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# Conventions and Modern Poetry: A Study in the Development of Period Mannerisms

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*University of Tennessee - Knoxville*

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jacob P. Blumenfeld entitled "Conventions and Modern Poetry: A Study in the Development of Period Mannerisms." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Robert Daniel, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

K.L. Knickerbocker, Nathaniel Wright, & James Patty

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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October 1, 1957

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Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

K. L. Knickerbocker  
Mathalia Wright  
James S. Falty  
Renita Moore

Accepted for the Council:

Dale Haunting  
Dean of the Graduate School

CONVENTIONS AND MODERN POETRY: A STUDY IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF PERIOD MANNERISMS

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A THESIS

Submitted to  
The Graduate Council  
of  
The University of Tennessee  
in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Jacob P. Blumenfeld

December 1957



I wish to express my appreciation to all those whose assistance, encouragement, and advice have enabled me to complete this project. I should like especially to thank Dr. Robert W. Daniel, my adviser, and the other members of my committee for their patient guidance and for all their suggestions, which I have used freely throughout this study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the peculiarities of literature, as with the arts in general and other forms of intellectual activity, is that every age develops its own characteristic manner and style. The division of the study of literature into the periods familiar to all students is dependent on this phenomenon. One has only to name a period to think of a kind of writing. The Elizabethans reveled in lush imagery and vigorous language, the Neo-Classicists concentrated on correctness and rationality, the Romantics re-introduced to poetry nature and feeling, and so on.

This tendency of each period to develop its own conventions and manner has been recognized by Josephine Miles, who finds that "groupings of poets are based more solidly on time than on type. Each decade has its own homogeneity, though each has a different degree of heterogeneity."<sup>1</sup> Miss Miles's study indicates

how closely contemporary poets work together, whether consciously or no; how closely contemporaries feel and analogize and sound and argue in common; how limited are a poet's choices by the choices of his times and how directly he himself participates in those choices and helps establish them.<sup>2</sup>

This development of a period manner was explained by John Livingston Lowes as a phase through which all poetry passes, part of a cycle consisting of alternating periods of convention and revolt which

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<sup>1</sup>The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, California, 1951), p. 517.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

proceeds through certain roughly discernible stages. The first stage is that of innovation, in which a talented poet introduces new methods which are so effective that they are taken up by his contemporaries and imitated. At this stage, conventions have already begun to develop; but the conventions are still plastic enough to be manipulated with some originality and effect. In the next stage, however, the conventions become so widely accepted that they are thought of as laws; then rigidity sets in and a new revolt must occur before poetry can advance.<sup>3</sup> Of the growth of these conventions, Lowes writes:

. . . conventions become conventions through wholesale imitation, conscious or unconscious, of forms, devices, methods of expression, which may themselves have had their origins in any of a hundred ways.<sup>4</sup>

It is as Laura Riding and Robert Graves state:

Once there is a tacit or written critical agreement as to the historical form proper to the poetry of any period, all the poets of fashion or 'taste' vie with each other in approximating to the perfect period manner.<sup>5</sup>

E. E. Kellet also notes this tendency of literary styles to develop in cycles.<sup>6</sup>

Although imitation has been cited as primarily responsible for the development of conventions, other factors are quite clearly involved. The Zeitgeist within which the poets write and the kind of audience for which they are writing will obviously have an effect on the sort of

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<sup>3</sup>Convention and Revolt in Poetry (New York, 1919).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>5</sup>A Survey of Modernist Poetry (London, 1927), p. 196.

<sup>6</sup>The Whirligig of Taste (New York, 1929), p. 21.

conventions which will be produced in a particular age.

Of the numerous critics who have recognized the process of the growth and development of conventions, almost all appear to agree with Lowes that a stage in the cycle is reached at which conventions become rigid and that a new group of poets must revolt if art is to remain alive and develop new forms and techniques. Even the revolts, however, have an essential irony, for, as Lowes points out, the new is able to remain new for only an instant. The newer and more striking it is, the sooner it is seized upon and the sooner it becomes trite. The cliché "is merely the sometime novel, that has been loved not wisely but too well."<sup>7</sup> Eventually, conventions become overworked, so that another revolt is required if poetry is to remain alive.<sup>8</sup>

The convention-revolt cycle is aptly illustrated in the history of the revolt led by Wordsworth against the poetry of the Eighteenth Century. Though the tendency in later days has been to consider Wordsworth's revolt as one against poetic diction, examination of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads reveals that he included in his revolt other elements of what have come to be considered the too-rigid poetic conventions of his day. Not only did he object to the substitution of artificial language for the natural language of men, he also opposed the idea

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<sup>7</sup>Convention and Revolt, pp. 145-146.

<sup>8</sup>W. P. Ker, Form and Style in Poetry: Lectures and Notes, ed. R. W. Chambers (London, 1928), pp. 165-168.



that only certain subjects were suitable for poetry<sup>9</sup> and in his practice rejected the Eighteenth Century's dependence on the heroic couplet as the proper medium for poetry. Wordsworth, along with Coleridge, was reacting against the rigid, frozen conventions of eighteenth-century poetry, and his genius, with that of Coleridge, produced the revolution which resulted in the triumphs of the Romantic Movement. The Romantic Movement, however, eventually developed conventions of its own--as will be shown--that led to the twentieth-century revolution against Victorian Poetry.

The purpose of this study is to show that Modern Poetry, which began as a revolt against the conventions of nineteenth-century poetry, has reached a stage in the convention-revolt cycle at which it has developed significant conventions of its own. Showing the existence of conventions within Modern Poetry has often necessitated describing some of those conventions in order to discuss them. The study, by emphasizing the fact that Modern Poetry represents normal development in the main stream of literature written in the English language, and by making clear that Modern Poetry has now reached a stage in its development where conventions have become evident, should help to correct some common misapprehensions about the individuality and originality of Modern Poets. By promoting a better understanding of the aims and methods of the Modern Poets, the study should lead to a better understanding of the individual works of particular authors in addition to correcting

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<sup>9</sup>Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, ed. Nowell Smith (London, 1905), pp. 27-29.

mistaken notions about the movement as a whole.

The selection of a group of poems wide enough to represent a variety of poems and poets throughout the period has, for the most part, precluded the making of value judgments among the individual poems and poets considered; similarly, any attempt to distinguish between the originator of a convention and its followers lies outside the scope of this study. If T. S. Eliot, for example, is said in this work to write within a certain tradition, such a statement means only that his works afford examples of the conventions which have been developed in Modern Poetry. Whether Eliot or any other poet cited is an originator of a given convention or merely accepts an already established convention can be determined only by separate and individual studies. The method employed in this study has also eliminated from consideration distinctions between imitation of a specific poet and the acceptance of established convention. It is assumed that widespread employment of a practice indicates the presence of general agreement rather than direct imitation.

In this dissertation, the term Modern Poetry is used to indicate the works of poets writing from approximately 1912 on, and including Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, E. A. Robinson, Robert Frost, E. E. Cummings, W. H. Auden, and a host of others writing under the influence of these men. Although 1912 is a somewhat arbitrary date, there are some reasons for choosing it, for it marks the beginning of publication of Poetry magazine in America. This magazine at one time or another published poems by almost every recognized poet of the new movement, and Poetry became the organ through which many of the theories and opinions of

Modern Poetry were advanced. A few poems written by Gerard Manley Hopkins considerably before this arbitrary date have been included both because of their appearance in the anthologies used and because of their recognized importance in the history of Modern Poetry, just as any study of the Romantic Movement would include poems by Robert Burns and William Blake, regardless of their composition before the publication of Lyrical Ballads in 1798. A further justification for the inclusion of Hopkins's poems can be found in the peculiar history of their publication; for although the poems were written in the nineteenth century, they did not appear in print until 1918.

Most of the poems considered in the study are by poets who reached the height of their activity before World War II. Care, however, is taken to include poems from the newer and younger generation of poets active in the Forties to assure that conclusions about the earlier poets remain valid for the later ones.

Although, as has already been pointed out, considerable literature exists on the subject of literary conventions in general, almost nothing has been written on the subject of conventions in Modern Poetry. For the most part, critics have been content to consider Modern Poetry a kind of separate category of literature in which poets write with a great deal of individuality and almost purely as their personal whims dictate. True, a few critics, John Sparrow, Elizabeth Drew and John L. Sweeney, Randall Jarrell, Selden Rodman, and Laura Riding and Robert Graves, have noted certain characteristics in Modern Poetry.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Sparrow, Sense and Poetry (New Haven, 1934), pp. 102-104;

Josephine Miles is even more specific in pointing out particular mannerisms of the Forties.<sup>11</sup> No one, however, has shown that Modern Poetry has developed many conventions of its own. Scholarship on the topic is rare.

The conclusions presented in this study have been arrived at from the examination of Modern Poems. So that the selection would be wide enough to represent a valid cross-section of Modern Poetry, and, at the same time, restricted enough to permit careful examination, only two basic sources were used: four volumes of Poetry magazine, and a number of standard anthologies of Modern Poetry. Poetry was selected for a number of reasons. In addition to being one of the earliest and longest-lived of the journals of Modern Poetry, it was in its early days closely associated with Ezra Pound, one of the major forces in Modern Poetry. Indeed, that poet may well be said to have dominated the editorial policy of the early years of the magazine. Furthermore, almost every major Modern Poet has at one time or another had his work included in Poetry. Pound, William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, and of course many other poets of slighter stature and reputation all contributed to Poetry. Volumes I and II of that magazine were chosen in order to secure a cross-section of poems early in the Modern Poetry Movement. Two later volumes from the Twenties were selected to secure

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Drew and Sweeney, Directions in Modern Poetry (New York, 1940); Jarrell, foreword to "The Rage for the Lost Penny," in Five Young American Poets (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1940), pp. 85-89; Rodman, ed., A New Anthology of Modern Poetry (New York, 1938), pp. 23-24; Riding and Graves, A Survey of Modernist Poetry, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Continuity of Poetic Language, pp. 390-393.

a sample of the contemporary poetry of that decade.

The anthologies were used to make certain that a significant group of better-known poets were included. Chief Modern Poets of England and America<sup>12</sup> was used largely because it contains a good representation of the poetry of the Thirties. Another anthology, New Poems, 1942: An Anthology of British and American Verse,<sup>13</sup> gives a view of the poetry being produced early in World War II. A third anthology, A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry,<sup>14</sup> besides containing a wide selection of poems throughout the period under consideration, has in addition a generous sampling of poems of the Forties. Including extensive samples from four different decades of the century made it possible to check on the continuity of mannerisms, language, and imagery throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. Some of those elements examined appear so frequently and consistently all through the first half of the century that they have been listed as conventions of Modern Poetry. The conclusions arrived at are based on the examination of approximately 1,500 poems by some 300 different authors.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Gerald DeWitt Sanders and John Herbert Nelson, edd. (New York, 1947)--hereafter cited as Chief Modern Poets.

<sup>13</sup>Oscar Williams, ed. (Mt. Vernon, New York, 1942)--hereafter cited as New Poems.

<sup>14</sup>Oscar Williams, ed., revised edition (New York, 1952)--hereafter cited as A Little Treasury.

<sup>15</sup>From those 1,500 an appendix to this study lists alphabetically by author more than 200 poems cited in the text of the study as examples and illustrations.

Subsequent portions of this dissertation discuss the relationship of Modern Poetry to the convention-revolt-cycle theory and investigate some of the conventions of the Modern Movement. Chapter II shows that Modern Poetry began as a conscious revolt against certain nineteenth-century conventions which are discussed. Chapters III, IV, and V form a unit in which some of the conventions which have developed in Modern Poetry are examined. Chapter III is concerned primarily with conventions relating to subject matter, vocabulary, metrics, and syntax. Chapter IV examines the Moderns' use of symbols, showing how certain conventions in their use have developed in Modern Poetry. Chapter V, the last one in the unit, contains an examination of conventional tone, attitudes, and techniques of Modern Poetry, stressing the way in which the Zeitgeist and the special audience of Modern Poetry influenced the development of those conventions.

Chapters VI, VII, and VIII form another unit dealing with the Moderns' use of conventional images and symbols. Chapter VI examines their use of certain archetypal images. Chapter VII notes non-archetypal, but familiar, images from earlier poetry and the employment of these images by the Moderns. Chapter VIII contains a discussion of conventional images introduced into poetry by the Moderns themselves. A final chapter includes a summary of the study and presents its conclusions.

## CHAPTER II

### MODERN POETRY AS A REVOLT AGAINST VICTORIAN CONVENTIONS

The historians, critics, and practitioners of twentieth-century poetry are almost unanimous in their view of Modern Poetry as a revolt against the conventions of nineteenth-century poetry. The Modern Poets and Critics see the cyclical process of revolt culminating in the establishment of new conventions, which in turn must lead to a new revolt, neatly illustrated in the history of nineteenth-century poetry in English. They see the revolt against the eighteenth-century poetic conventions in full swing at the beginning of the century. According to their view, this revolt led finally to the development of other conventions in the Victorian period, and by the end of the century another full-fledged movement against those conventions occurred. As will be shown in this chapter, there were clearly defined conceptions of the poet and the poetic in the late nineteenth century, and the Modern Poets were consciously revolting against these conventions.

Some of the nineteenth-century ideas about the poet and the poetic can be inferred from what Alba H. Warren, Jr., lists as the key terms of Victorian criticism: genius, insight, fact or reality, truth, and sincerity.<sup>1</sup> Warren declares that the spirit of the age conceived the aim of poetry as the cultivation of feeling<sup>2</sup> and that the

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<sup>1</sup>English Poetic Theory, 1825-1865 (Princeton, 1950), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

nineteenth-century theorists "believed . . . in the power of the poet as the man of feeling or insight to lead them out of the wilderness."<sup>3</sup>

He describes the typical poet:

The typical poet . . . is the God-gifted, heaven-sent, divinely inspired seer, the interpreter of man and nature, the living breath of his time and place, and the prophet of eternal verities and of things to come. He is Shelley's (not Samuel Johnson's!) "legislator of the world," the leader and the great teacher; he is also the creator, the revealer, the originator, the maker.<sup>4</sup>

Directly related to this growth of the concept of the poet as seer was the nineteenth-century belief in the poetic subject and idea. Hegel, for instance, came to the conclusion that some ideas were essentially poetic and that only a particular class of words could express those ideas. These were the "poetic" words, distinguished and distinguishable from prosaic ones.<sup>5</sup>

The point of view advanced by Hegel was widely held in English literature through the nineteenth century. William Lyon Phelps tells the following anecdote about Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence":

Shortly after its appearance, someone read it aloud to an intelligent woman; she sobbed unrestrainedly; then, recovering herself, said shamefacedly, "After all, it isn't poetry." The reason, I suppose, why she thought it could not be poetry was because it was so much nearer life than "art." The simplicity of the scene; the naturalness of the dialogue; the homeliness of the old leech-gatherer; these all seemed to be outside the realm of the heroic, the elevated, the sublime,--the particular

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<sup>3</sup>English Poetic Theory, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>5</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Philosophy of Fine Art, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston (London, 1920), IV, 57.



business of poetry, as she mistakenly thought.<sup>6</sup>

The anecdote indicates what the "intelligent" nineteenth-century reader thought poetry should be about.

Later in the century, Matthew Arnold is still insistent upon the importance of the proper subject matter for poetry, devoting several pages of his Preface to the 1853 edition of Poems to that idea, and explaining the omission from the collection of "Empedocles on Etna" on that ground.<sup>7</sup> After touching upon the point again in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,"<sup>8</sup> he makes the following statement in The Study of Poetry (1880):

The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner . . . . So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner.<sup>9</sup>

The importance to poetry of the proper subject is reflected in the hypothetical creed Alba H. Warren, Jr., assembles from his study of the critical works of nine nineteenth-century writers including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Newman, Keble, Arnold, and Ruskin. Warren declares that for the Victorians, "The object of poetry is truth . . .

