



Modern Poetry: Part 2

– Dr. S. Vasu

Professor Academy

Chennai

PG TRB English

17th June 2021



Today's Class

[Unit IV: under Poetry]

Part 1: Wilfred Owen

“Exposure”, “Greater Love”, “Mental Cases”

Part 2: W. H. Auden

“Consider this and in our time”

“Sir, no man's enemy”

“In Praise of Limestone”

Part 3: Stephen Spender

“The Prisoners”, “In railway halls”, “Ice”



Part 1:

Wilfred Owen

“Exposure”

“Greater Love”

“Mental Cases”



“Exposure”

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us . . .

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent . . .

Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient . . .

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,

Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.

Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

What are we doing here?





The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow . . .

We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army

Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,

But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.

Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,

With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,

But nothing happens.



Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.

—Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,—

We turn back to our dying.



Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
For love of God seems dying.

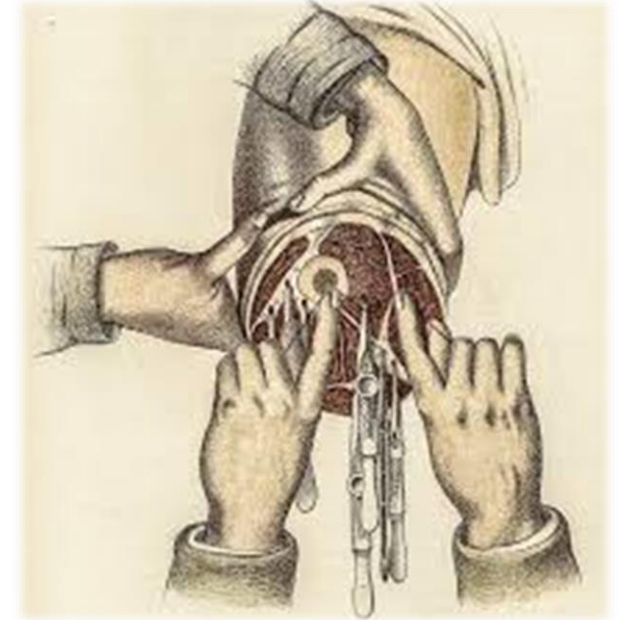
Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, and puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.



“Greater Love”

Red lips are not so red
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.
Kindness of wooed and wooer
Seems shame to their love pure.
O Love, your eyes lose lure
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

Your slender attitude
Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed,
Rolling and rolling there
Where God seems not to care;
Till the fierce love they bear
Cramps them in death's extreme decrepitude.





Your voice sings not so soft,—
Though even as wind murmuring through raftered loft,—
Your dear voice is not dear,
Gentle, and evening clear,
As theirs whom none now hear,
Now earth has stopped their piteous mouths that coughed.

Heart, you were never hot
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;
And though your hand be pale,
Paler are all which trail
Your cross through flame and hail:
Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.



“Mental Cases”

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,
Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,
Baring teeth that leer like skulls' tongues wicked?
Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic,
Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?
Ever from their hair and through their hand palms
Misery swelters. Surely we have perished
Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?





—These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
Always they must see these things and hear them,
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
Carnage incomparable and human squander
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.



Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented
Back into their brains, because on their sense
Sunlight seems a bloodsmear; night comes blood-black;
Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh
—Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,
Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.
—Thus their hands are plucking at each other;
Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;
Snatching after us who smote them, brother,
Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.



Part 2:

W. H. Auden

“Consider this and in our time”

“Sir, no man’s enemy”

“In Praise of Limestone”



“Consider this and in our time”

Consider this and in our time
As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman:
The clouds rift suddenly-look there
At cigarette-end smouldering on a border
At the first garden party of the year.
Pass on, admire the view of the massif
Through plate-glass windows of the Sport Hotel;
Join there the insufficient units
Dangerous, easy, in furs, in uniform
And constellated at reserved tables
Supplied with feelings by an efficient band
Relayed elsewhere to farmers and their dogs
Sitting in kitchens in the stormy fens.





Long ago, supreme Antagonist,
More powerful than the great northern whale
Ancient and sorry at life's 'limiting defect,
In Cornwall, Mendip, or the Pennine moor
Your comments on the highborn mining-captains,
Found they no answer, made them wish to die
-Lie since in barrows out of harm.
You talk to your admirers every day
By silted harbours, derelict works,
In strangled orchards, and the silent comb
Where dogs have worried or a bird was shot.



