

**Elements of Literature and Creative Communication**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur**

**Lecture - 29**  
**A Second date with European Poetry**

Hi, how was your first date with European poetry? I hope you enjoyed it; well here am I ready to take you on a second date with European poetry, are you game to this? In the last class, we discussed the poetry of Vasko Popa, a major Serbian poet, who has had a tremendous influence on the poetry of Ted Hughes. And of course, in the collective imagination of the world, how his poetry offers an extraordinary alternative to the warmongering political mind, his poetry offers a rich imaginative lyrical verse. So that, the soil, the land that is bathed in the river, bathed in the river of blood can now bathe in the river, or in the ocean, of creativity and imagination that is an alternative vision he offers. And after that, we went ahead and discussed how under similar circumstances here in Russia, and there in Serbia, we discussed Vasko Popa and here in Russia, under similar circumstances how Anna Akhmatova wrote her poetry, and how her poetry today offers a kind of a ray of hope for all the disenfranchised people and victims of the totalitarian regimes. The poet gives us a glimpse of an indomitable spirit that is always inherent in the body of poetry. So, let us continue that discussion today with another extraordinary poet, this time let us go to Poland and discuss the poetry of Poland's major poet.



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**Why Is This Age Worse...?**

Why is this age worse than earlier ages?  
 In a stupor of grief and dread  
 have we not fingered the foulest wounds  
 and left them unhealed by our hands?

In the west the falling light still glows,  
 and the clustered housetops glitter in the sun,  
 but here Death is already chalking the doors with  
 crosses,  
 and calling the ravens, and the ravens are flying in.

(Translated by Stanley Kunitz with Max Hayward)

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**CZESŁAW  
MIŁOSZ  
(1911-2004)**



Here is Milosz again a major 20th-century voice, Czeslaw Milosz was a major polish translator, poet, prose writer, diplomat and very many things and of course, he also later went on to win Nobel Prize for Literature. And also a diplomat of course, now is the time for us to know a little bit about the life of Milosz was a polish American poet, of course, he has his roots in Poland, but during that time again due to the political turmoil in Poland his parents had to seek asylum away in Lithuania.

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## ABOUT MILOSZ...

- Czeslaw Milosz -- a Polish-American poet, prose writer, translator and diplomat. He was born in Lithuania as the son of a civil engineer in asylum away from Poland
- His first poems appeared in 1930; he co-founded the literary group "Zagary" in 1931, and his first collection of poems were published in 1932.
- After WWII, he came to the United States as a Polish diplomat and later was posted in Paris.
- Having lived under the two great totalitarian systems of modern history, national socialism and communism, Milosz wrote of the past in a tragic, ironic style that nonetheless affirmed the value of human life.





So, he was born in Lithuania of Polish origin and born to a wealthy civil engineer, and later he went on to become a diplomat and also served as a diplomat of Poland in the US later for various reasons he had to seek asylum in Paris. So, again his life is also marked by a lot of lows ebbs and highs and lows. He is also a political prisoner who witnessed firsthand the violence of totalitarian regimes and sought asylum elsewhere. Nevertheless, his poetry offers extraordinary insights into understanding human nature and human love, again quite at an early age he published his first poetry collection and he found co-founded a literary group called Zagary in 1931 which played a major role again in spreading poetry across his society across his land. His poetry first collection comes out in 1932 after the Second World War well he went to the United States as a diplomat as Poland's diplomat and of course, later he also served in Paris, having lived under the two great totalitarian systems of modern history which are national socialism and communism - which is really unfortunate since both of them ideologically talk of building a utopia. And probably what they do not realize is that under the shimmer of utopia lies a direct route to hell that is the reason why it is very unfortunate that those ideologies those two governments that came riding on, came riding high on the ideologies of socialism and communism resorted to a lot of violence and themselves turned to turn the evils that they thought they were fighting against that is the irony. So, he had to endure those two oppressive systems and that is the reason why you find in his poetry a kind of an ironic style and his poetry is marked by a tragic note, the kind of tragedy that lurks somewhere behind his poetry. Behind the comedy of Charlie Chaplin lurks the tragedy of modern society. So, behind the writings of Milosz also you can find shades of tragedy nevertheless what is important is how they affirm human life, and how they sing virtues of

hope and courage. Because, how do you face a totalitarian regime? How do you face an oppressive system? Especially as an individual or as a small group of individuals when you are pitted against a huge system a behemoth, how do you fight that unless we keep a ray of hope in us?

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### ABOUT MIŁOŚZ. . .

