

Poetry
Professor S. P. Dhanavel
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Modernist Poetry

(Refer Slide Time: 00.22)

Modernist Poetry



- Historical and Literary Context
- Features of Modernist Poetry
- Rejection of the Past
- Influence of Symbolist Poetry
- Imagism and Vorticism
- Pound, H.D., and Eliot
- War Poetry and Sassoon
- Disorientation and Obscurity
- Imagistic and Mythical “Coherence”
- A Sample Modernist Poem



Hello. We are moving into the seventh week of our course with this topic, Modernist Poetry. We give a brief introduction to Modernist Poetry and then subsequently, we will discuss a few poets and their poems. In this lecture, we will provide a historical and literary context; Identify the features of Modernist Poetry; discuss these features one after another like Rejection of the past, Influence of Symbolist Poetry, Imagism, Vorticism and the chief practitioners of this Modernist Poetry Pound, H. D. that is Hilda Doolittle and Eliot.

We also have War Poetry in this period, so we will also spend some time on War Poetry and a poet called Siegfried Sassoon. Then other features like disorientation and obscurity, imagistic and mythical coherence. Finally, we will look at a sample Modernist Poem from proper British Literature. ‘The Blast’ is the cover that we have for the magazine that was published by Pound and his colleague Wyndham Lewis. In this magazine one of the first poems on Preludes was published by T. S. Eliot.

(Refer Slide Time: 01.44)

Historical Context



- King Edward VII (1901-1910)
- King George V (1910-1936)
- The First World War (1914-1918)
- The Second World War (1939-1945)
- Irish Revolt (1916) and Independence (1922)
- Russian Revolution (1917)
- Large-scale death and destruction
- The deterioration of a controlling center/ authority
- Enormous disorientation for people, especially writers
- Fragmented perceptions/ lives
- Search for alternative modes of understanding life



When we pay attention to the historical context, we find that two monarchs have ruled the early part of 20th century: King Edward VII and King George V. So, we have the Edwardian period and Georgian period in terms of literally periodization. But the decisive event of this early 20th century is this First World War between 1914 and 1918. Later on, we have this Second World War as well from 1939 to 1945. We also have some other influential events affecting British life and society that is Irish Revolt and Independence from Britain in 1922.

On the periphery, we also have the Russian Revolution in 1917 and in all this events, we have large scale death and destruction of people and property. Therefore, people could not identify a controlling centre or authority. They found the centre was deteriorating. That centre was losing its power. As a result, people became disorientated. Particularly writers felt affected by these events. As a result, we also have fragmented perceptions and also of lives, this pushed people, to go for alternative models of understanding life.

(Refer Slide Time: 03.23)

Literary Context

- **Symbolist Poetry:** Mallarme, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue; vers libre; impressions of inner life
- **Edwardian Poetry:** A E Housman, Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas; loss of old values, nostalgia
- **Georgian Poetry:** John Masefield, Walter de la Mare; sentimental, rural, romantic
- **Imagist Poetry:** Pound and H. D.; precise image
- **Vorticist Poetry:** Pound and W. Lewis; direct treatment
- **War Poetry:** R. Brooke, S. Sassoon, W. Owen; futility
- **Modernist Poetry:** Yeats, Eliot, and Pound; chaos
- **Key Texts:** Yeats's "The Second Coming," Eliot's *The Waste Land*,
- **Key Lines:** "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold"
"a heap of broken images"



Now, let us see the literary context of Modernist Poetry. We have first the Symbolist Poetry from Mallarme, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue; these are all French Poets actually this is called French Symbolism which influenced British Poetry. Vers libre and then most important aspect of this Symbolic Poetry is attention to impressions of inner life, that is what we find in many Modernist poets.

Then we have Edwardian poetry at this time represented by A E Houseman, Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and these poets and many others of these Edwardian Period were talking about loss of old values and they were thinking about the past, recollecting old values of the past in their nostalgic poems.

