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FREE

POET-TREE

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Yes, but what is poetry?

Robert Frost: "Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words."

Rita Spalding: "*Poetry is emotional photography.*"

Mary Couch: "*Poetry is artistry that speaks in colorful words.*"

Michael Ervin: "*Poetry is enlightenment.*"

Rupert Chapman: "*Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.*" - William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads

Sheila MacCallum: "*Poetry is painting with your eyes closed.*"

Michael Duckwall: "*Poetry is the canvas, the paint, the brush and the hand that speaks with each stroke...it's also the rinse cup where every thought that has escaped the poem dwells.*"

Millard See: "*Poetry is a verbal way to express the beauty of each day.*"

Mary Coulter: "*Poetry is the bending of words to your will.*"

JL Kato: "*Poetry is altered reality. It seeks the miracle in the mundane. It adds the extra to the ordinary.*"

Bill Cushing: "*Poetry is the history of the human soul.*"

Courtenay Nold: "*Poetry is a gift to the senses and an expression of thoughts, feelings, emotions and, most of all, life.*"



Article Corner - Mary Couch

Evolution of Poetry

Poetry has a long and varied history, and dates back at least to prehistoric times with hunting poetry in Africa and to nostalgic and plaintive court poetry of the empires of the Nile, and Volta River Valleys. Most of the earliest known poetry was a form of Epic Poetry, some of which dates back centuries before humans began writing down their stories.

Poetry's evolution stems from cultural shifts, literary movements, and technological advancements, which lead to changes in form, structure, and themes, allowing diverse voices and experiences to be expressed. Initially, poetry served as a way to preserve oral traditions, myths, and religious beliefs. As civilizations arose, poetry expanded beyond simple storytelling and investigated human experiences, ethics, and philosophy.

The Renaissance period saw a revival of classical forms and themes, along with the emergence of new poetic styles and genres. By removing the necessities of rhyme or strict stanza length, blank verse allowed poets and playwrights to narrate, meditate, and soliloquize at any length through capacious five-stress lines that (it was believed) approximated the duration of a single breath.

The 20th century witnessed a break from traditional forms, and poetry started to change. Poets like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens experimented with new styles. They moved away from strict forms and used free verse (poetry without regular rhyme or rhythm) and blank verse (poetry with a regular beat but no rhyme). In contrast to traditional poetry, modern or contemporary poetry is much more flexible and does not follow a specific form. It is typically written in free verse, which does not require any specific rhyme or meter. Contemporary poetry often uses more accessible language familiar to modern readers. This era further challenged traditional norms, embracing fragmentation, irony, and a focus on language and its limitations.

Styles of poetry emerged such as **Romanticism**: Emphasized emotion, individualism, and the beauty of nature; **Realism**: Focused on portraying everyday life and social issues straightforwardly; **Symbolism**: Used symbolism and imagery to convey abstract ideas and emotions; **Surrealism**: Explored the subconscious mind and dreamlike imagery; and **Confessional Poetry**: Poets like Sylvia Plath and Allen Ginsberg explored personal experiences and emotions with raw honesty.

Poetry further evolved due to Technological Advancements such as the **Printing Press**: which made poetry more accessible to a wider audience; **Mass Media**: Films, recordings, and online platforms have broadened the reach and influence of poetry; and **Digital Publishing**: Online journals and self-publishing options have democratized the publishing process, allowing more poets to share their work.

Through the years changes in form and structure evolved. **Traditional Forms:** such as sonnet, haiku, ballad, etc., have evolved over time, with some forms becoming more or less popular. **Free Verse:** The rise of free verse, which abandons traditional rhyme and meter, and allows for greater flexibility and experimentation. **Other Forms:** Poetry has also incorporated elements of other art forms, such as music, visual art, and performance. **Contemporary Poetry:** Often uses more accessible language and explores contemporary issues, making it more relatable to modern readers. **Diverse Voices:** Poetry has become a platform for marginalized voices and perspectives, reflecting the diversity of human experience. **Poetry as a Tool for Social Commentary:** Poets have used their craft to address social and political issues, raising awareness and sparking dialogue.

Although there aren't any hard and fast rules for writing poetry, there are some fundamental guidelines to keep in mind: 1) Show, don't tell. The goal is to provoke an emotion in the reader. 2) Less can be more, not all poems need to be long as short poems with the use of specific words can display deep meaning, and 3) It's okay to break grammatical rules when doing so helps you express yourself.

