

The Language Of Medicine And Medical Poetry

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Abstract: This article explores the intersection between the language of medicine and the art of medical poetry. It focuses on how specialized medical terminology is integrated into poetic discourse to convey complex physical, emotional, and psychological experiences. The study highlights the historical roots of medical poetry in Eastern traditions, particularly in the works of Avicenna and other classical physicians who expressed therapeutic knowledge through verse. It also discusses the stylistic, lexical, and metaphorical elements used in medical poetry to humanize clinical language, support emotional healing, and offer aesthetic value. The paper concludes that medical poetry not only serves as a cultural artifact but also contributes to the broader field of medical humanities by linking science with spirituality, intellect with emotion.

Keywords: Medical language, medical poetry, poetic therapy, Avicenna, medical terminology, stylistic features, metaphor in medicine, medical humanities, healing through art.

Introduction: The language of medicine is one of the most specialized and precise branches of scientific discourse. It is used to describe the structure and functions of the human body, diseases, and methods of treatment. However, from the earliest stages of human civilization, medical knowledge was often expressed not only through prose but also through poetry. This connection between medicine and poetry has deep historical roots. Ancient physicians and scholars believed that words have the power to heal, and that poetic expression can provide both intellectual and emotional relief.

In the Eastern cultural context, the relationship between medicine and literature can be observed in ancient texts such as the Avesta, where healing practices and medicinal plants are mentioned. Later, great scholars such as Hippocrates, Galen, and particularly Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) advanced this synthesis by using poetic forms to convey medical knowledge.

Medical language is characterized by its use of precise terminology, derived mainly from Latin and Greek roots. It is analytical, systematic, and functional, aiming to eliminate ambiguity. However, the medical lexicon also reflects human perception of health and disease through metaphors such as “the battle against illness,” “the body as a machine,” or “the heart as the seat of

emotion.” These metaphors connect the scientific with the emotional dimension of human life.

In modern times, the field of medical humanities has recognized that linguistic expression in medicine affects doctor–patient communication. The choice of words can influence a patient’s psychological state, demonstrating that language itself plays a therapeutic role.

Medical Poetry as a Cultural Phenomenon

Medical poetry represents the artistic side of the healing process. It uses medical terminology, imagery, and metaphor to express the emotional and spiritual aspects of illness and recovery. For example, in the poetic traditions of the East, the *urjuza* — a didactic poem written in rhythmic verse — was used to teach medical principles.

Avicenna’s *Urjuza fi’t-Tibb* (“Poem on Medicine”) is one of the most famous examples. In its preface, Avicenna explains that he wrote the poem in simple and rhythmic language to make it easier for students to memorize medical rules. This shows that poetic form was not only an artistic choice but also a pedagogical method. Through verse, complex medical knowledge became more accessible and memorable.

In addition, other poetic works such as *Dah Nasihat* (“Ten Advices”) attributed to Alexander the Great

(Iskandar Zulqarnayn) illustrate the harmony between ethical advice and medical guidance. Such poems emphasize moderation, balance, and spiritual well-being as key components of health.

Stylistic and Linguistic Features

The main linguistic characteristics of medical poetry include:

- 1. Terminological precision** — the use of authentic medical terms to ensure accuracy.
- 2. Metaphorical richness** — diseases, organs, and healing processes are often personified or described metaphorically.
- 3. Didactic tone** — medical poems often aim to teach, instruct, or moralize.
- 4. Rhythmic structure** — the use of rhyme and meter aids memorization and emotional impact.
- 5. Humanistic orientation** — focus on empathy, the soul, and the holistic nature of healing.

These features make medical poetry a unique genre that merges scientific clarity with aesthetic depth.

The Humanistic Value of Medical Poetry

Poetry plays a vital role in humanizing medicine. While physicians heal the body through medication, poetry heals the soul through words. This duality creates what modern scholars call poetry therapy — the use of poetic expression for emotional and psychological healing. As Sa'di Shirazi wrote, "Words can heal the soul before medicine heals the body."

By integrating emotion, language, and scientific knowledge, medical poetry contributes to a more compassionate form of healthcare. It reminds us that medicine is not only a science of the body but also an art of understanding human suffering.

The language of medicine and medical poetry together form a bridge between scientific precision and human emotion. From the Avesta to Avicenna's *Urjuza*, from ancient Eastern wisdom to modern medical humanities, the fusion of art and science has played an essential role in the development of healing culture. Medical poetry demonstrates that health is not only a biological condition but also a spiritual and linguistic phenomenon. Thus, the study of medical language and poetry is crucial for understanding how words, rhythm, and meaning contribute to both physical and psychological well-being.

In the past, along with many other sciences, the science of medicine was also thoroughly taught in madrasahs. As a result, even those who were not physicians — many poets and writers — often discussed medical knowledge and ideas in their literary works. One of the greatest among them was Alisher Navoi, the "Sultan of

the Realm of Poetry."

In several of his works, Navoi provided valuable insights related to the science of medicine. In particular, in the fifteenth chapter of his prose masterpiece "*Mahbub ul-Qulub*" ("The Beloved of Hearts"), he devoted a special section to medicine and physicians. In this chapter, Navoi presents observations on medical science and the moral character of doctors, describing them in a realistic and philosophical manner.

At the end of the chapter, he summarizes his reflections in a short poem (*qit'a*), where he uses poetic expression to generalize his ideas about the nature of physicians and the ethical responsibilities of their profession. Through this synthesis of prose and poetry, Navoi demonstrates that true healing requires not only medical skill but also moral integrity and compassion:

A skilled and kind-spoken physician is a remedy for the suffering,

But an ignorant, harsh, and ill-tempered person is a calamity for people's lives—

Hoziq tabibi xushgo'y tab ranjig'a shifodur,

Omiy-u tund-u badxo'y el jonig'a balodur.

In this couplet, Alisher Navoi expresses a profound ethical and psychological understanding of medical practice. The poet contrasts two types of healers:

- the "*hoziq tabib*" — the skilled and eloquent physician who not only heals with medicine but also with gentle words and empathy;
- and the "*omiy-u tund-u badxo'y*" — the ignorant, rude, and ill-natured person who brings harm instead of healing.

Navoi's words go beyond literal medicine, illustrating that the physician's moral character and speech are as vital as medical knowledge itself. The verse encapsulates a timeless principle of medical ethics: compassion, wisdom, and humane communication are indispensable in the healing process.

In modern medical humanities, this idea aligns with the concept of "holistic healing," which recognizes the interdependence of physical, emotional, and moral well-being. Navoi, writing centuries ago, thus anticipates one of the core values of contemporary medical ethics — that healing begins not only with the body, but with the heart and the word.

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