Poetry

J Piirto, Ashland University, Ashland, OH, USA

This article is a revision of the previous edition article by Jane Piirto, volume 2, pp. 409–417, © 1999, Elsevier Inc.

Glossary

Canon A body of literary works said to define the tradition.
Foot A group of syllables serving as a unit of meter, in verse: for example, *spondee* (two accented syllables); *iamb* (one unaccented syllable preceding one accented syllable); *trochee* (one accented syllable preceding one unaccented syllable); *anapest* (two unaccented syllables preceding one accented syllable); *dactyl* (one accented syllable preceding two unaccented syllables).
Free verse Rhymed or unrhymed poetry composed without attention to conventional rules of meter.
Image and imagery A figure of speech, especially metaphor or simile; a representation of a thing.
Line Phrase or words that make up a theoretical pattern of verse: for example, *dimeter* (two feet), *trimeter* (three feet), *tetrameter* (four feet), *pentameter* (five feet), *hexameter* (six feet).
Meter Measured, patterned arrangement of syllables in lines of poetry according to stress and length.
Mimesis Imitation or representation.
Muse One of the nine goddesses who presided in Greek mythology, over art, literature, and the sciences. The spirit that inspires a poet.
Poem An arrangement of words in verse, always rhythmical, sometimes rhymed, expressing facts, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech, sometimes in meter, sometimes in free verse.
Poesis Making or invention.
Rhyme Correspondence of end sounds in lines of verse or in words.
Rhythm Regular recurrence of grouped strong and weak, stressed and unstressed, long and short, high-pitched and low-pitched syllables arranged in feet or cadences, in alternation.
Stanza A group of lines of verse forming one of the units of a poem.
Symbol A sign that refers to or stands for another thing, usually abstract.
Verse A sequence of words arranged metrically in accordance with some rule or design.

Definition

A poem is an arrangement of words in verse, always rhythmical, sometimes rhymed, expressing facts, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful. Poetry is of poems.

Introduction

Poetry is the oldest form of literature. It is characterized by meter, rhythm, rhyme, and/or verse. Called by many the highest of the linguistic arts, it is written by poets. (The obsolete term 'poetess' is no longer in use, as both male and female practitioners prefer to be called poets.) Both poetry and the other form of literature, prose, are distinguished in that they are written from the imagination. Poetry, however, is metrical or at least cadenced. Poetry is an art form in which every word, punctuation mark, capital letter, line break, rhyme, rhythm, and stanza have meaning. Poetry is an art form in which things always mean more.

Kinds of Poetry

Lyric Poetry

Lyric poetry has a strong emotional component, using imagery, especially of nature. The emotion is compressed with attention to sensuality. Lyric poetry has its origins in musical singing, chanting, and reciting to accompaniment. By the Renaissance, however, the bard (singing and strumming poet) gave way to the lyric poet who wrote to be read and not for a musical presentation.

The lyric poem came to have its own rules:

1. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49) said it must be brief;
2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) said it must be unified and metrical;
3. William Wordsworth (1770–1850) said it must be "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings";
4. Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) said it should be subjective, personal, and intense;
5. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) said it should be "an inverted action of mind upon will";
6. John Stuart Mill (1806–73) said it should be concrete, like a brief overheard conversation;
7. Northrup Frye (1912–91) said it is "an internal mimesis of sound and imagery";
8. Herbert Read (1893–1968) said it is "the imaginative prehension of emotional states";
9. James Joyce (1882–1941) said it is where the poet "presents his image in immediate relation to himself."

The relation of the form to music is apparent in that the words of songs are still called 'lyrics.'

Lyric poetry includes not only popular and folk songs, drinking songs, hymns, lullabies, and love songs, but

philosophical poetry, dream visions, satire, odes, epigrams, sonnets, and elegies. Lyric poetry has its traditions in all cultures and geographical regions. In recent years, it has taken digital form, using hyperlinks to visual and kinetic elements and even texts generated by machine.

Narrative Poetry

Narrative poetry includes the epic poem, the romance, the ballad, the verse tale. The narrative usually tells a story of historical import. Narrative poems are difficult to categorize metrically, as sometimes they look like prose, and sometimes they use strict meter and verse. An example of the former is John Clare's *The Badger*; an example of the latter is Byron's *Don Juan*.

Dramatic Poetry

Dramatic poetry imitates speech, and is exemplified by the Greek tragedies, Shakespeare's plays, Molière's work, Goethe's *Faustus*, Pushkin's *Boris Gudonov*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Shange's *For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*.

