

Poetry
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Lecture - 63
Contemporary British Poetry

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Contemporary British Poetry

- English Poetry in the Late 20th and Early 21st century
- British, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Ethnic Poetry
- **Movement Poets:** Larkin, Enright, Jennings
- **Alvarez Group Poets:** Gunn, Hughes, Hill
- **Hobsbaum Group Poets:** Redgrove, Brownjohnson
- **Liverpool Poets:** McGough, Patten, Henri
- **Scottish Makars:** Edwin Morgan, Douglas Dunn
- **Irish Poets:** Heaney, Muldoon, Longley
- **Women Poets:** Duffy, Shuttle, Satyamurti
- **Martian Poets:** Raine, Reed
- **Next Gen and Ethnic Poets:** Armitage, Zephaniah



Hello friends. We have come to the tenth week of our course on Poetry. Today, we deal with Contemporary British Poetry. Actually, we give an introduction to Contemporary British Poetry in this lecture, and then we will move on to three other poets we have selected for this particular week program. English poetry in the late-20th and early 21st century is what we are going to see.

When we look at this 20th and 21st century British poetry, we find a variety of writers from different regions. British- that is a mainland; Scottish- one province of United Kingdom; another Welsh, that is, Wales, one more province of United Kingdom. Then we have Irish group from Northern Ireland, and then, more importantly, we have poets from various ethnic groups. So, we have ethnic poetry as well, immigrant poetry as well.

Then, when we look at the history of post 1950 British Poetry, we see several groupings based on these various geographical locations and different identities like ethnic or feminist. So, we can say, we have Movement Poets represented by Larkin, Enright, and Jennings. We also have Alvarez group of poets represented by Tom Gunn, Ted Hughes, and Geoffrey Hill. We have one more group poet, headed by

Hobsbaum, represented by Redgrove and Brownjohnson. We have a very popular group of poets called Liverpool Poets, Robert McGough, Brian Patten and Adrian Henri. They popularized poetry like no other people did in the past.

Then we have Scottish Makars. They have a different name for poets called Makars. because Makars means makers. They do not want to use that word 'poet.' We have some examples in Edwin Morgan and Douglas Dunn. Then we have Irish poets, primarily from Northern Ireland represented by Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, and Michael Longley.

Then we have a large number of poets under this category Women poets. Just we have some 3 examples here, Caroline Duffy, Penelope Shuttle, and Carole Satyamurti. Then we have Martian and Gorgon poets, represented by 2 main poets Raine and Reed. And lastly, we have Next Gen poets and Ethnic poets. We have an example for each, Simon Armitage and Benjamin Zephaniah.

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Historical and Literary Context

- Dissolution of the British Empire and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Nations in 1949
- Queen Elizabeth II (r.1951-)
- Voting Rights for adults above 18
- Britain as a member of the European Union (1973)
- The Conservative Party: Margaret Thatcher (1979)
- The Labor Party: Tony Blair (1997)
- Devolution of Powers for Scotland, Wales & Ireland (1998)
- Brexit (2016, 2020)
- Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism, Globalism in poetry
- Angry Young Men and Women Movements



Let us see the historical and literary context for this late 20th century and early 21st century British Poetry. This has its roots in this dissolution of the British Empire and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Nations in 1949. After this, we have the Queen Elizabeth the second reigning from 1951.

We also have to remember that women were able to get voting rights sometime before but then, voting rights for adults above the age of 18 were granted at this time. Then

after repeated attempts, Britain became a member of the European Union in 1973. Ironically, the same repeated attempts reflected in the Brexit in 2016 and 2020.

The conservative party was led by Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and immediately after this, we have the Labor Party led by Tony Blair. And during this Blair government, we have this Devolution of Powers for Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. That means regional aspirations were becoming stronger and stronger.

And in this kind of political and social climate, we have poetry in various forms like Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism, and Globalism. We have some group of people like Angry Young Men and Women Movements in this period. So individual aspirations, ethnic aspirations, regional aspirations as we have in politics, we also have in poetry.