- However, his relationship with the government deteriorated and he sought political asylum in France. In 1960, University of California invited him to be the lecturer of Polish literature
- Miłosz's works are known for their classic style and their preoccupation with political and philosophical issues
- "Remaining true to oneself is the hallmark of a poet"
- His concerns are visible in *Traktat poetycki* (1957; Treatise on Poetry), which is a long poem that is a defense of poetry that simultaneously briefs Polish history from 1918 to 1950.



So, fortunately, Miłosz kept it and his poetry is highly reflective of that kind of mad hope something like that. Even later though he act as a diplomat under the government of Poland and served his country in various other nations his relationship did not last long the relationship with the government soared and it deteriorated as a result of which later he had to seek asylum in France. That is probably true of all great revolutionary poets right because if there is one thing that they have faced, they have realized the value of words. In fact, words are in the true spirit words are revolutionary they always nurture within them, they always nurture within their semiotic dimension a flame of revolution so he like it keeps waiting for that flame of revolution for the betterment of society that keeps waiting for good poets to come and when it finds good poems or good poets it seeps into their poetry. So, Miłosz was fortunate enough to have found that kind of flame in his poetry. So, of course, later he joined the University of California and began teaching polish literature. And today Miłosz's work is known for its classic style while engaging on the one hand with the political debates of his time and philosophical issues of his time it was it also opened another door another channel of communication open with the classics with the works of the past, with the works of the legends. That is how you find a beautiful combination of the tradition and the present in his



works. So, when somebody later asked them how does one become a great poet he said he did not mention craft, he did not mention experience he said as long as one is true to oneself, remaining true to oneself is the hallmark of a great poet or great poetry. So, this is something that is significant.

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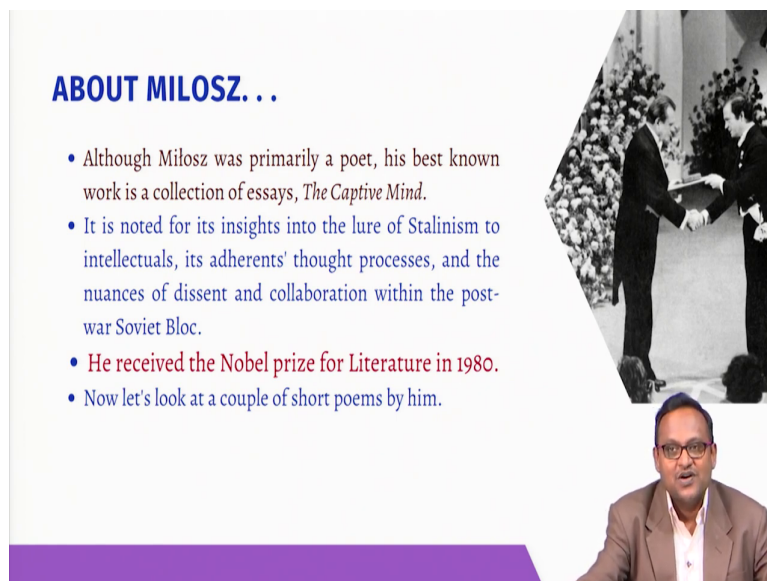


“The creative act is associated with a free feeling with a feeling of freedom that is in its turn born in the struggle against apparently invisible resistance”.

Of course, I mean these lines characterize the poetry of Anna Akhmatova, the poetry of Vasko Popa and the poetry of another major poet that we are about to discuss in a very short while, almost considered the national poet of Greece - Yannis Ritsos. So, this is prophetic, these words are prophetic in their best sense the creative act embodies in its core, the spirit of freedom which is born which itself is a consequence of a kind of resistance it is born in the face of resistance. Whoever truly creates is alone that is the reason why a creative writer most of the time feels alone because well if you are under the impression that writing is for the fun, of course, it is true, it is true but when you take it to the next level when you take your poetry when you take your writing to the next level you realize that you are alone like you remember the great Greek character Tiresias who was blind. But who is bestowed with some kind of power, he could see the past, he could see the future and when somebody commented that he must be really lucky to have that kind of knowledge, he said, “ you do not know it is a kind of a curse that I carry, let no man be let no man be cursed with the knowledge that I have on my

shoulders.” So, knowing the future is truly a curse and unfortunately, most of these great writers carry that curse within them that is why they say that they are alone in their best creative moments they are alone, lonely, desperate and so therefore, creativity comes great imagination comes out of the womb of despair right, out of the womb of despair hopelessness comes the great ray of hope that is it is that is the paradox that is the greatest paradox of creativity. The creative man has no choice, but to trust his inner command and place everything at stake in order to express what seems to him to be true we have realized that if you are ready to ferry yourself along wherever the truth takes you that is when you can be a true poet you cannot just modify what you discover. Because the political regimes that you are living in do not like it, you cannot modify that, if you are doing it you are not a great writer that is when you are misusing your position as a creative writer, of course, many writers do not realize that, we are concerned with those writers who matter to us a lot.

