

What does the poetry today?

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I think the answer to this question depends. You will ask: Depends on what? I am going to tell you: Depends on where you come from.

I am not an expert for what is going on with poetry in every country of the world, but I have some experiences that me taught, poetry here or in Turkey, in the Arabic countries or even in Pakistan, where I have been twice as a poet, has another status as it has in my country, in Germany. And when I take a look on Europe there are differences as well. You will find in the eastern parts more interest in poetry than in the western. As far as I have experienced it. In Lithuania for example, there are two big poetry festivals every year. In this and other countries in the area there are writers they call themselves poets. In Germany no writer, except your truly, will do it, and I, myself, do it only since I have experienced that abroad.

At one of these events abroad, I asked a man, I was introduced to: are you a writer as well. No, he said, I am a poet. I thought, that is nice and then I realized, that is me as well, I am a poet also. Before, I saw myself as a writer.

Lyric poems is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, form of literature expression. For the ancient Greeks, the poet was distinguished from the writer of plays or epics. And over all the centuries, poetry was an important form of literature.

Why did I and others in Germany don't call them poets any longer? I thought about it, and one of the answer is, the 1968-generation movement. There was a struggle from a new generation against old habits, especially in education and culture, and in Germany as well against silence of the former generation about what happened in the Hitler time. But for us here interesting is, the struggle against the old culture habits that were defined as a niche for the well-educated, rich and powerful people in the country, the elite. Especially the poetry with a lot of forms and combinations, the meter, based on syllables, and stress was in focus. So, to make a long story short: poetry in Germany became to be perceived as a literature form for the elite that the new intellectuals have to avoid for a reason. You won't find in Germany one of the big publishing houses nowadays that is publishing poetry. When I, a couple of years ago, was looking for a literature agent, I had a couple of contacts due to recommendations of friends. But I got from my expected former agents, always the answer: we don't do poetry.

On the other hand, there are small publishing houses, where a poet in Germany can publish. Publisher that are really interested in poetry and make wonderful little books. But out of a small circle of poetry lovers, nobody cares. Poetry as the one so fundamental to literary history, is nowadays treated like the obstinate step-daughter, hidden in front of the eyes of the prince by prose, namely crime or fantasy. Isn't it funny, that it is the fate of step-daughters, because they were mostly the first.

So, one can say, of course, to avoid to publish poetry maybe is, because the poetry isn't good enough. Yes, that might be. In some or even many cases. But there are poets I know, they are wonderful, and I am not even alone with my opinion. I am the chairman of a writers' association in Hamburg. We only have one event a year with poetry. One evening not one festival. It is a shame, not so much about the poets but more about the reader or listener, about the audience. Poets were always poor, as you can see at the wonderful and well-known painting by Carl Spitzweg, the German painter that depicted, in 1839 in his famous picture, the life in poverty that poets have to suffer.

From that point of view, financial success isn't the reason, why it matters when poetry is no longer what people are looking for. And what about the poets? I can only speak for myself, and that is this:

In moments, I observed an idea, received a word, or read a sentence, in such moments it can occur, my soul is penetrated, and it is like I have to open a peculiar door to my conscious mind. I do not exactly know what to expect. But what I do know is that I just need to go through the door to see what is behind, and when I open it and entering, everything is in front of me. The idea, the words, phrases, actions, insights, perspectives, and the purpose. The summary, the value, the end.

It happens that the parts that I put together do not match. Then I know, I wanted too much. The translation of my inner image, do not need to describe all the parts I see, but only what is needed to show, in just the way to let space for imagination.

What idea, what a word, what a sentence, you might ask. I will tell you: Everything. Everything that is knocking at the door to my poetic soul. But it does not open any. Because sometimes nobody is home or busy with other, apparently more important, things.

However, the crucial point with the visitors is: It must be opened. The idea, the word, the sentence are shy, and they are very soft knockers.

What I find behind hidden doors, is just waiting, hoping to be discovered. These parts became my friends then. I can distinguish them from those who I find, when I write

prose. The latter need to be caught, conquered, and tamed and they never submit entirely.

Therefore, as a poet, I am a happy person. That feeling I do not experience otherwise in writing. So, for me either it does not matter, if poetry nowadays might be no longer an important part of art.

But what matters, when it come to the answer of the question, I was asked: What does the poetry today? The answer is: What it always did.

Poetry gives you a view through the outside world, through literary images and metaphors insight in the world around and inside of yourself. Poetry it is the purest form of literature, and it deserved festivals, it deserved publishing, and it deserved attention.

It has nothing to do with to be a form of culture only for the elite. Because to take a look inside and outside the world through literary eyes is of course for everybody practicable. So we don't have to change poetry, but the attention.

In Germany a form of poetry is very popular, even it is supposed not to be written:

Poetry Slam. But that, no written down, was poetry itself in the beginning either. This new form is indeed more interesting for bigger audiences, because it comes as competition. The performer have to compete with their texts and acting. These kind of poetry, I like. It is mostly funny and I admire the performer for memorizing the texts in a tuneful manner. Even when I do so, my understanding of poetry is indeed another.

My understanding is the kind of art, as I described it: Poetry has to do with images, based upon inner spiritual sense that is not writable but interpretable. Hence, it lets us a lot of imagination. How can somebody follow his or hers imagination in a room full of people that have to decide about performers in a competition? In this understanding, my form of poetry is not one that is performed in packed houses. In poetry you are supposed to focus on the words. Therefore is to consume poetry maybe even best to do so, at home. Sitting in a cozy chair on a quiet afternoon with time to give up into your imaginations.

Ask him or her, my fictional reader of poetry, about what does the poetry today, and you might get a better answer than by me, because I am prepossessed. Remember, I said, poetry makes me happy.