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<sup>6</sup>The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1918), pp. 84-85.

<sup>7</sup>The Works of Matthew Arnold (London, 1903), X, 272-275.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., III, 5-6, 8-9.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., IV, 17.

Poetry must have a practical end, preferably moral . . . Poetry must contain great ideas."<sup>10</sup> Although cautioning that certainly no unanimity of opinion existed on any of the items in his list, Warren insists that the tenets reappear so often as to be characteristic of the century's poetic theory. He sums up the period's attitude toward poetry thus:

Poetry, the most complete mode of human expression, is distinguished from prose by the suitableness of its subject matter for metrical treatment. Ideally it is harmonious thought and feeling in harmonious words.<sup>11</sup>

This attitude toward subject matter persists with some writers even into the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

The same attitude, according to the poets of the Modern Movement, resulted in the fallacy of the Victorian style, the doctrine of subject. The selection of the proper, or "poetic," subject was automatically to call forth poetic language.<sup>13</sup> The Moderns saw the mass of nineteenth-century poets as following this visionary gleam of the poetic idea and

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<sup>10</sup>English Poetic Theory, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>12</sup>G. L. Raymond, for instance, declares that the poet must "use a special poetic diction. In doing this two things are incumbent on him. The first is to choose from the mass of language words that have poetic associations. All our words convey definite meanings not only, but accompanying suggestions; and some of these are very unpoetic." What the poet must do is "choose from the mass of language words that embody poetic comparisons,--choose them not only negatively, by excluding terms too scientific or colloquial, which, with material and mean associations, break the spell of the ideal and the spiritual; but positively, by going back in imagination to the viewpoint of the child, and . . . by substituting for the commonplace that which is worthy of an art which should be aesthetic." Poetry As a Representative Art (New York, 1910), pp. 189-190.

<sup>13</sup>F. W. Bateson, English Poetry and the English Language (Oxford, 1934), pp. 104-106.

the intrinsically poetic subject, turning their backs on the heroic couplet and the language of statement and reason, and seeking grandeur, sublimity, and remoteness from the everyday. The Moderns accused these poets of relying on unusual words, latinisms, and set types of figures of speech to achieve their results. As a group, the Moderns probably would have agreed wholeheartedly with Francis Thompson when he complained of certain poets who sought their inspiration and found their poetic genius in that

certain band of words, the Praetorian cohorts of poetry, whose prescriptive aid is invoked by every aspirant to the poetic purple . . . ; against these it is time some banner should be raised. Perhaps it is almost impossible for a contemporary writer quite to evade the services of the free-lances whom one encounters under so many standards. But it is at any rate curious to note that the literary revolution against the despotism of Pope seems issuing, like political revolutions, in a despotism of its own making.<sup>14</sup>

In the opinion of the Moderns, by the latter part of the same century which began with a revolution against the poetic diction of the eighteenth century, the revolution had resulted in the imposition of a new kind of poetic diction--quite different from that of the eighteenth century, and yet just as exacting and demanding in its own way. This new diction, derived from the poetry of Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Rossetti, and Swinburne, may have been more "poetic" in its elements than that which the early Romantics did so much to abolish;

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<sup>14</sup>Shelley (London, 1925), pp. 25-26.

nevertheless, it was just as artificial.<sup>15</sup> According to this Modern view, the Romantic reaction against the eighteenth-century conventions resulted in the establishment of a new type of convention—one that was "opulent, sumptuous, lavish, rather than pointed, terse, concrete."<sup>16</sup> Poetry had freed itself from the shackles of eighteenth-century poetic diction, they believed, only to begin forging shackles of a different kind. Eventually, the poet as "prophet" and "unacknowledged legislator of the world," the "priest of nature," and the "conscience of man" found himself confined to certain areas of subject matter deemed fit for poetry. The poets of the late nineteenth century might occasionally write of simple, everyday subjects only if they could find in those subjects profundity and depth of thought; consequently, their language had taken on a solemnity and seriousness of tone that had become characteristic of the poetry of the time. If, like Shelley, the poet concerned himself with the nebulous and abstract, if he set himself the task of probing into and elaborating upon the great mysteries of the universe, he used language of a suitable seriousness for his subject. According to the Moderns, the Nineteenth Century arrived at the same conclusions about poetry that the Eighteenth Century before it had, and came to regard poetry as

speech dressed in its Sunday best. The poet's tongue was not

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<sup>15</sup>Theodore Watts-Dunton, Poetry and the Renaissance of Wonder, ed. Thomas Hake (New York, 1916), p. 296.

<sup>16</sup>John Livingston Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry (New York, 1919), p. 218.

only language heightened by rhythm, meter, and concentration; it was a different language from that of common speech, a language with a strong tinge of snobbery in it, which could not mix with the vulgar tongue.<sup>17</sup>

Poetry, both for the Moderns and the Victorians, was once again a thing that could be recognized immediately as a genus by the particular manner in which men had agreed to write about particular subjects. It was the musical combination of grand and sublime words, a combination which concerned itself with the prophetic revelation of some grand and sublime idea. Poetry was concerned primarily with the super-refined and was not to sully the minds of its readers through the consideration of unworthy subjects in common language. For the Moderns, however, this sort of poetry was objectionable. They thought of it as "Victorian Poetry," and it came to be synonymous with a line of poems and poets "running from the Romantics through Tennyson, Swinburne, A Shropshire Lad, and Rupert Brooke."<sup>18</sup> True, they granted exclusion in this line to a few poets such as Hardy, Yeats, Browning, and sometimes Arnold; but it was often a grudging exclusion.

It was against the theory of this "Victorian Poetry" that the Modern was revolting. Where, and when, precisely, this revolt began is impossible to determine. Whether Modern Poetry should be considered a rediscovery of an old tradition, or the orderly development of a new tradition stemming from such poets as Walt Whitman, Gerard Manley Hopkins,

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<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Drew and John L. Sweeney, Directions in Modern Poetry (New York, 1940), p. 265.

<sup>18</sup>F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London, 1932), pp. 25-26.

Robert Browning, and Thomas Hardy, with a strong influence from the French Symbolists and Poe, is of little importance for this study. What does matter is that a revolt against conventions did take place, and that the revolt first manifested itself in the closely related spheres of subject matter and diction.

The Moderns rejected the Victorians' concepts both of the poetic subject and of poetic diction. Some typical objections are expressed by Ezra Pound when he complains of conventional Victorian subjects for poetry. In 1908 he writes to W. C. Williams, explaining that he has "written bushels of verse that could offend no one except a person as well-read as I am who knows that it has all been said just as prettily before. Why write what I can translate out of Renaissance Latin or crib from the sainted dead?"<sup>19</sup> There follows a list of subjects inappropriate to write on since some "9,000,000 other poets have spieled endlessly"<sup>20</sup> on them. The list includes spring, love, nature, and other similarly conventional subjects for poetry.

The close relationship between the subjects of poetry and the diction of poetry is made clear in a series of two articles by Ford Madox Hueffer entitled "Impressionism--Some Speculations" that appeared in Poetry magazine. In the course of the articles Hueffer scores Ernest Dowson, Lionel P. Johnson, and John Davidson by name from among the

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<sup>19</sup>The Letters of Ezra Pound, ed. D. D. Paige, preface by Mark Van Doren (New York, 1950), p. 4, October 24, 1908.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

poets of the Nineties for "writing in derivative language uninteresting matters that might have been interesting had they been expressed in the much more exquisite medium of prose."<sup>21</sup> He finds in Yeats and Hardy, for two, a "genuine love and . . . faithful rendering of the received impression."<sup>22</sup> He makes clear that he admires the language of these two because it varies from slang to the literary, depending upon what they think appropriate.

He complains in the first number of "literaryisms" and jargon in Victorian Poetry<sup>23</sup> and reveals his antipathy to conventional Victorian ideas about diction:

Is there something about the mere framing of verse, the mere sound of it in the ear, that it must at once throw its practitioner or its devotee into an artificial frame of mind? Verse presumably quickens the perceptions of its writer as does hashish or ether. But must it necessarily quicken them only to the perception of the sentimental, the false, the hackneyed aspects of life? Must it make us, because we live in cities, babble incessantly of green fields; or because we live in the twentieth century must we deem nothing poetically good that did not take place before the year 1603?<sup>24</sup>

In the second number he makes explicit his objections to "literaryisms":

. . . the attempt to read Tennyson, Swinburne and Browning and Pope--in our teens--gave me and the friends I have mentioned a settled dislike for poetry that we have never since quite got over. We seemed to get from them the idea that all poets must of necessity write affectedly, at great length, with many superfluous words--that poetry, of necessity, was something boring and pretentious.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>II (September 1913), 218-219.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>23</sup>II (August 1913), 178.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 186

<sup>25</sup>II (September 1913), 217.

Poetry for them, Hueffer writes, was "something pretentious . . . poetentous [sic], brow-beating, affected."<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, the Moderns' revolt against the subject matter of Victorian Poetry and their attitudes toward the diction of Victorian Poetry were closely related and had to effect sweeping changes in the language of poetry. When the Modern Poets introduced modern urban life with its streetcars, machines, technology, and social complexities to poetry, they almost necessarily used a vocabulary different from that of the nineteenth-century poets when they wrote of the sublime and the philosophical.

The Modern Poets' attitude toward subject matter thus contributed to their early efforts to reform diction, and the significance of those efforts has been recognized and summarized by F. W. Bateson:

The tendency of Victorian Poetry had been to reduce little by little the number of living words and to substitute for them the Praetorian cohorts of romantic poetic diction. Hopkins and Mr. Housman--assisted by Robert Bridges, Charles Doughty, and Thomas Hardy--rebelled against this tendency. Their efforts were tentative and sometimes mistaken--they exaggerated the value of archaisms and dialectal words and phrases; but they initiated a process that has culminated in the one indisputable achievement of postwar poetry--its catholicity of diction.<sup>27</sup>

The writers in the new movement were aware almost from the beginning of the issues involved in their revolt. Their leaders were in substantial agreement upon which elements of Victorian Poetry they opposed. They believed those elements had developed as a result of the

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<sup>26</sup>II (September 1913), 218.

<sup>27</sup>English Poetry and the English Language, p. 120.



notion that there was one particular way that should be followed to produce poetry. The new poets had this attitude in mind when they made Verlaine's "Take eloquence and wring its neck"<sup>28</sup> one of their principles of composition. Their poetry was directed against the concept of the overly self-conscious, mannered poet and his poetry.

Among the poets of the new movement who knew what they opposed in the conventional poetry of the period are Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, and Conrad Aiken. Hopkins, who anticipated the general revolt by a number of years, in a letter to his friend Richard Watson Dixon in 1881 reveals his attitude toward the language of poetry when he remarks about some of Dixon's sonnets:

. . . those on the World, except for happy touches, do not interest me very much and that to Corneille has a certain stiffness, as the majority of Wordsworth's have . . . but he wrote in 'Parnassian', that is the language and style of poetry mastered and at command but employed without any fresh inspiration . . . .<sup>29</sup>

Hopkins thinks poetry written too consciously as poetry is not apt to have a particularly interesting result. Even earlier, in a letter to Robert Bridges in 1879, Hopkins declares his opposition to the use of inversions in poetry on the ground that instead of invigorating verse they enfeeble it as a result of seeming to "be due" verse—"they weaken and . . . they destroy the earnestness or in-earnestness of the utterance."<sup>30</sup> For similar reasons, he objects to the use of words such as

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<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Mary Colum, From These Roots (New York, 1937), p. 325.

<sup>29</sup>The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1935), p. 72, October 12, 1881.

<sup>30</sup>The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. C. C. Abbott (London, 1935), p. 89, October 14, 1879.

ere, well-nigh, and o'er. His opinion is that

the poetical language of an age shd. be the current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself, but not . . . an obsolete one. This is Shakespeare's and Milton's practice and the want of it will be fatal to Tennyson's Idylls and plays, to Swinburne, and perhaps to Morris.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Hopkins's opposition to what he considers the artificial and the conventionally poetic is strongly stated.<sup>32</sup>

Similar conclusions about language and poetry evidently early influenced William Butler Yeats to modify his style of writing. Thomas Parkinson asserts in his study of Yeats that by 1895 the poet had basically altered his style so as to leave out thou-thy-thine. He also left out of yore, ere, and yonder. In at least one instance he changed the conventional ever to always. Yeats had become so intent upon eliminating obvious poeticisms, Parkinson declares, that he actually cast away one poem, "Kanva on Himself," because it contained so many inversions and archaisms that changing them would have ruined its rhyme and metrical scheme.<sup>33</sup>

In his Autobiography Yeats reveals his intentions when describing

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<sup>31</sup>The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, p. 89.

<sup>32</sup>It is worth noting that Bridges did not agree wholeheartedly with Hopkins on the proper idiom of poetry and devoted some four pages of his preface to the edition of Hopkins's poems to criticising too-radical departures from the conventional. The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W. H. Gardner, 3rd edition with preface and notes from the 1st edition by Robert Bridges (New York, 1948), pp. 204-208.

<sup>33</sup>W. B. Yeats: Self-Critic: A Study of His Early Verse (Berkeley, California, 1951), pp. 28-29.

the occasion on which he was reading some newspaper sonnets handed him at the Young Ireland Society:

I began idly reading verses describing the shore of Ireland as seen by a returning, dying emigrant. My eyes filled with tears and yet I knew the verses were badly written--vague, abstract words such as one finds in a newspaper. . . . We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in. . . . We should not disguise them in any way . . . . Personal utterance, which had almost ceased in English literature, could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. But . . . personal utterance was only egotism [for my father] . . . . "If I can be sincere and make my language natural, and without becoming discursive, like a novelist, and so indiscreet and prosaic," I said to myself, "I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet."<sup>34</sup>

Ezra Pound's objections to Victorian Poetry are much the same as those of Hopkins and Yeats, and his views are especially interesting since he provided much of the impetus for the new movement. Many principles that later became precepts of the new poetry had their first formulation with Pound, and his was one of the dominant influences through the early history of Modern Poetry. "His war was for a 'hardness' that had been lost in poetry, an edge and sense of brevity such as classics have."<sup>35</sup> In one of his letters to Harriet Monroe, Pound calls for a diction and style of poetry that will emphasize the original and conversational at the expense of the traditional. Formalism for the sake of Formalism must go, he declares; the only form to be imposed upon the poem is the form its subject matter demands. Specifically, he

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<sup>34</sup>The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats: Consisting of Reveries Over Childhood and Youth, The Trembling of the Veil, and Dramatis Personae (New York, 1953), pp. 62-63.

<sup>35</sup>Mark Van Doren, The Letters of Ezra Pound, p. vii.

condemns book words, periphrases, inversions, interjections, "straddled adjectives," conventional metres for their own sake, clichés, set phrases, stereotypy, and all "Tennysonianness of speech" and literary-isms.<sup>36</sup> One more quotation, also from a letter to Miss Monroe, should suffice to show precisely what Pound objects to:

Good god! isn't there one of them that can write natural speech without copying clichés out of every Eighteenth Century poet still in the public libraries? God knows I wallowed in archaisms in my vealish years, but these imbeciles don't even take the trouble to get an archaism, which might be silly and picturesque, but they get phrases out of just the stupidest and worst-dressed periods.

Oft in the stilly night I dallied in the glade  
On the banks of the Schuylkill as often I strayed.

The Davis person has caught up with 1890, like Kennerly, only she plys the Celtic oar.<sup>37</sup>

He has now added archaisms to the list of conventions and poeticisms against which he inveighs.

Still fairly early in the Modernist Movement Conrad Aiken also demonstrates his opposition to essentially the same aspects of Victorian poetic diction mentioned by these other poets. In particular he singles out for attack what he calls the "lyric method,"<sup>38</sup> numbering among its practitioners E. B. Reed, J. C. Powys, Joyce Kilmer, and Theodosia Garrison; and he asserts of all these:

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<sup>36</sup>The Letters of Ezra Pound, pp. 48-49, January, 1915.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 15, March, 1913.