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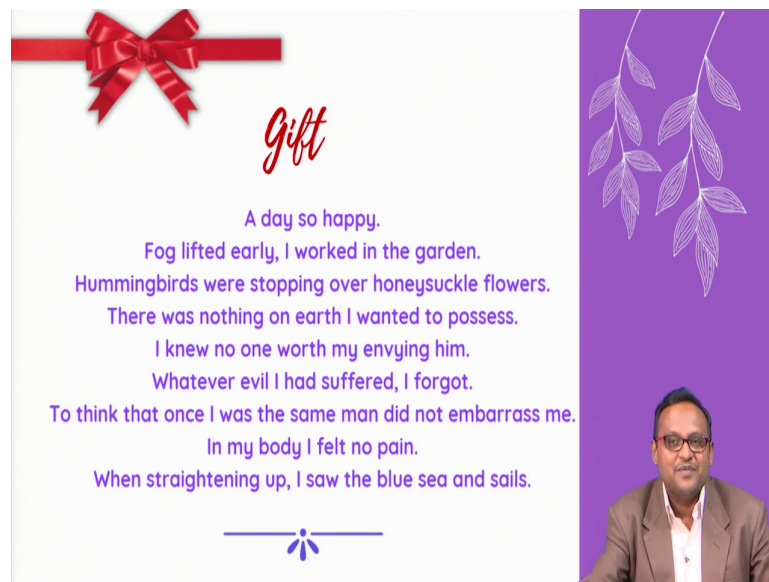
**ABOUT MILOSZ. . .**

- Although Milosz was primarily a poet, his best known work is a collection of essays, *The Captive Mind*.
- It is noted for its insights into the lure of Stalinism to intellectuals, its adherents' thought processes, and the nuances of dissent and collaboration within the post-war Soviet Bloc.
- He received the Nobel prize for Literature in 1980.
- Now let's look at a couple of short poems by him.

Yeah though Milosz is primarily known as a poet, he is also well known for his collection of essays called *The Captive Mind*, which illustrates the process of how poetry emerges under these kinds of circumstances, especially it is a remarkable book for budding writers, budding poets. So, you may if you are really aspiring to be a writer, if you are nurturing the ambition of becoming a writer you can please at least read some parts of this particular collection of essays *The Captive Mind*. And of course, it is also noted for its insights into the lure of Stalinism to intellectuals, its adherents thought processes, and the nuances of dissent and collaboration with the postwar Soviet Bloc we have discussed how all these systems rode

high on the greatest ideologies turned into oppressive regimes themselves - very ironic, very sad state and highly tragic. For exploring all these things he received Nobel Prize in 1980 alright. So, now, having known him let us take a dip in his poetry at least a couple of this couple of his poems.

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Gift:

“A day so happy.”

In fact, it is like these are fragments, these are not complete sentences, just like different phrases, incomplete clauses, phrases and look how using broad brush strokes using broad verbal strokes this particular poem constructs a picture; “A day so happy.”

The fog lifted early, I worked in the garden.

Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers.

There was nothing on earth I wanted to possess.

I knew no one was worth my envying him.

Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.

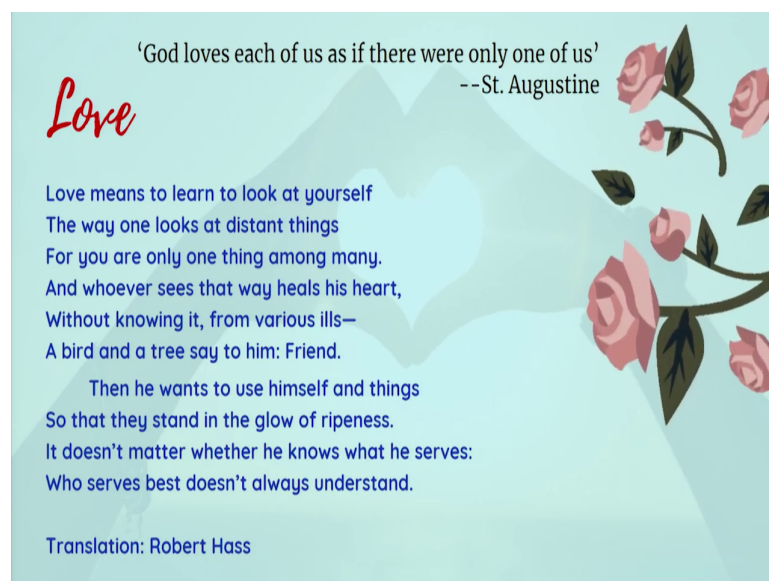
To think that once I was the same man did not embarrass me.

