

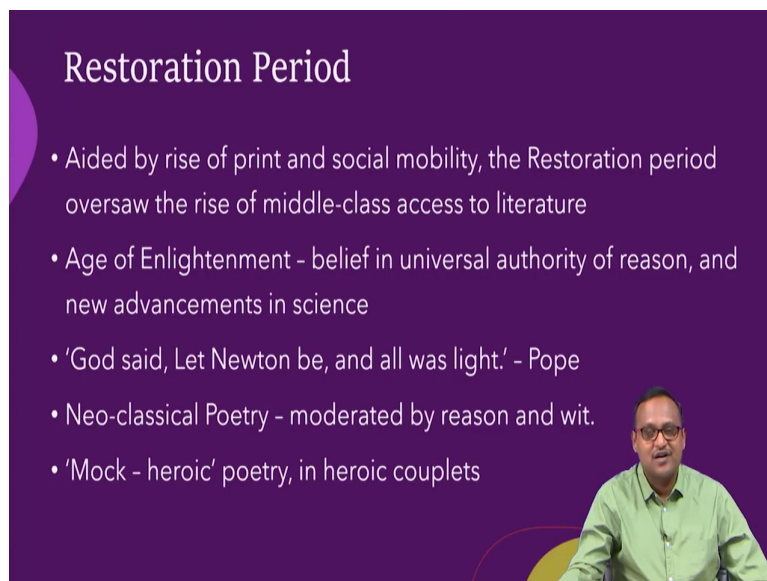
**Elements of Literature and Creative Communication**  
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**Lecture - 20**  
**English Poetry: An Overview. 17<sup>th</sup> Century Onwards**

Hello, welcome back. In the previous classes, we were discussing English poetry. In fact, we began with the origins of English poetry and we acquainted ourselves with English poetry during Chaucer's times and Chaucer's contribution to English poetry.

And then, we moved on to the introduction of sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets and then metaphysical poetry and Milton and in that series, this is going to be the last lecture. Here we are going to take you through poetry from English poetry especially from the 17th century onwards through modern poetry.

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**Restoration Period**

- Aided by rise of print and social mobility, the Restoration period oversaw the rise of middle-class access to literature
- Age of Enlightenment - belief in universal authority of reason, and new advancements in science
- 'God said, Let Newton be, and all was light.' - Pope
- Neo-classical Poetry - moderated by reason and wit.
- 'Mock - heroic' poetry, in heroic couplets

A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a man with glasses and a green shirt, likely the professor, speaking.

Here, let us begin this with poetry during the Restoration Period, this period is very interesting because aided by the print culture and social mobility the middle class had a kind of un-intermittent access to literature. So, because of this kind of exposure, there was literature, in general, received a kind of a major boost. So, generally, the restoration period is also called the Age of Enlightenment because here, there is a kind of a deviation if you compare poetry during this period with poetry from a little earlier especially Elizabeth and



poetry. There is a kind of a marked shift in the way human beings perceived the society around them and this was also the age that witnessed a kind of a spread of rationality, that is why you have Alexander Pope a remarkable poet acknowledging the influence of the scientific works of Newton he says ‘God said, Let Newton be, and all was light’. So, here in this neoclassical period, poetry as opposed to the poetry of the Elizabethan period is moderated more by reason and wit. And the predominant literary form especially in poetry that was practised was ‘mock-heroic’ poetry because well, society had grown wary of heroic poetry and a kind of welcome change was required. Therefore, satires in this age characterize the arrival of mock-heroic poetry specially written in heroic couplets that becomes the norm.

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## Alexander Pope

"True wit is Nature to advantage dressed  
What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed."