Then, we have Georgian Poetry represented by John Masefield, Walter De La Mare and these poets were looking at life sentimentally from rural perspectives and also romantic perspectives. So, we have to remember that many modes of poetry were concurrently available at this period. Against these kinds of poetry, we have modernist poetry in imagistic poems and Vorticist poems, first by Pound, Hilda Doolittle. They were paying attention to precise image in their poems. Then, Pound moved on to Vorticism with his colleague, Wyndham Lewis and they gave importance to direct treatment of objects, things, people, emotions. And we also have, as we mentioned earlier war poetry during this period, Soldiers who participated in the First World War like Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and they were all talking about this futility of war.

What is the use of war when this war involves so many deaths without much meaning? And then, we have proper Modernist poetry in W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Pound and others and they were all discussing modernist chaotic life in their poems. We have some key text like Yeats's, *The Second Coming* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*. We will discuss these poems in our course.

We also have some key lines from these poems like "Things fall apart, the center cannot hold," and then from Eliot's poem, "A Heap of Broken Images." There is no hold, there is no centre, there is no unifying factor for society, for people. And so, this was a fractured life that poets and people were living during this period.

(Refer Slide Time: 06.17)

Features of Modernist Poetry (Onley, 1984)



- Rejection of the past: the Victorian and the Romantic
- Highly experimental: symbolism, imagism, vorticism, use of other cultures (Indian, Chinese, Japanese)
- Fragmentation - **Disorientation**
- No cultural/religious moorings - Hopelessness/ **Despair**
- Obscurity: *The Waste Land*, the first annotated poem
- Juxtaposition of contrary images and ideas
- Mythical/ Musical "Coherence"



Certain features of Modernist Poetry, we can find here from a critic called Onley. We have listed them here from rejection of the past; past here means Victorian and Romantic Poetry. We also mentioned about this Edwardian and Georgian Poetry. This Modernist Poetry was highly experimental. It used symbolism, imagism, Vorticism and also it used other cultures like Indian, Chinese and Japanese.

That is a kind of alternative mode of life that poets were trying to look for themselves. A key feature of this Modernist Poetry is fragmentation, "A Heap of Broken Images." Complete disorientation was found among these poets and people. They could not have any kind of cultural, religious moorings and so many people became hopeless and desperate.

And this disorientation and despair, we find well exemplified in this kind of Modernist Poetry. This disorientation and despair lead to what is known as Obscurity in Poetry. This well-known poem, The Waste Land was first annotated poem in English literature. The poem was annotated by the poet himself for the benefit of others to make some sense out of this poem.

And what we have in this poem and many other poems is juxtaposition of contrary images and ideas without links among them, without explicit connection among them. That is where the readers have difficulty in understanding these poems. However, these poets have attempted to give some kind of internal coherence through myths and musical phrases in some sequences. We will see certain features of these poems in our course.

(Refer Slide Time: 08.12)

Rejection of the Past



- Modernists rejected both the form and content of traditional poetry, Edwardian, Georgian, and others
- Did not find meaning in old values and modes.
- Abandoned rhymes and fixed forms.
- Experimented with language to express images and ideas directly and precisely.
- Employed free verse extensively.
- Explored the inner life of human beings objectively.
- Used techniques from painting, sculpture, architecture, film, e.g., collage and montage



Now, let us start with this Rejection of the Past. Modernist poets rejected both the form and content of traditional poetry, Edwardian poetry, Georgian Poetry, Victorian Poetry and Romantic Poetry. Everything that was traditional in terms of form and theme, they rejected. These modernist poets did not find meaning in old values and modes, because these old values and modes did not prevent the First World War. They also abandoned rhymes and fixed forms which were available at that time.

They experimented with language to express images and ideas directly and precisely. They employed free verse extensively. They also explored the inner life of human beings as subjectively as they could. They used techniques from other arts like painting, sculpture, architecture, even film. Two techniques are very commonly used in this kind of modernist

poetry. One is collage and the other is montage; montage from film and collage from various kinds of arts.