History of Western Poetry

Each national and ethnic group has its own revered and special poetic heritage. Because this encyclopedia is written in English and published in the United States, within the sphere of the roots of that language, this brief history will concentrate on the history of western poetry.

The first poet of the Western canon was Homer, who wrote the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* circa 2000 BCE, yet poetry is much older than Homer, who wrote from oral traditions dating from as far back as the eighth century BCE. Poetry is older than writing. In the Judeo-Christian canon, much oral poetry was captured in the Old Testament, especially in such books as the Psalms. One of the most common forms of poetry was the hymn, an ancient Greek liturgical genre. Hymns have been found in all cultures, including aboriginal, Oriental, and African. Hymns were religious verses which praised the gods, heroes, or patriotic or religious abstractions.

Poetry was the spoken form of hymns and songs. By the fifth century BCE, Socrates (470?–399? BCE), Plato (*c.* 428–347 BCE), and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) were functioning as critics of poetry, and their works formed the first literary criticism. Poetry was described as being about heroes, gods, and common people; poetry was of concern to the public; poetry was itself a form of entertainment and delight to the people; poetry was touched with the divine, inspired by gods or Muses; poetry was both an art and a craft; the poet was secular, not a priest, prophet, or god. In Socrates' dialogue with Ion, Plato defined poetry's themes:

> Is not war his [Homer's] great argument? And does he not speak of human society and of intercourse of men, good and bad, skilled and unskilled, and of the gods conversing with one another and with mankind, and about what happens in heaven and in the world below, and the generations of gods and heroes?

In his dialogues, Plato viewed poetry as both inspiration and imitation. Poetry was a gift possessed by poets, and Socrates said it was not an art but "an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you." The divinity was like a stone magnet that attracted iron which in turn attracted other iron. The Muse inspires the poet who inspires others.

> All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. (*Ion*)

Poets fall under the spell of music and meter.

> For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him; when he has not attained this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles. (*Ion*)

Yet Plato also thought that the poet was an imitator. That is, the poet committed these inspirations to written language which is imitative, a *mimesis*. The language is referential, that is, representative of the emotion and captures the emotion through certain linguistic conventions such as metaphor, simile, and other figures of speech – as well as through imagery, rhyme, rhythm, and sound. Poetry as mimesis was inferior, as it was but an imitation, a copy, of the real form which existed in the ideal, nonmaterial world. Thus poetry was not truly creative, as it was written or oral representation and not original. This idea lasted until the time of the romantics in the eighteenth century, when poetry became *poesis*, or making. In Plato's *Republic*, the poet was to be relegated to a lesser height than the politician because of this imitative representation.

To Aristotle, however, poetry was more true than history because the poet could fabricate truth from the elements of history rather than exhaustively tell the facts. The poet is able to tell the truth on a deep level, being able to see the patterns, and the overarching themes. Aristotle said:

> The distinction between historian and poet . . . consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. (*Poetics*)

Though Aristotle spoke of the forms of poetry called drama (tragedy and comedy) and the epic poem, subsequent critics and thinkers have credited Aristotle with denoting the true nature of poetry. Poetry can capture the inner essence of a situation whereas history cannot. This idea about poetry was not to resurface in any major way until the late seventeenth century. Until then, poetry was often viewed as a branch of logic.

> Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. (*Poetics*)

The fact that poetry spoke of universal truth was the aspect of poetry that attracted the romantics in the eighteenth century and up to the present. Unlike the classicists of the Middle Ages and the neoclassicists of the seventeenth century, who produced poems in strict Platonic imitation, *mimesis*,

the romantics and later poets did not focus so much on the prescribed forms with their prescriptive line lengths in certain kinds of syllabic meter (i.e., iambic, trochaic, anapestic, and the like), but instead focused on the Aristotelian idea that the poem speaks more truly of a situation than a historical text could. The poem defined the inner reality. It was constituted of inner truth and not outer conformity to verse standards.

The poet thus was thought of as a seer, someone who could probe to the inner depths. However, the poem was not mere psychological essay, but a form of art evoking the Aristotelian fear and pity, a sense of beauty and of awe in both the poet and in the audience with its wedding of words and the elements of rhythm, rhyme, and stanza. The purpose of the poem was not to persuade, for that is the purpose of rhetoric and not poetry. The very form of the poem combined with the elements of poetic syntax, and put together with the denotative 'meaning' created something beyond meaning, inseparable from the form. The words of the poem form sound, a pure, nonintellectual substance heard by the ear and resounding within the throat or the breast. Mimesis was thus combined with poesis.

