

Ling 103 The origins of rhyme in Western Culture

- Rhyme was not used in the literature of the Greeks and Romans (except occasionally in popular Roman verse and comedy)
- The first systematic use of rhyme in Western poetry was in **early medieval Latin hymns**.

Three important questions about rhyme are:

1. **What properties** must two words share to count as 'rhyming'?
2. **Where** in the line must the rhyming words be positioned?
3. How are the lines **organized** with respect to rhyme?

I. Rhyme position in the line

End-rhyme.

The most typical type of rhyme requires that the last word of each line rhyme with the last word of one or more other rhymes.

This pattern is used in the earliest French poems, the epic **chansons de gestes** such as the **Song of Roland**, and in troubadour lyric.

Rhymes at line-medial breaks

In addition to **end rhyme**, early medieval Latin rhyming verse, often contained rhymes occurring breaks in the middle of a line.

An obligatory line-medial break is called a **caesura**.

If a line is divided into two parts by a caesura, each part is called a **hemistich** (= 'half line').

Quidam prosapia | vir progenitus generosa
 Motibus ingenitam | decorabat nobilitatem
 Qui dominos plures | habuisse datur locupletes

'While in antiquity | there abode a knight of much glory
 Virtuous strengthener | of the lustrous fame of his fathers
 And all his seigneurs were good | and noble examples of knighthood'

II. Organization of lines by rhyme

Laisse (lay)

- In the **laisse** of early French epic, all consecutive lines have **end-line assonance**.
- There is no fixed number of lines in the *laisse* — a *laisse* can be short or long.
- Because there is only one ‘rhyme’ (assonance) in each *laisse*, the *laises* are called **monorhymed**.

Fixed number of rhyming lines.

a. Couplets.

- Pairs of rhyming lines: **couplets**, or in French **la rime plate**.
- This style of rhyme became predominant in 11th century France, but was at first used only for short lines (lines with 8 or fewer syllables).
- The first poet to write 12 syllable couplets (**rhyming alexandrines**) in French was Girart de Roussillon in 1315.
- By the 16th century in France it became normal to write in alternating **masculine** and **feminine** rhyming couplets. (In a **masculine** line the final syllable of the line is stressed; in a **feminine** line the final syllable is unstressed).

b. Quatrains

- Four rhyming lines: **quatrain**,
- Experimentation with rhyming patterns led to the creation of certain patterns for groups of lines called **stanzas** (or sometimes, following Greek poetic terminology, **strophes**).

c. Troubadour stanzas

- The troubadours (or *trouvères*) were medieval lyric poets who wrote principally in Old Occitan, the Romance language of the south of France.
- The earliest recorded troubadour lyrics were written by Guillem IX, duke of Aquitaine (1071-1127).

In these lyrics there is a fixed rhyme pattern in each stanza.

In the following song, Guillem uses the pattern

8	8	8	4	8	4
a	a	a	b	a	b

a: *en, atz, itz, ur, es, ort, uy*

b: *au*

- Each column refers to the properties of a line.
- The first line has 8 syllables, the second 8 syllables, the third 8 syllables, the fourth 4 syllables and so on.
- The letter under each number indicates the rhyme. All lines having the same letter must have end-rhyme.
- Lines 1, 2, 3, and 5 all rhyme (the 'a-rhyme'), and lines 4 and 6 also rhyme, but with a different rhyme (the 'b-rhyme').
- The rhymes can vary from stanza to stanza, but the **pattern** of rhymes remains identical.
- In this song, the a-rhyme is different in each stanza (*en, ats, itz, ur, es, ort, uy*).
- The b-rhyme remains fixed (*au*) throughout the whole song.

Farai un vers de dreyt rien: Non er de mi ni d'autra gen, Non er d'amor ni do joven, Ni de ren au, Qu'enans fo trobatz en durmen Sobre cheveu.	I'm writing a song about nothing at all: Not about me or about anyone else, Not about love or youth, Or about anything, I've just composed it while sleeping Upon a horse.
No sai en qual hora·m fuy natz: No suy alegres ni iratz, No suy estrayns ni sui privatz, Ni no·n puesc au, Qu'enaissi fuy de nueitz fadatz, Sobr' un pueg au.	I don't know under what star I was born: I'm neither happy nor sad, I'm neither foreign nor am I familiar, I can't do anything about it, Since I was given this skill by a fairy One night upon a high mountain.
No sai quora·m suy endurmitz Ni quora·m velh, so'om no m'o ditz. Per pauc no m'es lo cor partitz D'un do corau: E no m'o pretz una soritz, Per sanh Marsau!	I don't know if I'm asleep or awake, At least when nobody tells me. My heart is nearly broken By a deadly sorrow: But I can't do anything but crack a smile, By Saint Martial!
Malautz suy e tremi murir, E ren no·n sai mas quan n'aug dir; Metge querrai al mieu albir, E no sai cau; Bos metges er si·m pot guerir, Mas non, si amau.	I'm sick and I'm shaking like death, And I don't know anything about it except what they tell me; I'm looking for a doctor in my fantasies, but I don't know who; He'll be good if he can cure me, but bad if I get worse.
Amigu'ai ieu, no sai qui s'es, Qu'anc non la vi, si m'ajut fes; Ni·m fes que·m plassa ni que·m pes, Ni no m'en cau, Qu'anc non ac Norman ai Frances Dins mon ostau.	I had a girl friend, but I don't know who, Because, believe me, I never saw her; She never pleased me, never upset me, And I don't care, Because no one Norman nor French Has ever been in my house.
Anc non la vi et am la fort, Anc no n'aic dreyt ni no·m fes tort; Quan non la vey, be m'en deport, No·m pretz un jau, Qu'ie·n sai gensor at bellazor, E que mais vau.	I never saw her but I love her well, She never did me right or wrong; When I don't see her, I easily do without her I value her less than a chicken's worth, I know someone, in fact, more lovely and beautiful, and who is worth more.
Fag ai lo vers, no say de cuy; E trametrai lo a selhuy Que lo·m trametra per autruy Lay vers Anjau, Que·m tramezes del sieu estuy La contraclau.	My song is done, I don't know who about, I'm going to send it to someone Who will through another send it Down to Anjou, And I'm going to ask him to send me back The key to her box.