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Symbolism

- The French Symbolist movement in the 19th century
 - Aimed at a highly personal form of expression
 - Used carefully chosen words to suggest deeper meanings through tones, colors, and harmonies
 - Exploited the inherent ambiguity in symbols which do not show links between images and ideas explicitly
 - Experimented with free verse
 - Focused on the inner life of human beings
 - Pioneered by Mallarme, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue
 - Influenced Yeats, Eliot, and others profoundly
- Yeats's "Byzantium" and "Sailing to Byzantium"



When we come to Symbolism, we find that the French Symbolist movement was popular at the end of the 19th century and it aimed at a highly personal form of expression. The symbolist poets used carefully chosen words to suggest deeper meanings through tones, colors and harmonies. So, we can see some kind of influence of painting here as well.

They exploited the inherent ambiguity in symbols, which do not show links between images and ideas explicitly leading to the difficulty for readers. They also experimented with free verse, open forms without restrictions. They focused on the inner life of human beings, not the outer forms through descriptions of nature or outer objects.

This kind of symbolist poetry was pioneered in France by Mallame, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue. All these writers, French writers influenced Yeats, Eliot and other Modernist poets profoundly. One example, we have here in Yeats, that is his poems like Byzantium and Sailing to Byzantium are good examples for Symbolist poetry which is part of Modernist poetry.

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Imagism



- A trans-Atlantic literary movement based in London
- Led by T E Hulme, F S Flint, Joseph Cambell, etc.,
- To communicate reality directly without fixed forms
- To promote free verse experimentally
- Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro"
- Three rules of imagism: 1. direct treatment of the thing, 2. accurate presentation (no verbiage), 3. composition in a sequence of musical phrases
- An image presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time (Pound)
- Poetry: the best image in the best order
- Reader: to interpret the images and make sense



A remarkable feature of Modernist poetry is this concentration on image which came to be called Imagism. It is a Trans-Atlantic literary movement based in London. It was led by writers like T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, Joseph Cambell and many others. The main aim of this imagist movement was to communicate reality directly without fixed forms. They also attempted to promote free verse experimentally.

The best example for imagism is the poem by Ezra Pound called 'In a Station of the Metro.' Just two-line poem. We will see that when we come to Ezra Pound. Three rules of Imagism were mentioned during this time, we have listed them here. One is direct treatment of the thing. The second is accurate presentation. That means no excessive use of words as we see in no verbiage. The third one is composition in a sequence of musical phrases. So, we can understand that these Modernist poets were using free verse but at the same time they were giving importance to music, rhythm and many other aspects associated with good poetry.

According to Pound an image presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. That is very important for Pound and many other modernist poets. Earlier, we know that the best word in the best order creates the best poem. But according to Pound, and others in this group, we find that the best image in the best order creates the best poetry. That is Modernist poetry. Finally, the burden of understanding the poem is on the reader. The reader has to interpret the images and make sense and that is where they had lot of difficulties. Because of this, poets like Eliot had to pitch in and provide annotations for the poems that they wrote.

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Vorticism



- Launch of **BLAST** in 1914 by W. Lewis and E. Pound
- To destroy old literary and social conventions
- Indebted to the futurist F. T. Marinetti who valued speed, technology and power
- Defined by **ACTIVITY**, **SIGNIFICANCE**, and **ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT** (Lewis)
- **Image**: a whirlpool of human imagination and potentialities; “the point of maximum energy” (Pound)
- To present the Reality of the Present
- To create a new taste among readers
- **Poets**: Pound and Eliot; **Writers**: Rebecca West, Ford Madox Ford; **Artists**: Edward Wardsworth, Jacob Epstein, Spencer Gore, Wyndham Lewis
- Eliot's “Preludes”



Vorticism is an offshoot of Imagism. Pound found that Imagism was misused by some poets. So, he wanted to distinguish himself from imagism by moving on to the next stage called Vorticism. This Vorticist movement started with the launch of the magazine called Blast. In this violet colour as we showed the picture earlier in 1914 and it was written by Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound.

The aim of this Vorticism was to destroy old literary and social conventions. It was indebted to the futurist, the Italian futurist called F. T. Marinetti who valued speed, technology and power. So, we can understand the influence of technology, power, speed through this futurist movement on Vorticism and Modernist poetry in general.