<sup>38</sup>Scepticisms: Notes on Contemporary Poetry (New York, 1919), p. 173.

. . . they are all, blood brothers—sentimentalists, dabblers in the pretty and sweet, rhetoricians of the "thou and thee" school, pale-mouthed clingers to the artificial and archaic. Here are platitudes neatly dressed, invocatory sonnets, the use of italics for emphasis (that last infirmity!), and all the stale literary tricks so relished especially by the female, --the "calls o' love," the "cries i' the wind," homing birds, --in fact the whole stock-in-trade of the magazine poets.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, he is eloquent in his praise of Modernist poetry and sees the success of the new movement chiefly in its breaking down of the barriers and distinctions between the poetic and the non-poetic, "a condition which has obtained conspicuously only in two preceding poetic eras, the Chaucerian and Elizabethan."<sup>40</sup> This fusion represents for him the opportunity to transfuse vitality from a dynamic and extensive prose vocabulary to a comparatively small and static poetic one. Although new developments in form occur with more obvious immediate effects, he thinks the rapprochement between the prosaic and the poetic more far-reaching. He declares his unequivocal approval of this tendency and asserts:

It is safe to say that no poet now writing in this country has escaped this influence. In its healthily acrid presence it has been increasingly difficult for the prettifiers, the airy treaders of preciosity, the disciples of sweetness and sentiment, to go their mincing ways. Most of them have felt a compulsion either to change tone or to be silent.<sup>41</sup>

Hopkins, Yeats, Pound, and Aiken, practicing poets prominent at various stages in the revolt against the traditions and conventions of

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<sup>39</sup>Scepticisms, p. 180.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

Victorian Poetry, are all definite in their assertions that they are attempting to get away from over-conventionality and stereotypy of one kind or another, be it of subject, words, phrase, or prosody. All are seeking a freshness which they feel poetry has lost and which can be regained only by casting aside many of the forms and attitudes and much of the language which they believe has come to be held sacred for the production of poetry.

Critics and scholars of the period are in agreement on the word revolt as most descriptive of the period. On the continent, René Taupin expresses this view in L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur La Poésie Américaine (de 1910 à 1920), and Twentieth-Century Criticism in the English language presents a stream of writers in accord on the objects of the battle and the aims of the new poetry.

Taupin's book, as often with works by students of a foreign literature, has the special virtue of simplifying and seizing upon the obvious points of dispute. Thus to Taupin, the foreigner looking on from the outside, the most important thing to note about the new poetry is its particular opposition to the notion of a style sacred to poetry; in the last analysis the words of poetry and the words of prose are to be the same.<sup>42</sup> He describes the poetry of the period just preceding the revolt as a "poetry of words" in which the poet had to choose certain words useless to the sense of the poem merely because the ear had become

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<sup>42</sup>Rene Taupin, L'Influence du Symbolisme Français sur La Poesie Americaine--de 1910 a 1920 (Paris, 1929), pp. 110-111.

habituated to the rhythms and the music of the Victorians.<sup>43</sup> In describing the activities of the Imagist group, Taupin affirms that the watchword was death to the cliché and everything that is called poetic language; there was an insistence on freshness and the new word, the exact word.<sup>44</sup> The fight, then, was one against tradition and conventionality, and for individuality, originality, and freedom. Taupin concludes that the war against the cliché resulted in a return to the conversational.<sup>45</sup>

Similar attitudes are expressed in reviews appearing throughout the early history of Poetry. There is an insistence upon originality, and a shortness with those who seem to the editors to be adhering too closely to the precepts of tradition. In a review appearing in January, 1913, the author is critical of "lack of originality of meaning or cadence" or "the hopelessly academic." There are "a stiltedness" and a use of "approved 'poetic' words" which make the reviewer disapprove of certain poems. Other poems are praised as "simple and sincere--straight modern talk which rises into song without the aid of worn out phrases."<sup>46</sup> Later, a Poetry reviewer gives only qualified approval to a book of poems by W. E. Leonard because of his verse forms, particularly

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<sup>43</sup>L'Influence, p. 108.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 293-294.

<sup>46</sup>H[arriet] M[onroe], I (January 1913), 128-130.

the "hackneyed sonnet."<sup>47</sup> The comment upon Amelia Johnson Burr's book of poems is that "some strenuous band of poetic Futurists ought to forbid the titular use of Icarus or Lilith for the space of one year at least."<sup>48</sup> Miss Burr uses "trite, worn-out, meaningless phrases, or words of an abstract, generalized significance."<sup>49</sup>

Fourteen years later, in 1927, the Poetry reviewer is still emphasizing originality and freshness in a discussion of The Collected Poems of John G. Neihardt. Mr. Neihardt's poems are said to lack "first-hand imagination" and to have been "artificialized by a rhetorical style and adherence to outworn fashions of technique."<sup>50</sup> Mr. Neihardt suffers from a "pre-occupation with himself as the poet."<sup>51</sup> He is still addicted to the use of "poetic" terms and words such as unwitting, deem, youngling, and twixt.<sup>52</sup>

Poetry and its reviewers are not alone in their strictures against the use of traditional forms and conventional and "poetic" terms, nor in their view of the new poetry as a revolt against these things. Critics writing on the period from the beginning of the century until today have remarked on those same phenomena. Laura Riding and

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<sup>47</sup>II (April 1913), 26.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>XXX (May 1927), 100.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 104.



Robert Graves (A Survey of Modernist Poetry), R. A. Scott-James (Fifty Years of English Literature), William Lyon Phelps (The Advance of English Poetry), Henry Wells (New Poets from Old), F. R. Leavis (New Bearings in English Poetry), Geoffrey Bullough (The Trend of Modern Poetry), Marguerite Wilkinson (New Voices), and of course those critics already mentioned, all, regardless of differences in their approaches to literature and in their evaluations of the new movement, recognize Modern Poetry as an attempt to strike a new note of originality and individuality in the poetic medium. Henry Wells accurately expresses the Moderns' attitude:

Upon the threshold of the twentieth century, rhetoric threw herself down, panting and exhausted. The high style had done its uttermost; the language was due for a period of deflation. . . . English verse was more than willing to bid farewell to the age that begot Tennyson, Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, and Francis Thompson.<sup>53</sup>

If all were not enthusiastic over the results, still all could, in general, agree what the new poetry had aspired to do.

Both the new poets and the new critics were agreed upon the kind of poetry they were interested in seeing obtain a hold upon literature and the reading public. According to the new poets, they were going to be, above all, original; they would assert their originality. The Victorian idea of poetic subject would not prevent their introducing new matter to poetry, and they would write about their new subjects with a fresh and unrestricted vocabulary. For them, the cliché, the trite

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<sup>53</sup>New Poets from Old: A Study in Literary Genetics (New York, 1940), pp. 60-61.

phrase, and all literary expressions were horrors of writing to be rigorously avoided. Nothing in the way of subject matter was to be excluded from their poetry, and they would use only the forms and language appropriate to the subject matter they happened to choose. They believed that they were breaking down the walls of tradition and freeing poetry from the bonds of convention, presumably for all time.

The relationship between Modern Poetry and Nineteenth-Century Poetry should now be clear. By the end of the nineteenth century certain conventions about poetry had become established. The poet was a special man writing about a particular class of "poetic" subjects in a language and style that had to be grand enough to suit the subjects. Modern Poets were consciously revolting against the nineteenth-century attitudes in an effort to revitalize poetry and create something fresh and new. Their movement was a revolt against what they considered the too-rigid conventions of the nineteenth century. Some of the results of that revolt are the subjects of the succeeding chapters.

## CHAPTER III

### SUBJECT, VOCABULARY, METRE, AND SYNTAX

#### AS CONVENTION IN MODERN POETRY

An indication of what has happened to the revolt of the Modern Poets is that today a person can speak of Modern Poetry and be reasonably certain that everyone who hears him will instantly assume he knows just what the speaker has in mind. True, each member of the audience might disagree with his neighbor on exactly what constitutes Modern Poetry; still, there would almost certainly be a broad area of general agreement. It would be difficult to deny that the efforts of the Moderns to produce something fresh and new have resulted in a "Modern Poetry" that means to many a great deal more than just twentieth-century poems. Instead, "Modern Poetry" describes poetry easily recognizable as a type--despite the difficulty of arriving at any unanimity of opinion concerning all its characteristics. In other words, the Modern Poets have now developed conventions of their own. In Chapters III, IV, and V some of these conventions are examined and certain influences on their development are suggested. This chapter is concerned primarily with those conventions relating to subject matter, vocabulary, metrics, and syntax. The subsequent chapters take up conventions relating to the use of symbols as well as those relating to tone, attitude, and special techniques of Modern Poetry.

It was to be expected that Modern Poetry would develop conventions of its own, for, as was shown in Chapter I, revolts in literary

history almost invariably result in the development of a new set of stereotypes and conventions. Tentative steps have been taken, notably by Josephine Miles, to determine the conventions that make Modern Poetry recognizable as a type. A study of five decades, one in each of five different centuries of poetry in the English language, convinces Miss Miles that "groupings of poets are based more solidly on time than on type."<sup>1</sup> She finds evidence that by the Forties Modern Poets "have modified their linguistic heritage toward their present attitude and need, and so have established their own standard medium of representation, expression, and communication."<sup>2</sup> She does little, however, to define the idiom of Modern Poetry other than to point in the direction of certain elements which should be considered: sound, sentence structure, the references and associations of words, and the influences on those things of the "social situation in time and place."<sup>3</sup> Although she concentrates on the vocabulary of Modern Poetry and investigates subject-verb-adjective ratios primarily, she does show that Modern Poetry has mannerisms and characteristics waiting only to be analyzed and categorized in order to define its poetic conventions.

Generally, the conventions that developed in twentieth-century poetry can be ascribed to three influences: 1) the search for the fresh and new in reaction to what the Moderns called the florid, elegant, and

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<sup>1</sup>The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, California, 1951), p. 517.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

"poetic" of the Late-Victorian and the Georgian periods; 2) the Zeitgeist, or general spirit of the times; and 3) the specialized audience which the new poetry soon found. Obviously, the first two of these influences are closely related, since the search for the fresh and new can be considered one aspect of the restlessness and agitation of the period. This impulse to revitalize and initiate has been abstracted from the general Zeitgeist influence for special treatment, however, since it has assumed major importance in its own right.

Almost all the characteristics that set Modern Poetry off as a recognizable type can be traced ultimately to the three above-mentioned determinants. The conventions discussed in this and the next chapter are primarily a result of the search for the fresh and the new; while the conventions discussed in Chapter V spring primarily from the other two determinants.

The Modern Poets' search for the fresh and new had two important results: 1) new subject matter was introduced into poetry with far-reaching effects on the vocabulary of poetry; and 2) new attitudes and approaches were adopted toward the use of language and metre. This search led the new poets to place a premium on novelty and experiment. The search for the fresh and the new effected sweeping changes in the vocabulary of Modern Poetry, largely through the introduction of new subject matter. In addition, the syntax of Modern Poetry underwent revolutionary changes closely related to ideas about prosody. It must be realized, too, that all three major influences on Modern Poetry were to some extent interdependent. For instance, while the introduction of

new material for subject matter can be attributed to some degree to the Zeitgeist, it was also stimulated by the deliberate search for something that could be treated freshly in poetry. The Modern Poets were tired of writing about King Arthur, stories of the past, the great role of the poet, and the manifestation of God in and through nature; and they turned enthusiastically to the introduction of subjects from modern industry, modern life, and the urban scene.

The pattern can be seen crystallizing in the London of the yellow fogs, tawdry flats, and tattered newspapers of Eliot's "Prufrock" and "Preludes," the world of his Sweeneys and Hollow Men; in the economics and urban scenes of parts of Pound's Cantos; in the Paterson of W. C. Williams; in the air-ports, the "instruments," and the brokers on the floor of the Bourse of W. H. Auden; or in the Brooklyn Bridge as used by Hart Crane. Lesser poets, too, write in the same idiom. Vachel Lindsay writes a short poem called "Factory Windows Are Always Broken" in which the tendency to expand the vocabulary is illustrated by his use of such expressions as "throwing bricks."<sup>4</sup> Another poet writes of a small park in the city, contrasting its peace and quiet with the hustle and bustle of "work-day in the town" with its "pavements grim," its "jostled street," and "office walls."<sup>5</sup> Still another writes "To a Steam Turbine-Generator," praising it as a "Behemoth of steel,/ Goliath with power superb," stupefying "by your enormous strength."<sup>6</sup> A fourth poet,

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<sup>4</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Helen Hoyt, "Ellis Park," Poetry, II (August 1913), 159-160.

<sup>6</sup>R. E. Hieronymus, Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 20-21.

Kenneth Fearing, writes about the city in which the buildings become "great iron idols," with "flowers of cold light" streaming from their windows--"Broad fields of poppies,/Purple, red, white,/Blazing on steel vines/Where marble birds cry/Terribly at night."<sup>7</sup> In their search for fresh and new material, these poets, along with many others, make modern cities with their machines and all the complexities deriving from modern industrial life, subjects for poetry; and this new subject matter demands a different vocabulary from that of earlier poetry.

The new poets' insistence on the suitability of any word and subject for poetry as long as the words selected are appropriate to the subject has already been noted. The modern life that the poets write about is vastly more complicated and diverse as a result of the machine age than was the life of previous periods. For that reason, the Modern Poets have a far wider range of subject matter to choose from than did earlier poets. This wide range of subject matter provides the Modern Poet ample opportunity for using a comparably diverse vocabulary. Thus Hart Crane when writing of the city freely uses a wide selection of words:

Capped arbiter of beauty in this street  
 That narrows darkly into motor dawn,--  
 You, here beside me, delicate ambassador  
 Of intricate slain numbers that arise  
 In whispers, naked of steel;  
religious gunman!  
 Who faithfully, yourself, will fall too soon,  
 And in other ways than as the wind settles  
 On the sixteen thrifty bridges of the city:  
 Let us unbind our throats of fear and pity.

We even,

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<sup>7</sup>"The City Takes a Woman," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 190.

Who drove speediest destruction  
In corymbulous formations of mechanics.<sup>8</sup>

The poet is writing about a confused and complex world of beauty and ugliness, of the profound and the prosaic, the religious and the secular. It is a world dominated by motors and mechanics and one in which any of the enumerated elements might occur in conjunction with, or alongside, any of the others. In the view of the Modern Poet and the Critic, the variety of words is justified by fidelity to the subject.

Similarly, T. S. Eliot writes of the evening as a "patient etherised upon a table,"<sup>9</sup> and in a colloquial vein of Lil's husband getting "demobbed," of pills, handkerchiefs, empty bottles, sandwich papers, cardboard boxes, and cigarette ends; of horns and motors, the gashouse, soda water, and taxis; of tawdry flats, stockings, slippers, records, gramophones, and river barges; of trams, broken fingernails, and dirty hands.<sup>10</sup> He writes of scarecrows, parodies a child's song,<sup>11</sup> and describes "Apeneck Sweeney" in a sinister cabaret.<sup>12</sup> He composes a poem about the smell of steaks in a setting of grimy scraps and discarded newspapers.<sup>13</sup> All this he can do because the Modern Poet has

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<sup>8</sup>"For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen (III)," A Little Treasury, p. 405.

<sup>9</sup>"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Chief Modern Poets, p. 773.

<sup>10</sup>The Waste Land, A Little Treasury, pp. 271-284.

<sup>11</sup>"The Hollow Men," Chief Modern Poets, pp. 784-786.

<sup>12</sup>"Sweeney Among the Nightingales," Chief Modern Poets, pp. 782-783.

<sup>13</sup>"Preludes," A Little Treasury, pp. 295-297.



asserted his right to create poetry from any of the materials of his world, and to write of that material in any way he feels will be most effective.