In my body I felt no pain.

When straightening up, I saw the blue sea and sails.

Again earlier recall in one of our earlier classes we were discussing moments of 'epiphany', which is a very beautiful word, it signifies an outburst of realization a sudden outburst of your realization and whatever may be the trigger. In fact, it said that Ramakrishna Paramahansa felt his first taste of epiphany when he came across birds larks flying across the sky he just had to watch it that was his first taste. So, there are many instances where you can feel moments of epiphany. In fact, in the Mahabharata itself when Krishna had to reveal his *Virat Darshana*. That is a moment of epiphany for people like Bhishma, Vidura and those who could see epiphany is that kind of a sudden realization it is bursting out of you, and you realize something great has happened probably. So, that is why he calls this poem a gift. So, something has happened to him, he has somehow found a door to a miracle and he has accidentally found it that is why he calls it a gift and when that happens he says, "I do not envy anybody because this pettiness envying, jealousy, anger these are all products of petty minds." So, he says I did not for a moment I did not feel pain, I did not suffer, I did nothing I felt that and I am not the same man you realize see we I mean remember there is again a famous Zen saying, a river is not same at its two points of flow supposing here is a particular river at point A here is a river at point B. So, though technically it's one river, it is not one river that is what Zen says. So, I am not the man I was a moment ago not even a second ago. So, we keep changing this talks about the principle of evolution, the cosmic, spiritual, principle of evolution that all of us are in whether we like it or not ok. So, the poem talks about that in a very beautiful extraordinary way yeah.

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And this is another extraordinary poem a remarkable poem and in fact, I have seen this poem being used in many heartfulness classes, mindfulness classes, happiness classes and all that; and rightly so it has it can also be read as a prayer, it can also be read as a prayer a poem that has found wide circulation in areas that probably we did not; we did not anticipate so, a wide widely accepted poem.

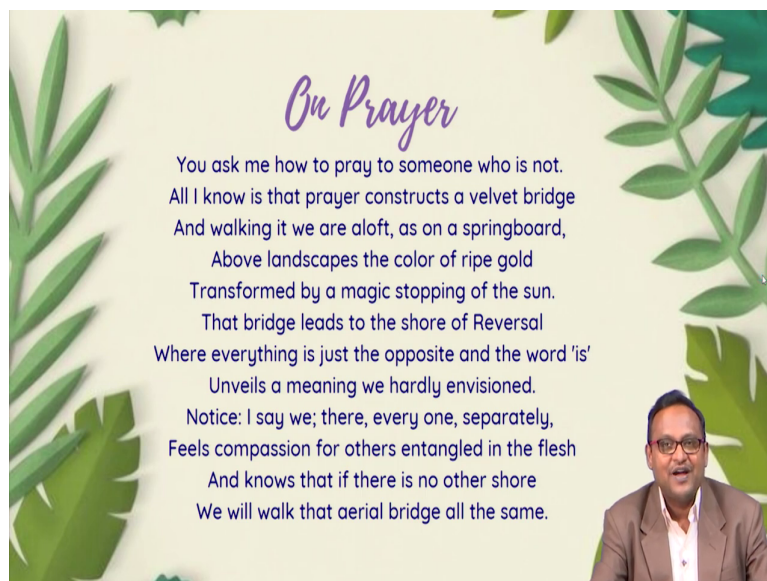
Love - and the poet here talks of love, not in any romantic sense of the term or not in any familial sense of the term or not even in any national sense of the term. Love here is it is a in a liberating sense, love here is used in a liberating sense of the soul in mean that is or in a liberating sense where we realize how indebted we are to nature, how indebted we are to the world that created us and it is a moment of aligning ourselves onto the higher dimension onto an onto a higher pedestal. So, the realization of a love of one for the self, something like that.

“Love means to learn to look at yourself  
the way one looks at distant things.”