Wyndham Lewis identified three features of Vorticism, one activity, two significance and third essential movement. All these were identified in Vorticism. And most important aspect of Vorticism is of course image from imagism but here we have a specific image for this Vorticism. That is a whirlpool of human imagination and potentialities and this Vorticist point is the point of maximum energy according to Pound.

Vorticism presented the reality of the present. It also created a new taste among readers. We have some poets, writers and artist. Pound and Eliot are good example for poets and Rebecca West, Ford Madox Ford are good example for writers and then we have many artists like Edward Wardsworth, Jacob Epstein, Spencer Gore and Wyndham Lewis himself. A very good poem for this Vorticist movement is Eliot's poem called ‘Preludes.’

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Ezra Pound (1885-1972)



- American born poet living in Europe promoting new talents with his slogans "Make it new," "Destroy the old"
- Appreciated the Japanese haiku for its concentration
- Identified the juxtaposition of Nature and Man
- Changed a nameless urban crowd into a beautiful object

➤ "In a Station of the Metro"

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough."

- Clarity and precision of language
- Images: Faces - petals; crowd - wet, black bough
- Originally several longer versions, reduced to three stanzas, and finally to two lines



The leader of Modernist movement is of course is Ezra Pound. He was an American born poet but he primarily lived in Europe promoting new talents with his slogans like 'Make it new' and 'Destroy the old.' He appreciated the 'Japanese haiku' for its concentration. He also identified the juxtaposition of Nature and Man in Chinese poetry and also Japanese poetry.

He changed a nameless urban crowd into a beautiful object in his most famous poem called 'In a station of the Metro.' It is an example of this Imagist poetry and also this Vorticist poetry. This is a short poem of two lines like haiku;

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough."

What we have here in this poem is clarity and precision of language. We have images, faces through petals, crowd through wet and black bough. Originally, this two-line poem had many lines, but later on these were reduced to three stanzas and finally we have just a two-line poem like a Japanese haiku or a Chinese pictogram.

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H.D. (1886-1961)



- Attracted to the conflicting natural forces
- Followed the principles of imagism
- Infused an energy not seen in E. Pound and F. S. Flint
- Achieved complexity by a dynamic interaction of images in a moment

➤ "Oread" [a sea nymph]

Whirl up sea –
Whirl you pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir

- A unified image for the sea and the land
- Dynamic force created by the active verbs



The next writer is Hilda Doolittle. Hilda Doolittle is also an American. She was attracted to these conflicting natural forces. She followed the principles of Imagism very carefully. That is why she is more often associated with Pound than with many other poets who were initially following imagism as represented by Amy Lowell. She infused an energy not seen in Pound and also F. S. Flint. She achieved complexity by a dynamic interaction of images in a moment. We have an example from her poem called 'Oread.' Oread means a sea nymph. Let us read this small poem;

"Whirl up sea-

Whirl you pointed pines,

Splash your great pines

On our rocks,

Hurl your green over us,

Cover us with your pools of fir."

What we have in this poem is a unified image for the sea and the land. Those of you who may have seen the connections would understand it much better. When you see the trees, when you see the clouds, you will have something like an image of waves. Now, you can see a wave of traffic or roads as well. The dynamic force created by the active verbs can be seen in

this poem, whirl, whirl, splash, hurl, cover. Such power is the heart of Vorticist, imagist, modernist poetry.

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T S Eliot (1888-1965)

- Most influential poet and critic
- Groomed by Pound in a world of futility and anarchy
- Published his poem "Preludes" in **BLAST** in 1915
- A poem on the chaotic modern city
- Juxtaposition of the clock time with internal time
- Four sections: evening, dawn, morning, evening
- The same days & actions of anonymous hands & feet
- The mental landscape of the speaker & the outer scene
- Loneliness, alienation, and isolation in the modern city
- The image of a woman in the soul of the speaker



We come to T. S. Eliot now; one of the most influential poet and critic of 20th century. He was groomed by Pound in a world of futility and anarchy. He published his poem 'Preludes' in Blast in 1915. A poem on the chaotic modern city is 'Preludes.' It juxtaposes the clock time with the internal time. We have four sections in this poem about evening, dawn, morning and again evening.

