

JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science

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POSTGRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

STUDY MATERIAL

Module I

Course Code: ENB 040

Course Title: The Modern Age I

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Modern / Twentieth Century Poetry

The most striking thing in twentieth-century English literature is the revolution in poetic taste and practice. Various movements and changes had a greater influence upon modern poetry. Though poets are often influenced by each other and sometimes, share a common outlook, their style and the ways of writing differ from each other. So modern poetry is essentially a private art form and it contains very much a story of individual poets.

T. S. Eliot

He is one of the most remarkable of English poets. He had great influence on poetry for more than forty years. He sees poetry and ceremony as forces that can give meaning to the emptiness and confusion of the modern world. He gives great importance to the forces that make it possible for spiritual as well as physical life to continue.

The Waste Land is Eliot's major work. It is very long and complex poem. The poem contains many old myths, literary allusions, languages, music as well as different kinds of characters. There is spiritual dryness in the wasteland where renewal of life is impossible. The poem shows the emptiness and meaninglessness of modern life and modern world. Eliot sees the root cause of modern world's unhappiness and confusion is the people's inability to bring together the different areas of their experiences to make a complete and healthy whole.

W. B. Yeats

He was, without doubt, one of the greatest English poets. By birth and temperament, he was the poet of the Irish traditions. Irish history, people, language, traditions and nationalism are always in the mind of the poet when he is writing, though the theme of his later poetry is universal. The use of symbol and imagery and the combination of magic and mystery also become characteristic of Yeats, great poetry. At times, we find the use of classical and Celtic mythology in his poetry. His later poetry uses plainer language in its description of human nature.

Thomas Hardy

Hardy is regarded as a great English poet of this century. He wrote poetry throughout his long life and considered it more important than his novels. As a poet, he sets out to show the other side of common emotions. His poetry does not suggest that life is a bitter tragedy. Hardy believes that life is hard and uncertain, but the man possesses the strength to tolerate its hardship and continues to struggle in life. His poetry shows great delight in the natural beauty

of the world and at the touch of humor in events. Hardy describes human hardship and suffering by looking at them from a distance. Though his language is generally direct, at times, it is loaded with unusual words and sentences.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

He was a poet of religious faith. He appears as a devout humble Christian. The theme of his poetry is the relationship of man to God and the problem of suffering in a world created by God. In brief, the poetic development of Hopkins is the story of the development of a religious poet. Hopkins also appeals to his readers as a natural poet. He was a keen observer of nature. He regarded nature as an agent of the lord. In order to use the rhythm in the most natural way he developed his own rhythm called sprung rhythm. His work had a greater influence upon other poets.

W. H. Auden

Auden is one of the most famous poets of the modern age. He was born in England and later in his life; he went to stay in America. He mainly wrote his early poems in political and social themes. They are the poems of examinations of the contemporary English situation. Some of his poems directly deal with political events and their effect on people's lives. The poems that he wrote in America are concerned very closely with the individual in contemporary organized society. He expresses a strong sense of the realities of everyday life.

Dylan Thomas

He is a famous poet who was born and brought up in Wales. His language is not plain and simple. It is full of life, energy, feeling and strength. Thomas religious poetry sometimes attains the strength of the spoken Welsh words. His work praises and delights in natural forces. His purpose of writing was to touch and show people their own human feelings.

Ted Hughes

Hughes' poetry is concerned with strong and violent forces of nature. D. H. Lawrence influences him. By making the animals and birds the subjects of many of his poems, the poet intends to express the human condition. Therefore, his animals are powerful as symbols. Hughes attempts to capture the mystery of life and experience of animal characterization.

Robert Grave

He is one of the important poets of this century. Many of his poems are love poems. In such poems, he deals with as a central subject the relationship between man and woman. He shows how physical love between man and women can bring back life to the world and the lost sense of innocence and wonder to human relationship.

R. S. Thomas

Thomas is Welsh and he is a clergyman by profession. Thomas follows the tradition of British poets who have written about the country. His poems deal with the hardship of country life. Country landscape and scene are beautiful to look at from a distance, but if one gets closer to them, he becomes aware of discomfort and hardship of life. His poems express the sense that

difficulty in life can be tolerated only by love of men and love of God, since the qualities of mind alone are not enough.

