

Preface

Rhyme as a major form of sound parallelism is found widely in the verbal arts of the world. After becoming established in many different languages all over the world from early to late Middle Age periods, it appears in all kinds of poetics: those composed orally as well as by pen; poems memorized, improvised, sung, recited and read. In research, rhyme is abundantly addressed in literature studies, linguistic and metrical analyses, and recently, after the bloom of rhyme in rap lyrics, increasingly in studies of popular song. Song writers' manuals typically provide extended rhyme typologies. Individual rhymed oral traditions are documented extensively. However, explicit, comparative research on rhyme chiefly concerns written verse. Moreover, authority and appeal to the literary canon over a significant but limited historical period has sought to constrain what rhyme is, despite a previous history in which practices varied and the persistence throughout of several kinds of alternative aesthetics. This is still well-established in such value-laden terminology as pure vs. impure rhyme and perfect vs. imperfect rhyme.

Neither the problems of terminology (discussed in Brogan & Cushman 2012: 1190; Scherr 1986: 198) nor the multiplicity of aesthetics have passed unnoticed. For example, the major reference on poetics, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes that the literary canon is challenged by alternative aesthetics established (1) in oral and popular traditions, (2) in song lyrics, and (3) in literary verse itself (Brogan & Cushman 2012: 1184). However, the availability of research that would explicitly focus on this variety of aesthetics is poor. Today, many literary scholars, folklorists, musicologists, linguists and others focus with new interest on practices which bridge between oral and literary cultures, and there is an ever greater need for access to knowledge of different poetics, historical and current – in general: how different traditions and trends are appropriate and aesthetically pleasing to those of whose culture, language, and practice they are part.

With this challenge in mind, and the goal of proposing a language- and tradition-sensitive approach to rhyme, this book offers perspectives on different kinds of rhymed traditions and practices. After an introductory discussion on rhyme's aspects in research, the book's chapters make

excursions to the development, forms, aesthetics, methods, and contexts of rhyme and rhyming. The geographical areas discussed are varied, yet there is a clear focus on Europe and several contributions come from the Northern countries, in particular Finland. This reflects the scholarly collaborations and mental landscape from which this book emerges.

The book grew out of the conference ‘Rhyme and Rhyming in Verbal Art and Song’ held in Helsinki in May 2019. The initial impetus for an international conference on rhyme came from Venla Sykäri, who from the late 1990s has focused her research on rhymed registers of oral poetry and the process of oral composition with end rhyme. The need for cross-disciplinary discussion on the forms, terms, and meanings of rhyme first arose from the apparent conflict between the informants’ ideas of rhyme in a vital oral culture and literary-oriented research literature. Further, the need for new, more varied perspectives on poetics emerged as the fuzzy boundaries of oral and written in early writings became a central interest in two recent research currents in Finland and the Nordic countries: the study of the long 19th century’s literacy and self-taught authors (e.g., Laitinen & Mikkola 2013; Kuismin & Driscoll 2013; Anttonen et al. 2018; Droste & Salmi-Niklander 2019), and in particular, the poetics of the 16th and 17th centuries’ hymns and other ecclesiastic texts (e.g., Kallio et al. 2016; Lehtonen & Kaljundi 2016). The conference was realized in collaboration with colleagues working in the Academy of Finland -funded research project *Letters and Songs: Registers of Beliefs and Expressions in the Early Modern North*, led by Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen in the Finnish Literature Society (SKS) in 2016–2020. This project also secured the conference’s funding. Among its research lines, the project focused on analysing and reinterpreting questions of poetic aesthetics related to the valorization, practice, and interaction of the two Finnish metrical systems: rhymed and stanzaic vs. non-rhymed, alliterative, and iterative (Kallio, Bastman, Frog in this volume).

