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Embodiment of the Main Features of Modern Poetry in Some Selected Poems

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Abstract:

The paper opens with the introduction which presents a background about the reasons behind the appearance of certain characteristics for Modern Poetry as a literary genre in Modern World. It discusses the circumstances and environment of the movements that absolutely have the great impact on developing this genre. The introduction also sheds light on the role of some Modern Poets who have participated , through their writings , in promoting Modern Poetry. Then , section one comes to define Modern Poetry , discussing Modernism and its influence upon Modern Poetry ; how the modern reader perceive Modern Poetry by the modern writers' themes and messages for the public. Some examples are also given in order to reinforce what has previously been discussed. As for section two , the main characteristics of Modern Poetry are analyzed as far as Modern Literature is concerned including poetry. This section revolves round how Modern poets focus on applying the elements of some features to their poetry



appropriately in a common way ; so the reader, later, becomes conscious of the messages of the poems. Modern Poets identify these characteristics for a purpose. They study their reader's mind and the way he or she judges ideas , which is accordingly a good base for poets in order to write manageable poems to such readers. Mind plays a decisive role in writing poems for the technological evolution of the modern world and people's changing life system. This does not , necessarily, mean that Modern Poetry goes far beyond traditional techniques. Many Modern poets are still holding the traditional style and mixing the modern to the old in one poetic form. Emotions and imagination , on the other hand , have a position in some modern poems too. Sometimes , poets gather mind , heart , imagination , sensibility , and materialism in one place for a certain message in the poem. Some poems are selected for analysis in this section. Finally, the conclusion sums up the result of the study. Going through the characteristics of Modern Poetry may cause confusion because of complexity , however , it is a reliable source to tackle and discuss serious issues. In fact , Modern Poetry is found to be a good means to change society and heal many wounds that many modern societies suffer from.
KeyWords:modernism ,realism ,mysticism ,disillusionment ,skepticism ,symbolism.

1. Modernism and Its Impact upon Modern Poetry

Before discussing Modern Poetry , one should have an idea about the circumstances which surrounded the development of this genre. As an art movement , Modernism has a notable impact on Modern poetry. In its broadest definition , "Modernism is considered as a modern thought , character , or practice. More specifically , the term describes the modernist movement in the arts , its set of cultural tendencies and associated cultural movements, originally arising from wide_scale and far_reaching changes to Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries."¹ Modernism is known as a revolt against the conservative values of realism. The most paradigmatic motive of Modernism is arguably that this movement "rejected the lingering certainty of Enlightenment thinking and also rejected the existence of a compassionate , all_powerful Creator God in favor of the abstract , unconventional , largely uncertain ethic brought on by modernity , initiated around the turn of century by rapidly changing technology and further catalyzed by the horrific consequences of World War I on the cultural psych of artists. In general , the term modernism encompasses the activities and output of those who felt the 'traditional' forms of art , architecture , literature , religious faith , social organization and daily life were becoming outdated in the new economic , social , and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world."² Another paradigmatic exhortation is articulated by the philosopher and composer Theodor Adorno , who , in the 1940s , challenged



conventional surface coherence and appearance of harmony typical of the rationality of Enlightenment thinking.

At the beginning of the 20th century , Modernism marked the first time that the term "avant_garde" , with which the movement was labeled until the word "modernism" prevailed , was used for arts rather than in its original political and military context. Moreover , Surrealism gained fame among the public as being the most extreme form of modernism , or the avant_garde of Modernism. Struggling with the failure of traditional sources of moral authority is the most important characteristic of modern literature in general , and modern poetry in particular. Skepticism has also an impact upon modern poetry. Modern poetry has inherited revelation and traditional religious standards as far as Skepticism is concerned, in addition to reason and community consensus as a source of meaning."So cold and optimistic , modernism. So sure that it will get there eventually."³ Midst all of these respects , modernism proves to be cold and optimistic at the same time. A state of disconnectedness is being described by the typical modern writer where the individual lacks real belonging and identity and has no ultimate purpose. Paralyzed, misguided , and controlled by false expectations , people resort to the encouragement of literature in its modern shape and pattern."Modernism is often considered the literature of city life....the city as a place of poverty and industrialization...the modernists deal with technological changeFor the modernist writer , this is the collective contemporary reality that has to be expressed amid the ruins of Europe , along with the new experiences of anonymity , of being lonely in a crowd , of being surrounded and alienated."⁴ The globalization of modern literature , including modern poetry , expose readers to a baffling array of alien perspectives. Modern poetry suggests an intensity of thought , strength of feeling , and full of vital experiences. T.S. Elliot emphasizes the fact that " The modern poetry can give us a feeling of excitement and a sense of fulfillment different from any sentiment aroused even by very much greater poetry of past age"⁵.It seems that the effort of widening the readership for modern poetry goes into misplacement. "Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people"⁶ is a fact that the publisher Neil Astley deplors. Thus the reader's response can be the touchstone for good poetry. People of modern age see modern poetry as a literary form which plays down what they are really interested in ; drama and mystery. The most striking element of modern poetry is the invention and experimentation of new modes of expression. Modern poetry also includes the imagist way of presenting just concrete images for the readers to understand the idea and experience feelings themselves. It , on the other hand , includes the presentation of deeply significant symbols of ideas and feelings for readers to interpret them intellectually ; the realist way of truly reflecting the reality of the world. Modern poetry