This same attitude toward vocabulary can be traced in the works of many poets of the century. Auden uses the modern vocabulary of his environment in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," and Louis MacNeice does the same in "The Kingdom;" Karl Shapiro, Randall Jarrell, Dylan Thomas, and Stephen Spender all use the vocabulary of the life about which they are writing. They freely write poetry about automobiles, traffic lights, airplanes, ambulances---anything worthy of notice in the world in which they find themselves.

In addition to sharing this common interest in the objects of contemporary life, the Moderns, Josephine Miles concludes on the basis of her study of the poetry of the 1940's, use vocabularies that are "as solid a poetic list as one could hope to find."<sup>14</sup> She remarks:

The tone of the time . . . is strongly unified. It speaks in the main of old, eye, man, time, coming, going, seeing, a wandering, observing man in an old world; it speaks characteristically of little and great, white, death, mind, head, thing, sky, water, and seeming, a world of increasing natural particularity pondered by a meditating man. It speaks in increasing fragments of line, of phrase, of reference and melody, in increasing interarrangement, assonant and synesthetic and inter-syntactic.<sup>15</sup>

Examination bears out Miss Miles's contention that the vocabulary of Modern Poetry has its conventional elements.

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<sup>14</sup>Continuity of Poetic Language, p. 417.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 458.

The Moderns' concern with urban terms and the conditions of modern life is but one manifestation of their impatience with the over-conventional and the stereotyped. Basically, their search for and development of a new vocabulary is an aspect of their struggle to create the new, the fresh, the striking.

The Moderns did not, however, confine their search for the new to the areas of subject matter and vocabulary. They vigorously attacked traditional metrics and proclaimed the complete independence of the artist in his choice of metres. As a result, experiments in free verse and polyphonic prose, and all sorts of combinations and variations of the two were rife throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century; and though many of the Modern Poets have always written in conventional patterns and verse forms, freedom in form became one of the hallmarks of Modern Poetry. Shown the possibility of writing good and effective poetry outside the bounds of traditional forms through the examples of such older poets as Walt Whitman and Matthew Arnold, the newer poets--Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, HD and most of the other Imagists, W. C. Williams, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Robinson Jeffers, and others--seized upon the opportunity free verse offered to achieve freedom, until with some, and especially with their less talented followers and imitators, this freedom came to seem little more than a mannerism.

After the first twenty years of the century, poems in any and every form and fashion may be found, and it is an everyday affair to discover a poem with hardly any traditional form ("I Shall Laugh Purely" by Robinson Jeffers, for example, contains long lines, short

lines, rhymed lines, and a section with definite and rigid verse forms. Lines in the poem vary from the short opening "Turn from that girl" to the lengthy "And watch the centaurs come from the sea; their splayed hooves plunge and stutter on the tide-rocks, watch them swarm up," all of which is written as one line).<sup>16</sup>

Another example is to be found in Pound's "Canto XLV," which begins

With Usura  
 With usura hath no man a house of good stone  
 each block cut smooth and well fitting  
 that design might cover their face,  
 with usura  
 hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall.<sup>17</sup>

Pound appears to be composing largely by phrases. Each line is normally a unit of thought by itself, while an occasional short phrase seems to have been put in a separate line for emphasis. The method is a popular one among the new poets. Wallace Stevens, for instance, writes

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
 The only moving thing  
 Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,  
 Like a tree  
 In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
 It was a small part of the pantomime.

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<sup>16A</sup> Little Treasury, pp. 266-268.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

## IV

A man and a woman  
 Are one.  
 A man and a woman and a blackbird  
 Are one.<sup>18</sup>

What is to be made of this form? There seems to be no pattern, even though the poet has managed to isolate several images and cause them to stand out more forcibly by varying his line lengths around those images. There is, of course, the repetition of the short line "Are one" in stanza IV, but that repetition also appears to be more for the sake of emphasis and surprise than to impose a specific form.

D. H. Lawrence is yet another poet who composes by phrases and uses lineation for effects and emphasis. In "Humming-Bird" he writes:

I can imagine, in some otherworld  
 Primeval-dumb, far back  
 In that most awful stillness, that only gasped and  
                   hummed,  
 Humming-birds raced down the avenues.<sup>19</sup>

"Primeval-dumb" is emphasized by being placed at the beginning of line two instead of being lost at the end of the preceding line; at the same time "far back" at the end of this same line causes the reader to pause before moving into the complete image isolated in the succeeding line. The last line is another single image representing a unit of thought. In like manner, Lawrence writes in "Snake":

A snake came to my water-trough  
 On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
 To drink there.

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<sup>18</sup>"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," A Little Treasury, pp. 170-171.

<sup>19</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 206.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great  
 dark carob-tree  
 I came down the steps with my pitcher  
 And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he  
 was at the trough before me.<sup>20</sup>

Once again the tendency to compose by phrase, the individual image,  
 and the unit of thought is seen.

Probably the two most extreme in their exercise of freedom in  
 versification are Marianne Moore and E. E. Cummings. Neither seems to  
 feel the least constraint from tradition; neither worries about the  
 necessity for beginning lines with the traditional capital. Instead,  
 both frequently abstain from using conventional punctuation; they con-  
 cern themselves with the individual lines, the meanings of those lines,  
 and the effects of those lines. Marianne Moore writes in "Poetry":

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are  
 important beyond all this fiddle.  
 Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt  
 for it, one discovers in  
 it after all, a place for the genuine.  
 Hands that can grasp, eyes  
 that can dilate, hair that can rise  
 if it must, these things are important  
 not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon  
 them but because they are  
 useful.<sup>21</sup>

Although this particular poem is written in stanzas of a definite number  
 of lines, the length of each line here is related to the movement and  
 meaning of that line. The reader is to suppose, further, that there is  
 a reason for the variations in line length. In some instances in

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<sup>20</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 208.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

Miss Moore's poetry, line length and arrangement suggest the sort of movement she is describing. In others, as here, length and emphasis are related to each other--as when useful is held back to begin a new line, with a resulting increase of its force for the reader. Later in the poem, typography and line-arrangement suggest what Miss Moore is writing about when she describes

the bat  
holding on upside down or in quest of something  
to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll . . . .<sup>22</sup>

The line arrangement at the beginning suggests the bat's hanging upside down until the poet declares he is "in quest of something to eat." At this point she indicates his swing from his roost into action in a long line that includes the actions of several other animals.

E. E. Cummings's technique is somewhat similar to Miss Moore's, as when he advises:

Pity this busy monster, manunkind,  
not. Progress is a comfortable disease.<sup>23</sup>

By withholding not as long as possible and then placing it at the beginning of line two, Cummings has given the word a particular shock value and has achieved a maximum of effect in presenting the thought.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 241.

<sup>23</sup>"Pity this Busy Monster Manunkind," A Little Treasury, p. 366.

<sup>24</sup>In "Portrait," too, where he describes the death of Buffalo Bill, Cummings lets what he is presenting determine his line lengths. He begins

Buffalo Bill's  
defunct

Though few Modern Poets are as extreme as Miss Moore and E. E. Cummings in exercising freedom from conventions of versification, many of them make some use of that freedom. Some experiments in versification result in far less radical departures from the old forms and metres than the examples just reviewed. Wilfred Owen, for instance, employs traditional metrical patterns, but within these patterns he often relies upon end-line consonance and approximate rhymes:

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.  
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned.<sup>25</sup>

Brewster Ghiselin uses approximate rhymes and consonance in a manner reminiscent of Owen's:

The umber slant lands under the Apennines  
Clouded their sunward dust with pluffs and plumes,  
Rust of peaches, pale of almonds and plums,  
And lower yet a still green mist of vines;  
These passed the slow train sliding down from the pines  
And the winter rocks and the smoke-gray ravines.<sup>26</sup>

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placing defunct on the second line by itself, where the word is more noticeable than it would be as part of the preceding line. From that he continues:

Who used to  
ride a watersmooth-silver  
stallion

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeons justlikethat.

In these lines the fluid movement of the stallion is suggested by the phrase "watersmooth-silver stallion," and the running together of the number of clay pigeons emphasizes the speed, ease, and skill with which Buffalo Bill could shoot. Collected Poems (New York, 1936), no. 31.

<sup>25</sup>"Strange Meeting," A Little Treasury, p. 347.

<sup>26</sup>"To the South," A Little Treasury, p. 654.

Although sight rhymes are not uncommon in older poetry, here they appear to be part of the conscious technique the poet is using. What is significant is that the Modern Poets, like the Romantic Poets earlier, reject the notion that it is necessary to compose poetry in traditional and regular patterns. There is no longer pressure on the poet to conform to preconceived critical notions about form when he begins to write.

With many of the Moderns, however, the very insistence upon the freedom which they desired for the expression of their ideas develops into mannerisms, especially with some of the later, derivative poets of the generation who feel the necessity for making an issue of their freedom. Even in the most recent stages of the movement, when a tendency to return to the stricter discipline of more classical forms appears to be developing among some poets, this freedom of form is still general. Even if freedom from traditional forms is not required for the production of Modern Poetry, then, it characterizes much of it.

The seeming chaos and irregularity of the syntax and the structure of much Modern Poetry are closely connected to its metrical freedom, and are also to a great extent a result of the effort to achieve the striking and new. Released by their belief in metrical freedom from the necessity of writing smoothly and regularly just to fill out the pattern of traditional verse forms, the Modern Poets have also had greater leeway than previous poets in their choice of grammatical structure. Convinced that a large part of the effectiveness of poetry results from condensation and compression, the Modern Poets have not hesitated to eliminate words that have no function in conveying thought, feeling, or emotion. Connectives, prepositions, or other minor words in



the poem that they feel might slow, weaken, or dilute the presentation of ideas have been left out. What is important to them is to express the thought with the maximum of effect--vividly, powerfully, directly, and immediately. Conventional word order and grammar are consistently sacrificed when the Modern believes greater power can be achieved through ignoring them.

It should not be assumed, however, that all Modern Poetry exhibits the extreme dislocation of syntax suggested above. In reality there are two distinct traditions which the Modern Poets accept as basic in their practice: the one tradition is the symbolist tradition in which images and symbols are arranged so that meaning flows from the relation between them; the other is the conversational tradition,<sup>27</sup> which often, as will be shown, exhibits upon closer examination some of the characteristics of the former.

In the first-mentioned tradition, the symbolist, the poet does not seem concerned primarily with presenting things in a logical order of syntactic discourse. Instead, he presents a series of images that convey the meaning. Through their knowledge of how the human mind works, obtained from modern psychological investigations, the poets writing in this tradition depend upon the associations among ideas for their structure. They do the same thing in verse that James Joyce does in Ulysses--shift rapidly from symbol to symbol, image to image, thought to thought, scene to scene, or theme to theme with the

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<sup>27</sup>Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Poetry (London, 1952), p. 27n.



is used to compress what would otherwise be a considerably longer statement of the drudgery in which man labors out his life. In the last stanza the same practice is repeated:

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best,  
But uncumbered: meadow-down is not distressed  
For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bones risen.<sup>29</sup>

In this stanza an abrupt jump in ideas occurs from the first statement to that of the second, where the poet uses "meadow-down" to signify the skylark in its natural setting and contrasts that natural prison to the bird's man-made one. At the same time the comparison between the cage of the skylark and the life of man is retained in the image of the risen bones, which represents man freed from the burden of flesh and spiritually akin to the free skylark. The connection between the two ideas is made in no logical and obvious manner; the connection is dependent upon the association of ideas already established in earlier images. In addition to this compression through associations, there is the further compression in the last line deriving from the omission of words which the reader can supply for himself by realizing the necessity for the repetition of "is not distressed" from the preceding line.

This same syntactical tradition can be seen in operation in portions of T. S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday." The poem opens:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope to turn  
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope  
I no longer strive to strive towards such things

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<sup>29</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 20.

(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)  
 Why should I mourn  
 The vanished power of the usual reign?

Because I do not hope to know again  
 The infirm glory of the positive hour  
 Because I do not think  
 Because I know I shall not know  
 The one veritable transitory power  
 Because I cannot drink  
 There, where trees flower, and springs flow,  
     for there is nothing again

Because I know that time is always time  
 And place is always and only place  
 And what is actual is actual only for one time  
 And only for one place  
 I rejoice that things are as they are and  
 I renounce the blessed face  
 And renounce the voice  
 Because I cannot hope to turn again  
 Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something  
 Upon which to rejoice.<sup>30</sup>

Although the severe dislocation found with Hopkins and in the works of many other Modern Poets is not found here, there is a noticeable use of repetition in phraseology and the introduction of a series of what at first appear to be unrelated images. When the cumulative effect of all the images is noted, however, they become connected as common elements of the frame of mind the author is trying to pass on to the reader. The predominant tone of the passage is one of resignation and despair, and it owes that tone largely to the initial repetition of "Because I do not hope." The reiteration of that phrase impresses the reader with the hopelessness of the poet; and the further images of tiredness, the "aged eagle"—"vanished power," reinforce the first impression. It is not necessary for the poet to present a logical chain of connectives between

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<sup>30</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 789.

these images; they have their points of contact in the idea the poet is handling. Though portions of the poem from time to time assume a regularity of syntax that would not be amiss in good prose, the initial repetition alone removes it definitely from that realm. Later in the poem an example of more extreme dislocation occurs:

And the bones sang chirping  
With the burden of the grasshopper, saying

Lady of silences  
Calm and distressed  
Torn and most whole  
Rose of memory  
Rose of forgetfulness  
Exhausted and life-giving  
Worried reposeful  
The single Rose  
Is now the Garden  
Where all loves end  
Terminate torment  
Of love unsatisfied  
The greater torment  
Of love satisfied.<sup>31</sup>

In this passage a coherent reading is achieved when the reader adds two ands, one after "end" in the fifth line from the bottom and the other after "unsatisfied" in the third line from the bottom. This is the same sort of syntactical freedom used by Hopkins.

Hart Crane is yet another poet who composes within the same tradition. His "To Brooklyn Bridge" opens:

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest  
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,  
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high  
Over the chained bay waters Liberty--<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Chief Modern Poets, pp. 790-791.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 907.

If the wording is carefully followed, the reader may derive from the lines the information that the sea gull, and not the dawn or the sea gull's wings, is the real subject of these lines. Likewise, by paying close attention throughout the next two stanzas, the reader can follow the thought of the poet:

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes  
 As apparitional as sails that cross  
 Some page of figures to be filed away;  
 --Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights  
 With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene  
 Never disclosed, but hastened to again,  
 Foretold to other eyes on the same screen.<sup>33</sup>

The jump from the gull to the figures on the page, and the subsequent focusing of the attention on modern man at his work and then at his amusement, is made through the associational process. This rapid interplay of images to produce meaning is one of the most noticeable characteristics of Modern Poetry. Crane uses the technique frequently, and it is one practice that makes for difficulty in understanding his poetry, as well as Modern Poetry in general. The effect of the passage quoted above is quite similar to that of the following lines from

The Bridge:

Through the bound cable strands, the arching path  
 Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,--  
 Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate  
 The whispered rush, telepathy of wires.  
 Up the index of night, granite and steel--  
 Transparent meshes--fleckless the gleaming staves--

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<sup>33</sup>Chief Modern Poets, pp. 907-908.

Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream  
 As though a god were issue of the strings . . . .<sup>34</sup>

Most of the difficulty in these lines disappears once the syntax is examined. For instance, a relative pronoun would make it clear that "telepathy of wires," in the fourth line, modifies the preceding "whispered rush."

