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**Lecture Two: Types of Literature**

**Part Two: Poetry**

**Introduction**

The world of literature is composed of three genres, types, or classes. They are poetry, drama, and prose. Each one of them is particular in the way it is produced and in terms of form (language structure and textual structure) and in terms of content, tone, and the way it is produced (style and technique of writing). These genres are universal i.e. they are known in all cultures and produced in all languages of the world.

**Poetry**

Poetry is ancient and predates other literary genres. It existed in primitive or uncivilized cultures through its oral form and still exists in modern and developed cultures through its written form. Poetry is delivered in verses (lines) that obey a specific structure: “poetry uses elements such as sound patterns, verse and meter, rhetorical devices, style, stanza form or imagery more frequently than other types of text” (Lethbridge &Mildorf, p. 142). Poetry sounds musical. It is imaginative and carries a lot of emotions. It may also portray a story. Furthermore and according to Hollander (2001), not all poetry uses all these elements, and not all texts written in verse are poems (p. 1). Yet, poetry, in general, relies on the aesthetic and the beauty of language expression.

**Definition**

Following its literary nature, Poetry is defined by many authors and from a different point of view. Here are a set of definitions:

* The kind of thing poets write (Robert Frost)
* The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings (William Wordsworth)
* The recollection of emotion, which causes a new emotion (William Wordsworth)
* Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude (John Stuart Mill)
* When we read a poem something happens within us. They bring to life a group of images, feelings, and thoughts (Stageberg& Anderson)
* Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things (Mathew Arnold)
* Poetry teaches the enormous forces of a few words (R.W. Emerson)
* Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to help reason (Samuel Johnson)
* Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best mind(Percey Bysche Shelley)

The producer or the author is called a “poet” and the product of poetry is a “poem”. The poem is a literary text written in verse. A text suggests an expression of thoughts, feelings, and experience. It can be serious as it can be funny. In a nutshell, poetry is the human artistic motivation that comes to the expression of delight, melancholy, skepticism, trust, depressions, and many other human emotions and thoughts.

**Characteristics of Poetry**

A poem seems to be specific in terms of their forms and content and it can be discerned according to some features which are summarized from Müller Zettelmann’s book (2000, pp. 73-156):

* The poem is generally shorter than other types of literary texts (with some famous exceptions like the Epic Poem which is very long)
* Condense expression
* It conveys subjectivity more than other literary texts, mainly Lyrical Poetry like sonnets. However, Narrative Poetry displays a considerable touch of objectivity e.g. Scott’s *Marmion.*
* It sounds musical or songlike feature
* Its language is distinct ( different) from our daily language (excellent, ambiguous, beautiful)
* Its artistic aesthetic form is well displayed and different from the daily language.

**Types of Poetry**

Poetry is divided into two main types that are distinguished in terms of form and content: lyrical poetry and narrative poetry.

* **Lyrical Poetry**

Lyric poems are relatively brief; they do not tell a story. The poet displays his feelings or his reflections. This type has some features of a song. Previously, lyric poems were associated with an instrument called a *lyre* (draw the lyre on the board). This category of poetry contains many subgenres of poems like the elegy, ode, and sonnet.

* **Elegy**

In the 17th the term elegybegan to be restricted to its most frequent present usage: “a formal and sustained lament in verse for the death of a particular person, usually ending in a consolation” (Abrams, 1999, p. 72). Therefore, it is a poem written to grieve and mourn a dead person; it is also called a lament poem (1850). It treats subjects of death and loss. For Example Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*. More widely the word elegy is additionally used for grave contemplations and death questioning.

* **Ode**

A long lyric poem that is serious in focus and treatment, superior in style, and complicated in its stanzaic structure. Norman Maclean thought the term reminds a *lyric* which is "massive, public in its proclamations, and Pindaric[[1]](#footnote-1) in its classical prototype" (quoted in Abrams, 1999, p. 198)

This poem expresses feelings of nobility and dignity; it is written in a very high style. It is a lyric poem that looks like a song. The ode sounds like music because it is more fashioned with sound patterns and figures of speech. We have two most known odes in English poetry which are W. Wordsworth’s *Hymn to Duty* or Keats’ *Ode to a Grecian Urn*. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Ode, to the West Wind* and William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality.*