adopts the naturalistic way of going to the extreme of realism by showing the private , psychological , fantastic , and neurotic style.

As a comprehensive movement , modernism reveals breaking away from the established rules , traditions , and conventions. It reflects the perspective of looking at man's position and role in life , in addition to his experiments in form and style. Embracing change and modernity , modernism encompasses the works of thinkers who rebelled against the academic traditions in the nineteenth century believing that "traditional forms of art , architecture , literature , religious faith , social organization , and daily life were becoming outdated."⁷ They directly confront the new economic , social and political aspects of an emerging fully industrialized world. They also rebel against Victorian artificialities , moral bankruptcy and historical traditions. Moreover , they encourage the re-examination of every aspect of existence , such as , commerce and philosophy. Real shifts in natural sciences , social sciences , and liberal arts occur at the time of Modernism which makes the movement go after studying the data of these sciences. It instigate writers to pursue highly individualistic forms of writing. As the movement has been set in motion through a series of cultural shocks , including the Great War which ruined many lives in Europe, the followers of Modernism attempt the strategy of attack against the horror of war through encouraging literature.

2.Common Characteristics of Modern Poetry in Some Selected Poems

The 20th century poetry is a diverse genre covering a variety of subjects. There are common characteristics that changed literature , in general , and poetry , in particular , forever.

The main feature of modern poetry is freedom . Modern and Post modern poets exercise freedom to write in any structure they choose , such as , rhymed verse , blank verse , and free verse. They also have the freedom to experiment with new hybrid structures. A variety of use is followed by intensely personal imagery and allusions that can be in accessible to the majority of readers. Modern poetry is by_ and large free of the requirement that it makes sense or has meaning. It may have a feeling , an experience , a provocative shadow of an idea or embryonic idea in place of a well_ formed meaning. Though some poets create meaning for their readers , who must bring self to the poem.

Modern poetry , as W. B. Yeats called , "an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling"⁸. The analysis of poetic structure must show the identity of content or idea and the rhythmic conveyers of feeling. Poetry exists in a sensuous realm of sound and the poet's private experience of the rhythms of nature and human process must be accessible , through the senses and intellect , to the reader. To make them accessible , the poet provides a primary aesthetic surfaces for his poem. Rhythmic sound has the ability to imitate the forms of physical behavior as well as



express the highly complex , continually shifting nature of human emotion. The rhythmic form of the following line , for instance , is imitative ; one can hear the rise and fall of feet keeping time to the beat of a drum:

Stone , bronze , stone , steel , stone , oakleaves , horses' heels...

T.S. Eliot , "Coriolan"

Modern poetry is characterized by diverse variety of themes. Modern poets find inspirations from railway trains , tramcars , telephones and things of common place interest. They have not accepted the theory of great subjects for poetic compositions. Their experience is the whole universe to them. They do not fix their area of interest , but they make their choice of subjects flexible. So , the themes of modern poetry are found to be related to such topics as religion , science , mysticism , and fairyland. Hence , birth has been given to a great and wide variety of themes and poems.⁹ Furthermore , the modern poet writes on themes of real life , for example , *The Songs Train* by John Davidson , "Goods Train of Night" by Ashley , and "Machine Guns" by Alidington .

