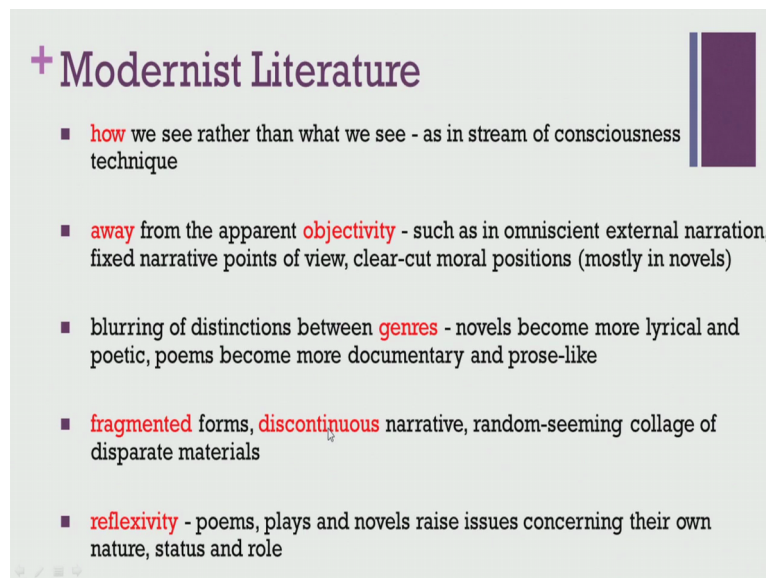


History of English Language and Literature
Dr. Merin Simi Raj
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Lecture – 22a
Modernist Literature

Hello and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course in the History of English Language and Literature. In today's session taking off from the dramatic rejection of tradition of art initiated by Marcel Duchamp, we continue looking at Modernist Literature and how this rejection of tradition was getting effected in many of these writings.

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+ Modernist Literature

- **how** we see rather than what we see - as in stream of consciousness technique
- **away** from the apparent **objectivity** - such as in omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view, clear-cut moral positions (mostly in novels)
- blurring of distinctions between **genres** - novels become more lyrical and poetic, poems become more documentary and prose-like
- **fragmented** forms, **discontinuous** narrative, random-seeming collage of disparate materials
- **reflexivity** - poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status and role

Modernist literature was not about what we see it was rather about how one sees and how one understands and this was explicated in the stream of consciousness technique which we shall be taking a look at when we talk about particularly the novel of the modernist period. In addition we notice lot of features which could be seen as representative of the modernist period.

We notice that in the modernist period the literature was apparently away from a sense of objectivity and because of this we find many of the traditional elements being pushed out of the literature of the modernist times such as we do not have an omniscient external narration or fixed narrative points of view but we do not have any clear-cut moral positions either so mostly in novels we begin to see this newer forms of experimentations away from any kind of objectivity.

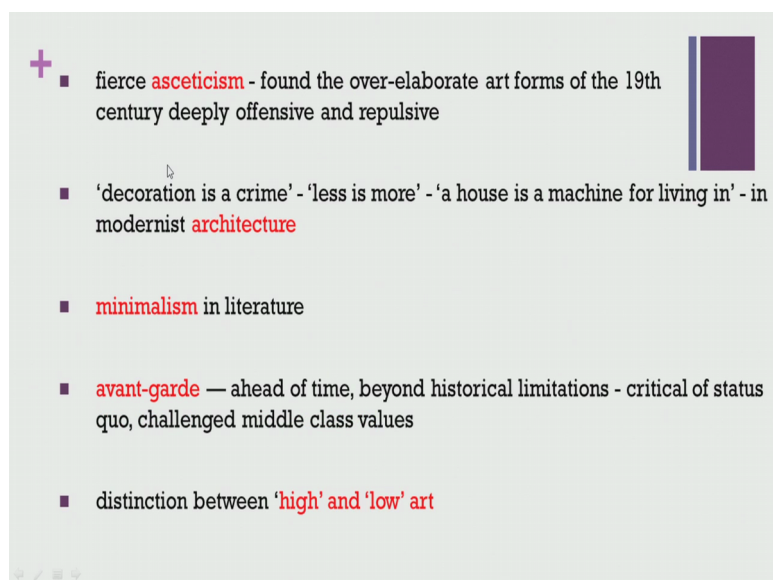
There is also blurring of distinction between genres (01:29) theoretically in place the principles that defined various genres such as drama, prose, novel or poetry. They did not hold any value from the modernist time onwards we find many writers and artist continuously challenging these definitions of genres. So accordingly we find novels becoming more lyrical and poetic and poems on the other hand becoming more documentary and prose like also.

