
UNIT 26 ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)

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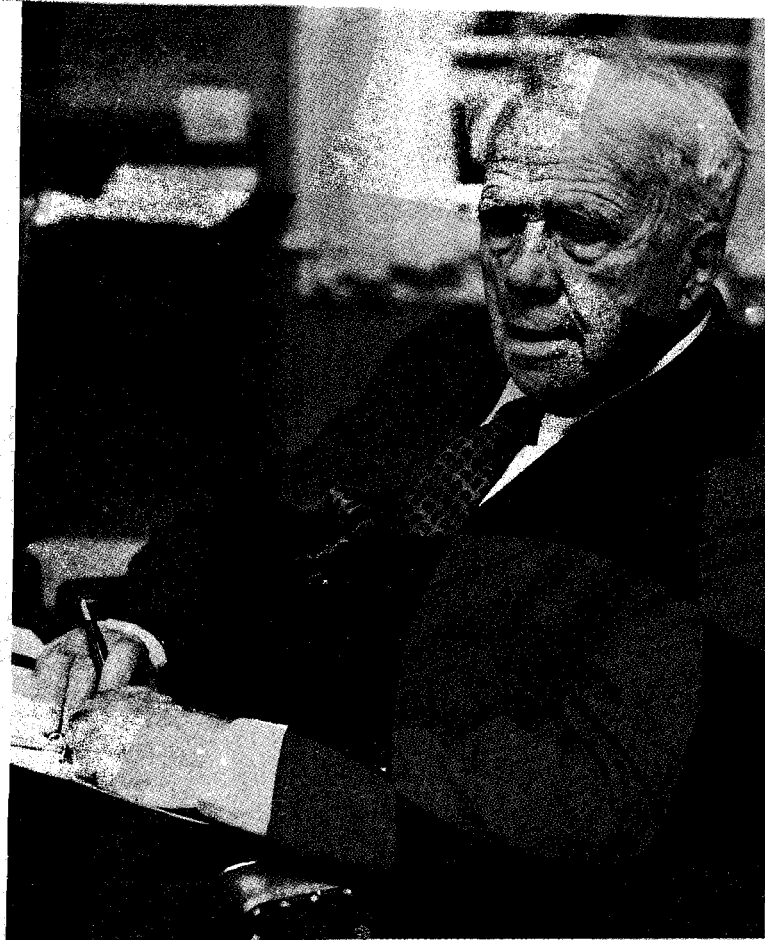
26.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we study the life and works of Robert Frost. We also look in detail at two of his poems, "Mending Wall" and "Birches" and see how Frost developed his own unique, spare and clean style in which there was a close link with nature and where ordinary natural objects often suggest something far greater.

26.1 LIFE AND WORKS OF ROBERT FROST

Robert Frost was born in California where his father, a journalist with political aspirations and a dissatisfied northeasterner, had moved. He was an occasionally violent man and developed in Frost a lifelong wariness towards destructive impulses. His mother was Scottish and wrote poetry. Through her Frost became acquainted with the Romantic poets as well as New England poets like Emerson. She also introduced him to organised Christian religion.

Frost's father died in 1885, the family returned to New England, and Frost finished high school from Lawrence, Massachusetts, (studying classics) as the class valedictorian. Three years later he married his classmate and fellow valedictorian, Eleanor White. Frost studied for a short time at Dartmouth College, taught in schools, and then enrolled as a special student at Harvard (1897-1899) where he was influenced by William James and George Santayana. He took courses in English, philosophy and the classics. From Harvard he entered a completely different world. His grandfather had left him a farm in New Hampshire and Frost, his wife and his four children endured years of hardship there. While he was struggling with depression and thoughts of suicide Frost was also composing poetry and establishing a close link with nature. In the years 1906-7 he wrote many of the poems that would later appear in North of Boston and Mountain Interval (1916). In 1909 Frost left the farm to teach in New Hampshire. From there he sold his farm and moved to England in 1912 because he was unable to find publishers for his work in the land of his birth. Within a month of his arrival in England he was able to publish his poems and North of Boston won praise from Ezra Pound. Within two years his volumes had appeared in America and he won a number of honours, including election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.



Frost returned to New England in 1915 and started teaching in Amherst College two years later. He was obviously making a commitment to a tradition and a particular location. Kipling had already pointed out that Frost's language sounded strange to English readers; Frost regarded this as an advantage--he felt his language had the "freshness of a stranger," and that strangeness, be it in language or metaphor, is intrinsic to poetry. Critics suggest that Frost's poetry sounds unfamiliar even to those Americans outside new England and of course we in India would feel no differently.

There were a number of sources from which Frost inherited the technique of using the ordinary to suggest something other than itself: the Bible, the classics, the poetry of Wordsworth, and New England writers such as Thoreau or Emerson. He admired Emerson's use of simplicity to suggest profound meanings. The classical pastoral tradition and the Romantic tradition of poetry about nature were in his hands refashioned by the use of New England vocabulary and turns of phrase. Rather than the fine arts or music that influenced a poet like Wallace Stevens Frost was more drawn to science and philosophy. He was not as radical an experimenter as Ezra Pound. He felt poets ought to develop links between sound and sense and emotion. Metre was important too, but its rigidity should be qualified by the rhythms of actual speech. (He was a master in the use of a number of verse forms, however, rhymed couplets, the sonnet, blank verse and rhyming quatrains.) Drama, also, was vital for it made writing "unboring," but poetry should contain no excesses--the effect should be a carefully controlled one. He called the poem in its beauty and its slow, dignified exploration of reality, "a momentary stay against confusion" (*Selected Prose* 36, Norton 1102). A poem is an affirmative entity for it springs from belief, be it belief in God, in the poet's own self, in art or in the nation.

His important poems were all written before 1930. While his first priority was always poetry he also made time to teach and to read his poems in public. He was associated the longest with Amherst (1917-20, 1923-38, 1949) but he also spent time at Michigan and Dartmouth and Harvard. He helped to establish the famous Bread Loaf School of English in Middlebury College, Vermont. He was a very popular teacher. He won four Pulitzer prizes before the publication of two ambitious philosophical poems, *The Masque of Reason* (1945) and *The Masque of Mercy* (1947). *In the Clearing* (1962) was his last work. He won many honours, including honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge universities in 1957, and last but not least the invitation to read a poem at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961 where he recited "The Gift Outright" from memory.

26.2 "MENDING WALL" TEXT OF POEM

26.2.1 Text of Poem I

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun; And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. The work of hunters is another thing:	5
I have come after them and made repair Where they have left not one stone on a stone, But they would have the rabbit out of hiding, To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean, No one has seen them made or heard them made, But at spring mending-time we find them there.	10
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill; And on a day we meet to walk the line And set the wall between us once again. We keep the wall between us as we go To each the boulders that have fallen to each. And some are loaves and some so nearly balls We have to use a spell to make them balance: 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'	15
We war our fingers rough with handling them. Oh, just another kind of outdoor game, One on a side. It comes to little more: There where it is we do not need the wall: He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.	20
He only says, "good fences make good neighbors. Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder If I could put a notion in his head: 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it Where there are cows? But here there are no cows. Before I built a wall I'd ask to know What I was walling in or walling out, And to whom I was like to give offense. Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That wants it down. I could say 'Elves' to him, But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather He said it for himself. I see him there Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top	25 30 35

In each hand, like an old stone savage armed.
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

40

45

26.2.2 "Mending Wall" Critical Appreciation

In this poem Frost takes a very ordinary incident, building or repairing a wall between his neighbour's garden and his, and turns it into a meditation on the divisions between human beings. While his neighbour believes that "Good fences make good neighbours," Frost questions this point-of-view. According to him land should be shared with trust and a mutual understanding. Walls give him a sense of being "walled in" or "walled out" that is 'cut off from his immediate environment' and he does not enjoy this. There are no cows to stray from his garden into his neighbour's-- why then, the wall, the fence?

From this ordinary incident Frost wants to suggest deeper meanings about the way human beings intrinsically distrust each other even when there is no reason to do so and how these suspicions should be replaced by trust and mutual good will. While his neighbour believes "Good fences make good neighbours," Frost keeps thinking, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." When one notes the year, 1914, in which this poem is composed one cannot help relate it to the outbreak of the First World War. It is the same sensibility of building walls and fences, of protecting one's property, of suspecting one's neighbours, that can take place even on a global basis and lead to wars. Trust and fellow feeling can go a long way in avoiding this sort of a situation.

Note the masterly way in which Frost uses the rhythms of the speaking voice and his understated style. His poetry helped evolve a new voice for modern poetry so that poetry sounded effortless, shorn of any deliberate poetic ornamentation, was meditative. In his hands poetry took on some of the qualities of prose.

26.2.3 "Mending Wall" Notes

"Mending Wall" 1914

L1-4 Here Frost is showing how nature dislikes the concept of walls or barriers and tries to break through walls and make gaps that at least two people can pass through. There is something unnatural about walls.

L10 "No one...made" Here Frost suggests the mysteriousness of these gaps in the wall--they were not made by hunters. Nature itself seems to be making them in protest against its laws of freedom and sharing and property common to all which human beings do not follow.

L24 "He is all pine..orchard" Frost means that his neighbour has mainly pine trees on his land while Frost has apple trees. Perhaps he also means to suggest that his neighbour does not believe in growing trees which give fruit, and thus food and pleasure. Also, pines are rather prickly--rather like Frost's neighbour who insists on everything being just so and on every gap in the wall being mended.

L36 "elves" Elves are tiny supernatural creatures drawn from folklore and myth. By this word Frost wants to suggest to his neighbour that some non-human agency is protesting about the existence of this wall and wants it to be broken down. But rather than suggesting it to his neighbour Frost wishes his neighbour had enough imagination to think of it himself--"I'd rather/ He said it for himself" (L37-38).

26.3 "BIRCHES"

Robert Frost

26.3.1 Text of poem II

Birches

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning 5
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells 10
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust-
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed 15
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. 20
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows-
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball, 25
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them, 30
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so no carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise 35
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground. 40
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs 45
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away form earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me 50
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away

Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.
 I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
 Toward heaven, till the tree could bar no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

26.3.2 "Birches" Critical Appreciation

The first part of this poem (L1-41) consists of a fairly straightforward nature description. Frost speaks of the many different appearances of birches in summer and in wintry weather. Frost imagines a rural boy climbing the birch tree, a boy who lives too far from town to enjoy baseball, and whose only entertainment is nature (Frost draws on his own childhood memories as a "swinger of birches" here). He says he longs for the return of those innocent pursuits.

In the next part of the poem (L43ff) Frost compares life's difficulties and hardships to the difficulties of walking through a "pathless wood" and says that he longs to get away from the pressures of life, not in the sense of dying, but in the sense of climbing a birch tree, tipping its branches towards heaven, and then returning to earth. By this metaphor Frost wants to suggest he wants to be able to return to the innocence and beauty of nature, to let nature refresh him, and then to return to the everyday grind of life on earth. He does not dislike earth--"Earth's the right place for love"--but a refreshing dose of birch-climbing would be a welcome respite.

The influence of the English Romantic poet Wordsworth, who composed The Prelude, on this poem is marked--we have the same fond recollection of a childhood closeness to nature, the same sense of oppression of an adult life spent apart from nature and the same sense of nature's rejuvenating energy.

Note the effectiveness with which Frost captures the rhythms and the locutions of the speaking voice with the use of the first person singular and conversational phrases like "Often you must have seen them" (L5) or "You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen" (L13) or "But I was going to say when Truth broke in/With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm/ I should prefer to have some boy bend them" (L21-23) or "I don't know where it's likely to go better" (L53) or the last line "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches" (L59). One gets a strong sense of the speaker and with the repetition of the word "you," the reader is also invited into the world of the poem and made to feel comfortable there. The atmosphere of the poem becomes confidential and intimate.

26.3.3 "Birches" Notes

"Birches" (1916)

Title: Birches are smooth-barked, slender-branched northern forest trees

L9 "enamel" Frost uses a metaphor here. He compares the shiny birch bark to enamel which is a glass-like coating of metallic surfaces for the purpose of ornament or for preservation. By this metaphor he expresses the shiny beauty of the birch bark.

L12 "broken glass" Another metaphor. The snow crystals are compared to bits of broken glass because of their transparency and their sharpness.

L14 "bracken" Fern abundant on heaths

L19-20 "Like girls...sun" This is a simile which compares the arched trunks of the birches trailing their leaves on the ground to girls who throw their wet hair over their faces in order to dry it. This simile brings out the delicacy and the vulnerability of the birches.

Robert Frost

L44 "life is too much...wood" A simile which compares life, with its enigmas and its hardships to a forest in which there is no clearly-marked path. One may easily lose one's direction.

L45-47 "Where your face...open" Frost adds a metaphor to the simile and compares the physical hardships of trekking through a pathless forest to the rigours, physical and emotional, of life. The word "weeping" suggests that the tears do not come simply as a result of a cut or bruise but because of some inner sorrow.

26.4 LET US SUM UP

Robert Frost is the quintessential New England poet. His poems are spare. He has a close affinity with nature and his poems are meditative--qualities he shares with the Romantic poet Wordsworth. Often, ordinary natural objects suggest something greater in his poems. He plays around with metre in order to capture the easy rhythms of the speaking voice. His poems flow very smoothly, like a good conversation.

26.5 QUESTIONS

- Q.1 How would you characterise Robert Frost's poetry? Answer with close reference to "Mending Wall" and "Birches."
- Q.2 What does the wall represent to Frost in "Mending Wall"?
- Q.3 What does swinging on birches teach the poet about life?
- Q.4 Analyse any three metaphors or similes in "Birches."

26.6 FURTHER READING

Brower, Reuben. The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention. 1963.

Ellmann, Richard and Robert O'Clair, eds. The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. New York: Norton, 1973.

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UNIT 27 WALLACE STEVENS 1879-1955

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Life and Works
- 27.2 "Sunday Morning"
 - 27.2.1 Text
 - 27.2.2 Background
 - 27.2.3 Critical Appreciation
 - 27.2.4 Notes
- 27.3 "The Emperor of Ice Cream"
 - 27.3.1 Text
 - 27.3.2 Background and Critical Appreciation
 - 27.3.3 Notes
- 27.4 "The Idea of order at Key West"
 - 27.4.1 Text
 - 27.4.2 Background and Critical Appreciation
 - 27.4.3 Notes
- 27.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.6 Glossary
- 27.7 Questions
- 27.8 Further Reading

27.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we study the life and works of Wallace Stevens and three of his poems, "Sunday Morning," "The Emperor of Ice Cream" and "The Idea of Order at Key West," in detail. Stevens' closeness to painting, the way in which his beliefs in art (poetry, painting, sculpture, music) as a new religion, a kind of replacement for the loss of faith in institutionalised religion, is analysed. The role of the poet and the role of the poet's imagination is also one of Stevens' pet concerns.

27.1 LIFE AND WORKS

On October 2, 1879, the man who was to become one of the six or seven foremost poets writing in the English language was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. He was descended of stubborn and taciturn farmer stock. His father was a schoolteacher and an attorney. In 1897 Wallace enrolled at Harvard as an undergraduate special student. There he was an occasional poet and short story writer, his pieces, the poetry marking the influence of Keats and Tennyson, appearing in the Harvard Monthly and the Harvard Advocate. At Harvard he came to know the poet-philosopher George Santayana and his works made him believe that poetry has a quasi-religious function in an age of scepticism and disbelief. Perhaps because his father had told him to put "work and study" above his "dreams," in 1900-1901 Wallace became, not a writer starving in a garret, but a well-paid reporter, for the New York Herald Tribune. He did not consider himself a success as a journalist and so, taking his father's advice, he enrolled in the New York Law School in 1901 and was admitted to the New York State bar in 1904. He was, however, not a success as a lawyer either so in 1908 he joined the New York office of a bonding company and married Elsie V. Moll the following year. In 1911 Stevens' father died and, in the following year, his mother. In September 1914, in The Trend, and in November 1914 in Harriet Monroe's Poetry: A Magazine of Verse came the first publication of Stevens' mature work. In 1916

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 - 27.3.3 Notes
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Stevens joined the legal staff of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, an insurance company he would work for the rest of his life, and made Hartford, Connecticut, his lifelong home. In 1915-17, he wrote three experimental one-act plays. His first volume of poems, Harmonium, appeared in 1923. Earlier his poems had appeared only in little magazines like Harriet Monroe's Poetry and Alfred Kreymborg's Others. These poems were the result of the double life Stevens led, a lawyer working for an insurance company by day, a poet by night, on weekends, and during the summers while his wife, of delicate health, vacationed in the country. He was a peripheral figure in the literary scene, a close professional friend, but only that, of poets William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore. He wrote and received letters but his reticence and his business kept him away from the centre of literary activity. In 1924 his daughter, Holly, was born and for the next six years Stevens wrote almost nothing. In the mid-thirties, he became economically secure. In 1934 he became the vice-president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, and four important collections of his verse appeared in quick succession: Ideas of Order in 1935, Owl's Clover in 1936, The Man With the Blue Guitar in 1937, and Parts of a World in 1942. In 1946, he became a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Transport to Summer appeared in 1947. In the '40s he gave occasional readings and delivered lectures at Ivy League institutions like Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Columbia. The Auroras of Autumn appeared in 1950. In the same year, he was awarded the Bollingen Prize for poetry. In the following year, his acclaimed book of essays, The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination,

appeared and, in 1954, his Collected Poems. The following year he was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for poetry and the National Book Award. In August 2 of the same year he died. Two years later appeared his Opus Posthumous.

