

Chapter One

The concept of poetry

The term poetry is a comprehensive term which can be taken to cover any kind of metrical composition. However, it is usually employed with reservations, and often in contradistinction to verse. The implications are that poetry is a superior form of creation; not necessarily therefore, more serious.

Verse is a metrical language, but all verse is not poetry; all poetry is not verse. Early attempts to define poetry, such as Aristotle's Poetics, focused on the uses of speech in rhetoric, drama, song and comedy. Later attempts concentrated on features such as repetition and rhyme, and emphasized the aesthetics which distinguish poetry from prose. From the mid-20th century, poetry has sometimes been more loosely defined as a fundamental creative act using language. It often uses particular forms and conventions to expand the literal meaning of the words, or to evoke emotional or sensual responses. Though the term poetry hasn't got one universal definition, so far the term has got different operational definitions at different times by different scholars. Look the following operational definitions:

“Poetry is best words in their best order.” Coleridge

“Poetry is the record of best and happiest moment of happiest and the best minds.”

Shelly

“Poetry is a criticism of life.” Mathew Arnold

“ Poetry is perceived as fictional (One characteristic feature of literary texts arguably is their functionality. People usually agree that literary texts, even if they attempt to represent reality in some form or another, are ultimately products of a writer's imagination and that at least the characters and their conversations are fictitious.)

“ It uses specialized language (It is often said that literary language is ‘special’ and that it differs considerably from normal everyday language);

“ It is also ambiguous (People generally accept the view that literary texts are far more ambiguous and thus often more complicated than non-literary texts. If one reads a recipe, for example, or a time-table or an instruction manual, the meaning expressed in these texts is presumed to be more or less fixed and not open to interpretation).

“Obviously, the individual text lines in poetry do not fill the entire width of the page. Thus, before they have actually started reading, readers of poetry are given an instant indication that what they are going to read is probably a poem. In consequence, a reader’s attention is likely to focus on ‘poetic features’ of the text.

“Poetry is often associated not only with specialized language but with a very dense use of such specialized language. Poems usually try to express their meaning in much less space than, say, a novel or even a short story. Alexander Pope once explained that he preferred to write poetry even when he wrote about philosophy because it enabled him to express himself more briefly.

“as a result of its relative brevity, poetry tends to make more concentrated use of formal elements, it displays a tendency for structural, phonological, morphological and syntactic over structuring, a concept which originated in formalist and structuralist criticism. It means that poetry uses elements such as sound patterns, verse and meter, rhetorical devices, style, stanza form or imagery more frequently than other types of text.

“Some people associate poetry with subjectivity and the expression of intense personal experience. While this is true for some poetry, especially lyrical poetry, there are a great number of poems this does not apply to; for example narrative

poems like Scott's *Marmion* or didactic and philosophical poems like Pope's *Essay on Man* or John Philips' *Cyder*. Just as it is often misleading to identify the author of a novel with its narrator, one should not assume that the author of a poem is identical with its speaker and thus even lyrical poems cannot be treated as subjective expressions of the author. The two levels of author and speaker should always be kept separate. In nutshell, poetic texts have a tendency to: Relative brevity (with some notable exceptions), dense expression, express subjectivity more than other texts, Display a musical or songlike quality, Be structurally and phonologically over structured, Be syntactically and morphologically over structured, Deviate from everyday language, aesthetic self-preferentiality (which means that they draw attention to themselves as art form both through the form in which they are written and through explicit references to the writing of poetry) Devices such as assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhythm are sometimes used to achieve musical or incantatory effects.

Poetry's use of ambiguity, symbolism, irony and other stylistic elements of poetic diction often leaves a poem open to multiple interpretations. Similarly, metaphor and simile create a resonance between otherwise disparate images—a layering of meanings, forming connections previously not perceived. Kindred forms of resonance may exist, between individual verses, in their patterns of rhyme or rhythm. Some forms of poetry are specific to particular cultures and genres, responding to the characteristics of the language in which the poet writes. While readers accustomed to identifying poetry with Dante, Goethe, Mickiewicz and Rumi may think of it as being written in rhyming lines and regular meter, there are traditions, such as those of Du Fu and *Beowulf*, that use other approaches to achieve rhythm and euphony. In today's globalized world, poets often borrow styles, techniques and forms from diverse cultures and languages.

2.1. History and development of Poetry

The term Poetry is derived from the Greek ‘poiesis’ which means a "making" or "creating". Poetry is a form of art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to, or in lieu of, its ostensible meaning. Poetry may be written independently, as discrete poems, or may occur in conjunction with other arts, as in poetic drama, hymns or lyrics. Poetry, and discussions of it, has a long history.

As Historians confirm, Poetry as an art form may predate literacy. Many ancient works, from the Vedas (1700–1200 BC) to the Odyssey (800–675 BC), appear to have been composed in poetic form to aid memorization and oral transmission, in prehistoric and ancient societies. Poetry appears among the earliest records of most literate cultures, with poetic fragments found on early monoliths, rune stones and seals. The oldest surviving poem is the Epic of Gilgamesh, from the 3rd millennium BC in Sumer (in Mesopotamia, now Iraq), which was written in cuneiform script on clay tablets and, later, papyrus. Other ancient epic poetry includes the Greek epics, Iliad and Odyssey, and the Indian epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. The efforts of ancient thinkers to determine what makes poetry distinctive as a form, and what distinguishes good poetry from bad, resulted in "poetics" the study of the aesthetics of poetry.

Some ancient societies, Disputes over the definition of poetry, and over poetry's distinction from other genres of literature, have been inextricably intertwined with the debate over the role of poetic form. The rejection of traditional forms and structures for poetry that began in the first half of the twentieth century coincided with a questioning of the purpose and meaning of traditional definitions of poetry

and of distinctions between poetry and prose, particularly given examples of poetic prose and prosaic "poetry". Numerous modernist poets have written in non-traditional forms or in what traditionally would have been considered prose, although their writing was generally infused with poetic diction and often with rhythm and tone established by non-metrical means. While there was a substantial formalist reaction within the modernist schools to the breakdown of structure, this reaction focused as much on the development of new formal structures and syntheses as on the revival of older forms and structures. More recently, postmodernism has fully embraced MacLeish's concept and come to regard boundaries between prose and poetry, and also among genres of poetry, as having meaning only as cultural artifacts. Postmodernism goes beyond modernism's emphasis on the creative role of the poet, to emphasize the role of the reader of a text, and to highlight the complex cultural web within which a poem is read.

Today, throughout the world, poetry often incorporates poetic form and diction from other cultures and from the past, further confounding attempts at definition and classification that were once sensible within a tradition such as the Western canon.