The same days and actions of anonymous hands and feet are pictured in this poem, the mental landscape of the speaker and outer scene are juxtaposed in this poem focusing on the loneliness, alienation and isolation of the modern city. Specifically, we have the image of a woman in the soul of the speaker. Probably the 'Preludes' can refer back to the 'Prelude' by Wordsworth by this kind of association, we can see how Eliot is rejecting Victorian and Romantic style or substance of poetry.

(Refer Slide Time: 19.43)

Preludes, Stanza 1



The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps 5
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots, 10
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And then the lighting of the lamps.



We have the first stanza here as a sample of Modernist poetry for us from Preludes.

“The winter evening settles down

With smell of steaks in passageways.

Six o'clock,

The burnt-out ends of smoky days.

And now a gusty shower wraps 5

The grimy scraps

Of withered leaves about your feet

And newspapers from vacant lots;

The showers beat

On broken blinds and chimney-pots 10

And at the corner of the street,

A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And then the lighting of the lamps.”

An evening is captured in this poem. ‘And newspaper from vacant lots’ is just one image we have drawn attention to but the whole poem is built on several images like,

“The burnt-out ends of smoky days
And now a gusty shower wraps;
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet.”

So, building of images one after another is the crux of this Modernist poetry. These images are objective correlatives for the internal emotions felt by the poet or speaker or other people of this time.

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War Poetry

- The First World War (1914-1918)
- Profound impact on soldier-poets and the public
- About 70 war poets, including 50 soldier-poets
- Expressed anger, disgust, and horror
- Nothing noble about the traumatic trench warfare
- Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen
- Adapted the rhythms and technology of a machine war
 - Brooke’s “The Soldier” – idealistic
 - Sassoon’s “Counter-Attack” – realistic
 - Owen’s “Anthem for the Doomed Youth” – surrealistic
- Owen’s unique position in war poetry by his use of alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, half-rhyme, etc.



As we said War poetry is a key aspect of this Modernist poetry, because War happened during this period and the War poetry also focused on the meaninglessness, the futility, the despair, the disorientation of Modern life. War poetry, in this context generally refers to the poets who participated in the First World War as soldiers primarily. However, we also have some poets writing about the First World War, those who may not have participated in this.

This First World War had a profound impact on soldier poets and the public. We have something like 70 war poets including 50 soldier poets; that means, they were soldiers, they participated in the war in some way or the other. They expressed anger, disgust and horror

openly in their poems. They said, there was nothing noble about traumatic trench warfare. We have this example in Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen.

They adapted the rhythms and technology of a machine war. We have Brooke's 'The Soldier.' This poem initially was idealistic. It was appreciating uprising war but then later on Brooke changed his opinion. Similarly, Sassoon also initially was writing about the war and later on became more and more realistic. Here, we have an example in Counter-Attack. But the best war poetry is represented by Wilfred Owen and there are many poems. Here, we have mentioned one 'Anthem for the Doomed Youth.' It is more surrealistic. So, we differentiate the three poets by these terms idealistic, realistic and surrealistic. Owen's unique position in war poetry was achieved by his use of alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, half-rhyme and many other poetic techniques. So, he became a unique poet. He occupied a unique position in war poetry in general.

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Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

- Wrote poetry before and after the war
- Started as an accomplished conventional poet
- Employed nature images and abstract meditations
 - "Absolution," and "To My Brother"
- Changed his treatment of war and the dead
- Exposed the indignity and inhumanity of death in war
- **Published Owen's Poems (1920)**
- Entangled by an open letter to the war department and considered unpatriotic but saved by Robert Graves ↗
- Captured the disorientation of war in "**Counter-Attack**"
 - "And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime"



Let us pay attention to Siegfried Sassoon. He wrote war poetry before and after the war. He started his career as a poet in the conventional format. He employed nature images and abstract meditations. Here, we have two examples, 'Absolution' and 'To My Brother.' Later on, when the intensity of the war increased when he saw many deaths, he changed his treatment of war and the dead. He, then began to expose the indignity and inhumanity of death in war.