In addition to Hopkins, Eliot, and Crane, Delmore Schwartz--among the later Moderns--uses this same sort of structure. The same type of relationship, unstated in syntax but implicit in the meaning of the poem, lies in the images of the following lines:

A dog named Ego, the snowflakes as kisses  
 Fluttered, ran, came with me in December,  
 Snuffing the chill air, changing, and halting,  
 There where I walked toward seven o'clock,  
 Sniffed at some interests hidden and open,  
 Whirled, descending, and stood still, attentive,  
 Seeking their peace, the stranger, unknown,  
 With me, near me, kissed me, touched my wound,  
 My simple face, obsessed and pleasure bound.<sup>35</sup>

There is a confusion in these lines until "snow-flakes" is read as the subject of the succeeding verbs fluttered, ran, came, snuffing, changing, halting, sniffed, whirled, stood, kissed, touched.

This extended discussion of the syntactic practices of Hopkins, Eliot, Crane, and Schwartz has been included to illustrate and indicate how widespread, inclusive, and characteristic of Modern Poetry those practices have become. The Modern Poets' use of disjointed and ambiguous word order and structure is so generally accepted as to need no

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<sup>34</sup>"Atlantis," from The Bridge, in A Little Treasury, p. 401.

<sup>35</sup>"A Dog Named Ego," A Little Treasury, pp. 500-501.

further illustrations. It should be remembered, however, that many more examples of this manner of writing exist. The poems of E. E. Cummings and Marianne Moore provide particularly fertile fields for the seeker of such examples.

Once more a manner of writing poetry is discovered that has found acceptance among numerous writers of the period. Though all the poetry of the period does not exhibit this characteristic dislocation of syntax and the juxtaposition of images that at first glance appear to have little connection, its occurrence is frequent enough to justify calling it one of the conventions of Modern Poetry.

Earlier, it was stated that the tradition just discussed is one of the two basic to Modern Poetry, the other being that of the conversational and prosaic. While the tradition of the symbolists has gained more attention, largely as a result of its greater shock effect, the second tradition is probably the more widespread of the two. So far as word order is concerned, the conversational tradition stands in close relationship to the older manner of writing poetry and is thus not readily recognizable as being part of Modern Poetry. What it amounts to is a careful selection of the language of the modern age and the use of the language in a "pure" and "refined" manner. It consists of the use of what Donald Davie calls pure diction--that which has the virtue of good prose.<sup>36</sup> The conversational tradition emphasizes the value of the word. There is an attempt to capture for the purpose of poetry that

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<sup>36</sup>Purity of Diction, pp. 27-28n.



which is best in prose, and the poetry written in the conversational tradition presents little of the irregularity and dislocation previously examined. Inversions of any kind are few, if present at all, and the connections are usually logical in contrast to the associational method of the symbolist tradition. The sort of poetry produced under the influence of this conversational tradition is illustrated in the following lines by William Butler Yeats:

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid  
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill  
Whereby the haystack-and-roof-levelling wind,  
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;  
And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.<sup>37</sup>

It is as regular and straightforward as prose, and advances in its course by the strict logic of grammatical construction. There is not the rapid and almost simultaneous representation of a number of images to overwhelm the reader and leave him with the idea of the whole poem at one time; instead, there is a calm and orderly presentation of material. Even in a poem where Yeats does present a series of images that reinforce one another and convey a single impression, he sometimes uses this same manner of writing. The opening lines of "Sailing to Byzantium" present an excellent example:

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
--Those dying generations--at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

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<sup>37</sup>"A Prayer for My Daughter," A Little Treasury, p. 82.

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
 Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
 Monuments of unaging intellect.<sup>38</sup>

There is the same kind of regularity and structure as in the other passage, despite the richness of the imagery and its symbolism. Only, Yeats here is fusing one tradition emphasizing the conversational and prosaic manner with another that emphasizes the symbol and the image cluster.

T. S. Eliot also composes within this tradition of the conversational and the prosaic. The separate portions of "Burnt Norton," like the other sections of his Four Quartets, are written in this manner.

Note the following lines from part one of that poem:

Time present and time past  
 Are both perhaps present in time future,  
 And time future contained in time past.  
 If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable.  
 What might have been is an abstraction  
 Remaining a perpetual possibility  
 Only in a world of speculation.  
 What might have been and what has been  
 Point to one end, which is always present.  
 Footfalls echo in the memory  
 Down the passage which we did not take  
 Towards the door we never opened  
 Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
 Thus, in your mind.<sup>39</sup>

A word of caution is necessary about Eliot's usage, however; for although the individual sections of the poem are presented in the conversational manner, the large blocks of material written in accord with

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<sup>38</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

this tradition of the prosaic and the analytical are arranged so that the meaning of the entire poem depends upon the relationships of these long passages to one another. Thus, if the poem is taken as a whole, it presents an example of the kind of poetry written in accord with the principles of the symbolist tradition mentioned. It is not too surprising, then, to find Eliot, still in logically ordered language, continuing in the poem:

But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves  
I do not know.

Other echoes  
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?  
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,  
Round the corner. Through the first gate,  
Into our first world, shall we follow  
The deception of the thrush?<sup>40</sup>

The initial conception of time's illusory nature has been replaced by images that suggest the deception of experience; and the connection, just as in the other kind of poetry, must be made by the reader himself through the association of ideas.

This existence of the one tradition within the other is realized even more forcefully when the second section of the poem introduces an entirely different movement, although still regularly and logically constructed:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud  
Clot the bedded axle-tree.  
The thrilling wire in the blood  
Sings below inveterate scars  
And reconciles forgotten wars.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A Little Treasury, p. 289.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

It is true that taken independently the lines read in the order of prose, clearly and regularly; but in relation to the poem as a whole, they read much as the individual phrases and words cited to illustrate the poetry of the other major tradition. When all the sections are read and apprehended as a whole, the poet's complete meaning suddenly springs into bold relief.

A variety of quotations could be assembled from the range of Modern Poetry to illustrate these two dominant traditions in its structure, but enough have been presented to establish their nature, existence, and dominance. Although all the poets composing do not use these practices to an equal degree, there are many correspondences in the structure and movement of the poetry of the twentieth century. Some poets favor one of these traditions to the almost total exclusion of the other; and, as has been shown, some move freely within either style, sometimes combining them effectively when the situation permits. The practices of the poets on the whole, however, are restrictive enough to constitute a manner of composition peculiar to the period, and one which is deemed essential to the reproduction of the poetic experience. One more of the conventions of Modern Poetry has been found.

It has been shown that there are many characteristics in the structure of Modern Poetry that grew out of the efforts of twentieth-century poets to achieve the fresh and the new. It has been demonstrated how under that impulse the Moderns introduced new subject matter from modern life and then developed a new vocabulary suitable to that subject matter. In addition, the same desire to achieve the fresh and

new influenced the Moderns to revolutionize their syntactical practices. Other conventions in Modern Poetry that have developed and that are related to the search for novelty are the subject of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SYMBOL AS CONVENTION IN MODERN POETRY

Subject matter, vocabulary, metre, and syntax are not the only elements of Modern Poetry to develop new conventions under the influence of the search for a fresh mode of expression. A conventional use of the symbol has also been developed. The eventual emphasis on the symbol as a conventional medium for expression and as an important unit of structure is a direct outgrowth of the Moderns' attempts to achieve originality.

The Moderns, seeking fresh ways to express their ideas, finally settle upon the image as the best means of conveying ideas that can not be explicitly and directly verbalized. The Moderns reach the conclusion that meaningless images should be excluded from their poems. Some idea of what the Modern sees in his contemporaries' work is afforded by Robert P. Tristram Coffin's remarks on Robert Frost:

Photography merely, as some have maintained?--Not if you know your head from a grindstone. These things Frost sees not merely as objects, in three dimensions. They are objects with tenderness and sensitivity like a nimbus around them. They mean more than they seem. This is great art. It is a new kind of vision. You try to find a camera that can show you how close cousins hepaticas and spring pools are, both having blueness and both having wateriness to them.<sup>1</sup>

Ezra Pound had already expressed the same idea when he gave his definition of poetry as a "sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres, and the like,

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<sup>1</sup>New Poetry of New England (Baltimore, 1938), pp. 58-59.

but equations for the human emotions."<sup>2</sup>

What Pound said about the image's function in poetry is elaborated by T. S. Eliot when he propounds his theory of the objective correlative:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.<sup>3</sup>

Both men echo what Mary Colum has called the Symbolist formula: "A writer should not describe a scene or a character or an emotion--he must evoke them."<sup>4</sup> It is Gerard Manley Hopkins's success in evoking the emotion that impressed the postwar poets--his "straining after a directness beyond that allowed by the formal syntactic use of language."<sup>5</sup>

Pound, however, carefully points out the differences between the poetry of the Moderns writing in English, represented by the Imagists, and that of the French Symbolistes. The Imagists hold "a like belief in a sort of permanent metaphor,"<sup>6</sup> but the belief of the Imagists is different since their meanings do not have to remain constant. As Pound puts it:

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<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of Romance (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1952), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Selected Essays, 1917-1932 (New York, 1932), pp. 124-125.

<sup>4</sup>From These Roots (New York, 1937), p. 341.

<sup>5</sup>David Daiches, "Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Modern Poets," New Literary Values (London, 1936), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup>"Vorticism," Fortnightly, CII (September 1914), 463.

Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in "association," that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy. One can be grossly "symbolic," for example, by using the term "cross" to mean "trial." The symbolist's symbols have a fixed value . . . like 1, 2, and 7. The Imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs a, b, and x in algebra.<sup>7</sup>

The whole of Imagisme to Pound is that it does not use images as ornaments: the image itself is the speech, "the word beyond formulated language."<sup>8</sup>

Coming to the conclusion that poetry should concern itself with emotions that could not be adequately described through the use of such conventional figures of speech as the simile and the metaphor, in which analogies are explicitly set up to describe one thing in terms of another, the Modern Poet sought a method for the direct presentation of emotion; and he found that method in the use of symbolism and related techniques.

The new poets seized upon the symbol as a medium through which they could achieve a synthesis of levels of meaning "in a way that explicit commentary cannot."<sup>9</sup> The symbol was to be a means of setting in operation a direct communication between the emotion and the expression, between the artist and his audience.<sup>10</sup> This dependence upon the

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<sup>7</sup>"Vorticism," p. 463.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 466.

<sup>9</sup>William Van O'Connor, Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry (Chicago, 1948), pp. 79-80.

<sup>10</sup>Rene Taupin, L'Influence du Symbolisme Francais sur La Poesie Americaine--de 1910 a 1920 (Paris, 1929), p. 84.



symbol was to have far-reaching influences on the development of Modern Poetry. Its effects upon the structure alone, already touched upon in the section of this work dealing with syntax, have been described by Frederick Pottle:

Since poetry . . . resides in the "objective correlative," that is, in the image or symbol of the immediate qualities of experience, all the conventional structure of a poem, its connections and transitions, everything that explicitly directs and explains the bits of heightened consciousness, is thought to be mere prose and therefore better omitted.<sup>11</sup>

On the whole, Modern Poets have accepted this theory of the functional use of imagery (that is, the use of images to convey thought and meaning) and the almost necessary corollary of the inevitability and indispensability of the symbol.

The results of the Moderns' theories about the symbolic uses of images may be observed in the changes that occur in their treatment of nature. Of course, nature was used symbolically before 1912, and it is certainly not suggested that the Moderns never make a pure appeal to the senses; but twentieth-century poets have increasingly used nature images to present ideas symbolically, and usually these images symbolize a threatening force.

Often the friendly, soothing nature of Wordsworth has been replaced by a nature inimical to man, the nature of the "Wasteland" by Madison Cawein<sup>12</sup> and that later similar and much more famous Waste Land

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<sup>11</sup>The Idiom of Poetry (Ithaca, New York, 1946), p. 95.

<sup>12</sup>Poetry, I (January 1913), 104-105.

of Eliot. It is likely to be a nature of the "shape in the twisted tree,"<sup>13</sup> of "Starving through the leafless wood."<sup>14</sup> For Conrad Aiken it is a nature of dark nights, of a "snowy night too and the soul starving" with "white lines of foam that cross the brain/and break against the skulltop and are bitter."<sup>15</sup> It is nature still, but not quite the nature of earlier poets and poetry.

Time after time, the new poets use nature in this strange, evocative, and ominous way. And the change involves more than the shift from a benevolent, friendly nature to a threatening, ominous one. The nature image, too, must justify its presence in the poem by helping to convey ideas; it must do more than provide a placid and decorative background useful only as a setting for the rest of the poem, as it did, the Moderns believed, in the works of far too many late nineteenth and early twentieth-century poets such as Dowson, Swinburne, E. B. Reed, and J. C. Powys. Modern Poetry's nature must play an integral part in the poem. In the hands of the Moderns the use of nature gradually developed into a characteristic.

These changes in the use of nature can be observed through an examination of a succession of poets beginning with George Meredith, and going through T. S. Eliot. In "Love in a Valley" Meredith makes a normal nineteenth-century use of nature imagery:

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<sup>13</sup>W. H. Auden, "Epilogue," Chief Modern Poets, p. 382.

<sup>14</sup>W. H. Auden, "Now the Leaves Are Falling Fast," Chief Modern Poets, p. 385.

<sup>15</sup>"Blues for Ruby Matrix," New Poems, pp. 19, 22.

Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping  
 Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.  
 Long on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,  
 Brooding o'er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.<sup>16</sup>

Nowhere in such poems is there found more than the appeal to the senses resulting from vivid pictures. The author's only interest in nature appears to be to provide a decorative setting.

In contrast, the two practices presented as typical of the twentieth-century attitude toward nature, symbolic usage and the representation of nature as something ominous, are noticeable in the poetry of E. A. Robinson, writing shortly after the turn of the century. The images become more than just mirrors for comparison, or a mood-setting medium. Nature becomes a thing alive. It takes on a meaning and individuality of its own, and plays a significant part in the action of the poem. The nature of "Luke Havergal," for instance, is more than just a series of pictures presented to the reader for admiration or comparison:

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,  
 There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,  
 And in the twilight wait for what will come.  
 The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,  
 Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;  
 But go, and if you listen, she will call.  
 Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal--  
 Luke Havergal.<sup>17</sup>

The vines are more than just a part of the setting. They have a meaning within the framework of the poem. In their clinging "crimson on the

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<sup>16</sup>"Love in a Valley" (1878 version), The Poetical Works of George Meredith (New York, 1912), p. 231.

<sup>17</sup>"Luke Havergal," A Little Treasury, p. 115.

wall<sup>n</sup> there is a threat to Luke, especially when he is warned that the leaves will strike him as they fall:

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies  
 To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;  
 But there, where western glooms are gathering,  
 The dark will end the dark, if anything;  
 God slays himself with every leaf that flies,  
 And hell is more than half of paradise.  
 No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies--  
 In eastern skies.<sup>18</sup>

In these lines Robinson identifies the vine, the leaves withering, and the dark of night with death and contrasts those images with the thought of life and hope implied in the "dawn in eastern skies," a hope that is denied Luke Havergal. Robinson concludes:

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,  
 There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.  
 Go, for the winds are tearing them away,--  
 Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,  
 Nor any more to feel them as they fall.<sup>19</sup>

The images used by the poet help convey meaning through their places in the context of the poem. They suggest in themselves what they mean through their function in the poem, and this autonomous, self-explanatory existence marks the difference between the use of nature imagery in the older poets and the later ones. A nature of this significant, suggestive, and antipathetic sort is the rule rather than the exception with Robinson.

Even Robert Frost, ordinarily thought of as a nature poet in the tradition of the soothing and the beneficent, sometimes uses nature

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<sup>18</sup>"Luke Havergal," A Little Treasury, p. 115.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

images in a manner similar to that of Robinson. The technique of giving import and independent existence to nature and the things of nature is set to work by Frost in "Desert Places" where he writes of a threatening nature:

Snow falling and night falling fast oh fast  
 In a field I looked into going past,  
 And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,  
 But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it -- it is theirs.  
 All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
 I am too absent-spirited to count;  
 The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness  
 Will be more lonely ere it will be less --  
 A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
 With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
 Between stars -- on stars where no human race is.  
 I have it in me so much nearer home  
 To scare myself with my own desert places.<sup>20</sup>

The poem relates the loneliness of the scene the man is watching with his own loneliness, though the most direct comparison made is the suggestion in "The loneliness includes me unawares." Thus, the partially snow-covered field in the night becomes a symbol for the loneliness of the observer, a concrete representation of that loneliness and not just the reflection of the emotion in a simile or a metaphor.<sup>21</sup>

Ezra Pound, too, uses nature images to express ideas, and the different manner of treating nature when he does use it is even more

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<sup>20</sup>"Desert Places," Chief Modern Poets, p. 592.

