Poetry

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Some say it's a force of cavalry, others of foot,
others of ships, but I say that the most beautiful thing
upon the black earth is whatever it is you desire.

Sappho (trans. Gillian Spraggs)

Participants: 8-20 players + 1 game master
Genre: Drama
Time to play: 4 h
Version: 1.0

Introduction

After a summer of playing A Midsummer Night's Dream together a theater company gathers for one last dinner. Bonds of love form and break in the heat of the late summer. Love and poetry intertwine and in the end changes who you are.

Poetry is a chamber-larp drama that explores poetic perspectives of play. It follows the final dinner of a theater company that has grown close during a summer of playing Shakespear together. It is now time to leave the magic circle behind. One last opportunity to chase the magic or break the spell. One last opportunity to say what you really want.

The game is mainly played in groups of three or four people. You will get to build your characters, relationships, and chart out the story you want to play as part of the workshop. The game itself mixes narrative scenes and metascenes in which you will get to write short poems that evolve as the scenario progresses.

The themes of Poetry are poetry and love, and with it we want to explore poetic perspectives as part of larp design. The intent is to create a game where the players get to experience how poetry can bleed in and out of the narrative as words take on new meanings as the interpretations change along with the story.

How to read this script

This document is primarily intended for anyone who wishes to run Poetry. As a player you don't need to go over this material.

If you are running the game, we suggest that you familiarize yourself with the larp-script in its entirety prior to running the game. If you have questions (or just want to let us know that you are running Poetry you can email spelledaren@gmail.com).

Some sections in this script are written in *italics,* these are intended to be read aloud to the players. You don't have to read it out verbatim, but the text is there to help you guide the players through those parts of the game.

The script is divided into the following main sections:

- Props and preparations prior to game - what to bring and how to set up
- Preparations with the players - workshops for mechanics and character creation
- The game structure - structure and scene content
- Debrief - suggestions around how to debrief after the game is finished

Props and preparations prior to the game

Before the game starts, you, the game master, needs to read this document, and make sure you have access to the props listed below when the game starts.

To play Poetry you will need:

- ☐ Music
  - ☐ Even If You Were Never Aware by Stars Of The Lid for the meta scenes
  - ☐ A playlist with music for scene 4. We have prepared one with slow blues music here. Feel free to substitute it with something else if you prefer.
- ☐ Speakers and device for playing the music
- ☐ Table(s) and chairs to seat all the players
- ☐ Appendix 1 printed out (and cut into the three and four player sections)
- ☐ Appendix 2 printed out (and cut up into notes)
- ☐ Glasses (plastic ones are okey)
- ☐ Something to drink, water is fine
- ☐ Snacks (optional)
- ☐ Pens, at least as many as players (they always stop working - bring extra)
- ☐ Paper, cut into pieces large enough to write a single word on
- ☐ Paper, cut into slightly larger pieces (roughly half an A4) for the poems
- ☐ Masking tape for name tags and to divide the room

Poetry can be played in any venue with access to tables and chairs that can fit the number of players you are hosting.

Prepare the game area

Before the workshop:

- ☐ Set up speakers so that you can play the music (see above)
- ☐ Prepare tape, paper and pens
- ☐ Make a line with tape on the floor, one part of the space will be the public area, the other a private area. The public area must be big enough for a dinner table and chairs for all players.

Time Requirements

The following is an approximate outline of how the game is played. The purpose of this is that you as a game master should get an overview of the act structure and the different parts of the game. Details about each part will follow in later sections.

The total game time is approximately 4 hours. The schedule for this scenario is tight, there is only a little leeway in the workshops and in the scenes so be sure to keep the time.

