

# Principles of Literary Study

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## rhyme review: look for variation

- ▶ usual rhyme: rime of stressed final syllable
  - ▶ *doubt/about* (Wyatt, “Whoso list”)
- ▶ disyllabic rhyme: rhyming stressed syllables followed by matching unstressed syllables
  - ▶ *painted/acquainted* (Shakespeare, Sonnet 20)
  - ▶ a.k.a. “feminine rhyme” but come on
- ▶ “slant” rhyme: coda matches; sometimes onset too
  - ▶ *grown/moon* (Yeats, “Adam’s Curse”)
  - ▶ *groined//groaned* (Owen, “Strange Meeting”)
  - ▶ *bedsidel/head* (Heaney, “Clearances” 3)
- ▶ full rhyme: syllable identity
  - ▶ *Whig/wig* (Swift, “City Shower”)
  - ▶ generally reads as repetition (or a joke) rather than rhyme

## further review

- ▶ “To His Coy Mistress”: creepy
  - ▶ “argument” troubled by violent metaphors
  - ▶ if dream of withdrawal from the world depends on libertine assumptions...
  - ▶ maybe those assumptions are the problem
- ▶ “Adam’s Curse”: triangles
  - ▶ “you,” “I,” “mild friend”
  - ▶ “us,” workers, “the world”
  - ▶ poetry, beauty, labor
  - ▶ “old high way,” life now, poetry
  - ▶ slant rhyme figures belaboredness

## Owen: reasons not to rhyme

'Strange friend,' I said, 'here is no cause to mourn.'  
'None,' said that other, 'save the undone years,  
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
After the wildest beauty in the world,  
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
And of my weeping something had been left,  
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
Now men will go content with what we spoiled,  
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.' (14-27)

## sonnets: you tell us

- ▶ Judging from the readings, what features are *typical* of the sonnet?
  - ▶ In addition to today's readings, remember: other Shakespeare sonnets, Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* 1, 55, Herbert's "Prayer," Milton's Sonnet 19, Shelley's "England in 1819."
- ▶ Think about:
  - ▶ thematic features (what it's about)
  - ▶ formal features (lines, meter, rhyme)
  - ▶ rhetorical features (what kind of audience or reading situation does it presuppose?)
- ▶ *typical* does not mean *universal*

## example sonnet

▶ (TBA)

# the typical sonnet

- ▶ 14 lines of rhymed iambic pentameter
- ▶ most common rhyme schemes:
  - ▶ Petrarchan *abbaabbacdecde* or variants
    - ▶ 8 (octave) + 6 (sestet) split by *volta*
  - ▶ Shakespearean *ababcdcdefefgg*, 4 + 4 + 4 + 2
    - ▶ 3 quatrains and a couplet
- ▶ concerns Platonic or frustrated love
- ▶ is aimed at private forms of reading
- ▶ established in Early Modern period as a central category of European vernacular lyric (Italian 14th c., French and English 16th c.)
  - ▶ anything established can be riffed off of
  - ▶ (already in Shakespeare's time)

## Vendler on Sonnet 116

- ▶ What is Vendler's main claim about Sonnet 116?
- ▶ What kind of evidence does she use to support it?



thesis I read this poem as an example not of definition but of dramatic refutation or rebuttal. (488)

motive This represents...a paradigmatic case of how reading a poem as though it were an essay, governed by an initial topic sentence, can miss its entire aesthetic dynamic. (491–92)

## genre generalities

Lyric, though it may *refer* to the social, remains the genre that directs its *mimesis* toward the performance of the mind in *solitary* speech. (1–2)

The true “actors” in lyrics are words, not “dramatic persons”; and the drama of any lyric is constituted by the successive entrances of new sets of words, or new stylistic arrangements (grammatical, syntactical, phonetic) that are visibly in conflict with previous arrangements used with reference to the “same” situation. (3)

It is in the hope of showing that Shakespeare’s sonnets contain more than is to be found in their translations or reductions or paraphrases that I have compiled this Commentary. (10)



Paul Cézanne, *Léda au cygne* [Leda and the Swan], oil on canvas, ca. 1880, Barnes Foundation, ArtSTOR.

Yeats: it's not a love poem

# Yeats: it's not a love poem

- ▶ ruthlessly conjoins erotic and violent language
  - ▶ *caressed, nape, breast, thighs, body, heart*
  - ▶ *blow, beating, staggering, caught, helpless, terrified*
  - ▶ which is *body*?
- ▶ *volta* links the traumatic moment to historical catastrophe
  - ▶ (and lyric to epic: cf. Kavanagh)
  - ▶ the turn to history makes the last rhyme deteriorate (*up/drop*)
- ▶ the questions: are they rhetorical?
  - ▶ ll. 5–8 situates speaker with Leda
  - ▶ ll. 11–14 registers his difference from her

My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor, and I began this poem; but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it, and my friend tells me that his 'conservative [i.e. uptight] readers would misunderstand the poem.'

Yeats's note to the poem, in *Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1997), 664.

next

- ▶ bring back sonnets so we can discuss Heaney
- ▶ think about stanzas (Italian *stanza*: “room”)
- ▶ focus on:
  - ▶ Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”
  - ▶ Moore, “The Fish”
  - ▶ Auden, “In Memory of W.B. Yeats”