

# Poetry

## Lecture 10

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**PROSODIC FEATURES: RHYTHM (PAUSES AT THE END OF LINES, PAUSES WITHIN LINES, ELISIONS AND EXPANSIONS, VOWEL LENGTH AND CONSONANT CLUSTERS, MODULATION)**



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# Learning Objectives

**1**

**DEFINE BROAD KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RHYTHM AND ITS TYPES**

**3**

**LEARN TO IDENTIFY THE BEAT AND RHYTHM IN DIFFERENT PIECES OF POEMS**

**2**

**EXPLORE POETRY FEATURES: RHYTHM AND IT'S EVERY TYPES.**

**4**

**LEARN TO READ A POEM PROPERLY**

# Topics\*

Rythm

Pauses

Elisions and  
Expansions

Vowel Length  
and Consonant  
Clusters

Modulation

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# RHYTHM



(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*

Poetry's power lies not only in its words and thoughts, but also in its music, using rhyme and a variety of rhythms to intensify its emotional impact.

(Roberts, E. V., & Zweig, R., 2012).

**Rhythm**–The regular recurrence of sounds: the beating of a heart, the lapping of waves against the shore, the croaking of frogs on a summer's night, the whispering of wheat swaying in the wind.

(Kirszner, L. G., & Mandell, S. R., 2007).

**"Rhythm generally is "a series of alternations of build-up and release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations and local inflections.""**

(Attridge 1995, as cited in Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

**Frequently repeating key words and phrases  
is to create rhythm.**

(Kirszner, L. G., & Mandell, S. R., 2007).

**“I Have a Dream”  
Martin Luther King Jr.**

**I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, *I still have a dream*. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. *I have a dream* that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” *I have a dream* that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. *I have a dream* that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. *I have a dream* that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.**

(Kirszner, L. G., & Mandell, S. R., 2007).

**Sadie and Maud**  
**GWENDOLYN BROOKS**

Maud went to college.  
Sadie stayed at home.  
Sadie scraped life  
With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.  
Her comb found every strand.  
Sadie was one of the livingest chits  
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies  
Under her maiden name.  
Maud and Ma and Papa  
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long  
Her girls struck out from home.  
(Sadie had left as heritage  
Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,  
Is a thin brown mouse.  
She is living all alone  
In this old house.

(Kirszner, L. G., & Mandell, S. R., 2007).

**Just as the repetition of words and phrases can  
create rhythm, so can the arrangement of words  
in a poem**

(Kirszner, L. G., & Mandell, S. R., 2007).

**Poetic rhythm— the repetition of stresses and pauses —is an essential element in poetry. Rhythm helps to establish a poem’s mood, and, in combination with other poetic elements, it conveys the poet’s emphasis and helps communicate the poem’s meaning.**

(Kirszner, L. G., & Mandell, S. R., 2007).

Poetic metre and metrical deviations contribute to the rhythm of a poem. It's mainly about the **variations of speed** in which a poem is likely to be read.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)



To achieve that variation of speed, there are several factors need to be considered;

Pauses at the  
End of Lines

Pauses  
within Lines

Vowel Length  
and  
Consonant  
Clusters

Modulation

Elisions and  
Expansions

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# \* PAUSE AT THE END OF LINES



(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*

# PAUSES AT THE END OF LINES

The fact that poems are presented in lines which do not fill the space on the page, coupled frequently with rhymes at the end of the line, invites the reader – and often also the performer – to pause for a moment **at the end of each line**. Such pauses are especially pronounced for end-stopped lines, lines where a syntactical unit comes to a close at the end of the line.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# PAUSES AT THE END OF LINES

These pauses at the end of a line cause a poem to have a different rhythm than prose. They also encourage the reader to dwell on individual words and sounds more than in prose.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)



TRY TO READ THE NEXT TWO  
FOLLOWING TEXTS!



# EXAMPLE!

The sea is calm to-night. The tide is full, the moon lies fair upon the straits; on the French coast the light gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand, glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. Come to the window, sweet is the night air! Only, from the long line of spray where the sea meets the moon-blanchèd land, listen! you hear the grating roar of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, at their return, up the high strand, begin, and cease, and then again begin, with tremulous cadence slow, and bring the eternal note of sadness in.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)



Now read it and give it a space after  
each line!