Introduction and workshop (~1h 45min)

- ☐ General introduction (5 min)
- ☐ Warm-up - the human knot (5 minutes)
- ☐ Open your eyes exercises (5 min)
- ☐ Create the groups and decide on a story (10 min)
- ☐ Trust walk (5 min)
- ☐ Select the characters archetypes and create name tags (10 min)
- ☐ Creating the the poems and the characters (30 min)
- ☐ Discuss the characters in the groups (5 min)
- ☐ Short introduction to all the characters in the full group (10 min)
- ☐ Create a relationship outside of the group (5 min)
- ☐ Time for questions and a break (15 min)

The game (2 h)

- ☐ Prologue (5 min)
- ☐ Scene 1: Entrée (10 min)
- ☐ Meta scene 1 (8 min)
- ☐ Scene 2: Desserts (15 min)
- ☐ Meta scene 2 (8 min)
- ☐ Scene 3: Clearing the tables (10 min)
- ☐ Meta scene 3 (8 min)
- ☐ Scene 4: Afterparty (20 min)
- ☐ Meta scene 4 (8 min)
- ☐ Scene 5: The light of dawn (15 min)
- ☐ Epilogue (8 min)

Debrief (10 min)

Preparations and workshops

This section describes how the participants will workshop their characters, relationships, and practice the meta scenes that will form the basis for the game.

General introduction (5 min)

Background of the game:

- *Poetry is a chamber larp where you will take on the roles of members of a theater company that has been playing Shakespear's A Midsummer Night's Dream all summer. During the past few months their lives have become tangled up in each other, and now it is time for the final dinner before the summer is over and the company is broken up. Soon, you will all leave the magic circle behind. You have one last opportunity to chase the magic or break the spell. One last opportunity to say what you really want.*

  The game is set during this final dinner and we will follow the characters through five scenes - from the first scene where you sit down to dinner, until the early morning next day when you watch the sun rise. Between each of the five scenes we will play a metascene where you will get to write and rewrite a poem by swapping words with each other.

  The themes we want to explore in Poetry are love and poetry. We wish to explore how to make poetic perspectives part of the game, so we encourage you to use the poems created in the metascenes in the regular scenes, and vice versa.
- *The game is set in present day Sweden.*

How the game is played:

- *The game is set during a dinner with the entire theater company - but the main focus of the story will be in groups of three or four.*
- *Before the game there will be a workshop where you get to create your characters, their relationships and practice the poetry mechanic that will be used in the game.*
- *The game is played in five scenes with a short prologue and epilogue. Between the scenes there are metascenes where you will write and rewrite your poems. The scenes are between 10 and 20 minutes long, and the metascenes will be roughly 8 minutes. As each scene starts, the game master will give directions on what the scene is about, and any other instructions that you will need.*
- *To signal the end of each scene and the transition into the meta scene, the music for the meta scene will start playing. When you hear the music there is roughly 1 minute left of the scene so wrap up and quiet down.*

- *The space is divided into two parts, one public where everyone can see you - this is where the dinner will be set up, and one private area where play can be considered private. In-game this is a different room, outside, or whatever you need it to be. That means that if you want to sneak off for a secret conversation with your lover you both step across that line. The characters in the public space do not see what happens there and vice versa, but the players should feel free to draw inspiration from both spaces. That means that if multiple scenes are going in the private space, each of these scenes take place in a separate space.*

General instructions:

- Tell the players the general outline of the schedule (see time requirements): Around 1:45 minutes workshop, short break, around 2 hr play time, then debrief.
- *This game uses "OFF" as a safety mechanic. If at any time someone feels that the game is heading in a direction that they are uncomfortable with, they will say "OFF" or "OFF-game." This will pause the game and the involved participants should discuss what has happened and how to proceed. The same mechanic is used should something happen that the players need to know about outside of the game, e.g. if someone has gotten physically hurt.*

Open up for questions.

Workshop

Warm-up - the human knot (5 minutes)

This is a warm-up exercise to help the players relax and get comfortable with physical interaction. Ask the players to stand in a circle and close their eyes. Tell them to stretch out their hands in-front of them, walk slowly forward until they reach other hands and grab hold of two hands. Ask them to open their eyes and try as best they can to untangle the knot into a circle again.

If the group is very large you can split them into two smaller ones when doing this exercise.

