

# An Introduction to Contemporary Poetry

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■ Postmodernity is seen as a socio-economic mode that has intensified and surpassed modernity itself then poetry produced under this new mode might be dismissed as another form of postmodern candyfloss neatly packed for our therapeutic consumption.

- The characteristics of Post-Modern Poetry include many modernist themes and many modernist themes taken to new levels. The largest indicator of Post-modern poetry is the “absence of a single dominant style”

- Other characteristics include, “Mix of image with narrative, mix of image with discursive, precise observation, philosophical reflection, open-ended juxtaposition, multiple stories, alterations in Point of View, digressions, no coherence or closure, and unexpected jumps & disjunctive thinking.”

■ There is also “an apprehension of the invisible world, fragmentation”, and a style that appears to be a “poetic diary or journal.”

The contemporary poets see language as a means of reaching the inner self and the emotion that is difficult to give voice to. The twentieth century ushered in many new discoveries, most importantly the discovery of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud.

- The advent of psychoanalysis gave people the means of accessing the individuals inner self. Modern poets sought to explore the inner workings of the individual as a human being, giving a concrete language to emotion.

- Wallace Stevens believed that the reality you are experiencing is your emotional state at any given time. We respond to our interpretations of what happens, not what has happened.



- This gives you an emotional state, an emotional state that reinforces and affects interpretation which in turn affects emotions. As we translate the material world into words we change the material world.

- Gwendolyn Brooks uses irregular lines and sudden rhythm to convey the emotion of anger and indifference. Her voice is one of passionate observation that expresses love and rage.



- In “a song in the front yard”, Brooks explores the class distinctions of the ghettos. The poem illuminates the human condition of presenting a polished aspects of our personality to the masses while harboring a wild, untamed personality on the inside.

- We note that the front yard is tended carefully, while the back yard is left wild. “I want a peek at the back Where it’s rough and untended and hungry weed grows. A girl gets sick of a rose” (Brooks 2780). The outside nurtures something wild within. Creating a dyad, Brooks makes what is unfamiliar inside, what is familiar is outside.

*General Features  
of Postmodern Poetry*

## ■ 1. Iconoclasm:

Poetry decanonizes cultural standards, previous artworks and authorities denies authority to the author, discounting his intentions and his claim to act as spokesman for a period contradicts the expected, often deliberately alienating the reader subverts its sources by parody, irony and pastiche denounces ethnic, gender and cultural repression strips context, reducing content to an austere minimum broods on the human condition disclosed by radical literary theory.

## **2. groundless:**

It employs flat, media-like images that have no reference beyond themselves  
champions the primary, unmediated but not sensuous regards both art and life as fictions, sometimes mixing the two in magic realism or multiple endings  
argues that meaning is indeterminate, denying a final or preferred interpretation.

### **3. formlessness:**

repudiates modernism's preoccupation with harmony and organic form narrows the aesthetic distance, art being something to enter into or act out rather than simply admire fragments texts, turning them into collages or montages avoids the shaping power of metaphor and other literary tropes mixes genres with pastiche, travesty and cliché promotes the fluid and socially adaptable.

## **4. populism:**

It employs material from a wide social spectrum eschews elitist, literary language avoids the serious and responsible, promoting the arbitrary and playful accepts media images as the most accessible contemporary reality, making these the building blocks of art.

- Postmodernism believes the view that there is no absolute truth and truth is relative. It asserts that truth is not mirrored in human understanding of it, but is rather constructed as the mind tries to understand its own personal reality. So facts are falsehood and interchangeable.

- Where modernism attempts to find depth and interior meaning beneath the surface of objects and events, postmodernism prefers to dwell on the exterior image and avoids drawing conclusions or suggesting underlying meanings associated with interior events or objects.

- whereas modernism focused on central themes and a united vision in a particular piece of literature, postmodernism sees human experience as unstable, internally contradictory, ambiguous, fragmented and indeterminate with no one specific reality possible.

- Whereas modern poets guide and control the reader's response to their work, the postmodern create an open work in which the reader must supply his own connections, work out alternative meanings, and provide his own interpretation.

# Degrees of Difficulty in Postmodern Poetry

While difficulty can be deemed as being a subjective issue, poems are regarded as being intellectually challenging from a general perspective. Unlike other forms of writing which are straightforward, poetry is known for its distinctive feature of being obscured.

For the reader to have a full and clear comprehension of a poem, he or she needs to put themselves within the context in which the writer was while penning down the work, as well as their state of mind. Otherwise, the reader would not be able to understand the message being communicated by the author and would, in the stead, only perceive the work as being a collection of words that do not make any sense.

Poetic difficulty can be categorized into various forms of difficulty. For instance, lexical difficulty is directly related to the choice of words used by the author. This kind of difficulty may be experienced by the reader when they come across words used by the author and which the reader is not familiar with.

Allusive difficulty, on the other hand, is concerned with the reader's incapability to understand the message being alluded to by the author. In this case, for instance, the author may possess some form of knowledge that the reader does not.

The words may be used to connote an idea that is different from the dictionary definition of the particular words. In such a case, the reader may be confused as to the meaning of the words used by the author, and with regard to the message being communicated by the author. Without being able to comprehend the specific words, the reader finds the entire poem as being difficult to understand.