

Literature

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Section: 1

What is poetry?

It is hard to define poetry, because it could mean different things for different people. That is why we are going to list different definitions and theories for poetry.

1. The Concise Oxford Dictionary:

“The elevated expression of elevated thought in metrical form” Poets also have their definitions of poetry:

2. A.E Housman:

“Poetry is not the thing said, but a way of saying it” Like for example; in one of his poems Housman wrote:

How clear, how lovely bright,

How beautiful to sight,

Those beams of morning play;

In other way, without poetry the lines would become:–

How beautiful and bright for us to see these sun beams shine.

3. William Hazlitt:

“Poetry is the language of imagination and the passions”



4. William Wordsworth:

“poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”

5. James Reeves:

“Poetry is vital, fresh and surprising language”

6. James Smith:–

“Poetry is the art by which feeling is conveyed by author to reader in metrical language”

7. John Keats

“Poetry is friend to soothe the cares and lift the thoughts of man”

8. P.B. Shelly

“Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar”

For example in his 'Ode to the West Wind', Shelley describes the wind as a magician that drives the leaves away. One starts to imagine the wind (familiar) as a magician (unfamiliar) thing or object.

All of these definitions are beautiful, but they do not fully explain to us what poetry is. We have to experience poetry, and know its principals in order to understand and appreciate it. We have to know the process of making it and the details of this process. The devices, rhyme, rhythm, sound, color, unless they are known, then our knowledge of poetry is superficial.



The Poet

We previously tried to know how to understand and appreciate poetry, now we have to know its creator; the poet.

What defines a poet? Or who is a poet? Can we point to a particular person among many people, in a crowd, and say “this is a poet”?

Does a poet study poetry like an engineer studying engineering to become one? Does he/she have special characteristics or features that make him/her a poet? How do we answer all these questions?

It is difficult to answer these questions, but we have to know a poet is distinguished by certain qualities.

Wordsworth and Shelly gave their definitions of the poet and his or her qualities. For Wordsworth the poet is:–

A man speaking to men whose qualities are:–

1. Endowed with lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness
2. Has great knowledge of human nature
3. Has a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind.



While Shelly's qualities of a poet:

1. A poet is more delicately organized than other men
2. She/he is sensible to pain and pleasure both his own and others' unknown to them
3. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world

In other words

1. The poet has a wide experience which enables him to speak of himself as well as others' experiences. He has a very sensitive mind that makes him see and feel things that are not seen or felt by an average person.
2. Unlike other people, the poet has a very developed characteristic; "the faculty to create and use language" a master of language, just like sculptor is a master of clay.
3. The poet has a fine sense for music and form, and that's why he uses the suitable pattern for his thoughts.
4. The poet has a powerful imagination which helps him to create new experiences and give new meanings to old ideas
5. A poet is like a musician or a painter who draws pictures with his words or forms a harmonious piece also with words.



Knowing the rules of writing poetry would not make a poet, but rather a poet should have:–

- a. Inner impulse
- b. Inspiration
- c. He must be a devoted reader of poetry

*How would a poet produce good poetry?

He must be:

1. Sincere and treating his subject matter with depth and vitality
2. He must be natural as Keats referred to

“If poetry comes not as naturally as leaves to tree, it had not come at all”

His poetry should not be labored; rather it should be as natural as possible and avoid artificiality and sentimentality.

3. A poet should avoid over-colorful language and false emotions.
4. He should not limit himself to personal experience or else his poetry would lose its validity for people.
5. His poems should have universal appeal, such a poet will live over time like all famous poets



Section: 2

English Poetry: Its Background and Development

Anglo-Saxon Poetry 7th to 11th Centuries

English Poetry has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon period. The Angles and the Saxons were tribes who settled in Britain, bringing with them their own kind of literature. These tribes were brave and adventurous and like many ancient people, they loved to sing of battles and heroes. It was in these songs English poetry began not in English as we know it today, but in Anglo-Saxon or Old English. One of the most important poems of this period is *Beowulf*. It is a long poem consisting of more than three thousand lines. It was composed by an unknown poet. It told the story of a heroic leader and his courage in fighting Grendel, the monster, and a dragon.

The Medieval Period 11th to 14th Centuries

In (1086) England was invaded by William the Conqueror who came from France. With this conquest England fell under a French influence since the French brought with them their own literary taste. This influence resulted in

the appearance of a new type of poetry of which romances were the most popular. Romances were long poems, which dealt with the adventures of brave knights saving beautiful ladies. Of these famous romances were the stories about King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.



Geoffrey Chaucer 1340–1400

He was the greatest poet of the Middle Ages. He is described as “the father of English poetry”, because his poetry has been regarded as the actual point of English Literature. He used the language from which modern English descended. He also wrote a masterpiece titled The *Canterbury Tales* which are stories narrated by a group of pilgrims on their way to visit the shrine of a saint at Canterbury.





Section: 3

Elizabethan Age (Renaissance)

The Elizabethan age took place from 1558 to 1603. It is the golden age in English History. During this era England experienced peace and the arts flourished. The time period is named after Queen Elizabeth I who ruled England during this time.



