

The Littlest About Poetry

By

G. M. K.

Introduction

Poet A will have a varying definition of poetry compared to Poet B. This is because no two poets have the same perspective about poetry. Though poets may tend to agree with the different styles of different authors to writing a poem, each poet has his own unique approach to poetry. This freedom of oneself to write poems self-expressively is the uniqueness of poetry and what differentiates it if placed side by side with other genres of literature.

Basically, poetry is a type of literature that communicates differently from the other genres of literature, through the use of concise, structured arrangement of words.

Generally, poems are not as simple as they look or sound like. Not all poems are like the nursery rhymes we sang in our kindergarten. There is more to this genre of literature than meets the eye. Behind this unique simplicity is an entire world full of enthralling mysteries even yet to be discovered. *The Littlest About Poetry* is a little composition that attempts to demystify this mystery - Poetry.

The History of Poetry

Poetry, from the Greek *poesis* meaning ‘making’ or ‘creating’, has a long history. As an art, poetry may outdate literacy itself. In prehistoric and ancient societies, poetry was used as a way to record cultural events or tell stories. Poetry is among the earliest records of cultures with poetic fragments found on monoliths, rune stones, and stela. (Gary R. Hess: *History of Poetry* - www.poemofquotes.com)

Unlike other literary forms that we can date back to precise texts and time periods, it's a challenge to pinpoint the earliest work of poetry. In one form or another, poetry has been around for thousands of years. However, we might think of the epic poem as the first instance of poetry, appearing as early as the 20th century B.C. Jumping hundreds of years ahead, we might turn, then, to the sonnet form and its early appearance in the 13th century. (Audrey Golden: *A Brief History of Poetry* [2015]- www.bookstellyouwhy.com:2022)

Throughout history, poets have been writing about their thoughts and feelings to reach people with similar experiences. Poetry is one of the oldest mediums for expressing one's emotions, and there are many different eras to explore. (Pick Me Up Poetry: *The Historical Timeline of Poetry* - www.pickmeuppoetry.org/the-historical-timeline-of-poetry/)

What is a poem?

The question: What is a poem?

As stated in the introductory page, one would want to define a poem as one sees it. My aim is to make you understand rather than define what a poem is.

From a personal, and the simplest point of view, a poem is any literary write-up in which the sentences are arranged in a vertical array. For instance, let us take this simple write-up: *The boy is going to school to learn A, B, C and D.* To make this look like a poem, it has to be arranged thus;

*E.g. 1: The boy is going to school
To learn A, B, C and D*

But to make it sound cool and nicer to my reader, I will write mine this way:

*E.g. 2: The boy is going to school
To learn A, B, C, that's cool*

I know you got a different feeling when you read E.g. 2, why? Good question!

In E.g. 2, rhyme and rhythm were added to the simple sentence, *The boy is going to school to learn A, B, C and D*, in that case ...*and D* was omitted. This is to say, to cause two lines to be of the same rhythm, some syllables or words might/can be omitted or simply replaced with the adequate words or syllables, as the case may be.

Now, *The boy is going to school* is made up of six words of seven syllables in total, *To learn A, B, C, that's cool* is also made up of seven syllables. We can see why we nodded our heads when we read both lines; it was danceable. The rhythm was brought in place when we ensured that both lines were made up the same number of syllables.

It would not have been enjoyable or captivating if we left our small poem as it was in E.g. 1. To want to make the reader go over that poem twice, we made both lines rhyme; making them end with words of similar phonic or sounds.

From the above, we have discovered two elements; ingredients or spices, of a poem: Rhythm and Rhyme.

You remember those nursery rhymes you sang, like *Twinkle, twinkle, little stars* and the rest? They were not written to be sung, but because of the rhyme and rhythm embedded in them, they were easily changed to songs. What easy, dreamy magical transformation! That is one of the beauties of poetry.

It would please you to know that a whole new gigantic world can be created by judiciously utilizing all elements of this tiny poetry- if only one knew all of them. This world created by poetry is often imaginary; only the reader's mind can conceive it. And a non-poet reader might not fully grasp the mightiness of this world because his or her horizon still craves for this particular transcendental world of literature. Discovering more and more ingredients of the subject matter is the easier way of defining it.

Rhyme and Rhythm are one of the foremost elements of a relevant poem. Any poem lacking the two is usually uninteresting. All the different forms of poetry are results of the breakdown of these two elements.

