

CALL FOR PAPERS

UGC SPONSORED NATIONAL SEMINAR

Organised By

Lal Baba College, Behurmath,

In Collaboration with

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Behurmath (D.U)

9th & 10th December, 2014

Venue: Lal Baba College

Title – “Awful Daring”: Modernism and Poetry’s Transfigured Moment

Unfortunately Modernism has not, in the English-speaking world, been rightly understood. For too long it has been seen as a revolution in the diction of poetry and nothing more. However, at the artistic level, Modernism was nothing short of a radical crisis of confidence in the authority of the poet or creator. Where the Romantic poet had been convinced of the truth and value of what he had to say, his modern counterpart could only see the absurdity of such a posture. – The need to write and the meaninglessness of all writing was the paradoxical law under which the modern artist seemed to work.

In Kierkegaard, who wrote a brilliant book on authority, we find the first major questioning of authority. And this is a problem that has dogged all the major poets of the 20th century: how to convey the sense of the partiality and distortion of books when all one has at one’s disposal are books? This explains why modern poetry is, in a sense, anti-poetry.

Our Seminar would seek to begin its reappraisal of ‘modernist’ poetry from the beginning of the ‘poetry wars’, the revolutionary decade between 1912 and 1922 when T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound introduced the poetic styles and cultural values that would change the rest of the century’s poetry for good. – The notion that modernist art was a world whose intellectual and aesthetic concerns were largely unique to itself was encouraged by both modernists and later their opponents, and the division between them has been articulated in various oppositions over the century: popular vs. professional poets, school vs. university, traditional vs. avant-garde, rootedly national vs. exiled international, unified vs. fragmented, formal vs. free. None of these antitheses are true of the situation as it was in 1912, but if they reflect the basic division that literary criticism has, ever since, drawn between modernist poetry and its contemporaries, they also indicate how any account of this period has the rest of the 20th century peering over its shoulder. Our seminar, therefore, will attempt to take a fresh look at the decade in question and its changing poetic and cultural valency in later decades of the 20th century.

Any survey of the general trends in 20th century poetry, written in English, in Britain and outside it, would establish the fact that a great deal of such writing owes as much or more to R.S. Thomas and Thomas Hardy's example than it does to Pound and Eliot. We want to keep this in focus at all times. – But, it is also certain that poetry in English, inside and outside Britain has been irrevocably changed by Modernism. Not only did Modernism introduce new styles and languages for poetry, it also ensured that there could be no way to hear the old ones in the same way. Our Seminar would be alive to this reality as well.

In instituting these probes and renewed appraisals of the foundational myths of modernist poetry, their survivals and transformations in the rest of the 20th century, however, we wish to avoid the tag of being 'fragmentary' in our approach. The idea we have is to work towards a holistic conception of how 'alternative' Modernisms operated in and affected poetry from the early decades to the close of the 20th century. We use the plural form of Modernism to acknowledge the regional and national emanation of movements in poetry that reassessed, adopted and challenged modernist poetics throughout the 20th century. Our seminar would consider the extent to which all such Modernisms can be viewed as part of a network of alternatives to tradition, realism, representation, mass culture, technology or even to each other.

Contrasts, cultural shifts and enjambments are therefore by-words of the modernist tradition in poetry. For William Carlos Williams in 1921, Eliot's pedantry in the *Wasteland* returned poetry to the classroom. However, Williams's democratic model of modernist poetry requires as much exegesis for us as Eliot's elitist masterpiece. Between the polar extremes represented by Eliot and Williams we find a heterogeneous array of modernist poetry. Our seminar wishes to deliberate on these multiple headings of the broad church of poetic modernism that include Wallace Stevens's post-Arnoldian idea of poetry as a substitute for religion, the avant-garde 'écriture féminine' of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Mina Loy, and the cultural nationalisms of African-American and Irish poetry.

