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**1.0 OBJECTIVE**

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After learning this unit, the students can understand the form of poetry, various definitions related to this term, various characteristics of poetry and how did the form of poetry originated and later developed.

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**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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While studying the History of English Literature, we come across various types of literary genres based on various variable criteria. However, as M.H.Abrams in his work *Glossary of Literary Terms* notes that since the time of Plato and Aristotle, overall literary domain has been divided into three parts: *Lyric* (mostly uttered in first person), *Epic or Narrative* (in which the narrator speaks in the first person, then lets his characters speak for themselves); and *Drama* (in which the characters do all the talking) . From that Aristotelian period, there has been a shift to the modern age where this division has transformed into prose, poetry and drama. While

talking about the genre of poetry, there are lots of terms such as poetry, poem, lyric etc. which have indistinguishable meanings at first place but how they are closely connected would be discussed in the next unit.

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## 1.2 POETRY: DEFINITIONS

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The term poetry is defined in *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* as “a comprehensive term which can be taken to cover any kind of metrical composition” However this definition also says that poetry “is usually employed with reservations, and often in contradistinction to verse” Elaborating this contradiction it further says that Shakespeare’s sonnets are described as poetry, but Ogden Nash’s witty poems are known as verse. Light verse is more prevalent word than a light poetry. However, we all know that Chaucer, Ben Jonson, Donne, Marvell, and many others to this list have written popular humorous and witty poems. The same dictionary also notes a separate entry for the word poem. A Greek word *poiema* means something created and taking this as a basic, the word poem is defined as “A composition, a work of verse, which may be in rhyme or may be blank verse or a combination of the two” (678). What it is that makes poem a different entity from other forms of literature? It is “the way the words lean upon each other, are linked and interlocked in sense and rhythm, and thus elicit from each other’s syllables a kind of tune whose beat and melody varies subtly and which is different from that of prose” (678) makes poetry a poetry. However, different from this structural perspective. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren in their book *Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students* provides different perspective of poetry as a discourse, but this discourse is not “prompted by purely practical consideration” rather is coloured by “an attitude toward and a feeling about the information”. This definition leads to one of the prominent views about poetry provided by the Romantic poets in the history of English Literature.

One of the canonical names of English poetry and a major Romantic poet William Wordsworth defines poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. Connecting poetry with our emotions and feelings, he suggests that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” His good friend S. T. Coleridge provides clear distinction between prose and poetry. He writes: “I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is prose; words in their best order; - poetry; the *best* words in the best order.” Just as Wordsworth and Coleridge, their contemporaries in the

Romantic Age also catenates poetry with nature and feelings as Percy B. Shelley defines “Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds”. However, later part of History of English Literature brings about the Modern Literature marked by “persistent and multidimensional experiments in subject matter, form, and style” in various literary forms including poetry. T.S.Eliot, one of the central figures of Modernist literature and major poets of 20<sup>th</sup> century provides completely different approach to the form of poetry than his ancestors in Romantic Age. He says, “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion. It is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality”. These definitions aid us in comprehending the multiple perspectives to understand poetry.

- **Check Your Progress: 1**

Q.1 Write an appropriate answer for the given questions.

1. What is poetry according to Romantic poets?

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2. What is Eliot’s concept of poetry?

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### **1.3 POETRY AND ITS FORMS**

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Understanding form of a poetry takes various perspectives as some groups of literary scholars consider form as a *genre* or literary type whereas the other group of scholars and critics refers to the structure of a poetry as a form. Sean Glatch includes the structural elements of poetry, such as "its line lengths and meters, stanza lengths, rhyme schemes (if any), and systems of repetition," in his examination of poetic forms. "Defined poetic structures employed across multiple poems, generally by multiple authors," is how he defines form. He has three things in common that are crucial to the poem's structure: lineation – which means line breaks and stanzas, rhyme scheme and rules of meter. Lineation, or the

breaking of the line, varies from form to form in the poem. For ex. Sestet (six lines stanza) and Octet (eight lines stanza) are quite popular in sonnet form. Like this, rhyme scheme and meter (the method of stressing a certain sound) are crucial in the development of poetry form. Let us discuss about some of the forms of the poetry here.

**1.3.1 Italian Sonnet:** A poem of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter and involving intricate rhyme scheme is usually known as sonnet. This form of poetry is basically travelled from Italy where during a 14<sup>th</sup> century, an Italian poet Petrarch was famous for Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. It follows a specific pattern of “an **octave** (eight lines) rhyming *abbaabba* followed by a **sestet** (six lines) rhyming *cdecde* or some variant, such as *cdcc*” (290). Some famous poems written in the form of Italian Sonnets are Wordsworth’s *London, 1802*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *sonnet 43*, and Oscar Wilde’s *The Grave of Keats*.

**1.3.2 Elizabethan Sonnet:** After arrival of sonnet in English literature, some experimenters including the Earl of Surrey brought some changes in the rhyme scheme of the form of Italian Sonnet. This new form which was greatly practiced by William Shakespeare among all the Elizabethan poets. And thus, this form became popular as Shakespearean or English sonnet which “falls into three *quatrains* and a concluding *couplet*: *abab cdcd efef gg*. Shakespeare contributed almost 152 sonnets during his lifetime. S.T.Coleridge’s sonnet *Fancy in Nubibus* is an example of Shakespearean sonnet.

**1.3.3 Spenserian Sonnet/ Contemporary Sonnet:** One more type of sonnet became popular after the name of Spenser who used to write sonnets with rhyming structure of *abab bebe cdcd ee*. The contemporary sonnets, as per Glatch’s opinion “do not have the same strict requirements. There are no metrical requirements, so the sonnet’s tradition of iambic pentameter is optional.” Some contemporary sonnets are written by Alice Notley, Billy Collins, and Anthony Opal.