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Let us see this map of United Kingdom. We need to understand the different regional aspects so that we can understand the voices from different locations. What we see in green is this mainland that is, Britain. And what we see in orange color is Wales. Then we have yellow color for Scotland and then, we have something like between yellow and orange above Ireland that is Northern Ireland. So these areas represent different regions of the United Kingdom. And we also have separately Ireland. When we come to Irish Poetry, we will see that this Northern Ireland and Ireland they come together. But then after independence of Ireland in 1922, we have Northern Ireland separately, which is still with the mainland that is Britain. But Ireland is separate.

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Movement Poets



- A reactionary movement against the cultural pretensions of Bohemia and Bloomsbury
- Aim of achieving diction and fidelity to mundane experience
- Accessible native idiom
- Members include: Donald Davie, D J Enright, Elizabeth Jennings, **Robert Conquest**, Kingsley Amis, John Wain
- Anthology: *New Lines* (1956)
- Led by **Philip Larkin**, a librarian by profession
- The self-effacing Larkin influenced by Yeats and Hardy
- Published *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974)



Let us begin with Movement Poets. After this modernism, after the First World War and the Second World War, this kind of centerless or chaotic experience of life, we have a group of poets called Movement Poets. And this Movement Poets represented a reactionary movement against the cultural pretensions of Bohemia and Bloomsbury group. Some elitist people interested in one way of life thinking that they represent the mass of people; that is what these poets were against. The aim of achieving diction and fidelity to mundane experience was the key to understand Movement Poets. They also used an accessible native idiom.

Some of the members of this movement include Donald Davie, D J Enright, Elizabeth Jennings, Robert Conquest, Kingsley Amis, one of the well-known novelists, and again, we have another novelist John Wayne, who wrote poems along with this movement poets. They had one anthology called *New Lines*, which was published in 1956.

The whole movement was led by, primarily by Philip Larkin. He was a librarian by profession but he wrote some excellent poetry during this period. He was a self-effacing man. He was influenced by Yeats and Hardy. So, we can see modernist reacting against Victorian poetry or Edwardian or Georgian poetry. We can find that kind of influence in Philip Larkin who took interest in Yeats, the later Yeats, and also this Hardy. These two were more lyrical, more romantic and this kind of lyrical, romantic aspects were imbibed by Philip Larkin and other Movement Poets. Philip

Larkin published two of his well-known poems during this period. One is called The Whitsun Weddings and other one is called High Windows, published in 1974.

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Larkin's "The Trees"

[a 12-line, 3-stanza "nature" poem;
the first two stanzas are here]

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again 5
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.



We have a sample poem from Larkin. This is called "The Trees." It is a 12-line, 3-stanza nature poem. It is about the nature. We have the first 2 stanzas here.

The trees are coming into leaf

Like something almost being said;

The recent buds relax and spread,

Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again

And we grow old? No, they die too.

Their yearly trick of looking new

Is written down in rings of grain."

Obviously, this is a poem about trees, leaves, and the falling of leaves, and renewal of the season, rejuvenation of life. But then, we can see their greenness is a kind of grief. And there is always a kind of movement from life to death. That is why this kind of

poem is very important for us to understand that life and death is all about a cycle. We just participate in this cycle of life and death.

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Alvarez Group Poets

- *New Poetry*, an anthology edited by Alfred Alvarez and published by Penguin in 1962
- Recorded the challenges of British poetry.
- A corrective to the academic, polished, and polite verse of 'The Movement Poets' like Larkin
- Represented by poets like R. S. Thomas, Norman MacCaig, Christopher Middleton, Ted Hughes, and David Holbrook; Robert Lowell and John Berryman
- The expanded volume in 1965 included Sylvia Plath, Peter Porter, and Ian Hamilton
- Also linked with Geoffrey Hill, Francis Berry, Jon Silkin
- Indicative of a variety of themes & experimental forms



Then we have another group of poets called Alvarez Group of poets and they publish one anthology called *New Poetry*. It was edited by Alfred Alvarez and published by Penguin in 1962. This anthology recorded the challenges of British poetry at this time. Alvarez wrote an introduction to this group of poems and said that what was happening in the poetry scenario at that time was not good enough for British culture, British poetry. He used the expression 'beyond gentility principle' in his introduction. There was an attempt to move away from this gentility, that is, this Bloomsbury group and all that.