Nineteenth century romantic philosophers debated the meaning of the sense of beauty (fear and pity) evoked by the poem (imagination), the form of the poem (sense), and the moral influence of the poem (intellect). In Germany, Kant (1724–1804), Schlegel (1772–1829), von Schiller (1759–1805), Hegel (1770–1831), Schopenhauer (1788–1860), and Nietzsche (1844–1900) thought about and debated the aesthetics of poetics.

In England William Wordsworth wrote a preface that became classic, to the second edition of his *Lyrical Ballads*. The poems were written in common language and not in neoclassical diction. Meter alone distinguished poetry. Although meter is also present in prose, poetic meter has regularity detectable in the line. Followed by poetic reflections by Samuel Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*), John Keats (1795–1821), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and George Gordon Lord Byron (1788–1824) these English romantic poets asserted their own philosophy. They revered the noble poet standing alone against the vagaries of the world and sentimentalized the peasant and the savage. The solipsism of self-reference in some romantic poetry led to a backlash by postromantics such as Victorian critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) and poet Matthew Arnold (1822–88).

In France, romanticism was personified in Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), a prose writer who had great influence on poetic thought with his visions of oneness with nature. Lamartine (1790–1869), Vigny (1797–1863), and Hugo (1802–85), among others such as Baudelaire (1821–67) continued with pantheistic and magical realistic views of nature as the source of feeling and a guide to spiritual wholeness. They also advocated a return to common language and disavowed classical form. By the end of the century, the poet was regarded as having a special magical relationship with the unknown and poetry were regarded as prophecy. The works of Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91) and Stèphane Mallarmé (1842–98) expressed this.

At the end of the nineteenth century the French symbolists such as Jules Laforgue (1860–1887) along with Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Paul Valéry (1871–1945) and Verlaine (1844–1896) asserted that poetry was overwhelmingly music and should capture from music the elements that belong to poetry. Poetic symbol shows a relationship between the thing and the readers. Prosody, or the ancient forms of verse, should be utilized in this attempt. Symbols expressed truth through suggestion rather than narration. Symbolist poetry also uses experimental grammar, many allusions that may make the poetry rather obscure. Paul Claudel (1868–1955) asserted that the symbol is metaphoric, that is, a relationship between two subjects. Each object is named and compared with another object, perhaps a divine object. For Claudel, the syllogistic nature of the old poetry should be replaced by the logic of the metaphoric and the symbolic.

In the dialectic of poetic history, Apollinaire (1880–1918) asserted a return to the lyric sensibility. His work and thought paralleled the rise of cubism, Fauvism, and the modern in the visual arts. Apollinaire coined the word 'surrealism' which signaled that the world of poetry was on the threshold, just outside the world of realism. The surreal deals with the ordinary and with the everyday and does not try to comprehend the divine or the spiritual. The poetry of the surrealists, especially Bréton (1896–1966) and Eluard (1895–1952) dealt with love of the woman, seeing her as equal to man.

French poetry of midcentury was called *engagée* by Jean Paul Sartre. Dealing with the Second World War, the Resistance, and the meaning of devastation, it tried to make sense of existence (*existentialism*). Poets separated from poetic movements, isolated themselves from current chic thought, and wrote as receptors of events around them.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) brought French symbolism to England. The romantic metaphysical way of looking at poetic subject matter and the symbolist way were similar, he thought. The comparison of poetry to music was essential. The subject matter was difficult, evoking religious symbols and obscure texts. American imagist Ezra Pound (1885–1972) was another influence on symbolist poetry, and on Eliot, who dedicated his poem *The Wasteland* to Pound. Pound defined the image as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." The pentameter was to be broken and straightforward line similar to the sequence of the musical phrase was to ensue.

Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) spanned the romantic and modernist era. His *A Vision* (1925) is a prose explanation of how he used symbolism, mythology, and symbolism in dealing with opposites: objectivity and subjectivity, art and life, soul and body. Postwar poets with competing theories – the Georgians – Walter de la Mare (1873–1956), Robert Graves – who advocated a return to nature and myth; the soldiers who died (Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) who argued a pacifist or patriotic vision of their experiences in the First World War; the colonialists – Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) – who wrote of England's glory overseas; dominated the poetry of the early twentieth century. By the 1930s, English poetry had become concerned with leftist causes such as the Spanish Civil War – Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden (1907–73). In the postwar Dylan Thomas (1914–53) wrote on personal themes in formal and experimental verses. The Movement of the 1950s was short-lived, and no theoretical schools of poetry have dominated British poetry since.

