PGEG S3 03

Modern Poetry

SEMESTER III

ENGLISH

BLOCK 1

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. **Prof. Pona Mahanta**, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University
2. **Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami**, Former Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University
3. **Prof. Bibhash Choudhury**, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinator : Dr. Prasenjit Das, Associate Professor, Discipline of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1-4	**Dr. Prasenjit Das**

Editorial Team

Content : **Dr. Manab Medhi**
Department of English, Bodoland University

Structure, Format and Graphics : **Dr. Prasenjit Das**

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SEMESTER 3
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 3: MODERN POETRY
BLOCK 1: HISTORY AND CONTEXTS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Modern Poetry refers to poetry written, mainly in Europe and North America, in between 1890 and 1950, in the tradition of modernist literature. But the term also depend upon a number of factors– including its origins and influences, particular poetic schools in question and so on. The modernist break with the past, its different inventions and innovations were also clearly visible in the field of poetry. Thus, modern poetry is stated to have begun with the French Symbolism or Symbolist Movement and have ended with World War II. However, for our purpose, in this course, we shall also try to look at the state of poetry following World War II.

Besides modern Poetry presents an almost different experience in addressing issues of the 20th century. Modern poetry encompasses a number of poets who offer very different responses to the chaos of a world torn apart by the two world wars. Poetic experiments in the beginning of 20th century bears important testimony of a changed outlook involving new modes of expression, the emerging idea of poetry as an exploration of the possibilities of language, the origins and emergence of modernism, the influence of symbolism, the impact of the two World Wars, and the subsequent post war disillusionment. In Course 1 of Semester 1 of the MA English Programme, you have already read about the history of modern poetry with reference to the representative poets. However, in this course, our purpose shall be to look at the history of modern poetry more meticulously, and the characteristics of the modernist poetry shall be discussed with reference to some poems of the representative poets.

BLOCK 1: INTRODUCTION

The units of this Block need to be studied as the history of Modern poetry with reference to various modern poets since the early part of the 20th century till 1960s and 70s, their technical and thematic renderings as well as the various social and intellectual contexts. Keeping this in mind, this Block is divided into four units, which are as the following:

Unit 1: This is the first unit of Block 1 of Course 3 on Modern Poetry. This unit will familiarise you with the idea of the modern poetry as well as with some important trends in the 20th century poetry. However, this unit shall also help you to consider the different important aspects and contexts of modern poetry, which would help you to discuss and interpret the prescribed modern poems.

Unit 2: This unit shall help you to discuss the idea of Symbolism in the context of Modern English Poetry. However, we shall start our discussion on the topic first by referring to the Symbolist Movement which designates specifically a group of French writers beginning with Charles Baudelaire and then with later poets such as Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, StéphaneMallarmé and Paul Valéry. Our main purpose here is to help you to examine how this Symbolist movement influenced the English poets of the 20th century.

Unit 3: In this unit, we shall try to discuss some of the important aspects as well as contexts of 20th century war poetry. The truths told by war poets continue to disconcert, not least because they encompass what Wilfred Owen called the 'exultation'of war as well as the futility, the imaginative opportunities as well as the senseless horrors. War poets cannot wholly regret even the most appalling experiences, as they transform violence, death, atrocity, into the pleasing formal aesthetics of art. It is assumed that once you finish reading this unit, you will be able to acknowledge the contributions of the war poets to English poetry of the 20th century.

Unit 4: This is the last unit of this Block. In this unit, we shall have a look at the contexts of modern poetry following World War II. In this unit, we shall specifically deal with Apocalyptic poetry and Movement poetry in some detail as they bear tremendous significance in the context of 20th century English poetry.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these

questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING MODERN POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Idea of Modern Poetry

1.4 Some Important Trends in Modern Poetry

1.4.1 The Decadents

1.4.2 The Georgians

1.4.3 The Imagists

1.5 Let us Sum up

1.6 Further Reading

1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.8 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the history of modern poetry with reference to the famous modernist poets
- provide your own definition of modern poetry
- enlist the various shifts and changes taking place in the field of poetry in the 20th century
- identify some of the important poetic trends and discuss their characteristics
- gain some ideas on the techniques used by the modern poets

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 1 of Course 3 on Modern Poetry. This unit will familiarise you with the idea of the modern poetry as well as with some important poetic trends in the 20th century poetry. In Course 1 of Semester 1 of the MA English Programme, you have already read briefly about the history of modern poetry with reference to the representative poets

and their works. However, in this unit, and also in the units that follow, we shall try to consider those aspects and contexts of modern poetry, which would help you to discuss and interpret the prescribed modern English poets of the 20th century in this Course. Therefore, we would like you to pay particular attention to the different changes taking place in the writing of poems by the renowned modern poets of the 20th century, and then use your understanding in the discussion of the prescribed modern poets. For the purpose of this unit, we have substantially adapted from the entry on modern poetry in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

1.3 THE IDEA OF MODERN POETRY

[Adapted from "English Poetry" in *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, Pages 350-352]

In this section, we shall try to quickly gloss through the different ideas of modern poetry with reference to the various modernist poets as well as their major concerns.

Modernism can be simplistically seen as a reaction against Romanticism. However, seen in the context of poetry, the picture of modernism seems too complicated. Amidst several competing poetic schools in the early 20th century, mention must be made of the rousing masculinity of Rudyard Kipling and Henry Newbolt; the Georgian return to the countryside, and the poetry of the First World War, which began in the patriotic enthusiasm of Rupert Brooke and ended in the angry pacifism of Wilfred Owen. The poetic anthologies of the Georgians that appeared from 1911 to 1922 included poets like Walter de la Mare, Robert Graves and Edward Thomas. Although not in technique, they were moderns in their awareness and purpose. The Georgians were very conscious of being English, and there has always been a strong native tradition in 20th century poetry, taking us back to Hardy and even to the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes. Poets like John Betjeman, Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes of around 1950s and 60s can all be seen as belonging to this tradition.

T. S. Eliot, as you will come to know, is the man who brought French symbolism to England, borrowing substantially from the concentrated, intellectual, gnomic poetry of Mallarme and Valery and the colloquial, ironic,

self-conscious poetry of Corbiere and Laforgue. Eliot's modernist viewpoints start with his claim that the English metaphysical poets used language in a way very similar to the French symbolists, and with his assertions that modern poetry must be difficult, "Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results." Eliot's first poetry collection—*Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) opens with two dramatic monologues that owe to Laforgue and Henry James. J. Alfred Prufrock, in his "love-song", sees himself descending the stair "with a bald spot in the middle of my hair," and the speaker of "Portrait of a Lady" also says, "My smile falls heavily among the bric-a-brac." This analogy with music is central to the symbolist view of poetry, and it appears in the titles of several of Eliot's poems such as "Preludes", "Five-finger Exercises", "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and *Four Quartets.*

Eliot regarded Ezra Pound, yet another great modern poet, as his immediate master, and dedicated his famous poem *The Waste Land* to him with the phrase "il miglior fabbro" (the best craftsman). Pound's origin in aesthetics is even clearer than Eliot's as is his debt to Browning in his early dramatic monologues. Pound never ceased to be a literary poet, adapting freely from many languages. Both Pound and Eliot reintroduced into English poetry the Renaissance idea of "imitatio," the insertion into a poem of pieces of earlier poems on the same theme, usually adapted somewhat; Pound carried this to its greatest extreme in the *Cantos,* the huge poem to which he devoted his later years.

Along with Eliot and Pound, we cannot but refer to the name of W. B. Yeats. However, Yeats never became a modernist to the same extent as Pound and Eliot. Instead, he moved away from his early romanticism. Although, his finest poems retain a concern with traditional romantic themes: religion, art, history. "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" sums up the dichotomy that runs through all his poetry. "Sailing to Byzantium" is often recognised as a 20th century equivalent to Keats' "Grecian Urn". Both poems set forth the paradox that the timelessness of art can capture the flux of living most perfectly because of its very lifelessness. Yeats was interested in a wide



Dissociation of Sensibility: This phrase first appears in T. S. Eliot's essay, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), where he suggests: "something…happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning…Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility."

This idea became instrumental in not only reviving the significance of the Metaphysical poetry in the 20th century but also in establishing Eliot's modernist ideas. Eliot's essay helped inspire interest in 17th century poets in the 20th century.

range of fringe religions, esoteric science, the occult and cyclic views of history. He put these ideas into his prose work *A Vision* (1925), and used them as a basis for many of his greatest poems. Thus, his poetic works are a prime case for exploring the relation between poetry and ideas. The painstaking system of historical periods, related to the phases of the moon in *A Vision* is compressed into terse and resonant statements about the chaos of the modern world in such poems as "The Second Coming" and "Lapis Lazuli," or such memorable couplets as "Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy / We that look on but laugh in tragic joy," where aesthetic delight and social despair ignite each other.

English poetry in the 1930s became more political. The leftwing enthusiasms of the Popular Front and opposition to Fascism ran through the works of the poets like W. H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice. The Spanish Civil War was the focal conflict of the decade, and Auden offered a Marxist version of it in his "Spain 1937." Auden, the most complex and interesting of these poets, soon left his political phase behind, and later tried to suppress it when revising his early work. His three long poems, *New Year Letter* (1941), *For the Time Being* (1945), and *The Age of Anxiety* (1948), show his growing religious concerns and shift to a more psychological and anthropological stance. However, one of his most powerful political poems, "The Shield of Achilles," did appear as late as 1955. Auden's later development was seen as irresponsible by those who regarded him as the political conscience of the 1930s, but it can equally be seen as showing a constant vitality and intellectual range. A very different view of the 30s is provided by John Betjeman (1906-83), who by the time he became the Poet Laureate in 1972, was regarded with a grudging respect by the critics, responding to his obvious verbal skill and the deep feeling under the quaint humour.

The World War II produced surprisingly little poetry of any lasting importance. Eliot and Dylan Thomas did write movingly about the air raids. The neo-romanticism and revived surrealism of the 1940s did not seem to be of any interest, but with the exception of the works of Dylan Thomas. His poems, using a variety of formal verse forms, including experiments of

great discipline and complexity, are at times turgid, at other times, very moving in their verbal richness. His most popular poems are the celebratory "Poem in October" and "Fern Hill" which anticipate the even more popular *Under Milk Wood* (1953), a radio play that mingles bawdiness and a nursery-rhyme magic.

The 1950s saw the rise of a new school of poets called 'The Movement' and they valued clarity, wit, and traditional competence, while also being suspicious of bardic afflatus and grand gesture. As a movement, it was short-lived, and its main figures, Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Donald Davie, Philip Larkin, and Thom Gunn, soon took their own ways. Larkin was the most admired poet in the 1960s, his wry melancholy and resigned awareness of the drabness of life being presented with wit and a powerful lyric gift: "Church Going" and "The Witsun Weddings," treating religion and ritual from the stance of a wryly-bewildered outsider, may be considered the two most representative poems of the post war generation. However, Ted Hughes, who became Poet Laureate in 1984, offers a strong contrast to Larkin: whereas Larkin derives from Hardy, Hughes derives from Lawrence. Hughes is prolific, sometimes obscure, his poems displaying verbal energy and inventiveness. His best-known volume is *Crow* (1970), which is explicitly violent and blasphemous, and which convey a disturbing sense of cruelty.

It needs to be mentioned here that since the 1960s, a poetic school of astonishing richness and fertility arose in Northern Ireland, with political violence since 1969 providing much of the subject matter. The leading figure is Seamus Heaney, whose verbal richness moves powerfully between Irish arid personal themes, The other poets are—John Montague, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon and Paul Muldoon. The works of Craig Raine and Christopher Reid have become known as "Martian" because of Raine's poem "A Martian sends a postcard home," a manifesto of Defamiliarisation, inviting the readers to see common objects with the eye of a Martian or small child. Many of their best poems are riddles.

This is also the time when for the first time in English literature, women started making their presence felt in the field of poetry. Stevie Smith wrote mischievously naive poetry that verges on doggerel, but achieved a few

unforgettable short poems: “Not waving but drowning” has become one of the most famous lyrics of the age. Elizabeth Jennings, who had been associated with the ‘Movement’ and Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963 at the age of 32, both handle mental breakdown and inner disturbance with poise and insight. She also wrote some very significant poems about motherhood and domestic life. More recent names include Elizabeth Bartlett, U. A. Fanthorpe, Anne Stevenson, Jenny Joseph, and Fleur Adcock.

It is however difficult to group the poets who rose to prominence after 1970. There can be seen a second “invasion” of American influence, esp. through the work of the “confessional” poets such as Amy Lowell, John Berryman and Sylvia Plath (who herself settled in England and married an English poet Ted Hughes), as well as through the violently modernist techniques applied to urban life—e.g. in the work of Roy Fisher. Adrian Mitchell is a popular—and populist—poet of strong political commitment.

Some other late 20th century English poets who need mentioning include–Norman MacCaig who combines a keen eye for nature with a brilliant verbal gift and philosophic probing; R. S. Thomas whose religious poems are the product of a Christianity after the death of God movement; Charles Tomlinson developing into an urbane, controlled, intelligent and at times witty poet; Peter Redgrove writing in a style that is largely surrealist; and Geoffrey Hill who has written complex, resonant poems in traditional meters and prose-poems.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name some of the poetic schools of the early 20th century.

Q 2: How is the poet T. S. Eliot connected to French Symbolism? How does he view the idea of modern poetry?

Q 3: Mention the specific contributions of W. B. Yeats to modern poetry.

Q 4: What is Auden’s contribution to modern poetry?

Q 5: Write a note on the major concerns of the Movement poets.

1.4 SOME IMPORTANT TRENDS IN MODERN POETRY

In this section, we shall only look at some of the most prominent groups of the modernist poets.

1.4.1 The Decadents

[Adapted from *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, Pages 275-6]

The decadents refer to periods or works whose qualities mark a "falling away" from previously recognised conditions or standards of excellence. The term is often applied to the Alexandrian (or Hellenistic) period in Greek literature (300-30 B.C.) and to the period in Latin literature after the death of Augustus (14 A.D.). In modern poetry, 'The Decadents' has been identified most persistently in the works of the French symbolist of the late 19th century, whose influence in the British Isles encouraged native tendencies already nurtured by the poetry of Walter Pater, Rossetti and Swinburne, and by the general ambience of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement.

A basic characteristic of the decadents has been a failure to recognise objective or timeless values that transcend and give form and direction to individual experience and effort. In these terms, a decadent poet is seen living in a state of flux, he tends to be concerned not with "the fruit of experience" but with "experience itself and with private sensations". Besides, his poems reveal a number of "decadent" characteristics, some of which are as the following:

- Ennui or the feeling of being bored by something tedious.
- A search for novelty with attendant artificiality and interest in the unnatural, excessive self-analysis, feverish hedonism with poetic interest in corruption and morbidity.
- Abulia or a loss of will power, neurosis, and exaggerated erotic sensibility.
- Aestheticism, with stress on "Art for Art's Sake" in the evocation of exquisite sensations and emotions.
- Dandyism and scorn of contemporary society and mores.