Stevens' poetry dealt with the problem of the role of the imagination in relation to reality. The poet's role is to speak to the elite but also to help people "live their lives." How so? Because the poet "gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive it." It creates "a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live, or, I ought to say, no doubt from the world in which we shall come to live" (The Necessary Angel).

27.2 "SUNDAY MORNING"

27.2.1 Text of the Poem III

Sunday Morning

I

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late	
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair	
And the green freedom of a cockatoo	
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate	
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.	5
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark	
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,	
As a clam darkens among water-lights.	
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings	
Seem things in some procession of the dead,	10
Winding across wide water, without sound.	
The day is like wide water, without sound,	
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet	
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,	
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.	15

II

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?	
What is divinity if it can come	
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?	
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,	
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else	20
In any balm or beauty of the earth,	
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?	
Divinity must live within herself:	
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;	
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued	25
Emotions when the forest blooms; gusty	
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;	
All pleasures and all pains, remembering	
The bough of summer and the winter branch.	
These are the measures destined for her soul.	30

III

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
 No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
 Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind
 He moved among us, as a muttering king,

Magnificent, would move among his hinds,	35	Wallace Stevens
Until our blood, commingling, virginal,		
With heaven, brought such requital to desire		
The very hinds discerned it, in a star.		
Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be		
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth	40	
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?		
The sky will be much friendlier then than now,		
A part of labor and a part of pain,		
And next in glory in enduring love,		
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.	45	

IV

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,	
Before they fly, test the reality	
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;	
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields	
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"	50
There is not any haunt of prophecy,	
Nor any old chimera of the grave,	
Neither the golden underground, nor isle	
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,	
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm	55
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured	
As April's green endures; or will endure	
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,	
Or her desire for June an evening, tipped	
By the consummation of the swallow's wings.	60

V

She says, "But in contentment I still feel	
The need of some imperishable bliss."	
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,	
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams	
And our desires. Although she strews the leaves	65
Of sure obliteration on our paths,	
The path sick sorrow took, the many paths	
Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love	
Whispered a little out of tenderness,	
She makes the willow shiver in the sun	70
For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze	
Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.	
She causes boys to pile new plums and pears	
On disregarded plate. The maidens taste	
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.	75

VI

Is there no change of death in paradise?	
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs	
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,	
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,	
With rivers like our own that seek for seas	80
They never find, the same receding shores	
That never touch with inarticulate pang?	
Why set the pear upon those river-banks	
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?	

Alas, that they should wear our colors there, 85
 The silken weavings of our afternoons,
 And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
 Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
 Within whose burning bosom we devise
 Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly. 90

VII

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
 Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
 Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
 Not as a god, but as a god might be,
 Naked among them, like a savage source. 95
 Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
 Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
 And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
 The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
 The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills, 100
 That choir among themselves long afterward.
 They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
 Of men that perish and of summer morn.
 And whence they came and whither they shall go
 The dew upon their feet shall manifest. 105

VIII

She hears, upon that water without sound,
 A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
 Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
 It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
 We live in an old chaos of the sun, 110
 Or old dependency of day and night,
 Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
 Of that wide water, inescapable.
 Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
 Whistle about us their spontaneous cries; 115
 Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
 And, in the isolation of the sky,
 At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
 Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
 Downward to darkness, on extended wings. 120

27.2.2 Background of Poem

This is a long, complex poem which appeared first in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* in 1915, but that was only stanzas I, VIII, IV, V and VII, printed in the order mentioned, scrambled by Stevens himself. In 1923, the poem was reprinted, but this time in its entirety and with the stanzas in the original order in which Stevens composed them. The poem is a slow meditation on death and on the conflicting claims of Christianity and paganism and their varied interpretations on the possibility of a life after death.

In the Title: "Sunday Morning" There is a pun on Sunday, the day of the week which perhaps got its name from the natural sun, and on "son," implying Christ, the Son of God. Stevens in his *Letters* (250) said that the poem was an unconscious "expression of paganism" and that it is not just a woman's but any person's "meditation on religion and the meaning of life" (Norton 1151). The poem was inspired, however, by his mother's death in 1912. His mother believed in Christianity while Stevens did not. He remembered in his journal how his mother would drink fruit juice and assert her

belief in immortality in her last days. Stevens also wrote to his wife that he thought that the grief of his mother's death could be "dissipated" (he uses the same word in this poem, L4) by pleasurable things. He urged his wife to indulge in "sweet breaths, sweet fruits, sweet everything" (Norton 1151). The poem may even be read in the form of a dialogue between a believer and a non-believer who alternately take turns to express their point-of-view rather than as a single meditation within a single mind.

Wallace Stevens

27.2.3 Critical Appreciation

In the first stanza Stevens imagines a woman sitting in her dressing gown, in her study and thinking about her approaching death or perhaps even death in general. However, these brooding thoughts are "dissipate(d)" (L4) or lessened by the pungent oranges, the sunny chair and the wonderfully free, green wings of the cockatoo embroidered upon a rug. All these colourful markers of life surround the woman as she meditates on death. Note also the combination of the Christian, in the reference to Palestine, and the pagan, in the phrase "ancient sacrifice" (L5) and in the subtle reference to the "procession of the dead" (L10). The pagan references are reminiscent of the scene Keats describes in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," a sacrifice that belongs to a pagan civilisation:

"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Leadeest thou that heifer lowing at the skies..."

The second stanza may either be the woman herself playing devil's advocate and asserting an opposing point of view or it could be another persona expressing something that is closer to the poet's own point-of-view. This stanza describes all the various things, objects in life that are to be "cherished" as much as "the thought of heaven" (L22): the sun, fruit, green wings, rain, snow, forest blooms and autumn nights. Note that the objects described combine effects of gladness and of grief--"All pleasures and all pains" (L28). "Divinity" must be sought within the human being rather than outside-- i.e., in the hope of God or Jesus or a life in heaven.

In the 3rd stanza the poet juxtaposes the pagan concept of divinity, Jove, who had no human mother and no homeland, whose thoughts were vast and who moved among humans "as a muttering king," with the Christian concept of divinity. Jesus was born of woman (the Virgin Mary) and born in a particular location (Bethlehem). The poet wants to suggest that the change from the pagan to the Christian concept of divinity, came about through human desire, and that desire, that very human blood, cannot fail us now. If we can only accept the earth as "all of paradise that we shall know" (L41) then the sky, (meaning nature and the world of nature,) will seem "much friendlier" (L 42). There will be no division between human toil and human sorrow and the world of nature. After all, nature too moves through various seasons, as Stevens has reminded us in the previous stanza. Of course, Stevens is much more tentative (note the three questions, L39-41) than I make him out to be in this paraphrase.

In the first two lines of this lovely stanza that follows the woman says she still feels the need, in the midst of earth's pleasures, of "some imperishable bliss" (some endless joy). In the remaining thirteen lines of this stanza, the poet's other persona explains how beauty can only come from transience: "Death is the mother of beauty" (L63). In other words, it is not the imperishable things that are joyous, but the perishable ones. We find things in life beautiful because they pass away so soon. And then the poet's other persona describes the many scenes of life through which death reminds us that she is the mother of beauty, scenes of earthly "sorrow," (L67) of earthly "triumph" (L68) and of earthly "tenderness" (L69). The last five lines of the stanza this persona elaborates on a pastoral scene in which boys pile the "disregarded plate" with ripe "new plums and pears" (emphasis added) in order to woo the "maidens." Images of love and death beautifully coexist--the "disregarded plate" (L74) has been handed down by long-dead ancestors. They are piled with fresh fruit symbolising

life. The maidens are young, and yet they "stray impassioned" (L75) (passionately move so as to lose their way) in the "littering" autumn leaves, representing decay and the passage of time.

What gives this verse its resonance are the rich echoes from earlier poets like Andrew Marvell ("To His Coy Mistress," "The Garden" "The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers," Keats' ("Ode on Melancholy" "Ode to a Nightingale") and Gerard Manley Hopkins ("Spring and Fall"). All these poets manage to combine the secular, pre-Christian elements of pastoral with the darker Christian hints of the Garden of Eden and the fall. According to Christianity, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they disobeyed God and from then on human beings, who had till then been immortal, became mortal and the eternal spring of the Garden of Eden changed into the cycle of seasons. Decay and death entered human life. Stevens follows in the footsteps of the poets mentioned and still gives his poem an unmistakably modern ring by juxtaposing words like "boy" and "plate" with older words like "maidens".

The next stanza tries to imagine what paradise would be like, where everything would be so perfect, nothing would decay, and yet there would be no satisfaction because time and change would not exist--the ripe fruit would never fall, the boughs would always hang heavy, the sky would be like the sky we know only unchanging. Paradise thus becomes a less satisfying copy of the earth because there is no change. Usually, it is common to argue the reverse, but again Stevens follows Keats' precedent in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The scene of the lovers depicted on the urn is beautiful, the youths remain forever young, yet they are cold, frozen in an attitude of never-consummated desire:

She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

In stanza 7 Stevens pictures a pagan celebration of life and nature as a sort of unorganised religion. What the men are celebrating is really their own energy. They also know that this earth and their "fellowship" (friendship) are all the heaven that they need. The sun, the wind, the trees--these are all the gods they need. They have no need of an "imperishable bliss." (L62) that the woman had longed for in Stanza 5. What is "fugitive," short lived, about life is what appeals to them.

In the last stanza Stevens describes the woman as hearing a soundless voice telling her that Jesus was just a human being, not a god. Palestine marks his grave; it is not the location of some mystical experience. We have not being created by God but have sprung from chaos, and this is where our complete freedom lies. The last seven lines of the stanza give a marvellous description of the wonderful variety of the birds, the trees, the fruits and the waters that surround us. No doubt Stevens was drawing inspiration from the grand New England scenery surrounding him. The last three lines are once again reminiscent of Keats, this time his "Ode to Autumn:"

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Keats is describing the "mellow fruitfulness" of autumn but the ode ends with a hint of winter in the air. The swallows are about to leave England for warmer countries.

The last line in this poem, "Downward to darkness on extended wings" provides a model or a pattern for the woman whose death is approaching. She should face the darkness, meaning death, squarely, unafraid--her wings, signifying hope and spiritedness, should be aloft.

27.2.4 Notes

Wallace Stevens

L1 "peignoir" dressing gown

L7 "old catastrophe" this could refer to death in general, the woman's particular (approaching) death, to the crucifixion of Christ or even to the Christian doctrine of the Fall.

L14-5 "silent Palestine,/ Dominion of the blood and sepulchre" Palestine was the place where Jesus was sacrificed and the location of many other bloody deaths in the name of religion.

L31 "Jove" This is the Roman name for the Greek god Zeus, the supreme deity in both Greek and Roman myth.

L37 "requital" repayment, reward

L38 "hinds...star" Farm labourers. This could be a reference to the shepherds who saw the star of Bethlehem that signalled the birth of Jesus.

L52 "chimera" a mythical, hybrid creature with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpent's tail. Here it represents difficult-to-prove beliefs in other worlds.

L53 "golden underground...isle/ Melodious" Perhaps referring to pre-Christian Greek or Roman visualisations of life after death in the isles of the blessed.

In this stanza Stevens imagines the woman as saying that she is content with life while it lasts, but what about when it ends? Shouldn't one have some hope to sustain one in that case? Birds and misty fields are all very well, but what about when the birds fly away and their "warm fields" do not return? To which question the poet seems to reply that no concept of the life hereafter can "endure" (last) or satisfy as do earthly pleasures, the simple pleasures of April green, the warmth of June, and swallow's wings.

L74 "disregarded plate" Stevens himself explained that this referred to the silver-plated dinner service that was handed down from generation to generation in a family. "'Disregarded' refers to the disuse into which things fall that have been possessed for a long time. I mean, therefore, that death releases and renews. What the old have come to disregard, the young inherit and make use of" (Letters 183, Norton 1153).

There are a number of personifications in this verse--death is personified as the mother of beauty (L63), sorrow is described as "sick" (L67), triumph is personified as a sort of army general or even the conductor of a band, ringing "his brassy phrase." (L68) and love is personified as a person tenderly whispering to his/her beloved (L68-69). These personifications help bring abstract concepts alive in the reader's mind.

L82 "inarticulate pang" a sorrow that cannot be expressed

L86 "silken" silky

L87 "pick the strings of our insipid lutes" play our stringed musical instruments, lutes, which are ordinary, humdrum

L88-90 "Death is the mother....sleeplessly" Two very difficult lines which probably mean that we create an image of Death, (an abstraction which we can never completely understand until we experience it, and then it's too late) in the image of our earthly, mortal mothers, waiting sleeplessly for their children to come home.

L91 "Supple and turbulent" easily bent (referring to the bodies of the men) and riotous

L92 "chant in orgy" sing wildly together in a secret rite in celebration of a particular god. This word is usually used with reference to Bacchus, the Greek god of wine. Celebrations in his honour were marked by drinking, singing and wild dancing.

L94-5 "Not as a god...savage source" The sun is being worshipped by these men not as a god but as a primitive source of energy not very different from themselves.

L100 "serafin" seraphim (Hebrew) are high ranking angels or heavenly creatures, gifted with love and associated with light and purity. The modern word "seraph" is derived from this.

L103 "fellowship" fellow feeling or friendship

L105 "The dew upon...manifest" Stevens in a letter explained this line thus: "Life is as fugitive as dew upon the feet of men dancing in the dew" (Selected Letters 250, Norton 1154).

L105 "manifest" show

L110 "chaos" matter without form. The Greek writer Hesiod in his Theogony (c 8th century BC) writes that chaos was the source of creation. This of course runs counter to the biblical belief that God created everything including Adam, the first man, in seven days (Genesis).

L119 "ambiguous undulations" the movement of the pigeons' wings does not have a fixed meaning. It may be interpreted in a variety of ways.

27.3 "THE EMPEROR OF ICE CREAM"

27.3.1 Text of the Poem IV

The Emperor of Ice-Cream

Call the roller of big cigars, The muscular one, and bid him whip In kitchen cups concupiscent curds. Let the wenches dawdle in such dress As they are used to wear, and let the boys Bring flowers in last month's newspapers. Let be be finale of seem. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.	5
Take from the dresser of deal, Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet On which she embroidered fantails once And spread it so as to cover her face. If her horny feet protrude, they come To show how cold she is, and dumb. Let the lamp affix its beam. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream	10 15

27.3.2 Background and Critical Appreciation

This short poem appeared in 1923. In 1933 Stevens said that this was his favourite poem because of its combination of a "deliberately commonplace costume" with "the essential gaudiness of poetry" (Norton 1155). In 1945, Stevens remarked on the

"singularity" of this poem. Any poem, he explained, "must have a peculiarity, as if it was the momentarily complete idiom of that which prompts it, even if what prompts it is the vaguest emotion" (Norton 1155).

The poem's setting is a funeral, an occasion which brings about one of Stevens' favourite juxtapositions--that between life and death.

In his Letters (341) Stevens writes that the poem "is obviously not about icecream, (sic) but about being as distinguished from seeming to be." "...icecream is an absolute good." Ice cream has the connotations of coldness and pleasure, a combination that sets the tone for this poem about the way life and death, pleasure and pain coexist in being. The image of ice-cream symbolizes grotesque death and the wake which are parts of life. Ice-cream is at once cold, agreeable, ordinary and gesture and hence a symbol of life and death. Ice-cream in this poem also symbolizes change and flux which are both essential parts of life. It symbolizes change and flux because it melts quickly. At the same time it also symbolizes firmness and stability in its frozen state. The idea conveyed by this poem is that though reality is a fixed appearance it is sure to change. "The Emperor of Ice-cream" uses change and flux as its central idea.

27.3.3 Notes

The title suggests, perhaps, in the combination of "emperor," a word denoting power and rule, with the word "ice cream," a sense of comic lightness. We should not take either death or life too seriously is what the poet seems to be telling us in his title.