US poetry was derivative or simultaneous with the movements in British and French poetry until the liveliness of post-Second World War signaled an ascendancy. For example, Walt

Whitman (1819–92) acclaimed a romantic vision of poetry derived from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) (who called for a transcendental vision whereby there is an association between the word, the thing, and absolute truth) and Edgar Allen Poe (1809–49) (who argued for the importance of the imagination). Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) proclaimed the importance of the body as much as the soul. While Whitman was representative of Emerson's call for a poetry of the democratic person in nature, Emily Dickinson (1830–56) represented Emerson's call for a poetry hermetic and private. She became the most well known woman among romantic poets on all continents. Other American romantic poets such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) and James Russell Lowell (1819–91) were very popular but their works have not stood the test of time. Dialect poets such as James Whitcomb Riley (1849–1916) and son of former slaves Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) and the late romantic poetry of southerner Sidney Lanier (1842–81) signaled a regionalism and ethnic emphasis that was to continue in American poetry.

Premodernist poets such as Robert Frost (1874–1963) continued to write pastorals with the subject matter of nature. Frost began to use the speaking voice within poetic form, responding to the call of the romantics. He eschewed free verse, which was advocated by the symbolists and which contains lines of irregular length that evoke the cadence of music.

Modernism advocated that there is a connection between art and life. The construction of the verse was irretrievably linked to the meaning of the words. Verse did not serve to convey words, but was itself an irrevocable structure intrinsic to the meaning. Symbolism and imagism were two different ways to achieve this unity. Symbolism (Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry) advocated a turning in to the subjective with impressions of the external world expressed in implied emotions and sensations. Imagism (Pound) called for a visual flash which stood for both the emotion and the thing. William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) sought to use the American idiom (a romantic precept) in a variable foot (the line as a musical bar) in an imagistic way (the word as thing). Hilda Doolittle, known as H. D. (1886–1961) incorporated psychoanalytic concepts into her images. Eliot declared himself a British citizen, but his deep influences were from his childhood in St. Louis, Missouri. Wallace Stevens (1879–1955) wrote with affinity to the symbolism of Mallarmé and Valéry. If poetry is connected to nature, it is connected through figures of speech and relationship to music. Hart Crane (1899–1932) tried to take in modern industrialization with the symbol of the Brooklyn Bridge and a hearkening back to Whitman's romantic optimism.

Regional and ethnic Black writers also hearkened back to romantic visions in structuring their poems around spirituals – Langston Hughes (1902–67) and Countee Cullen (1903–46); and images of small towns and large cities in the Midwest – Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) and Edgar Lee Masters (1868–1950). Women also followed romantic principles – Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950) and Elinor Wylie (1885–1928) – in their lyrics and formal sonnets.

The influence of imagism, surrealism, and symbolism continued with poets such as Robert Bly (b. 1927), who talked of the 'deep image' which would psychologically take the reader into a formerly unconscious place; with Allen Ginsberg (1926–96), who with the Beats looked to Whitman as well as to Pound in advocating a counter-cultural lifestyle with a poetic line that resembled jazz. The so-called 'Black Mountain' poets – Robert Creeley (1926–2005) and Denise Levertov (1923–97) were allied with the abstract expressionists of the mid-century art world and they called for open form poetry with stresses more gestural than formal. The 'confessional' poets – Anne Sexton (1928–75) and Sylvia Plath (1932–63) – took after Robert Lowell (1917–77) in their frank autobiographical work. The New Critics called for an 'objective' look at the work, apart from autobiography, as the work stood by itself, apart from personal history, geography, or culture. Among other poetry movements have been Acmeism, Beat, Concrete, Cowboy, Futurism, Feminist, Harlem Renaissance, Jazz, Language, Metaphysical, New Formalism, New York School, Objectivism, Slam, Fugitive, Post postmodern, and the like. Each of these has propounded a series of principles and has been a reaction to or response to another movement of poetry (see American Academy of Poets.)

