### 3.2. SYNTACTIC UNIT AND POETIC UNIT

From **Lennard, John *The Poetry Handbook* Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1996, pp. 58-84, 120-139.**

- **Lineation:** Poetry often avoids going to the end of the line. It uses the **line-break** to achieve particular effects. Every time the line breaks there is a **pause** in our reading of the poem. It is important to see whether the **syntactic unit** (**sentence, clause, phrase**) is interrupted by the line division.
- The sentence is a unit that forms the grammatically complete expression of a single thought. The conventional indication of sentences with **initial capital** and **terminal full-stop** was not fully developed until the eighth century.
- In most good verse there is a swirling relationship between the sentence (a grammatical unit) and the line (a poetic unit); and variations produced by sentences shorter or longer than a line are instrumental in preventing dullness.
- If a poet has chosen a regular **metre** or **stanza** form there are clear constraints on how the line-break can be used. **Free verse**, however, uses line-breaks at will.
- Sometimes lines are **end-stopped** (the line-break reinforced by a mark of **punctuation**) or **enjambed** (the sense and the syntax continue into the next line or stanza).
- If one line is divided into two half-lines, we call this a **medial line-break** and, as a consequence of this break, we make a **medial pause**. We make a similar pause when the line has a punctuation mark in its middle. We call this pause and syntactic division a **caesura** (from Latin, *caedere*, to cut). The caesura will naturally occur roughly in the middle, but a poet can force the caesura towards the beginning or end of the line
- When there is **enjambment** across a **stanza break** the effect is more conspicuous, because the stanza break is a strong one.
- Sometimes, stanzas are **self-contained**, end-stopped and complete a clause or a sentence.
- There are four types of stops: **the full-stop, the colon, the semi-colon, and the comma** (. : ; ,). They indicate the end of various grammatical units. The **full-stop** (USA *period*) is the heaviest of the four stops. The same mark is used as a **suspension mark** to indicate a word shortened by the suspension of the last letters.



Eg. "etc.", "ed." (et cetera, editor). Three suspension marks in a row … are called **ellipsis** and they indicate incompletion.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Try to find examples, in the three poems reproduced in section 3.1., of the categories written in boldface in this section.
2. What are the most evident differences in syntax among the three poems?

Further reading:

McGann, Jerome (1991) *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton U.P.

Nowottny, Winifred (1965) *The Language Poets Use*. London: Athlone Press.

Parkes, Malcolm B. (1992) *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*. Aldershot: Scolar Press.

## 3.3 SOUND PATTERNS: RHYTHM, RHYME, ALLITERATION

From **Montgomery, M. et al. (eds.)** ***Ways of Reading*****. London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 83-102.**

- **RHYTHM** can be defined as a repeated and regular switching between modes (quiet versus loud).
- A vocal sound is **stressed** if it is loud or high or long compared with the sounds which surround it (which are then **unstressed**).
- **Stress** is a quality not of an individual sound but of the cluster of sounds called a **syllable**.
- Syllables can be stressed or unstressed. Eg. specific: o / o; pattern: / o; typical: / o o.
- **Single-syllable words** can be stressed, but words which carry little meaning content, like *a, in, the, as*, etc. are usually unstressed.
- The rhythm of a line can be represented in the following way:

  o / o / / o
  I hear the wind sighing

- In many types of poetry, the rhythmic pattern of the lines is decided in advance, and the words are fitted into it.
- A poem's rhythmic structure is a **pattern of expectation**, not an absolute grid which overrides the natural stress patterns of the language.
- The **natural rhythm** of the spoken words must coincide to some extent with the poem's underlying rhythmic structure.
- The sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables is divided into groups called "**feet**", with one heavy stress in each group: I hear the wind sighing (o /) (o /) (/ o).
- In a **rising rhythm**, the stressed syllable is at the end of the **foot**; in a **falling rhythm**, the stressed syllable is at the beginning of the foot.
- There are the following types of feet:

  Iambic foot: o /
  Trochaic foot: / o
  Anapestic foot: o o /
  Dactylic foot: / o o
  Spondaic foot: / /
  Pyrrhic foot: o o



- There are eight possible **line lengths**: monometer (one foot), dimeter (two feet), trimeter ( three feet), **tetrameter** (four), **pentameter** (five), hexameter (six), heptameter (seven), octameter (eight).
- Iambic pentameter unrhymed verse is called **blank verse** (W. Shakespeare uses it in his plays).
- Poetry in which both the number of syllables and the number of stresses per line vary to such an extent that no pattern can be found is called **free verse**.
- **RHYME and SOUND PATTERNING**: Sound patterns are formed when there is a repetition of sounds in nearby words:

  **ALLITERATION:** Repetition of the initial consonant sounds of nearby words: boat-big-bad; grow-grand-Greek. Alliteration can also occur where there is a repetition of the first stressed segment within a word: aggression-ungrateful. It is sounds, not letters, which produce the effect. City-sandwich (not cauliflower), reading-writing.

  **ASSONANCE**: Repetition of the same vowel sound, especially in stressed syllables, embedded within nearby words: light-wide-sign.

  **CONSONANCE**: Repetition of final consonant sounds of nearby words: bad-good; treats-floats.

  **REVERSE RHYME**: Both the initial consonant sound and the following vowel sound are repeated in nearby words: cash-carry; stand-stamp.

  **PARARHYME**: Both the initial and the final consonant sounds in nearby words are repeated: send-sound; beat-bite.

  **RHYME**: Repetition of sounds from the last stressed vowel onwards in the words that end each line (**end-rhyme**): cloud-shroud; bending-sending; demonstrate-remonstrate. Rhyme can also occur within a line of verse (**internal rhyme**). Sounds, not spellings, produce rhyme. So "cough" rhymes with "off", not with "plough". However, words with the same spelling like "cough" and "plough" can be called **eye-rhymes**.

  Rhymes at the ends of lines are usually organized into patterns or **rhyme schemes**. Typical patterns which emerge are: abab, abba, abcabc, etc. Some poetic genres are defined partly on the basis of their rhyme schemes (e.g. sonnet, ballad).