Open your eyes exercises (5 min)[1]

Tell the players: "*I will read a number of questions to you, first once so you have heard them. Then I want you to close your eyes, I will read a question, and you will open them if this is something you want as part of your experience. You may answer yes on as many as you want, even if they are contradictory. This is to help you find players interested in the same themes as you.*"

Open your eyes if…

- *You want to explore more positive/feel-good themes in your character in play*
- *You want to explore darker themes in your character in play*
- *You want to lean into play on physical intimacy*
- *You want to play less on physical intimacy*
- *You want to play queer relationships*
- *You want to play straight relationships*

Create the groups and decide on a story (10 min)

Tell the players to form groups of three or four, trying to find players who have indicated an interest in similar themes in the previous exercise. If someone wants to form a pair that is also fine, but in general we recommend the larger groups for more dynamic play. Help them out to form the groups if they need it.

Tell them:

Take a few minutes to calibrate in your groups with the questions above as starting points. If you feel like you are not on the same track, let me know and I will try to help you switch groups.

When you have calibrated on the type of play you want, talk about what type of story you would like to play. It could for example:

- *be a classic love triangle where A and B are both in love with C, and C doesn't know who to choose*
- *a story of infidelity where parties from two couples have an affair on the side*
- *a story of budding puppy love*

When creating the relationship, ensure all characters have meaningful (positive or negative) relations with each other. For example A and B in the love triangle example might be old friends or bitter rivals?

[1] From https://workshophandbook.wordpress.com/2013/04/25/open-your-eyes/

It is important that there is something in the relationship that creates an obstacle to it being fully and immediately realized. This obstacle does not need to be very large, but it should be real to the characters. For example, one of the parties is already married to someone else, or both of the characters are really scared to tell each other how they feel.

Tell the players that if they struggle to come up with something they can ask for prompts and ideas from you. Hand out **Appendix 1** to those asking for prompts.

Trust walk (5 min)

In the newly formed groups: have one player close their eyes, the others lead them while they walk slowly together around the room. Ask them to switch within the groups after some time. Do this until everyone has had a chance to be led.

The aim of this exercise is to establish trust within the groups.

Physical and emotional intimacy (5 min)

The basic technique for simulating physical intimacy in this game is to stand closely together, leaning in so that either the foreheads or the checks touch. This represents physical intimacy on the level of a kiss. If you want to express more intense physical activities you may also touch your partners back, arms or neck while doing so. Tell the player they can also agree on other techniques that they are comfortable with within their groups.

Ask the players to speak to each other in the groups:

- About which level of physical intimacy that they as players would like, both in terms of physical and emotional intensity.
- If there is any experience they would specifically like to have
- If there are any boundaries that they would like to state up front

Examples here might be: “I would like to experience making out on the dance floor” or “My preference is to play mostly with stolen looks, and the most intimate thing I want us to do is to hold hands”.

Ask them to try to find a level that everyone in the group feels comfortable with. Note that it does not need to be the same between all players.

Instruct them to try to be perceptive to their co-players' signals and escalate slowly. If something does not feel alright, say OFF-game and tell the other player how you want to calibrate the play.

Select the characters archetypes and create name tags (10 min)

Select roles
Put the notes with the different archetypes (**Appendix 2**) in the theater company in a place where the players can see them. Ask them to pick the archetype that their character plays in the company, e.g. director, leading actor, technician, etc. You can find examples to cut out in Appendix 2, but if a player wants to be something else or multiple people want the same roles, be accommodating and work something out.

Ask the players to think briefly about who they will play and come up with some specific characteristics for their characters, they might be shy, attention seeking or self-centered, for example.

Make name tags
Ask the players to come up with a name for their character, and write down that name and their pronouns on a piece of tape and put it on their clothes where it is visible to everyone.

Present your character to the group
Ask them to gather in their groups when they have selected a name and an archetype and present a skeleton of who they think their character is. This does not need to be super deep at this point, but it can be something like “I am Robin (he/him) the leading actor diva. I want everyone's attention, all the time!” or “I am Charlie (they/them) the make-up artist who is friendly to everyone, and knows all the gossip".

Creating the the poems and the characters (30 min)

In this part of the workshop the players will work on a poem that forms the basis of their character. They will also also practice the mechanism of swapping words and rewriting the poem that will be used throughout the metascenes in the scenario.

Make sure there is paper and pens available for everyone before proceeding with this part.

