

English Poetry

Definition of Poetry

It is difficult to offer a comprehensive definition for poetry because the language of poetry is not the language of everyday speech. It is written in a special kind of language. Poetic language is compact; each word is selected with utmost care. The words often suggest more than they say directly. Elements like rhythm and rhyme make the language of poetry more musical than everyday language. Poetry also looks different in writing. It uses verses and stanzas much as everyday language uses sentences and paragraphs. Finally, poetry can be about any subject you can imagine.

However, it has been variously defined by poets, critics and scholars throughout the ages as “ a criticism of life”; “ overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquility” . The poet, Emily Dickinson, says “ If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me, I know that is poetry”.

Poetry is “ writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through its meaning, sound, and rhythm”.

The Language of Poetry

Poetic language is not detached from everyday language. Language is flexible; it provides the poet with rich expressive resources. Poets do not tend to use a language which is completely peculiar to them: they rather use ordinary words in special ways.

The poet, among other creative writers, aims at making his language as effective as possible. His words are reflections of his emotions and sensations; it is through language that he draws into focus his ideas, images and thoughts. Since the poet is fully aware of the capacity of language to evoke associations and emotions, he tends to utilize a language which is vital, fresh and precise. At the same time, he tends to avoid language, which is not effective. He, moreover, attempts to arouse the reader’s feelings with the fewest possible words. The poet is concerned with both what a word means and what it suggests. For words, they have literal meaning-denotative meaning-and suggested meanings-connotation.

To communicate their messages, poets are endowed with special liberties in using the language. This is referred to as poetic license. But this is not to say that there is a special vocabulary appropriate to poetry only. Using the poetic license, the poet may go beyond the limits of the language to express new areas of experience. Poetic license, however, gives the poet a chance to exploit language in a more flexible way than do other creative writers.

Figurative Language

1. Sense devices

Poets try to achieve certain special meanings or effects. The poet, more than any other creative writer, uses a large number of figures of speech for this specific purposes.

generally speaking, figurative language is way of describing, characterizing, or modifying a thing in terms of something other than itself. Reading a poem requires understanding, as much as possible ,its figurative language which implies going beyond the denotations of the words used in order to catch the meanings poets try to convey. By using figures of speech, the poet aims at making readers pay attention to what they hear or read, because it had been said in a striking or an unusual way.

Figures of speech, however varied, have a basic characteristics in common: they deal with something by relating it to something else. In poetry, figures of speech are generally used to focus on unfamiliar qualities, or to give familiar qualities unusual vividness. Thus, the comparison between the two objects requires transferring our feeling from one object to the other.