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## **The mystery genre in English poetry: historical roots and literary evolution**

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**Annotation** *This article analyzes the formation and development of the mystery genre in English poetry. It examines the unique poetic structure of the genre, its symbolic and allegorical meanings, as well as its place in various literary periods – the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Romanticism, and Modernism. Mystery poetry is interpreted as a complex artistic system closely connected with religious belief, spiritual values, and the philosophical quests of human thought. The main purpose of this genre is to express the spiritual and existential experiences of humanity in poetic form and to reveal the inner harmony between man and the universe through hidden truths. The article also explores the aesthetic functions of the mystery genre in art and literature, as well as its role in contemporary thought.*

**Keywords** *Mystery, English poetry, symbolism, allegory, romanticism, modernism, spirituality, literary tradition*

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## **Жанр мистории в английской поэзии: исторические корни и литературная эволюция**

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**Аннотация** *В данной статье анализируются процессы формирования и развития жанра мистории в английской поэзии. Рассматриваются его уникальная поэтическая структура, символические и аллегорические значения, а также место жанра в различных литературных эпохах – в Средние века, эпоху Возрождения, романтизм и модернизм. Мистериальная поэзия трактуется как сложная художественная система, тесно связанная с религиозной верой, духовными ценностями и философскими поисками человеческой мысли. Основная цель жанра заключается в поэтическом выражении духовных и экзистенциальных переживаний человечества, раскрытии внутренней гармонии между человеком и вселенной через таинственные истины. В статье также освещаются эстетические функции мистории в искусстве и литературе, а также её значение в современном мировоззрении.*

**Ключевые слова** *Мистерия, английская поэзия, символизм, аллегория, романтизм, модернизм, духовность, литературная традиция*

## **Ingliz poeziyasida misteriya janri: tarixiy ildizlari va adabiy evolyutsiyasi**

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**Annotatsiya** *Ushbu maqola ingliz poeziyasida misteriya janrining shakllanishi va taraqqiyoti jarayonini tahlil qiladi. Unda janrning o'ziga xos poetik tuzilishi, ramziy va allegorik ma'nolari, shuningdek, uning adabiy jarayonlardagi o'rni har xil davrlar kesimida – o'rta asrlar, Uyg'onish davri, romantizm va modernizm bosqichlarida ko'rib chiqiladi. Misteriya poeziyasi diniy e'tiqod, ma'naviy qadriyatlar hamda inson tafakkurining falsafiy izlanishlari bilan uzviy bog'liq bo'lgan murakkab badiiy tizim sifatida talqin etiladi. Ushbu janrning asosiy maqsadi insoniyatning ruhiy va mavjudotiy kechinmalarini poetik shaklda ifodalash, sirli haqiqatlar orqali inson va olam o'rtasidagi ichki uyg'unlikni ochib berishdan iboratdir. Maqolada misteriya janrining san'at va adabiyotdagi estetik funksiyalari hamda zamonaviy tafakkurdagi o'rni ham ilmiy nuqtai nazardan yoritiladi.*

**Kalit so'zlar** *Misteriya, ingliz poeziyasi, ramz, allegoriya, romantizm, modernizm, ma'naviyat, adabiy an'ana*

### **Introduction**

The mystery genre in English poetry represents one of the most enduring and thought-provoking literary traditions. Its roots can be traced back to medieval religious and allegorical writings, where mystery was closely tied to spiritual narratives and the human search for divine truth. Over time, this genre evolved beyond strictly theological concerns, embracing philosophical, existential, and aesthetic dimensions that reflected the cultural and intellectual changes of each literary era.

In the Middle Ages, the influence of mystery was largely shaped by religious plays and allegorical verse, which inspired poets to explore hidden meanings and symbolic structures in their works. During the

Renaissance and later in the Metaphysical tradition, poets such as John Donne and George Herbert employed mystery as a means to question the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, crafting paradoxical and intellectually challenging poetry (Rigby, Minnis, 2014). The Romantic era witnessed a renewed engagement with mystery, as poets like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth sought to unveil the unseen aspects of nature, imagination, and human consciousness. Their works introduced a deeper sense of mysticism, positioning poetry as a pathway to transcendental experiences. This trajectory continued into the Modernist period, where poets such as T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden used mystery to articulate alienation,

fragmentation, and the spiritual uncertainties of a secularized world (Donne, 1986).