Stanza 1

L3 "concupiscent curds" The word "concupiscent" means intense sexual desire. In 1945 Stevens wrote that this phrase has "no genealogy." They merely "express the concupiscence of life, but, by contrast with the things in relation to them in the poem, they express or accentuate life's destitution, and it is this that gives them something more than a cheap lustre" (Letters 500, quoted in Norton 1155). What is contrasted to the "curds" is the dead body of the woman described in the second stanza. There is also a sexual image in the reference to cigars, a phallic image. Sex (i.e., a life-generating energy) and death go on simultaneously in this poem.

L4 "Let the wenches dawdle..." The wenches (young girls) and "boys" of the following line both represent youth--something the dead woman has left far behind her.

L6 "flowers in last month's newspapers" Note again the juxtaposition of the past, something that is dead and gone, old news in the phrase "last month's newspapers" with something fresh and growing and living: "flowers."

L7 "Let be be finale of seem" A very complex line. "Finale" could refer to a) the striking flourishes that mark the end of a musical composition b) the final end or catastrophe. This line is something of a paradox. If one takes meaning a) the line could mean let being be celebrated in a display of "gaudy" (a favourite word of Stevens' and usually used to describe the effect of art or poetry) illusions (as in art or poetry). If one follows meaning b) the line could mean let being put an end to all illusions ("seem").

Stanza 2

L9 "dresser of deal" this means a chest of drawers made of plain, unpolished wood.

L10 "lacking the three glass knobs" three is a very important number for Christians because it represents the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The fact that the

dresser lacks three knobs could be taken to mean that Christianity can no longer play a major role in modern western lives.

L11 "embroidered fantails" fantails refers to fantail pigeons. What is significant is that a sheet embroidered by the dead woman is now used as her shroud. The woman is dead, but her art, the embroidered sheet, lives on.

L13 "horny feet protrude" "Horny" means hard as horn, calloused. The coldness and deadness of the woman and the attendant ugliness ("horny") of death is not something we are allowed to forget. But at the same time, the beautiful sheet she embroidered is also visible. There is a balance between the forces of death (the woman's dead body) and the forces of relative permanence (the embroidered sheet).

L15 "lamp affix its beam" "Lamp" could mean both a) the light by the corpse and b) the light of the poet's imagination. The poet's imagination transforms the sad spectacle of the dead woman into something beautiful, permanent and comforting, without denying the finality of her death. He does this by a series of juxtapositions in which he compares life and death, old age ("horny feet") and youth ("wenches" and "boys"), the past ("last month's newspapers") and the present, and death (the dead woman) and art (the embroidered sheet).

27.4 "THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST"

27.4.1 Text of the Poem V

The Idea of Order at Key West

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
 The water never formed to mind or voice,
 Like a body wholly body, fluttering
 Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
 Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
 That was not ours although we understood,
 Inhuman, of the veritable ocean. 5

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
 The song and water were not medleyed sound
 Even if what she sang was what she heard, 10
 Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
 It may be that in all her phrases stirred
 The grinding water and the gasping wind;
 But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang. 15
 The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
 Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
 Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
 It was the spirit that we sought and knew
 That we should ask this often as she sang. 20

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
 That rose, or even colored by many waves;
 If it was only the outer voice of sky
 And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
 However clear, it would have been deep air, 25
 The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
 Repeated in a summer without end

And sound alone. But it was more than that,
 More even than her voice, and ours, among
 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind, 30
 Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
 On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
 Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
 The sky acutest at its vanishing.
 She measured to the hour its solitude. 35
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
 As we beheld her striding there alone, 40
 Knew that there never was a world for her
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
 Why, when the singing ended and we turned
 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights, 45
 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night. 50

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
 The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
 Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
 And of ourselves and of our origins, 55
 In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

27.4.2 Background and Critical Appreciation

This poem appeared in 1935 and is one of the best known of Stevens' poems. The first stanza is complex stanza. Here Stevens is describing a woman singing by the sea shore in Key West and the effect her song has on the listeners. Although the woman is not singing about the sea, the sea seems to find expression in her song and the song elicits a response in the minds of the listeners. Stevens is obviously referring to the mimesis theory of art and what relation art has to life. This was a debate that was first opened by Plato, a circa fourth century B.C. Greek philosopher. According to him art was a reflection of a reflection and had no relation to truth. Aristotle, in his *Poetics* (c330BC) claimed that art should be judged on its own merits and not on whether it was a true reflection of life. Romantic poets like Wordsworth argued that the poet's imagination transformed nature and added a certain radiance that was not intrinsically present in nature. Stevens, as a modernist, here is trying to unravel the effect nature, as exemplified by the ocean, has on the artist, exemplified by the woman singing a song, and the effect art has on its audience. This gradually unravels in the course of the poem.

In the second stanza, the poet is trying to decipher the exact relation between the song and the sea. Is the sea merely a location for the woman's song? Is the sea her inspiration? Even if she sings what she hears, she transforms it because the sea cannot use words and she can. Was it the spirit of the sea finding expression in her song or was it her imagination at work? These and many other questions are aroused in the minds of the audience. Again, Stevens is probing the problem of the interaction between nature and art and the role played by both nature (here the sea) and by the artist's imagination. Nature is transformed by the artist's imagination and

finds intelligible voice through it. The listeners feel they understand the "tragic" nature of the sea because of the woman's song.

In the third stanza the poet is saying that if the woman's song were merely a replica of the voice of the sea then it would have no words, it would sound only like air. It would be sound alone. But it is something more than that. It is something more even than her voice, or the voice of her listeners, or the voice of the twilight landscape of the sea that surrounds them.

In the second part of the stanza, which begins from line 34 "It was her voice..." the poet explains that the woman's voice made the sea and the sky and everything else that surrounded them find a voice. The woman's voice gave the power of speech to the sea, the sky and the "bronze shadows" of twilight. The woman creates a world through her song. This too relates to what Elizabethan poet-critics like Philip Sidney say about the relation between the poet's imagination and nature. Sidney in An Apology for Poetry writes,

"Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection [to nature], lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature...;so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers....Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden." (14-15) "Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature, but rather give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature, which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of as divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her [nature's] doings...." (17) In other words, the artist becomes a sort of surrogate god or creator--note Stevens too uses the words "artificer" (L37) and "maker" (L40).

In the next stanza, the poet asks an imaginary friend, Ramon Fernandez, who had apparently been listening to the song along with him, why everything around looked different when the song ended. The lights of the fishing boats seemed to divide the night into perfectly ordered zones of radiance. They seemed to intensify the effect of the night. Why was this so?

In the final stanza, the poet himself suggests an answer to the question posed in the earlier stanza. He says the effect on the landscape came about through the artist's "rage for order" which is a "blessed one"--the artist's power of creation is a great gift. It is through this gift that the artist makes nature and our origins clearer to us. But at the same time, the artist's creation leaves us room for flexibility in interpretation--the "demarcations" are "ghostlier" less real than nature itself, more ambiguous too and yet the sounds are "keener"--that is, art gives us a heightened awareness of nature and of life.

27.4.3 Notes

Title: Order is a very important concept for Stevens, particularly in the sense of the order imposed by the artist's imagination on the chaos of nature. Key West is a place in Florida. Stevens used to vacation in Florida quite regularly and some critics see the pungent tropical fruits, birds and colours in his poems to stem from his experiences in Florida.

Stanza 1

L1 "genius" this could mean a) tutelary or guardian spirit or b) inspiration

L3-4 "Like a body...sleeves" This is a simile in which Stevens says that the sea does not become a body through the singer's song, a body clothed in a shirt whose sleeves are empty, but that the spirit of the sea is reflected in the singer's song. Spirit rather than body is what finds expression.

L4-5 "mimic motion...constant cry...caused constantly a cry" note how the alliteration of "m" and "c" reflects the sense of the lines--the song and the sea are mimicking (imitating) each other. Similarly, the "m" and "c" sounds are repeated in order to reflect in sound the sense of mimicry.

Stanza 2

L8 "mask" I think by this word Stevens means to suggest Greek drama with its use of masks and by implication Aristotle's theory of catharsis. Aristotle argued that art made pleasurable and instructive what was often horrifying in real life. For example, the story of Oedipus killing his father and marrying his mother would have merely shocked us if we had read about it in the newspapers. But Sophocles in his great tragedy, Oedipus Rex, makes it a grand and moving tale. The word "tragic" used later in line 16 also suggests that Stevens was thinking along these lines.

L9 "medleyed sound" mixed sound

L13 "grinding water...gasping wind" note the alliteration of "g" and "w" to suggest the sound of the water and the wind and the effect of the wind on the water.

L15 "maker" this is a loaded word because it means not just composer. It refers back to the word the Greeks used for poets and thus situates this poem in the whole art-life debate. The woman and her song represent the artist and his/her artistic creation.

L16 "ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea" the sea is personified as a person whose head is covered and whose hand movements are sorrowful. This means that it is difficult to interpret the sea. A hood covers the face and the hands move sadly, but there are only movements, no sounds or words to express what the sea is feeling.

Stanza 3

L21 "dark" means not just colour but inscrutability. The sea's voice is difficult to understand.

L24 "sunken coral water-walled" coral is a hard substance, red, pink, orange or white in colour which is secreted by some types of marine polyps for support. This is a lovely phrase, which captures, through sound and alliteration of "w," the sense of the coral deep beneath the sea, surrounded by water.

Stanza 4

L43 "Ramon Fernandez" Stevens points out in his letters that this name was not meant to refer to any particular person, particularly not to the critic of that name, but that he had just strung two common Spanish names together.

Stanza 5

L55 "demarcations" marks of a boundary

27.5 LET US SUM UP

Stevens is a poet who is deeply concerned about the world of poetry and the world of the imagination. He enters into the age-old debate about the relative merits of life and art, does one feed on the other, does one supersede the other? He seems to

suggest in "The Idea of Order at Key West" that art adds something to life that is not just a mimicking or mirror or copy or mimesis of it. The art produced by the artist lives on even after the artist dies in "The Emperor of Ice Cream." Art to Stevens seems to take the place of religion in a world where institutionalised religions like Christianity have fewer and fewer believers. In "Sunday Morning" he tries to convince one such timorous believer that life in its very fleetingness has a more powerful allure than the impossible-to-confirm promise of an everlasting Christian paradise.

27.6 GLOSSARY

Pagan: Pre-Christian

Mimesis: The Greek word for imitation. Entered the realm of aesthetics when Aristotle used it in his Poetics (c330B.C.), one of the earliest works of literary criticism.

27.7 QUESTIONS

- Q.1. What does "Sunday Morning" say about the conflicting claims of Christianity and paganism?
- Q.2. Analyse the significance of the lines, "And, in the isolation of the sky,/ At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make/Ambiguous undulations as they sink,/Downward to darkness, on extended wings."
- Q.3. Analyse all the ways in which life and death are juxtaposed in "The Emperor of Ice Cream." What is the significance of this juxtaposition?
- Q.4. What does "The idea of Order at Key West" contribute to the art versus life debate which thinkers and poets like Plato, Aristotle, Sidney and Wordsworth have spoken about?

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Wallace Stevens

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Vendler, Helen. On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems. 1969.

UNIT 28 WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883-1963)

Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Life and Works
- 28.2 "The Red Wheelbarrow"
 - 28.2.1 Text of the Poem VI
 - 28.2.2 Background and Critical Appreciation
- 28.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.4 Glossary
- 28.5 Questions
- 28.6 Further Reading

28.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we study the life and works of the poet William Carlos Williams and his poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" in detail. Williams was an oppositional voice in modern poetry--he agreed with many of the modern poets' endeavours (such as imagism) but was also fiercely critical of the expatriate poets. He was interested in developing a truly robust American voice and idiom in modern poetry. He was a strong influence on the movement called objectivism. He did a great deal to support new talent in American poetry in his lifetime.

28.1 LIFE AND WORKS

This poet did the most to support new talent in American poetry after World War II. He wrote for over sixty years and was both poet and doctor (pediatrics was his specialisation). Along with poetry he also wrote plays, essays and fiction and was, along with Hart Crane, one of the leading inheritors of Whitman's mantle in American poetry.

Williams was born in 1883 near Paterson, New Jersey and he lived there all his life. His father was an English immigrant and his mother a Puerto Rican who had studied painting in Paris. He was thus exposed to European culture but at the same time had a strong sense of America being his only home. He went to local schools as well as to schools in Switzerland and Paris. After graduating from the Horace Mann High School, he studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. There he became friends with the poets Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.). He graduated in 1906, and after working in New York City and Germany he returned to New Jersey, married Florence Herman, and began practising as a pediatrician. He continued seeing patients till a number of strokes in the mid '50s forced him to turn his practice over to one of his sons. Like Wallace Stevens, Williams pursued his career as a poet at night and in between seeing patients. He was determined to be a writer but equally determined not to let go of a doctor's livelihood. His practice and his community social projects brought him into contact with a wide variety of people and probably led to the energy and physicality of much of his poetry.

His first book, Poems was published privately in 1909. The second volume, Tempers, published in 1913 with the help of Ezra Pound, revealed Williams' interaction with the modern mode in poetry and his attempt to create his own voice.

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28.0 OBJECTIVES

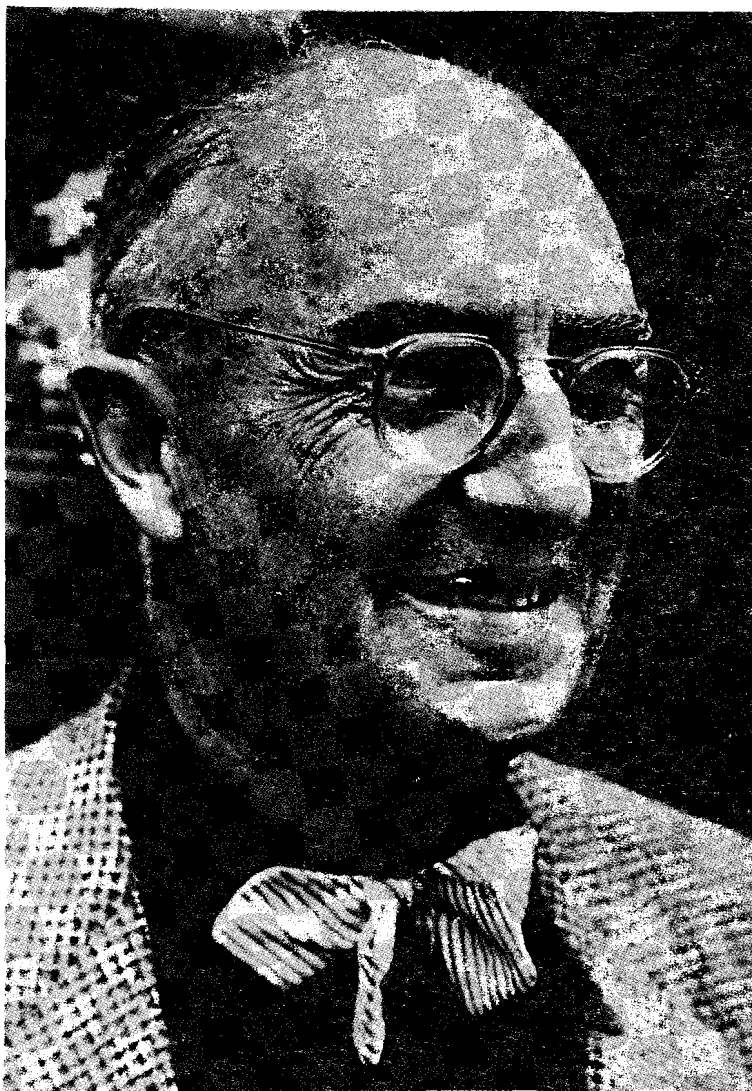
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In the intellectual circles of New York he came to know Wallace Stevens, the poet Marianne Moore, and painters like Picabia and Duchamp. Although he disagreed with Pound on matters like the revival of old verse forms, he agreed with him about his principle of "imagism." He was also attracted to Whitman's celebration of the merely physical and his strong recommendation for a poetry of feeling and of the poet's role as an upholder of liberty and equality. His essays in the magazine Contact which he edited between 1920 to 1923 with Robert McAlmon, his prose and poetry in Spring and All (1923) and his essays in the volume In the American Grain (1925) saw him moving away from expatriates like Pound and establishing his own, individual, even somewhat eccentric American tradition. Poetry, Williams argued, should be impelled by the same energies that bring about a revolution. It should run against the establishment. At the same time it should be grounded in reality--something he felt expatriate poets like T. S. Eliot were running away from. Symbolism should not be used to distance the reader of poetry from reality. Meanings should be found in actual things, actual objects and not vague abstractions. "The Red Wheelbarrow" is an excellent example of Williams' concerns about poetry in this sense. He was for reestablishing the cadences, the rhythms of American diction in poetry--this, he felt, would make poetry more down-to-earth. He also thought the very lack of stability of the American language would make it particularly open to innovation and fruitful change. Williams effectively uses fragmentation in syntax to draw attention to the particular and different ordering that the poet's imagination gives to the world of objects in order to turn it into poetry.