# EXAMPLE

The sea is calm to-night.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.

**(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)**

**One tends to pause in mid-sentence at a line break which considerably slows down the speed of reading and thus brings the individual words more to the notice of the reader**

**(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)**

# PAUSES AT THE END OF LINES

When the lines are written as prose, the effect of the rhyme words is almost completely lost (fair/air, to-night/light, stand/land, bay/spray, fling/bring, begin/in), and also the fact that the “grating roar” remains without a rhyming word in this section (it is actually taken up further down in the poem), which creates a situation where “roar” is literally “grating”, because it does not blend in harmoniously with the rhyme scheme.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

Many of the lines are not end-stopped but **run-on-lines (enjambment)**, used to speed up the rhythm of the poem.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

“ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?” Revelation came.  
“You mean – like plain or milk chocolate?” Her assent  
was clinical, crushing in its light Impersonality. Rapidly,  
wave-length adjusted, I chose. “West African sepia” –  
and as afterthought, “Down in my passport.” [...]  
(From: Soyinka, Telephone Conversation)

The simple fact that the words are arranged in lines achieves  
additional meaning.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# PAUSE WITHIN LINES



(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*

# PAUSES WITHIN LINES

A pause can also occur within lines and then it is called **caesura**. A caesura can serve simply to break the monotony of the metrical pattern but usually it emphasises particular words or a contrast within the line.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE

[...] “Madam,” I warned,  
“I hate a wasted journey – I am African.”  
Silence. Silenced transmission of  
Pressurized good-breeding. [...]

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

[...] “Madam,” I warned,  
“I hate a wasted journey – I am African.”  
Silence. Silenced transmission of  
Pressurized good-breeding. [...]

The caesura after “I hate a wasted journey” creates a moment of suspense, one is waiting to hear what he has to tell her. The caesura after “Silence” in fact acts out the meaning of the word ‘silence’ and thus intensifies its effect.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# ELLISION AND EXPANSION



(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*

**Elision-** there are times when unstressed syllables which are **normally pronounced** are **not pronounced** in a particular line in order to make the line fit the metre. It occurs mostly when two non-stressed syllables follow each other in a metrical pattern that demands only one.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# ELISION AND EXPANSION

**SILENCED**

**SILENC'D**

**HEAVEN**

**HEAV'N**

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE

The silenc'd Preacher yields to potent strain,  
And feels that grace his pray'r besought in vain,  
The blessing thrills thro' all the lab'ring throng,  
And Heav'n is won by violence of Song.

(From: Pope, *Imitations of Horace*)

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# ELLISION AND EXPANSION

\* Elide syllables is to accommodate certain rhythms of speech. In English, for instance most of the past participle '-ed' endings as in 'turned', 'talked', 'achieved',  
etc

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# ELLISION AND EXPANSION

Ellisions that occur in verse but  
do not normally occur in  
everyday speech create interplay!

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE!

But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
(From: Marvell, *To His Coy Mistress*)

The words “**chariot**” and “**hurrying**” have three syllables are squeezed into an iambic tetrameter, **the second and third syllables are pronounced as one.**

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE

\* Expansion - syllables that would normally be elided are **not always elided in metrical verse** (“winged” in this example), partly because that is an older common pronunciation, partly\*  
to fit the metre.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# VOWEL LENGTH AND CONSONANT CLUSTERS

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# VOWEL LENGTH AND CONSONANT CLUSTERS!

The speed and rhythm of a poem can be changed by altering its meter, which refers to the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry.

The catenation, or how words are linked in pronunciation, also supports the increase in speed in the second stanza.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE

I have a Gumbie Cat in mind, her name is Jennyanydots;  
Her equal would be hard to find, she likes the warm and sunny spots.  
All day she sits beside the hearth or on the bed or on my hat:  
She sits and sits and sits and sits – and that's what makes a Gumbie  
Cat!

But when the day's hustle and bustle is done,  
Then the Gumbie Cat's work is but hardly begun.

