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Poetry

Poetry (ancient Greek: ποιέω (poieo) = I create) is an art form in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content. It consists largely of oral or literary works in which language is used in a manner that is felt by its user and audience to differ from ordinary prose.

It may use condensed or compressed form to convey emotion or ideas to the reader's or listener's mind or ear; it may also use devices such as assonance and repetition to achieve musical or incantatory effects. Poems frequently rely for their effect on imagery, word association, and the musical qualities of the language used. The interactive layering of all these effects to generate meaning is what marks poetry.

Because of its nature of emphasising linguistic form rather than using language purely for its content, poetry is notoriously difficult to translate from one language into another: a possible exception to this might be the Hebrew Psalms, where the beauty is found more in the balance of ideas than in specific vocabulary. In most poetry, it is the connotations and the "baggage" that words carry (the weight of words) that are most important. These shades and nuances of meaning can be difficult to interpret and can cause different readers to "hear" a particular piece of poetry differently. While there are reasonable interpretations, there can never be a definitive interpretation.

Nature of poetry

Poetry can be differentiated most of the time from prose, which is language meant to convey meaning in a more expansive and less condensed way, frequently using more complete logical or narrative structures than poetry does. This does not necessarily imply that poetry is illogical, but rather that poetry is often created from the need to escape the logical, as well as expressing feelings and other expressions in a tight, condensed manner. English Romantic poet John Keats termed this escape from logic Negative Capability. A further complication is that prose poetry combines the characteristics of poetry with the superficial appearance of prose, such as in Robert Frost's poem, "Home Burial." Other forms include narrative poetry and dramatic poetry, both of which are used to tell stories and so resemble novels and plays. However, both these forms of poetry use the specific features of verse composition to make these stories more memorable or to enhance them in some way.

What is generally accepted as "great" poetry is debatable in many cases. "Great" poetry usually follows the characteristics listed above, but it is also set apart by its complexity and sophistication. "Great" poetry

generally captures images vividly and in an original, refreshing way, while weaving together an intricate combination of elements like theme tension, complex emotion, and profound reflective thought. For examples of what is considered "great" poetry, visit the Pulitzer prize and Nobel prize sections for poetry.

The Greek verb **ποιεω** [poiéo (= I make or create)], gave rise to three words: **ποιητής** [poiet?s (= the one who creates)], **ποίησις** [poíesis (= the act of creation)] and **ποίημα** [poíema (= the thing created)]. From these we get three English words: **poet** (the creator), **poesy** (the creation) and **poem** (the created). A poet is therefore one who creates and poetry is what the poet creates. The underlying concept of the poet as creator is not uncommon. For example, in Anglo-Saxon a poet is a scop (shaper or maker) and in Scots makar.

Sound in poetry

Perhaps the most vital element of sound in poetry is rhythm. Often the rhythm of each line is arranged in a particular meter. Different types of meter played key roles in Classical, Early European, Eastern and Modern poetry. In the case of free verse, the rhythm of lines is often organized into looser units of cadence.

Poetry in English and other modern European languages often uses rhyme. Rhyme at the end of lines is the basis of a number of common poetic forms, such as ballads, sonnets and rhyming couplets. However, the use of rhyme is not universal. Much modern poetry, for example, avoids traditional rhyme schemes. Furthermore, Classical Greek and Latin poetry did not use rhyme. In fact, rhyme did not enter European poetry at all until the High Middle Ages, when it was adopted from the Arabic language. The Arabs have always used rhymes extensively, most notably in their long, rhyming qasidas. Some classical poetry forms, such as Venpa of the Tamil language, had rigid grammars (to the point that they could be expressed as a context-free grammar), which ensured a rhythm.

Alliteration played a key role in structuring early Germanic and English forms of poetry (called alliterative verse), akin to the role of rhyme in later European poetry. The alliterative patterns of early Germanic poetry and the rhyme schemes of Modern European poetry alike both include meter as a key part of their structure, which determines when the listener expects instances of rhyme or alliteration to occur. In this sense, both alliteration and rhyme, when used in poetic structures, help to emphasise and define a rhythmic pattern. By contrast, the chief device of Biblical poetry in ancient Hebrew was parallelism, a rhetorical structure in which successive lines reflected each other in grammatical structure, sound structure, notional content, or all three; a verse form that lent itself to antiphonal or call- and-response performance.

In addition to the forms of rhyme, alliteration and rhythm that structure much poetry, sound plays a more subtle role in even free verse poetry in creating pleasing, varied patterns and emphasising or sometimes even illustrating semantic elements of the poem. Devices such as alliteration, assonance, consonance, dissonance and internal rhyme are among the ways poets use sound. Euphony refers to the musical, flowing quality of words arranged in an aesthetically pleasing way.