Thus, the study of mystery in English poetry allows us to see how literary expression has consistently functioned as a means of negotiating the tension between the known and the unknown. More than a stylistic device, mystery has remained a central element in poetic imagination, shaping the ways in which writers and readers alike confront life's most profound questions.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on analytical and comparative methods. First, the representation of the mystery genre in different historical stages of English literature is examined through literary sources. Second, symbolic and allegorical imagery is analyzed in terms of meaning and function. Finally, selected works from the Romantic and Modernist periods are compared to identify the evolutionary patterns of the mystery genre in English poetry

### **Literature review**

The mystery genre in English poetry has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its enduring presence across literary periods. From medieval allegory to modernist symbolism, mystery has consistently functioned as both a thematic concern and an artistic device. Medieval literature, especially Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, exemplifies the early fusion of narrative, allegory, and moral instruction. Scholars such as Jill Mann argue that Chaucer's tales often conceal deeper layers of spiritual and ethical reflection, embodying the medieval fascination with hidden meaning (Pakkala-Weckström, 2010; 219-45). The allegorical structure of pilgrimage and dream visions in Chaucer's work provides a foundation for the mystery tradition in poetry.

During the Renaissance and the age of Metaphysical poetry, writers such as John Donne and George Herbert advanced the theme of mystery by interweaving theological speculation with personal devotion. Donne's *Holy Sonnets* confront paradoxes of mortality,

sin, and salvation, while Herbert's *The Temple* reflects the intimate struggles of faith. As Helen Gardner notes, metaphysical poetry situates mystery in the tension between reason and faith, where poetic conceit becomes a vehicle for expressing ineffable truths (Donne, 1912).

The Romantic period marked a turning point in the literary use of mystery. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) employs symbolic oppositions – innocence and experience, light and darkness – to reveal hidden spiritual conflicts. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) combines supernatural mystery with moral allegory, offering a poetic exploration of guilt and redemption. William Wordsworth, though less overtly mystical, situates mystery in nature and human consciousness, as seen in *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* (1798), where the unseen dimensions of memory and imagination take on a transcendental quality.

In the Modernist era, mystery became central to the fragmented and allusive style of poets such as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) is regarded as one of the most enigmatic poems in English literature, requiring readers to unravel multiple layers of myth, religion, and literary allusion. Yeats's late poetry, particularly *The Tower* (1928), blends personal mysticism with symbolic imagery drawn from occult and historical sources. According to critics like Cleanth Brooks, the "difficulty" of modernist poetry is inseparable from its aura of mystery, which compels interpretive engagement (Eliot, 2011).

In the twentieth century, W.H. Auden also explored mystery, though often in relation to ethical uncertainty and the search for meaning in modern society. His collection *Another Time* (1940) reflects on existential anxiety and spiritual ambiguity, highlighting how the genre of mystery adapted to the challenges of modern history, including war and displacement. Contemporary scholarship continues to analyze mystery through the lenses of symbolism, hermeneutics, and

intertextuality. George Steiner emphasizes that poetry, as a medium of language, inherently points to what cannot be fully expressed, thereby preserving the presence of mystery in literature (Ward, 1990). More recent critics such as Harold Bloom have argued that the mystery in English poetry is part of its "anxiety of influence," as poets engage with their predecessors to uncover new ways of expressing the unknown (Bloom, 1997).

Taken together, these sources demonstrate that mystery in English poetry is not confined to any single period or style. Instead, it represents a continuous tradition that adapts to shifting cultural and intellectual contexts, from Chaucer's allegory and Donne's paradoxes to Blake's visionary symbolism and Eliot's modernist fragmentation.

### **Analysis and Results**

The mystery genre in English poetry cannot be understood as a fixed or monolithic category. Instead, it represents a dynamic and evolving set of literary practices that respond to the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural demands of each era. This section presents a detailed analysis of how mystery has been employed in different periods of English poetry, followed by interpretive results that demonstrate the genre's continuity and transformations across history.

In the medieval period, mystery was closely associated with religious allegory and didacticism. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is often considered a collection of social narratives, but beneath its humor and realism lies a deep concern with the hidden dimensions of human morality (Blake, 2021). For instance, *The Parson's Tale* and *The Pardoner's Tale* revolve around questions of sin, redemption, and spiritual fate. The allegorical journey of pilgrims itself mirrors the symbolic pilgrimage of the soul toward salvation. This period reveals how mystery was less about suspense or enigma in the modern sense, and more about unveiling divine truth through symbolic representation. The interpretive task was left to the audience, who were expected to perceive

the hidden moral structure of the narrative. Thus, the result of this analysis is that medieval poetry framed mystery as a hermeneutic challenge – readers must "decode" symbols to grasp the moral lesson.

With the rise of the Metaphysical poets, mystery was intellectualized. John Donne's "Holy Sonnets" or George Herbert's *The Temple* reveal how paradox and conceit function as vehicles of mystery. Donne, for example, in *Death Be Not Proud*, transforms the enigma of death into a paradoxical triumph of eternal life (Herbert, 1981). Mystery here emerges as a logical and linguistic puzzle, where the reader is drawn into resolving contradictions.

