Towards a Typology of Poetic Forms

From language to metrics and beyond

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one consistently being satisfied at the expense of the other, doesn't have many obvious analogs in metrics, and in its place is a different asymmetry. In addition to constraints which must always be satisfied, there seem to be constraints whose satisfaction may be preferred, or define a simpler structure, but which can be violated without there being any conflict with a higher-ranked constraint which forces the violation; and what we see here is that, as anticipated in Kiparsky's (1977) metrical description, satisfaction of such a constraint seems to allow another constraint which would otherwise have to be satisfied to be violated. I am grateful to Bruce Hayes (*voce*) for a succinct formulation of the issue, that while in grammar violation of such constraints would impose penalties, in meter observance of them seems to confer licenses; and here I will simply rely on that description, leaving its theoretical accommodation to another occasion.

2. European decasyllables

2.1 The English iambic pentameter

The English iambic pentameter is illustrated by Shakespeare's sonnet in (1):

(1) When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate, 4
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least; 8
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate, 12
For thy sweet love rememb'red such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

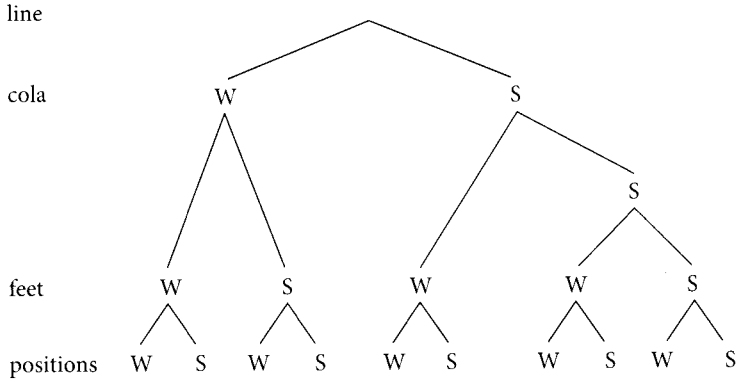
–Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (29)

Traditionally, this meter is described as a line of five feet, each composed of an unstressed (or less stressed) syllable followed by a stressed (or more stressed) one, with certain variations possible in both syllable count and stress placement. Here I assume the generative analysis of it in (2) and (3), which overlaps largely but not entirely with that description, as laid out in Kiparsky (1977). On this analysis, it has the underlying structure in (2) of five rising feet, each composed of a weak position

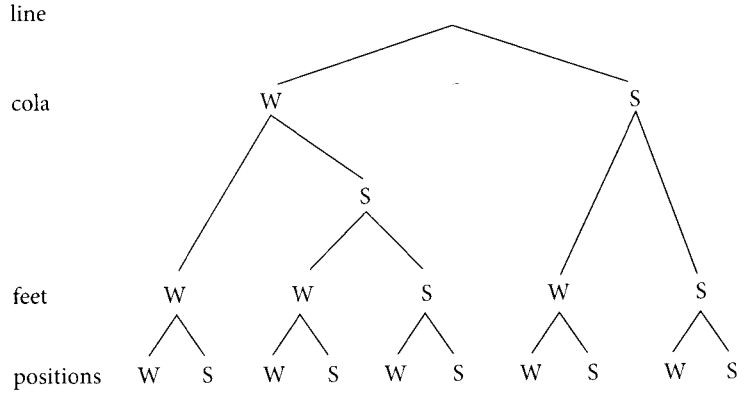
followed by a strong one; the feet are in their turn grouped into cola,[1] again with the final one strong; and the cola are grouped into a line, yet again with the final one strong:

(2) *Underlying structure for iambic pentameter:*

a.



or b.



1. The internal structure of the cola shown here differs slighly from Kiparsky's (1977) representation. While all analyses of the pentameter agree that it has two cola, one of two feet and one of three, the internal structure of the one with three is understudied, with choices generally made on theoretical rather than empirical grounds. For the present argument, the important claim is that Shakespeare's sonnets' underlying structure maintains the strength of the fourth or sixth and tenth positions, as in the Italian discussed below, but as Nespor & Vogel (1986) point out, a ternary structure would capture that as well as the binary one with adjunction presented here which raises the question of which, exactly, is adjoined.