So it becomes almost impossible to see what is more acceptable than something else, it is just one seamless continuum in which one rejection after the other of particular kinds of tradition become celebrated and also more delightful and all together we find most of the modernist literature celebrating the fragmented forms and the discontinuous narrative.

And there is also random-seeming collage of disparate materials but however when we look at writings of this period in detail we begin to notice that this is not just a random collage but there is an inherent sense of coherence which is perhaps most appropriate for talking about the various crises that were nominating the 20th century.

For instances this is also a time to perhaps remember how later Elliot would make use of his idea of objective are co-relative while bringing together the seemingly different things but to talk about one central objective or one central emotion. The literature was getting more reflexive so we find poems plays and novels raising issues concerning their own nature, status and role and not always talking about something external and unconcerning their own forms of art.

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- fierce **asceticism** - found the over-elaborate art forms of the 19th century deeply offensive and repulsive
 - 'decoration is a crime' - 'less is more' - 'a house is a machine for living in' - in modernist **architecture**
 - **minimalism** in literature
 - **avant-garde** — ahead of time, beyond historical limitations - critical of status quo, challenged middle class values
 - distinction between 'high' and 'low' art

There is a dominant role played by a fierce form of asceticism. We do not find any overelaborate art forms in the 20th century, in fact the elaborate art forms of the 19th century were beginning to be seen as deeply offensive and repulsive. We find this getting reflected in the field of architecture as well. There are these dictums which become the raining forces of the day such as decoration is a crime, less is more or a house is a machine for living in.

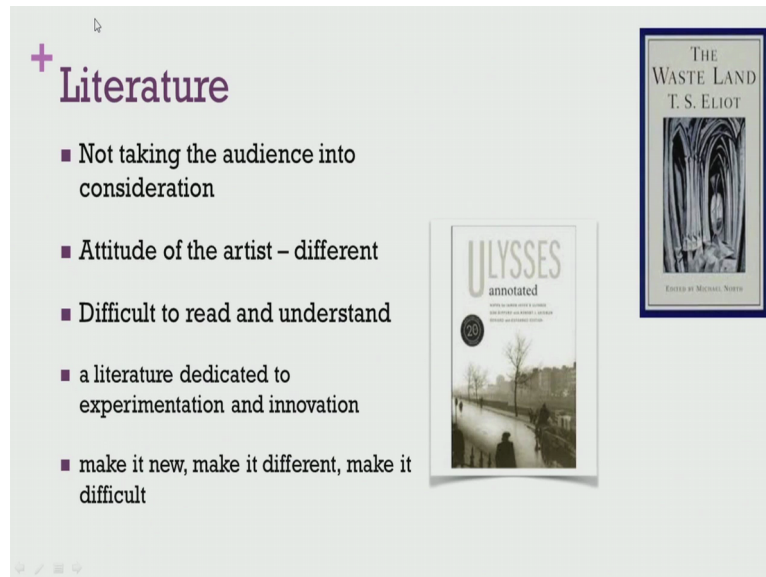
So modernist architecture also becomes a reflection of most of these newer tendencies and accordingly we find a certain kind of minimalism getting practiced in literature as well and all of these newer tendencies could be captured in one single term avant-garde which means ahead of time and beyond historical limitations.

We find that many of these writers and many of these forms of writing were avant-garde in the sense that they challenge the status quo and also challenge the middle class value system which was in place until the Victorian period. This also useful time to remember that the Victorian period was characterized by a particular value system about which most of them were very prudish and also there were taboo subjects, there was a particular temperament which was enjoyed a certain kind of balance, all of this seem to go away from the beginning of the 20th century onwards.

Though there is a way in which a greater move towards democratization of art and literature was beginning to be practiced from that 19th century onwards, in the modernist period we find that there is a dramatic rejection of this tendency as well and as a result there are two

different kinds of art available there is a distinction between high and low art and we find this getting further cemented in the period of high modernism dominated by Elliot, Pound and Joyce, keeping in mind the way in which Marcel Duchamp's Fountain challenged the conventional sensibilities.

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The slide features a title '+ Literature' in purple. Below it is a bulleted list of five points: 'Not taking the audience into consideration', 'Attitude of the artist – different', 'Difficult to read and understand', 'a literature dedicated to experimentation and innovation', and 'make it new, make it different, make it difficult'. To the right of the list are two book covers: 'Ulysses annotated' and 'The Waste Land' by T.S. Eliot.