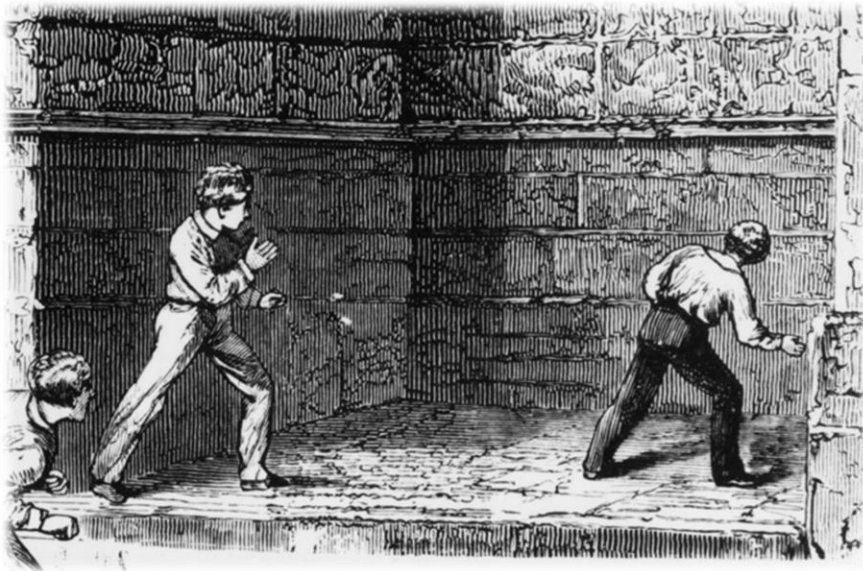
Order the ill that they attack at once :
Visit the ports and, interrupting
The leisurely conversation in the bar
Within a stone's throw of the sunlit water,
Beckon' your chosen out. Summon
Those handsome and diseased youngsters,
those women
Your solitary agents in the country parishes;
And mobilise the powerful forces latent
In soils that make the farmer brutal
In the infected sinus, and the eyes of stoats.





Then, ready, start your rumour, soft
But horrifying in its capacity to disgust
Which, spreading magnified, shall come to be
A polar peril, a prodigious alarm,
Scattering the people, as torn-up paper
Rags and utensils in a sudden gust,
Seized with immeasurable neurotic dread.

Financier, leaving your little room
Where the money is made but not spent,
You'll need your typist and your boy no more ;
The game is up for you and for the others,
Who, thinking, pace in slippers on the lawns .



Of College Quad or Cathedral Close,
Who are born nurses, who live in shorts
Sleeping with people and playing fives.
Seekers after happiness, all who follow
The convolutions of your simple wish,
It is later than you think; nearer that day
Far other than that distant afternoon
Amid rustle of frocks and stamping feet
They gave the prizes to the ruined boys.
You cannot be away, then, no
Not though you pack to leave within an hour,
Escaping humming down arterial roads:



The date was yours; the prey to fugues,
Irregular breathing and alternate ascendancies
After some haunted migratory years
To disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania
Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.



“Sir, No Man’s Enemy”



Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will his negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown virginity.



Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
And gradually correct the coward's stance;
Cover in time with beams those in retreat
That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great;
Publish each healer that in city lives
Or country houses at the end of drives;
Harrow the house of the dead; look shining at
New styles of architecture, a change of heart.



“In Praise of Limestone”

If it form the one landscape that we, the inconstant ones,
Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly
Because it dissolves in water. Mark these rounded slopes
With their surface fragrance of thyme and, beneath,
A secret system of caves and conduits; hear the springs
That spurt out everywhere with a chuckle,
Each filling a private pool for its fish and carving
Its own little ravine whose cliffs entertain
The butterfly and the lizard; examine this region
Of short distances and definite places:



[the Mediterranean locale of Ischia]



What could be more like Mother or a fitter background
For her son, the flirtatious male who lounges
Against a rock in the sunlight, never doubting
That for all his faults he is loved; whose works are but
Extensions of his power to charm? From weathered outcrop
To hill-top temple, from appearing waters to
Conspicuous fountains, from a wild to a formal vineyard,
Are ingenious but short steps that a child's wish
To receive more attention than his brothers, whether
By pleasing or teasing, can easily take.



Watch, then, the band of rivals as they climb up and down

 Their steep stone gennels in twos and threes, at times
Arm in arm, but never, thank God, in step; or engaged

 On the shady side of a square at midday in
Voluble discourse, knowing each other too well to think

 There are any important secrets, unable
To conceive a god whose temper-tantrums are moral

 And not to be pacified by a clever line
Or a good lay: for accustomed to a stone that responds,

 They have never had to veil their faces in awe
Of a crater whose blazing fury could not be fixed;



Adjusted to the local needs of valleys
Where everything can be touched or reached by walking,
Their eyes have never looked into infinite space
Through the lattice-work of a nomad's comb; born lucky,
Their legs have never encountered the fungi
And insects of the jungle, the monstrous forms and lives
With which we have nothing, we like to hope, in common.
So, when one of them goes to the bad, the way his mind works
Remains incomprehensible: to become a pimp
Or deal in fake jewellery or ruin a fine tenor voice
For effects that bring down the house, could happen to all
But the best and the worst of us...



