

Poetry of the World

Week 3

Today we'll be looking at:

- 1) Irish Poetry: The Bards of Ireland
- 2) Caribbean Poetry: The Traditional vs The Political
- 3) Sufi Poetry: The Divine Arts

Warm Up

“When writing poetry, use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something. Don’t use such an expression as ‘dim land of peace’. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer’s not realising that the natural object is always the adequate symbol. Go in fear of abstractions.” -Ezra Pound

Think about this quote. Do you agree with Pound? Does extra description and detail distract from a poem or improve it?

Write a new piece, or rewrite a previous piece thinking about this quote- you can agree with Pound, and write it as natural as possible, or completely go against him, and make your piece as grand and dramatic as possible.

If you’re stuck for ideas on what to write, think about an event from your past week, or a story/poem you’ve heard/read/seen lately and draw inspiration from that.

You have **5 minutes**.

Irish Poetry

- Ireland has a rich history of poetry – before the modern era, Irish poetry could be put into the category of what we know today as ‘epic poetry’, poetry with great narratives that explored heroes and tragedies.
- By the seventh century, Ireland was host to many Christian monasteries that became epicentres of literary scholarship. Later, Bardic schools were formed across the country and were considered extremely prestigious. In Medieval times, Kings and Chieftains would have a poetic bard as an official place within their respective courts.
- The Irish bards were highly respected & not just there to chronicle court life like a scribe was, they were free to incorporate satire and romanticism in their sonnets.
- The Irish bards were metaphorical Rockstars. Whether a person in a high society position was liked or hated would come largely down to how a bard would write about them, and because of this people went out of their way to get on a bard’s good side- often showering them with gifts and praise.

Let's look at a poem from the bard Dallán mac Móire, who wrote many poems in service and relating to his King Cerbhall of Leinster. This one is about a family sword passed down through the Kings bloodline.

Hail, sword of Cerbhall ! Oft hast thou been in the great
woof of war, oft giving battle, beheading high princes.
Oft hast thou gone a-raiding in the hands of kings, oft hast
thou divided the spoil.
Many a shield hast thou cleft in battle, many a head, many
a chest, many a fair skin.
Forty years without sorrow Enna had thee, who gave thee
to his own son, to Dunlang.
Who shall henceforth possess thee? or to whom wilt thou
deal ruin? Now that Cerbhall is departed, with whom wilt
thou be bedded ?
Thou shalt not be neglected. Come to Naas, where Finn of
the feasts is — there they will hail thee with ' Welcome !'

The following is a piece from Chief Poet Senchán Torpéist. He wrote the piece as revenge on Mice he suspected ate a meal his wife had prepared for him.

*Mice, though sharp their snouts,
Are not powerful in battles;
I will bring death on the party
For having eaten Bridget's present.
Small was the present she made us,
Its loss to her was not great,
Let her have payment from us in a poem,
Let her not refuse the poet's gratitude!
You mice, which are in the roof of the house,
Arise all of you, and fall down.*



- Irish poetry is one of the few forms of poetry from around the world that can and has incorporated multiple languages in the same pieces of work; Gaelic, Latin, and even English.
- Irish poetry differs from English poetry in that the emphasis is not put on the rhyming scheme (although this is more common today) but on the syllables.
- Examples of this include the Trian Rannaigehta Moire, where each line has 4 syllables and ends in a consonate:

Spring storm dumps snow,
glazes green clumps,
bends bows low
to grow huge humps.

March makes mischief:
tricksters take wing
practicing pranks
on silly Spring.

- 'Trickster Time' by Barbara Hartman

Caribbean Poetry

- Caribbean Poetry is hard to categorise – epic poetry, lyrical verse, prose poems, dramatic poetry; Caribbean poetry encompasses many different genres, and is not bound by or the other.
- Traditional poetry of the Caribbean is tied to folklore and the Caribbean language itself. Tales like ‘The Ligahoo’, the story of a shape changer who made a deal with the devil, and ‘The Soucouyant’, the Caribbean version of a vampire, are often told, retold, and narratively explored through poetry.
- Similarly to how African and Native American poetry are means of preserving culture, Caribbean poetry typically gives a metaphorical middle finger to ideas of imperialism and colonisation.
- Let’s watch an example from Ms. Lou, who was one of the Caribbean's most notable poets:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMRnWmSN6MI&ab_channel=ChrissyB00

- The Caribbean's history is one rife with struggle. Events like the Great Depression, which left many manual labour jobs in the Caribbean severely underpaid, have influenced the arts.
- It is a point of contention amongst Caribbean poets and philosophers today as to whether Caribbean poetry should be more political or stick to its traditional roots.
- McFarlane, a Caribbean poet, felt poetry 'should go beyond politics' and young poets should stick to the 'traditional forms', to which young Caribbean writers such as George Lamming argued that such a thing was impossible. That years of slavery, conquest and colonialism have created a 'global family' amongst Caribbean's, African's, & Indonesian's among others that has formed its own culture.
- What do you think? Thinking both in and beyond the Caribbean, Do politics have a place in Poetry?