It is a beautiful thing, love means to learn to look at yourself the way one looks at distant things can we do that; can we look at ourselves as we look at any other being. So, here is a process of nuding ourselves out, bearing ourselves out we are basically narcissists all of us are obsessed with ourselves if we can learn to look at ourselves as we look at others; that means, if we can learn to look at ourselves as part of a wider network around then it leads to a beautiful path, it leads to unlocking a door to another dimension, for you are only one thing among many. We behave as if we are the only supreme beings in the universe if we are under the impression we are definitely under delusion there is no greater delusion than that no. When I am saying I am not just human beings, I mean we are definitely human beings are not the cream of creation, what makes you think that you are the cream of creation you and I are the cream of creation we are just part of we occupy in this universe or we occupy in this nature as much significance as an ant has or as a leaf has or as a buffalo has that is when we realize this when we learn to locate our when we locate when we try to locate ourselves in relation to others then it becomes an extraordinary feeling. So, that is precisely probably what the poem is saying and whoever sees that way heals his heart here is when do you heal our heart. In fact, in modern life, we are suffering from many maladies, anxiety, fear, fear psychosis many things. So, the process of healing begins from here when we look at ourselves in relation to others, but that does not mean to say that we are diminishing ourselves. In fact, this is where we can recall what St. Augustine said ‘God loves each of us

as if there were only one of us'. Though the world is filled populated with so many billions of people things, and many other creatures, God loves each of us as if we are alone here. So, when we learn to connect ourselves with the nature around probably that is when we feel this again in a highly paradoxical way, there is another important book called *Poetry pharmacy* and there again it talks of using poetry as medicine. In fact, poetry pharmacy is a popular movement in England now BBC also hosted a series on that poetry pharmacy. Using poetry, small doses of poetry, short poems that prescribe to you if you go to the pharmacist and say you are suffering from this the pharmacist who is an aficionado of poetry will give you a poem. So, that is when you can cure your heart of that kind of malady. So, when we realize this then what happens without knowing it from various ills a bird and a tree say to him friend when that happens we realize that a tree next to us, a bird sitting on it call us and call you hi we are your friends now something like that; that is the beauty right so an extraordinary poem.

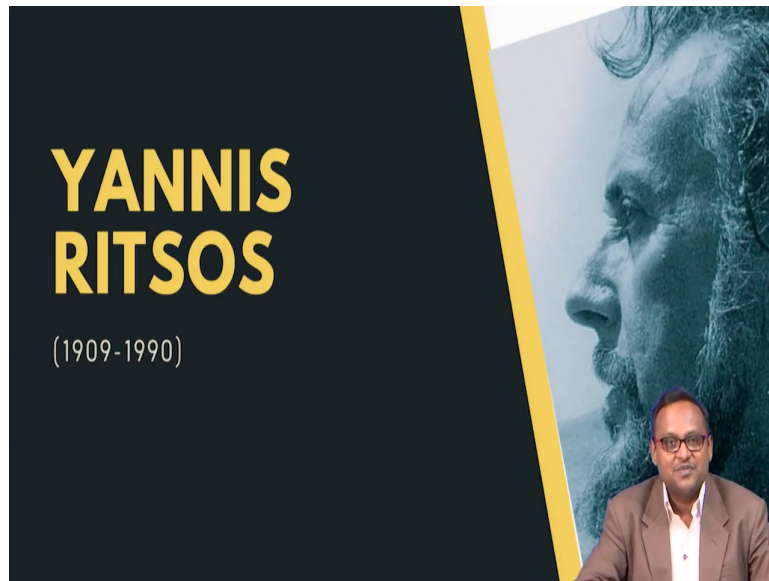
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So, from here let us move on to another poem on prayer. So, again these are all extraordinary poems of course, for want of time and space and many things we will not be dealing a with this poem in detail, we have to move on to another equally great poet, but you can read this poem a little later and see how much of it you can grasp. Again as I said understanding poetry is not the be-all and the end-all.



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From here let us go to Yannis Ritsos, an extraordinary Greece poet a 20th century Greece poet, the moment we say Greek we are automatically reminded of all the Greek myths legends stories that we have heard heroic tales and epics. Yannis Ritsos, if you look at his poetry, it seems he has successfully continued the rich Hellenic cultural legacy in his poem, again a major 20th-century product and many consider him as of course a major Greek left-leaning poet.

