

English Literature 1

Poetry

Lecturer-in-charge

Gert Buelens: Gert.Buelens@UGent.be

Co-lecturers

Eloïse Forestier: Eloise.Forestier@UGent.be

Tine Kempenaers: Tine.Kempenaers@UGent.be

Fauve Vandenberghe: fauvdnbe.Vandenberghe@UGent.be

Tessel Veneboer: Tessel.Veneboer@UGent.be

Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1. What is Poetry?.....	3
1.2. Basic Terminology	6
2. Typography and Layout	10
3. Register.....	13
4. Figures of Speech	16
5. Rhythm and Metre.....	23
5.1. The metrical structure of a line of verse.....	23
5.2. Metrical variation	24
5.2.1. Metrical Substitution	24
5.2.2. Catalexis	25
5.2.3. Caesura	26
5.2.4. Run-on lines or enjambment (as opposed to end-stopped lines).....	26
5.2.4. Tension between poetic metre and natural speech rhythm.....	29
6. Sound Effects	30
6.1. Rhyme	30
6.2. Other Sound Effects	31
7. Poetic Forms.....	33
7.1. Blank Verse	33
7.2. Heroic Couplet	35
7.3. Ballad	36
7.4. Sonnet.....	40
7.5. Free Verse	48
8. Extra Poems.....	50
9. Works Cited.....	51

POETRY

1. Introduction

1.1. What is Poetry?

1. Upon Julia's Clothes

Whenas in silks my Julia goes
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free,
Oh, how that glittering taketh me!

(Robert Herrick (1591–1674))

2. As to the general origin of the poetic art, ... two causes gave birth to it ...: (1) Imitation is a part of men's nature from childhood ... as is the fact that they all get pleasure from works of imitation. ... And since imitation is natural to us, and (2) melody and rhythm also ..., at the beginning those who were endowed in these respects ... gave rise to poetry out of the improvisational performances.

(Aristotle (384-322 BCE), *Poetics* 48b4-24, translated Gerald Else)

3. It has often been asked, What Is Poetry? And many and various are the answers which have been returned. The vulgarest of all – one with which no person possessed of the faculties to which poetry addresses itself can ever have been satisfied – is that which confounds poetry with metrical composition.

(John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), from "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties")

4. It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet (no more than a long gown maketh an advocate).

(Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), from *The Defence of Poesy*)

5. I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of eye –
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –
Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –
(Emily Dickinson (1830-1886))

6. A working definition:

Poetry is language in which every component element—word and word order, sound and pause, image and echo—is significant, significant in that every element points toward or stands for further relationships among and beyond themselves. Poetry is language that always means more. Its elements are figures, and poetry itself is a language of figures, in which each component can potentially open toward new meanings, levels, dimensions, connections, or resonances. Poetry does this through its careful, intricate pattern of words. It offers language as highly organized as language can be. It is language so highly patterned that there is, ideally, a reason or purpose (or rather, many) for each and every word put into a poem. No word is idle or accidental. Each word has a specific place within an overarching pattern. Together they create meaningful and beautiful designs."

(Wolosky 3)

7. **This is Just to Say**

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

(William Carlos Williams (1883-1963))

1.2. Basic Terminology¹

- **Verse** (noun): (1) a synonym for **poetry**; (2) a formal synonym for a **line** in a poem; (3) a synonym for a **group of lines** in a poem. Here we will use ‘verse’ only in sense (1), ‘line’ for sense (2) and ‘stanza’ for sense (3).
- A **stanza** is a group of verse lines forming a section of a poem and sharing the same structure as all or some of the other sections of the same poem, in terms of the lengths of its lines, its metre, and usually its rhyme scheme. Stanzas are distinguished by the number of lines they contain:

Two lines: *couplet* ['kʌplɪt]

Three lines: *tercet* ['tɜːsɪt, (Am.) 'tɜːr-]

Four lines: *quatrain* ['kwɒtrem, (Am.) 'kwɑ-]

Two tercets can form a *sestet* [ses'tet], two quatrains an *octave* ['ɒktɪv, (Am.) 'ɑk-].

- Poems that have no stanzaic structure, but are composed as a continuous sequence of lines of the same length and metre (e.g. poems in blank verse (see 6.1.)), are called ‘stichic’ ['stɪkɪk].

Poems consisting of loose groupings of lines (i.e. ‘verse paragraphs’, whose length is determined by the development of the sense rather than by a formal stanza pattern) are called quasi-stanzaic.

- Titles of long poems – that are published separately – are italicized (e.g. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*), titles of short poems – published in a volume – are put in between double quotation marks (e.g. Carol Ann Duffy’s “Valentine”).

¹ Most definitions were taken and/or adapted from the Lexicon of Literary Terms at www.schrijven.ugent.be, which is linked to the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun, 5
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first, 10
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime, 15
You may forever tarry.

(Robert Herrick (1591–1674))

Choric Song

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentler on the spirit lies 5
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And through the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep, 10
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

(Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), from “The Lotos-Eaters”)

Valentine

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
like the careful undressing of love. 5

Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
a wobbling photo of grief. 10

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful 15
as we are,
for as long as we are.

Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding-ring,
if you like. 20

Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

(Carol Ann Duffy (1955 -), "Valentine")