III. Types of Rhyme

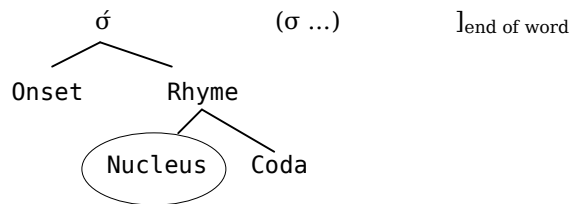
The types of rhymes can be understood in terms of the syllable constituents which much match.

1. Assonance:

The **nucleus** of the **final stressed syllable** must match.

The onset and coda can be different, as can material in syllables following the stressed syllable.

This style was predominant in French until the 11th century, and did not die out until the 15th century.



La Vie de Saint Alexis (11th cent. French)

Bons fut li siecles al tems **ancienour**,
 quer feiz i eret e justise ed **amours**,
 s'i ert credance, dont or n'i at nul **prout**;
 toz est mudez, perlude at sa **colour**:
 ja mais n'iert tels com fut as **anceisours**.

Life was good in ancient times,
 because there was faith and justice
 and love, and there was belief,
 which now there is hardly any of;
 everything is tired and has lost its
 color: it will never be like it was in
 ancient times.

Al tems Noé ed al tems **Abraám**
 ed al David, cui Deus paramat **tánt**,
 bons fut li siecles, ja mais n'iert si **vallánz**;
 viels est e frailes, toz s'en vait **declinánt**,
 si'st empeiriez, toz biens vait **remanánt**.

In the time of Noah and the time of
 Abraham and of David, whom God
 loved so much, life was good,
 no one was so noble;
 now everything is old and weak,
 and is going downhill,
 and is deteriorated, all good things
 remain behind.

Laisse 1: assonance on **-ou-** [oʊ]

Laisse 2: assonance on **-an, -am** = nasalized [ɑ]

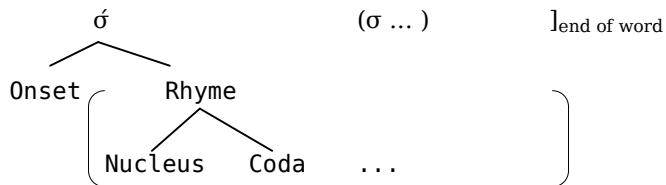
Song of Roland: Laisse XIII

«Seignors barons,» dist li emperedre **Chárles**,
«Li reis Marsilie m'at tramis ses **messáges**;
De son avoir me voelt doner grant **másse**,
Ors e leons e veltres **chadenábles**,
Set cenz cameilz e mil hostors **mudábles**,
Quatre cenz mulz chargez del ór d'**Arábie**,
Avoec iço plus de cinquante **chárre**;
Mais il me mandet que en France m'en **álge**:
Il me sivrat ad Ais, a mon **estáge**,
Si recevrat la nostre lei plus **sálve**;
Chrestiens ert, de mei tendrat ses **márches**;
Mais jo ne sai quels en est sis **coráges**.»
Dient Franceis: «Il nos i covient **guárde!**»

2. Perfect rhyme

All material in the word from the **nucleus of the stressed syllable to the end of the word** must match.

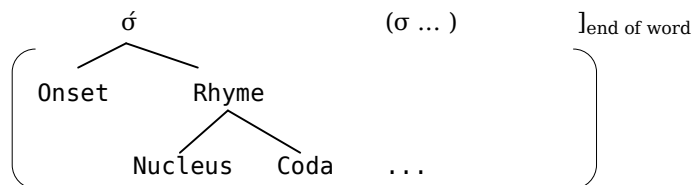
locomótion ~ commótion ~ pótion ~ lótion ≠ rátion ≠ volítion ≠ solútion