- Restless curiosity, perversity, or eccentricity in subject matter; overemphasis on form, with resultant loss of balance between form and content—or interest in ornamentation, resulting at times in disintegration of artistic unity.
- Bookishness, erudite or exotic vocabulary.
- Frequent employment of synaesthesia or a sensation that normally occurs in one sense modality when another modality is stimulated
- Complex and difficult syntax.
- Experiments in the use of new rhythms, rich in evocative and sensuous effects alien to those of tradition and often departing from the mathematical principles of control in established prosody.
- Obscurity, arising from remote, private, or complicated imagery.
- A pervasive sense of something lost—a nostalgic semi-mysticism without clear direction or spiritual commitment, but with frequent reference to exotic religions and rituals, e.g. Tarot cards, magic, alchemy, Theosophy and the like

From the above-mentioned characteristics, there emerge certain fundamental distinctions between the symbolists and the decadents. While the Symbolist inhabits a world of seamless and cumulative duration, a world of temporal synthesis, the decadent endures the forces of heredity, that produce a fluctuation between febrility and neurasthenia, culminating in psychological exhaustion.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Mention the common tendency of decadent poetry?

Q 7: State some of the common characteristics of decadent poetry.

1.4.2 The Georgians

[Adapted from *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, Page 461]

Edward Marsh, in his preface to the Anthology *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912* (1912), the first of five anthologies he edited, suggested, "that we are the beginning of another 'Georgian period' which may take rank…with several great poetic ages of the past." Since then, the term is in vogue and the poets associated with the movement called "The Georgians" include names like Lascelles Abercrombie, Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, John Drinkwater, James Elroy Flecker, W. W. Gibson, Ralph Hodgson, Harold Munro, J. C. Squire, and W. J. Turner; and the others who occasionally published in *Georgian Poetry* were Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence and James Stephens.

The Georgians were regarded as timid pastoralists, they were in fact rebelling against the poetic modes influential in Britain since the 1890s—the withdrawal from life of the Aesthetes (Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson) and the Tory Imperialism of the public poets (Rudyard Kipling, Sir Henry Newbolt). The Georgians proposed to record actual personal experience in language close to common speech anticipating a similar rejection of public rhetoric after the World War II by 'The Movement' poets in Robert Conquest's Anthology *New Lines,* 1956.

As an avant-garde movement, however, the Georgians were quickly outdistanced by the modernists Pound, Eliot and their followers, who published their first work during the same decade, 1910-20, and came to prominence in the 1920s. The other factor that made Georgian poetry look old-fashioned was the brutal experience of trench warfare in World War I, which brought into the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and, in the 1920s, Robert Graves a harsh realism absent from the Georgians' bucolic reminiscences. Their verse, traditional in technique, remained untouched by the modernists' experimentalism or flouting of

conventional decorum. Rival publications to the Georgian poets, came from the modernist camp such as Pound's *Des Imagistes* (1914) and *Wheels* (1916-21).

Although the Georgians existed for a relatively brief period, their influence continued for quite some time. For example, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence and other British poets developed their personal styles based on the Georgian emphasis on honesty in place of public rhetoric; on the common life as poetic subject rather than a retreat into aestheticism; and on the language of actual speech, not false poeticism. When Marsh, in his introduction to the last of his Anthologies (1922), wrote, "Much admired modern work seems to me, in its lack of inspiration and its disregard of form, like gravy imitating lava," the opponents of Grave could dismiss the movement as passé. Its virtues were being more aggressively promoted by Pound and other modernists in the context of bolder treatments of subject, structure, and diction. Therefore, through the Georgians faded away, still they helped to reform and redeem English poetry from being either too private or too public to express the truth of feeling.



LET US KNOW

Free Verse (Verse Libre):

This type of verse is distinguished from meter by the lack of a structuring grid based on counting of linguistic units and/or position of linguistic features. Some features of Free Verse include—nonmetrical structuring, heavy reliance on grammatical breaks, absence of regular end rhyme. The early 20th century saw the rise of Free Verse, which were the products of different literary-historical conditions. We could also argue that free verse reaches back to the oral roots of poetry, to the period preceding the development of regular metricity. In the first type of free verse, the form partly freed from the constraints of traditional meter, has its origins in Fr. *Vers Libere* of the 17th century, when La Fontaine and his

followers began to loosen the strictly syllabic lines of French poetry by inventing "liberated" metrical forms. Such was the precursor of those prosodic strainings against meter, which in the 19th century became a major trend.

In English, this partial liberation of and from meter existed here and there before Whitman. This type and, if included, the premetrical form described briefly above, appear as free verse only in retrospect. The second type, avant-garde free verse, has no direct roots in the metrical tradition at least in the way the verse-line is built up. Meter is what this self-conscious, self-proclaimed free verse is free of. This type was born when Walt Whitman's proudly non-metrical *Leaves of Grass* (1855) flouted accent-and-syllable counting regularity. Whitman brought back into poetry strong stress at unpredictable places, grammatical emphasis and parallelism, anaphora, and long lines. His oral-derived form is expansive, asymmetrical, mixing dialects and modes, and above all, personal.

Writers of another subtype, notably William Carlos Williams and those in his tradition, like Cid Gorman, George Oppen, and Robert Creeley, strive for more delicate dynamics, wrenching tighter Whitman's long and sometimes prolonged lines. An international list of avant-garde practitioners would include, among many others, Arthur Rimbaud, Andre Breton, Paul Eluard, Michel Deguy, Aime Cesaire, Anne-Marie Albiach, Kuo Mo Jo, Yip Wai-lim, Aleksandr Blok, Velemir Xlebnikov, Nikolai Zabolotskij, Olga Berggolts, Evgeny Evtusenko, Pablo Neruda; Lajos Kassak, Milan Fust; and Gael Turnbull and Charles Tomlinson.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Name the poets commonly known as the Georgians.

Q 9: Why did the Georgian poetry take a declining trend?

Q 10: What is Free Verse? Why did Free Verse emerge?

1.4.3 The Imagists

[Adapted from *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, Page 574]

As a school of poetry, Imagism flourished in England and America between 1912 and 1914, and being marked by the virtues of clarity, compression, and precision. In 1912, Ezra Pound wrote of the "forgotten school of images" that formed around the Bergsonian philosopher T. E. Hulme. Hulme was the founder of a 'Poets' Club' which began meeting regularly in London in 1909, and which was influenced by Hulme's speculations on literary language. Hulme wrote in his essay "Romanticism and Classicism" that the language of poetry is a "visual concrete one…Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive lang."

It was however Ezra Pound who founded the 'Imagist Movement'. Hilda Doolittle recalls in her memoir of Pound that Pound named imagism when he suggested revisions to her poem "Hermes of the Ways" and "scrawled 'H. D. Imagiste' at the bottom of the page" before sending it to the magazine called *Poetry* in October 1912. In November, Pound used the term "Imagiste" for the first time in print when he published the "Complete Poetical Works" of Hulme (five short poems) as an appendix to his *Ripostes.* Poems by "H. D., 'Imagiste'" were published in *Poetry* in January 1913, and in the March 1913 issue, F. S. Flint, quoting an unnamed "Imagiste" (Pound), listed these characteristics of the movement:

- Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective.
- Use of absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
- As regarding rhythm, to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.

However, the April issue of the magazine *Poetry* included the best known and perhaps the finest of the imagist poems, Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." The climax of the movement came in the Spring of 1914, when Pound published an anthology *Des Imagistes* in England and America*,* which included poems by H. D., Richard

Aldington, F. S. Flint, Amy Lowell, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams. By this time, Lowell was assuming leadership of the movement and began publishing anthologies entitled *Some Imagist Poets* for the years 1915-17. However, Pound repudiated "Amygism," declaring that it was a dilution of the original movement, which violated the second imagist principle, and aligned himself rather with vorticism.

By 1917, Lowell herself felt that the movement had run its course; but her anthologies had kept it alive, and her first two volumes contained prefaces, which, along with the *Poetry* essays, constitute the most deliberate statements of imagist theory. Though the poems themselves often have a merely casual relation to Pound's definition of the image, they place their values in clarity, exactness, and concreteness of detail; in economy of language and brevity of treatment; and in an organic basis for selecting rhythmic patterns. H.D.'s "Storm" illustrates these values:

> You crash over the trees,
> you crack the live branch—
> the branch is white,
> the green crushed,
> each leaf is rent like split wood.

The imagists' concern with poetic form and technique and their desire for the immediacy of effect that arises from the closest possible association of word and object were in part a program for improving the craft of writing which influenced the formalist poetics of critics like Eliot, Richards, and Ransom. Recent critics have seen imagism as an attempt to create a poem as a single entity, which, unlike a symbolic or allegorical poem, intensifies its objective reality rather than expressing the subjective feelings of the poet. Stephen Spender made the essential point about the influence and importance of imagism like this: "the aims of the imagist movement in poetry provide the archetype of a modern creative procedure."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Who are the imagist poets? Mention the characteristics of Imagist poetry.

Q 12: What are some of the main concerns of the Imagists?



1.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that modernism was an international movement, appearing in Germany as Expressionism and in England as introduced from France. The seminal figures of English literary modernism of the time are Pound and Eliot, both Americans, though Eliot became very thoroughly anglicised. Their poetry contains a great deal of social commentary and awareness of the ugliness of modern life, yet in many ways, they derive more from aestheticism than from any tradition of social realism. You have learnt that modernist poetic trends such as The Decadents, The Georgians and The Imagists help us to understand the nature of modernist poetry as well as its main concerns. With their individual poetic techniques, the poets belonging to these groups in a way shaped the history of modern poetry in the 20th century. It is hoped that the information and ideas you have gained in this unit shall help you to analyse the prescribed poets and their poems with confidence.



1.6 FURTHER READING

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1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The rousing masculinity of Rudyard Kipling and Henry Newbolt… ….the imagists… …the decadents… …the Georgian return to the countryside… …and the poetry of the First World War.

Ans to Q 2: T. S. Eliot brought French symbolism to England, borrowing substantially from the concentrated, intellectual, gnomic poetry of Mallarme and Valery and the colloquial, ironic, self-conscious poetry of Corbiere and Laforgue… …he started with his claim that the English metaphysical poets used language in a way very similar to the French symbolists… …his idea of poetry was that modern poetry must be difficult, because, "Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results."

Ans to Q 3: W. B. Yeats moved away from his early romantic themes: religion, art, history… …his "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" sums up the dichotomy that runs through all his poetry… …he was interested in a wide range of fringe religions, esoteric science, the occult and cyclic views of history, which he put as ideas in his prose work *A Vision*… ...the painstaking system of historical periods, related to the phases of the moon in *A Vision* is compressed into terse and resonant statements about the chaos of the modern world in such poems as "The Second Coming" and "Lapis Lazuli".

Ans to Q 4: Auden left his political phase behind and later tried to suppress it when revising his early work… …his three long poems, *New Year Letter* (1941), *For the Time Being* (1945), and *The Age of Anxiety* (1948), show his growing religious concerns and shift to psychological and anthropological stance… …"The Shield of Achilles" is one of his

most powerful political poems… …Auden's later development as a poet, though marked by political conscience of the 1930s, can equally be seen as showing a constant vitality and intellectual range.

Ans to Q 5: 'The Movement' poets valued clarity, wit, and traditional competence… …Philip Larkin, was the most admired poets for his wry melancholy and resigned awareness of the drabness of life… …his poems "Church Going" and "The Witsun Weddings," that treat religion and ritual from the stance of a wryly bewildered outsider are considered the two most representative poems of the post war generation… …Ted Hughes, whose poetry displayed verbal energy and inventiveness, was another important poet of the group.

Ans to Q 6: A basic tendency of the decadents has been a failure to recognise objective or timeless values that transcend and give form and direction to individual experience and effort. .. …the decadent poet is seen living in a state of flux, as he tends to be concerned not with "the fruit of experience" but with "experience itself and with private sensations".

Ans to Q 7: Ennui or the feeling of being bored… …loss of will power, neurosis, and exaggerated erotic sensibility… …Aestheticism, with stress on "Art for Art's Sake"… …dandyism and scorn of contemporary society and mores… …erudite or exotic vocabulary… …frequent employment of synaesthesia… …complex and difficult syntax… …experiments in the use of new rhythms… …obscurity, arising from remote, private, or complicated imagery… …a pervasive sense of something lost etc.

Ans to Q 8: Lascelles Abercrombie, Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, John Drinkwater, James Elroy Flecker, W. W. Gibson, Ralph Hodgson, Harold Munro, J. C. Squire, and W. J. Turner, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence and James Stephens.

Ans to Q 9: The Georgians were quickly outdistanced by the modernists poets like Pound, Eliot and their followers… …Georgian poetry started looking old-fashioned due to the brutal experience of trench warfare in World War I, which brought into the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried

Sassoon, a harsh realism absent from the Georgians' bucolic reminiscences…. …their verse, traditional in technique, remained untouched by the modernists' experimentalism or flouting of conventional decorum.

Ans to Q 10: It is a type of verse distinguished from meter by the lack of a structuring grid based on counting of linguistic units… …some features of Free Verse include—nonmetrical structuring, heavy reliance on grammatical breaks, absence of regular end rhyme… …it emerged in the early 20th century as a product of different literary-historical conditions… …borrowing much from French poetry, the English poets "liberated" metrical forms.

Ans to Q 11: Ezra Pound, T. E. Hulme, Hilda Doolittle… …direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective… …use of absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation… ...composing poetry in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.

Ans to Q 12: The imagists were concern with poetic form and technique… …closest possible association of word and object… …It was as an attempt to create a poem as a single entity… …intensified the objective reality rather than expressing the subjective feelings of the poet… …Stephen Spender stated, "the aims of the imagist movement in poetry provide the archetype of a modern creative procedure."



1.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Provide an overview of modernist poetry on the basis of the various thematic renderings by the poets.

Q 2: Discuss modern poetry with reference to the different important groups and movements until 1930s.

Q 3: Who are known as the Georgians? Discuss the characteristics of Georgian poetry, and then critically examine their contribution to modern English poetry.

Q 4: "T. S. Eliot is the man who brought French symbolism to England." Give a reasoned answer.

Q 5: What are the common features of the poetry of The Decadents? Explain with reference to some of the decadent poets that you have read.

Q 6: Who are known as 'The Imagists' and what type of poetry did they write? Discuss in detail.