Now, this is considered to be a corrective to the academic, polished, and polite verse of 'The Movement Poets' like Larkin. So, we can say that, this group of poets reacted against Movement poets and also the modernist poets. We have some representations here like R. S. Thomas, Norman MacCaig, Christopher Middleton, Ted Hughes, David Holbrook, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman. The last 2 poets Robert Lowell and John Berryman are in fact Americans.

By introducing some American poets, Alvarez wanted the British community to understand that there is something more to be done radically, experimentally in British culture. This group of poetry is also linked with Geoffrey Hill, Francis Berry, and Jon Silkin. And when Alvarez edited the volume second time in 1965 in an

expanded volume, he also included Sylvia Plath, Peter Porter, and Ian Hamilton. This volume is an indication of the variety of themes and the experimental forms that British poets practiced during this time, that is, in the 1960s.

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Ted Hughes's "The Thought Fox"
[a 24-line and 6-stanza poem on poetic creativity]

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is **alive**
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move. 4
....

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks.
The page is printed. 24



We have an example from Ted Hughes's well-known poem "The Thought Fox." It is a 24-line, 6-stanza poem on poetic creativity itself.

"I imagine this midnight moment's forest:

Something else is **alive**

Beside the clock's loneliness,

And this blank page where my fingers move. 4

....

We have some gaps, that is, the first stanza and we are now moving to the last stanza.

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox

It enters the dark hole of the head.

The window is starless still; the clock ticks,

The page is printed. 24

We have underlined some letters. We have also highlighted some parts of words to indicate that this kind of experimental poem is full of poetic qualities. Particularly, we can see the alliteration. We can see the repetition of words and we can see the assonance in 'night' and 'alive;' alliteration in 'midnight moment' and also, 'sudden sharp stink.' And further, we can see 'starless still,' again one more, 'clock tick.' And finally, we can see, 'page printed.'

It is an experimental poem but using certain qualities which are essential for poetry. That is why some of these experimental poems at least a few like Ted Hughes, they are still popular today.

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R S Thomas's "Welsh Landscape"



[a 29-line poem, first published in 1955]

To live in Wales is to be conscious
At dusk of the spilled blood
That went to the making of the wild sky,
Dyeing the immaculate rivers
In all their courses. 5

....

There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles 24



We have another representation from Wales by R S Thomas. This poem is called Welsh Landscape. We should not neglect one part of England that is why we have this example from R S Thomas. We earlier looked at Dylan Thomas as a poet from Wales and now, for this group, we have R S Thomas. He was a priest and poet and he has his poem. It is well-known. It is a 29-line poem. It was published in 1955 for the first time. We have just 2 stanzas here.

“To live in Wales is to be conscious

At dusk of the spilled blood

That went into the making of the wild sky

Dyeing the immaculate rivers

In all their courses

5

....

There is no present in Wales,

And no future;

There is only the past,

Brittle with relics,

Wind-bitten towers and castles

24

Obviously, this poem from Wales talks about one kind of attitude atmosphere in the landscape that is there is only the past, no present, no future. That is the kind of atmosphere that R S Thomas was able to capture during this time about Wales. Even today, Wales is not that much prominent as Scottish or Irish poetry.

