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“History of Poetry”

Poetry, from the Greek poesis meaning 'making' or 'creating', has a long history. As an art, poetry may out date 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 most cultures with poetic fragments found on monoliths, rune stones, and stelae.

The telling of stories about history have been used up until the 20th century, and in some cases, it is still in use today. During the Middle Ages, Ballads were a common way of doing just this, and

it was also a way to pass along news throughout the kingdoms. Today, Ballads are not used in the same way. However, Odes, for example, have been and will always be a way to tell stories about histories greatest feats.

The Epic of Gilgamesh often is cited as one of the earliest works of epic poetry, dating back to the 18th century B.C. Consisting of Sumerian poems, it's a text that was discovered through many different Babylonian tablet versions during archaeological excavations. The poem, based on the history of King Gilgamesh, was written around 3000 BC in Sumer, Mesopotamia in cuneiform script on clay tablets. Ancient societies such as the Chinese Shi Jing developed canons of poetic works to ritual, as well as aesthetic, importance. Recently, intellectuals have struggled to find a definition that covers the entire poetic compass from the differences of haiku to Shakespearean to slam poetry. Tatakiewicz, a Polish historian of aesthetics, wrote in *The Concept of Poetry* "poetry expresses a certain state of mind." This view point has been growing in popularity every year. Today, even media that doesn't involve words has been called poetry; for example, paintings and classical music.

Aristotle's *Poetics* describes three genres of poetry: epic, comic and tragic. Aristotle's work was highly influential throughout the Middle East during the Islamic Golden Age, then through Europe during the Renaissance. Later, aestheticians described poetry to have three major genres: epic, lyric and dramatic, with dramatic

holding the subcategories tragic and comedy. During early modern Western tradition, poets and aestheticians sought to distinguish poetry from prose by using the understanding that prose was written in a linear narrative form and used logical explication, while poetry was more abstract and beautiful.

Modern theorists rely less on opposing prose and poetry as to focusing on the poet as an artist. Intellectual disputes over the definition of poetry had erupted throughout the 20th century resulting in rejection of traditional forms and structures of poetry, coinciding with questioning of traditional definitions of poetry and its distinction between prose. More recently, post-modernists began to embrace the role of the reader and highlight the concept of poetry; incorporating its form from other cultures and the past.

Other examples of early epic poems might include the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the latter of which has become an important narrative in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology throughout regions of Asia.

A list of the most notable works of epic poetry—at least in the Western world—would have to include the Iliad and the Odyssey, both works of Greek mythology that have been attributed to the poet Homer. Written in dactylic hexameter, the Iliad recounts the battle between Achilles, a famed warrior, and King Agamemnon during the Trojan War. A companion of

sorts to the Iliad, the Odyssey depicts the long journey of its hero, Odysseus. Although these poetic works initially were composed thousands of years ago, even modest collectors can seek out translations for their libraries. For instance, you might look for T.E. Shaw's 1951 translation of the Odyssey, published by Oxford University Press.

By medieval times -- about 455 to 1485 -- poets began to play with both the subject matter and language of their poems. Some medieval poets, like Geoffrey Chaucer, even experimented with writing in the language of the common people, known as **vernacular**. Before that, most scholarly and artistic works were written in Latin.

During the Renaissance period (1485-1660), poets got even more creative. They developed new structures and forms of meter. Playwrights like William Shakespeare and Thomas Marlowe incorporated poetry in their plays, in what is known as **verse drama**. Structures and styles, as well as adding layers of meaning to poems, became very popular.

During the Enlightenment period (1660-1790), there was a big interest in returning to the styles of the classical Greeks. There was a lot of emphasis on formal styles and discipline in writing during this time.

During the Romantic period (1790-1830), on the other hand, there was a big departure from the methods of poets during the Enlightenment. The Romantics were all about finding new ways to express themselves. Romantic writers focused on individuality and nature, and valued creativity over logic. Poets, like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, explored new forms and themes during

this time. In the United States, new poetic styles emerged out of the **transcendentalist movement**. Transcendentalists wanted to break away from the established institutions of society. Like the Romantic writers in England, they focused on creativity, nature and individuality.

During the Victorian period (1832-1901), writers continued to break away from the established forms and structures that had been developing during the previous literary periods. Poets like Walt Whitman began writing in **free verse**, or completely without meter.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, there have been many changes to the way poetry is written and read.

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