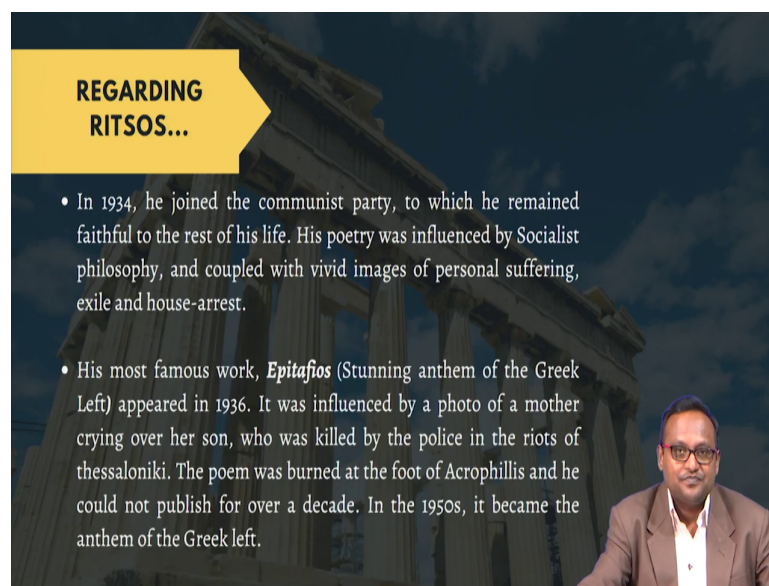
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A presentation slide with a dark blue background featuring a faint image of a classical Greek temple with columns. In the top left, a yellow arrow-shaped box contains the text 'REGARDING RITSOS...' in bold black capital letters. Below this, there are two bullet points in white text. In the bottom right corner, there is a small inset video of the same presenter as in the first slide.

- Yannis Ritsos was born into a wealthy Greek family, but his fortune deteriorated fast. His father suffered from mental illness and died, and he lost his mother and brother to tuberculosis when he was 12. Later in his adult life, he himself suffered from the disease and had to spend 3 years in a sanitarium.
- He worked many jobs before his first collection of poems, *Trakter* (Tractors) appeared in 1934.

Of course, even without that tag left he is still relevant to all of us. Like the other poets, we have been discussing this poet too had to undergo political oppression he was a victim of many things, even personal tragedies - he lost his father, he lost his mother, he lost his brother to tuberculosis. He had to get himself admitted and he was in the hospital for several years. So, he was in a sanatorium for a long time. And before he found his calling in poetry he worked many jobs fortunately in 1934, his first poetry collection is published - “Tractors” and since then, of course, there was no turning back. So, he found actually it is like a calling to him he found his calling in poetry.

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**REGARDING RITSOS...**

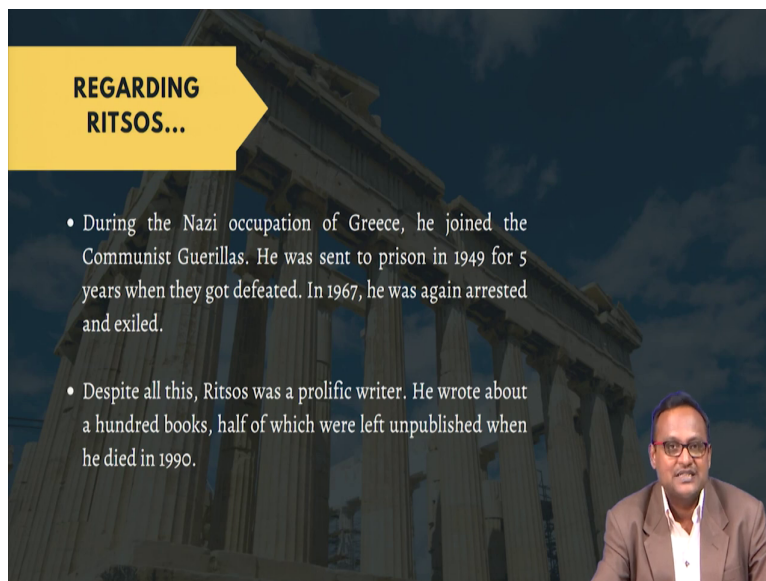
- In 1934, he joined the communist party, to which he remained faithful to the rest of his life. His poetry was influenced by Socialist philosophy, and coupled with vivid images of personal suffering, exile and house-arrest.
- His most famous work, *Epitafios* (Stunning anthem of the Greek Left) appeared in 1936. It was influenced by a photo of a mother crying over her son, who was killed by the police in the riots of thessaloniki. The poem was burned at the foot of Acrophillis and he could not publish for over a decade. In the 1950s, it became the anthem of the Greek left.