Poetry is not just imitation but "mutation." The influence of painting can be seen in his volume Sour Grapes (1921) as well as the earlier Spring and All. This is something else he has in common with Pound and Stevens. Dadaists, Expressionists, Cubists, Precisionists--Williams was exposed to all of these modern schools of European painting through art shows in New York City. He borrowed from the Cubists their fragmentation of objects; from the Precisionists their combination of geometry and objective realism.

In the 1930s, Williams' poems became one of the models for the "Objectivism" movement. His Collected Poems 1921-1931 was published by the Objectivist Press in 1934. At this time Williams was also writing a lot of fiction. The Great American Novel appeared in 1923, A Voyage to Pagan in 1928 and two collections of short stories, The Edge of the Knife and Life Along the Passaic River appeared in 1932 and 1938 respectively. The first two novels are mostly autobiographical and deal with the life of an artist; the short stories talk about the bleak, comic and heroic lives of American immigrants. Later novels like White Mule (1937) and its sequel In the Money (1940) talk of an immigrant's move from rags to riches in an America dominated by business.

Despite a series of heart attacks which began in 1948 and which made writing increasingly difficult for him, Williams completed his epic Paterson, the first book of which appeared in 1946 and subsequent books in 1948, 1949, 1951 and 1958. The epic is an answer to the Greeks and Romans and an epic about a modern metropolis. Book IV concludes with the hero's return to New Jersey, much like Odysseus' return to Ithaca in Homer's Odyssey.

Williams' honesty, his innovation and the directness and clarity of his style influenced later poets like Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, and Robert Creeley. He received a number of awards like the Dial Award (1926), the National Book Award (1950), the Bollingen Award (1953) and the Pulitzer Prize (1962). As can be seen from these dates, recognition came later rather than earlier in his career.

28.2 "THE RED WHEELBARROW"

28.2.1 Text of the Poem VI

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

28.2.2 Background and Critical Appreciation

The Red Wheelbarrow (1923)

This is a poem in the style of the Japanese haiku, where a single image is elaborated on and the significance of that image is left entirely up to the reader's imagination. It is objectivist, rooted in reality and uses no metaphors or symbols to escape from hard,

even mundane reality. The fragmentation of the syntax gives proof of Williams' effort to capture the new, intrinsic, particularly *American* cadences in his poetry. Here the object of Williams' attention is a red wheelbarrow, a humble country implement used for carrying straw or manure or animal food around a farm, "glazed" or made shiny by the rain, set up against some white chickens. The image becomes pungent because of the contrast between the red of the wheelbarrow and the white of the chickens. What is also unusual is that Williams can write a poem on such an ordinary farm object--poetry can indeed be composed about anything at all. The phrase "So much depends..." probably refers to the task the poet sets himself--can he indeed compose a poem about a wheelbarrow and some chickens, a poem that people will not laugh at, a poem worth the name? The fact that this poem continues to be anthologised 70-odd years after it was composed answers all those questions in the affirmative.

William Carlos
Williams

28.3 LET US SUM UP

While William Carlos Williams believed in the other modern poets' credos like Pound's imagism, he had problems with what he called the expatriate poets' flight from reality through symbolism. He wanted poems to be sensed as real objects, not to blind the reader to reality. He influenced the objectivist movement. He was also a strong influence in the creation of a robust American tradition in poetry, even though some may have seen his efforts in this direction as somewhat quixotic. In this endeavour he saw Walt Whitman as a powerful influence. "The Red Wheelbarrow" is a characteristically Williams poem--it elevates a humble object, sees it for what it is, does not obfuscate it into a symbol, and writes about it in a plain style that is nevertheless very graphic.

28.4 GLOSSARY

Imagism:	A literary movement launched in the early twentieth century in revolt against romanticism. It promoted free verse and precise imagery.
Symbolism:	A movement in France in the late nineteenth century that later spread to England and America wherein artists expressed ideas and emotions indirectly through symbols.
Mutation:	The act or process of being altered or changed.
Dadaism:	A western European artistic and literary movement (1916-23) that sought discovery of authentic reality through the abolition of traditional cultural and aesthetic forms by a technique of comic derision in which irrationality, chance and intuition were the guiding principles.
Precisionism:	A modern school of European painting combining geometry and objective realism.
Objectivism:	A mode of writing verse that recognises the poem, apart from its meaning, to be an object to be dealt with as such. It pays particular attention to the structure of the poem and its construction.

28.5 QUESTIONS

- Q.1. What is objectivism? Analyse "The Red Wheelbarrow" and say whether or not you think it is an objectivist poem.
- Q.2. In what ways did William Carlos Williams agree as a poet with his contemporaries like Pound and Eliot and in what ways did he differ?

28.6 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 29 EZRA POUND (1885-1972)

Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Life and Works
- 29.2 "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"
 - 29.2.1 Text
 - 29.2.2 Background and Critical Appreciation
 - 29.2.3 Form and Metre
 - 29.2.4 Notes
- 29.3 The Cantos
 - 29.3.1 Canto I: Text
 - 29.3.2 Background and Critical Appreciation
 - 29.3.3 Canto I: Notes
 - 29.3.4 Canto XVII: Text
 - 29.3.5 Canto XVII: Critical Appreciation
 - 29.3.6 Notes
- 29.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.5 Glossary
- 29.6 Questions
- 29.7 Further Reading

29.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we study the life and works of Ezra Pound and look in detail at his long poem, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as well as two parts of his magnum opus, "The Cantos"--Canto I and Canto XVII. This unit contains detailed, line-by-line annotations because the poems of Pound are crammed with allusions to classical mythology, to Renaissance history and to European geography among other things, so the reader must be a little patient. Pound was one of the most innovative poets of his time, both in terms of matter and form, and very supportive of new talent. His "Cantos" with their disjunctive form are an important precursor of the postmodern.

29.1 LIFE AND WORKS

Ezra Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, to parents who had ancestors in the American North-East and in the American West. They moved to Philadelphia when Pound was a few years old and his father worked in the Mint. Pound studied in the University of Pennsylvania--English literature, American history and the Greek and Roman classics--before moving to Hamilton College, where he took up Old English and Romance literatures. He graduated from Hamilton in 1905, returned to Pennsylvania for an M.A. the next year, and entered academics. He was dismissed from his first position (at Wabash College, Indiana) for sheltering an unemployed burlesque queen. This dismissal made him leave his native America for Venice and London but did not make him abandon his academic career. He taught medieval and Renaissance literature at the London Regent Street polytechnic between 1908-9 while trying to make his mark as a poet. His translations and scholarly works appeared in The Spirit of Romance (1910). His first verse collection was A Lume Spento (1908), published in Venice. Two others, A Quinzane for This Yule (1908) and Personae (1909) appeared in London. In 1914 he married Dorothy Shakespeare, who was to be the mother of his only son. Hand in hand with these publications went teaching and the writing of influential critical essays.



Although he spent much of his life outside America he was very conscious of his identity as an American within Europe. In his memoir *Indiscretions* (1923) he made clear his links both to the lumberman grandfather in the West and to the well-known upper New York family of his mother--two very disparate sections of society, one economically underprivileged, the other affluent. He insisted on using slang in his criticism and his poetry, along with colloquialisms in the latter in order to present an American identity, but as some critics have pointed out, there is also much of the cosmopolitan in Pound. He insists on writers adhering to standards of taste that are independent of national boundaries, is scathing when they do not, and is determined to formulate those standards in an effort to rebuild what we would now call the canon. Of course, Pound was far more radical than his contemporaries, the Georgian poets, who were merely calling for a literary revolt against Victorianism. At times in his strenuous efforts he appeared to want to become what a critic has called "the literary dictator of London" (Norman, *Ezra Pound* 273). Towards the end of his career he did occasionally sound a little too prone to the dramatisation of the loneliness of his endeavour, but the ambitiousness of his programme to redefine and rebuild the Anglo-American tradition, cannot be denied.

In essays like "Renaissance" Pound wrote about the steps that ought to be taken in order to carry out his programme: models from earlier ages should not be plagiarized but transformed and surpassed. Poets should "go against the grain of contemporary taste." History and culture should be ransacked in order to disclose lost traditions, as Pound thought he had done by discovering what he called a "new Greece" in Chinese

art and literature. Trusts and endowments should save the artist from the need to cater to the inferior tastes of the "ignorant" public and leave him/her free to pursue radical visions.

Ezra Pound

A few instances will prove Pound's indefatigable efforts to promote new talent. He was the first important reviewer of importance to praise what he called Robert Frost's "VURRY Amur'k'n" gift (Letters 114, Norton 1027); he promoted the music of the American composer George Antheil; he it was that was responsible for having Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man serialised in the journal The Egoist. Of course, his crucial editing changes in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land are now a part of literary history.

Along with Richard Aldington, Hilda Doolittle and others, Pound helped formulate the theory behind Imagism, and provided the title "Imagiste" for the group. The three main principles of this movement were: 1) the "direct treatment" of poetic subjects 2) economy of language by a radical condensing by the elimination of any unnecessary or merely ornamental words 3) an inorganic selection of rhythmical patterns--rhythmical composition was preferred in the sequence of the more flexible "musical phrase" rather than in "the sequence of a metronome" (Norton 1027). This group, which Pound left by the time he had published Des Imagistes: An Anthology (1914) and which was later led by Amy Powell, believed in the short poem, usually dominated by a single image or metaphor and structured around it, a rhythm of cadences, describing to the reader an object or scene from the material world and refusing to diffuse the poem's effect by relating it to an extended abstract meaning. This movement was a reaction to the flabbiness and abstraction of much of nineteenth century poetry. Some critics see a similarity in this poetic revolution and the one that came about as a result of the publication of the Lyrical Ballads in particularly in both Romantics' and Imagists' concentration on the object and the bias in favour of realism that accompanies this. In its concern with technique and in its restriction of meaning the movement also has something in common with more contemporary movements which attempt to reaffirm the values of poetry against the pressures of science. With formalism imagism shares an attention to the craft of writing. It focusses on a moment of discovery or awareness in which a single sharp metaphor or image crystallises the intuitive insight of the poet, the insight which he/she approximates with the essence of life. In its concern with surfaces, light and colour, the movement also has links with impressionism. Pound's haiku, "In a Station of the Metro:" "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/ Petals on a wet, black bough" is a famous example of an imagist poem.

Later Pound moved away from Imagism to Vorticism, along with the sculptor Jacob Epstein and the painter Wyndham Lewis. While imagism he now thought was too visual and static, Vorticism enabled forms that were sculptural and associated with energy and movement. Pound thought of the vortex as a form prior to any of the specific forms in art, a kind of ur-form. In cultural history a vortex is a time of revolution, innovation and ferment among all the arts. In poetry, an image is a vortex, "a radiant node or cluster...from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" (Pound Gaudier-Brzeska 92, Norton 1028).

During this time Pound was also interested in his explorations of oriental culture. His volumes Cathay (1915) and Lustra (1916) contained translations from the Chinese. He studied Ernest Fellonosa's manuscript, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of poetry and inferred that condensed Chinese ideograms had almost the effect of a film in their combination of events and actions, their words full of energy and their graphics. His interest in Confucian ethics can be felt in the Cantos and in his free translations of certain songs in The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius (1954). Studying Confucius convinced Pound that the poet's mission was to remake language and also the individual and society. Pound was drawn to the Confucian social model of the lord and his dependent community. His scholarship and his interest in the orient were not gratuitous and had to serve the larger purpose of his

propaganda in poetry and poetics--what he thought appropriate and what he strove to make authoritative in modern poetry.

In 1920 Pound left London for France and Italy--at this point he thought London as backward in the literary sphere as he had earlier thought New York. His farewell to London formed the basis of his early masterpiece "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920). By 1925 he was settled in Rapallo, Italy and well into composing the Cantos. At this time he relied mainly on the enormity of his correspondence to achieve his literary ends. Two volumes of his essays, Make It New (1934) and Literary Essays (1954), mostly contained essays written before 1920 while two other volumes, The ABC of Reading (1934) and Polite Essays (1937), contained his ceaseless appraisals of modern writing.

Along with assessments of the present went Pound's research into the past. In his study of the Middle Ages he came across the word forma which he felt expressed the process of creation which artists try to capture in their finished works of art. In his study of the Renaissance he was struck by similarities between 16th century statesmen and art patrons like Sigismondo Malatesta and Americans like Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, and more surprisingly, the Italian fascist dictator Mussolini. His Guide to Kulchur (1938), though containing many perceptive observations on history and culture, is now increasingly attacked for its anti-Semitism. Pound was increasingly emphatic in his denunciation of the Jews and his criticism of America under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He supported fascism saying it was preferable to "usury." According to Pound, usury was the enemy of social good and cultural order.

As expected, Pound's outspoken political views landed him in trouble. The talks that he delivered to the American troops on the invitation of the Italian government had the American government try him for treason in 1943. Literary circles in America also denounced him and he was edited out of an anthology. Not a bit deterred, Pound continued to recite his Cantos over the air, abuse President Roosevelt and the Jews, and mock American motives for taking part in World War II. After the fall of Italy Pound was imprisoned for months in an open-air cage--this physically and emotionally debilitating experience he hints at with anguish in the Pisan Cantos. In 1945 he was returned to the United States for trial, but his case was suspended because psychiatrists declared him mentally unfit. From 1946 to 1958 he was a patient in St. Elizabeth's hospital in Washington D.C., visited by his wife and admirers, and working on the Cantos. As a result of the efforts of influential friends like Archibald MacLeish, who harness the energies of lawyers and congressmen as well as literary figures, Pound's charge of treason was dropped in 1958 and he was free to return to Italy. Pound spent the rest of his life in Europe, mainly Italy, cared for by his faithful wife, the concert violinist Olga Rudge, and their daughter Mary, the Countess de Rachewiltz. Occasionally Pound visited London and in 1969 he even went to the United States to receive an honorary degree from Hamilton College and visit friends. He continued to publish the Cantos and to see friends, although towards the end of his life he was increasingly prone to long periods of silence.

Pound was awarded the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1948 for the Pisan Cantos, but this prize stirred up quite a bit of controversy because of Pound's political views and the charge of treason. Even though his influence on the poets of the '60s and '70s was immense, his reputation could never free itself from charges of anti-Semitism. In 1962 he received the Harriet Monroe Award for poetry and the following year a prize from the Academy of American Poets. However, when in 1972, just before his death, a committee of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences nominated Pound for its Emerson-Thoreau Award, the governing board of the Academy overruled the committee and did not give Pound the prize. In Pound's life radical courage and innovation on the one hand and controversy on the other were perpetual bedfellows.

29.2 "HUGH SELWYN MAUBERLEY"

Ezra Pound

29.2.1 Text of the Poem VII

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Life and Contacts)

"Vocat aestus in umbram"
-NEMESIANUS, Ec. IV

E.P. Ode pour L'Election de Son S  pulchre

For three years, out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"
In the old sense. Wrong from the start-

No, hardly, but seeing he had been born
In a half savage country, out of date;
Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;
Capaneus; trout for factitious bait;

5

Caught in the unstopped ear;
Giving the rocks small lee-way
The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year.

10

His true Penelope was Flaubert,
He fished by obstinate isles;
Observed the elegance of Circe's hair
Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.

15

Unaffected by "the march of events,"
He passed from men's memory in *l'an trentiesme*
De son eage, the case presents
No adjunct to the Muses' diadem.

II

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

20

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries
Of the inward gaze;
Better mendacities
Than the classics in paraphrase!

25

The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time,
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.

30

III

The tea-rose tea-gown, etc.
Supplants the mousseline of Cos,
The pianola "replaces"
Sappho's barbitos.

35

Christ follows Dionysus,
Phallic and ambrosial
Made way for macerations;
Caliban casts out Ariel.

All things are a flowing,
Sage Heracleitus says;
But a tawdry cheapness
Shall outlast our days.

40

Even the Christian beauty
Defects--after Samothrace;
We see
Decreed in the market place.

45

Faun's flesh is not to us,
Nor the saint's vision.
We have the press for wafer;
Franchise for circumcision.

50

All men, in law, are equals.
Fee of Pisistratus,
We choose a knave or an eunuch
To rule over us.

55

O bright Apollo,

What god, man, or hero
Shall I place a tin wreath upon!

IV

These fought in any case,
and some believing,
pro domo, in any case...

60

Some quick to arm,
Some for adventure,
Some from fear of weakness,
Some from fear of censure,
Some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
learning later ...
some in fear, learning love of slaughter;

65

Died some, pro patria,
non "dulce" non "et décor" ...
walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
came home, home to a lie,
home to many deceits,
home to old lies and new infamy;
usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places.

70

75

Daring as never before, wastage as never before.
Young blood and high blood,
fair cheeks, and fine bodies;

80

fortitude as never before

Ezra Pound

frankness as never before,
disillusions as never told in the old days,
hysterias, trench confessions,
laughter out of dead bellies.