Most important thing that he did was to publish Owen's poems. Owen wrote poems and sent them to Sassoon and he did not publish many of his poems during his own lifetime. These

were published after his death in the battlefield. Sassoon got into trouble by an open letter to the war department and so he was considered unpatriotic and put into lot of trouble . It was Robert Graves, another poet who saved Siegfried Sassoon at this time.

Sassoon captured the disorientation of war in a poem which we referred to earlier called ‘Counter-Attack.’ Here, we have two lines from this poem:

“And naked sodden buttock, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.”

We can see the image of destruction, death, disorientation, despair in these just two lines written by a war poet.

(Refer Slide Time: 24.54)

Disorientation and Despair

- A sense of being rootless and anchorless
- The utter failure of religion and other social institutions
- Discovery of the unconscious and its effect on humans
- Relativism and amorality of scientific knowledge
- Impact of the rapid changes in science and technology
- Mechanical and mechanized age of dehumanized self
- Isolated, lonely, and alienated modern human beings
- Breaking of race, class, gender, and other hierarchies
- Man as a money-making and soul-killing agent
- Disoriented and desperate human beings



Now, we specifically move on to the disorientation and despair as a feature of Modernist poetry. There was a sense of being rootless and anchorless among the poets and the people. There was the failure, the utter failure of religion and other social institutions. They could not prevent the war. They could not prevent the destruction. Actually, many such destructions have come about in the name of religion and other social institutions like nation and nationhood.

At this time, we have the discovery of the unconscious and its effect on human beings by Freud. We also have this relativism and amorality of scientific knowledge from Einstein. The

impact of the rapid changes in science and technology were also seen. We also noticed the impact of the rapid changes in science and technology at this time leading to mechanical and mechanized age of dehumanized self.

People were isolated, lonely and alienated and so these are called modern human beings completely losing contact with themselves and with others. They broke race, class, gender and other hierarchies and we have man as a money making and soul killing agent. That is a most distressing part of this modern life, so people became disoriented and they became desperate and naturally, the poets of this period gave expression to the disorientation and despair of the times.

(Refer Slide Time: 26.42)

Obscurity/ Deliberate Difficulty

- Excessive use of foreign language words and phrases
 - Obscure historical and cultural references
 - Uncommon literary allusions
 - Quotations without quotes (pilfering)
 - Montage, collage, mosaic: fusion and confusion
 - Ironic, ambiguous, open-ended texts
 - Fractured language for a fractured experience
 - Embedding of images without explicit connections
 - Elitist attitude and outlook
- "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch"
- I am not Russian at all. I come from Lithuania, a true German



Because of this disorientation, poets could not write poems with some clear meaning for the reader. The reader had to find the meaning. Even today readers will have to struggle hard to understand Modernist poetry. Why? because they used foreign language words and phrases excessively in their poems. They had obscure historical and cultural references. They also had uncommon literary allusions which we cannot easily locate.

They also wrote poems just like quotations putting them together without quotation marks. That is where we have this technique called montage, collage and mosaic. What we have here is a fusion leading to confusion; fusion by the poet and confusion for the reader. That is what we have in this Modernist poetry.

The stand taken by these writers is ironic therefore, their poetry is ambiguous and their poems are open-ended texts. They used a fractured language, to represent their fractured experience. And to represent this experience they used images without explicit connections. In general, there is a kind of charge against Modernist poetry that is this Modernist poetry had Elitist attitude and outlook. For example, we have one instance of this obscurity here. In the Waste Land, we have a quotation from German. And we have the translation here. “I am not Russian at all. I come from Lithuania, a true German.” This, when we have in a poem which is written in English suddenly all readers who may not understand German, will not have any clue at all to understand what this is all about.