- Not taking the audience into consideration
- Attitude of the artist – different
- Difficult to read and understand
- a literature dedicated to experimentation and innovation
- make it new, make it different, make it difficult

Let us take a look at how the literature of the period was challenging the convention understanding and the convention of critical principals. We find the number of works being produced in the modernist times which did not take the audience into consideration. The attitude of the artist in these times being radically different from that of the previous times. We find many writers such as Elliot and James Joyce producing works which are difficult to read and understand and there is no longer any care being placed to ensure that the work should be accessible to the reading public.

In fact we find a detachment or an indifference towards the readers from the side of the author and literature in that sense gets dedicated to experimentation and innovation and the role of the reader and role of the critic becomes quite minimal over here. The dictum seems to be make it new, make it different and make it difficult.

And we find that some of the works such as The Wasteland and Ulysses they become almost inaccessible to the reader that they always have to be accompanied with certain set of sources, notes, annotations, etc. from the author or from any other informed critic.

And this is also the time when an entire series of secondary material publishing industry also begin to dominate the literary scene from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, and also this very idea of having some kind of an aid to understand a text was not very popular until the 19th century, this is also an implication and a consequence of this dramatic rejection of the tradition which dominated the 20th century.

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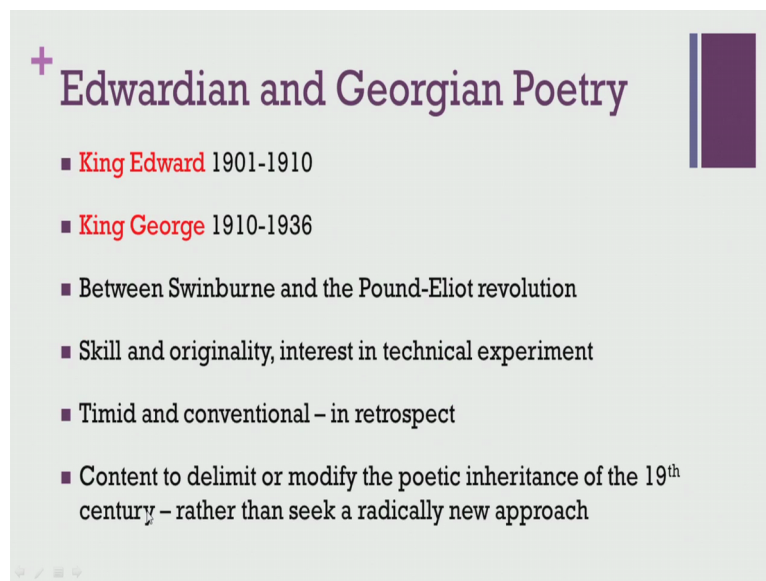
Even before we reach the period of high modernism it is important to take a look at the work that was available in early 20th century, the set of works written between 1900 and 1922 could be together club as Edwardian and Georgian Literature and this period is dominated by two form majorly two genres fiction and poetry.

During this early modernist phase we find certain set of writers being more dominant than the other and accordingly we also find two major genres dominating the literacy. In fiction we have a set of writers such as Rudyard Kipling, E M Forster, H G Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, G K Chesterton and Thomas Hardy, these writers and the few others which will come back to take a look at when we talk about the modernist novel.

However in poetry the variety was very impressive and fascinating it was also becoming the source of a more complex kind of a discussion. In poetry we find that it is very difficult to identify particular writers and particular followers of a movement but rather we begin by identifying the major movements which were dominating the early 20th century in terms of the poetic art.

There was a prominence of the Decadence Movement which was influencing most of the early 20th century poets it was followed by the Symbolist Movement there was also two kinds of poet becomes almost definitional of the age Edwardian poetry and Georgian poetry and a growing group of people were becoming very significant in laying the foundations of modernist poetry known as the Bloomsbury group, there was also the Kailyard School from the Scottish writers.

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The slide features a title 'Edwardian and Georgian Poetry' in a purple serif font, preceded by a purple plus sign. To the right of the title is a vertical purple bar. Below the title is a list of six bullet points, each starting with a small purple square. The first two points are 'King Edward 1901-1910' and 'King George 1910-1936', with the names in red. The remaining four points are in black. At the bottom left of the slide, there are small navigation icons.