Q 7: Attempt a brief outline of the intellectual contexts and its cultural manifestations in poetry before World War II.

Q 8: Show how 'modern' poetry reflected the dominant concerns of the modern age.

Q 9: Write short notes on the following:

a. The Imagists

b. Verse Libre

c. The Georgians

d. The Decadents

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UNIT 2: SYMBOLISM AND MODERN POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 What is Symbolism or Symbolist Movement?

2.4 The French Symbolist Manifesto

2.5 Important French Symbolist Poets

2.6 Impact of Symbolism and Aestheticism on English Poetry

2.7 Let us Sum up

2.8 Further Reading

2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.10 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- define symbolism in the context of 20th century poetry
- discuss the history French Symbolism that rendered marked influence on English poetry in the 20th century
- enlist the characteristics of Symbolist poetry in general
- identify the greatest French symbolist poets and note their remarkable works
- discuss the impact of Symbolism in English poetry

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall help you to discuss the idea of Symbolism in the context of Modern English Poetry. However, we shall start our discussion on the topic first by referring to the **Symbolist Movement** which designates specifically a group of French writers beginning with Charles Baudelaire and then with later poets such as Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry. You will note that Baudelaire based the symbolic mode of his poems in part on the example of the American Edgar Allan

Poe, but especially on the ancient belief in **correspondences**—a doctrine that there exist inherent and systematic analogies between the human mind and the outer world, and also between the natural and the spiritual worlds, as Baudelaire put this doctrine: "Everything, form, movement, number, color, perfume, in the *spiritual* as in the *natural* world, is significative, reciprocal, converse, *conespondent."* As you finish reading this unit, you will not only learn about the history of the Symbolist movement in brief, but will also be able to examine how this movement influenced the English poets of the 20th century.

2.3 WHAT IS SYMBOLISM OR SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT?

[Adapted from: https://www.britannica.com/art/ Symbolism-literary-and-artistic-movement]

As you have read in the Introduction to this unit, Symbolism is a loosely organised literary and artistic movement that originated with a group of French poets in the late 19th century, spreading to painting and the theatre, and also influencing the European and American literatures of the 20th century to varying degrees. The symbolist artists sought to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of highly symbolised language. This movement saw the flourishing of French poets like Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue, Henri de Régnier, René Ghil, and Gustave Kahn. Other French poets namely Paul Valéry and Paul Claudel are also often considered to be direct 20th century heirs of the Symbolists.

As you go through this unit, you will learn that Symbolism originated as part of the revolt of certain French poets against the rigid conventions governing both technique and theme in traditional French poetry as evidenced in the precise description of **Parnassian** poetry. They wished to liberate poetry from its expository functions and its formalised oratory in order to describe instead the fleeting, immediate sensations of man's inner life and experience. They attempted to evoke the ineffable intuitions and sense impressions of man's inner life and to communicate the underlying mystery of existence through a free and highly personal use



Parnassian: Refers to a group of French poets of the late 19th century who emphasised strictness of form, named from the anthology *Le Parnasse contemporain* (1866).

Wagner: Wilhelm Richard *Wagner* was a German composer, theatre director, polemicist, and conductor.

of metaphors and images that, though lacking in precise meaning, would nevertheless convey the state of the poet's mind and hint at the "dark and confused unity" of an inexpressible reality.

Symbolist poets such as Verlaine and Rimbaud were greatly influenced by the poetry and thought of Charles Baudelaire, particularly by the poems in his *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). They adopted Baudelaire's concept of the '*correspondances'* between the senses and combined this with the **Wagnerian ideal** of a synthesis of the arts to produce an original conception of the musical qualities of poetry. Thus, to the Symbolists, the theme within a poem could be developed and "orchestrated" by the sensitive manipulation of the harmonies, tones, and colours inherent in carefully chosen words. Their emphasis on the essential and innate qualities of the poetic medium was based on the conviction that art was supreme over all other means of expression or knowledge. This, in turn, was partly based on their idealistic conviction that underlying the materiality and individuality of the physical world was another reality whose essence could best be glimpsed through the subjective emotional responses contributing to and generated by the work of art. Works such as Verlaine's *Romances sans paroles* (1874; *Songs Without Words*) and Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1876) sparked a growing interest in the nascent innovations of progressive French poets.

Jean Moréas in *Le Figaro,* published the Symbolist Manifesto on September 18, 1886. Here, he attacked the descriptive tendencies of Realist theatre, Naturalistic novels, and Parnassian poetry. He also proposed replacing the term *décadent*, which was used to describe Baudelaire and others, with the terms *symboliste* and *symbolisme.* Many little Symbolist reviews and magazines sprang up in the late 1880s, their authors freely participating in the controversies generated by the attacks of hostile critics on the movement. Mallarmé became the leader of the Symbolists, and his *Divagations* (1897) remains the most valuable statement of the movement's aesthetics. In their efforts to escape the rigid metrical patterns and to achieve freer poetic rhythms, many Symbolist poets resorted to the composition of prose poems and the use of *vers libre* (free verse), which become a fundamental form of contemporary poetry.

The Symbolist movement in poetry reached its peak around 1890s and began to enter a precipitous decline in popularity about 1900. The atmospheric, unfocused imagery of the symbolist poetry eventually came to be seen as over-refined and affected, and the term *décadent*, which the Symbolists had once proudly proclaimed, became with others a term of laughter denoting mere fin-de-siècle preciosity. The symbolist works had a strong and lasting influence on much British and American literature in the 20th century. Their experimental techniques greatly enriched the technical repertoire of modern poetry, and Symbolist theories bore fruit both in the poetry of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot and in the modern novel as represented by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in which word harmonies and patterns of images often take preeminence over the narrative.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did Symbolism evolve?

Q 2: Who published the Symbolist Manifesto? State the significance of the Manifesto.

Q 3: How did the French Symbolist poets influence the 20th century literature?

2.4 THE FRENCH SYMBOLIST MANIFESTO

[Adapted from Wikipedia]

In this section, we shall quickly go through the "The Symbolist Manifesto" published on 18 September 1886 in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* by Jean Moréas. The Manifesto describes a new literary movement, an evolution from and rebellion against both romanticism and naturalism, and it asserts the name of Symbolism as not only the appropriate for that movement, but also uniquely reflective of how creative minds approach the creation of art. The manifesto was also intended to serve more practical, immediate needs. Moréas, together with Gustave Kahn and others, felt a need to distinguish themselves from a group of writers associated with Anatole Baju and *Le Décadent*. For Moréas and Kahn, the self-identified decadent writers represented both an earlier stage of development on the

path towards symbolism, and also a frivolous exploitation of the language and techniques of the movement. Definition of Symbolism became especially important with the publication of *Les Deliquescence d'Adore Floupette*, a work of intentional parody. The skill with which it was executed, made the reading public think that *Les Deliquescence* was representative of this new literature. Clarification was essential. The Manifesto unfolded as an introduction establishing the purpose of the document and then three stages: an opening argument, a dramatic interlude, and a closing argument.

The first stage of making the case for Symbolism is an aggressive and frank definition of movement, its beliefs and priorities. As a reaction against the authority of rational naturalism, the manifesto describes symbolists as enemies "of education, declamation, wrong feelings, [and] objective description." As a reaction against the newly self-styled decadents, the manifesto goes on to stipulate the primacy of "the Idea." The purpose of creativity is to find an appropriate way to subjectively express the Idea through extravagant analogy, using natural and concrete things to obliquely reference "primordial Ideas." Against charges of obscurity resulting from this approach, the manifesto simply points to many allegorical or obscurely symbolic characters from widely accepted literature. The conclusion of the opening argument is an explanation of the style itself. Moréas lays forth the sort of paradox that is typical for symbolist art when he talks about the rhythm of their writing: ancient but lively, chaotic but ordered, fluid but boldly assertive. He then gives an appropriately colorful and obscure description of their literary technique:

...an archetypal and complex style; of unpolluted terms, periods which brace themselves alternating with periods of undulating lapses, significant pleonasms, mysterious ellipses, outstanding anacoluthia, any audacious and multiform surplus; finally the good language – instituted and updated, good and luxuriant and energetic French language...

The second portion of the Manifesto is a brief drama in two scenes, featuring poet Théodore de Banville whose 1871 work *Petit Traité de Poésie Française* ("A Small Treatise on French Poetry") helped to liberate the French poets from traditions and rules that prevented the free exercise of their

creativity. Different qualities of the French language lent themselves to different kinds of poetic rhythm and structures. He also increased the emphasis on poetry as an exercise for the poet in developing clever rhyming games.

The Manifesto concludes by first explaining the power of art and literature to bring together streams of thought and transform them into new and grand things, implying both its grandeur and its wonder. Moréas credits writers of other traditions with their accomplishments in this regard, but then argues that symbolists are uniquely positioned to deal with the essence of life: the human being within a reality that has been distorted by his own hallucinations. Symbolists are free to work with things both mechanical and mythical, things seen ahead and recalled from behind.

The final words of the Symbolist Manifesto are that "art would not know how to search into the objective, what an extremely succinct and simple starting point." For, thus art must do its searching within the subjective. The Manifesto, besides tracing early Symbolism in the dramatic works of William Shakespeare as well as in the fictional works of Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Émile Zola, also identifies a few poets as most immediately responsible for developing this current Symbolism: Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Theodore de Banville. Symbolism was seen, however as a work in-progress, constantly being refined, including by the efforts of those writers. Moréas left the door open for newcomers to shape the movement even further.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What was the purpose of the French Symbolist Manifesto?

Q 5: How was the first case of Symbolism made?

Q 6: What do you find in the closing part of the Symbolist Manifesto?

2.5 IMPORTANT FRENCH SYMBOLIST POETS

[Adapted from online *Encyclopedia Britannica*]

In the previous section, we have mentioned how the Symbolist Manifesto made a reference to some of the French Symbolist poets. These

poets were undeniably influential, and their poetic structures and conceits were built upon grand, illogical, intuitive associations. The "symbols" for which they are named are emblems of the actual world—as opposed to the purely emotional world that dominates their work—that accumulate supernatural significance in the absence of a clear narrative or location. In the following, we shall try to discuss those poets.

Charles Baudelaire:

Charles Baudelaire or Charles-Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867) was born in Paris. Together being a poet, translator, literary and art critic, his reputation rests primarily on *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857; *The Flowers of Evil*), which was perhaps the most important and influential poetry collection published in Europe in the 19th century. Similarly, his *Petits poèmes en prose* (1868; "Little Prose Poems") was also the most successful and innovative early experiment in prose poetry of the time. Since his education at the Collège Royal in 1832, Baudelaire showed promise as a student and began to write his earliest poems, but to his masters, he seemed an example of depravity, adopting what they called "affectations unsuited to his age." He also developed a tendency to moods of intense melancholy, and he became aware that he was solitary by nature. Regular acts of indiscipline led to his being expelled from the school after a trivial incident in April 1839. After passing his BA at the Collège Saint-Louis, Baudelaire became a nominal student of law at the École de Droit while in reality leading a "free life" in the Latin Quarter. There he made his first contacts in the literary world. However, his continuing extravagance made him exhaust half of his fortune leaving him debt-ridden. The agonising moods of isolation and despair that Baudelaire had known in adolescence, and which he called his moods of "spleen," returned and became more frequent.

In around 1842, Baudelaire decided to become a poet. Until 1846, he probably composed the bulk of the poems that make up the first edition (1857) of *Les Fleurs du mal*. He refrained from publishing them as separate texts, which suggests that from the beginning, he had in mind a coherent collection governed by a tight thematic architecture rather than a simple sequence of self-contained poems. In October 1845, he announced

the imminent appearance of a collection entitled “Les Lesbiennes” (“The Lesbians”), followed, at intervals after 1848, by “Les Limbes” (“Limbo”). He stated the goal which was to “represent the agitations and melancholies of modern youth.” However, none of the collections ever appeared in book form. Nevertheless, Baudelaire first established himself in the Parisian cultural milieu not as a poet but as an art critic with his reviews of the Salons of 1845 and 1846. Inspired by the example of the Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix, he elaborated in his *Salons* a wide-ranging theory of modern painting, with painters being urged to celebrate and express the “heroism of modern life.”

In 1847, Baudelaire discovered the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Overwhelmed by what he saw as the almost preternatural similarities between the American writer’s thought and temperament and his own, he embarked upon the task of translation that was to provide him with his most regular occupation and income for the rest of his life. His translation of Poe’s *Mesmeric Revelation* appeared in 1848, and thereafter translations appeared regularly in reviews before being collected in book form in *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856; “Extraordinary Tales”) and *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires* (1857; “New Extraordinary Tales”), each preceded by an important critical introduction by Baudelaire. These were followed by *Les Aventures d’Arthur Gordon Pym* (1857), *Eurêka* (1864), and *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* (1865; “Grotesque and Serious Tales”). As translations, these works are classics of French prose, and Poe’s example gave Baudelaire greater confidence in his own aesthetic theories and ideals of poetry.

Baudelaire’s growing reputation as Poe’s translator and as an art critic at last enabled him to publish some of his poems. In June 1855, the *Revue des deux mondes* published a sequence of 18 of his poems under the general title of *Les Fleurs du mal*. The poems, which Baudelaire had chosen for their original style and startling themes, brought him notoriety. When the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* was published in June 1857, 13 of its 100 poems were immediately arraigned for offences to religion or public morality. Gradually, other poems were also removed on the grounds

of obscenity. Owing largely to these circumstances, *Les Fleurs du mal* became a byword for depravity, morbidity, and obscenity, and the legend of Baudelaire as the doomed dissident and pornographic poet was born.

At the time of Baudelaire's death, many of his writings were unpublished and those that had been published were out of print. The future leaders of the Symbolist movement who attended his funeral were already started describing themselves as his followers, and by the 20th century, he was widely recognised as one of the greatest French poets of the 19th century.



LET US KNOW

Baudelaire's poetic masterpiece *Les Fleurs du mal* consists of 126 poems arranged in six sections of varying length. Baudelaire always insisted that the collection was not a "simple album" but had "a beginning and an end," each poem revealing its full meaning only when read in relation to the others within the "singular framework" in which it is placed. A prefatory poem makes it clear that Baudelaire's concern is with the general human predicament of which his own is representative. The collection may be read in the light of the concluding poem, "Le Voyage," as a journey through self and society in search of some impossible satisfaction that forever eludes the traveller.

As both poet and critic, Baudelaire stands in relation to French and European poetry as a crucial link between Romanticism and Modernism and as a supreme example, in both his life and his work, of what it means to be a modern artist. His catalytic influence was recognised in the 19th century by Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Stephane Mallarme and in the 20th century by Paul Valéry, Rainer Maria Rilke, and T.S. Eliot. In his pursuit of an "evocative magic" of images and sounds, his blending of intellect and feeling, irony and lyricism, and his deliberate eschewal of rhetorical utterance, Baudelaire moved decisively away from the Romantic poetry of statement and emotion to the modern poetry of symbol and suggestion.