Elizabethan Poetry:

Who are the major Elizabethan poets/writers?

They are Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare.

*





He was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare is considered by many to be the greatest writer of the English language. Through his works, he introduced nearly 3,000 words to the English language. In addition, his works are the second most often quoted after the Bible.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (Sonnet 18) By William

Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.



**Glossary	
Temperate	Not extreme
Darling	Dearly loved
Lease	Contract
Dimmed	Made less bright
brag	Show off

***Meaning of the Poem line by line:**

Shall I compare you to a summer day?

You're lovelier and nicer.

Rough winds shake the loved buds of May.

And summer doesn't last nearly long enough. (There are personification & metaphor in this line)

Sometimes the sun shines too hot,

and often its golden face is darkened by clouds. (There is Personification in this line)

And everything beautiful stops being beautiful,

Either by accident or simply in the course of nature.

But your eternal summer will never fade,

Nor will you lose possession of your beauty,

Nor shall death brag that you are wandering in the underworld,

Once you're captured in my eternal poem.

As long as men are alive and have eyes with which to see,

This poem will live and keep you alive.



'Sonnet 18': A Background

- It is unknown whether this sonnet is true or imaginary experience. Some critics say it is from the poet's imagination, while some others say it could be dedicated to the Dark Lady who is a mysterious lady in Shakespeare's life.
- The speaker is the poet himself. He is addressing his beloved.
- The setting (place and time) is said to be a garden, but it is not obvious in the poem.

*What type of poetry is this poem?

It is a sonnet, (14 lines).

*What is the main idea of the poem?

Shakespeare is admiring a woman, and saying that her beauty will never fade because he is putting it into verse. He begins by comparing her to a summer day, and then saying she is much more beautiful.

Metaphysical Poetry (17th C.)

The Metaphysical poets include John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and many other poets. The term Metaphysical was applied by Dr. Samuel Johnson to Donne and his followers. Donne held a special place among the Metaphysical poets because of his influence on the writers of his century. This type of poetry appealed not to the emotions (heart), but more to the intellect (mind). Donne is the originator of the Metaphysical School.



Donne's poetry can be divided into two phases; the earlier phase is characterized by love poems, and the second phase is characterized by religious poems.

Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud

BY JOHN DONNE

Death, be not proud, though some have called
theeMighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must
flow,And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou
then?One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

**What kind of sonnet is “Death Be Not Proud”?
It is a sonnet. It has fourteen lines.**

A/ who is the speaker?

The speaker could be the poet himself. At the time Donne wrote this poem, he was said to be ill. He suffered a fever that brought him close to death.

B/whom is the poet addressing?

He is addressing death (personified).



C/What is the setting?

There are hardly any images of the "physical" world which we usually see in poetry, and that's why Donne's poetry is called metaphysical, as it deals with time and place that are beyond the physical world.

D/What is the atmosphere of the poem?

It is daring, serious and full of hope.

E /What is the message the poet is trying to convey?

Donne tells his readers that death has no right to be proud, since human beings do not die, but live eternally after "one short sleep" called death.

**Glossary	
Mighty	Powerful
Dreadful	Horrible, frightening
Overthrow	Put an end to
Desperate	Hopeless
Poppy	A plant from which opium comes



Explanation line-by-line & Figures of Speech

1-2

This is an example of personification; the speaker treats death like a person who is frightening and powerful. He addresses death directly saying „you should not to be proud, because you are not powerful“.

3-4

Here the speaker says „people are mistaken in treating you as some fearful being, because you are not frightening to me“. In line (4), the speaker addresses death as 'poor death' to scorn and disrespect it. He claims that death may believe (he/it) has defeated those who die, but they do not truly die, because their souls live on in the afterlife.

5-6

In these lines the poet uses metaphor when he calls sleep and rest as pictures of death. These lines mean that death is simply a deeper form or a copy of sleep which is only a short experience in life and so if sleep gives pleasure and rest to people in life the death must be more pleasurable and enjoyable.

7-8

Continuing the personification of Death, the speaker says that good people allow death to lead them out of their earthly lives. They go with death, their bones get their rest in the grave, and their souls are „delivered“ through death, being freed from the human body and from the fear of death, delivered into heaven, in other words, to be reborn.



9-10

In these lines the speaker calls Death a "slave" to "fate, chance, kings, and desperate men." In a metaphor. All these things are personified as Death's masters. In line (10), "poison, war, and sickness" are personified as worthless individuals with whom death lives. Death does not always have the power to choose who is to die, as fate and accidents may suddenly take someone, kings may send people to their deaths, and desperate people who see no hope in life may also take their own lives. Therefore, Death doesn't decide when people will die; he just carries out orders.

11-12

In these lines Donne goes back to sleep/death metaphor. He notes that drugs „poppy“ also have the power to produce sleep, and can even create a truer sleep than death, since death is only a short experience. Again he scorns death with the question „Why swell'st thou then?“ meaning „why are you so proud of yourself then?“ .