Again, so, in 1934 he joins the communist party and remained faithful to it throughout, though many criticize him for his blind faith because see when you are a follower of an ideology its fine, but when you turn a blind eye towards its pitfalls that is when it becomes difficult for others to digest right. Because I mean this is probably true for all ideologies, if somebody is drunk on an ideology then that person will not be able to see the pitfalls of the ideology that he is riding high on. So, that is a valid criticism against Ritsos so, but of course, that does not diminish the importance of his poetry. His extraordinary poem, his extraordinary work “Epitafios”, even to this day is called a Stunning anthem of the Greek Left. In fact, that was born out of the violence that killed hundreds of people. In fact, it carried the picture of a mother crying profusely before the dead body of her son and this particular picture moved him so much that he began composing it even to this day, of course, please recall one of our earlier classes how suffering leads to a song, and out of suffering

song comes [FL] in the case of Walmiki we realized this [FL] leading to [FL] poetry suffering leading to song.

Probably that is the reason why even Rabindranath Tagore said, at the moment of despair and darkness it is to a song that we must turn. It is to a song that we turn in the moments of despair and darkness because again songs have the inbuilt capacity to uplift us.

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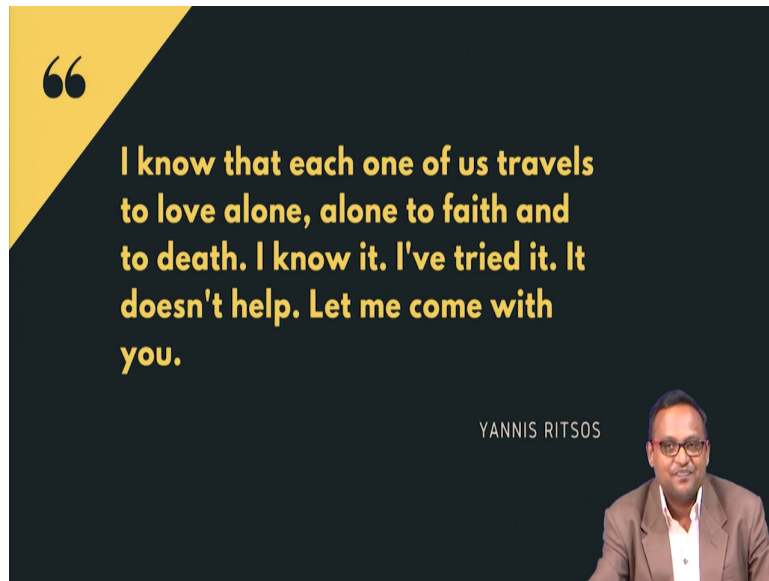


**REGARDING RITSOS...**

- During the Nazi occupation of Greece, he joined the Communist Guerillas. He was sent to prison in 1949 for 5 years when they got defeated. In 1967, he was again arrested and exiled.
- Despite all this, Ritsos was a prolific writer. He wrote about a hundred books, half of which were left unpublished when he died in 1990.

So, this is his major work yeah, during the Nazi occupation of Greece he joined communist Guerillas and when they were imprisoned he too was imprisoned and incarcerated for about 5 years and later again in 1967 he was arrested and exiled. All these poets like Anna Akhmatova, Milosz, and Vasko Popa that we discussed earlier, all of them they are they have been persecuted like hell. Nevertheless, they did not lose hope. In fact, that is the reason why we are reading their poetry today their poetry has an extraordinary capacity to offer a ray of hope to all the citizens who feel their rights are threatened today alright, and he was a very prolific writer he was a very very prolific writer more than a hundred books have been credited to him. So, he has to his credit more than a hundred books and many of them were left unpublished, but later they were published posthumously he died in 1990.

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And, this is where this is a very significant quotation by Yannakis Ritsos, he says,

“I know that each one of us travels to love alone, alone to faith and to death. I know it. I have tried it. It does not help. Let me come with you.”

I mean now you see what is, what he is doing here what his poetry does we are all alone our love to I mean this is all travels life I mean you agree with me right our entire life is a journey a huge one big journey from cradle to grave is one big journey. You want to consider it pilgrimage travel, whatever you want it to it is it entails a journey with it. So, to love you have to discover your love alone nobody can help you with that and so is the case with faith you can I mean many may teach you to reach you and all that, but you have to discover your faith alone. We have to discover our love alone, we have to discover our faith alone and we have to embrace death alone and it is not an easy task we feel lonely, we feel depressed and that is when he says, “let me come with you”. So, he is offering his poetry as a kind of a companion to take with you on your eternal journey an extraordinary line yeah.