Poetry and form

Compared with prose, poetry depends less on the linguistic units of sentences and paragraphs, and more on units of organisation that are purely poetic. The typical structural elements are the line, couplet, strophe, stanza, and verse paragraph.

Lines may be self-contained units of sense, as in the well-known lines from William Shakespeare's Hamlet:

| *To be, or not to be: that is the question.*

Alternatively a line may end in mid-phrase or sentence:

| *Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer*

this linguistic unit is completed in the next line,

| *The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.*

This technique is called enjambment, and is used to create a sense of expectation in the reader and/or to add a dynamic to the movement of the verse.

In many instances, the effectiveness of a poem derives from the tension between the use of linguistic and formal units. With the advent of printing, poets gained greater control over the visual presentation of their work. As a result, the use of these formal elements, and of the white space they help create, became an important part of the poet's toolbox. Modernist poetry tends to take this to an extreme, with the placement of individual lines or groups of lines on the page forming an integral part of the poem's composition. In its most extreme form, this leads to the writing of concrete poetry.

Poetry and rhetoric

Rhetorical devices such as simile and metaphor are frequently used in poetry. Indeed, Aristotle wrote in his *Poetics* that "the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor". However, particularly since the rise of Modernism, some poets have opted for reduced use of these devices, preferring rather to attempt the direct presentation of things and experiences. Other 20th-century poets, however, particularly the surrealists, have pushed rhetorical devices to their limits, making frequent use of catachresis.

History of poetry

Poetry as an art form predates literacy. In preliterate societies, poetry was frequently employed as a means of recording oral history, storytelling (epic poetry), genealogy, law and other forms of expression or knowledge that modern societies might expect to be handled in prose. The *Ramayana*, a Sanskrit epic which includes poetry, was probably written in the 3rd century BCE in a language described by William Jones as "more perfect than Latin, more copious than Greek and more exquisitely refined than either." Poetry is also often closely identified with liturgy in these societies, as the formal nature of poetry makes it easier to remember priestly incantations or prophecies. The greater part of the world's sacred scriptures are made up of poetry rather than prose.

The use of verse to transmit cultural information continues today. Many English speaking-Americans know that "in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue". An alphabet song teaches the names and order of the letters of the alphabet; another jingle states the lengths and names of the months in the Gregorian calendar. Preliterate societies, lacking the means to write down important cultural information, use similar methods to preserve it.

Some writers believe that poetry has its origins in song. Most of the characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of utterance—rhythm, rhyme, compression, intensity of feeling, the use of refrains—appear to have come about from efforts to fit words to musical forms. However, in the European tradition the

earliest surviving poems, the Homeric and Hesiodic epics, identify themselves as poems to be recited or chanted to a musical accompaniment rather than as pure song. Another interpretation, developed from 20th-century studies of living Montenegrin epic reciters by Milman Parry and others, is that rhythm, refrains, and kennings are essentially paratactic devices that enable the reciter to reconstruct the poem from memory.

In preliterate societies, all these forms of poetry were composed for, and sometimes during, performance. As such, there was a certain degree of fluidity to the exact wording of poems, given this could change from one performance or performer to another. The introduction of writing tended to fix the content of a poem to the version that happened to be written down and survive. Written composition also meant that poets began to compose not for an audience that was sitting in front of them but for an absent reader. Later, the invention of printing tended to accelerate these trends. Poets were now writing more for the eye than for the ear.

The development of literacy gave rise to more personal, shorter poems intended to be sung. These are called lyrics, which derives from the Greek *lura* or *lyre*, the instrument that was used to accompany the performance of Greek lyrics from about the seventh century BCE onward. The Greek's practice of singing hymns in large choruses gave rise in the sixth century BCE to dramatic verse, and to the practice of writing poetic plays for performance in their theatres.

In more recent times, the introduction of electronic media and the rise of the poetry reading have led to a resurgence of performance poetry and have resulted in a situation where poetry for the eye and poetry for the ear coexist, sometimes in the same poem. The late 20th-century rise of the singer-songwriter and Rap culture and the increase in popularity of Slam poetry have led to a renewed debate as to the nature of poetry that can be crudely characterised as a split between the academic and popular views. As of 2005, this debate is ongoing with no immediate prospect of a resolution.

Love poems proliferate now, in weblogs and personal pages, as a new way of expression and liberty of hearts, "I have won many female relations with this valid resource", has said a contemporaneous writer called Federic P. Sabeloteur.

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