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BA English Honours | Semester IV | ENG4CJ203

Journey Through The World of Poetry

Module 4: Contemporary Trends: Eco-Poetry, Feminism, Marginality, and Queer Aesthetics • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 4: Cutting-Edge Paradigms in Contemporary Verse

Contemporary poetry operates as a dynamic frontier challenging normative social structures, ecological exploitation, and systemic prejudice. By embracing concrete visual typography, ecocritical awareness, feminist rage, Dalit emancipatory poetics, and queer self-fashioning, modern poets reclaim the margins as vibrant centers of aesthetic innovation.

4.1 Visual Typography and Modernist Lyrical Intimacy: E. E. Cummings

E. E. Cummings fundamentally revolutionized poetic typography, punctuation, and syntax. In his famous lyric "i carry your heart with me(i carry it in my heart)," Cummings dissolves rigid mechanical punctuation, using lower-case typography and nested parenthetical enjambment to visually mimic the seamless, unbroken unity of romantic devotion.

4.2 Ecocritical Desolation: Earle Birney's "Bushed"

Canadian poet Earle Birney's "Bushed" (1951) deconstructs the romantic pastoral myth of the benevolent northern wilderness. The poem portrays an isolated trapper who builds a cabin in the rugged Canadian wilderness, only to find the primeval landscape—jagged rock faces, biting cold, and howling winds—hostile and alien. Nature is not an idyllic sanctuary; it drives the protagonist into paranoid isolation, reflecting the terror of an unyielding ecological reality.

4.3 Feminist Reclamation and Diaspora: Warsan Shire's "Backwards"

Somali-British poet Warsan Shire utilizes revolutionary non-linear narrative syntax in her poem "Backwards." The poem imagines rewinding traumatic domestic and global events—the domestic violence of a father against a mother, forced refugee migration, war devastation—running the tape backward until the mother is laughing, the war planes fly home, and the world returns to an unblemished state of childhood safety, exposing the deep scars carried by displaced women.

4.4 Dalit Body and Village Topography: Sukirtharani's "Portrait of My Village"

Tamil Dalit feminist poet Sukirtharani's "Portrait of My Village" exposes the brutal spatial segregation of caste in rural South India. The Dalit settlement (*cheri*) is pushed to the burning, barren edges of the village, deprived of potable water, sanitation, and dignity. Sukirtharani’s visceral, somatic imagery transforms the Dalit body and the village earth into sites of political confrontation, dismantling romanticized depictions of pastoral Indian village harmony.

4.5 Queer Vulnerability and Community: Kai Cheng Thom

Chinese-Canadian trans poet and performance artist Kai Cheng Thom's "What the Queer Community Should Have Told Us" interrogates the internal contradictions, beauty, and vulnerabilities within queer and trans spaces. Thom balances radical queer celebration with honest discussions of mental health, trauma, and the continuous labor required to build genuine sanctuary across diverse marginalities.

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Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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