Hymns and Poetry

Why the classic hymn is the apex of the art of sacred music

Tunes and Texts

Technically, a *hymn* is the words we sing and not the tune.

Most hymn books before the late 1800's had only the text of the songs with no music.

A standardized combination of a text with a tune is primarily an American tradition.

657 Choosing the Pearl. C.M. 1 Y E glittering toys of earth, adieu, A nobler choice be mine; A real prize attracts my view, A treasure all divine. 2 Begone, unworthy of my cares, Ye specious baits of sense :

WORLD RENOUNCED.

Inestimable worth appears, The pearl of price immense.

 3 Jesus to multitudes unknown, Oh name divinely sweet!
 Jesus, in Thee, in Thee alone, Wealth, honour, pleasure, meet.

- 4 Should both the Indies at my call, Their boasted stores resign, With iou I would renounce them all
- With joy I would renounce them all, For leave to call Thee mine.
- 5 Should earth's vain treasures all depart, Of this dear gift possess'd,
 I'd clasp it to my joyful heart, And be for ever bless'd.
- 6 Dear Sovereign of my soul's desires, Thy love is bliss divine;
 Accept the wish that love inspires, And bid me call Thee mine.

Anne Steele, 1760.

What makes modern, English poetry?

Rhyming Schemes and Metrical Patterns.

- The rhyme scheme is the pattern of rhymes in the last syllables of each line.
- The method for noting the rhymes is to assign letters to each (e.g. ABAB, AABBA, ABABCDCDEFEFGG).

- Isaac Watts's "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun" (1719) uses an AABB pattern.
 - Jesus shall reign where'er the **sun** (A)
 - does its successive journeys run, (A)
 - His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, (B)
 - till moons shall wax and wane no more. (B)

- Isaac Watts's "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross" (1707) uses an ABAB pattern:
 - When I survey the wondrous **cross** (A)
 - on which the Prince of glory **died**, (B)
 - my richest gain I count but loss, (A)
 - and pour contempt on all my **pride**. (B)

- Charlotte Elliott's "Just as I Am" uses an AAAB pattern:
 - Just as I am, without one plea, (A)
 - but that thy blood was shed for **me**, (A)
 - and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, (A)
 - O Lamb of God, I come, I come. (B)

- Fanny Crosby's "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross" (1869) uses an ABCB pattern, rhyming on the second and fourth lines:
 - Jesus, keep me near the cross, (A)
 - There a precious fountain; (B)
 - Free to all, a healing stream, (C)
 - Flows from Calv'ry's mountain. (B)

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- B.B. McKinney's "Neath the Old Olive Trees" uses an AABCCB pattern:
 - 'Neath the stars of the **night** (A)
 - Walked the Saviour of light, (A)
 - In the garden of dew-ladened breeze; (B)
 - Where no light could be **found**, (C)
 - Jesus knelt on the **ground**, (C)
 - There He prayed 'neath the old olive trees, (B)

- From Sing with Understanding:
 - "A somewhat less obvious feature of poetry is its meter. Meter refers to a systematically measured rhythm of accent in verse (that is, rhythm that consistently repeats a single basic patter). Like all verse, hymns are organized into poetic 'feet'. Each 'foot' consists of either two or three syllables, only one of which is accented."
- There are many types of patterns for the feet, and they are usually identified using terminology we inherited from the Greeks. A few common examples :

Types of metrical feet:

5 Different Types of Feet

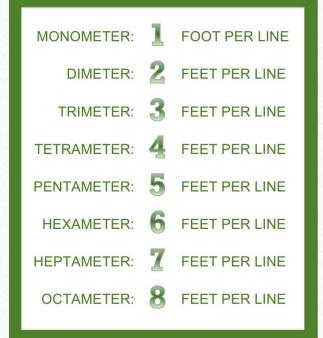
- Iambic (2 syllables) : Unstressed + Stressed
 - E.g. "because," "hello"
- Trochaic (2 syllables) : Stressed+ Unstressed
 - E.g. "answer," "Tuesday"
- Spondaic (2 syllables) : Stressed + Stressed
 - E.g. "football," "heartbreak," black hole"
- Anapestic (3 syllables) : Unstressed + Unstressed+ Stressed
 - E.g. "un-der-stand," "Ma-ri-anne"
- Dactylic (3 syllables) : Stressed + Unstressed + Unstressed
 - E.g. "beau-ti-ful," "Sa-tur-day"