For me, Ekphrastic poetry (poems written to art) and Haiku are the truest form of artistic writing.

Haiku Form

azure sea island
borne from ancient skeleton
life from death reborn



Pixabay Image

Ekphrastic Form

What lies beneath the surface?

Within azure sea, a knoll gently bobs beneath day's sunny warmth. Its rugged rocky surface ablaze with lush jade foliage teeming with the sounds of birds squawking amid chittering of chimpanzees. Life here is tranquil and serene, untouched by human presence. The island floats upon cerulean waters with depths unknown. Yet, what lies beneath its surface? What did it come from? Could we but look beneath, and see, it's fashioned from the remains of an ancient skeleton dinosaur head. Its rocky structure is naught but the weathered bits and pieces of what once was the mightiest creature that ever ruled the earth. Life begets life even in death from displaced bones a sanctuary in the middle of an azure sea appears, and bears a world within a world untouched by human hand. Strange how something good can be born out of something tyrannical. Yet here, life remains beautiful and serene. If only, there were more places like this in the world.

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Perry Armstrong

How Beautiful the Day

How beautiful this day I see
If it be the last that He lends to me!
When so many died that I'd be free
This Saturday present from a past memory!

Many know of the days of the past
When dark clouds loomed, and it was overcast!
When men would fight and breathe their last
Days long gone, so quickly they have passed!

Some were outnumbered, but never outclassed
When entered in, they thought it a blast!
Where rushed on through, like a spell was cast
Physicals given, some would be first, others last!

Why must it always be thus so
When forgotten memories of so much woe?
Not taught in schools, as far as we know
How far away from home so many had to go!

We see the sun shining upon us this day
So many members of family have gone away!
Nobody writes a letter anymore, I must say
How ancient has become our Ford Model A!

How beautiful the day that might have been
For those who served, never to be seen again!
Some few are still alive, with those old memories
Of sunlit days they saw overseas!

Some may still honor, for someone else, they might please
Gone from the past, like leaves fallen from the trees!
So long gone, until there are no more memories
Of brave young souls, for our victories!

Are there names in newspapers anymore
Of those who died in some far-off war?

So young and brave, going on before
How many died, on some distant shore?

Some saw their friends with unseeing eyes
Upon the ground, as a soft snowflake flies!
Still alive, watching as a loved one cries
Back home again, lying under these sun-filled skies!

Jonathan S. Baker

Flowers for the woman he met on Tinder

after "Four Flowers in a vase", Blanche Hoschedé-Monet

She put them in a Halloween glass
with a fading black cat
and a flaking sheet ghost.
It was the closest container,
an act of the least effort,
close at hand and completely empty.



Onward Downward

after "Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2" by Marcel Duchamp

She is 23 different women
 sauntering down his staircase
 each having a reason to leave
 each step a delightful decision
 trailing apprehension like snakeskin



Privilege

after "Fountain" by Marcel Duchamp

Here I am
going gaga for a replica.
No one ever saw THE real thing,
not in the flush.

Is it art?

Is it art?

art? Art! ART!

Artists and patrons and critics
basking barking on sea shores
schmucks on holiday
just a get away from
being normal and content.
Summering in the affectations
of academia.
Playing at higher education.
Barking like little
yippee dogs in the purses
of the fabulous.
This is luxury
but is it art?



Tony Brewer

Big Red Jupiter Storm Spot

The big red Jupiter storm spot
is finally fading away

Imagine a hurricane lasting
longer than agriculture has existed
running out of breath
the moment our cameras good
enough to capture it click

or the supernova three wise men
mistook for the star of Bethlehem
or the sunshine cloudburst
trapping you & me beneath a tiny awning
long enough to smile & flirt

& then disperse into obscurity
Moments savored into miracles
who don't believe in chance
or astrology & yet
here we are connecting dots
with a pencil &
erasing when we make mistakes

Haiku

death rattle Monday
cicada trapped in my house
his love winding down

Osage Arts Community Fragments

Though we sat near horses
we could not figure it out
The Earth made of so many things
each one feels like an outsider
We beckoned with sweet grass
from outside the fence & still

the horses would not come
We had gifts but they knew
we would be leaving soon
all the grass they needed
was already under their noses

* * * *

Back home
after the rain
I caught it in a glass
made of ear
the porch candle now
has water for fuel
I think
we're hungry
my matches
will be made
out of books