The poetry of the 20th century is marked with a note of realism. Realism in modern poetry is the product of a reaction against the pseudo romanticism of the last century over and above the influence of science. As a matter of fact , "realism is a healthy reaction against a convention which , if once valid , had by constant handling lost all the distinctness and ruggedness of reality."¹⁰ The modern poet sees life and paints it as it is with all its wait and ugliness .He tears the veil which the romantics had hug between life and art. Realism in modern poetry is mainly caused by the impact of science . Romanticism , pastoral aspects , shepherds , knights and such like tendencies have become part of the past. The modern poets have handled realistic things most daringly. The following lines belong to the poem "The Listeners" by Walter de La Mare:

'Is there anybody there?' said the traveler,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
'Is there anybody there?' he said .
But no one descended to the Traveller;



The poet ,here, extracts the image of the "Traveller" from reality when it is a moonlit night and deep in the forest , the traveler knocks insistently on the door of a 'lone house' where no response but silence. Although a 'host of phantom listeners' hear the traveler's call , he finds no one comes. The traveler keeps knocking louder and louder. The poem shows man's isolation in the modern world which is a reality that cannot be avoided.

Love also has a place in the characteristic dome of modern poetry.It is one of the common themes to all periods. As it has been stated that "the most common theme in modern poetry is love....this theme has been a favorite from the beginning."¹¹ Love , in fact , forms the subject of many modern lyrics. Robert Bridges has produced fine sonnets of love in *The Growth of Love* , for example , "I Will not Let Thee Go" and W. B. Yeats' "When You Are Old". This poem is directly addressed to the speaker's lover:

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face,

The poet concentrates on the love he once shared with a woman. The poem highlights the unrequited love for the beloved. Yeats asks her whether anyone has loved her as he did , and reminds her that he has fallen in love with her unconditionally. He loves her in all of her changes ; he loves her soul beside her beauty. The poet shows that his love is true and eternal since this love takes place in happiness and sadness ,and in false and true.

Disillusionment and pessimism are also observed in modern poetry. A gloomy shadow of the two World Wars has covered the modern age."The pessimistic note is the hallmark of modern poetry. Yeats's poetry , like that of Eliot and some of the other modern poets is marked with pessimism and disillusionment."¹² The age is being described as the age of anxiety and pessimism in spite of the technological progress. Tensions and anxieties overwhelm the whole age because of the lack of faith in religion which added to the gloominess of the age. As a result , pessimism becomes almost permanent in modern poetry. Many modern poets have pessimism as the main characteristic feature of their poetry , such as , Huxley , Hardy , and Eliot. The "Waste Land" serves as an example of the fact where Eliot shows the modern world as a place of despair:

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge , so many ,



I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs , short and infrequent , were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew , and stopped him , crying:
"Stetson!"

To Eliot , modern man finds nothing in this world but death. As the lines above suggest , Modern Age is the age of pain , sighs , and suffering. The poet shows the gloomy image of England.

Religion and mysticism also have a part in modern poetry. Skepticism and faith are dealt with by some modern poets who satirize modern society for becoming skeptic. Modern poets are divided into two sides ; Thomas Hardy laughs at God and A. E. Housman calls him "Brute". On the other hand , Eliot and Thomson have revived Christian Mysticism. D. H. Lawrence and W. B. Yeats are mystical poets too. Larkins has written poems like "Church Going" in which he mocks the loss of faith of modern people:

Or , after dark , will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer ; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games , in riddles , seemingly at random;
But superstition , like belief , must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass , weedy pavement , brambles , buttress , sky,

The poet shows modern people's beliefs as superstitions. He mocks their belief because the modern age has eliminated the role of religion in people's life. They come to have the blessing from the Divine and God's power in order to heal their physical and spiritual diseases. However , Larkins mocks them addressing them indirectly that they belong to the modern age which is an age of materialism and religious spirituality has no room in this age.