85

V

There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization,

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

90

For two gross of broken statues,
For a few thousand battered books.

Yeux Glauques

Gladstone was still respected,
When John Ruskin produced
"King's Treasures"; Swinburne
And Rossetti still abused.

95

Fetid Buchanan lifted up his voice
When that faun's head of hers
Became a pastime for
Painters and adulterers.

100

The Burne-Jones cartons
Have preserved her eyes;
Still, at the Tate, they teach
Cophetua to rhapsodize;

105

Thin like brook-water,
With a vacant gaze.
The English Rubaiyat was still-born
In those days.

The thin, clear gaze, the same
Still darts out faun-like from the half-ruin'd face,
Questing and passive...
"Ah, poor Jenny's case"...

110

Bewildered that a world
Shows no surprise
At her last maquero's
Adulteries.

115

"Siena mi fe'; Disfecemi Maremma"

Among the pickled fetuses and bottled bones,
Engaged in perfecting the catalogue,
I found the last scion of the
Senatorial families of Strasbourg, Monsieur Verog.

120

For two hours he talked of Gallifet;
Of Dowson; of the Rhymers' Club;
Told me how Johnson (Lionel) died
By falling from a high stool in a pub... 125

But showed no trace of alcohol
At the autopsy, privately performed—
Tissue preserved—the pure mind
Arose toward Newman as the whiskey warmed. 130

Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels;
Headlam for uplift; Image impartially imbued
With raptures for Bacchus, Terpsichore and the Church.
So spoke the author of "The Dorian Mood,"

M. Verog, out of step with the decade, 135
Detached from his contemporaries,
Neglected by the young,
Because of these reveries.

Brennbaum

The sky-like limpid eyes,
The circular infant's face, 140
The stiffness from spats to collar
Never relaxing into grace;

The heavy memories of Horeb, Sinai and the forty years,
Showed only when the daylight fell
Level across the face 145
Of Brennbaum "The Impeccable."

Mr. Nixon

In the cream gilded cabin of his steam yacht
Mr. Nixon advised me kindly, to advance with fewer
Dangers of delay. "Consider
Carefully the reviewer. 150

"I was as poor as you are;
"When I began I got, of course,
"Advance on royalties, fifty at first," said Mr. Nixon,
"Follow me, and take a column,
"Even if you have to work free. 155

"Butter reviewers. From fifty to three hundred
"I rose in eighteen months;
"The hardest nut I had to crack
"Was Dr. Dundas.

"I never mentioned a man but with the view 160
"Of selling my own works.
"The tip's a good one, as for literature
"It gives no man a sinecure.

"And no one knows, at sight, a masterpiece.
"And give up verse, my boy, 165
"There's nothing in it."

Likewise a friend of Bloughram's once advised me:
 Don't kick against the pricks,
 Accept opinion. The "Nineties" tried your game
 And died, there's nothing in it.

170

X

Beneath the sagging roof
 The stylist has taken shelter,
 Unpaid, uncelebrated,
 At last from the world's welter

Nature receives him;
 With a placid and uneducated mistress
 He exercises his talents
 And the soil meets his distress.

175

The haven from sophistications and contentions
 Leaks through its thatch;
 He offers succulent cooking;
 The door has a creaking latch.

180

IX

"Conservatrix of Milesien"
 Habits of mind and feeling,
 Possibly. But in Ealing
 With the most bank-clerky of Englishmen?

185

No, "Milesian" is an exaggeration.
 No instinct has survived in her
 Older than those her grandmother
 Told her would fit her station.

190

XII

"Daphne with her thighs in bark
 Stretches toward me her leafy hands,"
 Subjectively. In the stuffed-satin drawing-room
 I await The Lady Valentine's commands,

Knowing my coat has never been
 Of precisely the fashion
 To stimulate, in her,
 A durable passion;

195

Doubtful, somewhat, of the value
 Of well-gowned approbation
 Of literary effort,
 But never of The Lady Valentine's vocation:

200

Poetry, her border of ideas,
 The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending
 With other strata
 Where the lower and higher have ending;

205

A hook to catch the Lady Jane's attention,
 A modulation toward the theatre,
 Also, in the case of revolution,
 A possible friend and comforter.

210

Conduct, on the other hand, the soul
 "Which the highest cultures have nourished"
 To Fleet St. where
 Dr. Johnson flourished;

Beside this thoroughfare
 The sale of half-hose has
 Long since superseded the cultivation
 Of Pierian roses.

215

Envoi (1919)

Go, dumb-born book,
 Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:
 Hadst thou but song
 As thou hast subjects known.
 Then were there cause in thee that should condone
 Even my faults that heavy upon me lie,
 And build her glories their longevity.

220

225

Tell her that sheds
 Such treasure in the air,
 Recking naught else but that her graces give
 Life to the moment,
 I would bid them live
 As roses might, in magic amber laid,
 Red overwrought with orange and all made
 One substance and one colour
 Braving time.

230

Tell her that goes
 With song upon her lips
 But sings not out the song, nor knows
 The maker of it, some other mouth,
 May be as fair as hers,
 Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,
 When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
 Sifting on siftings in oblivion,
 Till change hath broken down
 All things save Beauty alone.

235

240

Mauberley

1920

"*Vacuos exercet aera morsus.*"

Turned from the 'eau-forte
 par Jaquemart"
 To the strait head
 Of Messalina:

245

"His true Penelope
 Was Flaubert,"
 And his tool
 The engraver's.

250

Firmness,
 Not the full smile,
 His art, but an art
 In profile;

255

Colourless
 Pier Francesca,
 Pisanello lacking the skill
 To forge Achaia.

260

II

"Qu'est ce qu'ils savent de l'amour, et qu'est ce qu'ils peuvent en comprendre?

*S'ils ne comprennent pas la poesie, s'ils ne sentent pas la musique, qu'est ce qu'ils
 peuvent comprendre de cette passion en comparaison avec laquelle la rose est
 grossiere et le parfum des violettes un tonnerre?"*

- Caid Ali

For three years, diabolus in the scale,
 He drank ambrosia,
 All passes, ANANGKE prevails,
 Came end, at last, to that Arcadia.

He had moved amid her phantasmagoria,
 Amid her, galaxies
 NUKTIS AGALMA

265

Drifted... drifted precipitate,
 Asking time to be rid of...
 Of his bewilderment; to designate
 His new found orchid...

270

To be certain... certain...
 (Amid aerial flowers).. time for arrangements—
 Drifted on
 To the final estrangement;

275

Unable in the supervening blankness
 To sift TO AGATHON from the chaff
 Until he found his sieve...
 Ultimately, his seismograph:

—Given that is his "fundamental passion,"
 This urge to convey the relation
 Of eye-lid and cheek-bone
 By verbal manifestations;

280

To present the series
 Of curious heads in medallion—

285

He had passed, inconscient, full gaze,
 The wide-banded irides
 And botticellian sprays implied
 In their diastasis;

Which anaesthesia, noted a year late,
 And weighed, revealed his great affect,
 (Orchid), mandate
 Of Eros, a retrospect.

290

Mouths biting empty air,
 The still stone dogs,

295

Caught in metamorphosis, were
Left him as epilogues.

"The Age Demanded"

VIDE POEM, II

For this agility chance found
Him of all men, unfit
As the red-beaked steeds of
The Cytherean for a chain bit. 300

The glow of porcelain
Brought no reforming sense
To his perception
Of the social inconsequence. 305

Thus, if her colour
Came against his gaze,
Tempered as if
It were through a perfect glaze

He made no immediate application 310
Of this to relation of the state
To the individual, the month was more temperate
Because this beauty had been.

The coral isle, the lion-coloured sand
Burst in upon the porcelain revery: 315
Impetuous troubling
Of his imagery.

Mildness, amid the neo-Nietzschean clatter,
His sense of graduations,
Quite out of place amid 320
Resistance to current exacerbations,

Invitation, mere invitation to perceptivity
Gradually led him to the isolation
Which these presents place
Under a more tolerant, perhaps, examination. 325

By constant elimination
The manifest universe
Yielded an armour
Against utter consternation,

A Minoan undulation, 330
Seen, we admit, amid ambrosial circumstances
Strengthened him against
The discouraging doctrine of chances,

And his desire for survival,
Faint in the most strenuous moods, 335
Became an Olympian *apathein*
In the presence of selected perceptions.

A pale gold, in the aforesaid pattern,
The unexpected palms

Destroying, certainly, the artist's urge,
Left him delighted with the imaginary
Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge,

340

Ezra Pound

Incapable of the least utterance or composition,
Emendation, conservation of the "better tradition,"
Refinement of medium, elimination of superfluities,
August attraction or concentration.

345

Nothing, in brief, but maudlin confession,
Irresponse to human aggression,
Amid the precipitation, down-float
Of insubstantial manna,
Lifting the faint susurrus
Of his subjective hosannah.

350

Ultimate affronts to
Human redundancies;

Non-esteem of self-styled "his betters"
Leading, as he well knew,
To his final
Exclusion from the world of letters.

355

IV

Scattered Moluccas
Not Knowing, day to day,
The first day's end, in the next noon;
The placid water
Unbroken by the Simoon;

360

Thick foliage
Placid beneath warm suns,
Tawn fore-shores
Washed in the cobalt of oblivions;

365

Or through dawn-mist
The grey and rose
Of the juridical
Flamingoes;

370

A consciousness disjunct,
Being but this overblotted
Series
Of intermittences;

375

Coracle of Pacific voyages,
The unforecasted beach;
Then on an oar
Read this:

"I was
And I no more exist;
Here drifted
An hedonist."

380

Medallion

Luini in porcelain!
The grand piano

385

Utters a profane
Protest with her clear soprano.

The sleek head emerges
From the gold-yellow frock
As Anadyomene in the opening
Pages of Reinach.

390

Honey-red, closing the face-oval,
A basket-work of braids which seem as if they were
Spun in King Minos hall
From metal, or intractable amber;

395

The face-oval beneath the glaze,
Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
Beneath half-watt rays,
The eyes turn topaz

29.2.2 Background and Critical Appreciation

This poem was published in 1920 when Pound was just about to leave London and was already at work on his ambitious *Cantos*. This poem too is quite ambitious. It seeks to measure the variety of social, economic and cultural ills in England that threaten poetic talent and force poets to become frivolous or escapist. The poem also questions the whole metier of being a poet and is quite clear-eyed about the limited efficacy of this vocation. F.R. Leavis has emphasised Pound's Wit, especially in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". He finds the verse is extraordinarily subtle, says that "critical activity accompanies feeling," and finds the poem "serious and light at the same time, Sardonic and poignant, flippant and intense"; "Mauberley," he concludes is a "great poem." (Seven Modern American Poets, Unger.pg 130)

Pound said that the poem was modelled on the technique used by Henry James in his fiction: it presents its subject through the medium of a character's mind or voice, a "centre of consciousness" which assesses the subject in question. In this poem the first thirteen lyrics are presented through "E.P.," a persona with whom Pound has much in common (besides the initials) by way of artistic tastes and ambitions but who should not be simplistically equated with the poet. The London cultural scene is surveyed through the eyes of "E.P." The tone verges on futility until the section entitled "Envoi," where the voice sounds more passionate.

In the next section entitled "Mauberley" "E.P." is absorbed into the persona of the fictitious poet Mauberley. Pound's attitude is slightly mocking here, but his attempt to infuse poetry with new life continues unabated. Pound attempts to rid his poetry of its tendency towards nostalgia and isolation and his belief in the perfect form. All these he feels threatened to turn his poetry to an aesthete's "overblotted/ Series/ Of intermittences." By admitting these limitations Pound manages partially to overcome them in the highly-charged last section, "Medallion."

There are a number of things to keep in mind while reading this early masterpiece by Pound. The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue, a form which Pound borrowed from Robert Browning and then later adapted. In Browning the monologue is used as if the speaker and not the poet is speaking, but speaking in such a way that we see him or her in an objective light. Thus, in "The Last Duchess," we cannot but be horrified at the speaker's cold-hearted murder of his wife because she smiled too much. However, the speaker himself remains imperturbable. In Pound's hands the form becomes more personal. The figure from the past and the poet himself become so entwined that the figure ends up being a persona or a mask for the poet. Browning's dramatic monologue becomes in Pound's hands and in his own words a "dramatic lyric." He defines this as "the poetic part of a drama the rest of which (to

me the prose part) is left to the reader's imagination or implied or set in a short note" (Letters 3-4). It also becomes a tour de force reworking of history. The person chosen is usually a poet and in the patchwork reconstruction of his life appear snatches of his poetry, his journal entries, and fragments of the documents in which the speaker's life is recorded. The persona thus became for Pound an important means of communicating in a plurality of voices and of exploring the western tradition and incorporating necessary parts of it to fabricate a voice suitable for modern poetry.

Ezra Pound

His admirable control over colloquial speech and his mastery over the "sculpture" of rhyme are evident in lines like those describing the affluent Mr. Nixon "In the cream gilded cabin of his steam yacht," advising the poet to "Butter reviewers. From fifty to three hundred/ I rose in eighteen months" (L148ff). The mix of the scholarly and the colloquial is also arresting: we glide from the oh-so contemporary Mr. Nixon to the Greek Aphrodite and Homer's Penelope and back again. At times, of course, Pound's relentless and intentionally teasing erudition--he believes in tossing out jigsaw fragments of the Greek epics, Ovid, Florentine art--can become tiresome.

29.2.3 Form and Metre

What Pound later called his attempt "To break the pentametre" (Canto 81) or the traditional five-foot line of English and American poetry, is evident in the way he avoids writing lines of the same length, breaks lines with an unexpected caesura, and avoids the monotonous regularity of "hefty swats on alternate syllables" (as typified by the iambic pentametre) by variations in cadence, tone and rhyme. It is this discipline in his craft that avoids the sharp contrasts of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" from becoming melodramatic. The tone of subtle irony is maintained throughout. Pound's innovations greatly influenced later modern poets and disciples such as T.S. Eliot.

29.2.4 Notes

Title: The name of the poet that Pound uses is entirely fictitious.

"Life and Contacts": This is an ironic transformation of the usual sub-title of literary biographies, "Life and Letters." In the American edition of 1926 Pound said that the poem was "distinctly a farewell to London" (Norton 1056.)

"*Vocat...umbram*": "The heat calls us into the shade." This line is from the Eclogue IV of the third century Carthaginian poet Nemesianus (Norton 1056).

"Ode...Sepulchre": This is an adaptation of the title of an ode by the French poet Pierre de Ronsard (1524-85), "On the selection of his tomb" (Norton 1056) .

L8 "Capaneus": One of the seven against Thebes whom Zeus struck down by lightning for his rebellion (Norton 1056).

L12 "Penelope": Penelope was the wife of Odysseus who remained faithful to him during his long absence from Ithaca. She fended off suitors by saying she would only marry once her tapestry was complete; every night she took care to undo all that she had woven during the day!

L12 "Flaubert": Gustave Flaubert (1821-80) French novelist and author of the celebrated Madame Bovary. He was a stickler for form and stylistic precision.

L14 "Circe": The enchantress with whom Odysseus spent a year before returning to Ithaca (Odyssey 10). She helped him successfully to complete his journey to the underworld.

L17-8 "l'an...eage": The French line translates, "The thirtieth year of his age." Adapted from The Testament by the 15th century French poet and robber Francois Villon. Pound later changed this to "trentunieme" or thirty-first, since he was referring to the turning point in his life which happened in 1916: the publication of Lustra (Norton 1056).

Stanza 2

L20 "Demanded": This word expresses how difficult it is for the modern poet to fulfill his public role when the public is so insistent about what it wants.

L30 "kinema": The Greek word for "movement" from which we derive the modern cinema.

L33 "Cos": Gauzelike fabric for which the Aegean island of Cos was famous (Norton 1057).

L35 "Sappho's barbitos": Sappho was the renowned lesbian poet of c600B.C. who lived on Lesbos. A barbitos is a kind of lyre.

L36 "Dionysus": The Greek god of fertility, wine and poetic inspiration. His worshippers indulged in wild orgies and ecstasies. His festivals included indulgence in wine, sex and theatre.

L38 "macerations": Wasting away by fasting. Pound contrasts the Dionysian indulgence to the body's needs with the Christian ascetic tradition of denying the body.

L39 "Caliban...Ariel": Two characters in Shakespeare's play The Tempest. While Caliban disobeys Prospero (he wants to make love to Miranda, Prospero's daughter) Ariel, a spirit with magical powers, follows his orders, albeit grudgingly, hoping to gain his freedom thereby. Pound seems to associate Caliban with the Dionysian and Ariel with the Christian.

L41 "Heracleitus": A Greek philosopher of c 500 B.C. who said that all reality is flux, mutable, ever-changing.