In the specific form the meter takes in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, each position contains one syllable, although various rules of elision affect just what counts as a syllable (Kiparsky 1977), and at the end of the line an extra unstressed syllable is possible as in line 11 of (1); this is the traditional feminine ending mentioned above, analyzed here as an extra-metrical syllable, as represented by its enclosure in angled brackets ('⟨ ⟩') in (4b) below. Also, oversimplifying a bit, stressed syllables of polysyllabic content words must be in strong positions, although as also mentioned above, exceptions are allowed for initial syllables as in the inversion in line 10 of (1), where that of *haply* is in a weak position, as shown in (4c). These constraints are summarized in (3), and (4) shows sample scansions, defined as mappings of the line into the template that conform to the constraints:

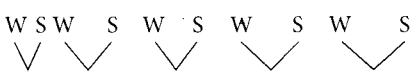
(3) *Constraints for Shakespeare's* Sonnets' *iambic pentameter:*

a. Position: each metrical position corresponds to a syllable
Exception: an extra unstressed syllable is allowed line-finally

b. Prominence: no weak metrical position corresponds to a stressed syllable of a polysyllabic content word
Exception: a line- or phrase-initial syllable may occur in a weak position regardless of its stress

A scansion is a mapping of the line into the template that conforms to the constraints, as in (4):

(4) a. Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,



b. (Like to the lark at break of day arising

c. Haply I think on thee, and then my state,

2.2 The Italian *endecasillabo*

The Italian *endecasillabo* of the Petrarchan sonnets on which Shakespeare's sonnets were partly modeled (though neither directly nor exclusively) is illustrated in (5):

(5) Amor, che nel penser mio vive e regna
e'l suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tene,
talor armato ne la fronte vene,
ivi si loca et ivi pon sua insegna. 4

Quella ch'amare e sofferir ne 'nsegna
e vol che 'l gran desio, l'accesa spene
ragion, vergogna, e reverenza affrene,
di nostro ardir fra sé stessa si sdegna. 8
Onde Amor paventoso fugge al core
lasciando ogni sua impresa, e piange e trema;
ivi s'asconde e non appar più fore.
Che poss' io far, temendo il mio signore, 12
se non star seco infin a l'ora estrema?
Ché bel fin fa chi ben amando more.

–Petrarch, *Rime sparse* (cxl)

Its rules are subtly different. It is traditionally described as having eleven syllables, except that again various rules refine what counts as a syllable, including most notably for what follows a requirement that a vowel before another vowel normally be elided. The tenth syllable is obligatorily stressed, and so is either the fourth or the sixth, while the eleventh is obligatorily unstressed. There is also an obligatory mid-line caesura, in this case a major phrase break, which can be after the fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh position (Giamatti 1972).

This *endecasillabo* has been analyzed by Piera (1981) and Nespor & Vogel (1986) as having basically (though see Footnote 1) the same template as the iambic pentameter, that in (2), and the same rule requiring one syllable per position as in (3a), once elision is taken into account. Where it differs is in its regulation of stress. In (2), it can be seen that the strongest position of each colon is the strong position of the foot which is itself strong. The tenth position of the line will always be one of these, and on the assumptions made explicit by Piera (1981) and reflected in the structures in (2) that constituency at all levels will be as binary and as even as possible, the odd number of feet means that either the fourth or the sixth will always also be one. As Piera observes, because Italian words normally have penultimate stress, (or final stress in the case of some poetic forms used line-internally), and phrases normally have final stress, it follows from a requirement of phrasal stress in the fourth or sixth position that there will also be a phrasal break—a caesura—after the fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh position. Hence, the meter can be described as in (6)–(7):

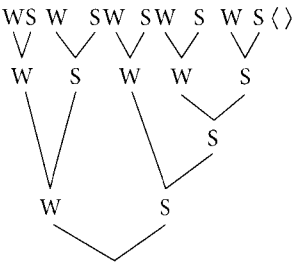
(6) *Underlying structure for* endecasillabo: = (2)

(7) *Constraints for Petrarch's* Rime's endecasillabo:
   a. Position: = (3a)
   b. Prominence: the strongest metrical position of each colon corresponds to phrasal stress

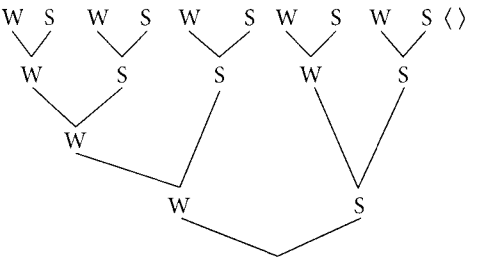
   Note: (7b) entails a caesura after the fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh position

The case where the fourth position contains the stress and the caesura falls after the fifth is illustrated by the scansion in (8a), and that where the sixth position contains the stress and the caesura falls after the seventh in (8b):

(8) a. talor armáto ne la fronte véne,



b. Lasciando_ogni sua_impresa,_e piange_e trema;



2.3 The French *décasyllabe*

The French *décasyllabe* has a structure which is close to this, though of course like the English and Italian slightly different for every period and every poet (Kastner 1903). The form I'll concentrate on here is the "Classical" French *décasyllable* contemporaneous with Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as exemplified by du Bellay's *L'Olive*, which was the first Petrarchan sonnet cycle in French, and which was partly translated into English by Spenser:

(9) Quand le Soleil lave sa teste blonde
En l'Ocean, l'humide et noire nuit
Un coy sommeil, un doulx repos sans bruit
Epant en l'air, sur la terre et soubz l'onde. 4

Mais ce repos, qui soulaige le monde
De ses travaux, est ce qui plus me nuist,
Et d'astres lors si grand nombre ne luist,
Que j'ay d'ennuiz et d'angoisse profonde. 8

Puis quand le ciel de rougeur se colore,
Ce que je puis de plaisir concevoir
Semble renaitre avec la belle Aurore.
Mais qui me fait tant de bien recevoir ? 12
Le doulx espoir que j'ay de bien tost voir
L'autre Soleil, qui la terre decore.