Elements of Poetry

The elements of a thing are what make up that thing as a whole. As such, there are the needful that must be undertaken when we take to write a poem. If you are just getting started in writing poems, when we get to know the elements of poetry, you will be able to write magical poems. It is like getting to know all the features of Microsoft Word Office, what a beautiful document would you create!

- Imagery

The Greek *poesis* means ‘making’ or ‘creating’; creating what? - creating an environment that a reader can consciously participate in through the subconscious. Imagery arouses a reader’s senses, causing them to have a sight, to be able to hear and perceive and taste of an entire imagined world. A writer can paint a picture, cook a delicious meal, sing a melodious song and release a fragrance with words. How can a poet do this? By using the adequate wordings that can entice the senses. As it is the aim of every form of literature, so as in poetry, the use of well descriptive words, language and grammar enhances this sensory encounter. Hence, imagery is the most important element of poetry. When you tell a story that cannot be understood, it is because you lack the right words that describe such a story. Each kind of tale has the appropriate words that can best convey the message of the tale.

- Rhyme

We have briefly understood what rhymes are from the little illustration above, but let us dive in deeper. Rhymes are words that rhyme. Funny! When a word is said to rhyme with another word, it means both words share a similar sound. Technically, rhyming words end with the same sound. Let’s take the words *school* and *cool* as used in E.g. 2; they both end with *-ool*. However, their meanings differ, so do their initials differ but their phonic sound alike, causing them to rhyme. Therefore, *school* and *cool* are two

different words that rhyme. Let us examine two stanzas of the well-known poem, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* by Jane Taylor

*Twinkle, Twinkle Star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.*

*When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle all the night.*

The first and second lines of both stanzas end with words that rhyme- *star* and *are*; *gone* and *upon*. So do the third and fourth lines of the two stanzas rhyme too- *high* and *sky*; *light* and *night*. We can observe clearly that in some of the rhymes, the words have similar spellings, while others don't. Nevertheless, they still rhyme.

- **Rhyme scheme:** The rhyming of lines one and two, as well as three and four, is not coincidental. It is as a result of the use of the rhyme scheme - AABB in stanza one, and CCDD in stanza two. Different forms of poetry have their rhyme scheme and rhythmic meter. Like the Limerick poem that consists of five lines, rhyming AABBA, and the English sonnet, a fourteen-line poem of four stanzas, with the rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

- **Rhythm**

Rhythm is created in a poem with the use of a calculated number of syllables in each line. The various poems that exist have different rhythmic meters. Like the English sonnet that is written in iambic pentameter. This alone makes the English sonnet the most brain-

working poem to write. Other poems require different rhythmic meters.

Apart from imagery, the most important, rhyme and rhythm; there are other elements of poetry. Let us explore them and broaden our horizon.

- **Figures of Speech**

There are multiple figures of speech, but we shall consider the most used in poetry.

- i. **Simile:** the use of 'as' or 'like' to compare two nouns. E.g. Dubai looks like heaven; Karan is as fast as a cheetah.
- ii. **Metaphor:** comparing of two nouns without using 'as' or 'like'. E.g. Dubai is heaven; Karan is a pig (meaning Karan is dirty).
- iii. **Personification:** giving human-like attributes to objects that are not alive; giving life to inanimate objects. E.g. the trees waved their leaves as I walked by.
- iv. **Alliteration:** the repetition of a consonant sound at the beginning two or more words immediately succeeding each other. E.g. Father Francis fried five fish for five French friends from France(repetition of *f* at the beginning of each word)
- v. **Assonance:** the occurrence of vowel sounds though with different consonants, in same succession as in alliteration. E.g. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers(repetition of the short *e* and long *i*)

- **Density**

Poetry is a more concise type of literature because of this element. Density is what sets poetry apart from prose. Density is how much is talked about in a little period of time. The ability to use the figures of speech like metaphor and personification, with an embedded rhythm provides a greater density.

There are other elements of poetry, but the enlisted above can suffice to begin to write any form of poetry.

Forms of Poetry

Poetry is another form of arts, and arts can be exhibited in different forms. Some writers tend to say poems can be of types, but as an art, poems should only be of forms.

There are several forms of poems, ranging from the simplest compositions like the Haiku and Cinquains to the intensely sophisticated compositions like the sonnets.