His disciple Jules Laforgue stated that he had been the first poet to write of Paris as one condemned to live day to day in the city, and his greatest originality being, as Verlaine wrote in 1865, to "represent powerfully and essentially modern man" in all his physical, psychological, and moral complexity. He is a pivotal figure in European literature and thought, and his influence on modern poetry is a matter of serious discussion.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is Charles Baudelaire so famous for?

Q 8: Which aspects of Poe's work greatly influence Charles Baudelaire?

Q 9: What is Baudelaire's significance as a poet critic?

Stéphane Mallarmé:

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842—1898) was an originator and a leader of the Symbolist movement in poetry. In his childhood, Mallarmé enjoyed the sheltered security of family life for only five brief years, until the early death of his mother in August 1847. This traumatic experience was once again echoed 10 years later by the death of his younger sister Maria, in August 1857, and his father in 1863. These tragic events often explain much of the longing Mallarmé expressed, from the very beginning of his poetic career, to turn away from the harsh world of reality in search of another world. You will note that this remained the enduring theme of his poetry which may be explained by the comparative harshness with which his adult life continued to treat him.

Despite these trials and tribulations, Mallarmé made steady progress with his career as a poet. His early poems, published in different magazines in 1862, were influenced by Charles Baudelaire, whose *Les Fleurs du mal* ("The Flowers of Evil") was largely concerned with the theme of escape from reality. This was also a theme with which Mallarmé was already becoming obsessed. But, Baudelaire's escapism had been of an essentially emotional and sensual kind—a vague dream of tropical islands and peaceful landscapes where all would be "*luxe, calme et volupté*" ("luxury, calm, and

voluptuousness"). Mallarmé was of a much more intellectual bent, and his determination to analyse the nature of the ideal world and its relationship with reality is reflected in the two dramatic poems he began to write in 1864 and 1865, respectively, *Hérodiade* ("Herodias") and *L'Après-midi d'un faune* ("The Afternoon of a Faun").

By 1868, Mallarmé had come to the conclusion that, although nothing lies beyond reality, within this nothingness, lie the essences of perfect forms. The poet's task is to perceive and crystallise these essences. In so doing, the poet becomes more than a mere descriptive versifier, transposing into poetic form an already existent reality. He becomes a veritable God, creating something from nothing, conjuring up for the reader, as Mallarmé himself put it, "*l'absente de tous bouquets*"—the ideal flower that is absent from all real bouquets. But to crystallise essences in this way, to create the notion of floweriness, rather than to describe an actual flower, demands an extremely subtle and complex use of all the resources of language, and Mallarmé devoted himself during the rest of his life to putting his theories into practice in what he called his *Grand Oeuvre* ("Great Work"), or *Le Livre* ("The Book"). He never came near to completing this work, however, and the few preparatory notes that survived give little or no idea of what the end result of him might have been.

However, Mallarmé did complete a number of poems related to his projected *Grand Oeuvre,* both in their themes and in their extremely evocative use of language. Among these are several elegies—the principal ones being dedicated to Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, Richard Wagner, Théophile Gautier, and Paul Verlaine, and Mallarmé was commissioned to write these elegies at various times in his career. He no doubt agreed to do them because the traditional theme of the elegy—the man is dead but he lives on in his work—is clearly linked to the poet's own belief that, although beyond reality there is nothing, poetry has the power to transcend this annihilation. In a second group of poems, Mallarmé wrote about poetry itself, reflecting evocatively on his aims and achievements. In addition to these two categories of poems, he also wrote some poems that run counter to his obsession with the ideal world, though they, too, display that magical use of language.



LET US KNOW

Stéphane Mallarmé, the high priest of the French movement, theorised that symbols were of two types. One was created by the projection of inner feelings onto the world outside. The other existed as nascent words that slowly permeated the consciousness and expressed a state of mind initially unknown to their originator. Though Mallarmé's work was initially met with hostility for its difficulty and obscurity, his experimental work and his intricate theories eventually made him a favourite for 20th century writers and readers. Thanks to his disavowal of tradition, his unconventional syntax, his indirect expression, and his resistance to criticism, adventurous writers continue to extend his methods into contemporary poetics.

Paul Verlaine:

Paul Verlaine (1844—1896) was French lyric poet first associated with the Parnassians and later known as a leader of the Symbolists. With Mallarmé and Baudelaire, he formed the so-called Decadents. Since his teenage, he started writing verse and used to meet the leading poets of the Parnassian group and other talented contemporaries such as Mallarmé, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, and Anatole France. His poems began to appear in their literary reviews; the first, "Monsieur Prudhomme," in 1863. Three years later the first series of *Le Parnasse contemporain,* a collection of pieces by contemporary poets (hence the term Parnassian), contained eight contributions by Verlaine. Verlaine received the most recognition for his work during his lifetime and, despite his erratic and sometimes criminal behaviour, he was elected the "Prince of Poets" by the review *La Plume* shortly before his death. Though he strove to make his poetry known for its intensity and extremity, his form was almost classical in its control and musicality.

In 1863, his first volume of poetry *Poèmes saturniens* appeared. In 1882, his famous "Art poétique" was enthusiastically adopted by the young Symbolists. He later disavowed the Symbolists, chiefly because they went

further than he in abandoning traditional forms: rhyme, for example, seemed to him an unavoidable necessity in French verse. Prose works such as *Les Poètes maudits,* short biographical studies of six poets, including that of Mallarmé and Rimbaud *is* one of his important works.

One of the best lyrical of French poets, Verlaine was an initiator of modern word-music and marked a transition between the Romantic poets and the Symbolists. His best poetry broke with the sonorous rhetoric of most of his predecessors and showed that the French language could communicate new shades of human feeling by suggestion and tremulous vagueness that capture the reader by disarming his intellect; words could be used merely for their sound to make a subtler music, an incantatory spell more potent than their everyday meaning. Explicit intellectual or philosophical content is absent from his best works. His discovery of the intimate musicality of the French language was doubtless instinctive, but, during his most creative years, he was a conscious artist constantly seeking to develop his unique gift and "reform" his nation's poetic expression.

Arthur Rimbaud:

Arthur Rimbaud or Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), yet another French poet and adventurer was a renowned Symbolist poet and he markedly influenced modern poetry. Rimbaud wanted to serve as a prophet, a visionary, or, as he put it, a *voyant* ("seer"). He had come to believe in a universal life force that informs or underlies all matter. This spiritual force, which Rimbaud referred to simply as "l'inconnu" ("the unknown"), can be sensed only by a chosen few. Rimbaud set himself the task of striving to "see" this spiritual unknown and allowing his individual consciousness to be taken over and used by it as a mere instrument. He should then transmit this music of the universe to his fellow men, awakening them spiritually and leading them forward to social progress. Rimbaud had not given up his social ideals, but intended to realise them through poetry. First, though, he had to qualify himself for the task, and he coined a famous phrase to describe his method: "le dérèglement de tous les sens" ("the derangement of all the senses").

Rimbaud intended to systematically undermine the normal functioning of his senses so that he could attain visions of the "unknown." In a voluntary martyrdom, he would subject himself to fasting and pain, imbibe alcohol and drugs, and even cultivate hallucination and madness in order to expand his consciousness. In his attempts to communicate his visions to the reader, Rimbaud became one of the first modern poets to shatter the constraints of traditional metric forms and those rules of versification that he had already mastered so brilliantly. He decided to let his visions determine the form of his poems, and if the visions were formless, then the poems would be too. He began allowing images and their associations to determine the structure of his new poems, such as the mysterious sonnet "Voyelles" ("Vowels").

At the end of August 1871, on the advice of a literary friend in Charleville, Rimbaud sent some samples of his poetry to the poet Paul Verlaine who was impressed by their brilliance, and summoned Rimbaud to Paris. In a burst of self-confidence, Rimbaud composed "Le Bateau ivre" ("The Drunken Boat"). This is perhaps his finest poem, and one that clearly demonstrates what his method could achieve. Soon, he emerged as a marvellous poet. But, embarking upon a life of drink and debauchery, he became involved in a homosexual relationship with Verlaine that gave rise to scandal. The two men were soon being seen in public as lovers, and Rimbaud was blamed for breaking up Verlaine's marriage.

Rimbaud would later suggest that he was near death at this time, and the group of delicate, tenuous poems he then wrote—now known as *Derniers Vers* ("Last Verses")—express his yearning for purification through all this suffering. Still trying to match form to vision, he expresses his longing for spiritual regeneration in verse forms that are almost abstract patterns of musical and symbolic allusiveness. These poems clearly show the influence of Verlaine. About this time Rimbaud also composed the work that Verlaine called his masterpiece, "La Chasse spirituelle" ("The Spiritual Hunt"), the manuscript of which disappeared when the two poets went to England. Rimbaud now virtually abandoned verse composition; and henceforth most of his literary production would consist of prose poems.

During 1872, Rimbaud composed a series of 40 prose poems to which he gave the title *Illuminations.* These are his most ambitious attempt to develop new poetic forms from the content of his visions. The *Illuminations* consist of a series of theatrical tableaux in which Rimbaud creates a primitive fantasy world, an imaginary universe complete with its own mythology, its own quasi-divine beings, its own cities, all depicted in kaleidoscopic images that have the vividness of hallucinations. Within this framework the drama of the different stages of Rimbaud's own life is played out. He sees himself formulating his dreams; his discovery of hashish as a method of inducing visions is hailed; his ensuing nightmare anguish is relived in swirling images and convoluted syntax; and his love affair with Verlaine is recalled in cryptic images and symbols.

The rest of Rimbaud's life, from the literary point of view, was silence. He spent mush of his time roaming around different parts of the world. During this period of expatriation, Rimbaud had become famous as a poet in France. Verlaine had written about him in *Les Poètes maudits* (1884) and had published a selection of his poems. These had been enthusiastically received, and in 1886, unable to discover where Rimbaud was or to get an answer from him, Verlaine published the prose poems, under the title *Illuminations,* and further verse poems, in the Symbolist periodical *La Vogue,* as the work of "the late Arthur Rimbaud."



LET US KNOW

Rimbaud is a rare poetic figure in that he stopped writing at the age of 21. His work, however, remains a passionate, visionary body that is continually and widely read. Though they received little public recognition until after his death, *Une saison en enfer* (*A Season in Hell*) and *Illuminations* became models for poets striving to make visible the tormented soul.

Paul Valéry:

Paul Valéry (1871-1945) the French poet, essayist and critic is also considered one of the most important symbolist thinkers, though he might

be more accurately described as a pivotal figure of many poetic schools. His work built upon the work of the writers mentioned above and eventually became a foundation for 20th-century modernists and structuralists.

Though he made much of his preoccupation with intellectual problems and incurred the particular displeasure of the Surrealists for his scathing attacks on poetic inspiration, there is ample evidence in Valéry's work that he remained all his life keenly responsive to the pleasures of the senses: the voluptuousness of his female nude studies ("Luxurieuse au bain," "La Dormeuse," and the picture of Eve in "Ébauche d'un serpent"), the warmth with which he writes of the lovers' embrace ("Le Cimetière marin," "Fragments du Narcisse," "La Fausse Morte") or of the sun, sky, and sea, which he had loved since his Mediterranean childhood—all show that he must not be too closely identified with his arid Monsieur Teste.

The distinctive feature of his prose and poetry, even when he is dealing with the most abstract of subjects, is sensuousness; his prose is aphoristic and graceful, his poetry rich in natural images and allusions, always classical in form, and, at its best, as sinewy, subtly rhythmical, and melodious as the very best verse of the great dramatist Jean Racine or the Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How did Charles Baudelaire influence Mallarme?

Q 11: What, according to Mallarme, was the task of the poet?

Q 12: What is Verlaine's contribution to French Poetry?

Q 13: How did Rimbaud preach his poetic purpose?

Q 14: Comment on the importance of Rimbaud's *Illuminations.*

2.6 IMPACT OF SYMBOLISM AND AESTHETICISM ON ENGLISH POETRY

[Adapted from *New Princeton Encyclopedia,* Page 10]

You must have by now understood that the French Symbolists exploited an order of private symbols in poetry of rich suggestiveness rather

than explicit signification. They succeeded in rendering an immense influence throughout Europe in the 1890s, and later in England and America on poets such as Arthur Symons and Ernest Dowson as well as on English poets such as W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings, and Wallace Stevens. Major symbolist poets in Germany are Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke.

In the decades following World War I, you will find a notable era of symbolism in literature, especially in the field of English poetry and fiction. Instances of a persistently symbolic procedure occur in English lyrics such as Yeats' "Byzantium" poems, Dylan Thomas' series of sonnets and longer poems, Hart Crane's *The Bridge,* T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* Wallace Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C", and in novels such as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and so on. As you finish reading this unit, you will learn that many of the major writers of the period exploit symbols, which are in part drawn from religious and esoteric traditions and in part invented.

However, while discussing Symbolism, we cannot but refer to the idea of Astheticism. It signifies that the work of art is self-sufficient and autonomous. Therefore, in judging the work of art, the critic should reject moral, social, political, religious, and other non-aesthetic standards as irrelevant. The origin of this view of art can be traced to the writers and philosophers of the German romantic movement such as Kant, Schelling, Goethe, and Schiller. Kant stressed the "pure" and disinterested existence of the work of art; Schelling, its fusion of the universal with the particular; Goethe, its life as an independent organism; and Schiller, the all-importance of its form. In England, such ideas were diffused by Coleridge and Carlyle; in America by Emerson and Poe; in France, by Mallarme.

The first robustly self-conscious expression of Aestheticism in modern literature is that of Theophile Gautier, who humorously but emphatically denied in the Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) that art could in any way be useful. From Gautier and Poe, with his belief that poetry is "the rhythmical creation of Beauty", Baudelaire derived his aesthetic view of experience and advocated, in writing his criticism and poetry, the

sovereignty of the creative imagination and the aspiration to apprehend an ultimate reality through the perceptions of the senses. You have already learnt that the French symbolist movement with Mallarme and Verlaine as its leaders, assimilated Baudelaire's concept of perception as constituting "a forest of symbols" to which the poet must give order, as well as his theory of the "correspondences" between sense impressions and "spiritual reality" and between one sense and another. The symbolists tried to communicate concentrated feeling by the use of evocative symbols rather than by rational statement, and they also tried to refine and purify language to obtain intimations of the ineffable and the transcendent. Following Poe, they held that poetry was to approximate the disembodied emotion to be found in music and that an Ideal Beauty was to be sought beyond the visible world, though paradoxically to be evoked in terms of the visible world—or of symbols. The symbolists were also conscientious craftsmen interested in the complex and subtle relationships among the poem's words and images.