(Refer Slide Time: 28.34)

Co-n-fusion of Images/Ideas



- Pairing of the past and the present (Eliot's historical sense in "Tradition and the Individual Talent")
- Mixing of literary and artistic forms
- Collision of languages and literatures
- Juxtaposition of images and ideas without explicit linking markers
- Exploration of literature, history, religion, myth, etc.
- Investigation of the linguistic medium
- Instantaneity, simultaneity and contemporaneity



And when we come to images, we have this fusion of images and ideas and so we have split this word confusion, co-fusion of images, co-n-fusion of images. These images represent the confused life of modern people. These writers paired the past and the present. For example, Eliot gave such a kind of idea in his own essay, critical essay called Tradition and the Individual Talent by referring to this historical sense. We have a mix of literary and artistic forms.

Collision of languages and literatures. So, we have many kinds of languages and literatures in modernist poetry. One of the statements of Eliot also, we have to remember this time, that is, the Modernist poet will have to bring the entire European literature and life, culture in general into his poem. We have this juxtaposition of images and ideas without explicit linking markers leading to difficulties.

Modernist poets explored literature, history, religion, myth; that means they were not just writing poems they were writing poems in relation to many other cultural factors like history, religion, myth. They investigated the linguistic medium much more seriously than poets who came before and as a result of all these, what they achieved was instantaneity, simultaneity and contemporaneity of experience, expression, everything in their poem.

(Refer Slide Time: 30.19)

Mythical and Musical Organization



- Eliot's review of Joyce's *Ulysses* in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," published in *The Dial* (1923)
- **Myth** is "a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."
- The myth of Ulysses in Joyce's *Ulysses*
- The Myth of the Holy Grail in Eliot's *The Waste Land*
- Improvisation techniques for coherence
- Repetition of words, phrases, images, ideas, emotions, rhythms, etc., by extending their significance
- Points and counter-points



Just because they had despair and disorientation it does not mean that these poems not had coherence at all. We have some organising principle identified by Eliot that is called mythical and musical organisation. Eliot wrote a review of James Joyce's novel, another Modernist novel, that is *Ulysses* in an essay 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' which was published in the magazine called 'The Dial.'

So, in this review Eliot himself gives clues for us to understand the organising principles. Eliot says 'Myth is a way of controlling or ordering of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.' James Joyce used the myth of Ulysses from Greek culture. Eliot also has used the Kingfisher myth in his poem *The Waste Land*.

So, the myth of Ulysses we find in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *The Myth of the Holy Grail*, we find in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Further, we also have improvisation techniques for coherence. These improvisations happen to repetition of words, phrases, images, ideas, emotions, even rhythms, by extending their significance from the beginning to the end. So,

throughout this text, what we have is points and counter-points and then finally taking a good shape which, of course the reader will have to find for himself, for herself.

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A Sample Modernist Poem



"The Embankment"

(The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night)

Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,
In a flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.
Now see I
That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.
Oh, God, make small
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.

5



• **T. E. Hulme** (1883-1917), an early leader of modernism

Here we have a sample Modernist poem. This is written by T. E. Hulme. It is called The 'Embankment' and we have something of a subtitle within brackets, 'the fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.'

"Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,

In a flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.

Now see I,

That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.

Oh, God, make small

5

The old star-eaten blanket on the sky,

That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie."

What a beautiful image we have in the old star eaten blanket, which is going to cover this fallen man and giving him some comfort. People suffered a lot. They needed some kind of support or succour. They did not find it that is why they wrote poems like this.

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Summary



- Historical and Literary Context
- Features of Modernist Poetry
- Rejection of the Past
- Influence of Symbolist Poetry
- Imagism and Vorticism
- Pound, H.D., and Eliot
- War Poetry and Sassoon
- Disorientation and Obscurity
- Imagistic and Mythical Coherence
- A Sample Modernist Poem



In summary, we have paid attention to the historical and literary context in which Modernist poetry was written. And we identified some of the features like rejection of the past, influence of symbolist poetry, the rise of imagism and Vorticism. The chief practitioners of imagism and Vorticism like Pound, Hilda Doolittle and of course Eliot. In between we found this war poetry also taking the shape of modernist poetry. Expressing disorientation and obscurity and finally we found, despite all these kinds of desperate elements, we find some kind of coherence through myth and musical organisation and finally we looked at a sample poem by T. E. Hulme.

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We have some references now. Thank you!