The Rhyme Conference inherited a well-working model: it completed a series of international cross-disciplinary conferences on poetics and verbal art organized from 2011 by the Folklore Studies of the University of Helsinki in collaboration with the Finnish Literature Society. Close ties between these two institutions, and the generous support provided by their leaders, professor Lotte Tarkka and secretary general Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen, secured the practical organization and scientific ambition of these events. All earlier conferences and symposiums were generated and guided through by docent Frog. They focused on the notion of Register (2011; 2013), Parallelism (2014), Versification (2016), and Formula (2017). The results have in each case been worked into publications, pre-prints and books, forming a significant inspiration and channel for recent output of the scholarship in related fields (Frog 2014; Agha & Frog 2015; Frog 2017; Frog & Tarkka 2017; Frog et al. 2021; Frog & Lamb 2022).

Similar to these earlier events, the goal of the Rhyme Conference was to discuss rhyme’s forms, poetics, and aesthetics in different oral, written, and popular cultures and involving scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds. An additional aim of this event was to focus on history: in particular, to bring the research on rhyme in the Latin and Arabic languages

within one event, which appeared not to have taken place before. Papers were presented by altogether thirty speakers from Europe, U.S. and South Africa, including keynote lectures by folklorist and ethnomusicologist, professor Dwight Reynolds from University of California, Santa Barbara, U.S., literary linguist, professor Nigel Fabb from University of Strathclyde, UK, and specialist of early Latin poetry, docent Seppo Heikkinen from University of Helsinki, Finland. The cross-disciplinary interaction in the intimate and conversational atmosphere was characterized by heuristic moments; since rhyme had in many cases not been the central focus of research but simply a central feature of the material, new connections were found. This made obvious that the results should also be offered to a wider public. The preparation of an edited volume became feasible as professor Fabb agreed to bring his literary-linguistic expertise into the process and share the editorial work. A selection of conference papers were hence thoroughly revised to become the chapters of this book.

Chapters in the book proceed in a loose historical order. The first six focus on the historical development and forms of rhyme in Arabic and early Latin cultures, in the early modern and modern periods in the Finnic languages Finnish and Estonian, and comparatively in old Germanic and Finnic alliterative cultures. All these chapters make visible how forms of rhyme develop in relation to language, and the chapters on Finnic languages examine how rhyme was employed in cultures relative to the impact of another parallel poetic model and its aesthetics. The second cluster of chapters tackles rhyme's specific psychological and aesthetic characteristics and its role as an established, primary device in recent and contemporary oral poetry, rap songs, and literary poetry. These chapters take up questions of end rhyme's role in oral composition and sung ornamentation, and rhyme's placement within the line in regular and irregular patterns. The last chapter provides an experiment-based analysis of German students' expectations of literary poetry, pointing out the strong mental connection of rhyme with the notion of poetry even in times when free verse reigns.

Authors have been free to use a terminology related to their research areas and traditions. We have however asked each contributor to prefer the term 'line' for poetic lines and only use the term 'verse' as an opposite to 'prose', in order to avoid misunderstanding, unless the term is fundamentally tied to a research tradition, as is the case with respect to the study of indigenous traditions, where 'verse' is equivalent to 'stanza'. We have also asked the authors to avoid, if possible, the use of value-laden terminology. During the process, we settled on the terms 'identical' and 'nonidentical' to be the most neutral terms to discuss whether the final sections of the words which create the parallel sound effect we hear as 'rhyming' are exactly the same or based on partial correspondence. This overlaps in some cases with the term 'identical rhyme' as used for two *words* that are identical, including their onset, and thus commonly regarded as not being able to be rhyme partners. It may also be noted that when we speak of rhyme 'words', the notion 'word' also includes sequences that can contain several words or are parts of longer or compound words. Inconsistency in terminology cannot be avoided when dealing with a phenomenon that has become established during the last 1500

years in the different local languages and cultures discussed in this volume.

We realize that the rhyme's many faces in terms of aesthetics, language-/tradition-/culture-related forms, history, practices of oral and written composition and performance, should be addressed in the future in a dedicated series of publications. We hope that the excursions provided by this book can serve as an inspiration for more research and presentation of the diversity of rhyme.

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