- Heroic Couplets in a mock-epic format
- His command of decorum and diction, in the form of Satire was unparalleled
- Major literary figure who engaged with both "high" and "low" cultural scenes
- Major works - 'Rape of the Lock', 'The Dunciad', 'Essay on Man'




We begin with Alexander Pope. In fact, scholars of English literature say that after Shakespeare, it is Alexander Pope whose quotations are widely followed even to this day. So, that is the contribution of Alexander Pope. So, again here too, in fact, he makes use of heroic couplets in a mock-epic format. And here his command of the language, his command of decorum and diction, especially in the form of Satire is totally unparalleled. So, some of his important works include ‘Rape of the Lock’, ‘The Dunciad’, ‘Essay on Man’ and all of them ridicule the kind of high culture. So, the lampooning of society in terms of its affectations, affectations in terms of aristocracy and all that are some of the popular themes in Alexander Pope's poetry. Please remember, we are just introducing you to some of these major poetic figures and the purpose of this class is basically introductory in nature. So, I am introducing you to the broad contours of English poetry through some of its important practitioners.

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## John Dryden

- John Dryden - Verse Satirist, and Poet Laureate of the 17th century
- He mastered the use of heroic couplets in a satirical narrative which Pope inherited from him
- Major Works - 'MacFlecknoe', 'Absalom and Achitophel'

"S--- alone my perfect image bears,  
Mature in dullness from his tender years:  
S--- alone, of all my sons, is he  
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.  
The rest to some faint meaning  
make pretence,  
But S--- never deviates in sense ..."

A man with glasses and a green shirt is speaking, positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide.

From Alexander Pope to John Dryden, John Dryden is basically a Satirist. In fact, John Dryden is the first poet laureate of England. So, he is the first poet laureate of England, again he too mastered the use of heroic couplets and his important works are 'MacFlecknoe', 'Absalom and Achitophel'. Especially it said of 'MacFlecknoe' that it is a kind of a political satire of a fellow poet with whom he did not see eye to eye. Therefore, that is been turned into a kind of political satire. Later writers, later British writers consider John Dryden as a kind of a father of political satire especially in poetry because he almost perfected it.

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## William Blake

- William Blake - Poet, Painter, Engraver, Mystic, and Visionary
- Blake's London - inhabited by the poor, lepers, orphans, chimney-sweepers, prostitutes - a city reeling from the effects of rapid industrialization, overpopulation, and inequality.
- He opposed the ruling intellectual orthodoxies, political, social, sexual and ecclesiastical
- Songs of Innocence and Experience is his seminal work, appearing in two phases - his poems accompanied by his illustrations

A portrait of William Blake, showing him from the chest up, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat.A man with glasses and a green shirt is speaking, positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide.

From John Dryden, we move on to William Blake. In fact, if you can recall we said that William Blake acts as a precursor to romantic poetry as such. Though officially speaking romantic poetry begins with the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's "Lyrical Ballads", the groundwork was done through the poetic works of William Blake. So, even here there is a kind of a marked shift in the poetic sensibility. In fact, again please remember with every generation there is a kind of a marked shift in the poetic sensibility. So, if the restoration poetry was a kind of a revolt against the earlier Elizabethan poetry and all that, romantic poetry is a kind of a revolt against restoration poetry. So, William Blake's contribution to English poetry, in general, is something remarkable. Unfortunately during his lifetime William Blake was not so much given credit for his genius. In fact, during his lifetime he was kind of an ignored genius, an ignored genius. It is only now, especially in the 20th century that the world has come to understand the greatness of his contribution, especially to the world of poetry. Especially to the world of poetry because he has a kind of an equal contribution to painting, during his time he was well known for his painting too. Therefore, you can call him a kind of multifaceted artist. He was a poet, a painter, an engraver more than that mystic and visionary. Blake saw his poetry in dreams, he stated that he just sees all his poems as dreams as some kind of vision and when he wakes up he just writes them down. In that sense, he believed that his poetry is a kind handed down to humanity from angels and meta-human creatures that he met in his dreams.