The moment we discovered a dead bird in the woods

some were solemn some squealed with delight
most hung back to watch & wait
knowing this was only the first time
Grief a unique hurt the young wade
into swift waters they know are overhead
It's still moving but its motivation is maggots
of even more delight
Jotting items on a grocery list
I'm overwhelmed by Dad crying fallen
in the bathroom last time I saw him alive
no kids around this time
They used to say leave a baby
bird untouched at the base of its tree
I can't hear anything long moments
of such sorrowful keening
you'd swear every blowfly
has a soul ripped into being
into and/or out of death
uncertain as a child
screaming with the others
in the woods

Parking Lot Trees

Modern roots
stable parking lot trees
barely reach

beyond a truck top
shadeless
birds perch
on taller halogens
glaring tiny moons
clicking on at sundown
shallow roots
nowhere to run
no drama in landscaping
curbed trunks
asphalt comes from the Earth
sand & gravel
a whiff of manure
mixed with mulch
baking to slow
traffic

why not cutouts
of children
or deer decoys?
keep your ride
inside the lines
remember
where you left it
lost in barren
wilderness

How's the Weather

Somebody says "That's it –
that's the last cold day –
spring is comin' now"
& I wonder what planet
they're talking about
that doesn't try to kill
what just started to grow

O let them have their myth
of attractive gods
in our own image
I can't shoot the weather down
even though there's April
to get through

Impending doom should not stop
anyone from planning
The cleaving of earth
with the hands is therapeutic

Scout close enough together
to shut out the light
It's snowing again today
I tried but couldn't
keep it to myself

I Saw the Moon

I saw the moon
in my rear view
mirror & a hawk
on a power line

& yet my eyes
were on the road
behind me blurs
into a twilight

Tree lines cup
the car like hands
holding us blue
in the moment

before potholes
dishevel us
Focus like hi-beams
bounce the oncoming
My rear view
is a strobe of lost
thoughts & drivers
keeping it together

Michael Brockley

“Both Sides, Now” at the 2022 Newport Folk Festival

Joni Mitchell is seated in a large chair on the Newport stage, wearing sunglasses and a beret that changes color as the film crew’s camera angles shift. When the hostess, who is dressed in a coat of many colors, asks if the historian of the heart’s whims will sing another song, the author of “Chinese Café” and “The Circle Game” agrees, and enters “Both Sides, Now” with a robust contralto. The artist the Yellow Quilt First Nation calls Sparkling White Bear Woman has put aside the American Spirits that eroded her mezzo-soprano range and still wrestles with colors that crawl upon and bite her skin. Now, as Mitchell sings about clouds and love and life, the woman in the coat of many colors nods and covers her heart with her right hand, her lips remaining still even as she draws the microphone closer to her mouth. In front of the stage, couples sway from side to side. Like “Big Yellow Taxi” and “Help Me,” everyone knows the words. The feather canyons dizzy dancing among circus crowds. Mitchell’s gray hair is tucked behind her face by the beret and her voice carries over and through the crowd that has gathered to honor this champion of love’s pleasures and pains. A voice like an instrument strummed with the confidence honed in recording studios and on untold stages. As the familiar melody swirls about the open-air venue, the host rests her microphone in her lap. And Mitchell’s solo accents the lessons of love gleaned from the ageless song. *The illusions life has dappled upon all the lives she has sung to.*

On the morning after my 74th birthday,

I water the flowers in my pollinator garden. Coneflowers, yarrow, and the oxeyes which will replace the wayward black-eyed susans next summer. The mystery plant with the single green bud has recovered from being replanted and bears what might be a flower that will look like a praying mantis. I fill the water buckets from the spigot, which I transfer into a watering can so I might sprinkle the perennials in the yard and the annuals I’ve potted and clustered on the back porch. The lantanas and zinnias are prospering this year, but the marigolds haven’t bloomed as the calendar moves toward the end of the eighth month. The tithonia is not even knee-high. It’s been a season for the cabbage butterflies to flutter before me as I carry water buckets along the garden path, but the fireflies vanished after I noticed the first scout in early June. The monarchs and dragonflies never arrived. Now coneflower pistils thicken with brown seeds, and the yarrow pollen are past their prime. Maybe the bee balm will persevere into fall as might the sedum drifts. Some mornings I sing while I water the bases of the plants in my garden. Songs about women I was once lovesick for. I still hum to the floret that suffered transplant shock and promise the black sedum a brighter spot in the sun closer to the house next spring. I mist the oxeyes and the marigold leaves that remind me of ferns before the heat drives me indoors. *How will any butterflies find their way to this afterthought garden?*