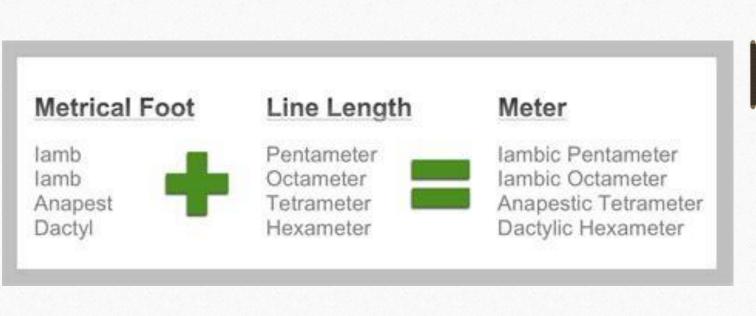
- Iambic two syllables *unstressed stressed*.
 - "A-maz-ing Grace, how sweet the sound"
- Trochaic two syllables *stressed unstressed*.
- "On-ward Christ-ian sol-diers march-ing as to war"

- **Dactylic** three syllables *stressed unstressed unstressed*.
 - "Be thou my vis-ion, O Lord of my heart"

- Anapestic three syllables unstressed unstressed stressed.
 - "There's a land that is fair-er than day"

Metrical Feet





Irregular

- Some texts are written without a metrical pattern or with an inconsistent one.
- These get lumped together into a category of "irregular".
- The more modern the text, the more likely it is to be irregular.
- Example: "I Will Enter His Gates"

Tunes and Metrical Patterns

- For a text and tune to be used together, the metrical pattern must match.
- Most songs today have tunes specially written to match the pattern of the text.

Mismatch Example

- Both "Be Thou My Vision" and "Abide With Me" have the same number of syllables/beats per line (four lines of 10 syllables).
- However, their metrical patterns do not match.
 - "Be Thou My Vision" is dactylic.
 - three syllables *stressed* unstressed unstressed.
 - "Abide With Me" is iambic.
 - two syllables *unstressed* stressed.



"Be thou my vi-sion, O Lord of my heart;"
S U U S U U S U U S
"A-bide with me: fast falls the e-ven-tide;"
U S U S U S U S U S U S

Try it!

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; naught be all else to me, save that thou art. Thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Try it!

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Hymn Meters

- Common Meter (abbreviated C.M.) 8.6.8.6
 - Example: "Amazing Grace"
- Short Meter (abbreviated S.M.) 6.6.8.6
 - Example: "Blest Be The Tie That Binds"
- Long Meter (abbreviated L.M.) 8.8.8.8
 - Example: "Doxology"

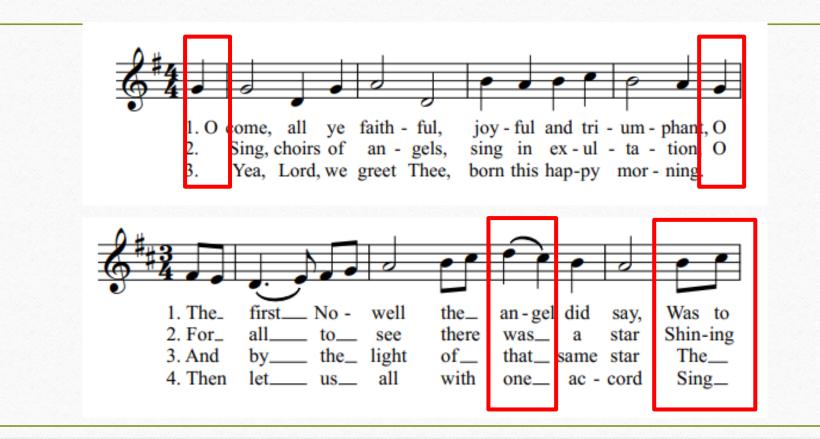
Hymn Meters (Double)