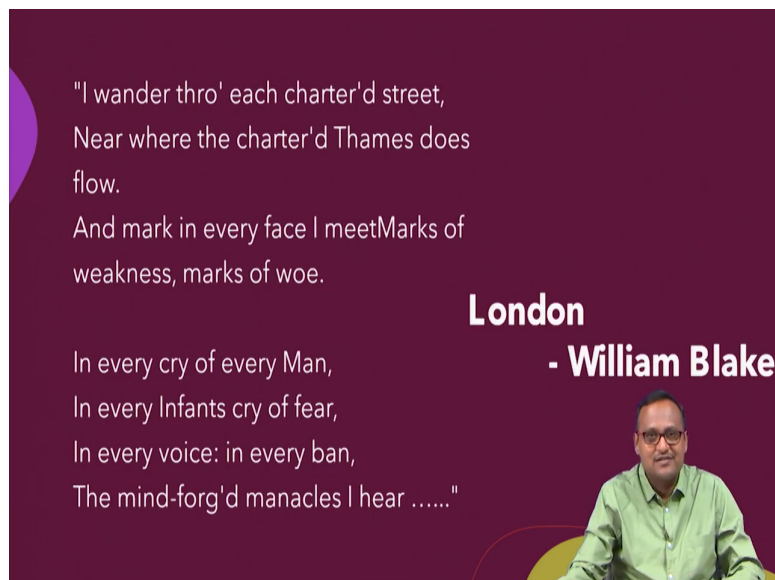
He is also a kind of an iconoclastic poet because again, a sensitive reader would find a cogent and powerful critique of society during his time. If you look at his poetry we find kind of a powerful critique of orthodox practices, socio-political and ecclesiastical exercises that the ruling class practised. So, his poetry is a kind of a shift toward the subaltern you can find a shift towards the subaltern via nature. William Blake, well is there is another reason why probably all of us may have heard of William Blake that is because of his two important poetical works "Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience". He believed it is a kind of a transition that human life has to pass through, when you are born until through your childhood you are innocent, and that characterizes our life. But as we walk into adult life well, if we continue to be innocent well that so much becomes ignorance than innocence. So, you need to know the world from a different perspective, otherwise, the world you may consider the world as highly unrealistic, harsh and all that. Therefore, you need to understand it from the perspective of experience therefore, he comes out with another collection called the "Songs of Experience". And afterwards interestingly during the third phase, he goes back



and says it is the Songs of Innocence, again it is a kind of a circle in a sense that passes through experience and comes back and remains innocent. Some of his popular poems include 'London', 'The Tyger' and all that especially you must have heard of these remarkable lines - "Tyger Tyger, burning bright, In the forests of the night."

So, his poetry is again is replete with symbolism and this symbolism is not the worldly symbolism that we later come to find in modern poetry. So, this symbolism was influenced by an understanding of myths, legends and his Christian background and all that and his understanding of the Bible. So, we can call William Blake a kind of precursor, a forerunner to romantic poetry.

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"I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does  
flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of  
weakness, marks of woe.

**London**  
**- William Blake**

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear ....."

Here is a poem 'London':

I wander through each chartered street,  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
marks of weakness, marks a woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

And he literally believed it; in fact, it is not just a product of imagination he really said that he felt all that in his dreams. So, some kind of angels dictated his verse, angels dictated his painting and he only gave voice to their spirit, their messages were his belief.

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### Romantic period – an "inward turn"

- New Romantic Sensibility – emphasis on Subjective experience.
- What is Subjectivity? – an "inward turn" for poetic inspiration, and truth!
- Poetry as a product of "*spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*" but also as "*emotion recollected in tranquility*"
- For the Romantic Poet one's perception of the outside world (nature, object, etc.) is shaped by an inward reconfiguration or sense of a subjective truth.