Aestheticism in England was the product of native and French influence both. In the 1850s, 60s and 70s, the Pre-Raphaelites appropriated Keats' predominantly aestheticist values, Tennyson's sensuousness and Ruskin's enthusiastic worship of beauty to foster a decorative conception of art and literature instead of an ethically oriented one. However, Baudelaire's grotesquerie and satanism and Verlaine's insistence that verse strive for the condition of music influenced the English poets of the 1890s more than did Mallarme's emphasis upon uncompromising artistry and the work of art conceived as the only indestructible reality. You should note that Symons in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) introduced the two British and American pioneers of modern poetry, Eliot and Pound, to the work of the French symbolists. They incorporated into the Anglo-American tradition, what was most vital in the Aestheticism of French poetry, the concepts of the objective and impersonal existence of the poem and of the artist as rigorous creator. In England, the followers of Eliot such as Auden, Day Lewis, Spender, and Mac-Neice absorbed the all-important concept of the autonomy of art, despite their earlier sociological and political orientations.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 15: Name the English poets who got inspired by the French Symbolists.

Q 16: How would you explain the idea of Aestheticism?



2.7 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of this unit, you have learnt that Symbolism in literature was a complex movement that deliberately extended the evocative power of words to express the feelings, sensations and states of mind that lie beyond everyday awareness. The impact of the Symbolist Manifesto was tremendous. The writers who were part of this movement were recognised as symbolists. As a bold, clear statement of symbolism, Jean Moréas' *Le Symbolisme* is often taken as the model document for all symbolism. His close allies also wrote their own responses to the Manifesto, differing on points of evidence. Gustave Kahn, for example, preferred to situate symbolism in the realm of Impressionism rather than as an evolution of Naturalism. The open-ended symbols created by Charles Baudelaire brought the invisible into being through the visible, and linked the invisible through other sensory perceptions, notably smell and sound. Similarly, along with Symbolism, aspects of Aestheticism signifying works of art as self sufficient and autonomous, greatly influenced the poetry of modern English poets such as T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.



2.8 FURTHER READING

Symons, Arthur. (1899). *The Symbolist Movement in Literature: A Collection of Short Essays on French Symbolist Writers and Poets.*

Bradbury, Malcolm & James McFarlane. (Eds.). (1978). *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*. Penguin.

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Bowra. C. M. (1943). *The Heritage of Symbolism.*

Preminger, Alex. & T. V. F. Brogan. (Eds.). (1993). *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton University Press.

Websites and Electronic Resources:

https://www.britannica.com/art/Symbolism-literary-and-artistic-movement

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolist_Manifesto

https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-symbolists

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Baudelaire

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephane-Mallarme

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Verlaine-Paul

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Rimbaud

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paul-Valery

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Symbolism originated as part of the revolt of certain French poets against the rigid conventions poetic technique and theme in traditional French poetry… …the symbolists wished to liberate poetry from its expository functions and its formalised oratory… …to describe the fleeting, immediate sensations of man's inner life and experience… …they tried to evoke ineffable intuitions and sense impressions of man's inner life… …used highly personal metaphors and images that lacked precise meaning.

Ans to Q 2: Jean Moréas in *Le Figaro* published the Symbolist Manifesto… …The Manifesto attacked the descriptive tendencies of Realist theatre, Naturalistic novels, and Parnassian poetry… … Moréas proposed replacing the term *décadent*, which was used to describe a poet like Baudelaire, with the terms *symboliste* and *symbolisme… …in* their efforts to escape the rigid metrical patterns and to achieve freer poetic rhythms, the Symbolist poets resorted to the use of *vers libre* (free verse), which become a fundamental form of early modern poetry.

Ans to Q 3: The symbolists had a strong influence on much British and American literature in the 20th century… …their experimental techniques greatly enriched the technical repertoire of modern poetry as practiced by poets like W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot… …modern novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in which word harmonies and patterns of images often take preeminence over the narrative.

Ans to Q 4: The purpose was to launch a new literary movement called Symbolism against romanticism and naturalism… …it is reflective of how creative minds approach the creation of art… … Moréas, Gustave Kahn and others distinguished themselves from a group of writers associated with Anatole Baju and *Le Décadent*. … … for them the self-identified decadent writers represented both an earlier stage of development on the path towards symbolism, and also a frivolous exploitation of the language and techniques of the movement.

Ans to Q 5: The first case for Symbolism was to present an aggressive and frank definition of movement, its beliefs and priorities… …as a reaction against the authority of rational naturalism, the Manifesto described symbolists as enemies "of education, declamation, wrong feelings, [and] objective description."… …as a reaction against the newly self-styled decadents, the Manifesto sought to stipulate the primacy of "the Idea."

Ans to Q 6: The Manifesto concludes by first explaining the power of art and literature to bring together streams of thought and transform them into new and grand things, implying both its grandeur and its wonder… …that the symbolists are free to work with things both mechanical and mythical, things seen ahead and recalled from behind.

Ans to Q 7: Charles Baudelaire' reputation rests primarily on *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857; *The Flowers of Evil*), which was perhaps the most important and influential poetry collection published in Europe in the 19th century… …his *Petits poèmes en prose* was also the most successful and innovative early experiment in prose poetry of the time.

Ans to Q 8: Poe's thought and temperament as a writer… …subsequently, Baudelaire embarked upon the task of translation that was to provide

him with his most regular occupation and income for the rest of his life… …he translated Poe's *Mesmeric Revelation, Extraordinary Tales* and *New Extraordinary Tales* into French which are now considered classics of French prose… …Poe's examples gave Baudelaire greater confidence in his own aesthetic theories and ideals of poetry.

Ans to Q 9: As both poet and critic, Baudelaire stands in relation to French and European poetry as a crucial link between Romanticism and Modernism… ...his poetic ideas and forms influenced other poets like Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Stephane Mallarme, Paul Valéry, Rainer Maria Rilke, and T. S. Eliot… ...with "evocative magic" of images and sounds, blending of intellect and feeling, irony and lyricism, Baudelaire moved decisively away from the Romantic poetry of statement and emotion to the modern poetry of symbol and suggestion.

Ans to Q 10: Mallarmé was influenced by Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* ("The Flowers of Evil") which was largely concerned with the theme of escape from reality… … Mallarmé was already becoming obsessed with that idea but he was of a much more intellectual bent, and his determination to analyse the nature of the ideal world and its relationship with reality is reflected in the two dramatic poems *Hérodiade* ("Herodias") and *L'Après-midi d'un faune* ("The Afternoon of a Faun").

Ans to Q 11: The poet's task is to perceive and crystallise these essences… …the poet becomes more than a mere descriptive versifier, transposing into poetic form an already existent reality… …he becomes a veritable God, creating something from nothing, conjuring up for the reader, the ideal flower that is absent from all real bouquets… …to crystallise essences in this way, to create the notion of floweriness, rather than to describe an actual flower, demands an extremely subtle and complex use of all the resources of language, and Mallarmé devoted himself to putting his theories into practice.

Ans to Q 12: Verlaine was an initiator of modern word-music and marked a transition between the Romantic poets and the Symbolists… …he showed how the French language could communicate new shades

of human feeling by suggestion and tremulous vagueness… …he tried to capture the reader by disarming his intellect.

Ans to Q 13: Rimbaud wanted to serve as a prophet, a visionary, or, as he put it, *voyant* ("seer")… …he believed in a universal life force that informs or underlies all matter… …this force, which was referred to simply as "the unknown", can be sensed only by a chosen few… ..Rimbaud set himself the task of striving to "see" this spiritual unknown and allowing his individual consciousness to be taken over and used by it as a mere instrument.

Ans to Q 14: The *Illuminations* consist of a series of theatrical tableaux in which Rimbaud creates a primitive fantasy world, an imaginary universe complete with its own mythology, its own quasi-divine beings, its own cities, all depicted in kaleidoscopic images that have the vividness of hallucinations. Within this framework the drama of the different stages of Rimbaud's own life is played out.

Ans to Q 15: In the decades following World War I, French Symbolist influenced the English poets—in Yeats' "Byzantium" poems, in Dylan Thomas' series of sonnets and longer poems, in Hart Crane's *The Bridge,* in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land… …*in novels such as James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and so on.

Ans to Q 16: Astheticism signifies that the work of art is self-sufficient and autonomous… …in judging the work of art, the critic should reject moral, social, political, religious, and other non-aesthetic standards as irrelevant… …Kant stressed the "pure" and disinterested existence of the work of art; Schelling, its fusion of the universal with the particular; Goethe, its life as an independent organism; and Schiller, the all-importance of its form… …such ideas were diffused by Coleridge and Carlyle in England; by Emerson and Poe in America, by Mallarme in France.



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How would you explain the term Symbolism? Write a note on the Symbolist movement with particular reference to the French Symbolist poets.

Q 2: How did the French Symbolist Manifesto formally launch the symbolist movement in poetry? Discuss.

Q 3: Write in detail about the impact of Symbolism on 20th century English Poetry.

Q 4: The Symbolist movement deliberately extended the evocative power of words to express the feelings, sensations and states of mind that lie beyond everyday awareness. Discuss.

Q 5: Write short notes on the following:

a. The Symbolist Manifesto

b. Charles Baudelaire

c. Stéphane Mallarmé

Q 6: Elaborate on how the different French Symbolist poets conceived the idea of a Symbol?

Q 7: How did Arthur Rimbaud proclaim the idea of "The Unknown" and how did it contribute to French Structuralist poetry?

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UNIT 3: WAR POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Poetry and War

3.4 Let us Sum up

3.5 Further Reading

3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.7 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the significance of War poetry in the context of modern poetry
- identify the different war poets and assess the role they played
- discuss how poetry became one of the best ways to tell war experiences
- appreciate the war poets and their poetic works based on different contexts

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the third unit of the Block. In this unit, we shall try to discuss some of the important aspects as well as contexts of 20th century war poetry. If we consider the poetry of World War I, we find that a substantial number of important British poets were soldiers, writing about the experience of War. However, by World War II, the role of 'War Poet' was so well established in the mind of the general public that they anticipated that the out break of War in 1939 would produce a literary response equal to that of World WarI The truths told by war poets continue to disconcert, not least because they encompass what Wilfred Owen called the 'exultation' of war as well as the futility, the imaginative opportunities as well as the senseless horrors. The war poets cannot wholly regret even the most appalling experiences, as they transform violence, death, atrocity, into the pleasing formal aesthetics

of art. W. H. Auden once rightly stated, “Poetry, we never cease to be told, makes nothing happen”; but war makes poetry happen. As you finish reading this unit, you will be able to acknowledge both the contexts of War Poetry and the contributions of the war poets into English poetry of the 20th century.

3.3 POETRY AND WAR

In this section, we shall try to read about some of the English poets whose contribution to English poetry during the time of World Wars is remarkable. Their poetry also helps us to understand how these poets reacted to the War and politics of the time.You have already read in Block 4, Course 1 of Semester I that World War I brought to public notice many poets, particularly among the young men in the armed forces, while it provided a new source of inspiration for writers of established reputation. Many of the war poets were either killed or died in the struggle. A representative selection of the work of poets of this War is to be found in *Anthology of War Poetry,* edited by Robert Nichols (1943). Broadly, two phases in War Poetry may be distinguished—the patriotic fervour and rejoicing in the opportunity of self-sacrifice in the cause of human freedom, and a revival of the romantic conception of the knight-at-arms. Poets like Rupert Brooke (1887-915), Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967), and Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) are some of the most renowned of the war poets. Brooke is usually considered typical of the early group of war poets and wrote with a youthful, healthy joy in life. While Siegfried Sassoon based nearly all his important works on his experiences in the War. A lover of the countryside, of rural sports, of music and painting, Sassoon represented a class, which was fast disappearing, and his work provides an admirable picture of a life of cultured leisure. Wilfred Owen was the greatest of the war poets. With a frankness, Owen set out to present the whole reality of war—the boredom, the hopelessness, the futility, the horror, occasionally the courage and self-sacrifice, but, above all, the pity of it. He himself wrote, “I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.”However, the following are some excerpts from Matthew Campbell’s Essay “Poetry and War” which shall not only refer to the war poets mentioned

above, but shall also provide a well-contained discussion on the relation between poetry and war.

In order to discuss war poetry, we shall adapt Matthew Campbell's Essay "Poetry and War" in Neil Roberts edited *A Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry.* You will be required to understand the different important connotations of war poetry from your reading of the essay.

Before he published his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* in 1952, Cecil Day Lewis sawout the 1930s with a version of the *Georgics*. It was published in 1940, in the earlydays of the Second World War, a poem of retreat written in a besieged Britain. In the'Dedicatory Stanzas' (to Stephen Spender) which preface his version, Day Lewis confronts Shelley's declaration of the part that the poet plays in history and asks the question of one of his own most famous lyrics, 'where are the war poets?'

It gives us the hump
To think that we're the unacknowledged rump
Of a long parliament of legislators.
Where are the war poets? The fools inquire.
We were the prophets of a changeable morning
Who hoped for much but saw the clouds forewarning:
We were at war, while they still played with fire
And rigged the market for the ruin of man:
Spain was a death to us, Munich a mourning.
No wonder then if, like the pelican,
We have turned inward for our iron ration,
Tapping the vein and sole reserve of passion,
Drawing from poetry's capital what we can.

Day Lewis, like many Irish and English writers of the 1930s, ended that decade with little hope for the legislative influence of the Shelleyan poet and turned deliberately 'inward'. The global market is now pursuing takeover and merger by violent means,so, 'Drawing from poetry's capital what we can', poets must tune the martial resonance of political poetry down to aesthetic questions of adequacy and appropriateness in the midst of a historical trauma which is 'No subject for immortal verse'. Failing in this,

poets can find themselves taking sides and then defending 'the bad against the worse' ('Where are the War Poets?' 1940).

A poet such as Day Lewis feels that he can no longer allow himself to sing, in Dryden's version of Virgil, of 'arms and the man': in 1952, his version of the *Aeneid* opens as flatly as he can manage: 'I tell about war and the hero…' For many, most notably Theodor Adorno, the horrors of the 20th century leave little room forlyric, let alone the martial concerns of epic. Yet throughout the century, poets continually worried over poetry's response–in terms of genre as much as subject matter–to the horrors of 20th-century history. The poetry from Britain and Ireland which was written about the wars in which those countries engaged–imperial andcivil wars as well as the world wars – is a poetry which no longer feels that it can singin celebration of arms and the man, but rather must turn to Wilfred Owen's theme,the 'pity of war' or its absurdity.