Mary A. Couch

Haiku's

weather-beaten house
observes empty metal chairs
home's spirit serene

mesa verde dust
scattered shards of flint and bone
ancient ghost remains

scraggly old oak tree
limbs bent in raging rain storm
squirrels safe haven

last lonely leaf falls
joins brethren on forest lawn
oak quivers in wind

wisps of silver mist
mingle with oak tree's shadow
harvest moon awaits

aspens sway in breeze
hear nature's rhythmic music
feel oneness of life

beneath barren oak
chinooks melt ivory snow
yellow crocus blooms

undulating streams
visions of gold and crimson
tropical sunset

petal reflections
hidden within jasmine perch
ghostly butterflies

chrysalis on branch
secrets tawny new monarch
springtime renewal

two paths mid trees
one worn down by many feet
choose the untrodden

ancient redwood trees
staunch guardians of nature
yet who protects them

leaves of rainbow hue
jitterbug across blue sky
harvest storm's remains

walking the snow-crust
squirrels search for sustenance
leave pictograph trail

Mary Coulter

What if there was a new Sound?

What if there were a new sound?
One the ears have never heard,
A new key that the hands have never touched
Or mouth has ever uttered.

What if there was a new sound?
One the generations have not developed,
Or never passed down throughout time.

What if there was a new sound?
A new verse; A new hymn.
A new rhyme; A new staph.

What if there was a new sound?
Would we know it?
Would we feel it in our souls?
Would it awaken us to the sunrise of a new day?

Would it be the sound of Heaven's gate opening?
The sound we have been longing to hear,
The sound of the ages being sung by angels in
unison,
Flowing down like a soft cloud from a
mountaintop.
What if there was?

Black Noise

In my turmoil-riddled brain, I am. I am there but
I am precarious.
All my rage, all my joy, all my beautiful
realizations spark at me like fireworks on the
fourth of July.

But, rumbling closely beneath the surface, white
noise simmers.

Constant buzzing in the depths, just beyond reach
and reason, threaten to pivot my high wire act.
Ever charging my movement, ever threatening
my being. It never lets me rest, it never lets me
sleep, it never lets up.

In an act of desperation, I choose to take my
meds to silence the hum.
Jumping off the edge of insanity, I will leave me
behind, entangled in white noises web.
Days turn to nights and meds turn to light.
All noise is still, all hum is hedged.
Here I am in the stillness of the noise that is not.
The black noise of sanity.

Dennis Dean

A train is between me and my destination.
The sun beats down on my arm that is hanging
out the window.
A warm breeze passes between me and the sun.
Cars lined up for half a mile, must be a long one.
For a time, Dennis Dean was the king of these
machines.
Riding the rails from Port Huron, Michigan to
Ohio and back again.
Crisscrossing Michigan day in and day out,
Pushing the limits is what he was all about.
When an Engineer checks in, he cannot walk off
the job.
He boards, he sits, he is the train.
He was weathered and tan, wrinkled to
distinction.
Worn and torn by the burden of the big machine.
He drank himself into oblivion.
He used drugs to run the roads after work,
And party when the day was done.
He drove his body into the ground,
A driving force beyond the momentum of his
train.

Leaving Grief Behind

Awakening to a lifted spirit
Am I leaving you behind?
Buried deep beneath despair
Previous passions did not survive the journey to
now.

I felt inspiration simmering
Bubbling up to the surface today.
In my elation I was not thinking of you.
The last time I wrote, you were here.
After six long years I still grieve.

But today I took up the pen once again.
I was inspired to create something new.
Then as the pen touched to paper, it was you that
fell on the pages.
I remembered you again.

Sadness overtook me when suddenly your
memory caught me by surprise.

You dwell in my grief.
In my grief you are woven with every gradation
of pain.
Suspended in my longing for you to be nearby.
Can I walk towards happiness and still have you
with me,
Or will you fade away?

It has been so long that I cannot remember when
I was not in pain.
Can I cross that line hoping you will still be
there.
Can I pluck you from griefs grip and keep you
here.
No longer in my grief but in my happiness.
In my heart where you belong.

Bill Cushing

MIRRORED IMAGES (for Jo Jo and Mom)

Two women sit, threading fingers,
intertwining generations.

Hands weave like vines of ivy
crawling along an ancient tree.