That is why, I suppose,

The best and worst never stayed here long but sought
Immoderate soils where the beauty was not so external,

The light less public and the meaning of life
Something more than a mad camp. 'Come!' cried the granite wastes,

"How evasive is your humour, how accidental
Your kindest kiss, how permanent is death." (Saints-to-be

Slipped away sighing.) "Come!" purred the clays and gravels,



"On our plains there is room for armies to drill; rivers
Wait to be tamed and slaves to construct you a tomb
In the grand manner: soft as the earth is mankind and both
Need to be altered." (Intendant Caesars rose and
Left, slamming the door.) But the really reckless were fetched
By an older colder voice, the oceanic whisper:
"I am the solitude that asks and promises nothing;
That is how I shall set you free. There is no love;
There are only the various envies, all of them sad."



They were right, my dear, all those voices were right
And still are; this land is not the sweet home that it looks,
Nor its peace the historical calm of a site
Where something was settled once and for all: A back ward
And dilapidated province, connected
To the big busy world by a tunnel, with a certain
Seedy appeal, is that all it is now? Not quite:
It has a worldly duty which in spite of itself
It does not neglect, but calls into question
All the Great Powers assume; it disturbs our rights.





The poet,
Admired for his earnest habit of calling
The sun the sun, his mind Puzzle, is made uneasy
By these marble statues which so obviously doubt
His antimythological myth; and these gamins,
Pursuing the scientist down the tiled colonnade
With such lively offers, rebuke his concern for Nature's
Remotest aspects: I, too, am reproached, for what
And how much you know. Not to lose time, not to get caught,
Not to be left behind, not, please! to resemble
The beasts who repeat themselves, or a thing like water
Or stone whose conduct can be predicted, these



Are our common prayer, whose greatest comfort is music

Which can be made anywhere, is invisible,

And does not smell. In so far as we have to look forward

To death as a fact, no doubt we are right: But if
Sins can be forgiven, if bodies rise from the dead,

These modifications of matter into

Innocent athletes and gesticulating fountains,

Made solely for pleasure, make a further point:

The blessed will not care what angle they are regarded from,

Having nothing to hide. Dear, I know nothing of

Either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love

Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur

Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape.





Part 3:

Stephen Spender

“The Prisoners”

“In railway halls”

“Ice”



“The Prisoners”

Far far the least of all, in want,
Are these
The prisoners
Turned massive with their vaults and dark with dark.
They raise no hands, which rest upon their knees,
But lean their solid eyes against the night,
Dimly they feel
Only the furniture they use in cells.





Their Time is almost Death. The silted flow
Of years on years
Is marked by dawns
As faint as cracks on mud-flats of despair.

My pity moves amongst them like a breeze
On walls of stone
Fretting for summer leaves, or like a tune
On ears of stone.

Then, when I raise my hands to strike,
It is too late,
There are no chains that fall
Nor visionary liquid door
Melted with anger.



When have their lives been free from walls and dark
And airs that choke?
And where less prisoner to let my anger
Like a sun strike?

If I could follow them from room to womb
To plant some hope
Through the black silk of the big-bellied gown
There would I win.

No, no, no,
It is too late for anger,
Nothing prevails
But pity for the grief they cannot feel.





“In railway halls”

In railway halls, on pavements near the traffic,
They beg, their eyes made big by empty staring
And only measuring Time, like the blank clock.

No, I shall weave no tracery of pen-ornament
To make them birds upon my singing tree:
Time merely drives these lives which do not live
As tides push rotten stuff along the shore.





- There is no consolation, no, none

In the curving beauty of that line

Traces on our graphs through history, where the oppressor
Starves and deprives the poor.

Paint here no draped despairs, no saddening clouds

Where the soul rests, proclaims eternity.

But let the wrong cry out as raw as wounds

This Time forgets and never heals, far less transcends.



“Ice”

She came in from the snowing air
Where icicle-hung architecture
Strong white fleece round the Baroque square.
I saw her face freeze in her fur,
Then my lips ran to her with fire
From the chimney corner of the room,
Where I had waited in my chair.





I kissed their heat against her skin
And watched the red make the white bloom,
While, at my care, her smiling eyes
Shone with the brilliance of the ice
Outside, whose dazzling they brought in.
That day, until this, I forgot.
How is it now I so remember
Who, when she came indoors, saw not
The passion of her white December?

To contact **Professor Academy:**

7550100920



professoracademy.in