Creating the words
Ask the players:

Please take eight notes each and write down eight words, one on each note. Try to write clearly so that others can read it. Pick words that you feel have some poetic weight to them, but don't overthink it.

When they have written down the words, ask them to put all the notes in one spot where everyone can see them, for example on a table in the middle of the room.

If they struggle with coming up with words they can use a random word generator online as inspiration.

Pick words
Ask each player to select five words from the table. If they cannot find five words that feel right it is okay to add words of their own until they each have five.

Tell the players to keep track of the notes with words on, as they will swap these with each other during the game.

Write the starting poem
Ask the players to write a poem based on the five words they have. The important thing here is not to write a great poem, or to think about rhyme or meter. It is perfectly fine to write the poem by just ordering the five words they have. If they wish to, they can add additional words and build out more.

Write the poem on a piece of paper and save it. Think about how the poem relates to your character. It might say something about their past, their present or just set a mood. You are entirely free to choose your own interpretation.

Practice swapping the words
Tell the players:

In the metascenes during the game itself you will swap words with each other and rewrite your poems. We will soon practice such a scene. These scenes take place in an abstract space outside of the narrative of the regular scenes, but what happens here will bleed into the regular scenes and vice versa.

As the game progresses you may find that you end up in a much different place from where you started out, with words shifting in meaning.

Here is how the meta scenes are played:

While the music plays, gather in your groups. Without speaking, you will swap words with each other. You will always do this by giving one of your words to another person. Start by pointing to the person you want to give a word. Everyone should give away one word and receive one word, so you might have to adjust who gives to whom to make it work.

When handing over the word, do so in a way that conveys something of what your character is feeling for that person. For example, hand it over with a light touch that is almost a caress, or with an unnecessarily hard harsh handshake. We will give some suggestions in each metascene to escalate the intensity during the game. Please use these in whatever way you find useful and adapt it to what you feel comfortable with and how the story evolves. The point is to start out slowly and escalate as the game progresses.

In this exercise, try to think about what the word you give and receive signifies in your relationship.

When you have swapped your words with each other, write the first version of your poem. In the metas scenes during the actual game you can revise the poem as much or as little as you like. When everyone is finished writing, read the poems to each other in the groups. When you have finished reading, sit or stand quietly, backs touching and notice each other's breathing.

During the game, once the music stops the next scene will start and you will get instructions for that scene.

Leave some space for questions, then turn up the music and ask them to practice the metascene. When they have finished reading the poems, let them breathe for about a minute at the most, then turn down the music.

Discuss the characters in the groups (5 min)

Now that they have made their poems, ask them to briefly talk to each other in the groups about their characters and their relationships. Has anything changed in how they view them? Are there any new things that have come up? This is the final check point to adjust characters and relationships before play starts.

Short introduction of all the characters in the full group (10 min)

Gather in the full group and have each player **very briefly** introduce their character with name, pronoun, their role in the ensemble (i.e. actor, director, etc) and one or two sentences about who they are.

Create a relationship outside of the group (5 min)

Instruct the players to each find one person who is not in their smaller group. In these pairs they should talk to each other and try to find a way to support each other's play. That can mean different things depending on your characters. For example:

- The other person will try to be someone who upholds the norms and questions the behaviours and/or relationship of your character
- The other person is an enabler who will push your characters into making good (or bad) decisions
- The other person is a shoulder to cry on when all has ended in disaster

Try to find a way to support each other's play and stories.

In one scene we will instruct you to focus a bit extra on these relationships, but you can always seek out each other during the game.

Time for questions and a break (15 min)

Leave some time here for the players to ask questions, go to the bathroom, etc.

During the break, set the table in the public play-area and put out glasses, drinks and any snacks. Also put up a station for paper and pens for the meta scenes.

You can also use this time as a buffer should any of the other sections have taken longer than anticipated.

The game

Intro and general instructions

It is now time to start the actual game. Below are the instructions to read to the players before you begin. Before doing so make sure to answer any questions that may have popped up.

Remind the players that the space is divided into two parts, one public where everyone can see you - this is where the dinner will be set up etc, and one private area where play can be considered private.