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Hobsbaum Group Poets



- A reaction against the Movement Poets
- A casual meeting of poets in London from 1955 to 1965
- **Principles largely based on Leavis:** rational discussion, close reading, elocution, and poetry's civic role
- **Organizers:** Philip Hobsbaum and Edward Lucie-Smith
- **Volume:** *A Group Anthology* (1963), eds. Lucie-Smith and Hobsbaum
- **Members:** George Macbeth, Edward Lucie-Smith, Peter Redgrove, Alan Brownjohn, Peter Porter, Martin Bell, Fleur Adcock, and B. S. Johnson
- **Poems** discussed include Porter's "The Pilgrimage," Macbeth's "Poem in a Meter of Ernest Dowson," and Redgrove's "The Archaeologist"



We have one more group of poets called Hobsbaum Group of Poets. This is again a reaction against the Movement Poets. A group of poets casually met in London from 1955 to 1965, that is, almost a decade. They followed the principles of F R Leavis from his close reading, scrutiny, and rational discussion, elocution. And also, they

were thinking more about the poetry's civic role. They believed that poetry had some civic role and they had to do it by themselves. This group of people met under the leadership of Philip Hobsbaum and Edward Lucie-Smith. They published a volume called "A Group Anthology," edited by Lucie-Smith and Hobsbaum and published in 1963.

Some of the members of this group include George Macbeth, Edward Lucie-Smith, Peter Redgrove, Alan Brownjohn, Peter Porter, Martin Bell, Fleur Adcock, and B. S. Johnson. In their meetings, they used to discuss some poems before they were published. Some of the poems which were discussed like this are given here, "Porter's The Pilgrimage," Macbeth's "Poem in a Meter of Ernest Dowson," and lastly Redgrove's "The Archaeologist." Such discussions are found in an essay.

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- ### Liverpool Poets
- A term that refers to a group of three poets
 - Roger McGough, Brian Patten, and Adrian Henri
 - Influenced by the Beatles, rock music, jazz
 - Performed and published together as well as individually
 - **Anthologies:** *The Mersey Sound* (1967), *The Liverpool Scene* (1967), and *The New Volume* (1983)
 - Presented a popular, urban, anti-academic, good-humored, and vocal poetry
 - Considered poetry a performance art medium for public rather than private consumption
- 

We have one popular group of poets called Liverpool Poets. It is a term that refers to a group of 3 poets. Particularly, Roger McGough, Brian Patten, and Adrian Henri. They were more into music and poetry coming together. They were influenced by the Beatles, rock music, and jazz. Remember, we mentioned the influence American poetry in Alvarez's Anthology.

We also have another group of poets called Black Mountain Poets. We have the beat generation. Such poets influenced poets all over the world in Canada, in Australia, including India. We have such influences and here, specifically, these 3 poets came

together, performed their poems along with music and they published poems together as a collective in 3 volumes, and then they were also publishing poems individually of their own poems. So, such anthologies are here, 'The Mersey Sound,' 'The Liverpool Scene,' and 'The New Volume.' They had huge impact on the cultural scene in Britain, removing the difference between popular poetry and high poetry. They presented a popular, urban, anti-academic, good-humored, and vocal poetry to the large audience. They consider poetry a performance art medium for public rather than a private medium of consumption.

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Scottish Makars

- Makar, a maker, poet laureate of Scotland since 2004
- City Makars of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Aberdeen, and Dundee
- Key facets: **Land, Language, and People**
- Edwin Morgan (2004-2011)
- Liz Lochhead (2011-2016)
- **Jackie Kay** (2016-)
- Other Scottish Poets
- **Douglas Dunn**
- Robert Crawford
- **C. A. Duffy** – poet laureate of England from 2009-2019



Now, let us come to these Scottish Makars. As we mentioned earlier, a Makar is a maker. They wanted to use this Scottish term specifically that is why we have retained that work Makar here. Makar is a maker, a poet laureate of Scotland since 2004. We also have City Markars for the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Aberdeen, and Dundee; these are located in Scotland.

Some of the key facets of Scottish group of poets are their land and language and people. Often, they write about themselves. We have some examples here. Edwin Morgan, he was a Makar from 2004 to 2011. And then, Liz Lochhead from 2011 to 2016, and lastly, we have Jackie Kay from 2016. These 3 poets are Makars for the whole province, whereas we have some poets specifically only for cities.