There was much heroic verse written during the century as there was verse, which invoked the mythic: David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937) writes his experience of the Great War through classical and Arthurian legend. There was also verse written inpraise of revolutionary struggles for freedom, in Spain, Ireland, Russia, Latin Americaor Africa. But, for all the 20th-century soldier-poets, there were many who,though they viewed war from a distance, felt its effects no less. Even a poet who wrote for Empire, Rudyard Kipling, found that the unfolding of the century would turnthe martial camaraderie and the heroism of the White Man's Burden to the elegiac note, which the loss of his son in the First World War taught him. In his excellent anthology, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, Jon Stallworthy includes thirty-four of Kipling's epitaphs of the Great War. They are written from the 'Home Front', but memorialise with sympathy and horror experiences of war, which cast any previous urge for epic into the delicate and powerless responses of epitaph:

A SON

My son was killed while laughing at some jest. I would I knew
What it was, and it might serve me in a time when jests are few.

THE COWARD

I could not look on Death, which being known,
Men led me to him, blindfold and alone.

SHOCK

My name, my speech, my self I had forgot.
My wife and children came – I knew them not.
I died. My mother followed. At her call
And on her bosom I remembered all.

Bereavement, the unheroic, psychic distress, the forgetting in this life matched onlyby the irony of knowledge in immortality: all of these responses could be felt at the heart of the establishment as well as by the Shelleyan radical poet. The tone is often closer to overwhelming irony than debilitating horror, yet from both–irony andhorror–come a set of aesthetic issues, which face the war poem, of response, representation,adequacy and eventual failure. Objecting to 'Jean Baudrillard's notorious analysis of the Gulf War as a series of rhetorical performances unattached to any material reality', Simon Featherstone says that poems written *at* war 'seem to insist on the closeness of writing to often appalling personal experience.'…..…The literary collaboration of the two most-celebrated of Great War poets, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, was cemented in a psychiatric hospital in Scotland, well away from the experiences which had put them there.

Given such a long time to fill not thinking about impending death or mutilation,the war poet must attend to a problem of style similar to that which also confronts the historian. Paul Fussell summarises the questions of rhetoric and style which faced Kipling, writing one of his 'most decent and honourable works'.

The Irish Guards in the Great War: *…how are actual events deformed by the application to them of metaphor, rhetorical comparison, prose rhythm, assonance, alliteration, allusion, and sentence structures and connectives implying clear causality? Is there any way of compromising between thereader's expectations that written history ought to be interesting and*

meaningful and the cruel fact that much of what happens – all of what happens? – is inherently without'meaning'?

We could adapt these questions to ask them of poetry written about war. Kipling's subject is war, and a war which killed many in the Irish Guards along with his son.But, finding an appropriate language, according to Fussell, would mean finding 'theclinical–or even obscene –language' which 'would force itself up from below…It was a matter of leaving, finally, the nineteenth century behind'.

For all its economy as it faces its terrible subject matter, the artistic achievement of 'A SON' is rhetorical: it suggests the correct tone for marking both grief and the terrible irony of the manner of the laughing son's death. At the same time, while itmay accede to Fussell's 'cruel fact that much of what happens…is inherently without meaning', the 'happening' of the response recreated in the poem has in itself created meaning. This meaning is not consolation or in any way redemptive of the ironies of a violent death; rather it is a pointing up of the irony and, in the epitaph form, amemorial to the unforgettable. Fussell's 'much of what happens', inevitably drawn at first to horror but ultimately to irony, suggests a famous elegy of W. H. Auden,written while Europe was contemplating another world war in 1939 and 1940:

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.

('In Memory of W. B. Yeats')

Auden's riposte to the political efforts of Yeats may have come from the same disillusion which prompted Day Lewis's repudiation of the Shelleyan poetic role, faced with Europe's return to war. Certainly, his grudging 'way of happening, a mouth', inwhich poetry is a conduit, a medium, rather than an effective historical agent in itsown right, places poetry well

away from the scenes of politics or war.Yeats himself had acted as observer and elegist on the subject of war, no matter how he too had indulged in the hubris of wondering if his poetry had exercised effective political agency. In 1939, reviewing his career, he had asked himself the question,'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?' ('Man and theEcho'– the reference is to *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, 1900, and the execution of the leaders of the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916). But it is in 'Lapis Lazuli', viewing a Europesuffering under new wars of annexation and aerial bombing, as well as the obliteration of ancient cities, that Yeats attempts to find a poetry which both faces the destruction of culture and attempts to find an aesthetic response.

On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,
Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,
Old civilisations put to the sword.
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus,
Who handled marble as if it were bronse,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp-chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
All things fall and are built again, And those that build them again are gay.

('Lapis Lazuli')

This poem was written in 1938 while the Spanish Civil War was underway, and views the refugees and emigrants swarming from previously settled societies with some ambivalence. In Yeats's authoritarian worldview, traumatic historical change may notentirely be a bad thing. And there is an aesthetic rather than political embrace of there building of societies as a necessary, comic, resolution. Yeats will not allow that the wiping out of cities and civilizations is merely an aestheticised act of history:

Irony remains, in that the classical form of the architect Callimachus stands but aday in these circumstances. But it is perhaps a chilling act of artistic ambition thathe attempts to push tragic circumstances out to the comic resolution where there builders, whether or not they also be the destroyers, are 'gay'.

It is Yeats who mounted the strongest arguments against the very possibility ofwar poetry in the 20th century. If 'joy' is a mark of great art, then poets who'felt bound…to plead the suffering of their men' were not included in Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, because 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'. Consequently, 20th-century war poetry loses the mythic or heroic along with the loss of joyfrom the tragic:

In all great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies; in Greece the tragic chorus danced. When man has withdrawn into the quicksilver at the back of the mirror no great event becomes luminous in his mind; it is no longer possible to write ThePersians, Agincourt, Chevy Chase: some blunderer has driven his car on to the wrong sideof the road – that is all.

If war is necessary, or necessary in our time and place, it is best to forget its suffering as we do the discomfort of fever, remembering our comfort at midnight whenour temperature fell, or as we forget the worst moments of more painful disease. (Introductionto *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, 1936)

Yeats makes only a small move from war as motor accident to the forgetting of historical necessity, since it is no more significant than a bout of 'flu. But the shock ofYeats's call for such forgetting does ask important questions about the representation of a suffering which may, in Fussell's words respecting Kipling, have no meaning at all. Even Yeats, in his elegy for his friend Lady Gregory's son, killed in the Great War,knows that tragic joy is not an easily achieved consolation for bereavement after violent death. His poem fails to achieve the heroic at its end, tactfully granting the overpowering fact of death.

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind

All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved
Or boyish intellect approved,
With some appropriate commentary on each;
Until imagination brought
A fitter welcome; but a thought
Of that late death took all my heart for speech.

('In Memory of Major Robert Gregory', 1918)

'Appropriate commentary' is not appropriate in these circumstances. Yet such appropriateness is a major aesthetic preoccupation of those British poets of the Great War who were excluded from Yeats's anthology…….Thenew 20th-century genre which Yeats dismisses, that of the war poem, emerged from these poets. This new genre shares much with the elegy, particularly as the Romantic conception of that literary form often founders on the ineffable, momentslike that of Yeats above, where the heart is taken for speech. The genre of elegy performs, in therapeutic terms, the 'work of mourning', a work in which the conclusion of the poem ought to coincide with consolation: Yeats's conclusion above seeks consolation through the very act of writing its 'appropriate commentary', which promises to provide a kind of therapy, while still facing the absolute sense of loss. The losses of bereavement can be daily occurrences for those at war, but the related problem for the early twentieth-century war poet, the accompanying loss of meaning (patriotism or a cause along with mental stability or even sanity), mounts powerful opposition to the generic expectations of a form which ostensibly performs this 'work ofmourning'– reintegration of the bereaved personality through the consolations of elegy.

Take these two poems written from within the hell of war, 'The Rear Guard',by Siegfried Sassoon and 'Strange Meeting' by Wilfred Owen. Both Sassoon and Owen enlisted to fight and were decorated for bravery. The Sassoon poem was writtenten days after arriving in hospital, supposedly suffering from shell-shock, a diagnosis, according to Sassoon, which was repudiated by the quality of his poem. It tells of an officer groping by torchlight through the tunnels of the Hindenburg Line, and is filled full of the detritus of

an experience which presents itself to the soldier in terms of overpowering smell and the discarded objects of war,alternately vivid and obscure according to the beam of the torch: 'Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know'. The packed stresses at the beginning of thisline, followed by the regularizing iambic beat show Sassoon's sense of great formal control over his verse, even as it suggests those horrors which are held just outside perception….Both experience and memory of the experiencehave literally and metaphorically been unloaded by the very writing of the poem, a poem resolutely shifted by its ill author into the third person.Yet at the centre of 'The Rear Guard' is an encounter which may not be so easily unloaded by the consolations of this elegiac pattern. The officer trips and seeing 'someone' he assumes to be asleep, asks for directions. Hearing no response he then makesan order followed by a sudden moment of frustrated savagery:

'Get up and guide me through this stinking place.'
Savage, he kicked a soft unanswering heap,
And flashed his beam across the livid face
Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore
Agony dying hard ten days before;
And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound.

A pause now follows in the text and narrative of the poem, before the officer is supposedly led out of this hell. But it is the absence of appropriate commentary afterthis experience of beating a ten-days-dead body that resounds most strongly through the poem. We have been presented with a number of objects an army has left behind and one of them is a human body. The officer's eye is led from the unannounced 'lividface / Terribly glaring up', across the body into the eyes and finally to the 'blackening wound', in a sort of numb assessment of information. This is then forced,by a necessary act of repression in the text, to lie without commentary behind the staggering man seeking the light above hell. There is no effort to find meaning here, just to seek escape.

Sassoon's lyric is formally quite enclosed between its rhyming first and last lines,and plays with triple rhymes throughout. Such a technique, and the encounter with the dead in the underworld, suggests Dante. Wilfrid Owen's 'Strange Meeting' is alsoa Dantesque dream of conversation with the dead, and is no less remarkable for itsattempt to find a prosodic form for the experience. In Owen's case this is achieved by sustaining para rhyming couplets throughout the poem. If the Sassoon poem was a deliberate attempt to enclose the experience in poetic form–and therefore to leaveit behind–Owen's poem refuses the consolations that the aesthetic completion of full rhyme might bring. The poem was written only a few months before its author's death and was, of course, not prepared for publication by the poet: but it ends with a lacuna,the truncated 'Let us sleep now…', which suggests that such experience cannot beallowed to complete itself.

It is in these terms that 'Strange Meeting' suggests a development from the significant achievement of Sassoon's poem. It looks to immortality as it thinks of the life after death of the war poet; but it also looks to the irony that after such experience wars will continue, and that writing poetry about war, or from war – this very poem– will have minimal effect on the future. The dead man whom the poet meets in his dream reveals himself at the end as the enemy he killed yesterday. Yet he too is a poet,a poet who mourns that poetry has proved supremely ineffective in this war. In hisway, the dead enemy is the poet Owen used to be:

Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.

Yeats had excluded Owen from his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* because his poetry told only of suffering and pity, and did not achieve tragic or comic resolutions. Here Owen gives us a late 19th-century Yeatsian poet,

but also one who might suggest his Romantic masters, Shelley and Keats. The lyric poet chases after the‘wildest beauty’, careless of mortality and time given the generic opportunity ofthe luxury of elegy where he can grieve ‘richlier than here’. That is lost forever to Owen and his vision, and is added to by the irony of his own imagined death, where what he could have said, ‘The pity of war, the pity war distilled’, is now denied tothe world due to that death. Owen views history – the progress of nations and capital– inevitably girding up to repeat this experience. …
All that is left is the ineffective Keatsian poet cleaning up after the massacre:

Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths which lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

Two previous texts haunt the poet’s task here. The first is from Homer, and the description of the chariot wheels of the unquenchably bloodthirsty Achilles at the end of Book XX of the *Iliad*, where, in Pope’s translation, ‘The spiky wheels through heaps of carnage tore; / And thick the groaning axles dropp’d with gore’. The other is from Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, where the poet had asked to die while the bird was‘pouring forth thy soul abroad / In such an ecstasy!’ Here Owen’s poet thinks of what he could have done with poetry after war, pouring his spirit through poetry and achieving the psychic cleansing of this experience. The dead poet’s speech reaches backto epic for some possible analogy for this cleansing. Yet it concludes such argument as it presents with a riddling last line: ‘Foreheads of men have bled where no woundswere’.

….After numerous 20th-century wars, the deathof poetry has long been proclaimed by those who found, along with Owen and Auden, that the poet’s cultural cleansing through pouring out his lyric spiritwill make nothing happen. Like Day Lewis and Kipling, much of this effect was felt by those who were not soldiers themselves, but who felt the long memories of war

suffered by their parents and grand parents resonate throughout the century. British culture has memories of significant victory to look back on when thinking about war, but epic triumphalism has not generally been the tone in which poetshave written. Writing about family experiences in the Great War, personal experience of the Blitz, or facing the fact of the Holocaust, poets who choose to write onpublic subjects, like Ted Hughes or Geoffrey Hill, filter them through the difficult questions of appropriateness and genre that the war poets raise.When the troubles broke out again in Ireland in the 1970s, poets turned againto the genre of war poetry in order to find form for writing not only about contemporary horrors but also the responsibilities, political as well as artistic, of the poet. Seamus Heaney returns to elegy through Dante, talking, like Sassoon or Owen, with the ghosts of the dead. These include the seeming 'enigma' presented by an Irish nationalist First World War poet, Francis Ledwidge ('You were not keyed or pitched like these true-blue ones / Though all of you consort now underground').

But the more recent dead in 'The Strand at Lough Beg' and the explicitly Dantesque *Station Island* sequence, exist uncomfortably between the British war poem and conventional elegy. Not that comfort would be provided by solving the generic problem, dependent on irony as it is. These are the ghosts of the violent dead which face Heaney:

I turn because the sweeping of your feet
Has stopped behind me, to find you on your knees
With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes,
Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass
And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
To wash you, cousin.

('The Strand at Lough Beg', 1978)

The cleansing of the elegiac poet amounts here to no more than the laying out of abody in a ritual–religious and aesthetic–which approximates burial rites. The action of the poet is of course, as the Irish poet Eavan Boland says, 'always too late'…Heaney's plea for forgiveness is in its way an Audenesque show of bad faith, to berejected peremptorily by its recipient.

The ghost here was the ‘perfect, clean, unthinkable victim’, but becomes eventually one more in a series of the wasted male youthof the century killed in wars which they had no part in starting, and little sense of how to prevent: ‘all that’s above my head’.