Further, our Seminar proposes to include a network of poets from around the world, in the erstwhile British colonies, as subjects of scrutiny. Our intention is neither to elide the differences between Modernism and Postcolonialism, nor to quarantine them in disciplinary isolation from one another, but, by identifying a trans-hemispheric and trans-historical common ground, to explore significant points of intersection between them. From Derek Walcott to Chinua Achebe, from Christopher Okigbo to A.K. Ramanujan, and from Kamau Braithwaite to Agha Sahid Ali, to name but a few, poets have openly acknowledged the role Euro-modernism has played in the formation of their aesthetics and Kamau Braithwaite's claim that T.S. Eliot helped Caribbean poets forge a vernacular poetics based in the region's speech rhythms is but the most famous example.

Despite the widespread critical assumption that postcolonial writers have rejected literary modernism, they have indigenized such modernist structures as trans-local

geographies that layer the local and the foreign, heteroglot vocabularies that creolize standard and dialectical registers, syncretic fusions that counterpoint diverse religious and mythical systems, and apocalyptic imaginings that conjure cultural transformation. Our Seminar would invite deliberations on these various poets in their own right or as suggested before, in comparative frameworks.

No seminar on modernist poetry can be complete without focusing on the role of little magazines and journals in propagating and intensifying the avant-garde trajectories across the swiftly altering face of the literary market-place of the late 19th and early 20th century. Modernist poetry was aimed at an unashamedly elitist readership of connoisseurs. Popularity was seen as failure of nerve, rather than as a token of success.

Our Seminar would therefore encourage discussion and papers on this and other mentioned areas of the establishment, provenance and transfiguration of modernist poetics beginning in the early decades and culminating in the close of the 20th century itself.

We welcome proposals in the following areas (But not strictly limited to them)

- **The Poetry Wars of 1912 to 1922**
- **Eliot & Pound, their relationship to Georgian Poets and to themselves**
- **Imagism, Vorticism, Surrealism, Dada & Futurism in English poetry**
- **War Poetry & Modernist poetics**
- **Avant-Garde collaborations between artists & poets**
- **The role of Little Magazines like The Little Review, Dial, Poetry, Quiver, Scribners, Criterion, Scrutiny & Southern Review &c/ the role of larger journals like TLS &c**
- **Modernist treatment of gender & sexuality in poetry**
- **The role of Hilda Doolittle, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, Mina Loy & Amy Lowell**
- **The role of such women poets as Edith Sitwell & Charlotte Mew**
- **W.B. Yeats & Irish poetry**
- **The role of Hugh MacDiarmid, Basil Bunting, William Empson, John Rodker, Nancy Cunard, David Jones & Lynette Roberts**
- **Gender, sexuality & Modernist Poetry in the 20s & 30s**
- **The anti-modernism of Philip Larkin & Donald Davie**
- **The poetry of Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky & Charles Olson**
- **Modernist poetry & the Harlem Renaissance**
- **The works of Langston Hughes, Claude Mackay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Helene Johnson, Douglas Johnson & Angelina Weld Grimké**
- **Modernist poetics vs. Creole poetics**
- **The contributions of Kamau Brithwaite, Lorna Goodison, Louise Bennett, Derek Walcott & David Dabydeen**

- **The negotiation of African modernity and the role of modernist poetics**
- **The contributions of Okot p'Bitek, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor, Kofi Anyidoho, John Pepper Clark, Oda Ofeimun & Denis Brutus**
- **The Angry Penguins vs. Jindyworobaks debates in Australia**
- **Negotiating modernism in Indian/ South Asian English poetry**
- **The role of Rabindranath Tagore as poet, critic and philosopher in his negotiations with European modernist practices**
- **The contributions of A.K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Agha Sahid Ali, Keki Daruwalla, Arun Kolatkar & Jayanta Mahapatra**

Abstracts of no more than 250 words are invited from presenters and may be sent at the following email id -- modernismugc14@gmail.com within 1st October, 2014. Selection of abstracts shall be made by the 15th of October and presenters shall be duly informed by the 18th of October. Completed papers need to be submitted by selected presenters at the above email id by the 1st of December, 2014.