

SJWMS English Literature Induction Series: Part III



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Contemporary Poem 1: Mrs Darwin by Carol Ann Duffy

Mrs Darwin

7 April 1852

Went to the Zoo.
I said to Him --

Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds me of you.

What do you make of this poem by Carol Ann Duffy?

The Purpose of Poetry

1. Why poetry?
2. What makes it different to prose?
3. What place does it have in modern society?
4. Has rap/spoken word replaced it?
5. Do the young generation understand its purpose?

Key Differences Between Prose and Poetry

The difference between prose and poetry can be drawn clearly on the following grounds:

1. **Prose** refers to a form of literature, having ordinary language and sentence structure. **Poetry** is that form of literature, which is aesthetic by nature, i.e. it has a sound, cadence, rhyme, metre, etc., that adds to its meaning.
2. The language of **prose** is quite direct or straightforward. On the other hand, in **poetry**, we use an expressive or creative language, which includes comparisons, rhyme and rhythm that give it a unique cadence and feel.
3. While the **prose** is pragmatic, i.e. realistic, **poetry** is figurative.
4. **Prose** contains paragraphs, which includes a number of sentences, that has an implied message or idea. As against, **poetry** is written in verses, which are covered in stanzas. These verses leave a lot of unsaid things, and its interpretation depends upon the imagination of the reader.
5. The **prose** is utilitarian, which conveys a hidden moral, lesson or idea. Conversely, **poetry** aims to delight or amuse the reader.
6. The most important thing in **prose** is the message or information. In contrast, the **poet** shares his/her experience or feelings with the reader, which plays a crucial role in poetry.
7. In **prose**, there are no line breaks, whereas when it comes to **poetry**, there are several line breaks, which is just to follow the beat or to stress on an idea.
8. When it comes to paraphrasing or summarizing, both **prose** and **poetry** can be paraphrased, but the paraphrase of the poem is not the poem, because the essence of the poem lies in the style of writing, i.e. the way in which the poet has expressed his/her experience in verses and stanzas. So, this writing pattern and cadence is the beauty of **poetry**, which cannot be summarized.

Contemporary Poem 2: Campaign by Carol Ann Duffy

(Published June 2017 exclusive to The Guardian)

In which her body was a question-mark

querying her lies; her mouth a ballot-box that bit the hand that fed. Her eyes? They swivelled for a jackpot win. Her heart was a stolen purse;

her rhetoric an empty vicarage, the windows smashed.

Then her feet grew sharp stilettos, awkward.

Then she had balls, believe it.

When she woke,

her nose was bloody, difficult.

The furious young

ran towards her through the fields of wheat.

1. Record your first impressions. Do you know what it is about? Can you remember what was happening in 2017?
2. Now read the article: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/carol-ann-duffy-pens-scathing-post-election-poem-567886>
3. Considering the information in the article, and now you know the subject of the poem, what do you think of it? Do you remember the memes created about Theresa May running through 'fields of wheat'?
4. Duffy was Poet Laureate at the time, do you think it appropriate for the nation's poet to share her political views in her poetry?

Poetry Comparison

Read these two poems carefully and annotate for meaning.

At SJWMS we often use the acronym S.M.I.L.E (Structure, Meaning, Imagery, Language devices, Effect/Emotion) when looking at poems for the first time.

These two poems are **not** easy but have a go!

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| <p>Lizzie, six</p> <p>What are you doing? I'm watching the moon. I'll give you the moon when I get up there.</p> <p>Where are you going? To play in the fields. I'll give you fields, bend over that chair.</p> <p>What are you thinking? I'm thinking of love. I'll give you love when I've climbed this stair.</p> <p>Where are you hiding? Deep in the wood. I'll give you wood when your bottom's bare.</p> <p>Why are you crying? I'm afraid of the dark. I'll give you the dark and I do not care.</p> <p>Carol Ann Duffy</p> | <p>Sweet 18</p> <p>You move before me with all the unknowing ease of your age; your face clear of the awareness that clouds mine. Your only scars: where you tried to shave, before there was any need. When you speak, shyness makes your words short, and your hesitancy touches my heart. It stands to reason I must want you to stay like this: who could wish to make away such innocence, such perfection? Who has never wished to put a stone through a great, clear, shining pane of glass: who can see snow unbroken and not long to crunch the chill of it underfoot: to make their mark on white? What is canvas for, but to take colour, though the artist's thought is no sooner fixed in paint, than it begins to fall short of his hopes? You are a choice meal, so perfectly set out on the plate, that to disarrange one leaf, one floret, would be to vandalise a gracious pattern, but, for all that, I'd let my tongue learn each taste and texture: the warm flesh juices and the eye's salt; the mind's crisp freshness: I would leave nothing. I'd be ivy, resting her lameness on the crutch of a young sapling, using his life, sucking it out of him, Think of me as old Mother Time, your parasite, your predator: give her a smile, glass of light, and stay clear.</p> <p>Sheenagh Pugh</p> |
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Extending your understanding:

- There are two speakers in 'Lizzie, six' - can you identify who these speakers are and what their ages might be?
- The speaker in Sweet 18 is like one of the speakers in Lizzie, six, why? How?
- Think about the presentation of adults in these two poems, what are they both doing/wanting to do? What do they wish to destroy or corrupt?
- In Sweet 18 pick out the 4 images the speaker describes of ruining something that is perfect.
- Do we pick up on these disturbing themes on first reading?
- How do the poets use simplistic language and subtle imagery to present these sinister themes? What makes them so powerful?