Poets in all ages , in all countries and in all languages have employed imagism and symbolism to enhance expressions and create an impact on the reader. Such movements



as Thought , Imagism , and Symbolism started late in twentieth century. A deep bond can be found between imagery and symbolism. As Kristian Smidt reveals:

Poetry is the language of actual thought , or actual Ideas. Its actuality is not merely contingent , and does not merely lie in its faithfulness to an external subject matter: it resides far more in its faithfulness to the movements of the mind and spirit of the poet. And this is manifested in the poetic use of imagery. For actual thought also tends to move in images.¹³

Symbolism and imagism are also notable features of modern poetry . In fact , modern poets choose symbolism over direct descriptions. Symbols and metaphors make modern poetry impressive and influential. As for imagism , it has revolted against Romanticism. T.E. Hulme is the poet who mainly inspired imagism. The use of common speech is the main element in Imagism with a great focus on a direct treatment of the subject. Hilda Doolittle is one of the founders of Imagism. "Oread" is her most famous poem which presents the nymph ordering the sea around:

Whirl up , sea_
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us_
Cover us with your pools of fir.

The poem is very short and simple and just like other poems , this poem focuses on the image of the sea crashing into the earth. The speaker tells the sea to fuse with the earth , and the poetess blends the images of the earth and sea with her language. She tells the sea to 'Splash your great pines / On our rocks.' The does not actually have pine trees , but she talks to the sea as if it was like the earth. She is breaking down the barriers between land and sea , which is exactly what the speaker of the poem tells the sea to do.

Moreover , modern poets write and express their love for nature in their poems. They love nature and the creatures which nature embraces. The poets get delight in the sensuous beauty of nature. George Eliot has his own sentence in this respect : "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat , and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."¹⁴ The reference here comes to remind people of the connection between the human life and nature as a part of the balance of life. Like Wordsworth , modern



poets fall in love with nature , but they present it realistically and precisely. W. H. Davies tackles the limited amount of leisure time that is spent in society through images are taken from nature. In his poem "Leisure" , Davies discusses this matter realistically and naturally:

What is this life if , full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see , when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see , in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars , like skies at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet , how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this is if , full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

It seems that life is at once deeply profound yet jerks itself back to what at first sounds quite trivial. Standing and staring at nature is wasting time for the modern man while it is a more constructive activity. At this point in his life , the speaker muses on the notion of standing and staring , and he wishes to suggest that life is certainly a poor thing , if people cannot tolerate the simple act of standing and staring. The poet names things of nature that fill out the old saw: stop and smell the roses. The speaker enjoys the scenery and he asserts that the human condition contrasts unfavorably with that of "sheep and cows". Those animals are allowed to stand and stare as long as they desire. The poet expresses his sadness since he could not take all the leisure time that he wishes. He as a human being , passing by a woods have no time to watch as squirrels roust about through the grass hiding their nuts for winter. The poet goes on mourning the lack of time for watching brooks , creeks , and rivers where he has concocted to see the "stars" during the day. There is no time to stop and watch a woman smiles as the smile begins with her eyes and then spreads to her mouth. The speaker shows how he can pick apart something as enigmatic as a smile by the powers of observation and intense musing. For the poet , human beings have a rather pitiful time that they cannot stop to enjoy what is going on in nature around them. The poet also laments that human beings are strapped with cares ,



worries , and so much responsibility that they cannot even start enjoying the beauty of nature and life as well. They lack a rich life and live a poor one instead.

Humanitarian spirit is another feature for modern poetry. Modern poets feel pity for their miserable condition and they express their sympathy for the human beings who live in misery. The sympathetic sense of modern poetry includes even the out casts , such as , criminals and drunkards. D. H. Lawrence has glorified flesh and body on one hand , and poets like Davidson and Masfield have glorified the heroism of the mean existence of the poor.

The metaphysical note can also be seen in modern poetry as there has been a revival of interest in the poetry of Donne and other metaphysical poets of the 17th century. Intellectual qualities of the metaphysical poets are reflected by modern poets. Eliot , for example , has revived metaphysical elements including farfetched imagery , paradoxes desire to startle and surprise , and wisdom which find expression in the poetry of modern poets.

One of the leading qualities of modern poetry is complexity and psychological element. Modern poetry is complex due to the allusions , symbols , images , abrupt contrasts , and elimination of conjunctive phrases . The development of this poetry " coincided with the rise to respectability within British culture of the discipline of psychology , founded both on the introspective analysis of mental process and on the scientific examination of the psychological and neurological aspects of mental life.¹⁵ In addition to these elements , the innovations like impressionism and Surrealism have made modern poetry obscure. Interior monologue is a psychological factor which is used as the medium of expression. Eliot's "The Wasteland" and "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock are obvious examples of obscure and psychological poems. Furthermore , the psychological elements have been inspired by psychologists like Freud and Jung.