L45 "Samothrace": North Aegean island which was the centre of mystery cults and the location of the famous statue, "Winged Victory" (norton 1057).

L53 "Pisistratus": Athenian tyrant and, surprisingly, art patron of sixth century B.C. (Norton 1058).

L57: This is Pound's version of Pindar's "What god, what hero, what man shall we loudly praise" ("Olympian Odes", II.2) (Norton 1058).

L61 "pro domo": For the home, adapted from Cicero's De Domo Sua (Norton 1058).

L69-70 "pro...décor": Adapted from Horace's famous lines, "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (Odes III. ii. 13) meaning it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. Pound says the deaths are neither sweet nor fitting. His lines are similar to those of the English war poet, Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), who has a poem entitled "Dulce et Decorm Est," published posthumously in 1920, the same year as "Hugh

Selwyn Mauberley." In that poem Owen calls Horace's lines "the old Lie": a lie for which thousands of young men, including Owen himself, gave their lives in the First World War. As Pound himself says in section V of this poem, "There died a myriad,/ And of the best, among them,/For an old bitch gone in the teeth,/ For a botched civilisation." The biting alliteration of the "b" sound underlines his fury. The "old bitch" is Europe.

"*Yeux Glauques*": This refers to the yellow-green eyes of Elizabeth Siddall, the seamstress-turned-model of the pre-Raphaelite painters, who was later to become the wife of the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) (Norton 1059).

L94 "Gladstone": William E. Gladstone (1809-98) was a politician and three times Prime Minister of England (Norton 1059).

L95 "John Ruskin": The critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) whose book Sesame and Lillies contains a chapter entitled "King's Treasures" called for an improvement in English tastes in art (Norton 1059).

L96 "Swinburne": The poet Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909) was part of the pre-Raphaelites. These poets were attacked as the "fleshly school of poetry" by Robert W. Buchanan (1841-1901) and defended by John Ruskin (Norton 1059). Pre-Raphaelite art too tended to be overripe.

L102 "cartons": drawings

L108 "The English Rubaiyat": Edward Fitzgerald (1809-83) translated The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam in 1859 but it was not read until discovered later by the Pre-Raphaelites. That is why Pound calls it "still-born" (Norton 1059).

L113 "poor Jenny": The prostitute heroine of a poem by Rossetti (Norton 1059).

L116 "maquero": Or *magnereau*, meaning sexual exploiter or pimp (Norton 1059).

L118 "*Siena...Maremma*": Some of the most moving lines in Dante's Purgatory V.134 which translate as "Siena made me, Maremma unmade me." They are spoken by a woman born in the beautiful town of Sienna who is condemned to die in the Maremma marshes for her adultery.

L122 "Verog": Victor Plarr (1863-1929) the French poet and story teller from Strasbourg who was later the librarian of the Royal College of Surgeons and a member of the Rhymer's Club.

L123 "Gallifet": Marquis de Gallifet (1830-1909) French General of the Battle of Sedan, which the French lost, in the Franco-Prussian war (Norton 1060).

L124-5 "Dowson...Johnson": These were two heavy drinkers and poets at the Rhymer's Club (Norton 1059).

L130 "Newman": John Henry Newman (1801-90) editor and Roman Catholic convert and intellectual. He was later a Cardinal (Norton 1059).

L132 "Headlam...Image": The Rev. Stewart D. Headlam (1847-1924) was forced to resign his curacy for lecturing on the dance to working men's clubs. Selwyn Image (1849-1930) was the co-founder, with Headlam, of the Church and Stage Guild (Norton 1060).

L133 "Terpsichore": The Greek muse of the dance.

Brennbaum: in German means burnt tree which also suggests 'burning bush'



Bernini, Apollo and Daphne, c1620

L143 "Horeb, Sinai": The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Moses saw the burning bush at Horeb and received the ten commandments at Sinai (Exodus 3.2 and 19.20) (Norton 1059).

L167 "Bloughram": In Robert Browning's dramatic monologue, "Bishop Bloughram's Apology," the Bishop rationalised his laxness in matters of religious doctrine (Norton 1061).

L168 "Don't...pricks": This is an ironic echo of Christ's statement to Saul: "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9.5) (Norton 1061).

L183 "Consevatix...Milesien": Conservator of the erotic indulgence for which the Ionian city of Miletus and Aristides's Milesian Tales were known (Norton 1062).

L185 "Ealing": A London suburb.

L191 "Daphne" This is a reference to the moving tale of Apollo and Daphne in Ovid's Metamorphoses I. Apollo was in love with the nymph Daphne and kept pursuing her against her will. One day as he touched her she prayed to her father Peneus for help and was changed into the laurel tree. Ever since, the laurel has been associated with Apollo.

Mary M. Innes' translation reads:

'O father,' she cried, 'Help me! If you rivers really have divine powers, work some transformation, and destroy this beauty which makes me please all too well!' Her prayer was scarcely ended when a deep languor took hold on her limbs, her soft breasts were enclosed in thin bark, her hair grew into leaves, her arms into branches, and her feet that were lately so swift were held fast by sluggish roots... (43)

This myth has also been immortalised in marble by the Baroque sculptor Bernini. Pound's lines are a translation of the French poet Theophile Gautier's Le Chateau de Souvenir.

L212 "'Which...nourished'": A translation of two lines from the French poet Jules Laforgue's (1860-87) Complainte de Pianos (Norton 1062).

L213 "Fleet Street": The newspaper district of London.

L214 "Dr. Johnson": Samuel Johnson (1709-84), poet, novelist, essayist, biographer and critic. One of the most respected and influential people in the world of English 18th century letters.

L218 "Pierian roses": Pieria is a place near Mount Olympus where the Muses were worshipped (Norton 1063).

Notes (ENVOI)

Envoi: "This poem is modelled on the rhetoric and cadences of "Goe, Lovely Rose" by Edmund Waller (1606-87), whose poems were set to music by Henry Lawes (1596-1662). 'E.P.' first addresses his book and dispatches it with a message for the listener who once inspired him by singing Waller's song then in L221 breaks off to confess the limited powers of his poetry. The second stanza celebrates the beauty of the singer and listener, and offers to commemorate her in verse. The third warns of the incompleteness of her response and of the transience of all things but beauty. The concert singer whom Pound heard sing Lawes and Waller's song was Raymonde Collignon" (Norton 1063).

Notes (Mauberley)

"*Vacuus...morsus*": "He snaps vacuously at the empty air." This line describes the effort of a dog, Laelaps, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* VII to bite at an elusive monster attacking Thebes. Both dog and monster are later metamorphosed to stone (Norton 1063). Mary M. Innes' translation of Ovid reads, "he [Laelaps] seemed to have his victim, but never quite had it, and snapped uselessly at the air."

L245-6 "eau-forte...Jaquemart": Etching by Jaquemart. Jules Jaquemart (1837-80) was a French graphic artist (Norton 1063).

L248 "Messalina": The dissolute and lascivious wife of the Roman emperor Claudius (c 8 A.D.) (Norton 1064).

L249-250 "His true...Flaubert": See line 13.

L258 "Pier Francesca": Piero della Francesca (1420?-92), an Umbrian painter (Norton 1064).

L259 "Pisanello": Vittore Pisano (1397?-1455?), Veronese painter and medallist who made medallions based on Greek coins (Norton 1064).

L260 "Achaia": Southern Greece (Norton 1064).

"*Qu'est...Caid Ali*": "What do they know of love, and what can they understand? If they do not understand poetry, if they do not respond to music; what can they understand of this passion in comparison to which the rose is gross and the perfume of violets a clap of thunder?" This is the translation of the words in French which Pound presents as a sort of quotation, but Caid Ali is only a pseudonym for himself (Norton 1064). Perhaps he is aware that "caid" or "quaid" means prisoner in Urdu.

L261 "diabolus": Refers both to the devil and to the musical term that denotes the interval of the augmented fourth (Norton 1064).

L263 "ANANGKE": Necessity (Norton 1064).

L264 "Arcadia": Greek mountain region thought of as a rustic paradise, but whose mountainous locale carries within it the demystification of the arcadian myth--of life untinged with sorrow.

L267 "NUKTIS 'AGALMA": "Night's jewel." This is a phrase from a pastoral poem by the Greek poet Bion (c100B.C.) in celebration of the evening star (Norton 1064).

L277 "AGATHON": The good (Norton 1064).

L287 "irides": This is the plural of iris, both the flower and the part of the eye (Norton 1065).

L288 "botticellian sprays": This is a reference to the Renaissance Florentine painter Sandro Botticelli (1444?-1510) whose famous painting "Primavera" (Spring) depicted a nymph with sprays coming out of her mouth.

L289 "diastasis": Separation (Norton 1065).

L293 "Eros": The Greek god of love, whom the Romans call Cupid. He is the son of Aphrodite (whom the Romans call Venus).

"*Vide*": The Latin for "see."

L300-1 "red-beaked...bit": This is a reference to the red-beaked doves tied to the chariot of Aphrodite when she first landed on the island of Cythera off the Laconian coast (Norton 1065).

L318 "Nietzschean clatter": These are ideas derived from the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) whose bold ethical and aesthetic theories challenged conventional morals and traditional western philosophy (Norton 1066).

L330 "Minoan undulation": The Minoan period was from 2000 to 1500 B.C. According to the French archaeologist, Salomon Reinach, this "undulation" is a stylistic feature of the portrait sculptures by the Cretan Scopas during the Minoan period (Norton 1066).

L336 "*apathein*": The indifference of the Greek gods to the mortal matters (Norton 1066).

L359 "Moluccas": Spice Islands in the Malay Archipelago (Norton 1067).

L363 "Simoon": Violent wind and sand storm of Near Eastern deserts (Norton 1067).

L376 "Coracle": Small boat covered with animal hide and framed in wicker which the ancient Britons used (Norton 1067).

L384 "Luini": Bernardino Luini (1475?-1532?) was an Italian painter (Norton 1067).

L390-1 "Anadyomene...Reinach": This is an adjective used to describe Aphrodite. It means foam-covered. Reinach's "Apollo" included a reproduction of a head of Aphrodite (Norton 1068).

L394 "Minos": This was the legendary King of Crete.

29.3 THE CANTOS

29.3.1 Cantos I: Text

From THE CANTOS

And then went down to the ship,	
Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and	
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,	
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also	
Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward	5
Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,	
Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess	
Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,	
Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day's end.	
Sun to his slumber, shadows o'er all the ocean,	10
Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,	
To the Kimmerian lands, and peopled cities	
Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever	
With glitter of sun-rays	
Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven	15
Swartest night stretched over wretched men there.	
The ocean flowing backward, came we then to the place	
Aforesaid by circe.	
Here did they rites, Permedes and Eurylochus,	
And drawing sword from my hip	20

I dug the ell-square pitkin;
 Poured we libations unto each the dead,
 First mead and then sweet wine, water mixed with white flour.
 Then prayed I many a prayer to the sickly death's-heads;
 As set in Ithaca, sterile bulls of the best 25
 For sacrifice, heaping the pyre with goods,
 A sheep to Tiresias only, black and a bell-sheep.
 Dark blood flowed in fosse,
 Souls out of Erebus, cadaverous dead, of brides
 Of youths and of the old who had borne much; 30
 Souls stained with recent tears, girls tender,
 Men many, mauled with bronze lance heads,
 Battle spoil, bearing yet dreory arms,
 These many crowded about me; with shouting,
 Pallor upon me, cried to my men for more beasts; 35
 Slaughtered the herds, sheep slain of bronze;
 Poured ointment, cried to the gods,
 To Pluto the strong, and praised Proserpine;
 Unsheathed the narrow sword,
 I sat to keep off the impetuous impotent dead, 40
 Till I should hear Tiresias.
 But first Elpenor came, our friend Elpenor,
 Unburied, cast on the wide earth,
 Limbs that we left in the house of Circe,
 Unwept, unwrapped in sepulchre, since toils urged other. 45
 Pitiful spirit. And I cried in hurried speech:
 "Elpenor, how art thou come to this dark coast?
 "Cam'st thou afoot, outstripping seamen?"
 And he in heavy speech:
 "Ill fate and abundant wine. I slept in Circe's ingle. 50
 "Going down the long ladder unguarded,
 "I fell again the buttress,
 "Shattered the nape-nerve, the soul sought Avernus.
 "But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied,
 "Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-board, and inscribed: 55
 "*A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.*
 "And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows."

And Anticlea came, whom I beat off, and then Tiresias Theban,
 Holding his golden wand, knew me, and spoke first:
 "A second time? why? man of ill star, 60
 "Facing the sunless dead and this joyless region?
 "Stand from the fosse, leave me my bloody bever?
 "For soothsay."

And I stepped back,
 And he strong with the blood, said then; "Odysseus 65
 "Shalt return through spiteful Neptune, over dark seas,
 "Lose all companions." And then Anticlea came.
 Lie quite Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus,
 In officina Wecheli, out of Homer.
 And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away 70
 And unto Circe:
 Venerandam,
 In the Cretan's phase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,
 Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, oricalchi, with golden
 Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids 75
 Bearing the golden bough of Argicida. So that:

Pound's most celebrated work is his epic, the Cantos, on which he began composition in 1915 and continued for about fifty years. They were first published as A Draft of XVI Cantos in 1925. According to some critics this epic is a masterpiece of innovation, with its pluralistic open form, to others it is disorderly and obscure. Readers must decide for themselves which critical group to identify with after their own reading is complete.

In Lustra (1917) Pound calls the Cantos a "rag-bag for the 'modern world' to stuff all its thought in" (Norton 1032). In his Selected Essays he called it a poem "including history," with three important foci: 1) men of action (statesmen, warriors, bankers), 2) documents and books and 3) creative genius. These are all explored in an anecdotal and conversational way. History is to be experienced rather than written about as an isolated object. There are a number of long and short excerpts in the poem from literature, biography, letters and the poet's personal memories. On the basis of these some critics find it useful to divide the Cantos into different groups, such as the "Pisan cantos," based on Pound's experience as a prisoner in an American detention camp, the "Malatesta cantos," organised around the figure of the Renaissance soldier and patron Sigismondo Malatesta, the "Chinese history cantos," and the "American cantos." However, it must not be forgotten that there are also intricate links between these different groups which surface through repeated images, associations and phrases. Figures from western civilisation, both epic poets like Homer and Dante and the people in their poems, Odysseus, Cavalcanti (who was also of course a real person whom Dante knew), more recent poets like Browning, Yeats and Eliot, figures from myth like Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and Persephone or Proserpine, daughter of Demeter who was carried off by the God of the Underworld, Pluto, and whose return to earth signified the return of spring, appear and reappear. Three quests dominate the poem, the quest of Odysseus for his home, Ithaca (Homer's Odyssey), the search for Paradise on the part of the exiled Dante (Divine Comedy), and finally the search in the Cantos for an ideal social order and a utopian city, Dioce, "whose terraces are the colour of stars" (Canto 74). However, what is most striking about the Cantos is what R.P. Blackmur calls their "deliberate disconnectedness" (Language as Gesture 140, Norton 1032). They present what Mikhail Bakhtin would call heteroglossia, or a plurality of voices at work at the same time rather than a single controlling voice or poetic persona. Also, the material is deliberately presented in the process of assimilation rather than fully assimilated. In all these ways the Cantos could almost be termed a postmodern poem before its time.

29.3.3 Canto I: Notes

L1-68 These lines are an abbreviated adaptation of Book XI, lines 1-174 of Homer's Odyssey. In this part of the epic Odysseus undertakes his voyage to the underworld, inhabited by the dead. Pound omits most of the meetings Odysseus has with dead souls after he has spoken to Tiresias and concentrates, instead, on the first part of the book, condensing almost 174 lines in Homer's more leisured epic narrative to sixty-seven masterly lines.

L7 "Circe" Circe was an enchanter with whom Odysseus lived with for a year. She told him to get directions from the blind Theban prophet Tiresias (who had prophesied Oedipus's doom) and who was now in the underworld.

L12 "Kimmerian lands" The fog-laden region at the earth's edge where people from myth lived.

L19 "Perimedes and Eurylochus" Two of Odysseus' friends



L21 "pitkin" A small pit. Circe had given Odysseus detailed instructions which he followed to the letter, and digging a pit and pouring libations all around it were a part of her instructions.

L22 "libations" Drink offerings to the gods

L27 "A sheep to Tiresias" This too was part of Circe's instructions: Tiresias must be offered "the finest jet-black sheep to be found in your flock" (Odyssey X) once Odysseus returns to Ithaca. Here Pound seems to conflate the sheep to be sacrificed back in Ithaca with the "young ram and black ewe" that Circe instructed Odysseus to sacrifice in the underworld and that she left tied by his ship just before he left her land and sailed for the underworld (Odyssey X).

L28 "fosse" A ditch

L29 "Erebus" Another name for Hades, the underworld land of the dead. At times the word Hades is also used to refer to the king of the underworld, Pluto.

