TEI BY EXAMPLE

MODULE 4: POETRY

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4. Metrical Structure

There is a difference between the conventional metrical structure of a poem and the actual realisation of that conventional metrical structure. Both can be documented with the use of attributes.

4.1 Conventional Metrical Structure

The conventional metrical structure in which a poet is working can be documented with the @met attribute, whose value specifies the metrical form of a single verse line. This attribute can be added to any text-division element in use in the encoding of poetry: <div>, <lg>, and <l>. The metre documented inside the @met attribute is inherited by any metrical unit contained within the element for which the @met attribute has been supplied. This means that the @met value of a <div> or an <lg>, for instance, is inherited by nesting <div>s or <lg>s. The metrical structure of that <lg> is understood to contain as many repetitions of the pattern as there are lines in the line group. The same attribute value, when inherited in turn by the <l> element, must be understood not to repeat. Consider the third stanza of our shopping list poem, which exists of three lines of alternating long and short syllables:

```
<lg xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0" type="stanza" met="-u|-u|-u|-/">
  <l>Paper towels/garbage bags</l>
  <l>Pasta sauce and Parmesan</l>
  <l>Pumpkin seed and olive oil</l>
</lg>
```

Example 20. Encoding the metrical structure of a stanza.

4.2 Private Metrical Notation Scheme

The encoder is free to design their own metrical notation scheme. In the example above use has been made of the classical scansion system which marks quantitative metre originally by a macron (here a dash -) for long syllables and a breve (here a u) for short syllables. A bar | is used to mark the foot boundary and a slash / marks the line boundary. Other systems like the ictus (/) and x (x) system could be used to denote metrically stressed and unstressed syllables. The use of this latter system results in the following @met attribute value for the stanza above: "/+/+/+/".

The metrical notation scheme used may be documented in the <metDecl> element within the <encodingDecl> element inside the TEI header. For the above example this could be documented as follows:

```xml
<metDecl xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">
  <metSym value="-">long syllable</metSym>
  <metSym value="u">short syllable</metSym>
  <metSym value="|">foot boundary</metSym>
  <metSym value="/">metrical line boundary</metSym>
</metDecl>
```

Example 21. Formal documentation of the metrical notation scheme with <metSym> elements inside <metDecl>.

This may also be expressed less formally, for instance:

```xml
<metDecl xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">
  <p>use has been made of the classical scansion system which marks quantitative metre
    originally by a macron (here a dash '-') for long syllables and a breve (here a 'u')
    for short syllables. A bar '|' is used to mark the foot boundary and a slash '/'
    marks the line boundary.</p>
</metDecl>
```

Example 22. Informal documentation of the metrical notation scheme as a loose description inside <metDecl>.

> REFERENCE
>
> See section 6.5 Metrical Notation Declaration of the TEI Guidelines for more examples and complex cases.

4.3 Realisation of Metrical Structure

When we consider the third and the fourth stanzas of the shopping list poem, we see that some lines of the fourth stanza divert from the metrical scheme documented in the @met attribute. This deviation, or otherwise put, the "realisation," may be documented inside a @real attribute:

```xml
<lg xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0" type="stanza" met="-u|-u|-u|-/">
```

```
  <l>Paper towels/garbage bags</l>
  <l>Pasta sauce and Parmesan</l>
  <l>Pumpkin seed and olive oil</l>
</lg>
<lg xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0" type="stanza" met="-u|-u|-u|-/">
  <l>Cheesy crisps and favourite mags</l>
  <l real="-u|-'|-u|-">Kidney beans (1 large can)</l>
  <l real="- -|u-|u-">Cling film and kitchen foil</l>
</lg>
```

Example 23. Encoding the actual realisation of a metrical scheme with a `@real` **attribute.**

4.4 Caesura and Enjambements

Whereas a caesura expresses a metrical pause inside one line of verse, an enjambement marks the breaking of a syntactic unit between two lines of verse.

The third line of the last stanza of the shopping list poem consists of two equal metrical parts (-u-) with a rest in between. This rest is called a caesura, and is here represented with an apostrophe. We can encode this information also in the verse line, with the <caesura> element which marks the point at which a metrical line may be divided:

```
<l xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">Kidney beans <caesura/> (1 large can)</l>
```

Example 24. Encoding caesura with `<caesura>`**.**

The presence, absence, or degrees of discrepancy between lines of verse and syntactic units running over them can be documented as values of an optional @enjamb attribute on the <l> element. When used, this attribute can, for instance, have the value "yes" or "no" to signal its occurrence, or "weak" or "strong" to express some sort of evaluation. In the following stanza of Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" the presence or absence of enjambement is encoded:

```
<lg xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">
  <l enjamb="yes">But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only</l>
  <l enjamb="no">That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.</l>
```

```
  <l enjamb="no">Nothing further then he uttered, not a feather then he fluttered,</l>
  <l enjamb="no">Till I scarcely more than muttered,—"Other friends have flown
   before;</l>
  <l enjamb="no">On the morrow he will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before."</l>
  <l enjamb="no">Then the bird said, "Nevermore."</l>
</lg>
```

Example 25. Encoding enjambments with `@enjamb`.

SUMMARY

The expressions of conventional metrical structures in @met attributes are inherited by the children of the attributed elements, except where deviations are expressed in a @real attribute. Each encoder is free to design their own encoding scheme and document it inside <metDecl>. It is also possible to encode the occurrence and location of a caesura (with <caesura>) or an enjambement (with @enjamb).