Surely the political and the traditional can co-exist? Ms. Lou seems to think so.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W58MtDzanqA&ab_channel=ShakaRaSpeaks

- A talk from Ms Lou on 'Patwah', Jamaican language and the understanding thereof.

Ms. Lou was a Jamaican poet and writer who believed that tradition, folklore and language was by its own nature political. Any time a Caribbean or Indigenous person was to occupy a space with their culture, this was, in essence, a form of protest against imperialism. Her work explores this in an energetic and comedic fashion.

Let's look at her poem, 'Colonization in Reverse'.



Wat a joyful news, miss Mattie,
I feel like me heart gwine burs
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in reverse.

By de hundred, by de tousan
From country and from town,
By de ship-load, by de plane-load
Jamaica is Englan boun.

Dem a pour out a Jamaica
Everybody future plan
Is fe get a big-time job
An settle in de mother lan.

What a islan! What a people!
Man an woman, old an young
Jus a pack dem bag an baggage
An tun history upside dung!

Some people doan like travel,
But fe show dem loyalty
Dem all a open up cheap-fare-
To-Englan agency.

An week by week dem shippin off
Dem countryman like fire,
Fe immigrate an populate
De seat a de Empire.

Oonoo see how life is funny,
Oonoo see de tunabout?
Jamaica live fe box bread
Out a English people mout'.

For wen dem ketch a Englan,
An start play dem different role,
Some will settle down to work
An some will settle fe de dole.

Jane say de dole is not too bad
Because dey payin she
Two pounds a week fe seek a job
Dat suit her dignity.

Me say Jane will never fine work
At de rate how she dah look,
For all day she stay pon Aunt Fan couch
An read love-story book.

Wat a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse,
But me wonderin how dem gwine stan
Colonizin in reverse.

Sufi Poetry

- Sufi Poetry, written primary in Persian, is used mostly for devotional and spiritual purposes.
- Early Islamic Poetry retained to writing and speaking about tribal life, and how to bring honour to ones tribe.
- Sufi is about the direct and personal relationship with God, and understanding humanity and divinity through Sufi Poetry. It explores the perceived differences between divine & man, and the yearning for faith.
- The duality of Sufi Poetry explores two themes; love and death. Love, as coined Rabia of Basra, is a direct manifestation of God, and death is merely the next phase of life.
- Sufi poetry is about peace and prosperity, and through the Sufi's people tolerant nature, has influenced Hindu & Muslim literature over the years. The legacy of Sufi poetry is one of communal harmony.

The whole world is a marketplace for Love,
For naught that is, from Love remains remote.
The Eternal Wisdom made all things in Love.
On Love they all depend, to Love all turn.
The earth, the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars
The center of their orbit find in Love.
By Love are all bewildered, stupefied,
Intoxicated by the Wine of Love.

From each, Love demands a mystic silence.
What do all seek so earnestly? 'Tis Love.
Love is the subject of their inmost thoughts,
In Love no longer "Thou" and "I" exist,
For self has passed away in the Beloved.
Now will I draw aside the veil from Love,
And in the temple of mine inmost soul
Behold the Friend, Incomparable Love.
He who would know the secret of both worlds
Will find that the secret of them both is Love.

- Farid ud Din Attar, in Essential Sufism, James Fadiman and Robert Frager

Hatim al-Asamm said, "I have chosen four things to know
and discarded all other things of knowledge.

"The first is this: I know that my daily bread is
apportioned
to me and will neither be increased or decreased, so I
have stopped
trying to add to it.

"Secondly, I know I owe to God a debt which no one
else can
pay for me, so I am busy about paying it.

"Thirdly, I know that there is someone pursuing me ---
Death --- whom I cannot escape from, so I have prepared
myself
to meet him.

"Fourth, I know that God is observing me, so I am
ashamed
to do what I should not."

- Farid ud Din Attar, translation by Andrew Harvey and
Eryk Hanut - 'Perfume of the Desert'

Exercise

- We're going to wrap up with an exercise. You have three options on what to do:
- **Write like a bard!** Think of an event from your own or someone else's life. (choose someone close to you, a fictional character, or someone in the public eye) In the style of epic poetry, write about this event. You can be grandiose, romanticise, or even put a satirical take on it.
- **The traditional and the political:** Think of a story/poem you've written/read/seen/heard. Does this piece have any underlying political theme to it? Can it have one? Expand on the work in a poem exploring what this piece says about culture or society.
- **Faith through art:** Think about your faith (or lack thereof), how would you communicate your spirituality through a piece of poetry? This could be a piece reflecting on the lessons taught by your own spirituality or faith, or could be a method of direct commune with whatever you consider to be a 'higher power'
- There are no wrong answers! Go wherever you wish to with one of these prompts, or if something else we've discussed today has inspired a different kind of piece, write that!

You have **10 minutes**.