- **Haiku:** is a simple poem of a three-line stanza with a 5/7/5 syllable count that focuses on beauty and simplicity found in nature, encompassing simple moments in life. In the 5/7/5 syllable count, the first line contains 5 syllables, the second line consists of 7 syllables, and the third 5 syllables. The Haiku is a Japanese poem defined by specific rules- go check them.
- **Cinquains:** (also known as a quintet) is a short poem of five lines, hence the name. Adelaide Crapsey, the inventor of this poem, got her inspiration from the Japanese Haiku. Cinquains describe a person, place or thing.
- **Free verse:** is the most practiced form of poetry since it has no strict rhythmic meter to follow. Free verse gives the freedom to choose words at convenience, conveying meaning to the reader. Free verse can be short or long, contain rhymes and rhythm or none. Contemporary poets find the free verse convenient for their poetic expression. It is the right poem for improvisation.
- **Blank verse:** is not blank as the name conveys. It is a poem written in regular metrical lines that are not rhymed.
- **Epic poems:** are lengthy poems that tell a story about a hero, extraordinary triumphs and adventure.
- **Acrostic poems**
Acrostic poems are also known as name poems. In an acrostic poem, names or words are spelt out with the first letter of each line

of the poem. Each line of the poem contributes in describing that name or word. Let us describe POEM acrostically.

***P**ervading subtly into the subconscious*

***O**pening ancient locks, thus releasing antiquities*

***E**motions gushing forth after so long a bondage*

***M**oments with the art of poetry are so*

(N.B: This Acrostic poem is a spontaneous poem penned at the moment of writing this page of the booklet.)

The first letters do not necessarily have to be bold and large as in the example given. That was done for emphasis, and for the clarity of the reader.

- **Sonnets**

A sonnet is a 14-line poem in iambic pentameter. It is a line of a verse consisting of one short syllable followed by one long syllable. An iamb is two syllables. Iambic pentameter is 5 sets of two syllables. It means that each line of a sonnet contains 10 syllables; the first syllable is unstressed, the second syllable is stressed. There are different forms of sonnets and they are mainly differed by their varying rhyme schemes, stanzas, and themes, but the iambic pentameter is maintained. Below are they:

- i. **English sonnet:** consists of 4 stanzas with the most traditional rhyme scheme- ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. William Shakespeare is the famous poet that explored this form of sonnet. His themes commonly covered the ideas of love, lust, danger, beauty, mortality, and responsibility.
- ii. **Italian sonnet:** (perfected by the Italian poet Petrarch is also called the Petrarchan sonnet) is divided into two sections: an eight-line stanza (octave) rhyming ABBAABBA, and six-line stanza (sestet) rhyming CDCDCD or CDECDE. Love is the most common subject of Petrarchan sonnets.

- iii. **Spenserian sonnet:** (named after the inventor, Edmund Spenser) comprises of three interlocked quatrains and a couplet, with rhyme scheme **ABAB BCBC CDCD EE**. A quatrain in poetry is a series of four lines that make one stanza. A couplet is just two rhyming lines. Now, the quatrains, i.e. the first three stanzas, are interlocked in the sense that, the last line of the first stanza rhymes with the first line of the second stanza, and the last line of the second stanza also rhymes with the first line of the third stanza. It resembles the English sonnet because they both consists of three quatrains and a couplet. Spenser's sonnets deal a lot with the ideas of love too.
- iv. **Miltonic sonnets:** (named after the English poet John Milton) bears a resemblance with the Italian sonnet, comprising two sections too: an eight-line stanza (octave) rhyming **ABBAABBA**, and six-line stanza (sestet) rhyming **CDECDE**. Unlike the other sonnets and sonneteers that linger around love and romance, Milton focused his sonnets on politics, intellectual pursuits, moral issues and spirituality.

Conclusion

Poems, according to me are a medium of catharsis. Through poems, a writer is able to convey emotions in the most concise manner. This beautifully unique art, and genre of literature that makes use of words to awaken the senses of the reader in a world so strange, yet they get acquainted with soonest.

Some are unaware of the beauty of this piece of artistry. Others have some surficial misconceptions about this art and do not make headway to understanding it. Many desire to fathom this form of literature, unfortunately, just a few get embraced by her outstretched arms. As they say, “All poets are writers. But not all writers are poets.” We all, writers, might be able to convey meaning through our different grounds of communication, but not as poetry does.

I hope that by now, my dear reader might have gotten, if not an in-depth knowledge, an inkling of what poetry is, how poems are written and how to go about the different forms of poetry, utilizing the various elements of it.

It doesn't stop here. It has just begun. Continue to learn and practice this art. And relish every moment of it, hoping to be counted among the great poets of this age, someday.