The game has five scenes, a prologue and an epilogue. Between all the regular scenes there will be a metascen in which you will swap words, write poems and read them to each other (like you have already practiced). We will use music to signal the transition into the metascene. When you hear the music there is roughly 1 minute left of the scene so wrap up and quiet down.

The scenes will follow the theater companies last dinner together, from the start of the dinner to the morning after. As the night progresses, social norms will become less and less strict, and things that have previously been happening under the surface will come to light.

The themes of this game are love and poetry - you are free to interpret these as you wish.

As you play, try to let the poetry from the metascenes inspire you in the regular scenes and vice versa. Bring what happened in the last scene into the word exchanges and the poems that you write. You may find that you end up in a different place from where you started out, with words shifting in meaning as the game progresses.

We will lead you through the entire process, so you do not have to remember anything, just follow the instructions before each scene.

Prologue (5 min)

Tell the players to sit down on the floor or stand facing each other.
Play the meta scene music.

I now want you to look at the other person or persons in your groups through the eyes of your character. Notice all the unique and wonderful things about each person. The shape of their ears, the way the hair sticks up, or doesn't, the color of the skin just above the neck, their hands, and so on and so on…

Give them some time to do this before you continue.

Now, please raise your hands and hold out the palms of your hands, almost touching but not quite. Feel the warmth, the closeness and the distance between you. Think about what pulls you together and what pushes you apart.

Give them a moment again.

Now, please read the poems you created in the workshop to each other, one at the time, in your groups. When you have done so I will lead you into the next scene.

Scene 1: Entrée (10 min)

Instructions for the players
The dinner is about to start and the entrée is served.

Take your places at the table. Try to sit apart from your core group and close by your out-of-group relation. Try not to talk to the people in your group, only play with stolen looks and meaningful glances.

The mood is festive but you feel that the eyes of polite society are on you.

Meta scene 1 (8 min)

Turn up the meta scene music when there is about one minute left of the previous scene.

We are now entering a metascene where you will gather in your groups. Without speaking, you will now swap words with each other.

This time, try to do so while barely touching each other.

When you have done so, take a piece of paper and revise your poem as much or as little as you would like. When you have all finished writing, read the poems to each other in the groups. When you have finished reading, sit or stand quietly, backs touching and focus on each other's breathing.

Let them breathe together for about a minute, then end the scene by turning down the music.

Scene 2: Desserts (15 min)

Instructions for the players
The party is really starting to kick off. Spirits are high, and many are getting a bit drunk. Conversations are louder and more rowdy than they were at the beginning of the evening. Conventions matter less and less as the dinner is drawing to a close.

You are now free to move around the table and sit wherever you want. You can start acting on the desire to be close to your love interest or interests. The mood is drunk and honest.

Meta scene 2 (8 min)

Turn up the meta scene music when there is about one minute left of the previous scene.

We are now entering a metascene where you will gather in your groups. Without speaking, you will now swap words with each other.

This time, whether the touch is gentle or hostile, let it linger for a little bit.

When you have done so, take a piece of paper and revise your poem as much or as little as you would like. When you have all finished writing, read the poems to each other in the groups. When you have finished reading, sit or stand quietly, backs touching and focus on each other's breathing.

Let them breathe together for about a minute, then end the scene by turning down the music.

Scene 3: Clearing the tables (10 min)

Instructions for the players
Dinner is over, it's time to clear the tables and move them aside to make a dance floor.

Start the scene with your out-of-group relationship, but you don't have to spend the whole scene with them. Take this opportunity to get new perspectives, and good or bad advice.

The mood is jittery, both hopeful and desperate.

Meta scene 3 (8 min)

Turn up the meta scene music when there is about one minute left of the previous scene.

We are now entering a metascene where you will gather in your groups. Without speaking, you will now swap words with each other.

This time, when you swap words, get into each other's personal space. Let any touch linger longer, and stand close together.

When you have done so, take a piece of paper and revise your poem as much or as little as you would like. When you have all finished writing, read the poems to each other in the groups. When you have finished reading, sit or stand quietly, backs touching and focus on each other's breathing.

