

Colin Ian Jeffery

Thoughts on Modernist poetry

Modernist literature is categorized by breaking with the old traditions of literary forms, concepts and styles, with new trends in literature given birth in the early twentieth century following World War One, with such works as T.S. Elliot's 'The Waste Land' in 1922 and 'Four Quartets' in 1943. Elliot was a leader of the Modernist movement in poetry, and in 1948 awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Dylan Thomas was another major modernist poet.

Modernist poetry falls under four headings: modern with new experiments in form and style, new themes and word-games, modes of expression with complex open-ended themes and meanings.

The poetry is the experimentation of new modes of expression with many ways expressing ideas and emotions, including creating images for readers to experience the feelings expressed for themselves; embracing the emotions and interpreting intellectually deep hidden feelings, such as found in the confessional poem.

Modernist poetry embraces a wide range of themes and issues, while traditional poetry limits with universal significance of the world with human appeal, even when poems are romantically personal on the surface. The modernist poet covers many topics such as nature, spiritual, political, satire, humour, erotic love, and life's journey with death's constant shadow following.

Some single modernist poems cover many themes at the same time, for example Dylan Thomas's poem "This Bread I Break" which covers nature, spirituality, and art. The modernist poet never states as in traditional poetry, what the precise meaning of the poem is.

The modernist poetry movement has radically changed the rules in form, style, stanza, and rhythm. There are blank verse, free expression, pictorial, and a host of others. The old metrical rhyme-schemes, traditional symbols, metaphors no longer being dominant with each poet making his own rules using his own unique voice. Multiplicity of styles is characteristic of modernist poetry.

What is poetry?

Poetry is the language of the heart and soul, creating images and landscapes within the reader's mind --- for it is said a picture is worth a million words, and so it is with a modernist poem, a word picture of ideas, dreams, memories, embracing the emotions. There are many styles of poetry and the poet must have a unique voice.

Poetry is the highest of literary achievements, timeless, appealing down the ages, revealing a poet's struggles, experiences, stresses, joys and passions, navigating the way through life's journey. Poetry is word paintings, full of colours, bright and dark, creating images inspiring, enhancing the imagination, recalling memories good and bad.

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The modernist poet uses experiences and emotions, often raw and painful, sharing visions, relationships with family, friends, and lovers, ever seeking for knowledge and answers and for the stars.

I am a poet of the modernist school who composes best in spiritual pain with poems forged white hot, hammered out upon an anvil of anguish, exploring what it means to be human in my age and time, always seeking for the meaning to the mysteries of the universe, looking for God hiding in his everywhere.

Poetry should have a steady beat like a drum with the poet creating a word picture within the mind. The truth of the poem is the springboard into the poet's soul, inspiring the reader to experience the heartfelt emotions portrayed.

What would life be like without poetry for me? Well, like the sun perpetually eclipsed never yielding to a bright dawn of promise where the soul soars mountain high with eagles on the wing.

The poet's Muse composes within a secret landscape of the soul, and is as important as the beat of the poet's heart and each breath taken, and the daily bread of emotions, sweet, joyful, sorrowful and grieving, and out-pacing purple storms when threatened thunder-clouds threaten fierce lightning bolts of depression.

*In childhood
A voice called to me
And I hear it calling still.*

Some poets thoughts on what is poetry?

"Poetry is the medicine of the world. It soothes and ennobles the soul."

Associate professor Feng Yan, China.

"The best words in the best order."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"The record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds."

Percy Bysshe Shelley

"If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that it is poetry."

Emily Dickinson

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"A poem begins with a lump in the throat, a home-sickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where the emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words."

Robert Frost

"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."

William Wordsworth

"Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent, makes your toenails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or nothing, makes you know that you are alone in the unknown world, that your bliss and suffering is forever shared and forever all your own."

Dylan Thomas

"Poetry is, at bottom, a criticism of life"

Matthew Arnold

"Poetry is always written by somebody straining to go beyond what he can do."

Stephen Spender

"Poetry is the language of the soul --- a bright light reaching for the stars."

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