The mother—withered, infirm—
droops in the chair as she stares

at the other, her eyes vacant,
coated by the film of age.

The daughter—vibrant, lively—
rests soft palms over gnarled skin

that sags above bony fingers,
knuckles stiffened by arthritis.

So, the parent, now docile,
becomes nurtured by the child.

LAS CROABAS

Plank by plank,
the snowy egret
approaches, stalking
a crushed milk carton

as a sliver of moon
drops, waiting
between the fading light
of today and the dropping

of night's velvet
curtain that reveals
an array of stars
uncensored by the glow

of shopping centers.
A chorus of coquis,
playing percussion,
ushers in morning.

A BRIEF EULOGY FOR AN ATHEIST

“Death is a part of life,” say the living, yet
many people will bear burdens to get
one extra day—one reason to admire my father,
a man whose creed rejected even the notion
of an afterlife, then turned down
a chance to go on since it meant
he'd have to exist unable to engage
with the company of people.

AT PETE'S HUT ONE SATURDAY NIGHT

Cue balls scatter,
clicking through the Marlboro haze
thick enough
to choke a horse.
He wheels around, bearlike hand
gripping the edge
of fading felt.
He stops, says,
“Let's put that puppy right there.”
Then, aiming from
an otherwise
awkward angle,
slaps a clean cross-table shot into
the side pocket.

Three girls, sitting
on a bench, watch
as the winning continues.
He is handsome:
broad shoulders, a square
face, framed by
a dark beard, breaking into wide smiles.
And were it not
for the broken
lower half
of his body,
he might have left the place that night
and gone home
with any one of them—
or all three.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

They work as a team.
Some shovel dirt,
clearing the way;
others follow
leveling earth,
grading the new path
with blades,
laying down
a road that becomes
an artery.

Buildings go up—
the tall ones for offices,
hotels, apartments—
a few
houses.
Intent,
the workers continue,
stopping only
when mothers mount
front stoops,
calling out

"Suppertime!"

MARY, COLIN, AND ME

The moon hangs suspended
balanced between three stars
this autumnal February evening.

He's Libra, balanced; you, I,
Pisces—water signs:
tonight a lunar Trinity.

And I'm thinking of him
and you, and his eyes—
your eyes when you allow,

And I think how when
I hold him, I hold a part
of you, and sometimes
that's enough.

A PRAYER TO REJECT SANCTUARY

Let me live
alive,
unnumbed by the sedative of
too much comfort,
too much security.

Let the pain of age and isolation
sharpen my senses,
hone my soul
into a spear tip of exploration,
excommunicated from
the swaddling of outside help.

Keeping children safe
presents its own danger.
I was battered and bent,
dented in a thousand ways;
past damage altered me.
Every scrape and scar, each cut or burn,
ordained me into
the one I became.

THE BETWEEN DAYS

(written on the 23rd day of the 2020 lockdown)

We now spend all our days
surrounded by wonders
of this age, trapped between
new lines of safety, drawn
farther out, to become
margins of solitude,
forcing isolation.
This pox is not our sin;
rather, this other life
relies upon our lives.
This virus is trying
to live, between us, like
all of God's creations.

These selections appear in *Just a Little Cage of Bone* (Southern Arizona Press, 2023: finalist, 2024 American Writing Award)

Bill McCloud

OLD MEN (play chess in the rain)

She watches as the old men
play chess in the rain As
they sit in the pouring rain
As she sits in the pouring
down rain She watches She
wants to study and learn
and remember all she possibly
can about the pouring down rain

SHE WATCHED (as dinosaurs became birds)

She listened as the professor
droned on and on But
she was also using the time
to read ahead in the text
She had a few questions
she wanted to ask but
didn't know who she could
possibly address them to So
she closed her eyes felt herself
drop into a deep sleep and
she watched while the
dinosaurs evolved into birds

Yvonne Morris

Before Light - Haibun

At dawn, I am watching the field behind my house. A shape waits there, forming against the gradual sky. What appears to be a woman bending toward the ground becomes instead an alert doe. She raises her head, alone and beautiful. Although I only see her outline, I know how to recognize deep grace in the shadows. I open the door and step out to let her sense me, to warn her that I am human—a potential threat. But she doesn't startle, only turns slowly toward me to share the mystery before light.

Light knows the shadows
An open door embraces
Animal spirit

Lylanne Musselman

Alert - Haiku

ring-billed gull shrieks
danger lurks for feathered friends
eagles search for food



Photo: Pixabay

White Pelican Pair - Haiku

White pelicans glow
with breeding bumps visible:
nesting imminent.



