

## Terms for discussing poetry

### 1. Metric structure

The smallest metric structure is a *foot* ('Versfuß'), a sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables (represented as ' [stressed] and ~ [unstressed]; German: 'Hebung' and 'Senkung') .

There are different types of feet:

- *iamb*: unstressed stressed, ~ ' e.g. re-peat, in-sist (German: Jambus)
- *trochee*, stressed unstressed, ' ~ e.g. key-word (German: Trochäus)
- *dactyl*, ' ~ ~ *un-con-cerned* (German: Daktylus)
- *anapest*, ~ ~ ' *in-ter-fere* (German: Anapäst)
- *spondee*, ' - - (German: Spondäus)
- *amphibrach*, ~ ' ~

Terms for the metrical structure of verses or lines (according to number of stressed syllables):

- *trimeter* (3 feet): *The kÍng | sits in Dúmferline tówn* (popular ballad)
- *tetrameter* (4 feet): *Behóld | the hílpopóltamús!* (Ogden Nash)
- *pentameter* (5 feet): *My mísstress' éyes | are nóthing líke | the sún* (Shakespeare)
- *hexameter* (6 feet): *Ánd, as I | líve, you will | sée my helxámeters | hópping belfóre you.* (Coleridge, "Hexameters")

Rhythm: interaction between metric, syllabic and linguistic structure.

Interaction between verse and syntax:

*end-stopped lines* vs. *run-on lines* (German: Enjambement)

### 2. External structure: Stanzas

A poem may be structured in stanzas ('Strophen') consisting of a given number of verses (lines).

Stanzas are distinguished by their number of verses:

- two verses: *couplet* (*heroic couplet* if rhymed and in iambic pentameters) (German: 'Zweizeiler')
- three verses: *tercet* (German: 'Terzett')
- four verses: *quatrain* (German: 'Quartett')

Two tercets can form a *sestet* ('Sextett'), two quatrains an *octave* ('Oktett').

Stanza forms can be combined to create lyric genres. The Italian **sonnet** (German: 'Sonett', watch out for spelling!), for instance, as created in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, consists of 14 lines with 11 syllables in 4 stanzas: two quatrains (abba, abba), two tercets (cdc, dcd). The English sonnet, as created in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Earl of Surrey and widely used by other poets (Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare), has 14 lines, mostly of 10 syllables; iambic pentameter; 3 quatrains (rhymed abab) plus 1 couplet.

### 3. Phonologic structure: Rhyme and other non-semantic features

Rhymes are distinguished according to their position in the verse:

- *end-rhyme*: homophony of the words at the end of two verses  
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night (William Blake, "The Tyger")
- *internal rhyme / leonine rhyme*: rhyme of two words in the same verse  
And a clatter and a chatter from within [...] (T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land")

Or according to the exactness with which phonemes are repeated: *full / perfect* or *imperfect rhyme*, *slant rhyme*, *half-rhyme*, *near-rhyme*, *pararhyme*. E.g. assonance – homophony of vowel sounds (crowd/bough), alliteration – homophony of consonants (rider/reader).

Or according to the number of syllables that are repeated:

- *masculine rhyme* (last syllable is stressed) : eye/my
- *feminine or disyllabic rhyme* (penultimate syllable is stressed): ditty/pity
- *triple rhyme* : declivity / festivity

Other rhyme types are:

- *identical rhyme*: repetition of the same word (rose-tree / rose-tree)
- *paronomastic rhyme*: use of homophonous words (Knight / night)
- *eye rhyme*: use of homographic words that look like rhymes to the eye but sound differently (dies / eternities)
- *historical rhyme*: words that used to sound the same in historic pronunciation (prove/love)
- *mosaic rhyme*: rhyme is spread out across word boundaries: (is it / visit)
- *split rhyme*: a word is split a by rhyme (in run-on lines)

Some standard rhyme schemes:

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| - <i>rhyming couplets</i>                 | aa bb cc    |
| - <i>alternate rhyme / cross rhyme</i>    | abab cdcd   |
| - <i>embracing rhyme / envelope rhyme</i> | abba cddc   |
| - <i>chain rhyme / interlocking rhyme</i> | aba bcb cdc |
| - <i>tail rhyme</i>                       | aab ccb     |

#### 4. Rhetorical figures (1): Morphologic and syntactic figures

Morphologic figures relate to the level of words and word formation, e.g. various forms of word repetition in poetry: anaphora, epiphora, epanalepsis, anadiplosis, polyptoton, figura etymologica, synonymy.

Syntactic figures relate to sentence structures: parallelism, chiasm, asyndeton, polysyndeton, inversion, hysteron proteron, ellipsis, aposiopesis, zeugma.

[For a detailed description of these figures, see Nünning/Nünning, *Grundkurs* 66-68 or a dictionary of literary terms.]

#### 5. Rhetorical figures (2): Semantic and pragmatic figures

Poems frequently use *imagery* ('Sprachbilder'). to convey special effects of meaning. The figure studied most often in this context is **metaphor**. Often a metaphor contains a covert comparison, whereas a simile is an overt comparison using the word 'like'. Metaphors consist of vehicle (what is said) and tenor (what is meant) 'in the full bloom of youth' (vehicle: flower at the peak of its beauty; tenor: being at the peak of one's youth). Other relevant terms are *pun* (play on different meanings of the same word), *metonymy*, *synecdoche* (a part is made to stand for the whole or the whole for a part), *synaesthesia*, *personification*, *euphemism*, *hyperbole*, *irony*, *oxymoron*, *paradox*, *antithesis*, etc. [Again, for a detailed description see Nünning/Nünning 75-76 or a dictionary of literary terms.]