* **Sonnet**

It started as a love poem that tells about the love subjects and the agony of lovers. First, it was known in Italy. Then, after the translation of the Petrarchan sonnets by the British authors, it got to be well known in Britain within the Renaissance. Since the 17th century, the topics of the sonnets did not exclusively treat love matters, but other themes were treated too. Religious themes were discussed in the sonnets of Milton and John Donne. War and chaotic themes were discussed by Brooke and Owen and other topics also. Still love subject were the most important themes treated by the most known poets like Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Michael Drayton who followed Petrarch. The sonnet is written in fourteen lines but they differ from one writer to another in terms of stanza forms. There are two known sorts of sonnets, the Petrarchan also called the Italian sonnet. It comprises two stanzas an octave (8lines) and a sestet (6lines). Some English poets follow Petrarch type of sonnet e.g.

* Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “How Do I Love Thee?”
* John Milton, “On His Blindness”
* John Donne, “Death, Be Not Proud”
* William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18, 1609. “Shall I compare thee to summer’s day?”

The Shakespearean also called the Elizabethan or the English sonnet comprises three quatrains (4lines each) and an ending couplet (2ines). The separation provided in the flow of ideas in both.

Lyrical poetry shows other types but, less important than the aforementioned three types. E.g. dramatic monologue e.g. Browning's *My Last Duchess*, occasional poetry e.g. Spenser’s *Epithalamion,* and epithalamion e.g. Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis*.

* **Satire**

is a poem in which the poet means to attack, insult, or criticize something or someone. A satire can be full of humor, irony, or sarcasm to bring laughter; trying to expose the many vices or follies found in a society. A satire is not at all a reflection of pleasure for the part of the poet but it is an expression of anger and disapproval of things the satirist is often against. Famous British satirists are Charles Dickens, and Alexander Pope. They tried to mock the stupid, the villain, and the snob, in addition to the moral dissolution of upper classes and religious deviations. E.g. Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Sea Dreams* and Byron George’s *The Vision of Judgment*

* **Pastoral**

It is deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet's nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting in contrast to city life. The originator of the pastoral was the Greek poet Theocritus, who in the third century B.C. wrote poems representing the life of Sicilian shepherds. ("Pastor" is Latin for "shepherd.") Christopher Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*

**Narrative Poetry**

Narrative poems tell a story. The poet plays a role comparable to that of a narrator in a fictional work. He represents detailed events of a story interwoven in dramatic representation and a plot. This kind of poem “survives only in a written form, had originated and evolved as oral-formulaic poetry” (Abrams, 1999, p. 200) which are mainly transmitted by singers or reciters. . This type of poetry may tell love or heroic stories. The most known subgenres of narrative poetry are the epic and the ballad.

* **Epic Poem**

The epic poem is a very long imaginative poem and well elaborated and detailed in terms of the themes and the events of the story. It tells about the establishment of a country telling about its founder and heroes and tells a way of life in a very long period. Its linguistic style is very high and difficult. The characters are not only human beings but also supernatural and mythical creatures. Virgil, Homer, and Milton are all writers of very famous epics. One can cite Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Homer’s *The Iliad,* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy.*

* **Ballad**

Ballad is a short narrative popular poem. It is originally a traditional song of an anonymous creator that is orally transmitted among people. These folkloric songs had been associated with the “peasant origin”. They are defined by Krappe (1930) as “lyric poems with a melody which originated anonymously among unlettered folk in times past and remained in the currency for a considerable time” (quoted in Pound,1945, p. 217).

Modern ballads are written in a direct and simple style and deal with everyday life comedies and tragedies. They are written in four or five-line stanza. Among the most known English ballads we may cite:

* John Keats, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*
* Edward Arlington Robinson, *Richard Cory*
* William Butler Yeats, *The Fiddler of Dooney*
* **Limerick**

It is a type of usually narrative poetry used for bringing fun through jokes and vulgar funny anecdotes. It is a humorous poem of five lines where the first, the second, and the fifth verses rhyme together and are distinct from lines number three and four in terms of the number of feet in each line. E.g. Edward Lear *Book of Nonsense Verse*

1. The greatest lyric poet of ancient Greece (Pindaros) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)