

I ANALYSING POETRY

1 THE SPECIFICITY OF POETRY

'The poetic' is not defined by "the special properties of the language of poems".

It is defined rather by "the expectations with which one approaches lyric poetry, the conventions which govern its possible modes of signification" (Culler, 162).

2 CONVENTIONS THAT GOVERN THE ANALYSIS OF POETRY

2.1 Constructing the speaker's situation.

2.1.1 Distance / Impersonality:

[For the critic,] the poem is not part of an interpersonal communicative circuit.

In reading a poem, we have to construct a context around it.

2.1.2 Deictics: first and second person pronouns, anaphoric articles and demonstratives which refer to an external context:

"The deictics do not refer us to an external context but force us to construct a fictional situation of utterance ..." (Culler, 166).

"The fictional situation of discourse must be constructed so as to have a thematic function."

2.2 "The expectation of totality or coherence".

This convention is at work even where it is violated.

2.3 Convention of significance: 'every poem has a theme'

2.3.1 Establish the isotopies (= repetition of a semantic feature) in the text.

2.3.2 There may always be a metapoetic dimension.

"The conventions of impersonality, unity and significance set the stage, as it were, for the reading of poetry and determine the general orientation of reading, but more specific and local conventions are at work in the processing of the text itself." (Culler, 178)

3 THE STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION OF POETRY.

3.1 Metre and rhythm.

3.2 Rhyme and other sound patterns.

3.3 Syntax and verse / stanzas.

3.4 Figures of speech and images.

II THE MOST BASIC TYPES OF RHYME AND METRE

1 The most frequent rhyme schemes:

rhymed couplets (Paarreim):	aabb
alternate rhymes (Kreuzreim):	abab
enclosing rhymes (umfassender Reim):	abba

2 The most frequent metres:

[**x** = stressed; x = unstressed]

iamb (Jambus): x x

trochee (Trochäus): x x

dactyl (Daktylus): x x x

anapaest (Anapäst): x x x

tetrameter / pentameter: a line of four / five feet

blank verse: rhymeless iambic pentameters

III BASICS OF THE SONNET

(from *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Ian Ousby, Cambridge 1989)

sonnet Coleridge defined the sonnet as ‘a small poem, in which some lonely [i.e. single and coherent] feeling is developed’. Traditionally it is a short single-stanza lyric poem in iambic pentameters (see **metre**), usually consisting of 14 lines, rhyming in various patterns. The **Petrarchan** sonnet has an octave (8 lines) rhyming abba abba and a sestet (6 lines) rhyming cde cde (or some variation such as ccd ccd). **Sir Thomas Wyatt** was an early imitator of Petrarchan sonnets in England. There was also the so-called English or Shakespearean sonnet, developed by the **Earl of Surrey** and others in the 16th century, which consisted of three quatrains and a concluding couplet: Shakespeare’s rhyme abab cdcd efef gg. The late 16th century saw a vogue for sonnet sequences, such as **Shakespeare’s Sonnets**, **Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*** and **Spencer’s *Amoretti***. The latter has a different rhyme scheme for its sonnet: three quatrains with interlinked rhymes abab bcba cdcd ee. In the 17th century **John Donne** and **John Milton** expanded the sonnet’s range from love poetry to include religious feelings and serious contemplation. Most of the Romantic poets wrote sonnets. The form was used by **W. H. Auden** and is still used by practising poets. **Wordsworth’s** sonnet beginning ‘Scorn not the Sonnet’ at once gives an example of his own use of the form and a brief history of the sonnet up to Milton.