Literary Genres: Poetry

**Definition of Poetry:**

* Poetry is perceived as fictional, it uses specialized language, in many cases it lacks a pragmatic function, it is also ambiguous.
* It is a mode of writing that is as focused on rhythm (a strong, regular repeated pattern of movement or sound that creates a musical effect), metre (The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables to create a melody), and sounds as on meaning and communication. It specifically emphasizes the interaction of sound and sense.
* Poems usually try to express their meaning in much less space than, say, a novel or even a short story.
* 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 or didactic and philosophical poems like Pope’s *Essay on Man*.
* Whatever its function, poetry has closer ties to performance than prose does: even when not read aloud (as poetry originally was in all cultures), poetry is concerned with the auditory and visual way in which it strikes its audience.

**Purpose of Poetry**

* It may range from religious rituals to popular entertainment.

**Origins of poetry:**

* Poetry was traditionally composed to be spoken aloud or to be sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Our earliest ancestors sat together around campfires, then later at feasts to pass on their history by telling stories. Some of these stories have come down to us through many, many generations. One way of telling these stories is through songs.

**Kinds of Poetry**

* **Lyric poetry:** expresses personal thoughts and emotions. Common forms include sonnets, odes, and elegies, but lyric poems may just as well be written in free verse.
* It is comparatively short non-narrative in which a single speaker presents a state of mind or an emotional one.
* It retains some of the elements of song which is said to be its origin.

**Elegy**

* It is a formal mourn for the death of a particular person. Broadly defined, it is also related to serious thoughts on questions of death. Tennyson In *Memorian*

**Ode**

* It is a long lyric poem with a serious subject written in elevated (high, prominent) style. One example is Wordsworth’s Hymn to Duty.

**Sonnet**

* It was originally a love poem which dealt with the lover’s sufferings and hopes. It originated in Italy and became popular in England in the Renaissance.
* From the 17th c. onwards, sonnets were also used for other topics than love, for instance for religious experience, reflections on art, or even the war experience.
* The sonnet uses a single stanza of usually 14 lines and an intricate (complex, difficult) rhyme pattern.

**Occasional Poetry**

* It is written for a specific occasion like a wedding.

**Narrative Poetry**

* It tells a story in verse form. It is a relatively long form of poetry that contains all of the necessary elements for a story, including plot, characters, setting, theme, and dialogue. Narrative poems generally rhyme, make use of regular meter, or play with sound through assonance and alliteration.

**Epic Poetry**

* Epics are long narrative poems recounting the deeds of legendary or historical heroes. The oldest epic in English is **Beowulf**, the story of an Anglo-Saxon hero who defeats a man-eating monster. The oldest epic from the Middle East is Gilgamesh, which tells the story of a man who loved his friend so much that he went to search for him in the land of the dead. Greek epics tell the story of the Trojan War in the **Iliad** and of Odysseus’ journey homeward from that war in the **Odyssey.** Some of these epics are still used for the basis of modern plays and films.

**Modernist and Postmodernist Poetry**

* Modernist poetry rejected poetic traditions, it embraced the unregulated rhythms of free verse
* It consciously reexamines the nature and function of poetry.