3. Rich rhyme (French *rime riche*, *rime léonine*)

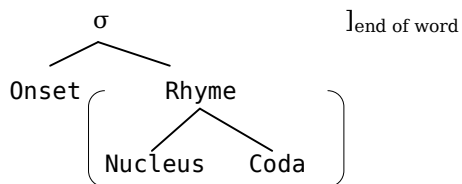
All material in the word from the **onset** of the stressed syllable. In other words, the entire stressed syllable (and anything that follows) must rhyme.

mótion ~ locomótion ~ demótion ≠ pótion ≠ lótion ≠ rátion ≠ volítion ≠ solútion



4. Final syllable rhyme.

Here the rhyme constituent of the last syllable — regardless of whether it is a stressed syllable or not — must match.



mótion ~ rátion ~ solútion

Final syllable rhyme is occasionally seen in medieval Latin poetry.

plúribus ~ discumbéntibus ~ pejóribus ~ melióriibus
 inímico ~ populo
 túum ~ monastérium

Aeternus orbis conditor (St. Ambrose)

Aeternus orbis cónditor,	-or
Christus, perente non mínor,	-or
Originali témpore,	-re
Dignatus orbem cóndere,	-re

Hora sub hac novíssima,	-ima
Mundi petivit ínfima,	-ima
Promissus ante plúrimis	-is
Propheticis oráculis.	-is

Ut providus Ezéchiél,	-el
Corona plebis Ísrahel,	-el
Clausam notavit jánuam,	-am
Summo tonanti pérviam.	-am

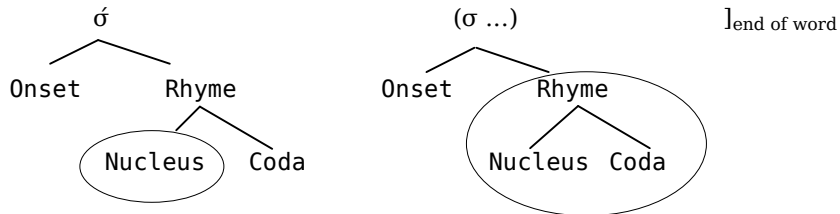
Ergo manente víscerum	-um
Pudore virginálium,	-um
Divina proles térreae	-ae
Se miscuit substántiae.	-ae

Origins of French and English 'perfect rhyme'

Perfect rhyme became conventional for French poetry in the 12th cent. and probably emerged as a kind of combination of assonance and final syllable rhyme.

'Intermediate Rhyme'

A 'middle ground' between **perfect rhyme** on the one hand and **assonance** and **final syllable rhyme** on the other can occur when the conditions for **both** assonance and final syllable rhyme are met.



This means that the stressed syllable nucleus and the last syllable rhyme must match — *but the consonants intervening can be different:*

novíssima ~ ínfima

sócios ~ bónos ómnes ~ honóres

This type of rhyme occurs rather frequently in contemporary rap/hip-hop lyrics, e.g. Busta Rhymes (**When Disaster Strikes**):

númeral ~ úsual

smóthered ~ cóvered

ráisin' me ~ amázes me

chéck for ~ néxt door

móvin' ~ dóin'

ásk you ~ páss through

Béntley ~ sént me

mád cool ~ mán's jewels

stárt shit ~ márkét

bíte it off ~ líght is off

impréssive ~ expénsive

ingrédié(n)t ~ sée me wit(h)

Rhyme to localize a text in time

1110	[ai] = [ei] before nasals	Voyage de St. Brendan
1163-69	[ai] = [ei] before nasals	Édouard le Confesseur
1170	[ai] = [ei] before nasals	St. Gilles
1184	[ai] = [ei] before a consonant	Thomas Becket
1190	[ai] = [ei] everywhere	Simon de Fresne

St. Laurent: [ai] = [ei] only before nasals, hence probably prior to 1180s

Chascuns dei[t] eschever la peine **peine** 'pain' / **soveraine** 'sovereign'
 Et traire a la gloire soveraine cf. Mod. French [pɛ̃] [suvrɛ̃]

compare **Le Secré de Secrez** (Anglo-Norman, late 13th cent.)

ferre / cre[i]re 'to do / to believe'
 Mod. Fr. faire, croire [fɛʁ] ≠ [kʁɛʁ]

hurter / ave[i]r 'to strike against / to have'
 Mod. Fr. heurter, avoir [œʁtɛ, avɛʁ]

Rhyme to localize a text in place

Lat. **ū** > OFr. **u** > **ü** mūrum > mur Mod. Fr. [mʏʁ]
 Lat. **ō** > OFr. **o** > **œ** flōrem > flor > fleur [flœʁ]
 but OFr. **u, o** > Norman **u**

Brendan 1699-1700

E puis desus esteit li **murs** 'And then above were the walls
 De parais qui clot les **flurs**. Of paradise, which enclosed the flowers'

St. Laurent 411-12

Decius Cesar al tiers **jor** 'Decius Caesar on the third day
 Se sist al sié l' **enpereor** Sat at the throne of the emperor'

jor / enpereor 'day / emperor'
 Mod. Fr. jour, empereur [ʒuʁ, ɑ̃pɛʁœʁ]

Secré de Secrez 921-22

seignur / creatur 'lord / creature'
 Fr. seigneur, créature [sɛ̃ɲœʁ, kʁeɑtyʁ]