Some other Scottish poets are Douglas Dunn, Robert Crawford, and Carol Ann Duffy, another poet laureate of England from 2009 to 2019. The first woman poet, the first Scottish poet, the first lesbian to be the poet laureate of England is Carol Ann Duffy. This Robert Crawford, Carol Ann Duffy also comes under another category called New Gen Poets but we have grouped them under Scottish regional poetry here.

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Douglas Dunn's Poem

"Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March"
[A 52-line section in the long poem *Elegies*]

And visitors, three, four, five times a day;
My wept exhaustions over plates and cups
Drained my self-pity in these days of grief 15
Before the grief. Flowers, and no vases left.

Tea, sherry, biscuits, cake, and whisky for the weak . . .
She fought death with an understated mischief—
"I suppose I'll have to make an effort"—
Turning down painkillers for lucidity. 20



Let us have an example from Douglas Dunn's poem called "Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March." It is a 52-line section of the long poem called *Elegies* by Dunn. We have just 2 stanzas here.

"And visitors, three, four, five times a day;

My wept exhaustions over plates and cups

Drained my self-pity in these days of grief, 15

Before the grief. Flowers, and no vases left.

Tea, sherry, biscuits, cake, and whisky for the weak. . .

She fought death with an understated mischief-

"I suppose I'll have to make an effort"-

Dunn’s first wife died of cancer. At this time, he wrote this poem for her as an elegy. It is a very powerful poignant poem, sharing his grief for his dead wife.

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Irish Poets (Northern Ireland)

- The best poetry of the post-1950 Britain came from the Irish poets with an awareness of their troubled history.
- **Seamus Heaney** distinguished himself with a Nobel Prize for poetry in 1995 and **Michael Longley** garnered several awards and recognitions for his poetry.
- **Eavan Boland** is a notable Irish poet from Ireland.
- Others include Ciaran Carson, Tom Paulin, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Mebdh McGuckian, Pearse Hutchinson, Paul Durcan, Michael Davitt.
- They describe traditional rural and literary landscapes.
- Additionally, they deal with urban working class issues.



We have a large number of poets in this group called Irish poets and we specifically refer to Northern Ireland. One or two poets maybe from Ireland but then we have brought them together. Often, they are discussed as Irish poets.

Interestingly, the best poetry of the post 1950 Britain came from the Irish poets with an awareness of their troubled history. The troubled history refers to the conflicts between Irish people and the government of Britain. Always some kind of conflict or the armed conflicts.

Seamus Heaney distinguished himself with a Nobel Prize for Poetry in 1995 and we have another poet called Michael Longley who also garnered several awards and recognitions for his poetry. Eavan Boland is a notable Irish poet from Ireland. Others include Ciaran Carson, Tom Paulin, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Mebdh McGuckian, Pearse Hutchinson, Paul Durcan, Michael Davitt. All these poets described traditional, rural, and literary landscapes of Ireland.

They additionally deal with urban working-class issues. And when they focused on this Irish land, people, culture, everything together, they were able to write very

powerful poetry and which was much more powerful than poetry from England or any other place.

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Michael Longley's "Ghetto"



[An irregular eight stanza poem, published in 1991]

Because you will suffer soon and die, your choices
Are neither right nor wrong: a spoon will feed you,
A flannel keep you clean, a toothbrush bring you back
To your bathroom's view of chimney-pots and gardens. 4
... [an inventory is listed] ...
These are your heirlooms, perishables, worldly goods.
What you bring is the same as what you leave behind, 10
Your last belonging a list of your belongings.



We have an example from Michael Longley here. This poem is called "Ghetto." It is an irregular 8-stanza poem published in 1991.

"Because you will suffer soon and die, your choices
Are neither right nor wrong: a spoon will feed you,
A flannel keep you clean, a toothbrush bring you back
To your bathroom's view of chimney-pots and gardens. 4
... [an inventory is listed] ...

Then we have an inventory of many items listed and then we have these 3 lines.

