

Lyric poetry

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Unlike narrative poetry, which chronicles events, lyric poetry doesn't have to tell a story. A lyric poem is a private expression of emotion by a single speaker. For example, American poet Emily Dickinson described inner feelings when she wrote her lyric poem that begins, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, / And Mourners to and fro."

Key Takeaways: Lyric Poetry

- A lyric poem is a private expression of emotion by an individual speaker.
- Lyric poetry is highly musical and can feature poetic devices like rhyme and meter.
- Some scholars categorize lyric poetry in three subtypes: Lyric of Vision, Lyric of Thought, and Lyric of Emotion. However, this classification is not widely agreed upon.

Lyric Poetry: Expressing Emotion Through Verse

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Origins of Lyric Poetry

Song lyrics often begin as lyric poems. In ancient Greece, lyric poetry was combined with music played on a U-shaped stringed instrument called a lyre. Through words and music, great lyric poets like Sappho (ca. 610–570 B.C.) poured out feelings of love and yearning.

Similar approaches to poetry were developed in other parts of the world. Between the fourth century B.C. and the first century A.D., Hebrew poets composed intimate and lyrical psalms, which were sung in ancient Jewish worship services and compiled in the Hebrew Bible. During the eighth century, Japanese poets expressed their ideas and emotions through haiku and other forms. Writing about his private life, Taoist writer Li Po (710–762) became one of China's most celebrated poets.

The rise of lyric poetry in the Western world represented a shift from epic narratives about heroes and gods. The personal tone of lyric poetry gave it broad appeal. Poets in Europe drew inspiration from ancient Greece but also borrowed ideas from the Middle East, Egypt, and Asia.

Types of Lyric Poetry

Of the three main categories of poetry—narrative, dramatic, and lyric—lyric is the most common, and also the most difficult to classify. Narrative poems tell stories. Dramatic poetry is a play written in verse. Lyric poetry, however, encompasses a wide range of forms and approaches.

Nearly any experience or phenomenon can be explored in the emotional, personal lyric mode, from war and patriotism to love and art.

Lyric poetry also has no prescribed form. Sonnets, villanelles, rondeaus, and pantoums are all considered lyric poems. So are elegies, odes, and most occasional (or ceremonial) poems. When composed in free verse, lyric poetry achieves musicality through literary devices such as alliteration, assonance, and anaphora.