As she finds that the mice will not ever keep quiet,  
She is sure it is due to irregular diet;  
And believing that nothing is done without trying,  
She sets right to work with her baking and frying.  
She makes them a mouse-cake of bread and dried peas,  
And a *beautiful* fry of lean bacon and cheese.

(From: Eliot, *Book of Practical Cats*)

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE

Iambic meter

01

Anapaestic meter.

001

I have a Gumbie Cat in mind, her name is Jennyanydots;  
Her equal would be hard to find, she likes the warm and sunny spots.  
All day she sits beside the hearth or on the bed or on my hat:  
She sits and sits and sits and sits – and that's what makes a Gumbie  
Cat!

But when the day's hustle and bustle is done,  
Then the Gumbie Cat's work is but hardly begun.

As she finds that the mice will not ever keep quiet,  
She is sure it is due to irregular diet;  
And believing that nothing is done without trying,  
She sets right to work with her baking and frying.  
She makes them a mouse-cake of bread and dried peas,  
And a *beautiful* fry of lean bacon and cheese.

(From: Eliot, *Book of Practical Cats*)

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# VOWEL LENGTH AND CONSONANT CLUSTERS!

The speed and rhythm of a line of verse are not only determined by its metre, but also by other elements such as word choice and arrangement of vowels and consonants.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

**"Careful observers may foretell the hour  
(By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower:  
While rain depends, the pensive cat gives o'er  
Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more."**

The poem by T.S. Eliot above an iamb was used for a fairly slow rhythm with a number of long vowel sounds and diphthongs as in Careful, foretell, hour, shower, rain, o'er, more, dine, hire, wine)

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

Now from all part the swelling kennels flow,  
And bear their trophies with them as they go:  
Filth of all hues and odors seem to tell  
What street they sailed from, by their sight and smell.  
[...]  
Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,  
Drowned puppies, stinking sprats, all drenched in mud,  
Dead cats, and turnip tops, come tumbling down the flood.  
(From: Swift, *Description of a City Shower*)

The use of iambic metre and short vowels: dung, guts, blood, puppies, stinking, sprats, drenched, mud,  
dead, cats, turnip, tops, etc

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# EXAMPLE

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind.  
(From: Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*)

The combination of very long vowels and alliteration contributes to a pensive slowness suitable to the theme of the poem. The l-alliteration combined with four repetitions of the consonant combination 'ng' ("longing lingering") and the elision "e'er"

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)

# MODULATION



(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*

\* The metre of a poem does not account for a variety of rhythmical effects. The aspect of modulation also deserves some consideration in this context.

\* (Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*



**Both poems are in iambic metre but they support  
a very different rhythm**



FOR God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love ;  
Or chide my palsy, or my gout ;  
My five gray hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout ;  
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve ;  
Take you a course, get you a place,  
Observe his Honour, or his Grace ;  
Or the king's real, or his stamp'd face  
Contémptrate ; what you will, approve,  
So you will let me love.

(From: Donne, The Canonization)

Come live with me and be my Love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dale and field,  
And all the craggy mountains yield.

There will we sit upon the rocks  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

(From: Marlowe, The Passionate Shepherd to His  
Love, Palgrave ed.)

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)\*



## Why then is there such a difference?

The irregular length of Donne's lines (he alternates between pentameter and tetrameter, the last line is a trimeter) jolts the reader out of any rhythmic pattern he might be tempted to fall into. The frequent caesuras at different positions within the lines further disrupt any regular rhythmical development.

**Diction-** Donne's poem starts out with an impatient colloquial expression ("For God's sake!") which immediately asks for a fairly colloquial modulation

The regularity of Marlowe's song on the other hand encourages the emergence of a regular rhythmical pattern, there is almost a danger that the lines start jingling

Marlowe's cheerful invitation to be unrealistic uses more 'artificial' or poetic expressions ("pleasures prove", "melodious birds sing madrigals") which support a modulation of more amplitude.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003)


**SUCH RHYTHMICAL EFFECTS MUST NOT  
BE IGNORED IN THE ANALYSIS OF POETRY  
SINCE THEY CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT  
PART OF THE POEM'S MEANING.**

THANK  
YOU!





# References



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