The prophecy of Owen’s dead enemy carries on through the century, like wounds which refuse to heal. In Michael Longley’s elegy ‘Wounds’ (1972), his father, wounded in the First World War, carries not only vivid memories, but also the lead traces which would flare up and kill him fifty years later: the wound is unhealableby time or poem. The father is buried as other wounds erupt into more than irritation, and a long unhealed history results in explosions, assassinations and theunaccommodated ironies of the war poem. In such contemporary wars there is not even the difference of language to separate combatants. At the end of ‘Wounds’a killer turns to the wife of the man he has killed in front of her, addressing her inthe intimacy of the vernacular: ‘I think “Sorry Missus” was what he said’……



3.4 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading this unit, you have learnt about the relationship between poetry and war. A representative selection of the work of war poets who were either killed or died in the War is to be found in *Anthology of War Poetry,* edited by Robert Nichols (1943). Broadly, two phases in War Poetry may be distinguished—the patriotic fervour and rejoicing in the opportunity of self-sacrifice in the cause of human freedom, and a revival of the romantic conception of the knight-at-arms. Poets like Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen are some of the most renowned of the war poets. Matthew Campbell’s essay “Poetry and War” has provided an overall idea of the major concerns of the war poets which must have also helped you to discuss the war poetry of the 20th century more critically.



3.5 Further Reading

Howarth, Peter. (2005). *British Poetry in The age of Modernism.* Cambridge University Press.

Kendall, Tim. (2006). *Modern English War Poetry*. Oxford University Press.

Preminger, Alex. & T. V. F. Brogan. (Eds.). (1993). *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton University Press.

Roberts, Neil. (2001). *A Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry*. Blackwell Publishing.

3.6 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS



Q 1: Write in detail about 20th century war poetry with reference to the famous English war poets.

Q 2: "The losses of bereavement can be daily occurrences for those at war, but the related problem for the early 20th-century war poet was the accompanying loss of meaning." Discuss.

Q 3: World War I and II had a profoundly disturbing impact on Western society. Discuss.

Q 4: Briefly compare the main themes of the poets writing before the World War I and after World War II.

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UNIT 4: POETRY AFTER WW II

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Apocalyptic Poetry

4.4 Movement Poetry

4.5 Other Developments

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify the major concerns of the poets following World War II
- enlist the characteristics of Apocalyptic poetry, Movement poetry and other poetic developments following World War II
- explain the characteristics of Movement Poetry with particular reference to the works of Phillip Larkin
- appreciate the major achievements of modern poetry after World War II

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this Block. In this unit, we shall have a look at the contexts of modern poetry following World War II. We shall in our discussion mostly consider Apocalyptic poetry as well as Movement poetry, which bear tremendous significance in the context of 20th century English poetry. The outbreak of World War II in 1939, just like in 1914, brought an end to the era of great intellectual and creative exuberance. Individual writers were dispersed; the production of magazines and books were affected; and the poem and the short story became the most convenient and favoured means of literary expression. No new beginning could be seen, although

the poets of the New Apocalypsemovement produced some anthologies in between 1940–45. Only three new poets Alun Lewis, Sidney Keyes, and Keith Douglas (all of whom died on active service) showed some promise. It was a time, T.S. Eliot, produced his *Four Quartets* (1943),a masterpiece of the war. Reflecting upon language, time, and history, Eliot searched, in the three quartets written during the war, for moral and religious significance in the midst of destruction and strove to counter the spirit of nationalism inevitably present in a nation at war. However, the last shining of New Apocalypse poetry could be perceived in the the flamboyant, surreal, and rhetorical style of poets like Dylan Thomas, George Barker, David Gascoyne, and there emerged what came to be known as The Movement. Poets such as D. J. Enright, Donald Davie, John Wain, Roy Fuller, Robert Conquest, and Elizabeth Jennings produced a kind of verse anti-romantic in vein but characterised by irony, understatement, and a sardonic refusal to strike attitudes or make grand claims for the poet's role. However, the most preeminent practitioner of this style was Philip Larkin. In Larkin's poetry—*The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), *High Windows* (1974), a melancholy sense of life's limitations throbs through lines of elegiac elegance. With an acute awareness of mortality and transience, Larkin's poetry is also finely responsive to natural beauty, while also darkened by the fear of death or sombre preoccupation with human solitude. John Betjeman, poet laureate from 1972 to 1984, shared both Larkin's intense consciousness of mortality and his gracefully versified nostalgia for 19th- and early 20th-century life. Thus, as you finish reading this unit, you will gain sufficient ideas on the contexts of English poetry following World War II.

4.3 APOCALYPTIC POETRY

As you have already got certain ideas on the preoccupations of the Apocalypse Poets, you will note that these poets, also known as the Apocalyptics, were a network of British writers centred around the largely forgotten Apocalypse poetry movement. Apocalypse poetry, inspired by the notion of Surrealism stripped of its automatism, was a reaction to the poetic

dominance of the Auden Generation during the 1930s. Aesthetically, Apocalypticism dealt in nightmarish images, engaged with mythology, and meditated on war. Politically, it tended towards anarchism.

Poets such as Henry Treece (1912–1966) and J. F. Hendry (1912–1986) became acquainted with one another while contributing to the literary magazine *Seven*. They developed an Apocalyptic Manifesto in 1938 in collaboration with Dorian Cooke (1916–2005). The following year, Treece and Hendry edited an anthology of poetry entitled *The New Apocalypse* (1939). They later anthologised two more collections of Apocalyptic poetry: "The White Horseman" (1941) and "The Crown and the Sickle" (1943). By the time the second anthologywas published, the Apocalypse movement had lost much of its momentum and, along with another short-lived movement, Personalism, was subsumed under an emerging New Romanticism.

4.4 MOVEMENT POETRY

[Adapted from Stephen Regan's article "The Movement" in Roberts, Neil. (Ed.). (2003). *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry.* Blackwell Publishing Ltd.]

In the critical discussion of postwar British poetry, a frequent reference is made of a group of writers known as the Movement. It is commonly assumed that the Movement waslargely a reaction against the inflated romanticism of the 1940s, a victory of commonsense and clarity over obscurity and mystification, of verbal restraint over stylisticexcess. Such elements and aspects marked the poetry of Philip Larkin and Dylan Thomas. Criticswho admire the rationalism of Larkin's verse have also emphasised the importance of the Movement and its continuing influence in contemporary poetry. Some have even gone farther to claim for the Movement a significant place in a tradition of modern poetry, usually dubbed 'the English line' extending back through Edward Thomas and Thomas Hardy to the poetry of William Wordsworth. However, there also exists a degree of scepticism about the aims and achievements of the Movement. This critical scepticism is compounded by the reluctance of the writers themselves to acknowledge

their membership of a particular group. Philip Larkin, when interviewed by Ian Hamilton, confessed 'no sense at all' of belonging to a movement, and Thom Gunn also stated, 'I found I was in it before I knew it existed…and I havea certain suspicion that it does *not* exist.' Elizabeth Jennings was similarly inclined to play down the idea of a movement among a particular generation of postwar poets, "They may have common aims–but this is something very different from that deliberate practice and promulgation of shared views which a true literary movement implies."

If the Movement did not exist as a coherent literary group, it certainly operated asa significant cultural influence. It was the product of specific views about literature and society, which in turn it helped to establish and disseminate. Those critics whohave disputed the idea that the Movement was a well-organised group with a clear and consistent programme of ideas have nevertheless recognised among its alleged participants a shared set of values and assumptions closely related to the moods and conditions of postwar England. Neil Corcoran in his book *English Poetry Since 1940* even claimed that the preference for traditional forms and methods in Movement poetry was part of a determined effort to rebuild the intellectual culture of the postwar years: 'Syntax, measure and alogic of statement were, in the Movement poem, almost an act of postwar reconstruction: to build the decorous shape of the poem was to provide a defence against barbarism.' (P-83)

To understand the origins of the Movement, it is necessary to return to the autumn of 1954, when the arrival of a new poetic trend was announced in the literary journals. However, what emerged from the early articles and reviews announcing 'the Movement' is not so much a departure from the alleged romanticism of the 1940s,as an awareness of the continuing dominance of W. H. Auden and the poets of the1930s. In his article, 'Poets of the Fifties' (generally thought to herald the Movement);published in the August 1954 issue of *Spectator*, Anthony Hartley begins by asking, 'What do most readers mean whenthey talk of modern poetry?' He offers the following reply:

In the eyes of the general reader, it is the Thirties that continue to typify the modern movement in verse…Now, however, there are signs that this twenty-year-old domination is coming to an end. New names in the reviews, a fresh atmosphere of controversy, a new spirit of criticism–these are signs that some other group of poets is appearing on the horizon. pp. 260–1)

At the same time, signalling a shift in direction, the new poetry retains its roots inthe work of the 1930s. In Anthony Hartley's estimation, 'the return to romanticism which came between was essentially a sport'. Hartley does not consider the new movement tobe a school of poets with a specific programme and manifesto, but there is evidence,he argues, 'that the present generation has been sufficiently affected by common influences and circumstances for a not too vague *seitgeist* to be apparent in their productions.' 'Poets of the Fifties' is perhaps the earliest and the most useful description of the Movement as it was perceived in its own time.

Hartley goes some way towards explaining the characteristic features of the newpoetry: 'It might roughly be described as "dissenting" and non-conformist, cool, scientificand analytical . . . the poetic equivalent of liberal, dissenting England'.

You will note that perhaps, it was here that for the first time, a Movement ideology had been identified. The poetry of Philip Larkin isonly briefly mentioned, along with the work of John Wain, Donald Davie, KingsleyAmis and Thom Gunn, but already a group personality was seen to have existsted. Stylistically,these writers share an avoidance of rhetoric, an austere tone and a colloquial idiom.The importance of Hartley's early review is that it acknowledges the political and cultural contours of a dominant literary tendency in postwar England. The 'liberalism' to which Hartley refers can be traced back to the kind of liberal idealism espoused by E. M. Forster in the early part of the 20thcentury: 'A liberalism distrustful of too much fanaticism, austere and sceptical. A liberalism egalitarian and antiaristocratic. A liberalism profoundly opposed to fashion in the metropolitan sense ofthe word'. This remains one of the best descriptions of Movement ideology.

Hartley's remark that 'we are now in the presence of the only considerable movement in English poetry since the Thirties' is echoed in J. D Scott's article in the October issue of *Spectator* entitled, 'In the Movement' where he agrees that 'the English literary scene' has not been transformed in such a way since the1930s, and contrasts the social, political and moral consciousness of that age with the seeming disengagement of the 1950s. Once again, the Movement was sought to be defined by Scott in terms of a lost idealism and in terms of a vigilant readjustment to an unsettled postwar England:

The Movement, as well as being anti-phoney, is anti-wet; sceptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in a wicked, commercial, threatened world which doesn't look, anyway, as if it's going to be changed much by a couple of handfuls of young English writers.'

It was the appearance of poems by a particular group of writers in several anthologies of the 1950s, which gave further impetus to the idea of a movement in English poetry. For example, the editors of *Springtime: An Anthology of Young Poets and Writers* (1953) refer to a kind of poetry which is 'going through a period of consolidation and simplification…of reaction against experiment for its own sake, and they further claim that their chosen contributors are 'poets of an analytical habit of mind,whose aim is to clarify, by stating plainly, typical complex situations'. The same emphasis on 'honesty of thought and feeling andclarity of expression' can be found in D. J. Enright's introduction to *Poets of the 1950s:An Anthology of New English Verse*, but Enright is clearly alert to the cultural conditions that have prompted this kind of poetic response. Echoing the *Spectator* articles,Enright acknowledges 'a new spirit stirring in contemporary English poetry' (Enright,1955, p. 15). He presents his anthology *not* as the work of a movement, however, butas a selection of poems by individual writers, some of whom share common attitudes.

Like the *Spectator,* Enright stresses the distinction between the political commitment that characterised the poetry of the 1930s and the desired neutrality of the 1950s. The liberal humanist perspective identified

by Hartley is given further clarification by Enright, who speaks of the need to 'resuscitate the idea of the dignity ofthe human individual' and of the way in which 'private responsibility' sometimes outweighs 'social responsibility'. Despite Enright's disclaimers about a group identity, his poets seem to share a common set of values and assumptions: a vigilant individualism, a careful distancing of the private from thepublic, and a cautious avoidance of political commitment. Enright further stated that these poets were 'moderate', they exemplified 'chastened common sense' and they eschewed obscurity 'becausethey find it unnecessary'. In listing these 'virtues', Enright felicitously alludes to the title of Philip Larkin's 1955 volume of poems, *The Less Deceived*.

Had Enright's anthology been more widely distributed and read, the political and cultural significance of the Movement poets and their anxious relationship with the poetry of the 1930s might have been better understood by a later generation of readers and writers. However, the anthology which had the greatest impact and which was generally held to be most representative of the Movement was Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956). It was Conquest's introduction to the anthology, which was largely responsible for encouraging the idea of a reaction against the excesses of 1940s romanticism. The poets of that decade, Conquest argues, were 'encouraged to produce diffuse and sentimental verbiage', while the new generation holds to 'a rational structure and comprehensible language.' Conquest shows little concern for the social and historical circumstances of postwar England and instead resorts to dubious cultural metaphors of sickness and health. The attitude to poetry in around 1940 sinduced a 'sort of corruption'; it led to 'a rapid collapse of public taste, from which we have not yet recovered'. The poetry of the 1950s, however, represents 'a new and healthy general standpoint…the restoration of a sound and fruitful attitude topoetry.' Conquest's bombastic description of the new poetry is frequently cited as a manifesto for the Movement poets:

If one had briefly to distinguish this poetry of the fifties from its predecessors, I believe the most important general point would be that it submits to no

great systems of theoreticalconstructs nor agglomerations of unconscious commands. It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions and – like modern philosophy – is empirical in its attitude to all that comes. This reverence for the real person or event is, indeed, a part of the general intellectual ambience (in so far as that is not blind or retrogressive) of ourtime.

What Conquest seems to be saying here is that the poetry of the 1950s is characterised chiefly by its anti-dogmatic ideals, by a kind of aesthetic purity and philosophical detachment. There is an apparent disregard for the poetry of the 1930s in his jibeat 'theoretical constructs', but the principal target would seem to be Dylan Thomas. Conquest assumes that poetry can maintain a 'free' and neutral stance, and that 'empiricism' is, in itself, a guarantee of this neutrality. These are also the problems of a good deal of so-called Movement poetry and they were partly responsible for its eventual demise.The pose of neutrality and objectivity could not be sustained indefinitely; the tensions and conflicts of post-war England continued to disturb the equanimity of such poetry, and what began as something separate and detached was either made to look increasingly defensive and withdrawn, or pushed towards a point of declaration. In the case of Philip Larkin, the fastidious restraint of *The Less Deceived,* gradually gaveway to a much more confrontational and openly polemical writing, especially in *High Windows*.