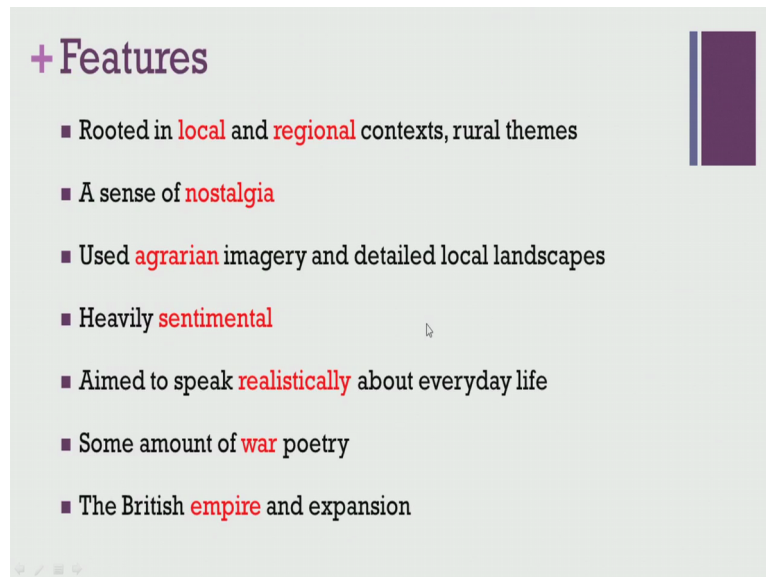
- King Edward 1901-1910
- King George 1910-1936
- Between Swinburne and the Pound-Eliot revolution
- Skill and originality, interest in technical experiment
- Timid and conventional – in retrospect
- Content to delimit or modify the poetic inheritance of the 19th century – rather than seek a radically new approach

Taking a more focused look at the Edwardian and Georgian Poetry, it would be useful to highlight that it was based on the names of the ruling monarchs King Edward who rule from 1901 till 1910 and King George who ruled from 1910 till 1936 and these set of poets together known as the Edwardian and Georgian Poetry for sake of convenience and the literary historical chronology we find them getting located between Swinburne and the Pound-Eliot revolution.

They could also be seen as the poets who bridge the gap between the late Victorian period and the high modernist period, these set of poets they had much skill and originality and had a lot of interest in technical experiment but however we do not find them beginning to experiment but clearly since they were writing soon after Victorian period they were more keen on trying to establish certain conventions which were going out of their way and we find them being quite timid in that sense and they also look more conventional when we look at them from the contemporary point of view.

They did not want to challenge or defy any conventions, they were more content to delimit or modify the poetic inheritance of the 19th century, we do not find them consciously seeking out for any radically new approach either.

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Let us first take a look at some of the common themes which could be seen as characteristics to this kind of poetry named as Georgian and Edwardian poetry, all of these writers were rooted in local and regional context and they also spoke about rural themes as a sense of nostalgia that we find in their poems, and there is also a dominance of agrarian imagery though this was a period of rapid mechanization and urbanization and we also find a detailed portrayal of landscapes especially of the country side.

The poetry is heavily sentimental and here we see a continuation of the Victorian sensibilities as well and there is a tendency to speak realistically about everyday life and not to linger on with philosophical discussion about the various crises which were dominating the 20th century.

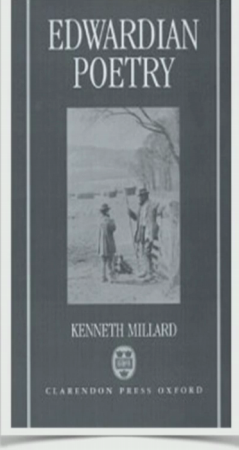
And alongside we also find some reflections of the 20th century crises as well we find some amount of war poetry finding its way into this collection and there is also a lot of discussion about British Empire and the colonial expansion which was also beginning to fade from the beginning of the 20th century.

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+ Edwardian poetry

- Housman
- Henry Newbolt
- John Masefield
- Thomas Hardy
- Edward Thomas
- John Davidson
- Rupert Brooke

Concerned with fast disappearing values of 'Old England' in the age of Modernization



