



*Poetry
in
Motion*

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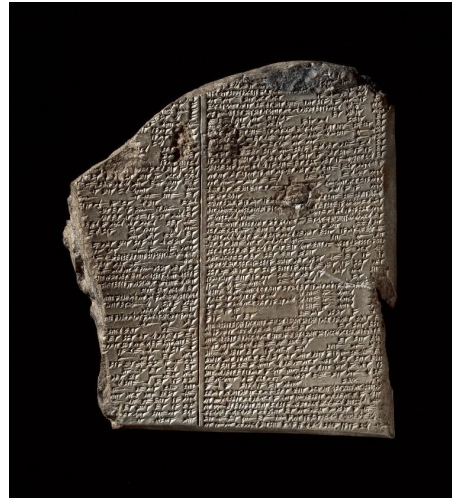
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A QUICK HISTORY OF POETRY

It is believed that poetry, as an art form, predates the written word in human history. It was commonly thought to be an early device for remembering history, law, and genealogy, as well as religious teachings. Among the desert nomads of Senegal, one of the most important jobs of their poets is to "remember where the water is." Much of the earliest recorded poetry were prayers and chants that held religious or other moral teachings. Even the earliest written poetry shows evidence of coming from an oral tradition, with numerous repetitions within a unit of text which would allow for better memorization. Given the rarity of literacy until relatively recently in human history, such a device would be invaluable for storing and transmitting knowledge.

The earliest poetry thus discovered comes from the hunting poetry and praise poems of the empires that rose in the Nile, Niger, and Volta river valleys in Africa, while the earliest written poetry dates back to the 25th century BCE in the form of the *Epic of Sundiata*. Poetic fragments are also found on early monoliths and runestones.

The oldest epic poetry to have come down to us today is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, believed to be the earliest example of written poetry that was not simply transcribed from the oral tradition. This work was written in cuneiform. Other early epic texts include the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from Greece, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from India, and the *Epic of King Gesar* from Tibet.



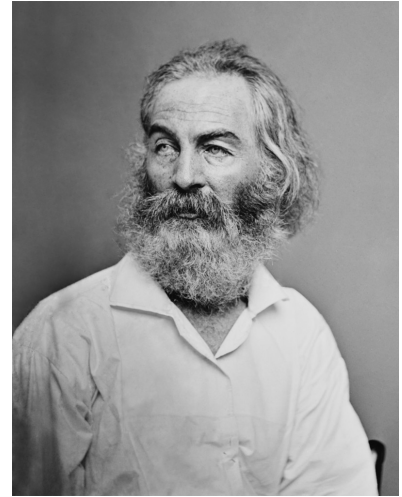
Poetry was also one of the first literary forms to warrant serious study by classical thinkers. The study of the aesthetics of poetry was pioneered in the Chinese works *Classic of History* which developed a canon of great poetic works and commentary on them for their aesthetic importance. This was echoed in the Western World by Aristotle, who wrote the treatise *Poetics* on tragic poetry.

Understanding the context in which poetry is created is vital to understanding the poetry itself, as many structures were developed for specific purposes, whether they be for purposes of memory, praise, or for political gains. Epic poetry, recounting a historical event, will of needs be large and sweeping, while liturgical poems like suras, sutras, and hadiths will carry religious and moral teachings. Poems written to accompany music will have a rhythmic structure closely tied to said music, while other poetry might play with rhythm as an experiment.



THE POETS

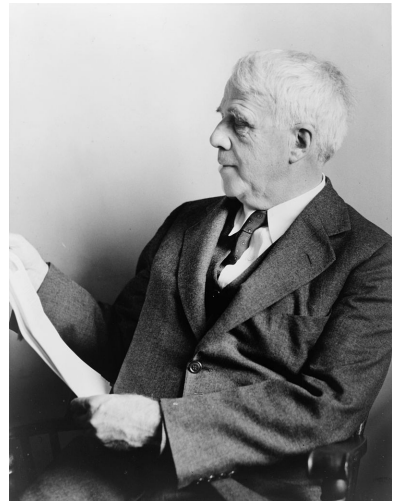
Walt Whitman (1819-1892)- Was an American poet and journalist. Known for his humanistic sentiments, he is commonly viewed by critics as a bridge between transcendentalist and realism. Both of these styles were included in his works. A major popularizer of free verse (poetry that follows the rhythm of human speech as opposed to pre-established meter), he is one of America's most influential poets. His work was, at the time, viewed as obscene, particularly his masterwork *Leaves of Grass*, for the sensuality of the language. *Leaves of Grass* was published with his own money.



Born in Huntington, New York, Whitman left school to go to work at the age of 11. He would later work as a teacher, a journalist, and a government clerk. During the American Civil War, he went to Washington DC to work in hospitals for the war wounded. Two of his most famous poems "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" were about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He would work continually on his poetry until his death in 1892.

Whitman is still considered influential in American poetry, with many critics arguing that a true understanding of American poetry, or even America itself, requires an understanding of Whitman's poetry, particularly *Leaves of Grass*.