The prevailing tone of Movement poetry is urbane and academic, and many of the anthologised pieces are too neatly prescriptive or look like pieces of versified literary criticism. Some of the titles provide an indication of a 'bookish' or 'middlebrow' attitude:

Kingsley Amis's 'A Bookshop Idyll', D. J. Enright's 'The Verb to Think', Donald Davie's 'Rejoinder to a Critic' and 'Too Late for Satire', and John Wain's 'Reason fornot Writing Orthodox Nature Poetry' and 'Poem Without a Main Verb'. One of the shortcomings of Movement poetry is its tendency to make a virtue out of the civilised sensibility, to value intellectual detachment and 'urbanity' above all else. Thiscool, ironic aloofness can be mildly shocking, as in Amis's 'Shitty', but more often than not it leads to a shallow denial of

human potential for change and development,as in Davie's 'A Christening', with its cynical insistence: 'What we do best is breed'.

Perhaps the most significant 'manifesto' within Movement poetry is Davie's 'Remembering the Thirties', which in many ways epitomises the cautious outlook of the Cold War years in its declaration that 'A neutral tone is nowadays preferred'. What thepoem demonstrates most forcefully, however, is that the example of Auden and his contemporaries continued to have a powerful impression upon the postwar generation of writers.It is also the case; however, that Movement poetry probably displays far more diversity and daring than subsequent critical accounts have given it credit for.

Literary history has too readily equated the work of the Movement with parochialism and provincialism. Looking back on Robert Conquest's anthology is to be reminded of the cosmopolitan,international interests of several contributors. Larkin appears resolutely English, but the *New Lines* volume also contains 'Afternoon in Florence' and 'Piazza San Marco' by Elizabeth Jennings; 'Lerici' by Thom Gunn; 'Evening in the Khamsin' and 'Baie des Anges, Nice' by D. J. Enright; 'Nantucket' and 'Near Jakobselv' by Robert Conquest; and 'Woodpigeons at Raheny' by Donald Davie. Davie's *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952) is often thought to have set the standard for a neo-Augustan discipline in Movement poetry, promoting a particular kind of English traditional lyricism, but this aspect of Davie's critical endeavours needs to be set agains this intense and prolonged engagement with the poetry of Ezra Pound and with post-Poundian poetics in the United States. It is certainly the case that critical appraisals of Movement poetry have tended to repeat the formulas and generalisations associated with 1950s and 1960s anthologies rather than exploring the extent to which the work confounds those familiar summaries.

One of the earliest appraisals of Movement poetry can be found in *Rule and Energy* by John Press (1963). Although Press gives little credence to the publicity surrounding the Movement in the mid-1950s, he nevertheless ventures a critique of itsaims and achievements. The new poets 'advance no systematic theory of poetry andoffer no rigid set of dogmatic beliefs', but it is possible, Press claims, to summarise the main characteristics of their work:

They all display a cautious scepticism, favour an empirical attitude, speak in carefully measured accents, and examine a problem with an alert wariness…All of these poets, mistrusting or ignoring the legacy of the Romantics and aiming at colloquial ease,decorum, shapeliness, elegance, are trying to bring back into the currency of the language the precision, the snap, the gravity, the decisive, clinching finality which have been lost since the late Augustan age.

Here, Press is referring not just to a reaction against the 'neo-Romanticism' of the1940s but to the whole trend of English poetry since the early 19th century.The Movement poets, in this respect, are seen to represent a new 'classicism' in English poetry. Yet it is clear throughout *Rule and Energy* that this distrust of inflated rhetoricand large emotional gestures is only one aspect of a much broader postwar tendency.The most striking characteristic feature of English poetry in these years, according to Press is, 'the general retreat from direct comment on or involvement with any political or social doctrine'. This is particularly noticeable, he adds, 'ifwe contrast the verse of the past two decades with that of the 1930s'.However, what disturbs Press most is the peculiar passivity of postwar poetry. He speculates that the establishment of the Welfare State may have mitigated some of the more glaring political and social injustices, but continues: 'it is absurd to pretend that in our affluent society a poet can find nothing to arouse his compassion or his savage indignation.'

According to Morrison in his book *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s,* what emerges in the work of the Movement, then, is an uneasy combination of class consciousness and acceptance of class division; an acute awareness of privilege, but an eventual submission to the structure which makes it possible…As spokesmen for the new self-proclaimed lower-middle-class intelligentsia, the Movement was forced intoan ambivalent position; on the one hand opposed to the 'old order'; on the other hand indebted to, and respectful towards, its institutions. Morrison attributes this ambivalence to the fact that most of the Movement poets were scholarship boys in centres of learning still largely dominated by the

upper middleclass and therefore subject to pressures to understate social difference. Larkin refers to this process in the introduction to his novel *Jill*, where he admits that in Oxford in 1940 'our impulse was still to minimise social differences rather than exaggerate them.' Furthermore, the influence of thinkers like F. R.Leavis, especially in such subjects as English, undoubtedly helped to promote the kindof conformity and spirit of national unity that Morrison detects.

However, despite its mood of dissent and its anti-establishment attitude, the Movement offered only 'a token rebellion', and did not attempt to change the prevailing social structure. The ambivalence of Movement politics becomes particularly evident in the immediate context of the postwar years and manifests itself in a wavering liberal attitude towards the changing balance of power in the new society. The Movement poets were clearly influenced by the democratic idealism that accompanied the Labour victory of 1945, however short-lived that spirit of optimism might have been, and yet most of them were distrustful of egalitarian political ideals and remained deeply suspicious of radical change. Blake Morrison diagnoses the Movement predicament very astutely and shows how it operates in their poetry. Donald Davie's poem 'The Garden Party', for instance, seems at first sight to be severely critical of both class division and capitalism, yet the speaker of the poem has benefited too well from the current social structure to wish to change it. The poem ends in compromise, seeming to offer a critique of existing social arrangements but carefully maintaining a sense of distance and neutrality. The Movement, then, for all its initial anti-establishment fervour, proved to be politically inoffensive. In contrast to the poets of the 1930s,many of whom were upper-middle-class political activists, the poets of the 1950s werelower-middle class and politically neutral.

It is not surprising to discover in the work of Movement writers a sense of nostalgia and regret in the face of Britain's inevitable decline as a world power. Neil Corcoran claims that 'Some of the most interesting poetry of the Movement in the 1950s may be read as inscribed with the sense– anxious, distressed, nostalgic, stoic–of a great national termination and reorientation.'Morrison, too, acknowledges the impact of the end of empire

on Movement poetry and shows how a seemingly innocent lyric poem like Philip Larkin's 'At Grass' might be read within this context. He claims that the reason 'At Grass' became one of the most popular postwar poems is that 'by allowing the horses to symbolise loss of power, Larkin manages to tap nostalgia for a past "glorythat was England"'. Accordingly, Morrison identifies 'At Grass' as 'a poem of postimperial *tristesse*'. What is particularly impressive about Morrison's thesis is that it demonstrates how the Movement's social and political ambivalence extends into the formal and structural texture of the poetry in terms of hesitations, qualifications and conversational asides. In fact, the whole sense of an audience in Movement poetry, Morrison argues,is shaped by questions of socio-political identity, especially by the difficulty of appealing to an academic elite and at the same time being responsible to the general publicin a modern democracy.

Further confirmation of the Movement's political caution can be found in Robert Hewison's well-documented account of the post-war years, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945–60* (1981). Rather comically, Hewison reminds us that 'the movement did not exist' (it was, he believes, an effective piece of stage management), but he himself can hardly avoid using the label. His essential point is thatthe attitudes of the Movement poets reflect the restrictive conditions of the Cold War. In other words, the neutrality, caution and self-limitation of these writers belong to the mood of fear and suspicion created by the continuing opposition among the military and diplomatic forces of East and West after 1945.

There are, of course, important ways in which Larkin's poetry departs from Movement principles, and these tendencies were evident even before the Movement dissolved into divergent lines. Blake Morrison claims that Larkin is much more astute thanhis peers in his sense of audience and perhaps more sympathetically attuned to the Romantic influences the Movement poetry professed to scorn. Samuel Hynes in reviewing Morrison's book in "Sweeping the Empty Stage" In *Times Literary Supplement* claims that Larkin's work is more 'expansive' and more 'wide-ranging' than that of other Movement poets. Many critics are convinced that Larkin is a 'better' poet than Amis, Wain, Enright and Davie. Implicit in their evaluation is a

belief that Larkin's poetry, in contrast with the work of other 'Movement' writers, not only exemplifies a deeper imaginative apprehension of social experience and its contradictions, but also exhibits a far greater range of formal and stylistic devices and a more profound sense of the linguistic and aesthetic possibilities of modern colloquial English.

In 1963, Robert Conquest published a second anthology of contemporary poetry,*New Lines II*, in which he once again paid tribute to the persistence and variety of 'the central current of English verse'. Modernist innovations such as might be found inthe poetry of Ezra Pound were, for Conquest, little more than 'peripheral additions to the main tradition of English poetry'. Acknowledging the work of Philip Larkin as an essential continuation of this tradition, Conquest continued in a vein of stridentanti-modernism:

One even comes across the impudent assertion that English poets were unaware of the existence of the darker elements in the human personality, and of large-scale suffering,until psychoanalysts and world wars drew attention to them, and this is compounded with transparently spurious logic, by the notion that the way to cope with these forcesis to abandon sanity and hope.

Without being explicit about the matter, Conquest was responding to a rival anthology,*The New Poetry* (1962), in which Alfred Alvarez had strongly criticised the workof the Movement (and Larkin in particular) for failing to deal with the full range ofhuman experience. The obvious irritation in Conquest's rejoinder is an indication ofthe profound impact that Alvarez had made on contemporary literary criticism. You should note that by throwing 'tradition' and 'experiment' into sharp relief, *The New Poetry* undoubtedly stimulated one of the liveliest debates in the history of 20th century poetry. Alvarez also helped to shape a climate of opinion in which the poetry of Ted Hughes,Sylvia Plath and others–a poetry seemingly at odds with the work of the Movement–might flourish. By 1962, however, any sense of a coherent Movement project had largely dissolved and the writers who were briefly identified with it had already gonetheir separate ways.

4.5 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

[Adapted fromhttps:// www.britannica.com/art/English-literature/The-literature-of-World-War-II-1939-45#ref308824]

In contrast to a kind of traditionalism among the Movement Poets, is the poetry of Ted Hughes, who succeeded Betjeman as the poet laureate (1984–98). In extraordinarily vigorous verse, beginning with his first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), Hughes captured the ferocity, vitality, and splendour of the natural world. In works such as *Crow* (1970), Hughes added a mythic dimension to his fascination with savagery (a fascination also apparent in the poetry of Thom Gunn produced throughout the late 1950s and 60s. Much of Hughes's poetry is rooted in his experiences as a farmer in Yorkshire and Devon. It also shows a deep receptivity to the way the contemporary world is underlain by strata of history. This realisation, along with strong regional roots, is something Hughes had in common with a number of poets writing in the second half of the 20th century.

Britain's industrial regions received particular attention in poetry too. In collections such as *Terry Street* (1969), Douglas Dunn wrote of working-class life in northeastern England. Tony Harrison, the most arresting English poet to find his voice in the later decades of the 20th century—*The Loiners* (1970), *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (1978), *Continuous* (1981), came, as he stresses, from a working-class community in industrial Yorkshire. Harrison's social and cultural journey away from that world by means of a grammar school education and a degree in classics provoked responses in him that his poetry conveys with imaginative vehemence and caustic wit: anger at the deprivations and humiliations endured by the working class; guilt over the way his talent had lifted him away from these. Trenchantly combining colloquial ruggedness with classic form, Harrison's poetry kept up a fiercely original and socially concerned commentary on such themes as inner-city dereliction, the horrors of warfare and the evils of censorship.

From the late 1960s, onward Northern Ireland, convulsed by sectarian violence, was particularly prolific in poetry. From a cluster of significant

talents—Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Medbh McGuckian, Paul Muldoon—Seamus Heaney emerged as the most prominent poet. Born into a Roman Catholic farming family in County Derry, he began by publishing verse—in his collections *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969)—that combines a tangible, tough, sensuous response to rural and agricultural life, reminiscent of that of Ted Hughes, with meditation about the relationship between the taciturn world of his parents and his own communicative calling as a poet. Since then, in increasingly magisterial books of poetry—*Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things*(1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996)—Heaney has become arguably the greatest poet Ireland has produced, eventually winning the Nobel Prise for Literature in 1995. Having spent his formative years amid the murderous divisiveness of Ulster, he wrote poetry particularly distinguished by its fruitful bringing together of opposites. Sturdy familiarity with country life goes along with delicate stylistic accomplishment and sophisticated literary allusiveness. Present and past coalesce in Heaney's verses: Iron Age sacrificial victims exhumed from peat bogs resemble tarred-and-feathered victims of the atrocities in contemporary Belfast; elegies for friends and relatives slaughtered during the outrages of the 1970s and '80s are embedded in verses whose imagery and metrical forms derive from Dante. Surveying carnage, vengeance, bigotry, and gentler disjunctions such as that between the unschooled and the cultivated, Heaney made himself the master of poetry of reconciliations.

The closing years of the 20thcentury witnessed a remarkable last surge of creativity from Ted Hughes (after his death in 1998, Andrew Motion, a writer of more subdued verses, became poet laureate). In *Birthday Letters* (1998), Hughes published a poetic chronicle of his much-speculated-upon relationship with Sylvia Plath, the American poet to whom he was married from 1956 until her suicide in 1963. With *Tales from Ovid* (1997) and his versions of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (1999) and Euripides' *Alcestis* (1999), he looked back even further. These works—part translation, part transformation—magnificently reenergise classic texts with Hughes's own imaginative powers and preoccupations. Heaney impressively effected a similar feat in his fine translation of *Beowulf* (1999).



4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to gain some ideas on the development of English poetry following the World Wars, through a reading of Stephen Regan's article "The Movement" available in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry.* You have briefly read about the developments of Apocalyptic Poetry, Movement Poetry, Poetry of Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney, while also identifying the dominant themes in the works of the poets mentioned. It is hoped that, you are now in a position to address the different aspects of modern poetry in its nuanced totality.



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4.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Explain the methods adopted by the modernist poets to articulate their departure from older traditions since 1940s.

Q 2: Explain the methods adopted by the modernist poets following World War II to articulate their departure from older traditions.

Q 3: World War I and II had a profoundly disturbing effect on Western society. How did the modern poets especially those related to the Movement group react to these effects?

Q 4: Provide a comparative analysis of the main themes of the poets writing before the World War II and after it.

Q 5: Write a note on the major tendencies of the different groups of modern poetry in general with particular reference to 'The Movement'.

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