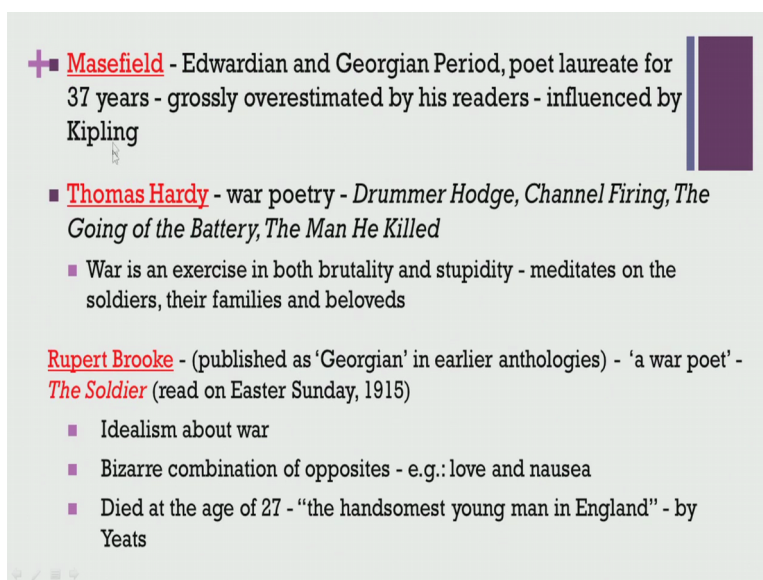
Pub: 1991

Let us first take a look at the collection of Edwardian poetry, a very significant fact we foregrounded at this point is that the term Edwardian poetry and this form of classification was not found in the early 20th century rather it is a more recent phenomenon with Kenneth Millard publishing a volume titled Edwardian Poetry in 1991, so it is a very recent phenomenon to club together a set of poets, give them the common term Edwardian poetry.

The set of poets were included in this collection are Housman, Henry Newbolt, John Masefield, Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas, John Davidson and Rupert Brooke. Not all of these writers are very famous in the contemporary nor were they extremely popular during their lifetime but however it is important for a sense of a continued and coherent literary history to mention all of these works in continuum.

All of these writers together they were concern with the fast disappearing values of Old England in the age of modernization so as noted earlier it is dominated by a sense of nostalgia.

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- **Masfield** - Edwardian and Georgian Period, poet laureate for 37 years - grossly overestimated by his readers - influenced by Kipling
- **Thomas Hardy** - war poetry - *Drummer Hodge, Channel Firing, The Going of the Battery, The Man He Killed*
 - War is an exercise in both brutality and stupidity - meditates on the soldiers, their families and beloveds
- **Rupert Brooke** - (published as 'Georgian' in earlier anthologies) - 'a war poet' - *The Soldier* (read on Easter Sunday, 1915)
 - Idealism about war
 - Bizarre combination of opposites - e.g.: love and nausea
 - Died at the age of 27 - "the handsomest young man in England" - by Yeats

If you take a look at the work of Masfield, he was one of the prominent poets of the Edwardian and the Georgian period and that is in some of these writers it is quite difficult to classify them as well, Masfield was more noted for being the poet laureate for about 37 years. He was in fact it is considered by many historians that he was grossly overestimated by his readers and he did enjoy a lot of popularity officially and other wise and he was mainly influenced by the writings and the works of Kipling.

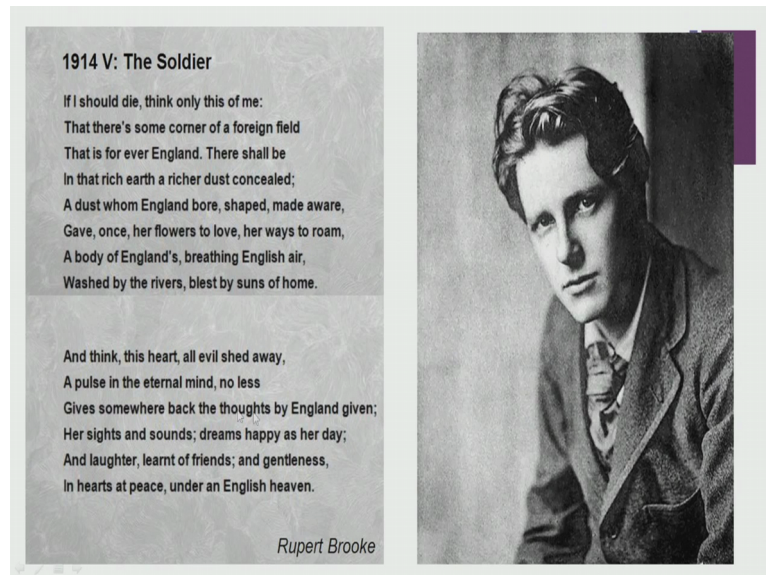
Thomas Hardy who is also one of the prominent novelists of the 20th century, he wrote mostly war poetry his work such as *Drummer Hodge, Channel Firing, The Going of the Battery and The Man He Killed* were popular even during his own lifetime. We find him approaching war with a very different sense of understanding, for him war was only an exercise in both brutality and stupidity and in his poems we find him meditating on the soldiers, their families and the beloveds and not about the kind of material success that it would give to particular nations or particular rulers.