**1.3.4 Limerick:** One of the forms of light verse, Limerick was invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Mostly used as a humorous way to write about other people, this form follows five-line structure with *aabba* rhyme scheme. Edward Lear who is also known as creator of Limerick had written *Limericks*. Kipling’s poem *There was a small boy of Quebec* is also an example of Limerick form.

**1.3.5 Free Verse:** Printed in short lines just as traditional verse, they are different in their rhythmic pattern. As their “rhythmic pattern is not organized into a regular metrical form—that is, into feet, or recurrent

units of weak- and strong-stressed syllables. Most free verse also has irregular line lengths, and either lacks rhyme or else uses it only sporadically” (Abrams 105). Free Verse is a popular form of most of the modern American and British poets including T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

### **Check Your Progress: 2**

#### **True or False:**

- 1) Elizabethan sonnet is also known as contemporary sonnet.
- 2) Free verse are different from traditional verse in content.
- 3) Lear was the founder of Limerick form of poetry.

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## **1.4 HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF POETRY**

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It is challenging to page down the history of poetry in detail because it is an ancient art form in the history of literature. The history of poetry has seen many changes, beginning with the oral tradition of singing numerous narratives. Starting from various Old and Middle English oral narratives, it has progressed to Chaucer whose *The Canterbury Tales*, considered as a magnum opus by many critics provides the reflection of middle age British society with focus on various characters from different parts of the society. A colourful cast of characters—a carpenter, a cook, a knight, a monk, a prioress, a haberdasher, a dyer, a scribe, a merchant, and a very bawdy miller—are introduced to us by Chaucer. Chaucer has the opportunity to talk in a variety of voices since these characters represent all facets of society in the fourteenth century. The stories spoken by the characters range from moral and contemplative to funny, nasty, and impolite. The introduction of the sonnet form during the 16th century, which as we mentioned in the preceding unit, took on a different shape with Shakespeare and Spenser, caused a significant shift in the poetry of English literature after that. Shakespeare gave almost 154 sonnets including some of the popular sonnets like ‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?’ and ‘My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun.’ The *Faerie Queene*, an enormous epic poem by Spenser, is his best-known work. Spenser intended the work, which was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth (herself represented by the title character), to consist of twelve books, each of which narrates a journey undertaken by a knight of King Arthur’s court on behalf of Gloriana, the *Faerie Queene*. Before his death in 1599, Spenser was only able to complete the first six books (and start writing the seventh). Between Shakespeare- Spenaser and Wordsworth, notable poets including John Milton, John Dryden, and Alexander Pope also had a great impact on the genre. Dryden and Pope came out with some of the brilliant satires of the age. Some important works of John

Dryden are his satires such as Absalom and Achitophel, Mac Flecknoe, and The Hind and the Panther. Pope who is a brilliant and incredibly witty writer, comes up with some great poems such as Ode on Solitude, An Essay on Criticism, Windsor Forest apart from his master piece The Rape of the Lock. Milton's literary epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regain* are part of literary canon even today. They not only capture the human history but also mirrors the political scenario of Milton's time. The character of Satan which is acclaimed by many critics is viewed as a republican hero who is persuasive and articulate, far more so than the "tyrannous" and somewhat humourless character of God.

Romantic Age of English Literature is considered as a golden age of poetry as per the opinions of many scholars and critics. This age has given some of the greatest poets to the history of English Literature. Individualism and affection towards the nature are the major characteristics of Romantic age. Sonnet and ode are some of the popular forms of poetry during Romantic Age. Wordsworth, Shelly, Coleridge, Byron, Black and Keats are some of the significant names of this age. They produced work that expressed spontaneous feelings, found parallels to their own emotional lives in the natural world, and celebrated creativity rather than logic. Poetry of Victorian Age echoed the loss of love and nostalgia. Classic Victorian works generally pay close attention to rhyme, exhibit considerable tenderness, and frequently explore chivalric themes. Epic poems and theatrical monologues were popular forms of poetry during this time. The most prolific and well-regarded poets of the age are Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, and G.M.Hopkins. Under the umbrella term of modernism and with the cry of make it new, modernist poetry broke all the notions of previous ages with its fragmented, broken and disillusionary picture of an isolated individual and its society.

• **Check Your Progress: 3**

1. Find out the odd one among the given list.  
a) Alfred Tennyson                      b) William Wordsworth  
c) Matthew Arnold                      d) Robert Browning
2. Individualism was essence of poetry of \_\_\_\_\_ age.  
a) Elizabethan                              b) Neo Classical  
c) Romantic                                 d)Victorian
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is a well known work of Alexzander Pope.  
a) Mac Flecknoe                            b) The Rape of the Lock  
c) Paradise Lost                            d) Ode to Westwind

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## 1.5 LET US SUM UP

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Overall, the chapter examines the idea of poetry using various perspectives. It also provides the idea of form of poetry and ends with the brief historical background of English poetry.

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## 1.6 KEY WORD

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**Form** the shape and structure of something specifically in terms of poetry, it's the structure of poetry

**Modernism** An umbrella term for a series of literary and artistic movements took place during late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that break with the past and in search of new forms of expressions.

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## 1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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1. Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students by Cleanth Brooks
2. A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H. Abrams
3. The Cambridge Introduction to Modernist Poetry by Peter Howarth

### Answers:

Know Your Progress 2:

- 1) false 2) false 3) true

Know Your Progress 3:

- 1) b) William Wordsworth
- 2) c) Romantic
- 3) b) The Rape of the Lock