Photo: Pixabay

Haiku Sonnet

Spring greenery grows,
the redbuds burst like fireworks,
young squirrels scamper.

Yellow daffodils bloom,
The colorful tulips dance
in gentle spring wind.

Dogwood trees dress white,
lilac bushes spread their scent,
hummingbirds return.

Songbirds gather round
a full feeder in delight,
chirp their gratitude.

It's spring in Indiana –
nowhere else I want to be.



Photo: Pixabay

Courtenay Nold

The Flying Pig

Cinderella was my favorite story because it reflected aspects of my life. I tried to keep all of the laundry washed and the kitchen clean of messes created, then neglected, by half a dozen other humans at my abode. I did what I could to make my siblings' lives at least a little bit fair. The librarian waived the age limit and allowed me to take out twenty books at a time so I could have more to read, for myself and them. Stomachs growled not for sustenance but for connection. Pets served as a surrogate muse, forming fragile and temporary affinities. I spent fifteen years in Ballet with silken ribbons and satiny shoes, hiding torn and bloody toes. I was part of acting and dance performances for many audiences, with theater seats never once filled by family.

Seeing things I wished I hadn't. I locked away the pain in a million tiny vaults. I prayed for survival, but attacks still rattled inside my skull, tearing apart ragged threads of association and ushering in thoughts of self-destruction. Mom's jewelry was tried on only in my mind because, in echoed silence, it was all taken away by my older brother, adding more bricks to a wall that was already quite formidable. That iron pig with wings is the only thing I ever gave my Mother that she accepted and valued. It seemed that trying to feel love was part of an unending battle, for her and me. I almost gave up once or twice, dancing a thin line upon a scythe blade; between life and death. The sands of time offered a slippery slope on which to climb, and yet I remained. A battle within and without, but I always emerged undefeated.



Photo Pixabay

Chris Ryan

Haiku's

Evidence of life
Loneliness a slow-acting
But fatal poison

A troubled some man
Sketch in stone, an epitaph
Leaves behind a song

A homeless woman
Elements overbearing
No arms to die in

A gentle sunlight
Able to grow anything
Humble farmer's life

A dying mother
Goodnight till we meet again
Remain in the heart

Dancing sheets in wind
Flutters though midnight hour
Refusing cross over

Lazy apprentice
Hippos dance in tutus
Fantasia vision

Petals in shadows
Illuminating light shines
Conquering darkness

Gliding through the night
Beacon conquers misty fog
Deception no more

Red eye can see you
Caution with your yellow nose
Go with your green tongue

Golden sun rising
Nature's beauty to behold
Until midnight moon

Water to explore
Fantasy treasures unknown
Dive in deep to seek

Mango nectarines
Blooms within the morning dawn
Cream soda flowers

Chilly winds blowing
Frozen Rain falling from sky
Melts into puddles

Sweet strawberry wine
Mixed with fungus toe jam
True sweet bitter taste

Gigantic glacier
Slowly becoming snow-broth
To form five great lakes

A single blossom
Poetic in its beauty
Nature's artistry

Itching within time
Counting down final freedom
Breaking from soft shell

Rocky Mountain cliffs
Extraordinary danger
Clear breathtaking view

Clean sheet of paper
Folded into masterpiece
Transformation art

A Bride's Betrayal

It was to be a wonderful eventful day. The bride-to-be was finishing up the final touches, dress, hair, and makeup. Her mother gave her an old heirloom barrette to pin up her hair. Her father had bought her a new pendant necklace. Her best friend let her borrow her earrings. Her brother gave her a blue corsage for her wrist. The bride linked arms with her father, getting ready to walk down the aisle. To their surprise, the guests did not have smiles on their faces. Instead, horrific panic shown on their faces for the groom was not standing at the altar. He had abandoned her. Devastated, she threw down the bouquet of flowers, to run from the church. The bride ran until she collapsed onto an old rickety bridge. She cried so hard feeling heartbroken and betrayed. It took her some time before she stopped crying. She started to pull herself up, but the rotted wood rail of the bridge broke. She tumbled into the raging river below. The current carried her wildly, dragging her under water. She was swept to the waterfall, but there was nothing to grab on to save her. She went over, hitting jagged rocks on the way down, leaving her lifeless body to be found on the river bank.