Rupert Brooke is perhaps a best known among these poets his also published as a Georgian poet in some of the earlier anthologies, he was the most important and the prominent one among the war poets about whom we shall be taking a look at even later. His most important work *The Soldier* a poem, it was read on the Easter Sunday of 1915 across Britain.

In his work we find certain kind of an idealism of war which begins to go away as the century progresses and he was one them in the very few who continued to be fascinated with the idea

of fighting for the nation and in his work we find that there is a bizarre combination of opposites and a contrasting elements for example in the same poem we find him talking about two aspects such as Love and Nausea, fortunately he died very young at the age of 27 and Yeats identified him as the handsomest young man in England.

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If you could read from the poem The Soldier which is oft anthologized and much quoted even the contemporary. If I should die, think only this of me, that there is some corner of a foreign field that is forever England. There shall be in that rich earth a richer dust concealed, a dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware, gave, once her flowers to love, her ways to roam, a body of England's breathing English air, washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

After his death this poem was considered very touching and very moving it also aroused a lot of popular sentiments against wars and many of these young British men losing their lives in these pointless wars.

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Georgian Poetry

- only **nostalgia**
- not located in the actual living conditions
- does not sketch the historical/economic conditions—

Poetry Bookshop - Harold Monro
Bloomsbury district

- Five Volumes Edited by **Howard Marsh**
- 1912 to 1922
- true to life, no ornamentation or exaggeration
- extremely sentimental
- recalled the ideological mode of 17th century - instilling a sense of Englishness in the past - nationalist pride
- response to the first moments of global migrations and cosmopolitanisms
- emphasis on the local and the regional - rural poets
- Extremely popular

John Masefield
Walter de la Mare
W H Davies
Rupert Brooke

Wilford Gibson, James Stephens, Ralph Hodgson - now forgotten

In Georgian Poetry also we find a sense of nostalgia dominating when we talk about Georgian Poetry usually it is about a set of poems who were together anthologized in the series of five volumes edited by Howard Marsh and this series appeared from 1912 till 1922 as five different books, they enjoyed much popularity during the early 20th century though its critical genius was much a (())(14:39) they continued to be identified among the foremost writers of the early 20th century.

We find that most of the writers in this volume they were all true to life and they did not resolve to any form of ornamentation or exaggeration, their poetry was extremely sentimental. We also find the continuation of some of the characteristics of the previous age such as the seventeenth century and also a sense of pride in the Englishness of the past which could also be identified as the nationalist pride but in the 20th century it is again useful to remember all of these things were going out of fashion so Georgian and the Edwardian poetry together they were also seen as some kind of a poetry from the past.

But Georgian poetry continues to be significant for one thing because it was one of the rare responses to the first moments of global migrations and cosmopolitanisms and these set of poets they also lamented the fact that England was moving towards a rapid urbanized economy and it one did not have much time to look at the glorious past or to engage with the countryside or the agrarian economy.

And what also made this distinct in the globalized period of the early 20th century was that there was much emphasis on the local and the regional and they were in that sense also seen as rural poets as against a dominating urbanization and the more popular ones among the Georgian poets were John Masefield, Walter de la Mare, W H Davis and Rupert Brooke, who as we mentioned were anthologized in both Georgian and Edwardian poetry.

The other important members Wilford Gibson, James Stephens and Ralph Hodgson are now more forgotten figures. The one criticism which is more dominant against Georgian poetry is that they do not sketch the historical or economic conditions of the time so we do not find much of a reflection of the sociopolitical or the religious conditions of the those times and nevertheless the popularity ensured that the people were also longing for some kind of a nostalgic depiction of the English (16:42)

In this context it is also important to foreground poetry bookshop which was associated with Harold Monro and this was bookshop in the Bloomsbury district and they also ensured the availability and publication of many such important text of the early 20th century.