These are your heirlooms, perishables, worldly goods.
What you bring is the same as what you leave behind, 10
your last belonging a list of your belongings."

Ghetto refers to this Jewish Ghettos. People moving from one place to another, taking their belongings, and in order not to forget, they have a list of belongings. And then

what is left finally is this list of belongings. It is again, a powerful poem about the holocaust, the suffering of millions of people.

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Women Poets

- Women's poetry is rich and multifarious.
- Different regions and backgrounds focused on women's issues; re-vision, freedom, justice, earth, sexuality
- **English Poets:** Carol Satyamurti, Jenny Joseph, Anne Stevenson, Penelope Shuttle, U A Fanthorpe, Wendy Cope, Stevie Smith, Carol Reumens, **Linda France**, Elaine Feinstein, Selima Hill, Ruth Padel, Helen Dunmore, Vicky Feather, Jo Shapcott
- **Scots:** Kathleen Jamie, J. Kay, **C A Duffy**, Maura Dooley
- **Welsh:** Deryn Rees-Jones, Gillian Clarke, Gwyneth Lewis
- **Northern Ireland:** Kate Newmann, Medbh McGuckian, Leontia Flynn, Sinead Morrissey, Colette Bryce



Now, we come to the interesting part of our contemporary British poetry which is full of Women poets. That is why women's poetry in England is very rich and multifarious. We have different regions and backgrounds focused on women's issues; re-vision, freedom, justice, earth, sexuality.

These poets have discussed these issues in wide-ranging perspectives. We have some English poets represented by Carole Satyamurti, Jenny Joseph, Anne Stevenson, Penelope Shuttle, U A Fanthorpe, Wendy Cope, Stevie Smith, Carol Reumens, Linda France, Elaine Feinstein, Selima Hill, Ruth Padel, Helen Dunmore, Vicky Feather, Jo Shapcott. Linda France has recently won the Cholmondeley award in 2020. That is why we have highlighted her.

We have some Scottish poets in Kathleen Jamie, Jackie Kay, Carol Ann Duffy, and Maura Dooley. Then women poets are found in Wales as well. We have some examples like Deryn Rees-Jones, Gillian Clarke, and Gwyneth Lewis. And again, we have some poets from Northern Ireland in Kate Newmann, Medbh McGuckian, Leontia Flynn, Sinead Morrissey, and Colette Bryce.

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Women Poets

- **Themes:** violence, beauty as commodity culture, domestic chores, eccentricity, globetrotting, recovery of women's skin, body, gender, motherhood, dreams and longings, anti-war, pro-climate, foul media, identity, etc.
- **Techniques:** the play on impropriety, delinquency, incongruity, irony, sophistry, shifting of images from reproduction to production, transition from maternity to effectivity, etc.

➤ Carol Satyamurti's "Ourstory"

Let us now praise women (1) ...
But awkward women, tenacious with truth,
Whose elbows disposed of the impossible;
Who split seams, who wouldn't wait,
Take no, take sedatives; (5-8)



Women poets in late 20th century or early 21st century is very powerful. We have a large number of poets and they deal with different kinds of themes. Violence, beauty as commodity culture, domestic chores, eccentricity, globetrotting that means people move from one place to another, they do not live in the same place.

Many of these women poets have work experience in America or in other European countries or elsewhere. They just come and go and keep on moving. That is why this globetrotting we have mentioned here; recovery of women's skin, body, gender, motherhood, dreams and longings, anti-war, pro-climate, foul media, and identity, and other themes.

We have women poets focusing on a wide variety of techniques as well. They play on impropriety, delinquency, incongruity, irony, sophistry, shifting of images from reproduction to production, transition from maternity to effectivity, that is, efficiency; how much effectively they can work in various fields. And we have an example from Carole Satyamurti's poem called "Ourstory."

"Let us now praise women. ...

But awkward women, tenacious with truth,

Whose elbows disposed of the impossible;

Who split seams, who wouldn't wait,

Take no, take sedatives;

It is again, a very powerful poem. I just came across Carole Satyamurti's poem in one place. Ever since I have taken a liking to her poems; they are very powerful.