Tragic betrayal
A painful suffering end
Her spirit lives on

Unexpected Outcome

I remember a time when I worked at a laundromat, this guy comes in carrying a big hunter green duffle bag. He started filling up a top loader with laundry out of this bag. It was a slow business day, and I decided to chat with him. Come to find out, he just moved to town staying at the local campsite. He wanted to get away from the drama as he put it. He was headed for the capital, but thought about how he liked the town. Somehow, we ended up talking about food, made him hungry. So, I felt bad for the guy, thinking that he must be struggling, with no place to live and hardly anything to eat. So, I asked him if he liked coney dogs, which he told me yes. So, I was thinking of going next door to Dairy Queen to buy us one. But before I could make my way over there the phone rang, and I got sidetracked answering it. After I was done with the call, I looked up and the guy was gone. A few minutes later he come walking in with a sack from Dairy Queen pulling out two coney dogs and handing them to me as he pulled out a couple for himself. I was surprised for his kindness. I told him, I was getting ready to go over there to buy him one, because I thought he was struggling. He told me he had money to get by.

A thoughtful kindness
Expect the unexpected
Turn-about fair play

Adrienne Stevenson

2010-06-24, 07:30

my Gran had a carpet like this one full of elephants' feet
all similar but not identical, because life isn't perfect

I used to sit on the top step of a folding step-stool
and fish with a string tied to a yardstick, for carpet-fish

this carpet, a gift from my in-laws, is overlooked
by bookcases that hold books and family memorabilia

including framed photos of nineteenth-century people
like the one lying here, my Dad's great-grandfather

which stood quite calmly until the day of the earthquake
when it, alone among many, leapt to the middle of the room

I was in the front yard, saw the P wave happen
it rippled the bricks in our interlock driveway

all the neighbours erupted from their front doors
saying did you feel that?—I *saw* it, I said

the epicentre was miles away, somewhere in Quebec
up the Gatineau, so there was no noise in Ottawa

but we felt it, right back to the fifth generation
a reminder that carpets may not be what they seem

some attract flying objects, some contain
dreams of fish and elephants' feet



Dennis White

Cinquain Chain Bouquet

petals
fall one by one
she loves me, loves me not
anxious suitor awaits outcome

daisy
chain coronet
prettifies gold spun hair
wild scented bouquet steals my breath

roses
scent precedes way
for bewitching delights
flowers thriving in pale moonlight

orchid
blush against
pearliest silken cheek
love blossoming, she hums softly

bluebells
fragrant echo
returns scenes of love past
forget - me - nots in violet/blues

pale hues
arc across sky
long-imagined moment
fanfare of yellow trumpets blast
love you

Grandma's Doilies

Grandma's doilies
Were strategically placed
On all her end tables,
Like pale, off white snowflakes,

complimenting rich mahogany tones.
Each were lovingly tatted
By Grandma's knobby, knurled hands,
Individual works of art carefully made,
Gracing her comfortable home
And expressing her creative thoughtfulness.
Their elephant tusk hue
Were delicate reminders
To protect the wood surfaces
They sheltered from scratches,
Preserving the natural wood beauty.
Grandma would always put
Her very best doily under
Her crystal candy dish, that she kept filled
With delicious, hard raspberry candies.
Today, that doily and candy dish
Are displayed in a place of honor
On my wooden fireplace mantle
With sweet memories of Grandma.

Whispering Trees

In the shadows, standing, barely touching you,
A hand to hold when winds begin to blow.
My leaves you brush when the storm's about to brew
And nestles close with whispers, speaking low.

Our roots go deep, fed from a common spring,
With sparkling waters and richest soil around.
On solid foundation our dreams take wing,
Then soar above, forsaking not the love we've found.

Ah! Birds of heaven nest among your boughs-
And young have eaten fruits my branches give
Could we ever forsake our love somehow...
Or leave this place in which we both do live?

We're side by side in mutual respect,
We'll weather each storm and share the sun's sweet rays,
As shade and fruit trees, intermingled in the love we reflect,
We'll never be alone all of our days!

Bill Cushing

What does “Poetry” mean?

In 1989’s *Dead Poets Society*, instructor John Keating, played by Robin Williams, demolishes academic orthodoxy by having his students rip out pages of their textbook titled “Understanding Poetry,” an academic screed by one J. Evans Pritchard, Ph.D. It becomes a liberating act in the lives of these prep-schoolers and reveals Keating’s boundary-breaking love for the written word. It also convinces the audience to join in the anarchy that leads to true appreciation for the poetic art, as it can be when freed from any establishment rule.