From William Blake, we move on to the more romantic phase of poetry, the romantic period. As I said if there is a kind of a shift in the sensibility, the shift is this during the neoclassical period it was more a kind of a universal theme. It was more a kind of reason oriented approach towards everything, but here the approach and emphasis are more on the 'subjective turn'. So, you can call it a kind of a subjective turn in poetry. So, what is a subjective turn you may ask? It is more towards looking inward, rather than looking outward, at our own emotions looking at our heart and then speaking. More than that romantic period of poetry is marked by a heavy tilt toward nature. In fact, nature acts as a kind of a language to them, more than a theme. In fact, a lot of discussions have happened as far as the rich portrayal of nature is concerned in romantic poetry, but if you carefully look at their poetry you realize that nature more or less acts as language, more than a theme it acts as a language. So, it becomes a medium through which they find an expression to the human turmoil, human voices and virtues and all that. So, nature provides rich scope for these poets to explore their own inner lives. Of course, this is where you understand, you come face-to-face with Wordsworth and Coleridge and especially how they foregrounded a marked shift in the poetic sensibility. Especially in the preface that they write, preface to lyrical balance they talk about their poetics, poetics of the romantic period. So, for them poetry was basically a kind of a

“spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” and “emotions recollected in tranquillity” that is a kind of a definition of the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”.

But that happens when the emotion is recollected in tranquillity - it is a kind of an outpouring, a spontaneous outpouring. Well, when you recollect it, then, of course, recollect not casually when you recollect it during your peaceful and tranquil state of mind that is when you can produce poetry. So, as I said for them, for a romantic poet their perception of the outside world when we say outside world, it is nature, society anything. It is basically shaped by somebody's inward reconfiguration, there is a kind of oneness; when there is a kind of oneness between what one thinks and what one feels with what one finds outside you can produce great poetry that was the belief.

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*A Few poems.....*

She dwelt among th' untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A maid whom there were none to praise,  
And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half-hidden from the eye! -  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

.....a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man

- Tintern Abbey, William Wordsworth

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and oh!  
The difference to me

- William Wordsworth

These are some remarkable lines by William Wordsworth. Especially “Tintern Abbey”, which is his important work. “Tintern Abbey” is a major poem that William Wordsworth wrote, as well as the Lucy poems. So, these are some well-known poems that we are familiar with, and when it comes to Coleridge again their joint venture created “lyrical ballads”, Coleridge is another important poetic genius who was a friend of William Wordsworth. And he also wrote an important critical piece called “Biographia Literaria”, in which he foregrounds a major distinction between fancy and imagination, and how imagination is a higher form. And in order for us to write poetry, we need not be fancy of course, because if your poetry is a product of fancy then it does not have a lasting impact. On the other hand, if it is a product of

your imagination, rich creativity then, of course, poetry achieves a kind of a lasting impact. So, some of Coleridge's well-known works are the 'Rime of Ancient Mariner', 'Kubla Khan' etc.

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### Late Romantics

- John Keats, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron belonged to the second generation of Romantic Poets who wrote intense and compelling poetry, defined by their feelings of rebellion, melancholy, individuality, and beauty
- They advocated a commitment to mankind and social issues through their poetry
- Keats' Negative Capability: 'that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'



From here we come to other romantics when we say the late romantics especially John Keats, Shelley and Byron continue the romantic ideals that Wordsworth and Coleridge proposed. Unfortunately, all of them met an untimely death. Nevertheless, their contribution to poetry, in general, is significant. So, they practised Odes. So, 'Ode to West Wind', 'Ode to Nightingale', are quite important poetic pieces. Keats's concept of negative capability, in fact, is a very important concept - he says that for a neoclassical writer clarity of mind is very very important. Because for a human, rationality is a defining trait that is true more or less for even metaphysical poetry. But here more than certainty, clarity for a poet, a state of ambiguity becomes important, a state of uncertainty becomes important. Therefore, doubts, mysteries, and uncertainties act as a kind of a starting point for poetry to explore because poetry does not deal with certainties, it basically travels in some kind of in-between zone. So, uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts provide a fertile ground for poetry to emerge, they come out of the grey areas of the subconscious which is the reason why uncertainty is celebrated here.