- Common Meter Double (abbreviated C.M.D.) 8.6.8.6.8.6.8.6
 - Example: "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear"
- Short Meter Double (abbreviated S.M.D.) 6.6.8.6.6.6.8.6.
 - Example: "Crown Him With Many Crowns"
- Long Meter Double (abbreviated L.M.D.) 8.8.8.8.8.8.8.8
 - Example: "Sweet Hour of Prayer"

Hymn Meters (Irregular)

- As stated before, some songs do not fit common meters.
- These can be listed by their own meter (8.7.8.7, 6.6.4.6.6.6.4, etc.)
 - There's really no end to these...
- Sometimes these are grouped together as "Irregular"
- There are other songs that simply do not strictly follow any meter...

Hymn Meters (Irregular)



Hymn Meters (Irregular)

- Sometimes songs are so unique that they may be classified as "Peculiar Meter" (P.M.)
- According to Hymnary.org, "Almost Persuaded" is the only song that uses a 9.9.6.6.6.4 meter.
 - It will be classified as either Irregular Meter or Peculiar Meter.

Hymn Meters (Refrains)

- Traditionally, songs with a chorus/refrain are categorized by the meter of their verses. A notation is added that there is a chorus/refrain.
- Example: "Jesus Loves Me" is classified as "7.7.7.7 with Refrain".

Content and Expression

- "A good hymn is the most difficult thing in the world to write." Tennyson
- Simple it can be easily understood.
- Sensuous it appeals to the senses.
- Feeling it appeals to the heart, emotions, and mind.

- Alliteration repetition of opening sounds of words.
 - "His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
 - till moons shall wax and wane no more."

- Anaphora repetition of a word at the beginning of lines for emphasis.
 - "Mild he lays his glory by,
 - <u>born</u> that we no more may die,
 - <u>born</u> to raise us from the earth,
 - <u>born</u> to give us second birth."

- Assonance repetition of vowel sounds.
 - "Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
 - tell <u>o</u>ld Phara<u>oh</u>: Let my people <u>go</u>."

- Chiasmus crossing of lines and clauses
 - "Just and Holy is Thy name, (Savior)
 - I am all unrighteousness; (sinner)
 - False and full of sin I am, (sinner)
 - Thou art full of truth and grace. (Savior)"
 - From a verse from "Jesus, Lover of my Soul"

- Climax arranging ideas in increasing intensity
 - "Demands my soul, my life, my all"
- Hyperbole exaggeration for effect
 - "O for a <u>thousand</u> tongues to sing
 - my great Redeemer's praise,"

- Metaphor making a likeness or analogy by using one thing in place of another
 - "Life's evening sun is sinking low,"
- **Personification** representing something inanimate as a person
 - "<u>My faith looks up</u> to thee,"

- Simile comparing two usually unlike things using *like* or *as*.
 - "Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace,"
- **Tautology** repeating a thought in a different way.
 - *"Jesus, thou art all compassion, (1)*
 - Pure, unbounded love thou art;" (2)
 - From a lesser-known hymn by Charles Wesley.

- Itemization combines many related ideas into one theme.
 - Verse 1 "Open my eyes that I may see..."
 - Verse 2 "Open my **ears** that I may hear..."
 - Verse 3 "Open my **mouth** and let me bear..."

- **Call and Response** sometimes called antiphony, where each line is followed by a tag or refrain.
 - "O for a thousand tongues to sing, CALL
 - Blessed be the name of the Lord! **RESPONSE**
 - The glories of my God and King, CALL
 - Blessed be the name of the Lord!" **RESPONSE**

- Dialogue question and answer, conversation.
 - Verse 1 "What Child is this, who, laid to rest," QUESTION
 - Chorus "This, this is Christ, the King," **ANSWER**

- **Trinitarian** similar to itemization, these hymns have one verse for each Person of the Trinity. A good example is "Come, Thou Almighty King":
 - Verse 1 "Come, thou almighty King..." FATHER
 - Verse 2 "Come, thou incarnate Word..." **SON**
 - Verse 3 "Come, holy Comforter,..." **SPIRIT**
 - Verse 4 "To thee, great One in Three..." **TRINITY**