L33 "dreory" Dripping with blood—from the Old English *dreorig*

L38 "Pluto...Proserpine" Daughter of Demeter and wife of Pluto, the god of the underworld, who forcefully carried her off to the underworld. Also called Persephone.

L48 "'Cam'st thou afoot?'" Elpenor, till recently, was a living part of Odysseus' crew. Unfortunately he drinks too much in Circe's castle, slips on the ladder and breaks his neck. Although this incident is described in the Odyssey X, in the following book Odysseus appears surprised to see Elpenor and wonders how he could have reached the underworld so fast on foot since he wasn't with them on the ship. The sudden presence in the underworld of a man who was living only the day before adds a poignant note.

L50 "ingle" Corner

L53 "Avernus" A lake near Naples and also the entrance to Hades

L58 "Anticlea" Odysseus' mother. Pound's adaptation entirely elides the emotional charge of this glimpse Odysseus has of his mother. The last time he had seen her she had been alive and now, although he sees her, he can say nothing until he has offered the blood libation to Tiresias which would help him speak (Circe gave very specific instructions to this effect). The sadness of the moment is underlined once Anticlea does speak—she tells Odysseus that it is not old age or illness that has robbed her of life "and all its sweetness" but "my heartache for you, my glorious Odysseus, and for your wise and gentle ways" (Odyssey XI). This passage too is omitted by Pound.

L60 "A second time?" They met once before on earth

L62 "bever" Libation

L66 "Neptune" God of the Sea who was going to delay Odysseus' return home by a tempest

L69 "officina" Workshop

L69 "In officina...Homer" Pound admitted to using the Renaissance Latin translation of Homer produced by Andreas Divus in the Paris workshop of Wechel in 1538 (Norton 1070)



Poussin, Bacchanalian Revel, mid 17th century

L72 "Venerandam" Commanding reverence—this phrase is used of Aphrodite, the god of Love (called Venus by the Romans)

L74 "Cypri...est" Latin for "the fortresses of Cyprus were her appointed realm" (Norton 1070)

L74 "oricalchi" Of copper (Norton 1070)

L76 "Argicida" The Greeks are known as Argi, but there are a number of other associations here. Pound combines a number of mythical figures here, Aphrodite, Proserpine and Hermes. Aphrodite was the killer of the Greeks during the Trojan war (she supported Paris and Helen) while Proserpine or Persephone was the figure to whom Aeneas, the hero of the Roman poet Virgil's epic, the Aeneid offered the golden bough before going to the underworld. The golden bough was sacred to the goddess Diana and is here conflated or associated with Hermes, the slayer Argus of the numerous eyes (Argicida) and freed Io (Norton 1070)

29.3.4 Canto XVII: Text

So that the vines burst from my fingers
 And the bees weighted with pollen
 More heavily in the vine-shoots:
 Chirr—Chirr—chir—rikk—a purring sound,
 And the birds sleepily in the branches. 5
 ZAGREUS! IO ZAGREUS.
 With the first pale-clear of the heaven
 And the cities set in their hills,
 And the goddess of the fair knees
 Moving there, with the oak-woods behind her, 10
 The green slope, with white hounds
 leaping about her;
 And thence, down to the creek's moth, until evening,
 Flat water before me,
 And the trees growing in water, 15
 Marble trunks out of stillness,
 On past the palazzi,
 in the stillness,
 The light now, not of the sun.
 Chrysophrase, 20
 And the water green clear, and blue clear;
 On, to the great cliffs of amber.
 Between them,

 Cave of Nerea,
 She like a great shell curved, 25
 And the boat drawn without sound,
 Without odour of ship-work,
 Nor bird-cry, nor any noise of wave moving,
 Nor splash of porpoise, nor any noise of wave moving,
 Within her cave Nerea, 30
 She like a great shell curved
 In the suavity of the rock,
 Cliff green-gray in the far,
 In the near, the gate-cliffs of amber,
 And the wave 35
 green clear, and blue clear,
 And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple,

Cool, porphyry smooth, the rock sea-worn.	40
No gull-cry, no sound of porpoise, Sand as of malachite, and no cold there, the light not of the sun.	
Zagreus, feeding his panthers, the turf clear as on hills under light.	45
And under the almond-trees, gods, with them, <i>choros nympharum</i> . Gods, Hermes and Athene, As shaft of compass, Between them, tembled—	
To the left is the place of fauns, <i>* sylvā nympharum</i> ;	50
The low wood, moor-scrub, the doe, the young spotted deer, leap up through the broom-plants, as dry leaf amid yellow.	55
And by one cut of the hills the great alley of Memnons.	
Beyond, sea, crests seen over dune Night sea churning shingle, To the left, the alley of cypress.	60
A boat came, One man holding her sail, Guiding her with oar caught over gunwale, saying:	
" There, in the forest of marble,	65
" The stone trees—out of water—	
" the arbours of stone—	
" marble, leaf, over leaf,	
" silver, steel over steel,	
" silver beaks rising and crossing,	
" prow set against prow,	70
" stone, ply over ply,	
" the gilt beams flare of an evening"	
Borso, Carmagnola, the men of craft, <i>'I vitrei</i> , Thither, at one time, time after time, And the waters richer than glass,	75
Bronze gold, the blaze over the silver, Dye-pots in the torch-light, The flash of wave under prows, And the silver beaks rising and crossing.	
Stone trees, white and rose-white in the darkness,	80
Cypress there by the towers, Drift under hulls in the night.	
"In the gloom the gold Gathers the light about it."...	
Now supine in burrow, half over-arched bramble, One eye for the sea, through that peek-hole, Gray light, with Athene. Zothar and her elephants, the gold loin-cloth, The sistrum, shaken, shaken, the cohorts of her dancers.	85
And Aletha, by bend of the shore, With her eyes seaward, and in her hands sea-wrack	90

"While they [Actaeon's hounds] held their master down, the rest of the pack gathered, and sank their teeth in his body, till there was no place left for tearing. Actaeon groaned, uttering a sound which, though not human, was yet such as no stag could produce." (Metamorphoses III 225-259)

Pound does not describe the death but readers familiar with the Actaeon story will feel a chill down their spine while reading these lines.

L16 "Marble trunks...stillness" This is the first view of Venice, an incredible Italian city built on and surrounded by water. Here Pound describes its palaces ("palazzi" L17) as coming out of nature and entering art. This is what Pound's friend, the painter and art critic Adrian Stokes (1854-1935) believed. Stokes, in his book The Stones of Rimini (1934), wrote "Amid the sea Venice is built from the essence of the sea" (Norton 1071)

L20 "Chrysophrase" apple-green variety of the precious stone chalcedony

L24 "Nerea" This could mean the nymph Calypso, the daughter of Atlas, who kept Ulysses in her island cave for seven years (Odyssey V)

L41 "malachite" Green mineral taking a high polish

L46 "*choros nympharum*" Chorus of nymphs (Norton 1071)

L47 "Hermes and Athene" Hermes is the messenger god and the patron of merchants and thieves; Athena is the goddess of wisdom. Both were Ulysses' supporters. Hermes helped Ulysses escape from Calypso while Athena calmed the sea for his final voyage home (Odyssey V)

L51 "*sylva nympharum*" the nymphs' forest

L57 "Memnons" This man was called the "son of dawn" and was the commander of the Ethiopian troops in support of Troy. Apparently his statue near Thebes, here compared to an "alley of cypress," made a sound when the first rays of the sun touched it (Norton 1072)

L60 "cypress" coniferous tree associated with mourning

L73 "Borso, Carmagnola" Borso d'Este (1431-71) of Ferrara, Italy, was a patron of learning and a failed peacemaker on whom there was an assassination attempt made in Venice; Francesco Bussone da Carmagnola (1390?-1432) was a mercenary soldier who was tried for treason and executed between two columns (Norton 1072)

L73 "*i vitrei*" The famous Murano glassmakers of Venice

L83-4 "In the gloom...about it" Hugh Kenner explains that this is quoted from Canto 11 except that there "about" is "against" and that this is derived from a distich(couplet) by Pindar (Norton 1072)

L88, L91 "Zothar" "Aletha" These are probably fictitious names (Norton 1072)

L89 "sistrum" Jingling instrument or rattle used by the ancient Egyptians

L95 "Kore" Proserpine or Persephone

L97 "Circe" See note to Canto I, L7. Circe's brother was Aetes, the King of Colchis, their father the sun. Aetes had a cult of the sun on his island and guarded the Golden Fleece, Jason's quarry. So through the person of Circe's brother, two of the

movements in this canto, that of Odysseus and Circe and that of Jason and the Golden Fleece are linked by Pound.

Ezra Pound

L112 "Sigismundo...Dalmatia" Sigismondo Malatesta (1417-1468) was the ruler of Renaissance Rimini, Italy, and admired by Pound. He was an art patron and against the corrupt papacy; he fought for Venice and travelled up to the Dalmatian coast in a failed crusade in 1464 (Norton 1073).

29.4 LET US SUM UP

Pound was a rebel in his own life, often having to suffer acutely as a result of his convictions, as he did when accused of being anti-semitic (against the Jews). This rebellious spirit is reflected in his poetry which is crammed with erudite fragments of classical, Renaissance, and contemporary legend, literature and history. He also had a deep interest in Chinese history and literature. He writes for a very sophisticated, highly-educated reader, but all the learning in his poems often lies side by side with slang or colloquial diction. He believed in rebuilding and purifying the canon of English and American literature and was a great supporter of new talent.

While "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is filled with satiric glimpses of the shallow intellectual life of London to which the poet is bidding adieu, Canto I is a retelling of a part of Homer's Odyssey and Canto XVII deals with Renaissance history. Many different quests lie at the heart of the Cantos and particular images and references to classical, legendary and historical figures, knits together this otherwise fragmented, enormously difficult, excessively ambitious poem, bristling with intellectual energy.

29.5 GLOSSARY

Vorticism:

This was derived from art by Pound. It was a short-lived reaction to romantic and vitalist theories of futurism. It stood for the abstract and non-representational in art. The vortex or whirlpool is energy, but it is energy that has undergone a metamorphosis into form.

Dramatic Monologue:

This is a poem written in the form of a single speech by a lone speaker with an audience where a miniature drama unfolds and one is aware of the reactions of the audience even though that audience never utters a word. Browning used the form to great effect in poems like "My Last Duchess."

Persona:

Greek word for "mask." It means the disguise adopted by the poet or novelist when he/she does not want to address the reader in his/her own voice.

"Fleshly School of Poetry":

This is a pejorative term used by Robert Buchanan to describe the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, both painters and poets. This group or Brotherhood as they were called included poets like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne and it advanced the style and spirit of Italian painting before the Renaissance painter Raphael. It delighted in the sensuous aspects of art.

Heteroglossia:

The simultaneous existence of different voices in a narrative, be it prose or poetry. The voices may be those of the narrator, the narrator's personae, or of different characters.

29.6 QUESTIONS

- Q.1. What form does Pound choose in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"? Can you justify his choice?
- Q.2. Identify any three of the following figures in his poetry and analyse how Pound uses them in his poetry: A)Aphrodite or Venus B)Persephone or Proserpine C)Dionysius or Zagreus D)Sigismondo E)Ulysses F)Circe
- Q.3. Is "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" a fragmented poem or a well-integrated one? Give reasons for your answer.

29.7 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 30 ADRIENNE RICH (1929---)

Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Life and Works
- 30.2 "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"
 - 30.2.1 Text
 - 30.2.2 Background and Critical Appreciation
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- 30.3 "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law"
 - 30.3.1 Text
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30.0 OBJECTIVES

In this, last unit of the block, we study the life and works of the only woman and the only postmodern poet in our collection: Adrienne Rich. Besides studying two of her poems in detail, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" and "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," this unit also explores Rich's strong feminist beliefs and her crusade as a lesbian feminist activist.

30.1 LIFE AND WORKS

Adrienne Rich is probably the best-known living female poet in the world today. She was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 16, 1929. The family was well educated and well off, but conscious of being set apart as Jewish. From a very young age, she composed poems, trying to please her demanding and meticulous father. Her mother, who had studied music, opted for the family over a career. Rich graduated from the exclusive women's college, Radcliffe, one of the seven sister colleges to the Ivy League ones, in 1951. There she was not taught by any female faculty and did not read works by any female poet. She published her first collection of poetry, A Change of World, in the well-known Yale Younger poets' series. W.H. Auden's preface praises her metre and diction and says the poems are "neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs." (Norton 2023). Four years later appeared The Diamond Cutters which was well-received, despite Randall Jarrell's rather disparaging comment about the poet sounding like "a sort of princess in a fairy tale" (Norton 2023).

Rich married Alfred Conrad, a Harvard economist, in 1953 and had three sons before she was thirty. Even at this stage, she was filled with a burning desire to make something of her life and not merely conform to the Victorian stereotype of women as the angel in the house. Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law was the title of her next collection which only appeared, understandably, eight years later in 1963.

In 1966, Rich moved with her husband and children to New York City where her husband had a teaching position at City College. Husband and wife were both very



active in the resistance movement against the Vietnam War. Rich taught for a while in the SEEK programme for disadvantaged people and as a result of her commitment to social causes her poetry underwent a change. Leaflets (1969) and The Will to Change (1971) reflected her new concerns both in subject matter and style. She moved increasingly away from the perfectly structured poems of her earlier volumes to a more improvisational and intense verse form. There were turbulent changes taking place in Rich's private life as well. In 1970, she left her husband and later that same year her husband committed suicide.

Diving into the Wreck (1973) continues Rich's exploration into both her environment and her psyche. This book received the National Book Award in 1974. Rich rejected the prize as an individual but accepted it in the name of all women--she did this in a statement which she co-wrote with two other female nominees, both black, Audre Lord and Alice Walker. In 1974 she also became professor of English at City College, New York and began research for her prose work, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, which appeared in 1976. The book examines myths and reality about motherhood through a study of personal diaries, anthropology, politics and medicine. In 1976, Rich published Twenty-one Love Poems in which she used the Elizabethan sonnet sequence to express not heterosexual love but a lesbian attachment. As she says in her famous essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Continuum" "lesbian" is a word that to her does not simply mean two women going to bed with one another--one can also be a part of the "lesbian continuum"--i.e. believe in eroticised female friendship. In her work, It is the Lesbian in Us (1976) she wrote

Even before I wholly knew I was a lesbian, it was the lesbian in me who pursued that elusive configuration. And I believe it is the lesbian in every woman who is compelled by female energy, who

gravitates toward strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that energy and strength. It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, grasp, the full connection between woman and woman. (Norton 2024-5)

Adrienne Rich

From 1976-79 Rich was professor of English at Douglass College. She then retired from academics and moved to a small town in Massachusetts from where she edited, along with Michelle Cliff, the lesbian-feminist journal, Sinister Wisdom. Her next two books, The Dream of a Common Language and A Wild Patience Has Taken me This Far appeared in 1978 and 1981 respectively. While preparing a collected volume edition of her poems, she wrote "one task for the nineteen--or twenty-year-old who wrote the earliest poems here, was to learn that she was neither unique nor universal, but a person in history, a woman and not a man, a white and also Jewish inheritor of a particular Western consciousness, from the making of which most women have been excluded" (Norton 2025).

30.2 "AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS"

30.2.1 Text

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool 5
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie 10
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

30.2.2 Background and Critical Appreciation

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"

This short poem appeared in 1951. In three stanzas of four lines each rhyming aabb ccdd eeff, Rich brings out the contrast between the wonderful freedom of the work of art that Aunt Jennifer has produced, embroidered tigers prancing across a screen (a room-divider) and the constraints of Aunt Jennifer's personal life.

In the first stanza there is a description of the tigers, Aunt Jennifer has embroidered on her screen, of their rich colours, their free movement, their lack of fear and their self-assurance.

In the next stanza, there is a contrast between Aunt Jennifer's artistic creations, the tigers, and Aunt Jennifer herself. Aunt Jennifer is timid and weak. She feels bowed down not just physically but also emotionally by the weight of her wedding ring. In other words, the wedding ring is a symbol of the oppressive male-dominated environment in which Aunt Jennifer lives.

In the final stanza the poet underlines the contrast between the hard and oppressive and terrified life Aunt Jennifer led in a male-dominated environment and how her spirit ranged free only in her artistic creation, the tigers on the screen. The tigers have all the spirit, all the energy and all the courage that Aunt Jennifer lacked in her own life. Rich is probably trying to say that art may be a form of release for women who are trapped in an oppressive domestic environment, something that Rich herself went through in her own life. You can compare this poem to Wallace Stevens' poem, "The Emperor of Ice Cream." There too there is a woman who embroidered a shawl that is now spread over her dead body. But note that Stevens has nothing to say about the particularly feminine difficulties that dead woman may have gone through in her life. In other words, her sex does not matter to Stevens, except in that embroidery is an art associated with women rather than with men. It could just as well have been the dead body of a man. For Rich, however, a person's sex is crucial.