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- **W H Davies** - *Cowslips and Larks* - far more meditative than other Georgian poets
- **Walter de la Mare** - Romantic sentimentality - childhood, death, the supernatural - *The Listeners*
- **Rudyard Kipling** - *Gunga Din* - celebrates an Indian's courage.
 - *The Ballad of East and West* - 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet'
 - War poems - *Soldier Soldier, Danny Deever, The Young British Soldier*
- **Charlette Mew** - *The Farmer's Bride* (published by Harold Monro) - echoes *Jude the Obscure*

Georgian poetry was Severely criticised by Pound and Eliot

Taking closer look at the Georgian poets W H Davies authored *Cowslips and Larks* and he was considered far more meditative than other Georgian poets. Walter de la Mare retained a kind of romantic sentimentality in his works and he incased with the themes of childhood, death and the supernatural, this is particularly evident in his poem *The Listeners*. Rudyard Kipling who had an Indian connection authored the poem *Gunga Din* in which he celebrates Indian's courage and some of his other works also talk about the way in which the east and

the west can encounter for example the Ballad of the East and West has this oft coated line, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet. Kipling also wrote some war poems such as Soldier Soldier, Danny Deever and Young British Soldier.

Charlotte Mew instantly was the only woman poet among the Edwardian and the Georgian Poets to find her way into this canon, her important poem The Farmer's Bride was also published by Harold Monro who was responsible and popularizing most of the early poetry of 20th century and in this poem what made it significant was the fact that it echoes Jude the Obscure, though this poetry was extremely popular in the early 20th century they were severely criticized by Pound and Eliot later when they became the leaders of high modernism in the early 20th century.

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+ Decadence movement

- Prioritised **experience** over everything else
- Followed the aesthetic ideology of **excess** and **artificiality**
- As opposed to 'aestheticism', a **pejorative** term used by critics to disparage the aestheticism of France and the symbolism of the Pre-Raphaelites

Now it is time for us to take a look at some of the prominent movements of this period, the first one being the Decadence Movement, the Decadence Movement was a movement in the field of art which prioritized experience over everything else, they follow the aesthetic ideology of excess and artificiality.

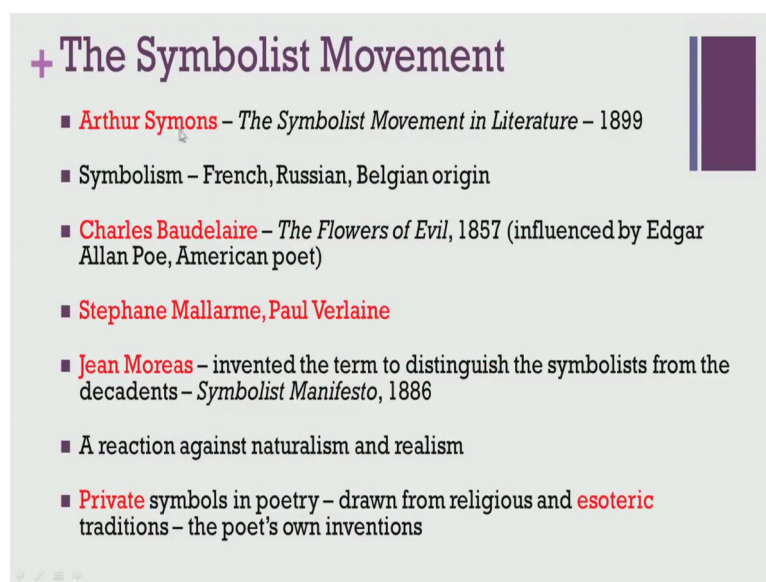
This significantly was quite opposed to the idea of aestheticism, one should not make the mistake of using aestheticism and decadence synonymously because decadence was mostly a pejorative term used by critics to disparage the aestheticism of France and the symbolism of the Pre-Raphaelites. Here we also note that some of the terms which were seemingly synonymous did not really have the same kind of import in the 20th century.

Scottish Kailyard School was influential movement which range from the 1880s to the 1890s though it was at the turn of the century the end of the 19th century, we find a lasting influence of the Kailyard School even in the 20th century. The important writers who belong to this group were three Edinburgh University writers J M Barrie who is now most famous for his character Peter Pan, Rev John Watson and S R Crockett.

Kailyard means a kitchen garden in the Scottish tongue, so keeping in tune with term what they tried to capture was the Scottish rural life through different anecdotes and episodes and we also find these writers exhibiting a strange kind of stoicism in the phase of poverty and also exhibiting a kind of nostalgia for the countryside.

They also had a high degree of piety which made them quite distinct and different from the other writers of the modernist period, however again one of the criticism against them was that they did not engage with any real problems and issues though the end of the 19th century and earlier 20th century was completely ridden by various sociopolitical issues. Scottish Kailyard School was extremely popular for a while and this is also another instance where we find Scotland and England to complementing each other in terms of their literary output.