Modern poetry also has the style and diction which is different from the poetry of the past. New verse_forms and poetic techniques are constantly experimented by the modern poet who uses the colloquial language that has become common. The language that they use resembles common speech. There is also the bonds of metre which have been loosened alongside with the use of 'verse_libre' that has become common as well. Modern poets do not follow rules of rhyme too. The style is a mixture of the old and the new ; it is traditional as well as experimental and it is complex , varied and many_sided. In fact , It has its own distinctive features.



Thomas Hardy's "The Oxen" exhibits an effective demonstration for the poet's modern perspective which is the urgent need , for modern man , to restore past beliefs in order to escape his current isolation.

"The Oxen"

Christmas Eve , and twelve of the clock.
'Now they are all on their knees , '
An elder sais as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years ! Yet , I feel ,
If someone said on Christmas Eve ,
'Come ; see the oxen kneel,

'In the lonely barton by yonder comb
Our Childhood used to know , '
I should go with him in the gloom ,
Hoping it might be so.

In his poem , Hardy recalls how at midnight on Christmas Eve , as the anniversary of the birth of Christ arrives , he sat with other people by the fire , and they pictured the oxen kneeling down in their 'strawy pen' , paying homage to the birth of Christ. There is obviously a link with the nativity scene here , where oxen and other animals knelt in the barn where Christ was born , according to legend. Back then , Hardy says neither he nor any of the other men present , in an inn perhaps to see in Christmas Day with a few ales , thought to doubt the idea that oxen knelt in homage to Christ.

In the third stanza , Hardy uses fricative alliteration to underscore sliding away of certainty 'So fair a fancy few would weave' . hardy reflects that , nowadays , most people would not believe in such a thing ; the magical sense of the oxen somehow knowing that it is Christmas and kneeling accordingly in reverence to Jesus which has been lost.



The poem reflects a yearning for childhood beliefs which the adult speaker cannot longer hold. It highlights the yearn to believe even though such beliefs are gone. The specific example of the oxen kneeling might be understood in the broader context of a belief in a deity: Thomas Hardy has lost his religious faith early in life , but he remains 'churchy' as he literally describes himself , with a profound affection for the liturgy of the Anglican Church.

Since the poem has been written during the First World War , it has a reference to the illusions which the war stripped and people who might have been clinging to a residual belief in old customs and traditions often found themselves becoming disillusioned very quickly. Thus , the pessimistic mood is overwhelming the poem except the final line which carries a hopeful note.

As far as the characteristics of modern poetry are concerned , Hardy's poem , in brief , includes religious faith and symbolism which is represented by the oxen kneeling for Jesus Christ. The oxen image is representative for it refers to modern people who are found to lose faith in the Church. Since the oxen are animals , one may say that the image is also related to nature. It may also refer to the people who turn to be like the oxen when they lose humanity. Pessimism is obviously followed by the poet through the whole poem. He talks about the pessimistic life under the umbrella of the World War consequences. However , the last line bears the hopeful note to recall the past innocence of childhood: 'Hoping it might be so.'

Conclusion:

In general , modern poetry gradually moves towards more difficulty and more allusiveness. Otherwise , it might not be able to represent modern humanity's crisis. Yet , most modern poets address their readers using simple common language. Because of the special problems of modern civilization , modern poetry is written in complex contexts. Modern poets realize that writing poetry directly is not enough for the modern reader. Thus , they also tend to express ideas and themes indirectly beside the simple language they adopt. They leave their poetry for modern readers to understand and interpret.

Modernization opens the door before literature in general and poetry in particular to be integrated with the featuring mood of modern age. Modern poetry tackles war , religion , pessimism , human issues , individuals , and society through symbolism , imagism , and unique styles in order to attract the modern reader's attention towards his crisis and dilemma in the modern society. It has been viewed as a concept creating new values and meanings. It also relates to changes in all sectors of society , including social relations , norms and personality. Modern poetry is known for discussing modernity which involves processes of specialization and differentiation , which eventually leads to



a modern world. Modernism and modern poetry are related in such a way that they should be maintained as distinct , at the same time , they vary and the sequence of their occurrence vary as well.

End Notes:

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