30.2.3 Notes

Stanza 1

L1 "prance" rise by springing from hind legs

L2 "topaz denizens" yellow (like the semi-precious stone topaz) inhabitants

L4 "sleek chivalric certainty" the tigers are smooth, gallant (like the medieval knights) sure of themselves and of their existence. Note the alliteration of the "s" sound, denoting the smoothness and self-assurance of the tigers, frightened as they are, of no man.

Stanza 2

L5 "fluttering" moving in an agitated way

L7 "wedding band" wedding ring

Stanza 3

L10 "ringed with ordeals" surrounded by hard tasks. "Ringed" also recalls the "wedding band" or ring mentioned in Stanza 2.

30.3 "SNAPSHOTS OF A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW"

30.3.1 Text

1

You once a belle in Shreveport,
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud,
still have your dresses copied from that time,
and play a Chopin prelude
Called by Cortot" *"Delicious recollections*
Float like perfume through the memory."

5

Your mind now, moldering like wedding-cake,
heavy with useless experience, rich
with suspicion, rumor, fantasy,
crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge
of mere fact. In the prime of your life.

10

Nervy, glowering, your daughter
wipes the teaspoons, grows another way.

Banging the coffee-pot into the sink
 she hears the angels chiding, and looks out
 past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky.
 Only a week since They said: *Have no patience.*

15

The next time it was: Be insatiable.
 Then: *Save yourself; others you cannot save,*
 Sometimes she's let the tapstream scald her arm,
 a match burn to her thumbnail,

20

or held her hand above the kettle's snout
 right in the woolly steam. They are probably angels,
 since nothing hurts her anymore, except
 each morning's grit blowing into her eyes.

25

A thinking woman sleeps with monsters.
 The beak that grips her, she becomes. And Nature,
 that sprung-lidded, still commodious
 steamer-trunk of *tempora* and *mores*
 gets stuffed with it all: the mildewed orange-flowers,
 the female pills, the terrible breasts
 of Boadicca beneath flat foxes' heads and orchids.

30

Two handsome women, gripped in argument,
 each proud, acute, subtle, I hear scream
 across the cut glass and majolica
 like Furies cornered from their prey:
 the argument *ad feminam*, all the old knives
 that gave rusted in my back, I drive in yours,
 ma semblable, ma soeur!

35

Knowing themselves too well in one another:
 their gifts no pure fruition, but a thorn,
 the prick filed sharp against a hint of scorn...
 Reading while waiting
 for the iron to heat,
 writing, *My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—*
 in that Amherst pantry while the jellies boil and scum,
 or more, often,
 iron-eyed and beaked and purposed as a bird,
 dusting everything on the whatnot every day of life.

40

45

Dulce ridens, dulce loquens,
 she shaves her legs until they gleam
 like petrified mammoth-tusk.

50

When to her lute Corinna sings
 neither words nor music are her own;
 only the long hair dipping
 over her cheek, only the song
 of silk against her knees
 and these
 adjusted in reflections if an eye.

55

Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before
 an unlocked door, that cage of cages,
 tell us, you bird, you tragical machine-
 is this *fertilisante douleur*? Pinned down
 by love, for you the only natural action,
 are you edged more keen 60
 to price the secrets of the vault? has Nature shown
 her household books to you, daughter-in-law,
 that her sons never saw? 65

7

*"To have in this uncertain world some stay
 which cannot be undermined is
 of the utmost consequence."* 70

Thus wrote

a woman, partly brave and partly good,
 who fought with what she partly understood.
 Few men about her would or could do more, 75
 hence she was labeled harpy, shrew and whore.

8

"You all die at fifteen," said Diderot,
 and turn part legend, part convention.
 Still, eyes inaccurately dream
 behind closed windows blankening with steam. 80
 Deliciously, all that we might have been,
 all that we were-fire, tears,
 wit, taste, martyred ambition-
 stirs like the memory of refused adultery
 the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years. 85

9

*Not that it is done well, but
 that it is done at all? Yes, think
 of the odds! or shrug them off forever.
 This luxury of the precocious child,
 Time's precious chronic invalid,- 90
 would we, darlings, resign it if we could?
 Our blight has been our sinecure:
 mere talent was enough for us-
 glitter in fragments and rough drafts.*

Sigh no more, ladies. 95

Time is male
 and in, his cups drinks to the fair.
 Bemused by gallantry, we hear
 our mediocrities over-praised,
 indolence read as abnegation, 100
 slattern thought styled intuition,
 every laps forgiven, our crime
 only to cast too bold a shadow
 or smash the mold straight off.

For that, solitary confinement, 105
 tear gas, attrition shelling.
 Few applicants for that honor.

10

Well,

she's long about her coming, who must be

more merciless to herself than history. 110
 Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge
 breasted and glancing through the currents,
 taking the light upon her
 at least as beautiful as any boy
 or helicopter, 115
 poised, still coming,
 her fine blades making the air wince

 but her cargo
 no promise then:
 delivered 120
 palpable
 ours.

30.3.2 Background and Critical Appreciation

This powerful, angry poem was composed between 1958-1960 and published in 1963. It makes a very important statement about Rich's feminism. It is a lament, a scream, a plea and a hope that the lot of gifted women, all women may change, even if the price to be paid is a heavy one.

The title "Snapshots" suggest carelessly taken photographs of family members at unguarded moments. They have none of the studied formality of photographs taken in a studio or by a professional photographer. "Daughter-in-law" is an intriguing term, the mystery of which is solved in Part 6 of this poem. By this term Rich means woman, whom she sees as nature's daughter-in-law, rather than her daughter, because nature's son, man, refuses to let there be a natural relationship between woman and nature. What intervenes and falsifies the relationship is patriarchy, man's disguise for his love of power and domination.

The first part of this poem shows the rapid change in a woman once marriage and motherhood befall her. Earlier she was lovely and fresh; rumours and suspicions beset now her mind. She is supposedly in the prime of her life, but she hates every minute of it and her daughter is hostile to her, grows away from her.

In the next part Rich wonderfully creates the anger and frustration of a woman who wants to be more than just a wife, a mother and a household worker. She imagines the woman to be hearing "probably angels" who tell her to be impatient, to be insatiable, and to save herself because she cannot save others. Note that all the things the angels tell her run counter to what patriarchy has deemed fit for women--the angels in the house--who ought to serve their husbands and children and not think of any life outside their home and, most of all, not think of themselves. Note also that the woman is barely conscious of hurting herself in the hot water from the tap or the fire from a matchstick or the steam from a kettle--she is already so emotionally and perhaps even physically bruised and battered that "nothing hurts her anymore" (L24).

In the third part Rich speaks of the old nature argument about women--women are biologically inferior, the weaker sex. Instead of attacking the true enemy, man, women waste much of their energy attacking each other, like furies deprived of their rightful quarry. These are the monsters that a "thinking woman" sleeps with and ultimately becomes. In other words, a woman who thinks for herself is already a monster in the eyes of the patriarchal establishment.

In the fourth part Rich imagines the life of another thinking woman, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), and a favourite of hers. This nineteenth century reclusive American poet lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, all her life. One of her poems begins with the line "My Life had stood--a Loaded Gun--." Yet for all her genius, she was

surrounded not by fellow poets and writers, but by pans containing boiling jellies, by dusters and by irons--household paraphernalia.

In the fifth part The woman is trying to conform to the patriarchal stereotype of the sweetly smiling, softly speaking lady, shaving her legs so that her body hair does not disturb the men's delicate sensibilities. But even as she shaves her legs, she is aware that they shine like the tusks of a dead, prehistoric animal, the mammoth. In other words, she realises that by conforming to male stereotypes of women she is trying to conform to something outdated and lifeless, something that denies her own individuality.

In part six Rich suggests that women are somehow always positioned outside the hub of things as a creature conditioned only to love and serve and perhaps see to the household accounts--men, nature's "superior" creations cannot possibly be expected to deal with anything that is trivial or mundane. Rich is being ironic here--that is, she obviously does not believe in these myths propagated by patriarchy about woman's place within the house and in her intrinsic inferiority.

In the seventh part Rich is talking about how women who struggle against great odds to make a significant contribution to civilisation are given ugly labels. Their contribution is undermined because they do not conform to patriarchal notions of the woman's fit place--that is, in the house, tending to her husband and children.

In part eight Rich speaks of how women do in fact die at fifteen in a certain sense--their dreams die, their selfhood dies. They become partly conventional and partly legend--that is, their sense of their own reality is sapped. They cannot change their lives, they merely wish for change; they dream of lost opportunities--"all that we might have been." And the reality of what they are, "fire, tears, wit, taste, martyred ambition," stirs within their sagging middle aged chest.

In part nine Rich says that certain women have been comfortable with the role and image patriarchy has given them. They have been content with "mere talent" and have not been too ambitious. Rich speaks of how women have been duped by flattery into accepting their own mediocre work. Flattery has prevented them from striving to achieve something tremendous--to "smash the mold"--to create a new way of looking at things. And for those few heroic women who have tried just that the pains have been so intense that few women have opted for it.

After the pains and horrors described in the previous part Rich in part ten ends on a more hopeful note by prophesying that the woman of the future will be "more merciless to herself than history"--she will be hard on herself, harder even than history (Rich has already described in the previous stanzas all the ways in which history has subjected women to oppression). She says this new woman will be "at least as beautiful as any boy/or helicopter." This implies that the woman will be part machine, part boy--here sex and her humanness will have to be changed in certain respects. When we look around society today we can see the truth of Rich's words--women now increasingly opt for a career, some of them dress like men, and many ignore the conventional roles society has given them of wife and mother and homemaker. They are also like a helicopter in the sense that they fly, they conquer new worlds, and also they have a little bit of the machine in them. Rich is suggesting that women have to cut themselves off from the nurturing role given them by history and create a new function for themselves, even if this means curtailing their motherly and domestic instincts. Otherwise a clear break with the past and women's freedom will not be possible. They will then not just "promise" to deliver, but actually deliver a new millennium--her "cargo" will be women's freedom to be herself, to mould her own history. The elements of nature, the sea and the wind, will also recognise the ability of this new woman--the air is described as "winc(ing)" under the impact of the new woman's blades. Nature who earlier showed only her household books to

woman, her daughter-in-law (L67), now winces under the force and impact of the new woman.

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30.3.3 Notes

Stanza 1

L1 "belle" good-looking young woman with many male admirers. From the French word meaning beautiful.

L4 "Chopin" Frederich Chopin (1810-1849) was a Polish composer and pianist who settled in Paris in 1831. He is a famous romantic composer.

L5-6 "Cortot...memory" This remark was made by Alfred Cortot (1877-1962), a well-known French pianist, in his 1930 work Chopin: 24 Preludes. (Norton 2026)

L7 "moldering...cake" the woman who was once a beauty finds that her mind is now crumbling and rotting like wedding cake. The simile points out that the woman's mind and the cake are equally fragile and equally susceptible to decay. The words "heavy" and "rich" carry on the simile. Wedding cake is rich and heavy on the stomach; similarly, the woman's mind is heavy with rumours and suspicions.

L12 "glowering" frowning

Stanza 2

L18 "insatiable" not be satisfied, content

L25 "grit" dust

Stanza 3

L 29 "*tempora and mores*" times and customs. A phrase made famous by the Roman orator Cicero in his lament "O tempora! O Mores!" (Alas, how the times have changed and morals have degenerated!)

L32 "Boadicea" British queen at the time of the Roman emperor Nero who led her people in a brave though ultimately unsuccessful revolt against Roman rule (Norton 2027).

L35 "cut glass" crystal

L35 "majolica" a kind of glazed and ornamented Italian ware.

L36 "Furies" the Greek goddesses of vengeance that made frequent appearances chasing murderers in Greek tragedies.

L36 "cornered from" deprived of

L37 "*ad feminam*" Rich's feminized version of the logical fallacy, *ad hominem*, which means when one attacks a person's character rather than attack his logic or his arguments.

L39 "*ma semblable, ma soeur!*" Again, Rich feminizes the last line of the French poet Charles Baudelaire's poem *Au Lecteur*: "*Hypocrite lecteur!--mon semblable--mon frère!*" ("Hypocrite reader, my double, my brother.") "*Soeur*" means sister in French.

Stanza 5

L50 "*Dulce ridens dulce loquens*" "sweetly laughing, sweetly speaking" from the Roman poet Horace's famous ode, *Integer vitae*.

Stanza 6

L53 "When...sings" This is the first line of a poem by the English poet Thomas Campion (1567-1620) (Norton 2027)

L63 "*fertilisante douleur*" French for fertilising sorrow.

L66-8 "Nature shown...saw" Nature is personified as a woman with grown sons and all women are her daughters-in-law rather than her daughters. Through this image Rich is suggesting that patriarchal tradition has always seen women in a subordinate position to men and that they have presented this subordinate position as something natural rather than something created.

Stanza 7

L69-71 "To have....consequence" These lines are from Mary Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, London 1787. Wollstonecraft, (1759-1797) the mother of Mary Shelley who wrote Frankenstein was the authour of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, one of the first works to argue for women's rights. (Norton 2028)

"stay" place

"undermined" challenged

"consequence" importance

L76 "harpy, shrew and whore" a harpy is a mythical monster with a woman's face and body and a bird's wings and claws. It is supposed to signify greed. A shrew is a disparaging word used for quarrelsome women.

Stanza 8

L77 Diderot: Denis Diderot (1713-1784) was a French philosopher, playwright and critic as well as the writer of an encyclopaedia. This statement of his is from Lettres a Sophie Volland and quoted by Simone de Beauvoir in Le Deuxieme Sexe (The Second Sex)(1949) (Norton 2028).

L84-5 "stirs like...years" This simile compares women's perceptions of what they are upsetting them like the memory of "refused adultery." Men had made propositions to married women which they had refused--now, perhaps, looking back, they wish they had acted otherwise.

L85 "drained and flagging" depleted and sagging not just physically but also emotionally

Stanza 9

L86-7 "Not...at all" This is an allusion to Samuel Johnson's observation to Boswell about a woman preaching being like a dog walking on its hind legs: "It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all" (Norton 2028). This is a typically sexist remark about men's thoughts about women's limited abilities. The comparison with the dog is meant to be insulting.

L92 "Our blight...sinecure" "blight" means a withering disease and "sinecure" an office of profit or honour without any obligations or duties.

L94 The phrase "rough drafts" refers to a writer preparing something for publication and being content with not making the final draft and polishing up her work. This could be a reference to Rich's own vocation as poet, which she had to subordinate so many times because of her commitments to her family.

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L95-6 "Time is male...fair" Time is personified as a man who toasts or praises only beautiful women.

L97 "Bemused" stupefied

L100 "indolence" laziness

L100 "abnegation" denial of oneself

L101 "slattern" careless

L105-6 "solitary confinement...shelling" The rigours of making a revolutionary change in women's lives are compared to being imprisoned for a crime, being gassed in a war and being shelled. These metaphors drawn from war and from jail suggest the tremendous hardships that the few heroic women who try to change their own and other women's lives face.

30.4 LET US SUM UP

Adrienne Rich is the only postmodern poet in our collection and the only female voice. One can immediately distinguish a difference in the point-of-view from the other preceding male poets when one reads her work. In the first poem she makes the point about the suppression of Aunt Jennifer by her husband subtly--it is only in her embroidery that Aunt Jennifer's spirit finds free expression. In the second poem Rich's tone is far more straightforward, wounded, angry and embittered. She can no longer distance herself from the suffering of woman--this is a poem that seems to be wrenched out of her own guts. Feminism's rejection of the unreasonable demands that patriarchy puts on women finds strident expression here.

30.5 GLOSSARY

Feminism:	A doctrine that advocates or demands for women the same rights granted men, as in political, economic and social status.
Lesbian:	A woman who is a homosexual.
Patriarchy:	A system of social organization in which descent and succession are traced through the male line. Also taken by feminists to represent an unjust social system in which men always have more rights than women, and where women are denied equality.
Sexist:	The quality of promoting stereotyping of social roles on the basis of gender in a negative and demeaning way. For example, if you say "Oh, women should stick to being housewives, that's all they're good for" that is a sexist remark.

30.6 QUESTIONS

- Q.1. Do the two poems by Rich, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" and "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" have anything in common? What are the differences between them?
- Q.2. Explain the use of the word "Daughter-in-law" in the poem, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law."
- Q.3. Would you call Rich a feminist? Give reasons for your answer.
- Q.4. Compare any poem by Rich to any poem by a male poet in this unit. How can you tell from this comparison that Rich is a woman and the other poet is a man?

30.7 FURTHER READING

Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Trans. H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage, 1974.

Gelpi, Albert and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi. Adrienne Rich's Poetry. New York: Norton, 1975.

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