**What is Dramatic Poetry?**

**Dramatic poetry** is a form of poetry that is written in verse and meant to be recited in public or acted out. Dramatic poetry is often in the form of long speeches either to another actor, the audience, or oneself by musing aloud. When aimed at another person, this form of dramatic poetry is known as a **dramatic monologue**, and when musing aloud, it is known as a **soliloquy**. Dramatic poetry generally uses a meter pattern, which is a rhythmic pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. This sets it apart from prose and lends itself admirably to being performed aloud or sung.

**History of Dramatic Poetry**

One of the earliest forms of western literature, dramatic poetry, originated in **ancient Greece**. Aeschylus, known as the ''father of tragedy,'' wrote some of the earliest dramatic poetry in his plays like Oresteia. Other ancient Greek playwrights like Sophocles and Euripides also wrote plays in dramatic poetry that survive till today. These were mainly tragic **dramas** like Oedipus Rex by Sophocles, and these plays would be performed at the **Theatre of Dionysius** in Athens around the 5th Century BCE. Dionysus was the Greek god of wine and festivity, and these plays were a way of honoring him.

Dramatic poetry remained popular throughout the Classical Period with the later Roman playwrights and poets Seneca, Ovid, and Horace making use of it in their dramas. After the fall of Rome, dramatic poetry continued to survive during the Middle Ages and enjoyed a resurgence during the Renaissance. However, the Renaissance saw dramatic poetry moving away from the metered style of previous generations. The Renaissance emphasized the use of the vernacular or the language of the general people in literature. Following this principle, dramatic poetry started appearing in **blank verse**. The two greatest exponents of blank verse in plays were **Christopher Marlowe** and **William Shakespeare**. After the Renaissance, dramatic poetry started becoming less popular and was replaced by the common prose gradually, which we find today in plays and drama.

**Features of Dramatic Poetry**

Dramatic poetry is written to be spoken or acted in public, in front of an audience. It often reveals the inner psychology of a character and must be told from the point of view of a particular person. It reveals the character for the audience by describing their personality and motivations. Through their speeches and actions, dramatic poetry depicts a scene or plot of a drama. Dramatic poetry used a meter pattern of stressed and unstressed rhythmic syllables during its earliest forms in ancient Greece. By the Renaissance, most dramatic poetry was in blank verse, a non-rhyming verse in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter simply means a form of poetry where five stressed syllables alternate with five unstressed ones in a line usually made up of ten syllables.

**Types of Dramatic Poetry**

Dramatic poetry usually appears in four recognized types. The first is a **soliloquy** where a character muses to themselves about something troubling them. The second is a **dramatic monologue** in which a character addresses someone else but reveals something about themselves in the process. The third type of dramatic poetry is a **character sketch** where the playwright invites the audience to form an opinion on the character delivering their lines. The fourth **type of dramatic poetry** is a **dialogue** between at least two characters. There are also two other kinds of dramas where dramatic poetry is used, known as **closet dramas** and **drawing-room plays**. We will be looking at these in greater detail below.

**Dramatic Monologue**

A dramatic monologue is a type of dramatic poetry where a character addresses another or several others and reveals something of his inner self in the process of the speech. A dramatic monologue always involves a single speaker on stage, and while the speaker may be talking directly to another person, we will never directly encounter them during the dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue Although the dramatic monologue is used frequently in theatre, we can also find examples of it in poetry. In this poem by Ezra Pound called The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter, a young woman is speaking aloud to her absent river merchant husband who has traveled far from home on work.

*While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead*

*I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.*

*You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,*

*You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.*

*And we went on living in the village of Chokan:*

*Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.*

*At fourteen I married My Lord you.*

*I never laughed, being bashful.*

*Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.*

*Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.*

**Soliloquy**

During a soliloquy, a character speaks aloud about what is going on inside their mind. It is almost as if the character is talking to themselves about their deepest fears, desires, or motivations. Soliloquies are a wonderful way to give information to the audience or reader about hidden motivations or psychological impulses within the head of a character. In this soliloquy from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Juliet gives expression to her thoughts when she finds out that Romeo is the son of her father's enemy:

*O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?*

*Deny thy father and refuse thy name.*

*Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,*

*And I'll no longer be a Capulet.*

*'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.*

*Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.*

*What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,*

*Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part*

*Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!*

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose*

*By any other word would smell as sweet.*

**Closet Dramas**

A closet drama is a play that I meant to be read aloud rather than performed. It is often meant to be read out to a small group of people. Examples of closet dramas include John Milton's Samson Agonistes and Thomas Hardy's The Dynasts.

**Drawing Room Plays**

As the name suggests, a drawing-room play, as the name suggests, is designed to take place inside the drawing-room of a home. This form of drama emerged during the Victorian period in England. An example of a drawing-room play is T.S. Eliot's The Elder Statesman, first performed in 1958.

**Character Sketch**

In a character sketch, the writer is trying to arouse emotion or interest among the audience or reader towards a particular character. The reader is given a few important details about the character that the writer considers important. These details reveal the general character and nature of the person being described.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue is a type of dramatic poetry when two or more characters talk to each other and give us a sense of what is going on and what is going to happen in the play. Dialogue carries the plot forward as well as gives us an idea of how the characters interact with each other.

**Dramatic Poetry Examples**

Sometimes the best way to understand and appreciate dramatic poetry is to read some plays and poems where we find examples of it. We will be looking at some of the best-known examples of different types of dramatic poetry below.