

Banha University - Faculty of Arts
English Department
First Year Students

Introduction to Criticism
Lecture 4

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Ezra Pound

In a Station of the Metro

Ezra Pound

- Ezra Weston Loomis Pound (30 October 1885 – 1 November 1972) was an American expatriate poet and critic, and a major figure in the early [modernist](#) movement in poetry. He became known for his role in developing [Imagism](#), which, in reaction to the Victorian and Georgian poets, favored tight language, unadorned imagery, and a strong correspondence between the verbal and musical qualities of the verse and the mood it expressed. His best-known works include [Ripostes](#) (1912), [Hugh Selwyn Mauberley](#) (1920), and his unfinished 120-section epic, [The Cantos](#), which consumed his middle and late career, and was published between 1917 and 1969.

In a Station of the Metro

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

Analysis

- "In a Station of the Metro" relies on just two images, both presented in a simple, direct way, plus the catalyst of one word which is not straightforward description: "apparition." Through the metaphoric suggestion of that word, Pound fuses the mundane image of "faces in the crowd," with an image possessing visual beauty and the rich connotations of countless poems about spring. And because "apparition" means what it does, he is able to convey the feeling of surprised discovery which such a vision in such a place must evoke.

the structure of this poem

- Examining the structure of this poem, one might say that it is a metaphor with the link verb is omitted. The judgment is not wrong; but the creation of the poem has a much more complex history than that. Pound said he wrote this poem to convey an experience one day from a train in the Paris subway (Metro), he beheld suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another. Originally he had described his impression in a poem of thirty lines long.

Imagery

Imagery is one basic element of poetry. Therefore, an accomplished poet, at one point of his or her career, may possibly write poems with strong images. And imagism, theoretically speaking, is closer to realism than romanticism. (Recall that realism is the showing of things as they really are, or a way of representing life as it seems to the common reader.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black
bough.

What is the prose equivalent of this poem?

- It is almost impossible to paraphrase the poem because the facts it communicates are less important than the feelings associated with these facts. The poem's title indicates that the first line is meant to suggest a group of people standing in a station of the Paris subway. The scene, however, is identified not as a clear picture but as an apparition, suggesting that it is somehow unexpected or even dreamlike. In contrast with the image of the subway platform is the association of the people's faces with petals on the dark limb of a tree. The subway platform-dark, cold, wet, subterranean (associated with baseness, death, and hell)-is juxtaposed with white flowers-delicate, pale, radiant, lovely (associated with the ideal, life, and heaven).

Robert Frost

The Road Not Taken



Robert Frost

- Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) was an American poet. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work frequently employed settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. A popular and often-quoted poet, Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry.

The Road Not Taken

- Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

The Road Not Taken

- And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Analysis

- “The Road Not Taken” consists of four stanzas of five lines. The rhyme scheme is ABAAB; the rhymes are strict and masculine, with the notable exception of the last line. There are four stressed syllables per line, varying on an iambic tetrameter base.
- Paths in the woods and forks in roads are ancient and deep-seated metaphors for the lifeline, its crises and decisions. Identical forks, in particular, symbolize for us the nexus of free will and fate: We are free to choose, but we do not really know beforehand what we are choosing between. Our route is, thus, determined by an accretion of choice and chance, and it is impossible to separate the two.

Irony

- The ironic tone is inescapable: “I shall be telling this with a sigh /
Some where ages and ages hence.” He knows that he will be inaccurate, at best, or hypocritical, at worst, when he holds his life up as an example. In fact, he predicts that his future self will betray this moment of decision as if the betrayal were inevitable. This realization is ironic and poignantly pathetic.
- Ironic as it is, this is also a poem infused with the anticipation of remorse. Its title is not “The Road Less Traveled” but “The Road Not Taken.” Even as he makes a choice --a choice he is forced to make if does not want to stand forever in the woods, one for which he has no real guide or definitive basis for decision-making.

Thomas Hardy

- **The Man He Killed**

Thomas Hardy

- Thomas Hardy(1840-1928), the son of a stonemason, was born in Dorsetshire, England, in 1840. He trained as an architect and worked in London and Dorset for ten years. Hardy began his writing career as a novelist, publishing *Desperate Remedies* in 1871, and was soon successful enough to leave the field of architecture for writing. He left fiction writing for poetry, and published eight collections, including *Wessex Poems* (1898) and *Satires of Circumstance* (1912).

The Man He Killed

"Had he and I but met .
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin
"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face, I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.
"I shot him dead because-
Because he was my foe,

The Man He Killed

Just so: my foe of course he was; That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,

Off-hand-like-just as I-

Was out of work-had sold his traps—

No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!

You shoot a fellow down

You'd treat if met where any bar is,

Or help to half-a crown."

Analysis

- The speaker of this poem is a soldier who tells his story about World War I in the first person. The poem indicates that the speaker is engaged in conversation-perhaps in a pub. The speaker's colloquial dialect indicates that he is probably of the English working class. For him the object of war is simple: Kill or be killed. To Hardy, the speaker seems to represent all men who are thrust into a war without understanding its underlying economic or ideological causes. In this sense the speaker and his enemy are both victims of forces beyond their comprehension or control.

The speaker

- The sentence structure of the poem helps to convey the attitude of the speaker toward his subject. In the first two stanzas of the poem, sentences are smooth and--unbroken. The third and fourth stanzas, however, use broken syntax to reflect the narrator's disturbed state of mind as he tells about the man he killed. The smooth sentence structure in the last stanza, the attempt to trivialize the incident ("Yes; quaint and curious war is!!") and the poem's singsong meter and regular rhyme scheme (met/wet, 'inn/nipperkin) suggest that the speaker is trying to regain his composure by trivializing the incident.