Philip Larkin

Larkin is one of the most important poets since the war. He is the central figure of the group who began Movement poetry. This group of poets rejected the tradition of Dylan Thomas that poetry should express high emotion and feeling and forces of nature. Their subject trend to be smaller and their language more clearly controlled. In much of the poetry, there is a sense that reality is dull and unattractive, but that living through a dream is equally impossible. Larkin is very much influenced by Hardy and like him; he looks back to the past because the real happiness seems to have been lost in the present.

Stevie Smith

Smith is a naïve writer, whose voice is always clear and unmistakable and whose expression is spontaneous. She writes poems in her simple language and she treats common reality and experience of people in them. Many of her poems concerned with good and evil carry on a direct debate over the mystery of religion. She writes about her dislike of cruel people and gives sharp and critical description of how people behave to each other. Her aim of writing was ethical and didactic as well as to be entertained.

Seamus Heaney

Heaney is an Irish poet who is influenced by R. S. Thomas and Ted Hughes. Like them, he writes of the countryside and of the natural world in his early poems. His later poems move from private history to the public events of the past and how they have influenced the present political and military situation in Northern Ireland. Heaney is attempting to go beyond the daily events of the life around him and to discover the forces below his country's history that can bring back life and hope. He received the Noble Prize for literature in 1995.

War Poets

Rupert Brooke

One of the most famous poets of the war is Brooke. However, he does not express the painful view of the suffering caused by the war in his poetry. The romantic and patriotic view of many soldiers at the beginning of the war is reflected in one of his most famous poems. For Brooke death for a soldier was a great sacrifice for his country. The poet has been criticized for not responding to the horrors of war.

Siegfried Sassoon

Other war poets have truly expressed the painful realities of war. As an English soldier, Sassoon fought in France and gathered the real experience of the destructive war. In his poems, his anger is directed at the pointlessness of war. He severely attacks those military senior officers who plunged the innocent soldier into the war. He hates those people at home who ignored the misery and sufferings of the soldiers. The poets accuse them of believing the false heroic stories of war told by government.

Wilfred Owen

He is the best-known English poet of the First World War. Like Sassoon, he describes the realities of war-pain, horror and the suffering of the soldier in his poem. He mentions how the war destroyed the soldiers' happiness and damaged their mind permanently. Owen did not accept the romantic and patriotic view of the war as Brooke did.

Isaac Rosenberg

He belonged to a working-class family and served as an ordinary soldier in the war. He had not received much formal education. Therefore, his experience of life in the war is different from other poets. This reflects in the language of his poetry and in the events, he describes. He did not follow the models and traditions of earlier poetry. He has used a new form of poetry to describe his new experience. His language has great life and energy.

Conclusion

When the World War I came in 1914, the poets' minds were filled with heroic and nationalistic feelings. Their poems gave a romantic and patriotic view. Rupert Brooke wrote representative poems giving a traditional view of war. His five war sonnets represent the romantic and enthusiastic feelings of the people. However, in the later poets, we see the sad realities of war.

Siegfried Sassoon had fought in France and seen the death and destruction. In his poems, he expresses his anger towards the uselessness of war. He hated the patriotic people of England, who just believed the government propaganda, and were unknown about the sorrows and sufferings of the soldiers. He was himself wounded in the war in Europe.

Wilfred Owen is the most popular poet of World War I. His poems show the danger, discomfort, and suffering of the soldiers in the trenches. They show how war harms the minds and happiness of the soldiers. In his poem, *Strange Meeting* he describes that even the enemy soldiers are human beings like them. In "Disabled", he wrote about the soldiers disabled by war. He himself died in the war.

Isaac Rosenberg came from a working-class family and served as a common soldier during the war. His language was not so refined, but it had a great life and energy. The difficulties of the trench life and the inhumanity of killing is described in his poems, *Break of Day in the Trenches* and *Dead Man's Dump*.

The poets of the World War II were very different. As many people had suffered the darker side of life during the after-war period, they did not have the same hope and enthusiasm. These poets often showed a sense of tiredness and a sense of helplessness. The language was also plain and simple. Some of the poets of World War II were Sidney Keyes, Alun Lewis, Roy Fuller and Keith Douglas.