<sup>21</sup>Another instance of Frost's use of nature imagery in this

striking than with Robinson and Frost. In "Mauberley" the nature images must be interpreted functionally if any coherent meaning is to be deduced from the poem. For instance, when Pound writes

Scattered Moluccas  
 Not knowing, day to day,  
 The first day's end, in the next moon;  
 The placid water  
 Unbroken by the Simoon;  
 Thick foliage  
 Placid beneath warm suns,  
 Tawn fore-shores  
 Washed in the cobalt of oblivions;  
 Or through dawn-mist  
 The grey and rose  
 Of the juridical  
 Flamingoes;

A consciousness disjunct,  
 Being but this over-blotted  
 Series  
 Of intermittences;  
 Coracle of Pacific voyages,  
 The unforecasted beach;  
 Then on an oar  
 Read this:

"I was  
 And I no more exist;  
 Here drifted  
 An hedonist"<sup>22</sup>

the moon, the water, the thick foliage, the dawn-mist, and the unforecasted beach are more than decorations. They have implications important to the meaning of the passage as a whole. They are "the word beyond formulated language":<sup>23</sup> that is, they represent an effort to

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manner can be seen in "Into My Own," Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>"Mauberley," A Little Treasury, pp. 223-224.

<sup>23</sup>Pound, "Vorticism," p. 466.

express through images and the associations and connotations surrounding those images an emotion, feeling, or idea impossible to explain through the logical concatenation of words alone. In other words, their primary function is not to delight the senses as ornaments or decorations, but to evoke the thought Pound is embodying in the poem. These images, too, suggest a nature that is removed from the friendly and beneficent nature of earlier writers; Man, adrift in a wide, uncaring world, can look forward only to landing on unforecasted shores.

Poems can also be cited from the works of T. S. Eliot to support this contention. The use of nature in The Waste Land alone provides a convincing illustration. The opening lines of that poem represent both a symbolic and a threatening nature:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.<sup>24</sup>

From this initial presentation Eliot soon goes to:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.<sup>25</sup>

The nature he depicts is a nature of dryness and of dust. It is inhospitable and ominous to man, and it is only through finding water (spiritual solace) that man can gain comfort. In this poem, the

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<sup>24</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 271.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 271-272.

symbolic values of the images from nature are all-important. What representational qualities there are serve only to enhance what the images symbolize. And there is no direct interpretation. Once more, if the images speak, it is for themselves through their own arrangement.

When the images of "Gerontion" and "The Hollow Men," to mention only two more poems, are added, it becomes evident that Eliot shares with the other Moderns this conventional use of nature imagery.

What the Modern Poets demand of nature imagery they demand of imagery from all fields of experience and endeavor. Images, no matter what their source, have no justifiable place in the poem if they do nothing or have no meaning. It is undoubtedly the Moderns' adherence to this theory of poetry that leads them to admire the poems of John Donne and other metaphysicals such as Herbert and Crashaw. In what for long had been considered the strained intellectuality of these men, the Moderns can understand and appreciate a genuine effort to translate intense emotion into experience that will be expressive and intelligible to sympathetic readers, that is, readers who are interested enough in poetry really to pursue the meaning and intention of the author. Thus it is that the Moderns admire such use of images as that made by Donne in "The Flea," "A Valediction: Of Weeping," "The Ecstasy," "The Funeral," "The Canonization," and "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." It is also for his success in expressing emotion directly through the symbolic use of images that the Moderns admire William Blake. These "discoveries" by the Moderns of the Donnes, the Blakes, the Marvells, and the Hopkinses are all, in a sense, symptomatic of their own efforts to produce a poetry of the direct apprehension and evocation of emotion.



What they admire in earlier poets is the reflection of what they themselves are trying to do. The success of the earlier poets confirms the Moderns in their beliefs and gives them, to some extent, a selection of models by which to proceed.

As a result of the emphasis upon the use of images to evoke emotions and feelings, Modern Poetry has become permeated with symbols. The truth of this fact can be established by opening almost any anthology of Modern Poetry at random and looking at the first selection that meets the eye:

There are wolves in the next room waiting  
 With heads bent low, thrust out, breathing  
 At nothing in the dark: between them and me  
 A white door patched with light from the hall  
 Where it seems never (so still is the house)  
 A man has walked from the front door to the stair.  
 It has all been forever. A beast claws the floor.  
 I have brooded on angels and archfiends  
 But no man has ever sat where the next room's  
 Crowded with wolves, and for the honor of man  
 I affirm that never have I before. Now while  
 I have looked for the evening star at a cold window  
 And whistled when Arcturus spilt his light,  
 I've heard the wolves scuffle, and said: So this  
 Is man; so -- what better conclusion is there --  
 The day will not follow night, and the heart  
 Of man has a little dignity, but less patience  
 Than a wolf's, and a duller sense that cannot  
 Smell its own mortality. (This and other  
 Meditations will be suited to other times  
 After dog silence howls my epitaph)  
 Now remember courage, go to the door,  
 Open it and see whether coiled on the bed  
 Or cringing by the wall a savage beast  
 Maybe with golden hair, with deep eyes  
 Like a bearded spider on a sunlit floor,  
 Will snarl -- and man can never be alone.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Allen Tate, "The Wolves," A Little Treasury, p. 387.

This poem is about man's fear of the unknown and all its terror and about the courage he needs to face it. Those fears are symbolized by the wolves that can be heard snuffling continually behind the closed door that man has been unable to bring himself to open. Once his courage has been summoned, however, and the door opened, even should there be a beast, sunlight has penetrated the room and its mysteries are no longer cloaked in darkness. This impression has been conveyed through the medium of the images of the wolves, the room, the door, shadows, and light. And even where it is not possible to assign definite meanings to the images, they suggest and hint at deeper meanings waiting only to be penetrated.

What has been said of this poem could be said of a great many Modern poems. Delmore Schwartz writes:

The heavy bear who goes with me,  
A manifold honey to smear his face,  
Clumsy and lumbering here and there,  
The central ton of every place,  
The hungry beating brutish one  
In love with candy, anger, and sleep,  
Crazy factotum, dishevelling all,  
Climbs the building, kicks the football,  
Boxes his brother in the hate-ridden city.<sup>27</sup>

It is obvious that the bear is the symbolic presentation of the bestial qualities that man carries with him everywhere. The entire poem has been developed in the shape of the central image, the bear, which represents the idea expressed in the poem.

This practice of using images in a symbolic and suggestive manner is common to both the major and minor poets of the Modern

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<sup>27</sup>"The Heavy Bear," A Little Treasury, p. 499.

Movement. Auden adopts the practice in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" when he writes:

He disappeared in the dead of winter:  
 The brooks were frozen, the air-ports almost deserted,  
 And snow disfigured the public statues;  
 The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.  
 O all the instruments agree  
 The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness  
 The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,  
 The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays;  
 By mourning tongues  
 The death of the poet was kept from his poems.<sup>28</sup>

Here, too, the images are important more for their connotations and suggestiveness than for their decorative effects. There is a juxtaposition of images from the modern world and images from a wild and uncaring nature. The frozen brooks, the deserted "air-ports," the disfigured public statues, the "dark cold day," the wolves running through the evergreen forests, all are objective correlatives and symbolic representations of the loss the world has suffered, though unknowingly, in the death of W. B. Yeats. All the images mean something in the total texture of the poem, and ideally the Modern Poet always keeps this meaningful use of images in mind when he composes.

In addition to influencing subject matter, vocabulary, metrics, and syntax, then, the impulse to find the fresh and the new directed the Moderns toward an increased use of the symbol to express emotion and contributed to developing a new characteristic manner of handling traditional, familiar materials. Other conventions relating to tone,

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<sup>28</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 406.

attitude, and special techniques that were more directly a result of the Zeitgeist and specialized audience than of the search for the fresh and the new also developed in Modern Poetry; and some of those conventions are examined in Chapter V. Subsequent chapters of the study return to the topic of imagery and symbolism and show that many images appearing in Modern Poetry are conventionalized and standardized in their symbolic values, or to use the words of Ezra Pound when he spoke of the symbolists, the symbol has tended to become "degraded . . . to the status of a word" so that a cross has come to equal "trial."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>"Vorticism," p. 463.

## CHAPTER V

### ATTITUDE, TONE, AND SPECIAL TECHNIQUES

#### AS CONVENTION IN MODERN POETRY

Modern Poetry has developed some conventions that are the result of more than just a desire to create the fresh and new. Two other factors, the Zeitgeist and a specialized audience, have influenced the poetry of the twentieth century in the direction of standardization and convention. As a result of these two influences certain conventions relating to attitude, tone, and special techniques have become established in Modern Poetry.

The Zeitgeist which resulted in the prevailing attitude and tone of much Modern Poetry was a complex one, and to a great extent it represented a development of the problems and ideas present through much of the nineteenth century. The Victorian problem of the conflict between science and religion was not only still with the Moderns, but it became aggravated with the passage of time. A science that had begun by questioning the truth of religious beliefs under the impact of Darwinism ended, under the influence of Einsteinian relativism, by posing even more awesome questions of its own. There was no longer possible even a faith in science and its promise of millennium. Men began to feel less sure all the time of the doctrines of progress and the perfectibility of Man. The world took on an aimlessness difficult for the poet to resolve. The period became one of complex transitions characterized by the incessant and rapid changes of the machine age, with a

resulting uprooting of lives.<sup>1</sup>

Left insecure in their beliefs by the inroads of science, the Moderns were further shaken by the social and political unrest of the times--also to a large extent bequests of the nineteenth century. The shaky foundations of belief were unable to withstand the stresses proceeding from the first World War, and the result was a collapse into the general feeling of disillusionment and spiritual ennui which grew out of that conflict and which in time gave way to a feeling of despair that led the generation to refer to itself, sophisticatedly, as the lost generation.

In attempting to explain the tone of Modernist Poetry, Robert Graves characterizes the generation of poets producing the poetry as a "generation opposed to stress."<sup>2</sup> He ascribes that opposition to scepticism following the disillusionment of World War I, and the subsequent inability of the poets to find stability in any human relationships, national, religious, or moral.<sup>3</sup>

This generation grew up in a time of cynicism and doubt that brought into serious question the inherent nobility of man and the certainty of his immortal soul. It was a period of an almost scientific deflation of man's ego, and an age singularly inappropriate for enthusiasms, ideals, and faith in poetic beauties. It was a time of the

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<sup>1</sup>F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London, 1932), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>The Common Asphodel (London, 1949), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

triumph of science and the scientific attitude at the expense of Man.

The Modern Poet has probably both influenced and been influenced by this Zeitgeist. Reflecting the approach of his scientific contemporaries, he has adopted a pose of coldness and objectivity in his poetry. Even when writing of immensely personal matters, he has suppressed his emotional involvement. The result is, at least superficially, the passionless introspection of the Modern Poet and the quiet, matter-of-fact presentation of much Modern Poetry. It is a kind of intellectual shrug that has developed into a convention. This intellectual shrug is to a great extent responsible for what I. A. Richards calls T. S. Eliot's success in The Waste Land in effecting a "complete severance between his poetry and all beliefs,"<sup>4</sup> thereby resolving the dilemma of a generation caught between science and religion.<sup>5</sup>

The Waste Land contains little poetic enthusiasm. The work is an autobiography of despair and regeneration; yet the tone throughout is one of almost complete detachment. It is a poem couched largely in the form of flat statement, and on the surface it reads with the finality of a laboratory report. The opening passage sets the tone for almost the entire poem.

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering

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<sup>4</sup>"Poetry and Beliefs," The New Criticism, ed. E. B. Burgum (New York, 1930), p. 50n.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.<sup>6</sup>

Here is the presentation of the facts of the situation; there is no direct interpretation by the author, even though he presents his facts so that the reader ultimately arrives at a predetermined conclusion. The same technique is practised throughout the poem. Even at the conclusion, after the coming of the rains that mean life, the poet is strangely subdued and unenthusiastic:

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
Shall I at least set my lands in order?  
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
Poi s' ascose nel foco che gli affina  
Quando fiam uti chelidon -- O swallow swallow  
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie  
These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih?<sup>7</sup>

At the conclusion as well as at the beginning, feeling as such is ruled out, and a dispassionate, perhaps insane, utterance is substituted; and not only in The Waste Land does Eliot adopt this tone. Part of the effect of hopelessness in "The Hollow Men" certainly results from the subdued and restrained tone. From the quiet and plaintive invitation of Prufrock's "Let us go then, you and I" to the "Time present and time past" of "Burnt Norton," through all the intermediate stages of "Ash Wednesday" and the other poems, this same tone predominates, and is perhaps best exemplified in the last three lines of

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<sup>6</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 271.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-284.



"Preludes":

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;  
The worlds revolve like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.<sup>8</sup>

The manner is not restricted to Eliot. The same sort of scientific, laboratory approach to the examination of psychological life is common to most of the major poets of the twentieth century.

Pound's poetry exhibits it:

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.<sup>9</sup>

Wallace Stevens also adopts the manner:

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.  
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark  
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,<sup>10</sup>  
As a calm darkens among water-lights.

Though the attitude with these three poets may be described as tonal understatement and conscious anti-hysteria, at the same time it still seems to reflect a disinclination on their parts to admit or recognize the importance of events or the individual.

It should be recognized, of course, that the Moderns' attitude

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<sup>8</sup> A Little Treasury, p. 297.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, in A Little Treasury, p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> "Sunday Morning," A Little Treasury, p. 167.

of uninterest serves a dramatic purpose as well as being a reflection of the prevailing Zeitgeist. It is obvious that in certain poems ("Prufrock" comes first to mind) the air of indecision is as much a characterizing device determined by and determining personality as anything else. But here too it is equally obvious that personality is largely a product of the times.

A great many Modern Poets characteristically drop into this attitude and tone when they write. Robinson Jeffers does it in "Shine, Perishing Republic," "The Bloody Sire," and "I Shall Laugh Purely"; John Crowe Ransom does it in "The Equilibrists" and "Man Without Sense of Direction"; Conrad Aiken and Wilfred Owen do it in "The Room" and "Mental Cases", respectively. All are writing in the spirit of their times, and none appears able to take a stand at variance with that spirit.

It is difficult to decide when a characteristic has become a convention, and certainly many defenders could probably be found ready to clear most of the poets just named of charges of conventionality in their approach to poetry on the basis of their poetic abilities, just as Milton, Dryden, and Pope are often cleared of similar earlier charges concerning their use of poetic diction. Examples from lesser poets, however, show that in the Twenties this tone has already become conventional for poetry. Eliot's tone of detachment in "Prufrock" has lost its freshness and originality in the following passage from a poem by Herbert Gorman:

Though I am Chateaulaire who sings,  
The pale man with the Chinese rings,

The cloudy-headed cane, the spats  
 Pearl-grey, the vast array of hats,  
 The gloves, the dragon samovar,  
 The tiny jugs of caviar,  
 The rare Picasso and the plate  
 From whose pale disk Marcel Proust ate,  
 Think not that I am wholly lost  
 Who never quite may count the cost.<sup>11</sup>

Eliot's influence on these lines, both in ideas and manner, is as unmistakable as it is in these by another poet of almost the same time:

The night drove nails into his pale flesh,  
 And the cold morning jerked them out again.  
 High noon found him stretched against the sunlight,  
 Or fallen, with his arms crossed, in the rain.  
 Often in the afternoons he was calmly crucified  
 With a book within his hands, and a frozen thought  
 Withering within the molten fire of his eye.<sup>12</sup>

Although this study is concerned more with establishing the existence of conventions than with the time of their establishment, the suggestion from the examples cited here is that a certain tone and attitude grew conventional for poetry in the Twenties concurrent with the growth of Eliot's fame and reputation.