Robert Frost (1874-1963)- Was an American poet who first found success in England before making it closer to home. His first poems had their debut publications in London as opposed to the United States. He was known for his vivid and realistic depictions of rural, particularly New England, life and a command of common American speech. He is the only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes in Poetry and was unique for being a well-known public figure during his lifetime.



Frost was born in San Francisco, CA. He was descended from a number of prominent early settlers of New England. When his father, who had been a teacher and the editor of the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, died in 1885, the family moved to Massachusetts. Frost graduated from High School in 1892 and attended Dartmouth College for a couple of months, but left it to go to work. He worked numerous factory and delivery jobs until he began to publish his poetry.

Robert Frost remains a popular poet in the American imagination, with his poems "Stopping by Wood on a Snowy Evening" and "The Road Not Taken" remaining common knowledge in the American canon.

Maya Angelou (1928-2014)- Was an American poet and civil rights activist known for prolific output and moving imagery expressing the African-American experience. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, as well as numerous plays, movies, and television shows spanning a 50 years career. She has been the recipient of many awards and over 50 honorary degrees. Her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, tells her story up to 17 years of age and is still commonly taught in the American curriculum.



During her young adulthood, she worked a number of odd jobs including fry cook, nightclub performer, cast member of *Porgy and Bess*, SCLC coordinator, and journalist reporting from Egypt and Ghana. In 1982 she was named Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University. She was also active in the Civil Rights Movement and worked with both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. She recited a poem at President Bill Clinton's first inauguration, begin the first poet to do so since Robert Frost at John F. Kennedy's 1968 inauguration.

Angelou's work often discussed aspects of her personal life, and she was viewed as a spokedperson for women and black culture. Though she is widely taught in curriculum, there have been attempts to ban her books from schools and libraries.

Bob Dylan (b. 1941)- Is a singer/songwriter, author, and artist who has been a major figure in American popular culture for the last fifty years. He is best known for his early works from the 1960's, particularly song such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are a-Changin,'" which became anthems for the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement. He began as a counter-cultural figure and denied a number of trends in pop music at the time. After adopting rock instrumentation, he recorded a number of influential rock and roll albums, particularly *Highway 61 Revisited*.



Dylan was born in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota, as Robert Alan Zimmerman. His paternal grandparents had fled Odessa, Russia, due to the pogroms of 1906. After his father contracted polio, the family moved from Duluth to Hibbing, where Dylan was raised. He formed several bands while in High School, and one performance at a school dance was so loud that the principal was forced to cut the microphone. He would continue playing with groups while studying at the University of Minnesota, though his focus would switch from rock to American folk.

Dylan has received numerous awards throughout his careers, including ten Grammys, a Golden Globe, and an Oscar. He was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a special Pulitzer Prize, and the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature. He remains active to this day.

SCANSION: WHAT DOES THE RHYTHM MEAN?

In the Western (Euro-American) poetic tradition, poetry is often classified by what is called its meter or scansion. This has to do with the number and types of metrical "feet" (which is a cluster of syllables) per line. So, for example, tetrameter has 4 feet and pentameter has 5. This system of classification was originally used by the ancient Greeks for the classification of their poetry.

Feet, as mentioned above, are clusters of syllables that have a particular stress pattern in them. Though there are dozens of types of feet, the most common in the English language are:

- iamb- one unstressed, one stressed (**des-cribe**)
- trochee- one stressed, one unstressed (**pic-ture**)
- dactyl- one stressed, two unstressed (**sim-i-lar**)
- anapest- two stressed, one unstressed (**com-pre-hend**)
- spondee- two stressed (**four-teen**)
- pyrrhic- two unstressed (very rare, no natural examples)

The longest foot is the four-beat choriamb, but this does not occur in the English language. Each of these types of foot has a certain feel. For example, the iamb mimics the heartbeat and breathing patterns of humans, making it feel very natural in terms of speech. Comparatively, the trochee can turn this on its head. Examining meter like this can show the underlying pattern beneath the verseform.

We should note, however, that poetical rhythm does not simply take into consideration the verseform and metrical footing. Other factors such as punctuation and other markers should also inform our reading and recitation of poetry.

On the **FIF**teenth of **MAY**, in the **JUN**gle of **NOOL**,
In the **HEAT** of the **DAY**, in the **COOL** of the **POOL**,
He was **SPLASH**ing... en**JOY**ing the **JUN**gle's great **JOYS**...
When **HORT**on the **EL**ephant **HEARD** a small **NOISE**.
(Example from *Horton Hears a Who* by Dr. Seuss)

So the feet and line length can be combined to refer to poetry as a specific type of meter. For example, most nursery rhymes (and the works of Dr. Seuss) are poems in anapestic tetrameter. This means that most of the lines have four feet and are primarily composed of anapests. Most of Shakespeare's poetry is in iambic pentameter, where the lines have five feet and most of them are iambs.

SOME MORE POETICAL TERMS: A GLOSSARY

There are other elements of poetry that we can also look out for. So we have provided a useful list of terms and definitions to help you with further exploration of poetry.