–du Bellay, *L'Olive* (27 [26])

Traditionally the *décasyllabe* is described as having ten syllables in each line, again with elision creating certain complexities regarding what counts as a syllable. In du Bellay's time, a vowel before another vowel may count as its own syllable within a word, but across a word boundary, a word-final schwa will generally be elided before a vowel-initial word.[2] Also, as in the *endecasillabo*, the tenth syllable must be stressed, and a feminine ending, a final unstressed syllable which doesn't count in the ten, is permitted. What is not found in either Italian or English is another requirement, that there be a word boundary after the fourth syllable.

There is some debate about just how much stress that fourth syllable must have, but what seems clear is that the word boundary requirement cannot be reduced to a requirement on stress as the caesura requirement for Italian can. *E-muet* generally counts as a full syllable before a consonant (though see Footnote 2), as in the last syllable of *soulaige* in line 5 of (9), scanned in (12a) below; but such a word can't have its stressed syllable in the fourth position and that *e-muet* in the fifth position: a line parallel to that in (8a) with *soulaige* scanned like *armato* would be unmetrical in du Bellay's sonnets' meter. Such words can only be positioned with their stressed syllable in the fourth position if the fifth syllable is one that permits the *e-muet* to be elided, as is the final *-e* of *renaitre* in line 11 of the sonnet in (9), scanned in (12b) below.

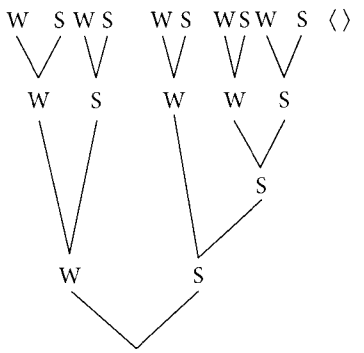
Thus, the French meter is like both the English and the Italian in having the underlying structure in (2), though in this Classical form specifically only (2a), and in having one syllable in each position, taking rules for elision into account; and it is also similar to the Italian in having a requirement of stress in at least the strongest position of the line, as stated conservatively in (11b). But the French meter must also have some direct constraint like (11c), which states baldly that the beginning of each colon coincides with the beginning of a new word:

(10) *Underlying structure* = (2a)

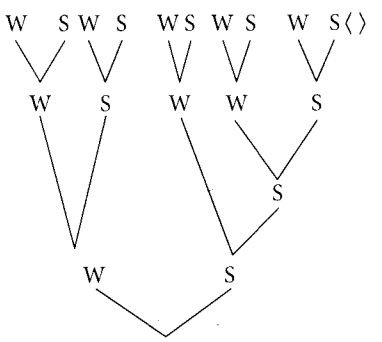
(11) *Constraints for* L'Olive's décasyllable
   a. Position: = (3a)
   b. Prominence: the strongest metrical position of each line contains a stressed syllable
   c. Alignment: the left edge of each colon coincides with the left edge of a word

2. "Generally" because, as I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for pointing out, the rules' application shows certain well-known intricacies: a word-final vowel is elided in some cases when the next word may not begin with a vowel, as in *la petite huître*, and not elided in some cases where it may, as in *le onzième*, so that elision is traditionally described more precisely as affecting a word-final vowel before a *mot jonctif* as opposed to a *mot disjonctif*. I have also made no attempt to be precise about the syntactic context.

(12) a. Mais ce repos, qui soulaige le monde



b. Semble renaitre_avec la belle_Aurore.



3. Alignment in grammar

Now, this is easy enough to state—it has in much more careful formulations always been part of traditional descriptions of the meter. What is of interest here is rather the justification for such a constraint within a theory of metrical forms that holds them to stylize the properties of grammar. That justification can be found, as proposed above, in the set of alignment constraints proposed to mandate coincidence between boundaries of different kinds of constituents in grammar, whose operation and variety we can see in an analysis McCarthy & Prince (1993) give of stress in the Indonesian language Garawa, based on previous descriptions and analyses in Hayes (1995), citing Furby (1974).

In Garawa, stress falls without exception on the initial syllable, and secondary stress falls on every other syllable from the end of the word. But words with an odd number of syllables don't wind up with a secondary stress on the second syllable;