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Martian and Gorgon Poets

- Post-1950 poetry has attempted new ways of seeing with several groups of poets.
- Martian & Gorgon poets brought a fresh air into poetry
- **Craig Raine** has redefined the English vocabulary in his poem "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home" (1979).
- He called books flying Caxtons perching on hands.
- **Tony Harrison** emphasized the need for **debrainwashing** in his long poem, *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992).
- They are polemical poets who explore social issues of class, violence, and language seriously.
- Christopher Reid and James Fenton are also associated with Raine and Harrison in their technical experiments and poetic sensibilities.



We have another group of poets called Martian and Gorgon Poets. Primarily, 2 poets, some others are also associated with this group of poets. This is again a post 1950 poetry which attempted new ways of seeing with several groups of poets.

Martian and Gorgon poets brought a fresh air into poetry at this time. Craig Raine has redefined the English vocabulary in his poem called "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home," published in 1979 and became a very popular poet. What he did was "to call books flying Caxtons perching on hands."

Then we have another poet called Tony Harrison who emphasized the need for de-brainwashing in his long poem called "The Gaze of the Gorgon." De-brainwashing is similar to what we have in criticism, de-familiarization. They are polemical poets who explore social issues of class, violence, and language very seriously.

We have 2 other poets Christopher Reed and James Fenton. They are also associated with Raine and Harrison in their technical experiments and poetic possibilities.

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Craig Raine's Poem
"A Martian Sends a Postcard Home"
[A 34-line poem on naming things anew in couplets]



Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings—

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

5



We have an extract from "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home." This is a 34-line poem on naming things anew in couplets. 'Caxton,'- you may remember who was the first one to bring printing to England.

"Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings-
they cause eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.
I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand."

5

Caxtons, that means books or mechanical birds with many wings. When we turn the leaves, they have many wings and some are treasured for their markings. We have markings on pages. So, he describes books in a quite new way for us and expands our perception.

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New Gen and Ethnic Poets



- New generation poets have powerful voices.
- They have moved from the margin to the center within England and from outside
- Simon Armitage, a Yorkshire poet, **current poet laureate**
- Glyn Maxwell, of Welsh origin, many voices and forms
- Robert Crawford, a Scottish poet, a major anthologist
- Benjamin Zephaniah: the Jamaican-British anti-empire poet of *Wicked World!* (2000)
- John Agard – Guyanese-British poet of *Travel Light Travel Dark* (2013)
- Grace Nichols – Guyanese-British poet of *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (2009)



We have the last group of poets called New Gen and Ethnic Poets. We have new generation poets who have very powerful voices, unlike all the previous groups of poets we have looked at.

These poets have moved from the margin to the center within England and also from outside, that is, different packets of England, they send poets to London or they are able to operate in different locations away from London, that is the center of British society. We have some examples in Simon Armitage, a poet from Yorkshire who is the current poet laureate. Glyn Maxwell from Welsh origin has many voices and forms. Then we have Robert Crawford, a poet from Scotland. He is a major poet and also an anthologist.

Then we move onto this ethnic group of poets. These are represented by Benjamin Zephaniah. He is of Jamaican-British origin and he writes anti-empire poems in a volume called “Wicked World.” We have John Agard, a Guyanese-British poet. He has written a volume called “Travel Light Travel Dark.” And one more poet we have, Grace Nichols. She is also from Guyana. That is why she has Guyanese-British origin. And she has a volume called “Picasso, I Want My Face Back.”

Benjamin Zephaniah is a very powerful poet who was offered this poet laureateship and also this order of British Empire but he refused, he rejected them by saying, ‘I do not like that word empire.’ And these poets continue to express themselves. They

represent the voices of many kinds of people from various parts of the world living in England.

