

**Title:** “Liubliu tsezuru na vtoroi stope” — The Role of the Caesura in Russian Poetry

**Author:** Michael Wachtel, Princeton University

The caesura is one of the oldest features of verse, both in Russia and in European poetry generally. However, it has rarely if ever been the subject of detailed analysis. That is to say: even the greatest scholars of poetic form (Gasparov, Taranovski) have been content to recognize its presence or absence or to register its effect on rhythmic patterning. However, its potential semantic function remains largely unexplored. In this paper I will focus on caesura as a poetic constraint, which like other constraints (rhythm, rhyme scheme, etc.) can be expressively exploited. Using examples mainly from iambic hexameter verse (where the caesura is so traditional that its absence is regarded as a mistake), I will show how poets (especially Pushkin and Blok) use this obligatory feature to offset syntactic expectations and, ultimately, to make it a meaningful element of their poetry. In other words, I will argue for the caesura not as a vestigial part of a poet’s arsenal, but as an aspect of verse that an interpreter should not ignore.