Still, I believe that those who delve into poetry as a serious artistic form of expression do need some guidelines—a starting point if you will—as to its nature, especially given how poetry can adhere to “traditional” formats of structure (haiku, imayo, madrigal, ode, sestina, somonka, sonnet) or form (verse, meter, rhyme scheme) yet also shatter them completely.

I also believe that understanding any topic requires the ability to define it, so how does one define poetry? As opposed to the fictional Dr. Pritchard, I plan on opening the discussion on a wider plane by considering some of the answers to that question I’ve run across over the years before arriving at my preferred definition.

Let me start with some personal background: I came to poetry in an unexpected way as a college journalist who, decades ago, attended a media conference. One workshop, “How to Improve Your Writing,” proved a very short lecture. The woman conducting the seminar told us, quite directly, “If you want to get better at writing anything, start writing poems.”

She stressed that poets learn to use language by compressing imagery onto the page. A poet’s challenge is in packing as much into every word as possible by using language efficiently and economically—almost to the point of being stingy. This squares with Adrienne Rich’s assessment that poetry is “a concentration of the power of language” or Rita Dove’s view that “poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful.”

Our seminar speaker challenged us to try it when we returned to our lives. Taking up her challenge, I discovered my first poem the next day while eating breakfast in a diner.

I say “discovered” because I have come to believe few of us actually “create” a poem; rather we find it somewhere along the way and then present our discoveries as creatively as we can. As Jean Cocteau observed, “The poet doesn’t invent. He listens.”

Once I became involved with poetry, journalism never again held the same interest for me. Later, as an instructor myself, I loved the challenge of “teaching” poetry by (with any luck) opening students’ eyes to the wondrous beauty—or horror—that awaits them in the poem.

As a classroom lecturer, preliminary information has to sneak in at the onset, and that returns to defining what poetry is.

That is where both the fun and the madness begin. One of the first definitions I ran into as an instructor came from a textbook that declared poetry as “an arrangement of words into patterns predetermined by the poet.”

Okay, but so is graffiti or text messages or advertisements, yet I don’t consider them poems although they can utilize poetic devices. Besides, how often are our poetic patterns “pre-determined?” Not very. What have others said?

Robert Frost said, in his poetic and mystical fashion, “Poetry is the kind of thing that poets write.” Equally ambiguous but still fascinating is Carl Sandburg’s view of the poem being “an echo, asking a shadow to dance.” Khalil Gibran saw it as “joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.”

Those are interesting views on how poetry operates but do not really serve as an actual definition of the term.

Eventually, my personal quest became trying to locate and isolate the ideal definition of poetry? Edith Sitwell defined it as “the deification of reality;” William Wordsworth saw it as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings [taken] from emotion recollected in tranquility.”

It turns out that—for me, at least—the superlative definition of poetry came at the most unlikely of moments from the most unlikely of sources, specifically a fellow student with whom I shared a train ride. I was returning to Florida from Vermont when I met a young Canadian passenger, also involved in poetry. At one point, I brought up my standard question of “what is poetry” to see how my fellow traveler responded. That was when the Canadian said, simply and surely, “Poetry is the history of the human soul.”

And there it was, the “Eureka” moment in my search for an answer. I repeat: “Poetry is the history of the human soul.”

This summary works both literally and literarily.

Bear in mind that the Greeks used the poetic form to record historical events since rhyme and meter allow for retellings with no requirement for literacy. Moreover, what is history other than the written record of contemporary events for the sake of later consideration and reaction?

As a subscriber to literary historicism myself, the statement also satisfied my belief that writing is more than a reflection of the writer; it represents the time of the writer’s existence.

Poetry is “historical” as well by virtue of its ability to relate more than events or circumstances. It also captures image, emotion, tableau, vignette, or any of the other many possibilities of recording for posterity.

Aristotle saw poems as being “finer [. . .] than history [since] poetry expresses the universal and history only the particular.”

Thus, “poetry is the history of the human soul.”

When my traveling companion—whose name I confess having forgotten—said what he did, he not only defined the term in only eight words, he expanded my own view and perception of the genre, allowing me to take a giant step in my own approach to both reading poems and crafting my own work.

I have never encountered a better statement since, nor do I bother asking any longer—unless it is simply for the joy of recounting this event and revelation.

“Poetry is the history of the human soul.”

Amen to that.

