

Modern poetry

What “modern poetry” means?

Modern poetry developed mainly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the world was changing fast:

- industrialization
- world wars
- collapsing religious and social certainties
- new psychology (Freud), new politics, new science

Poets felt the old romantic, musical style couldn't express this new reality anymore, So they changed the rules.

Key features of modern poetry

1. Breaks traditional form

- Less strict rhyme and meter
- Free verse becomes common

The poems may sound uneasy—that's on purpose.

2. Focus on the inner mind

Modern poets care more about thoughts, memories, and emotions than storytelling.

- stream of consciousness
- fragmented ideas
- sudden shifts in time or perspective

3. Fragmentation

Modern poems often feel like pieces of a broken mirror:

- disjointed images

- abrupt transitions
- unresolved endings

This reflects a world that feels chaotic and unstable.

4. Symbolism instead of direct meaning

Rather than explaining ideas clearly, modern poets:

- use symbols
- use myths, history, and literary references
- expect the reader to work for meaning

5. Darker, more realistic themes

Common themes include:

- alienation
- loss of faith
- war and violence
- aging and death
- political disillusionment

How Yeats fits into modern poetry?

Yeats is interesting because he bridges the old and the new:

- Early Yeats = romantic, musical, traditional
- Later Yeats = modernist: sharp language, harsh images, political tension

Poems like “Easter, 1916” and “The Second Coming” are deeply modern:

- history feels broken

- certainty is gone
- the future feels threatening

In one sentence:

Modern poetry doesn't try to comfort you—it tries to tell the truth about a confusing, unstable world.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was one of the giants of modern poetry—and a fascinatingly strange one at that.

Who he was

- Irish poet, playwright, and cultural leader
- Central figure in the Irish Literary Revival
- Co-founder of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin
- Won the Nobel Prize in Literature (1923)

What makes his work special

- His poetry evolves dramatically over time
- Early Yeats: dreamy, mystical, Celtic folklore
- Later Yeats: sharp, political, intense, aging, power, violence
- Obsessed with:
 - Myth & symbolism
 - Irish nationalism
 - Time, aging, and death
 - Occult philosophy and mysticism (he was deeply into it)

Famous poems

- “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” – peaceful, lyrical, early Yeats
- “Easter, 1916” – politics and revolution (“A terrible beauty is born”)
- “The Second Coming” – apocalyptic and endlessly quoted
- “Sailing to Byzantium” – aging, art, immortality

Why he still matters

Yeats managed something rare:

he grew harder, darker, and more modern as he aged, instead of softer. His later poems feel uncannily relevant—chaos, political unrest, the sense that the world is tilting off its axis.