each with classical names
      - Iambic (×/): “today”
      - Trochaic (/×): “heaven”
      - Dactylic (/××): “wonderful”
      - Anapestic (××/): “understand”
  - The meter listed in the hymnal (for example, 8.6.8.6) gives the number of syllables per line
    - Usually hymns with the same meter use the same pattern of feet, but not always
1. Practice identifying the metric pattern for the following hymn titles:
1. Love divine, all loves excelling
  2. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father
  3. A mighty fortress is our God
  4. There's a song in the air, there's a star in the sky

### Lord, You Were Rich Beyond All Splendor

Text: Frank Houghton (1894–1972), 1937

- Son of an Anglican pastor, the fourth child of eight
- Ineligible for service in World War I due to a heart condition caused by a near-drowning as a teenager
- Entered ministry in the Church of England himself in 1917
- Served as curate for three years in England before heading to China as a missionary
- Following the beheading of two fellow missionaries in China, Houghton traveled across China to bring encouragement to each individual missionary outpost
- This text was written during Houghton's journey, meditating on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice
- Was later appointed Bishop in Sichuan province and led the China Inland Mission
- Following the rise to power of Mao Zedong, all missionaries in China were recalled in 1951
- Consequently, the CIM became the Overseas Missionary Fellowship but a younger colleague was tasked as general director
- On returning to England, continued to pastor and write a number of books and hymns

Tune: Traditional French

- Originally a French carol with the name “Quelle est cette odeur agréable”
  - Several English translations exist, titled “Whence is the goodly fragrance flowing”
  - The tune retains some rhythmic syncopation typical of medieval carols and folk tunes
  - Transcribed by Martin Shaw, co-editor of the *Oxford Book of Carols* with Percy Dearmer and Ralph Vaughan Williams
1. In many ways, this is a Christmas hymn without the usual trappings we find in a lot of other traditional Christmas carols - angels, shepherds, starlight, etc. Do you think that this takes anything away from the hymn? Or do you wish other Christmas songs were similarly stripped down?
  2. Determine the meter for this hymn. Do you notice anything interesting? Does the structure of the hymn reinforce the text in any way?

### Rhyme

- Although many would name rhyme as a key quality of poetry, rhyme is a comparatively recent invention
  - Classical poetry in ancient Greece and Rome relied purely on meter without rhyme
  - Hebrew poetry in the psalms often use acrostics and other organizational schemes
  - Early English poetry too (in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English) focused on alliteration rather than rhyme
  - Only comparatively recently (late middle ages, early renaissance) did rhyme rise to prominence
- Today we recognize many different types of rhyme:
  - true/pure/perfect rhyme: “cat” and “hat”
  - identical rhyme: “leave” and “believe” or “there” and “their”
  - slant/false/imperfect rhyme: “soul” and “all”
  - sight/eye rhyme: “love” and “prove”
  - assonance: “flesh” and “head”
- Many people decry the loss of pure rhymes in modern music:
 

If [Watts, Wesley, and Crosby] could churn out thousands upon thousands of perfectly rhymed hymns, surely a gifted contemporary writer can get through at least a few original contributions without having to fall back on assonance.

(Source: <http://yankeegospelgirl.com/2014/06/03/on-new-hymns-and-perfect-rhymes/>)
- In reality, many of the great hymnwriters (especially Watts!) used their share of slant rhymes and sight rhymes
  - Some hymns, such as “O Come All Ye Faithful”, don’t use any rhyme at all
- The “rhyme scheme” of a hymn tells which lines in a verse rhyme with each other. For a four-line verse:
  - ABAB indicates lines 1 and 3 rhyme and 2 and 4 rhyme
  - AABB indicates lines 1 and 2 rhyme and 3 and 4 rhyme
  - ABCB indicates lines 2 and 4 rhyme and 1 and 3 do not

## Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Text: Robert Robinson (1735–1790), 1757

- Born into a poor English family, father died early in his childhood
- With his widowed mother unable to provide for the family, went to London as a barber’s apprentice
- After hearing George Whitefield’s preaching, found “peace by believing” at age 20
- Served as pastor in a disparate collection of churches: Calvinistic Methodist, Congregationalist, and Baptist
- Finally after retirement in 1790, found himself leaning towards Unitarianism
- Better known for his works of prose (particularly regarding baptism) than for his thirteen hymns
- This text was written for Pentecost Sunday at the Calvinistic Methodist chapel in Mildenhall
- Most hymnals combined the original verses 2 and 3 and omit the final verse

Tune: Traditional American, 1813

- First published anonymously in a set of folk hymn tunes published by John Wyeth in 1813
  - Not a musician, Wyeth worked with Methodist preacher Elkanah Kelsay Dare to publish his tunebook for use in Methodist and Baptist camp meetings
  - Named NETTLETON after 19th-century evangelist Ahasel Nettleton
  - Some hymnals name Nettleton as the tune’s author, since it was included in his *Village Hymns* of 1824
  - However, no evidence exists that Nettleton ever wrote any hymn tunes himself
1. Robinson uses a number of biblical images spread throughout the text. Which do you recognize and what do they add to the message of the hymn?
  2. Look at the use of rhyme in the text, both true rhyme and slant rhymes. Does the inclusion of “false” rhymes hurt the text at all? Also consider the original text compared to its “modern” version - why do you think sections of verses 2, 3, and 5 are routinely omitted?