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### Victorian Poetry

- Victorian verse is broadly post-Romantic, giving new inflections to the personal, subjective, emotional and idealistic impulses of the Romanticism
- Tennyson - Poet Laureate, greatest Victorian Poet. His "Charge of the Light Brigade", critical poem on military blunder
- Dramatic monologues - dramatizes figures from history, legend, and literature in first- person monologues, poems by Browning and Tennyson
- Victorian Comic Verse - Punch magazine, Fun Magazine




From here we come to Victorian poetry: even in Victorian poetry again there is a kind of a marked shift from the earlier poetry, romantic poetry. So, if there is one type of poetry that this period preferred it's dramatic monologues. The dramatic monologue has some kind of shades of soliloquies, and soliloquies in a play. A character speaks in order to bear his or her mind, a character starts speaking dramatic monologues are a kind of a poetic equivalence of that. Tennyson is considered the poet laureate of the Victorian period.

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### Dover Beach

"The sea is calm tonight.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in....."



So, I am just brushing through some of them. And then we have Matthew Arnold, another important literary figure of this period, Matthew Arnold is another important literary figure. So, “Dover Beach” is a kind of a poetic manifesto here.

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand  
glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

That is how the poem begins. It is an extraordinarily extraordinary poetic piece, when time permits, of course, you can read this poem.

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**Modernism**

- Modernism in Literature, and specifically poetry, can be defined by the following parameters :-
  - Themes of alienation and isolation
  - Radical experimentation in poetic form
  - Formalism- the idea of literature being a craft and a product of originality and creativity
  - Symbolism- poets infused objects, people, places and events with significant meanings.

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From Victorian poetry, we come straight to Modern poetry. Modern poetry you will have to keep in mind there is in order for us to understand modern poetry or modern literature we need to understand the background in which it is written. By the time modernism began in literature as a kind of a movement, you have already seen the World Wars, there is a kind of isolation, there is a kind of helplessness and industrialization, which began during the Victorian time, and had already come to threaten the human way of life as a human society knew it. So, in other words, it is a kind of a transition, a great transition period. So, in order to understand modern poetry, we have to keep all these things in mind like industrialization and how the entire world is torn apart because of the great World War as a result of that



isolation, and alienation. So, these are some of the predominant themes of modern poetry. In fact, if you look at poetry specially written during this time you come to see what alienation is, what isolation is and all that. So, here, of course, there were some extraordinary experiments that took place. In fact, modern poets did a tremendous experiment here, influenced by various movements in the world of painting and art in poetry there were a lot of experimentations alright. So, and symbolism to poets, symbolism is a kind of a defining trait of modernism where poets infused objects, people, places, and events with significant meanings. In other words, rather than being direct, through symbols poets began exploring the theme of alienation, isolation and the disintegration of the world. So, that is why you have Yeats almost saying “.... the falcon cannot hear the falconer” and all that there is no link between the inner spirit and our actions so, this kind of alienation.

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**William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)**

- An Irish poet, drew wisdom and inspiration from the ancient culture of Ireland. In his later years he found a metaphysical approach to poetry and wrote on the great, eternal subjects of time and change, love and age, life and art ("The Wild Swans at Coole"). There is profound beauty in his poetry.
- His poetry was characterized by disillusion, bitter satire, strong symbolism and the combination of colloquial and formal language. There is profound beauty in his poetry.

But I, being **poor**,  
have only my **dreams**  
I have spread my dreams under  
**your feet**  
Tread **softly** because you tread on  
**my dreams.**  
-William Butler Yeats

"There are no strangers here;  
only **friends**  
you haven't yet met."  
-William Butler

So, Yeats is a very important figure. In fact, if two voices stand out in poetry, modernist poetry, it is W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats says his poetry is characterized by disillusion of course, as I said you have to understand the society in which he wrote it. And there is also as far as his Irish background is concerned, even there was a kind of a national movement entire Ireland was in the grips of the National Movement. Therefore, his poetry is characterized by bitter satire, strong disillusionment, disenchantment with modern values, symbolism and all that. So, in his A Prayer for My Daughter, though it is a kind of a personal one he vents out all these things and in a kind of a visionary way, he prays how the modern world should seek its anchor from some other ideals, not the ideals that the society has come



to believe in during the modern times. But some other ideas and this is where in fact, he was also influenced by Indian philosophy and Indian wisdom. So, in many of his poems, you find a frequent reference to the wisdom from the Indian Upanishads and the Vedas and all that. So, he finds an ideal. So, these are some just to give you a kind of a taste of how he writes.

