

Poetry
Professor. S.P. Dhanavel
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture No. 76
Outro to Poetry – Conclusion

Hello friends, we come to the end of our course on poetry now. Thank you so much for having joined this course and undertaken your poetic journey along. Now we will travel in different directions in search of our destiny, we hope you enjoyed this journey and found it meaningful. We began with the relevance of poetry discussed the approaches, functions, forms, poetic devices and the music of poetry. We have seen two kinds of poetry, subjective and objective. While subjective poetry includes sonnets, lyrics, odes and villanelles. Objective poetry includes narrative and dramatic poems like epic, mock epic, and dramatic monologues.

Obviously, we can see that Chaucer is primarily a narrative poet who tells us the story of the pilgrims on a spiritual journey to Canterbury, the Elizabethan Sonneteers and metaphysical poets describe the basic emotion of love between human beings and between human beings and gods for us. However, Milton and Dryden take us on a cosmic and poetic journey in the form of an epic and mock epic respectively.

While Milton justifies the ways of god to men, Dryden explains the ways of poets and poet tasters to the public, if Pope continues Dryden's explanation personally in an epistolary and reflective form, poet like Thomas Gray, William Collins and William Blake announced the advent of romantic poetry with their explorations of death nature and love for human beings.

Certainly, we can observe the poetic revolution in the case of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge with their commingling of lyrics and ballads in their joint venture lyrical ballads. The individual self and poetic imagination become serious subjects of poetry in Wordsworth and Coleridge which find two distinct glorious expressions in John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

If the personal narrative is a dominant mode in romantic poetry, the public narrative is a primary mode in Victorian poetry. Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Matthew Arnold address the issues of immortality, personal and marital relations and social and political questions in their poems. The confidence of the romantic poets receives

a blow in the Victorian period compelling poets like Matthew Arnold and G.M. Hopkins to adopt an interrogative tone which takes a firm route in the twentieth century poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Wilfred Owen and Dylan Thomas.

Interestingly, the modernism of Yeats and Eliot took different shapes in the U.S in the hands of Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. The despair of the Europeans is missing, if not, lost in American poets. The U.S enabled a variety of experiments in poetry influencing the whole world including Britain, Australia, Canada and India through the beat generation poets, black mountain and feminist poets. A.R. Ammons and Langston Hughes are two contrasting examples of these multifarious experiments of the extremely personal and social poetics with an awareness of the postmodern and post-human concerns.

Contemporary British poetry is rich and diverse largely due to the contribution from the Irish, the Scottish and other marginal groups of poets. If Seamus Heaney brings alive the Irish form life in his poems, Carol Ann Duffy gives voice to the marginalized sections of people including lesbian women. Simon Armitage reminds us that British poetry can bounce back by listening to the original voice of the people. The politics of power between men and women is the driving force of feminist poetry as we see in Maya Angelou, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, P. K. Page and Judith Wright. The women poets assert their self, express their anger and suggest ways to build their own poetic tradition.

Naturally, the course brings us to our own tough Indian poetry in English which has grown into a large body of writings, making up a distinct corpus. The pioneers like Nissim Ezekiel and Dom Moraes visited England and started writing their poems like the English, but the English has turned out to be Indian English. If Kamala Das and Rukmini Bhaya Nair have absorbed the feminist impulses in their poems in the Indian context, A. K. Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra have engaged with the Indian tradition and society with a scientific passion and precision. The linguist Ramanujan and the physicist Mahapatra have explored our social and cultural fabric poetically to excel the poets who gave us the English language.

In this exploration of poetry, we have discussed the background the historical and literary context, the motivations of poets and poetic conceptions, selected poems and passages, the thematic contrast, the poetic forms and devices the musical qualities of poetry, the overall impressions of each poet and poem and critical and creative responses to poets and their poems.

We hope you have found some poets and some poems some forms and devices some themes and musical qualities to enrich your life.

Robert Frost has been a special poet for us, as he continues to influence our understanding of life. We recreate Frost's loveliness of the words of poetry here in 4 lines, "the poems are lovely brief and brilliant, but we have lives to live before we last and lives to live before, we last and lives to live before, we last."

As we conclude our course, we may record with joy the award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2020 to the American poet Louise Gluck. It is a testimony to the faith poets and readers have in the poetry of hope for humanity. Let us read her reflective and interrogative poem on 'Mother and Child' from her volume "The Seven Ages" published in 2001. Here is the poem for you,

MOTHER AND CHILD

We're all dreamers; we don't know who we are.

Some machine made us; machine of the world, the constricting
family.

Then back to the world, polished by soft whips.

We dream; we do not remember.

Machine of the family: dark fur, forests of the mother's body.

Machine of the mother: white city inside her.

And before that: earth and water.

Moss between rocks, pieces of leaves and grass.

And before, cells in a great darkness.

And before that, the veiled world.

This is why you were born: to silence me.

Cells of my mother and father, it is your turn
to be pivotal, to be the masterpiece.

I improvised; I never remembered.

Now it's your turn to be driven;
you're the one who demands to know:

Why do I suffer? Why am I ignorant?

Cells in a great darkness. Some machine made us;
it is your turn to address it, to go back asking
what am I for? What am I for?"

We will end the program with a reading of a poem on "Small Kindnesses" by Danusha Lameris, a young American poet who seems to answer Louise Glück's questions Why do I suffer? Why am I ignorant? What am I for? Here is the poem by Danusha Lameris on 'Small Kindnesses.'

"I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.

And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we do not want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam
chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of
exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say “Here,
have my seat,” “Go ahead - you first”, I like your hat.”

That is a fantastic poem of gratitude about Small Kindnesses from Danusha Lameris, a young American poet. We are here on the earth for something which we may not know yet but then we can surely help each other to live this life through with a little dose of small kindnesses. Writing and reading poetry are two ways of going through this life purposefully. Once again, we thank you all learners for taking up this course to explore your world poetically. It is our fond hope that you enjoyed the visionary company of poets and their poems. Thank you very much.