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Glyn Maxwell's Poem
"Letters to Edward Thomas: for Derek Walcott"
[selections]

Dear Edward Thomas, Frost died, I was born.
I am a father and you'd like the names
We gave our girl. I'm writing this at dawn
Where Robert lived, in Amherst, and your poems
I keep by his, his housebrick to your tile. 159

... Perhaps I'll guess
Which one will ask me what they always ask:
Whom do I write for? Anybody? Yes, / You 165



We have a poem from Glyn Maxwell, "Letters to Edward Thomas: for Derek Walcott." Just some extracts we have. It is a poem written in the form of a letter. So, it reads like this.

"Dear Edward Thomas, Frost died, I was born.

I am a father and you would like the names

We gave our girl. I'm writing this at dawn

Where Robert lived, in Amherst, and your poems

I keep by his, his housebrick to your tile.

... Perhaps I will guess

Which one will ask me what they always ask:

Whom do I write for? Anybody? Yes, /you."

Edward Thomas is an early 20th century British poet. Edward Thomas and Robert Frost were friends, we have already seen that. And here, we have a poet at the end of

20th century writing to Edward Thomas in America that is Amherst and the whole question is whom do I write for? Who is your audience?

When Chaucer wrote his poems, he was convinced that he would have only a limited number of audiences from the court. Later on, the audience for poetry in Britain increased or expanded, and today, in 21st century we have audience for poetry in different parts of the world. And some poets write for certain specific audience like their own mentors or those poets who influence them.

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Summary

- English Poetry in the Late 20th and Early 21st century
- British, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Ethnic Poetry
- **Movement Poets:** Larkin, Enright, Jennings
- **Alvarez Group Poets:** Gunn, Hughes, Hill
- **Hobsbaum Group Poets:** Redgrove, Brownjohnson
- **Liverpool Poets:** McGough, Patten, Henri
- **Scottish Makars:** Edwin Morgan, Douglas Dunn
- **Irish Poets:** Heaney, Muldoon, Longley
- **Women Poets:** Duffy, Shuttle, Satyamurti
- **Martian Poets:** Raine, Reed
- **Next Gen and Ethnic Poets:** Armitage, Zephaniah



To summarize our introduction to contemporary British poetry, let us see these points. We looked at English poetry in the late 20th and early 21st century. We referred to the various regions of United Kingdom, British mainland, Scottish land, Welsh land, Irish land, particularly Northern Ireland, and also poets from different ethnic backgrounds. We saw a number of poets belonging to various groups. Movement poets, as we saw in Larkin, Enright, and Jennings. Alvarez group of poets, we saw in Gunn, Hughes, and Hill. Hobsbaum group of poets, we found in Redgrove and Brownjohnson.

A very interesting group of poets we saw in Liverpool poets, who like McGough, Patten, and Henri really popularized poetry through their performances. We also looked at Scottish Makars in the form of Edwin Morgan and Douglas Dunn.

Then we examined Irish poets represented by Heaney, Muldoon, Longley with their attachment to their land, culture, people. And the most interesting group of poets we

have seen is these women poets represented by Duffy, Shuttle, and Satyamurti. We have a very experimental group almost post-modernist group in Martian poets, Reign and Reed. And lastly, we saw this Next Gen and Ethnic poets in Armitage and Zephaniah.

We started with this modernist group of poets in Britain in our previous lecture and we now saw these anti-modernist poets. We also have post-modernist poets and globalist poets. There is no specific -ism in this case. These poets belong to different backgrounds, different languages, different lands, different experiences, and there is no one -ism that they belong to. Geographically, they belong to one group; by language they belong to another group; by immigration they belong to another group; by experience of their own travel and all that, they have different identities; multiple identities, multiple issues they have. But all of them deal with contemporary issues of representation of human beings, their dignity, their life, nature, environment, everything they deal with.

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We have some references here for you. You can read some of these references. I refer to one essay by Hobsbaum. It is not mentioned here. If you look for Philip Hobsbaum, you will find the article and see how he has written about the experiment or informal meeting that he conducted. Hope you will find some references and pursue your interest in British poetry. Thank you.