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+ The Symbolist Movement

- **Arthur Symons** – *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* – 1899
- Symbolism – French, Russian, Belgian origin
- **Charles Baudelaire** – *The Flowers of Evil*, 1857 (influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, American poet)
- **Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine**
- **Jean Moreas** – invented the term to distinguish the symbolists from the decadents – *Symbolist Manifesto*, 1886
- A reaction against naturalism and realism
- **Private** symbols in poetry – drawn from religious and **esoteric** traditions – the poet's own inventions

The Symbolist Movement we can say was inaugurated by Arthur Symons whose epoch making work *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was published in 1899. His influence was quite widespread it could be said that it was not a movement limited to Britain but it was also found in France, Russia and Belgium, so in that sense we can even say that as a movement and as an idea it had varying kind of origin.

Charles Baudelaire was one of the leading figures of the Symbolist Movement, his *Flowers of Evil* published in 1857 became extremely influential in Britain though Baudelaire was a French Poet and Baudelaire in turn was influenced majorly by the American poet Edgar Allan Poe. Here we find a way in which different nations and different languages and literatures informing each other and also influencing various schools of thought.

Here as we pointed in the introductory session, it is no longer limited to particular communities and particular nationalities but about an overarching influence that cuts across different nations. The other important figures were Stephane Mallarme and Paul Verlaine. Jean Moreas was the one who actually invented the term Symbolism in order to distinguish the symbolist from the decadents.

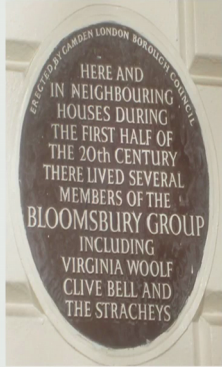
Here again it is important to highlight that decadents was a term which many of the artist were not very comfortable with so they used to stay away from the term decadents and they use other terms such as aestheticism or symbolism depending upon what kind of art one was (())(21:52) Moreas Symbolist Manifesto of 1886 in that sense could be seen as a foundational work in the emergence of the Symbolist Movement.

Overall one can see a form of reaction being generated against naturalism and realism through the symbolist movement. What made them distinct from the other poets was their use of private symbols in poetry and most of these symbols were drawn from religious or even from esoteric traditions and that since they also become quieter representative of the modernist portray because most of these symbols were not accessible to a common reader and since some cases we also find another poet or the artist themselves inventing these terms which remained very private and very esoteric.

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+ The Bloomsbury group

- coterie of English writers - met regularly in the Bloomsbury district of London - early 20th century
- Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, J M Keynes, Lytton Strachey
- **Intolerant** of Victorian prudishness - redefinitions of sexual morality



In the early 20th century, a particular group named Bloomsbury group became very influential in reshaping the ideals of literature, arts and even the conventions of the society. This was a privilege coterie of English writers who met regularly in the Bloomsbury district of London in the early 20th century, the most prominent names of these set of people include Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, J M Keynes and Lytton Strachey.

As the names suggest we also realize that they were not in the same field they were scientist, artist, literary writers and economists and painters who all decided to come together to challenge the conventions of the contemporary period. There was one thing that tied them together it was their intolerance of the Victorian prudishness and we also find them together trying to redefine the notions of sexual morality by going against most of the moral convention of those times.

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+ Avant garde

- French - advance guard or vanguard, fireguard
- experimental and innovative work in art, literature, culture, politics
- hallmark of modernism
- pushes the boundaries of status quo - opposed to 'mainstream' cultural values

As we begin to wrap up this lecture let us come back again to this term which became quite definitional and representative of the modernist period, Avant garde and it was this term which could capture the diverse ways in which the age was beginning to manifest itself and while talking about this term Avant-garde it is again useful to remember that this term was quite handy not just in talking about literature but in all other forms of art and all other forms of new techniques which were being devised.

It could also be used to talk about new sensibility in the context of war, high imperialism and the new ideas and philosophy and human psychology and as an age progressed and as many of the experimental and innovative work were dominating art, literature, culture and politics we also find it became the hallmark of modernism as well.

Accordingly we also find many using this term Avant garde to even talk about the radical departures in view about God, religious doctrine and about sexuality in general and since this term continued to push the boundaries of status quo and challenged the mainstream cultural values, the modernist literature throughout remained extremely powerful and extremely radical so that it could never be contained within any kind of conventional ideals or conventional definitions.

So with this understanding we also get ready to take a look at the other varying form of genres and other varying form of writings in the coming sessions and this is all we got for

today's lecture. Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the coming sessions.