Formal verse gave way to the ironic lyric. Modernism gave way to postmodernism. Constructivism gave way to deconstruction. By the end of the twentieth century poetry was looked at as sign, for it had a dualism. Poetry was physical words on a page; the medium was ink on pulp. However, while prose was also physical words on the page, the medium was in the background. In poetry, the physical words are the foreground as well. This led poetic philosophers to contemplate the difference between signification and content. The experimenting of early and mid-twentieth century poets who aligned their work with movements in music and art shook the very Platonic and Aristotelian foundations of what poetry is. At the millennium we were left with these questions. Can poetry stand up to the creative imperatives of the other arts or is it merely a fundamentally poor imitation? Can poetry show truths through art that philosophy and religion cannot show? Can poetry continue to be a political force with a critique of bourgeois values? Can poetry align itself not with an obscure elite but with the common people? These questions continue to plague poets. Post postmodern poets have wrestled with morphing recent scientific discoveries with the language and lines of poems.

Creativity and Poetry

Poetry is inherently creative in that the creative process whereby poetry is made utilizes the Seven I's of inspiration, imagination, imagery, intuition, insight, incubation, and improvisation.

All creators talk about inspiration. Literally, inspiration is a taking in of breath. In terms of creativity, inspiration provides the motivation to write. When one takes in breath, one fills the lungs with air, with environment, with the stuff of life, and after the intake comes the necessary release. For poets this release is in the writing of the poem. Various kinds of inspiration have been recorded: the visitation of the muse, or the inspiration of love and desire; the inspiration of nature; inspiration through substances; inspiration by others' works of art and music; inspiration from dreams; inspiration from social injustice; inspiration of novel surroundings. The topics of poems range throughout these, and many other situations of inspiration.

In order to be inspired, the poet must experience insight. Insight in the creative process is the ability to see and

understand clearly the inner nature of things, especially by intuition. Insight involves restructuring the problem so that it can be seen in a different way. The creator experiences a feeling of delight in what is called an 'Aha.' It could be argued that poetry is one of the most regular providers of ahas for its readers, who are moved to fear and pity by the writing of the poet, whose insight provides insight to the apprehender, the reader or hearer of the poem.

All creators experience, during the creative process, a period of incubation, of fallowness where the inspirations that provide the insights are resting. Poetry is a solitary art, for the most part, as the poet meditates, walks, reads, and thinks about the meanings, images, and puts things together into the whole that is the finished poem.

Imagination is a faculty much discussed in creativity literature. Imagination in the creative process refers to a mental faculty whereby one can create concepts or representations of objects not immediately present or seen. The Romantic era of the eighteenth and nineteenth century began to view imagination as the primary criterion for the writing of poetry. Coleridge said imagination was the main power used in writing poetry: a "synthetic and magical power." Any writer can string images together but the poet infuses the images with imaginative power and with passion and makes not an account of imagery but of emotional truth. The poet must have an innate sense of music:

> But the sense of musical delight, with the power or producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this, together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learned. (*Biographia Literaria*)

Even the intellectual deconstructionists and postmodernists say that imagination is necessary in uniting poetry with philosophy. In their discussions, imagination remains the creative force behind poetry.

Imagery is also part of the creative process. The term *imagery* is psychological, the ability to mentally represent imagined or previously perceived objects accurately and vividly. Imagery is an attribute of imagination. Imagery is not only visual, but also auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory. While imagery is to be infused with the poet's imagination and sense of music in order to produce the truly creative poem (as opposed to the nonpoem, the 'fancy'), the *image* is the organic heart of the poem to twentieth-century modernists. The image is the concrete metaphor for inner reality. The poem itself becomes the image, an energy field made corporeal. Pound said, "The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is a . . . VORTEX, from which ideas are constantly rushing." The image is then both a description and a metaphor for the creative energy of a field surrounding the image. The image is a reference to a visual, aural, or kinesthetic semblance named to subdue or elaborate the unnamable.

To postmodernist deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, the image fills out the words. The reader, with imagination, completes the poem's empty spaces with the image. Thus figurative images – onomatopoeia, irony, metaphor, simile, and the like – the rhythmic conventions of poetry – function as rivers to complete the effervescent meaning of the poem. The poet as creator is at the mercy of the image created, for the references evoked by the images are uncontrollable. The reader in the physical act of reading, the eyes moving across the page, taking in the letters in type upon paper combined into words and an evocative language, enters into a dark room which is only illumined by images evoked by the words put into patterns created by the poet.