Let them breathe together for about a minute, then end the scene by turning down the music.

Scene 4: Afterparty (20 min)

Instructions for the players
Dinner is over and the party continues. Someone has put on music. All bets are off, you are drawn to each other and feel the need to act on your desire, whether this is to confront a rival or be near a lover. Dance, if you want to.

The mood is that it is now or never.

Here is a link to a spotify playlist with slow blues music that you can use here.

If you want to, feel free to substitute it with music that you prefer.

Meta scene 4 (8 min)

Switch to the meta scene music when there is about one minute left of the previous scene.

We are now entering a metascene where you will gather in your groups. Without speaking, you will now swap words with each other.

This time, when you swap words, do so trying to express everything that your character feels for the other person. Let the nature of your relationship guide you.

When you have done so, take a piece of paper and revise your poem as much or as little as you would like. When you have all finished writing, read the poems to each other in the groups. When you have finished reading, sit or stand quietly, backs touching and focus on each other's breathing.

Let them breathe together for about a minute, then end the scene by turning down the music.

Scene 5: The light of dawn (15 min)

Instructions for the players
Dawn is coming, the birds start to sing, the morning is just around the corner. You are no longer with the others at the party, but have found a spot for yourselves.

You need to decide how things will end as morning comes. Is this the beginning of something new? A good-bye? Or something in between? The scene does not have to be a promise for the future, but if you want to, it can set the tone for what's to come.

In this scene, you might have to take turns, if some characters need time alone. It is fine for players to watch from the sidelines, but try to take turns and/or to invite the third or fourth wheels back at some point.

Epilogue (8 min)

Turn up the meta scene music when there is about one minute left of the previous scene.

One final time, you will swap words with each other, any way you choose, and then revise your poem as much or as little as you would like. You may find that you have ended up in a much different place from where you started out, with words shifting in meaning.

When you have all finished writing, read your final poems to each other in the groups. When you have finished reading, sit down facing each other. If you want, you can hold hands. Look at each other with the eyes of the character. Perhaps you see each other clearer now, perhaps you notice something new.

When the music fades out the game is over.

Let them sit for at least one minute. Then fade out the music.

Debrief (10 min)

The purpose of the debrief is to give the players a few minutes to gather themselves and share their experiences before leaving the game area.

Gather all the players in a circle and go around the group asking everyone to share a short thought on how they are feeling right now.

If you have more time here you can do more rounds on more questions, for example asking people if they want to share some memorable moments from the game.

Ask if you can collect all the poems, as documentation from the game. This is of course completely voluntary.

Now, you can let the players stay around and talk freely amongst themselves if they wish. But at this point the game is finished.

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Appendix 1: Story archetype suggestions

Groups with 3 people

The love triangle
A loves both B and C. Who will they choose? Are B and C bitter rivals from way back or the best of friends?

Enemies to lovers
A and B are a pair (friends or lovers), and enemies with C. But is the animosity turning into something else between two or more of the parties?

The queer crush
A and B are a supposedly straight couple, but now A is starting to feel an attraction for the same-sex person C, who is also B's best friend.

Infidelity
A and B are a pair, but A has had a secret affair with C. What happens when B finds out?

Will they, won't they?
A loves B, B loves A, but will they be able to get past their insecurities and tell each other? And will C, a good friend of both, help or hinder the situation, or maybe realize they have feelings of their own?

Groups with 4 people

The invite
One couple wants to invite the other for a more intimate relationship. How do they respond? And what complications arise if they accept?

Never too late for love?
A, B, C, and D have been friends forever - but is that all they ever will be? Is it really too late for new feelings to emerge? And how do they deal with the new situation?

Double exes, double trouble
A used to be with B, and C used to be with D. A and D, and B and C are best friends. Now the question is - should they get back together with their exes, or is it actually a really, really bad idea...

Appendix 2: Character archetypes

Leading actor	Leading actor
Director	Leading actor
Playwright	Supporting actor
Supporting actor	Supporting actor
Technician	Supporting actor
Costume designer	Technician
Make-up artist	Technician
Make-up artist	Assistant director
Producer	Supporting actor
Choreographer	Leading actor