- Assonance- a resemblance of words particularly between their vowel sounds (beet/clean)
- Consonance- a resemblance of words particularly betw consonants (peet/put/putt).
- Alliteration- the repetition of initial consonant sounds (humble/house). Also called a head rhyme.
- Onomatopoeia- a word that ponetically resembles or imitates the sound that it describes (meow or tic-toc). These can vary by culture.
- Rhythm- the pattern over time of beats, rests, and holds.
- Rhyme- the repetition of the same (or very similar) sounds at the ends of words.
- Ambiguity- where the precise meaning or intentio of a phrase is not clearly defined
- Symbolism- where a word or other concept is represented by something else.
- Irony- When what is expected to be or appears to be on the surface is actually not what is happening.
- Metaphor- where two things are compared directly without using "like" or "as"
- Simile- where two things are compared with the use of "like" or "as"
- Metonymy- when something is referred to by referring to something closely related to that thing.



The Muses Clio (history), Euterpe (Lyric Poetry), and Thalia (Comic Poetry)



The Muses Melpomene (tragic poetry), Erato (love poetry), and Polyhymnia (sacred poetry)

THE ARTISTS

Rebecca Bossen is a Durham-based voice coach, playwright, and performer. Dialect coaching credits include: Miss Holmes, The Syringa Tree, I Capture the Castle, Drood, Pygmalion, Sweeney Todd (Creede Repertory Theatre); The Royale, Heisenberg, Skylight, Blue Sky, The Heretic, Ruined, Good (Burning Coal Theatre); Parade, Titanic (Elon University); One Man Two Guvnors (Raleigh Little Theater); Skin in Flames (Stage Left Theatre); Escanaba in Love (Circle Theatre); and the film The Game of Their Lives. She has taught voice classes at Northwestern University and at Act One Studios in Chicago. She holds theatre degrees from Duke University and Northwestern University, as well as an Advanced Certificate in Voice Studies from London's Central School of Speech and Drama. She is delighted to be returning to Burning Coal! www.rebeccabossen.com

Matthew Hager is happy to return to the Burning Coal stage after performing last year as Charlie in Mary's Wedding and in Mark Twain's Joan of Arc with Urban Garden Performing Arts at the Politheatrics Festival. He is also a proud member of Burning Coal's Shakescenes team, which preaches the message of the Bard to schoolchildren across the Triangle. Other local credits include Announcer in The Leader (Bare Theatre), This One in In on It (Manbites Dog), Lysander in Midsummer (Koka Booth), Finch in The Collective (LAB! Theatre), and Babbs in Charley's Aunt (TIP). Matthew has trained at UNC-Chapel Hill (BA Dramatic Arts, 2011), DePaul University, Shakespeare & Co., and UNC-School of the Arts (High School, 2005). Much love and thanks to his family for their constant love and support.

Dylan Bailey is a Raleigh-based theatre artist. He holds a BFA in Theatre for Youth from ECU. As a teaching artist, he works with RLT, Applause! Youth Theatre, NCT, Seed Art Share, TAP, and The ArtsCenter. He also often works with Burning Coal Theatre as both an actor and a stage manager. In 2016 he was awarded a URCA grant to fund a tour of his original touring production of Cinderellas from Around the World which toured throughout Eastern NC. During the summer of 2018, he performed Tales from Around the World at the Juwenalia Festival in Krosno, Poland and in Polish Primary Schools. In 2019 he was awarded the Intersection of Arts and Sciences Award for his research of Polish and Czech Theatre practices and for the implementation of said research into his original touring production of The Many Adventures of Peter Rabbit.

Maxine Eloi is an actor, writer, director and filmmaker. Classically trained at Boston University and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA), Maxine received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting from Boston University. Since graduating, Maxine has continued to pursue her creative passions through film and theatre with recent film credits such as Blue Crossing, Roll Pin Punch, and Diamond, to name a few. Maxine is also a company member at Theater Delta, Theatre For Change, Curious Theatre Collective and Little Green Pig Theatrical Concern. Maxine is grateful to pursue her career as an artist and collaborate with others to create engaging and thoughtprovoking work. Maxine recently starred in the feature film The Last in Line which will soon be available on Amazon. Blue Crossing will also be available to view on Revolt TV which is on all Cable networks (Comcast, Spectrum, AT&T, On Demand). Maxine continues to write, act and create film, television, music and theater projects.

Melanie Simmons graduated from Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre. She has been in numerous shows in the Raleigh/Triangle area. This is her second show with Burning Coal Theatre, having previously appeared in *Shakescenes*.

Ben Apple For Burning Coal: Rum and Vodka, The Greeks, Peter Pan. For Triad Stage: Brother Wold, Snow Queen, Christmas Carol. Other Regional: Bad Jews (A Big Wig Production), Romeo and Juliet (NC Shakespeare), Recent Tragic Events (Interrobang Theatre Project), The Actor and the Assassin (Haywood Arts Regional Theatre), Winnie the Pooh (NCTYP Tour), Fashionistas (THRE 232 at Triad Stage), Richard III (Bare Theater). BFA Acting- UNC-Greensboro, 2014.

Amanda Axelrod is coming soon!