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### THE POETRY OF RITSOS

- Ritsos' poetry ranges from overtly political to deeply personal.
- Although he is influenced by social realism, it never proved to be an obstacle to his poetic imagination. His poems often indulge in quasi-surrealist elements. Critics praised him for making the extraordinary constructs out of most ordinary elements.
- Characters from ancient Greek myth are found in his poetry in abundance
- He is 'a bard of loneliness', but of loneliness ennobled and overcome; fighting in vain against our loneliness, are our ultimate drive and must thus also be the deepest motivation





His poetry ranges from overtly political to deeply personal of course, that becomes evident when we take a look at his poetry and his poetry is replete with images of Greek myths and legends and all those things, he recreates his poetry recreates the high point of Hellenistic culture. And this is precisely what he, in fact, many consider him as a bard of loneliness; a bard of loneliness, a poet of loneliness, but this loneliness is not of despair, but it is an ennobled loneliness and this loneliness can be overcome that is the reason why it can be said that fighting in vain against our loneliness is our ultimate drive. We can derive our drive from that fight against that loneliness and that is our deepest motivation poetry has demonstrated, and that is why he offers his poetry as a companion in our struggle to come to terms with loneliness and grief and suffering fortunately we find his poetic lines yeah.

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The Meaning of Simplicity

I hide behind simple things so you'll find me;  
if you don't find me, you'll find the things,  
you'll touch what my hand has touched,  
Our hand-prints will merge.

The August moon glitters in the kitchen  
like a tin-plated pot (it gets that way  
because of what I'm saying to you),  
it lights up the empty house and the house's  
kneeling silence  
always the silence remains kneeling.






Here is a poem: “The meaning of Simplicity”, a beautiful poem you can read.

“I hide behind simple things. So, you will find me  
if you do not find me; you will find the things,  
you will touch what my hand was has touched.  
Our hand-prints will merge...”

Look how beautiful he is talking of love - if you do not meet, no problem; you and I have walked on the same ground. So, our footprints will match our handprints will match so, beautiful love.

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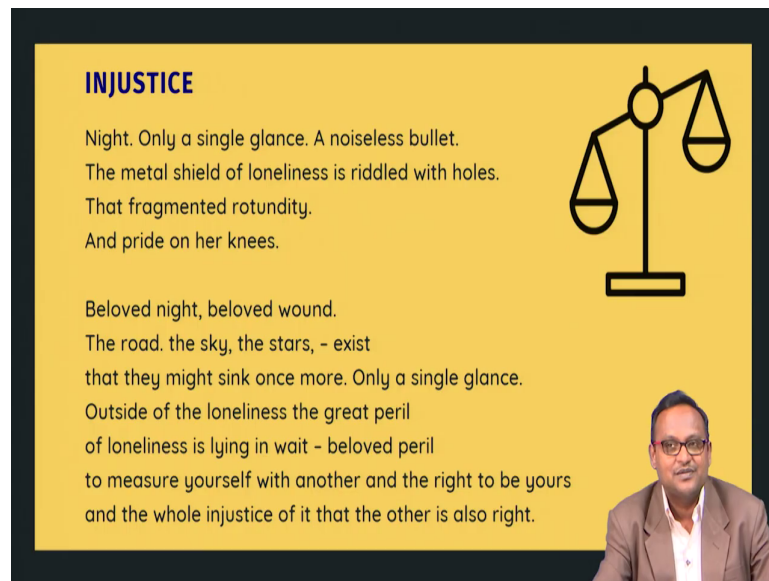
Every word is a doorway  
to a meeting, one often cancelled,  
and that's when a word is true: when it  
insists on the meeting..





And again this particular line every word is a doorway to a meeting one often cancelled and that is when a word is true when it insists on the meeting, how every word the I mean here word again it is a metaphor for probably a poem. It is a doorway when we come across a beautiful poem at the right moment we do not know where that takes us what kind of turn it gives us ok.

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**INJUSTICE**

Night. Only a single glance. A noiseless bullet.  
The metal shield of loneliness is riddled with holes.  
That fragmented rotundity.  
And pride on her knees.

Beloved night, beloved wound.  
The road. the sky, the stars, - exist  
that they might sink once more. Only a single glance.  
Outside of the loneliness the great peril  
of loneliness is lying in wait - beloved peril  
to measure yourself with another and the right to be yours  
and the whole injustice of it that the other is also right.

And he is also well-known for another poem of his called injustice you can again read this poem when you are when you have time on your hand when you are leisurely you can read this poem and for want of again time we are rushing through this.

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So, I am sure having come face-to-face with these great extraordinary remarkable poets I am sure you have enjoyed and found some ray of hope. And maybe some of you may have even found some kind of a companion in their poetry. So, if they really excite you please carry on with that journey, but remember I will not be there with that on your date. So, you will have to carry your third date and subsequent dates on your own ok alright. Take care.