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قسم اللغة الانكليزية

Modern poetry

Theoretical Foundations of Modern Poetry

T. E. Hulme, Classicism, Anti-Romanticism, and the Birth of the Modern Image

الادب الانكليزي / ماجستير

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Introduction

The emergence of Modern Poetry in the early twentieth century represented one of the most significant revolutions in literary history. Modernist poets rejected many of the assumptions that had dominated nineteenth-century literature, particularly the Romantic emphasis on emotion, self-expression, individual genius, and the transcendental imagination. Instead, they sought new forms of poetic expression capable of representing the fragmented, urban, and rapidly changing realities of modern life.

Among the most important intellectual figures in this transformation was T. E. Hulme (1883–1917). Although his poetic output was relatively small, his influence on Modernist poetry was immense. Hulme provided many of the theoretical foundations that later shaped Imagism and influenced poets such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.

According to Beasley, Hulme's importance lies not simply in his poems but in his critical ideas. He challenged Romantic assumptions, advocated a return to classical restraint, and developed a new understanding of poetic imagery. Through poems such as "Autumn," "A City Sunset," "Above the Dock," and "The Embankment," Hulme demonstrated a radically different poetic practice that helped establish the foundations of Modernism.

Historical Context: The Crisis of Romanticism

By the beginning of the twentieth century, many writers believed that Romantic poetry no longer adequately represented modern experience.

Romanticism emphasized:

- * Individual emotion
- * Imagination
- * Nature
- * Spiritual transcendence
- * Subjective experience

However, modern society was increasingly characterized by:

- * Urbanization
- * Industrialization
- * Technological change
- * Social fragmentation
- * Scientific rationalism

Many poets felt that Romantic language had become overly emotional, abstract, and detached from contemporary reality. Hulme became one of the first critics to articulate a systematic rejection of Romanticism.

Hulme's Anti-Romanticism

One of Hulme's most influential arguments concerns the distinction between Romanticism and Classicism. According to Hulme, Romanticism is based on an unrealistic view of human nature. Romantics often assume:

- * Human beings are naturally good.
- * The imagination possesses limitless power.
- * Individuals can transcend ordinary limitations.

Hulme rejected these assumptions.

He argued that human beings are finite, imperfect, and limited. Therefore, poetry should not indulge in emotional excess or visionary idealism. Instead, poetry should recognize human limitations and represent reality with precision and restraint. This position became one of the foundational principles of Modernist aesthetics.

Hulme's Classicism

In opposition to Romanticism, Hulme advocated a form of classicism. For Hulme, classicism does not simply mean imitation of ancient literature.

Rather, it involves:

- * Discipline
- * Precision
- * Restraint
- * Objectivity
- * Formal control

Classical poetry acknowledges human limitations. Romantic poetry seeks to escape them. Hulme famously described Romanticism as "spilt religion." By this, he meant that Romantic poets transferred religious emotions into literature after traditional religious beliefs had weakened. As a result, poetry often became sentimental and excessively emotional. Hulme sought a more disciplined poetic language grounded in concrete reality.

The Idea of the Image

Perhaps Hulme's most important contribution to modern poetry is his emphasis on the image. For Hulme, poetry should communicate through precise visual images rather than abstract statements. Instead of explaining emotions directly, poets should present concrete sensory details. The image allows readers to experience meaning rather than simply receive information.

Characteristics of the poetic image include:

- * Precision
- * Brevity

- * Visual clarity
- * Concentration
- * Sensory immediacy

This emphasis later became central to Imagism, one of the first major Modernist movements. Ezra Pound would later develop Hulme's ideas into the Imagist principle of "direct treatment of the thing."

"Autumn": Analysis

"Autumn" is one of Hulme's most famous poems and a classic example of early Modernist imagery. The poem presents an autumn evening through a series of concise visual impressions. Rather than describing nature in Romantic terms, Hulme offers a brief, highly concentrated image.

The moon is compared to a "red-faced farmer."

This comparison is striking because it avoids traditional poetic language.

Instead of idealizing nature, Hulme presents an ordinary, almost humorous image.

The poem illustrates several Modernist principles:

- * Compression
- * Precision
- * Visual immediacy
- * Rejection of sentimentality

Unlike Romantic descriptions of nature, Hulme's nature is concrete, physical, and unsentimental.

"A City Sunset"

Modern Urban Experience

Unlike many Romantic poets who celebrated rural landscapes, Hulme frequently focuses on urban environments.

"A City Sunset" presents the modern city as a legitimate subject for poetry.

The poem captures a fleeting visual moment. Rather than providing emotional commentary, Hulme concentrates on perception itself. The city becomes a collection of images rather than a symbolic landscape. This focus reflects Modernism's growing interest in:

- * Urban life
- * Everyday experience
- * Fragmentary perception

The poem demonstrates how beauty can emerge from ordinary modern settings.

"Above the Dock"

The Image as Structure

"Above the Dock" is among the earliest poems to embody Imagist principles. The poem presents a brief visual scene involving the moon and urban surroundings. Meaning emerges through the juxtaposition of images rather than through narrative or explanation.

The poem's brevity is significant.

Every word contributes to the overall image.

Nothing is unnecessary.

This economy of language became a defining feature of Modernist poetry.

The poem demonstrates Hulme's belief that poetry should present rather than explain.

recision offer advantages over Romantic emotional expression?