

Norwegian poetry

- dates back more than a thousand years to the Skaldic verse of the 9th century. During the Middle Ages, ballads, occasional poetry, and improvised poems known as *stev* were commonly produced. In addition to folktales, these anonymous works comprise a vital part of Norwegian folk literature.

As education became more widespread - especially among the clergy - hymn writing emerged as another important form of lyrical expression in Norway. Poetry also played an important role in building the fledgling Norwegian nation at the beginning of the 19th century. One of Norway's Nobel laureates in literature, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910) wrote a poem called *Ja vi elsker dette landet* ("Yes, We Love This Land"). This poem later became the Norwegian national anthem, and was first performed on Norwegian Constitution Day, May 17th, in 1864 in Christiania (Oslo).

Around the turn of the 20th century, Symbolist poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866-1900) was the most significant innovator in Norwegian lyric poetry circles. His works reflect a wonderment of life with an atmosphere of unfocused imagery. At the same time, his voice was intensely personal, and he became an important representative of early modernism. Also counted among the modernists is Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994), whose free verse debut collection *Jord og Jern* (*Earth and Iron*, 1933) is still viewed as refreshingly unconventional. Both Obstfelder and Jacobsen have been translated into numerous languages and are included in many foreign-language poetry anthologies as prominent envoys of European modernism.

Other lyricists who have achieved national and international popularity include Olav H. Hauge (1908-1994) and Paal-Helge Haugen (1945-). Hauge's poems are deceptively simple, with clear allusions to Homer, classical Chinese and Japanese poetry, Old Norse literature and the Bible. Paal-Helge Haugen's works, too, are often simple and anti-metaphorical. Haugen reveals the poetic potential of even the smallest creatures and things. Poetry remains a popular genre in Norway today, and many contemporary writers consciously employ lyricism as a mode of expression to enhance the resonance and musicality of their works. Important authors here include Eldrid Lunden (1940-), Gro Dahle (1962-) and Tor Ulven (1953-1995).

During the 1960s, trends in Norwegian poetry moved more in the direction of non-rhythmic, modernistic, experimental technique. In the 1970s, poetry was characterized by political and social commitment, while the 1980s it became more aesthetically oriented. These two trends were then consciously synthesized during the 1990s. A number of lyricists have taken a critical view of the narrower predilections of the previous decades, and many have chosen to combine politics and aesthetics, content and form, in a new fashion. While contemporary Norwegian poetry in general demonstrates a great fascination with reality, it is difficult to gather the great diversity in style and forms of expression of today's poets under a single standard.

Source: NORLA - Norwegian Literature Abroad