This introspective, objective, investigative nature of Modern Poetry has been partially explained by Selden Rodman, who points out the intellectual interest of the Modern Poets in the expanding field of psychology, and the increased knowledge that science has made possible about the working of the mind, and the makeup of personality. This interest turns their attention and concern toward the naked consciousness and the newly identified "unconscious" as against the "soul."

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<sup>11</sup>"Worldlings," Poetry, XXXI (October 1927), 2.

<sup>12</sup>Pat Morrisette, "Evening Song of a Young Scholar," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 145.

Along with this shift in interest occurs another involving a renewed concern for the common man, almost to the exclusion of the hero or extraordinary man. This latter shift, of course, has been closely related to the social upheaval and turmoil in the Moderns' world; as a result, the structure of the social order has come to assume increasing importance to the Modern Poet at the expense of "heaven" and "nature."<sup>13</sup>

As a result of their attitude toward life, the Modern Poets have ended by writing under the sway of this reticent tone. Of their manner of writing Josephine Miles says:

It does not discover an order in nature; rather it discovers over and over a disorderly nature, which it strives to take to task. It does not accept forms of poetic harmony and bring them to a higher potential state; rather it works on an alternation between hints of form, echoes of form, and almost literal analyses of form . . . . It acclaims no golden mean, but a fiery point in time, a point which vanishes but persists, between a personal heaven and a personal hell, both worldly, both subordinate to the desired and the abstract.<sup>14</sup>

Because this "fiery abstract" is impossible of exact determination the Modern Poet is reluctant to take a position; instead, he assumes a pose of intellectual casualness and aloofness, playing mental, dialectical gymnastics with the problems of his world.

This feature of Modern Poetry has been ascribed, by Laura Riding and Robert Graves, to an effort to prove that it can bear the pressure

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<sup>13</sup>Selden Rodman, ed., A New Anthology of Modern Poetry (New York, 1938), pp. 23-24.

<sup>14</sup>The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, California, 1951), p. 412.

of a "progressive civilization."<sup>15</sup> In a later book of his own, Mr.

Graves elaborates:

Many contemporary poets not only snap their fingers at civilization; they elaborate their superior attitude by casually proving that they can not only keep up with civilization but outstrip it.<sup>16</sup>

To show their superiority, many of the Modern Poets parade the vast range of their knowledge by casually letting fall references to musical theory, painting, and psychology.<sup>17</sup> Of the Modernist poet,

Graves concludes:

[He] . . . as a type . . . may be said to possess a peculiar and recognizable intellectual slant. He does not commit himself wholeheartedly to any obvious conviction. He does not, on the other hand, waste himself in attacking the convictions of others. Since any choice of faith, action or habit is held to belong to the historically less developed processes of reasoning, the making of a choice seems a vulgarity. It is a point of intellectual pride with him to refrain from utilitarian choices: his choices are in the more serious realm of speculation.<sup>18</sup>

One especially important influence of this attitude on the work of Modern Poets has been the development of a rather widespread serio-comic tone for poetry. Hesitant to become too serious and make a definite, "vulgar" choice, the Modern Poet in many instances has fallen back upon the device of laughing at himself, and, through himself, society.<sup>19</sup> Graves uses Eliot's *Bleistein* to illustrate this trait in

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<sup>15</sup>A Survey of Modernist Poetry (London, 1927), pp. 155 ff.

<sup>16</sup>The Common Asphodel, p. 131.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Modern Poetry, but a multitude of examples from a number of poets could be chosen. The serio-comic is a favorite pose of E. E. Cummings, who writes:

as freedom is a breakfastfood  
 or truth can live with right and wrong  
 or molehills are from mountains made  
 -- long enough and just so long  
 will being pay the rent of seem  
 and genius please the talentgang  
 and water most encourage flame

as hatracks into peachtrees grow  
 or hopes dance best on bald men's hair  
 and every finger is a toe  
 and any courage is a fear  
 -- long enough and just so long  
 will the impure think all things pure  
 and hornets wail by children stung.<sup>20</sup>

In this poem, as always in the serio-comic, the tone is ironic, and Cummings achieves his effect through the contrast of such words as freedom and breakfastfood. The tone is intensified by the poet's choice of words and images; he speaks of paying the rent, uses the colloquialism gang, introduces hatracks and bald heads, and writes of children stinging hornets so that the latter wail. Then later in the poem he writes of dingsters who "die at break of dong."<sup>21</sup> He concludes by declaring:

-- time is a tree (this life one leaf)  
 but love is the sky and i am for you  
 just so long and long enough.<sup>22</sup>

Here he has almost allowed himself to become serious, but suddenly he

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<sup>20</sup>"As Freedom Is a Breakfastfood," A Little Treasury, p. 360.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

returns to the ironic level with the last line.

Wallace Stevens also often writes in the serio-comic vein, as in "The Emperor of Ice Cream," or in the following poem:

On her side, reclining on her elbow.  
This mechanism, this apparition,  
Suppose we call it Projection A.

She floats in air at the level of  
The eye, completely anonymous,  
Born, as she was, at twenty-one,

Without lineage or language, only  
The curving of her hip, as motionless gesture,  
Eyes dripping blue, so much to learn.

If just above her head there hung,  
Suspended in air, the slightest crown  
Of Gothic prong and practick bright,

The suspension, as in solid space,  
The suspending hand withdrawn, would be  
An invisible gesture. Let this be called

Projection B. To get at the thing  
Without gestures is to get at it as  
Idea. She floats in the contention, the flux

Between the thing as idea and  
The idea as thing. She is half who made her.  
This is the final Projection, C.

The arrangement contains the desire of  
The artist. But one confides in what has no  
Concealed creator. One walks easily

The unpainted shore, accepts the world  
As anything but sculpture. Good-bye,  
Mrs. Pappadopoulos, and thanks.<sup>23</sup>

In this poem, Stevens has chosen to treat even the creative process

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<sup>23</sup>"So-and-So Reclining on Her Couch," A Little Treasury, p. 726.

lightly and comically. He has assumed the pose of laughing at the artist and his efforts to construct for himself the complex he has in mind, and in laughing at the artist in general he is laughing at himself and his efforts. It is the blasé and sophisticated reaction against modern life.

Eliot, Cummings, Stevens, Pound, the Sitwells, Auden, and many other major and minor poets, all drop into the serio-comic tone, and by and large they do so as a result of the sceptical world view of their generation. Superficially, they are a bored, intellectual society for whom it would be unfitting to admit that there is much of life and living that must be taken seriously. Under their façade of sophistication, however, they are serious enough, and often their seriousness is allowed to show through even their most elaborate efforts at shielding it in the comic. Somehow, an entire generation of poets has been produced whose primary reaction to life has been to refuse to become involved in it. They have chosen to solve their problems in a personal and introspective manner, and they have cloaked themselves in the protective armor of the objective uninterest of the scientific approach and the sophistication of self-ridicule. In doing so not only have they reflected the time spirit of their generation, but they have also conventionalized that spirit into a standardized approach to the presentation of poetry.

A third great shaping influence on the conventions of Modern Poetry is the audience which that poetry has assumed. For the most part that audience has been a greatly restricted and highly specialized



one. Going back to French poets of the mid-nineteenth century for much of their inspiration and many of their techniques, Modern Poets of the English language have continued to write and develop within the tradition of isolation and art-for-art's sake.<sup>24</sup> Many of them have expressed their revolt against modern life and modern civilization by retiring into some form of ideal dream world of their own making. Seemingly, the poets of the Modern Movement have been writing poetry only for themselves and others just like themselves, either more poets or would-be poets. This audience has never been a large one, and on the whole the Moderns have shown little interest in reaching a large reading public. They have been intellectual, serious about the art of poetry, and absorbed in aesthetic theory and doctrine; and they have assumed all these qualities in their audience. Interested in intellectual activity of all kind, they have delved into the findings of many and varied fields, and they have appropriated the discoveries of anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and the physical sciences, and used that information in their poetry. Above all, however, they have assumed that the audience for which they are writing is a professional one in the sense that it shares in their knowledge of and interest in all these things, including of course a close familiarity with the literature of the English language in particular. As R. A. Scott-James writes, "They assumed in a reader the experience which their fellow poets had shared with them, and were rather indifferent to the uninitiated."<sup>25</sup> It is for this

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<sup>24</sup>Rodman, A New Anthology, pp. 33-34.

<sup>25</sup>Fifty Years of English Literature: 1900-1950 (New York, 1951), p. 212.

reason that the history of Modern Poetry is so much the history of numerous "little magazines" that were established, flourished a short while, and then either continued in a moribund condition or faded away. The movement can be traced to a great extent in the names of such publications as The Egoist, Blast, and The Little Review.

In adopting the attitude they did toward their audience, the Moderns have left themselves open to serious charges. They have been accused, probably with some justification, of snobbishness and of using many of their more remote and esoteric references merely to impress readers and to show off their knowledge. As they evaluate the situation themselves, however, they are merely trying to write a

kind of poetry that requires of the reader the fullest co-operation of all his intellectual resources, all his knowledge of the world, and all the persistence and alertness that he now thinks only of giving to scientific studies.<sup>26</sup>

Believing, then, that they are writing for a sympathetic audience able to appreciate them and understand what they are doing and saying, or at least one that is willing to try to follow them, Modern Poets have used numerous allusions to literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, religion, and anything else that comes to mind or to hand. And to a certain extent this practice has proved effective and stimulating. It has resulted, for instance, in a condensation and juxtaposition of ideas difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at in any other way. In addition, the technique offers almost limitless opportunities for the

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<sup>26</sup>Allen Tate, "Understanding Modern Poetry," On the Limits of Poetry (New York, 1948), p. 123.

expression of the ironic through contrasts--as when Eliot paraphrases Marvell or Spenser in The Waste Land to contrast the vitality of their age with the enervation of his own. The free use of allusion, carried to extremes, as it often is, however, has done much to contribute to the difficulty of Modern Poetry for the reader who may not be so specialized in his knowledge as the poet thinks he should be. There seems little doubt, too, that some Modern Poets have become more interested in seeking out learned and obscure allusions to use than they have been in writing poetry.

At any rate, it is largely because of T. S. Eliot's confidence in his audience that he can write The Waste Land, admittedly an extreme example of Eliot's application of these methods. He himself declares that the inspiration and even the title, "the plan, and a good deal of the incidental symbolism"<sup>27</sup> were derived from a book on anthropology, Miss Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance. He recommends that book to the reader as a source for elucidation of most of the textual difficulties.<sup>28</sup> In addition, he states that he is greatly indebted to The Golden Bough, another anthropological work. Although The Waste Land has been so much explicated and analyzed as to render such a task here superfluous, a few passages from the poem along with the notes supplied by Eliot illustrate the sort of information that perhaps the most important Modern Poet feels his readers should have.

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<sup>27</sup>Collected Poems 1900-1935 (London, 1936), p. 91.

<sup>28</sup>By the very act of advancing this information to the reader and providing explanatory notes for much of the poem, Eliot, it has been argued, makes a tacit admission of the difficulty of following

The first portion which Eliot annotates is that beginning with line 20. Previous even to that, however, a line of German is worked into the text with the obvious assumption that his readers will be able to cope with "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch" without difficulty. Then come lines 19 following:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
 And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
 There is shadow under this red rock,  
 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
 And I will show you something different from either  
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
 I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Frisch weht der Wind  
Der Heimat zu,  
Mein Irisch Kind,  
Wo weilest du?<sup>29</sup>

Lines 20 and 23, Eliot informs, come from the Bible: the first from Ezekiel II, i; and the second from Ecclesiastes XII, v. The German verse is from Tristan und Isolde, I, verses 5-8, and in line 42 Eliot refers to the same poem once more, this time III, verse 24. Of course neither the Bible nor Tristan is an especially obscure work, but the expectation of instant recognition seems something less than reasonable.

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his poem. As will be pointed out later, however, while the information Eliot gives certainly results in a better understanding of the poem, anyone with the broad, general educational background assumed by the Moderns should be able to follow the general theme of the poem and, indeed, be able to spot many of the specific allusions, such as those to the Bible, Marvell, St. Augustine, and The Spanish Tragedy.

<sup>29</sup>A Little Treasury, pp. 271-272.

And it is necessary for the reader to have this recognition if he is to get from the poem all Eliot wrote into it. Eliot is kind enough to supply the reader with notes, but not all Modern Poets are so considerate.

Eliot's next annotation, covering the material beginning with line 46, consists of a discussion of the Tarot pack of cards. One of the cards from this pack he has associated with the Hanged God of Frazer's Golden Bough and another with the Fisher King of Miss Weston's work. In this same section of the poem, he has reference to Baudelaire (lines 60 and 76), Dante (lines 63 and 64), and Webster's White Devil (line 74).

Section II of the poem, "A Game of Chess," begins with an adaptation of some lines from Antony and Cleopatra (II, ii, l. 190):

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,  
Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines  
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out.<sup>30</sup>

He goes from there to the Aeneid, Paradise Lost, Metamorphoses, and Middleton's Women Beware Women. In other portions of the poem he refers to The Confessions of St. Augustine, Buddha's Fire Sermon, and the Brihadaranyaka -- Upanishad, 5, I. It can be seen now what a wide variety of literature Eliot expects his readers to be conversant with. All these quotations and references are made in the most casual and matter-of-fact manner. The assumption is that the reader will at least know enough to be able to discover their exact source if he does not

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<sup>30</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 273.

recognize them immediately. In connection with Eliot's use of allusions, it should be remembered that in most instances they have a self-sufficiency. That is, while knowledge of the sources and their contexts adds to the reading of the poem, such knowledge is usually not absolutely necessary. What is true of Eliot in this respect, however, is not always true of his contemporaries and followers.

It is evident from the kind of poetry Ezra Pound writes that he makes assumptions similar to Eliot's about the sort of reader for whom he is writing. In The Cantos, for example, he takes for his subject world-history and the way it has been determined by the power of money.<sup>31</sup> In the presentation of his material he relies upon the reader's being in possession of all kinds of esoteric and obscure facts from many different fields. The opening lines of the poem are relatively easy to understand, requiring only the ability of the reader to recognize their connection with the Homeric epic tradition. Along with this recognition should come all the associations with the Homeric age and the Homeric heroes, Odysseus and his voyages especially:

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, so winds from sternward  
Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,  
Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Peter Russell, ed., An Examination of Ezra Pound (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1950), p. 20.

<sup>32</sup>"Canto I," The Cantos of Ezra Pound (London, 1944), p. 3.

Then the reader is off with Pound on a voyage ranging geographically from Cathay to America and encompassing the history of civilized man. And although it has been demonstrated that Pound is sometimes unreliable in his pretensions to esoterica, the important point to be noted is not that he is sometimes undependable but that he uses the technique of allusiveness and reference to obscure and far-ranging material. In this poem, Pound is creating an epic, an epic of the struggle of man against usura, or the power and misuse of money. The following comment should give some idea of just how far-reaching and inclusive the poem is and of some of the demands it makes upon its readers.