Images become symbols, icons, imagery. These also are creative, both in the spiritual sense of having been infused with import and meaning by centuries of thought, but in the individual sense of resonance with an interior truth to which the reader (or hearer) gains access through the associations evoked by the aesthetic creation of the poet. Consider the imagery in this line from Whitman's 'Song of Myself.'

> *I hear the bravura of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of sticks cooking my meals.*

The reader is thrown to the auditory by the first two words, and the image of swaggering, bragging birds, chests puffed up, sitting in trees loudly chirping comes upon the ear. To hear growing wheat 'bustle' evokes the humming sounds of fussing, moving females, scuffling and scurrying, who more often 'bustle' than men. With 'bustle' comes a transition to 'rustle,' which is a sound evoked by the word, and perhaps to the taffeta dresses women wore at that time, which had appendages called 'bustles.' All these and many more images associate to the ear from the juxtaposition of 'bustle' with wheat growing.

Whitman adds the 'gossip of flames' to his auditory images. Gossip has a sound that is quiet, as it is usually passed from one person to a trusted other in a hallway, a doorway, before a meeting. Gossip is hearsay, rumor, not truth. To associate 'gossip' with fire makes the flame seem friendly, for gossip is usually exchanged between friends about other friends or acquaintances, and the person who gossips usually trusts the person to whom she is gossiping. Thus the auditory image is homey, friendly, but a little cruel and dangerous as well.

The 'clack of sticks' also creates astonishing auditory imagery, as 'clack' seems too loud for what sticks do when they hit each other. 'Clack' is a sound word, but in the increment of sounds, sticks would not 'clack' but would perhaps 'click' or make a dull 'thwack.' That they 'clack' enhances their flame-readiness, for they must be quite brittle and quite large. Yet they are 'sticks' and not 'logs' and so the imagery presented by the juxtaposition of the two words 'clack' and 'sticks' tells the reader in her dark recess that creates imagery, exactly how big the sticks are. Big enough to cook a meal, quite dry, but not logs. Thus the reader must be creative also, in trying to understand the imagery created by the poet.

Another aspect of the creative process that poets use is in the connection to intuition. Poetry has recently (in the twentieth century) been called a form of intuition. Though ideas can be deduced from a poem, the poem itself is the idea, and that is intuition. Phenomenological theories of poetry assert that the reader grasps the poem through a kind of 'inseeing' – according to Henri Bergson (1859–1914) – who advocated the importance of intuition over intellect, expounding the idea that there are two opposing forces: he promoted the idea of two opposing currents: lifeless matter in conflict with organic life as the vital urge (*élan vital*) strives toward the freedom inherent in the poet's and poem's intuitive creative action.

Finally, while poetry is formally structured, metrical, and musical, many poets have used the regular practice of improvisation by which to write. The accidents that come from regular practice, from trying out new words, new ideas, new syllabic formations, often come through improvisation. Although improvisation is a key skill in the domains of music, poets also use it, especially poets who write free verse, but formalist poets also improvise. The poet James Merrill, who wrote much free verse, used automatic writing as an improvisational technique: William Butler Yeats, who wrote much formal verse, also used automatic writing as inspiration for work.

Conclusion

Poetry is one of the oldest domains of creativity, practiced instinctually by humans throughout evolutionary time. Because of this, the future for poetry is assured; whether new forms will evolve through technology is immaterial, for the human creative instinct to produce poetry has always existed and will continue to exist.

See also: Domains of Creativity; Metaphors; Sara Teasdale 1884–1933; Writing and Creativity.

Further Reading

Aristotle. *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*.
Ciardi J and Williams M (1975) *How Does a Poem Mean?* 2nd edn. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
Coleridge ST (1872) *Biographia Literaria*. New York: John Holt.
Hamilton I (ed.) (1996) *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hutchins RM (ed.) (1952) *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.
Muller-Zettelmann E and Tubik M (eds.) (2005) *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
Piirto J (2004) *Understanding Creativity*. Tempe, AZ: Great Potential Press.
Plato. *The Republic and Ion*.
Preminger A and Brogan TVF (eds.) (1993) *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. New York: MJF Books.
Spiegelman W (2005) *How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Wolosky S (2001) *The Art of Poetry: How to Read a Poem*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Relevant Websites

www.poets.org – From the academy of American Poets.
www.poetryfoundation.org – The Poetry Foundation.
www.famouspoetsandpoems.com – Famous Poets and Poems.
www.loc.gov/poetry – The Library of Congress, Poetry.