But I, being poor,  
have only my dreams.  
I have spread my dreams under  
your feet;  
tread softly because you tread on  
my dreams.

W. B. Yeats is also important for another reason, he was almost obsessed with Maud Gonne, unfortunately, Maud Gonne never accepted his love and his love for Maud Gonne a kind of unrequited love that finds a rich expression in his poetry. In fact, what is remarkable is how he converts his personal disappointment into a creative force and writes extraordinary poetry, writes extraordinary poetry and at that state of mind you begin looking at the world as there are no strangers, but only friends you have not yet met. So, at a different state of mind, that is when it is a realized state of mind. After dissolution, after disenchantment, you come to a stage where you begin looking at things from a broad perspective, and in that state of mind you begin looking at everybody not as a stranger, but a friend yet to be made; a friend yet to be met something like that.

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T S Eliot *The Waste Land*

" April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.  
Summer surprised us, coming over the  
Starnbergersee  
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the  
colonnade,



Yeah, we have T. S. Eliot; we have discussed his “Waste Land”, - again a very important piece as far as modernism is concerned. And both T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats, these are they are Nobel laureates in literature. So, their poetry has a significant influence on poets, the younger poets of their generation. So, this is an excerpt from “The Waste Land”,

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
memory and desire, stirring  
dull roots with spring rain.

And all this is again a very difficult piece of writing, but for them poetry was not something that should be easily accessible to people. In fact, that is a kind of elitist concept that modernism believed in. If you wanted to understand poetry you need to put you had to put a lot of effort to understand, when somebody criticizes Elliot for using symbols from Hebrew culture, he said unless one strives to be worthy of poetry, poetry is not for everybody and not everybody can access poetry.

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### Contemporary poets - Phillip Larkin

- Phillip Larkin employed the traditional tools of poetry—rhyme, stanza, and meter—to explore the often uncomfortable or terrifying experiences thrust upon common people in the modern age
- Larkin became the preeminent poet of his generation, and a leading voice of what came to be called "The Movement," a group of young English writers who rejected the prevailing fashion for neo-Romantic writing in the style of Yeats and Dylan Thomas.

"Cut grass lies frail:  
Brief is the breath  
Mown stalks exhale.  
Long, long the death  
It dies in the white hours  
Of young-leaved June  
With chestnut flowers,  
With hedges snowlike strewn,  
White lilac bowed,  
Lost lanes of Queen Anne's lace,  
And that high-budded  
Moving at summer's peak  
- Cut Grass - Phillip Larkin



So, from T. S. Eliot we come to Phillip Larkin and Ted Hughes, again these are remarkable poets these are just some major names. In fact, we have to leave out in a short course such as this. We will not be doing justice to even the writers we represent here, but as I said the purpose of these classes is to shed broad light on their poetic persona and introduce you to their poetic genius. Of course, not doing justice there, it becomes impossible which is the reason why we are unable to discuss any of them in detail. Phillip Larkin and Ted Hughes employ traditional tools of poetry generally speaking and they play a major role, especially Phillip Larkin he is a prominent poet of his generation and a leading voice. And he later floats a group of young English writers called 'The Movement' and they reject the neoclassical, the neo-romantic styles of W. B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas, and write poetry altogether in a different ways. In fact, it is their poetry that later paves the ground for postmodern poetry. So, this is in a nutshell a kind of English poetry for us. So, if you can quickly recall we began with Chaucer, a little earlier than that Beowulf and then we discussed poetry during the Elizabethan period especially, sonnets by Phillip Sidney, Shakespeare, metaphysical poetry and now we have discussed modern poetry.

The purpose of these lectures is to give you a kind of an overview, an overview of British poetry something like this. So, in the next class, we begin with poetry from other parts of the globe, we begin with Indian English poetry and maybe in another week we can take up poetry from across the globe that is it. So, until then take care bye.