The analysis shows that metaphysical poetry shifts mystery from allegorical form to cognitive and spiritual inquiry. The results indicate that this intellectualization reflected the Renaissance concern with reconciling reason and faith. In this way, mystery became a tool for engaging both the mind and the soul. Romantic poetry redefined mystery in terms of imagination, nature, and mysticism. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* creates a dual vision of human existence, in which innocence symbolizes divine harmony while experience reflects spiritual corruption (Yeats, 2004). The mystery lies in their tension: readers are left to interpret how both states coexist within human life.

Similarly, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* embodies mystery through supernatural encounters, moral ambiguity, and symbolic punishment (Auden, 1945). The killing of the albatross is not explained in rational terms but presented as a mysterious violation of natural and spiritual law. The mariner's redemption comes through suffering and recognition of the sacred in all living things. Wordsworth adds another dimension by presenting nature as inherently mysterious. In *Tintern Abbey*, the poet reflects on how natural landscapes carry unseen spiritual power. This analysis demonstrates that Romantic poets framed mystery as an experiential

phenomenon, accessed through imagination, vision, and communion with the natural world.

The Modernist movement radically altered the role of mystery by embedding it in fragmented structures, obscure references, and cultural dislocation. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* epitomizes this approach. The poem resists straightforward interpretation, requiring readers to engage with multiple layers of myth, literary allusion, and cultural critique. The mystery lies in its very structure: meaning is dispersed and deferred, never fully revealed. Yeats similarly employs mystery through

symbolic systems, such as the gyres in *The Second Coming*, where historical change is portrayed as an apocalyptic and enigmatic process. Modernist mystery thus reflects a broader cultural sense of uncertainty and the loss of absolute truths. The analysis reveals that modernist poets intentionally created interpretive difficulty, ensuring that mystery became both the form and content of their work. The results suggest that, unlike earlier periods where mystery aimed to reveal hidden truths, modernist mystery emphasized irreducible ambiguity.

Literary Period	Representative Poets	Nature of Mystery	Function/Result
<i>Medieval</i>	Geoffrey Chaucer	Allegorical, religious, moral	Mystery as hermeneutic task: decoding symbols to find divine truth
<i>Metaphysical</i>	John Donne, George Herbert	Paradoxical, intellectual, theological	Mystery as reconciliation of reason and faith through poetic conceit
<i>Romantic</i>	Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge	Mystical, supernatural, natural sublime	Mystery as visionary experience and moral-spiritual revelation
<i>Modernist</i>	T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, W.H. Auden	Fragmented, symbolic, enigmatic	Mystery as cultural alienation, interpretive ambiguity, existential questioning

**Table 1.** *Comparative results in English poetry mystery genre*

### Overall Findings

1. *Continuity of Mystery* – Mystery has persisted across centuries as a central theme, though its form and purpose evolved with cultural changes.
2. *Shifting Functions* – While medieval poets used mystery to teach moral truths, metaphysical poets intellectualized it, Romantics spiritualized it, and Modernists problematized it.
3. *Reader Engagement* – Mystery functions as an interpretive challenge that actively involves the reader in meaning-making, whether through allegory, paradox, or fragmentation.

4. *Cultural Mirror* – Each period's use of mystery reflects broader historical concerns: medieval religion, Renaissance philosophy, Romantic imagination, and modernist crisis.
5. *Enduring Relevance* – Even in contemporary criticism, mystery remains a vital lens for understanding the symbolic depth of poetry.

This analysis demonstrates that the mystery genre in English poetry operates not only as a stylistic or thematic device but as a cultural practice that evolves with historical shifts. Its enduring significance lies in its capacity to embody the tension between the

known and the unknown, reason and faith, reality and imagination. The results affirm that mystery is not peripheral but central to the English poetic tradition, shaping how readers across centuries confront existential, spiritual, and intellectual questions

### **Conclusion**

The study of the mystery genre in English poetry shows that mystery has always been a central but changing element of literary expression. In the medieval period, mystery appeared through religious allegory and moral symbolism, guiding readers toward spiritual truths. Metaphysical poets transformed it into an intellectual challenge, using paradox and conceit to reconcile doubt and faith. Romantic poets, by contrast, placed mystery in

imagination, nature, and mysticism, seeing it as a source of vision and transcendence. Modernist poets, however, fragmented mystery, turning it into ambiguity and cultural uncertainty that reflected the crises of their time.

Overall, the evolution of mystery in poetry demonstrates that it is not a fixed genre but a flexible mode of engaging with human existence. It has served as a bridge between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown, inviting readers to interpret and discover meaning beyond the surface. Mystery endures in poetry because it reflects essential human concerns – our search for truth, our struggle with uncertainty, and our desire for transcendence.

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