13-14

The metaphor extends to these lines „one short sleep“ referring to death. It means that we die for moments then we wake eternally, we will be resurrected to eternal life, never to sleep or die again. Then, death will cease to exist, it will die. The final line, „death, thou shalt die“ completes the idea that death is the one who should be afraid, not the one to be feared“.



Section: 4

* Romanticism (18th C.)

It is an 18th century movement in the arts and literature that emphasized nature, imagination, emotion and the individual.

* Romantic Poetry

It was one branch of the Romantic Movement. The first generation of Romantic poets were primarily Coleridge, William Blake and Wordsworth. The second generation were poets such as Shelley, Byron and Keats. The five poets are now referred to as major Romantic poets.

* The Characteristics of Romantic Poetry:

1. Focus on Individuality, Democracy, and Personal Freedom.
2. The use of Spiritual and Supernatural Elements.
3. Love of nature.
4. Interest in Past History like Ancient Greek and Roman Elements.
5. Celebration of the Simple Life.
6. Interest in the Pastoral Life.
7. Interest in Folk Traditions.
8. Frequent Use of Personification.
9. The Use of imagination.
10. Idealization of Women



***London 1802**

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

***The poem is a sonnet.**

***It is an elegy of Milton; a great poet of the 17th C.**

***The setting of the poem is in its title; the place is London and the time is 1802.**

****Glossary**

Fen	Wet land/ Marsh
Stagnant	Still/ not moving
Altar	The sacred table in the church
Bower	A shady resting place in the countryside
forfeited	Lost



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

***1. When was this poem composed?**

It was composed on Wordsworth's return from France, where he had seen the results of the Napoleon's rule.

***2. Why does the speaker in the poem call up/invokes the spirit of Milton?**

He invokes his spirit to arouse the English people from their indifference (lack of concern) to the crises faced by their neighbors (The French).

***3. Who is John Milton?**

He is a great English poet, who lived in the 17th C. He is a puritan. He was very much concerned with religion, politics, and freedom.

***4. What did Milton do when civil war threatened England?**

He felt he must help the Puritan cause. He used his literary weapon. He also supported freedom and the personal rights of men. He stood up for the freedom of the English people at the time of civil war.

***5. What does the first part of the poem mean?**

The poem begins with a call to Milton, the great English poet, and one of Wordsworth's great influences. The speaker laments the fact that Milton isn't around anymore, when England needs a guiding voice. The speaker condemns the state of the nation, saying that it has turned into a stagnant swamp, and that the English people have forgotten all the things that used to make them great, including religion, military might and literature. He worries that the English—men of his day are too selfish.



***6.What does the second part of the poem mean?**

The speaker wishes Milton could return and give the nation a good old fashioned energy talk. The poet here is certain that Milton could inspire England to greatness once again, and mold its inhabitants into more noble creatures.

***7.What does the last part of the poem mean?**

The last part of the poem presents Milton's high points. The speaker uses celestial imagery to show us how divine he is. Not only is his writing admirable, so was his character. The man could do no wrong. The poem ends in praising the deceased poet's humility.

William Blake

Blake was born in 1757. He was an English poet and painter. He was born in London and died there. During his lifetime he was not very well known. Today Blake's work is thought to be important in the history of both poetry and the visual arts.

'The Lamb' from songs of Innocence'

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,



Making all the vales rejoice!

Little Lamb who made thee

Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,

Little Lamb I'll tell thee!

He is called by thy name,

For he calls himself a Lamb:

He is meek & he is mild,

He became a little child:

I a child & thou a lamb,

We are called by his name.

Little Lamb God bless thee.

Little Lamb God bless thee

***The poem is from Blake's collection, 'Songs of Innocence'.**

***The poem is a lyric. It has two stanzas.**

*** It is in the form of a dialogue between a child and a lamb.**

****Glossary**

Dost	an archaic form of the word „do“
mead	Meadow (land covered with grass)
vales	valley
rejoice	Show great happiness
meek	Quiet and gentle



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

***1. What words or phrases are used to describe the Lamb?**

It is covered with soft and bright wool “clothing”, and it also has a tender voice that makes all those who hear it very happy.

***2. Who is the speaker in this poem?**

He is a little child.

***3. What does the lamb symbolize?**

The lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ. The lamb is also a symbol of life. It provides humans with food, clothing, and other things humans need to survive.

***4. What is this poem about?**

It is about a child who talks to a lamb about who created them.

***5. What is the main idea of the poem?**

The idea of this poem is Innocence.

***6. What does the first stanza mean?**

In the first stanza, the child is talking directly to a lamb. He asks the animal if he knows who created it. Blake writes of the water and food supplied to the lamb, as well as the soft wool and gentle voice of the lamb. The entire first stanza centers on the question of the creator.

***7. What does the second stanza mean?**

This second stanza supplies the answer for the question presented in the first stanza. Blake describes Christ as the creator of the lamb. Since Christ is often called the 'Lamb of God,' Blake also names the similarities between the lamb and the Lord