The nature of the underlying myth in The Cantos begins to become really clear about half way through, in the two long sections where the anecdotes, of which the poem is largely composed, are no longer broken off in the middle to be taken up, in a different setting, several Cantos further on. Of these two large monolithic chunks . . . one is about John Adams . . . it presupposes, for the English reader at least, a grounding in the early history of the United States which few English readers are likely to have. The other section is a condensed version of the history of China . . . .<sup>33</sup>

Here is a poem which demands that its readers be intimately acquainted with the history of both America and China, and, in addition, the first thirty or so cantos can be taken to be a statement of a complete matter in the medieval sense -- the "matter" of Europe.<sup>34</sup> Allen Tate, in discussing the impossibility of determining with certainty what Pound is trying to express, notes the extent and lengths to which he sometimes goes and declares:

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<sup>33</sup>G. S. Fraser, "Pound: Masks, Myth, Men," An Examination of Ezra Pound, p. 177.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

Yet one takes comfort in the vast range of Mr. Pound's obscure learning, which no one man could be expected to know much about . . . more than half of the Thirty Cantos contain long paraphrases or garbled quotations from the correspondence, public and private, of the Renaissance Italians, chiefly Florentine and Venetian . . . . Another third are classical allusions, esoteric quotations from the ancients, fragments of the Greek poets with bits of the Romans thrown in; all magnificently written into Mr. Pound's own text.<sup>35</sup>

It can be seen from the preceding quotations that Pound has been recognized as a master of the technique of seasoning his poems well with matter that has extremely limited dissemination and recognition. Like Eliot and many other Modern Poets he writes for an audience which he assumes is either already possessed of sufficient information to appreciate his allusions or is interested enough in poetry and literature to obtain the necessary information.

The allusiveness and dependence on an audience of marked intellectual capacity and activity noted in Eliot and Pound is common among the Modern Poets and has often been cited as a characteristic of Modern Poetry. Robert Graves, for instance, apparently does not even feel it necessary to support by textual references his casual statements that W. J. Turner introduces musical theory, the Sitwells painting, Herbert Read and Archibald Macleish psychology, Conrad Aiken philosophy, and T. S. Eliot and Marianne Moore encyclopedic knowledge in general into their poetry.<sup>36</sup> Randall Jarrell, too, comments upon the intellectuality of Modern Poetry, and R. A. Scott-James has

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<sup>35</sup>"Ezra Pound," An Examination of Ezra Pound, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup>The Common Asphodel, p. 131.



ascribed many of the difficulties of the Modern Poet for the ordinary reader to the assumption of a special kind of audience.<sup>37</sup> Others who have commented upon the obscurities deriving from the learned and intellectual quality of Modern Poetry are John Sparrow, Selden Rodman, and Elizabeth Drew and John L. Sweeney.<sup>38</sup> Once more, too, evidence indicates that this practice first became widespread in the Twenties, suggesting again the influence of the reputation and the practice of Eliot on the development of this characteristic and conventional manner of writing poetry.

This technique and practice of using obscure, intellectual, and far-fetched material of all kinds has become general enough in Modern Poetry to constitute a recognizable mannerism long since considered characteristic. For although these poets may allude to material in widely differing fields, it is not the allusion but the practice, based upon the assumption of a specialized audience, of using esoteric and obscure material that has become a convention. Thus, it is not that Eliot and Pound use materials from the same fields that allows a reader to say they are using the same technique and convention--for their material often differs radically--but the fact that they make the assumption of an extremely well-informed audience. The same applies to the use of learned and obscure materials by the other poets.

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<sup>37</sup>Jarrell, foreword to "The Rage for the Lost Penny," Five Young American Poets (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1940), p. 87; Scott-James, Fifty Years of English Literature, p. 212.

<sup>38</sup>Sparrow, Sense and Poetry (New Haven, 1934), pp. 5-6; Rodman, A New Anthology, pp. 34-35; Drew and Sweeney, Directions in Modern Poetry (New York, 1940), pp. 14 ff.

As a characteristic mannerism, this practice qualifies for inclusion as one of the conventions of Modern Poetry. It is a characteristic of Modern Poetry growing out of the assumption of a special kind of audience. Assuming that they are writing for readers as intellectual and as interested in learning and aesthetics as they are themselves, the Moderns have delved into many areas and used their findings in their poetry. The assumption of the sort of audience described has done much to determine the content of Modern Poetry and its forms. It has permitted the Moderns to pursue their attempts to achieve the fresh, the new, and the arresting in a great variety of fields through the feeling that though what they write might be obscure or unintelligible to the masses of people, it is not so to those who really are interested in poetry, understand it, and are thus the only ones who really matter. Unfortunately, the salutary effects this technique may have had originally have tended to become dissipated in the flagrant use of allusiveness and intellectuality as too-conscious mannerisms. In this respect, it shares the fate already noted of the Zeitgeist concern with the individual and the intellectual shrug, which also began as effective innovations, but ended by developing into conventions of that Poetry.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CONVENTIONAL USE OF ARCHETYPAL IMAGES IN MODERN POETRY

So far this study has shown that a definite pattern in the development of Modern Poetry can be discerned. It has shown that certain techniques and practices such as the use of a detached, objective pose and allusiveness are introduced in the hope of achieving a new effectiveness and that then those techniques and practices are accepted and so widely used that they have become the conventional manner for writing Modern Poetry.

The use of symbolism and its associated techniques has had a similar history. The Moderns began using symbols in an attempt to present emotions and ideas directly without being forced to weaken them by explanations and interpretations. It was not enough for the Moderns, however, to seek freshness merely through new techniques. They insisted on originality in the images they used, and for the most part observers have accepted their claims of originality in their choice of images and symbols. Indeed, the Moderns have often been attacked for obscurity on the basis of their use of too-personal symbols. John Sparrow, for one, declares that personal symbolism and associations result in unintelligibility in Modern Poetry, and he further asserts that the Moderns' belief that a writer should attempt an exact reproduction of experience has influenced their work in the direction

of dullness, shapelessness, and depression.<sup>1</sup>

Supporters of Modern Poetry such as Kenneth Burke, F. R. Leavis, and R. A. Scott-James, although disagreeing with Sparrow on the difficulties of Modern Poetry and the practicability of penetrating its web of symbols and allusions, appear also to accept at face value the Moderns' claims to complete originality in their images and symbols.<sup>2</sup>

Studies have been made, however, which indicate that the complete originality of images and symbols in Modern Poetry has been exaggerated. Maud Bodkin has charted correspondences in the works of all poets, not just the Moderns, based on phenomena discovered by the psychoanalysts. Although limiting her study somewhat, Miss Bodkin determines that some images, at least--the wind, the night journey, mountains, mountain gardens, caverns and underground waters, fountains, and vegetation as an expression of life's regenerative powers, along with various hero and heroine archetypes--appear to be constant in their symbolic meanings to all men.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, then, such archetypal images can be expected to show up in Modern Poetry whether the poets will have it or no. Quite frequently, of course, an archetypal image, or any other one for that matter, may appear in new dress, as when T. S. Eliot imbues the

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<sup>1</sup>Sense and Poetry (New Haven, 1934), pp. 102-104.

<sup>2</sup>Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1944), pp. 19-20; Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London, 1932), p. 106; Scott-James, Fifty Years of English Literature: 1900-1950 (London, 1951), p. 212.

<sup>3</sup>Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London, 1934).

image of Spring in the opening lines of The Waste Land with a freshness and vitality reminiscent of the kindred image opening The Canterbury Tales; or when he converts the familiar image of evening into something arresting and significant by comparing it to a "patient etherised" in "Prufrock." The regeneration of the archetypal and the familiar into something fresh and new, however, is the exception rather than the rule; and frequently even the regenerated form occurs so often that it becomes conventional.

In addition to Miss Bodkin's work, James Frazer's The Golden Bough and Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance also examine correspondences among all mankind in the materials of myth and romance. These and similar studies suggest there would be some degree of standardization among the symbols of Modern Poets as a result of racial inheritance, regardless of how personal and original each might attempt to be. When to similarities of this order are added the effects of imitation of such successful poets as Eliot and Pound--there of course will be such imitation--it should not be surprising to find a great many images and symbols that are used conventionally by Modern Poets.

A close examination of a large sample of poetry written from approximately the beginning of the twentieth century until well into the Forties provides strong evidence that many images and symbols are used conventionally and become standardized during that period. Despite their claims to originality and their attacks upon the conventional language and images of earlier poetry, the Moderns have developed conventional images just as they have arrived at a conventional manner of writing poetry. They have retained many images and symbols of the

archetypal sort described by Miss Bodkin which have been common throughout the history of poetry, and most of those images they have continued to use in the conventional manner of their predecessors. Even when the Moderns have introduced images and symbols of their own, those images have become conventionalized to a surprising degree, as is shown in Chapter VIII of this study.

A great many of the images retained by the Moderns are nature images, and it should not be surprising to find among these nature images a number of the archetypes already mentioned or suggested by Maud Bodkin. Modern Poets use images of water, snow and winter, spring and April, the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains and hills, and fallen leaves to stand for much the same things they always have in poetry.

A familiarity with Miss Bodkin's work would lead one to expect the characteristic use of water and associated images to suggest birth, life, and well being of some kind,<sup>4</sup> and T. R. Henn finds this expectation confirmed as the image is used by William Butler Yeats.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the water image is used frequently throughout Modern Poetry. T. S. Eliot, for instance, writes in "Gerontion":

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,  
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.<sup>6</sup>  
(1920)

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<sup>4</sup>Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, pp. 61, 99, 114.

<sup>5</sup>The Lonely Tower (New York, 1952), pp. 127-128, 222.

<sup>6</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 778.

And the same water image occurs again in The Waste Land:

Here is no water but only rock  
 Rock and no water and the sandy road  
 The road winding above among the mountains  
 Which are mountains of rock without water  
 If there were water we should stop and drink  
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think  
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
 If there were only water amongst the rock  
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit  
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit  
 There is not even silence in the mountains  
 But dry sterile thunder without rain.<sup>7</sup>  
 (1922)

In this passage the water image is contrasted with rock images that are ominous and threatening, a treatment of the latter which subsequent portions of the study will also show to be conventional in Modern Poetry.

The water image appears in a series of poems in the 1927 volume of Poetry magazine. The first example is from an Easter poem about the renewal of faith. The similarity between the use of the water image here and that already seen in The Waste Land is obvious:

The body of Christ is white as the moon;  
 His hair streams like the wind filled with dust.  
 Break open the sacred loaf that the people may have bread,  
 Split the holy mountain and give water to the land.<sup>8</sup>  
 (April 1927)

In this passage water is obviously a symbol for the life that comes through faith, much as it is in the following lines from a poem of devotion and trust:

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<sup>7</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 281.

<sup>8</sup>Elizabeth J. Coatsworth, "Easter Rains at Taos," XXX (April 1927), 12.

The older people say,  
 "Ah, he has much to learn!"  
 But I shall go his way  
 Where hot sands burn —  
 Thirsty and choked with dust,  
 Blind from the sun's glare,  
 That the little pool of my trust  
 May cool him there.<sup>9</sup>

(May 1927)

Another poem in the same volume of Poetry uses the more particularized image of rain:

The rain upon the earth falls down  
 Lone and naked, straight and wan;  
 Still and white along the hill,  
 Bending to her miracle;  
 Slow and silver in the grass.<sup>10</sup>

Miss Flanner's short poem in praise of the life-giving qualities of rain represents one more example in Modern Poetry of the conventional use of the water image.

Water as an image of life and well-being is also used by Robinson Jeffers in "Meditation on Saviours" when he contemplates the foibles of man and the sterile, barren life which most civilized men lead:

Here on the rock it is great and beautiful, here on the foam-  
 wet granite sea-fang it is easy to praise  
 Life and water and the shining stones.<sup>11</sup>  
 (1928)

It is only when Jeffers gets away from the multitude of men in their cities that he attains to the good of "Life and water and the shining stones."

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<sup>9</sup>Mildred Bowers, "Idyl," XXX (May 1927), 76.

<sup>10</sup>Hildegarde Flanner, "The Rain," XXX (September 1927), 300.

<sup>11</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 743.



In "Two Tramps in Mud Time," Robert Frost uses the water image to describe the renewal of activity and life that occurs in the spring. Frost describes the scene which two tramps enter while he is chopping wood:

The water for which we may have to look  
 In summertime with a witching-wand,  
 In every wheelrut's now a brook,  
 In every print of a hoof a pond.  
 Be glad of water, but don't forget  
 The lurking frost in the earth beneath  
 That will steal forth after the sun is set  
 And show on the water its crystal teeth.<sup>12</sup>  
 (1936)

The water image is retained into the Forties in the following lines:

The rain is ritual I wander through for catharsis<sup>13</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

and

I do, now, mouth downward fall  
 On the naevus in thirst still.<sup>14</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

In the examples presented, every one of the poets has used the image of water or rain to stand for something comforting and necessary to the well-being of man. It may represent life, spiritual solace, or fertility, but in the contexts of the poems all these meanings are so closely related, to each other and to the archetypal use of water imagery cited by Miss Bodkin, that it would not be amiss to refer to them as conventional in their symbolism.

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<sup>12</sup>Chief Modern Poets, pp. 589-590.

<sup>13</sup>George Barker, "Elegy," New Poems, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup>Richard Eberhart, "Hand View," New Poems, p. 83.

Another group of images the Moderns retain from their predecessors, again probably archetypal in origin, are those associated with snow and ice. A great many of the Modern Poets continue to identify the coldness of these images with the coldness of death or the sterility and hopelessness of modern life. In 1912 Clark Ashton Smith refers to the snow:

The years are a falling of snow,  
 Slow, but without cessation,  
 On hills and mountains and flowers and worlds that were.<sup>15</sup>  
 (December 1912)

Clearly, snow and winter are associated with death through the passing of years, much as a similar image is used in the following lines to contrast with the rejuvenation of spring:

With upward fling  
 To brush and break the loosening cling  
 Of ice, they shake  
 The air with Spring.<sup>16</sup>  
 (February 1913)

In this last poem, the poet imagines he can overhear murmurs of the real meaning of life under the snow. Another image of the winter as death is used by Arthur Davison Ficke in the same volume of the magazine when he writes:

These rapt diviners gather close to thee:--  
 Whom now the Winter holds in dateless fee  
 Sealed of rest.<sup>17</sup>  
 (February 1913)

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<sup>15</sup>"Remembered Light," Poetry, I (December 1912), 78.

<sup>16</sup>Witter Bynner, "Passing Near," Poetry, I (February 1913), 158.

<sup>17</sup>"Swinburne, An Elegy," I (February 1913), 140.

Eliot, too, in The Waste Land writes of the winter "covering/Earth in forgetful snow,"<sup>18</sup> and of the "brown fog of a winter noon."<sup>19</sup>

In the later Twenties, Pat Morrissette uses the snow image in a long poem about a sensitive university student seeking spiritual values in an alien, materialistic world. She describes the young rebel-intellectual:

"That boy has a hound within his head, his eyes  
Are wolves following the wind in a blizzard of snow."<sup>20</sup>  
(June 1927)

Kenneth Fearing uses the snow image when he writes a poetic profile of the live-dead men who reside in modern cities:

Pierce me with a wide arc,  
One curving line, to show  
Wind swept down from a cold sky,  
Back into withering height.  
Make it a winter scene,  
The ground a vacant space,  
White, for an ice plateau.  
.  
.  
.  
Do not suggest the stiff dark  
Compact men who lie  
In ichor-bleeding cliffs,  
Silent and sweet, that stretch  
Beneath this vacant snow.<sup>21</sup>  
(July 1927)

A procession of these snow images can be assembled from Poetry magazine's 1927 issues. All are from different poets, but stand for

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<sup>18</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 271.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>20</sup>"Evening Song of a Young Scholar," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 146.

<sup>21</sup>"Caricature of Felix Ricarro," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 191.

substantially the same thing, some kind of physical or spiritual death. In a short poem called "Fall of Snow," Polly Chase establishes a direct connection between snow and death:

Your hand within my hand  
 Sleeps moth-wise in a closely spun cocoon.  
 There is no stir  
 Of feather or of fur . . .  
 And the snow falls from the caverns of the moon.

Your lips against my lips,  
 Moist with the frosty imminence of breath,  
 Are more alone  
 Than footsteps covered and gone . . .  
 And the snow falls from the corridors of death.<sup>22</sup>  
 (August 1927)

Just as obvious and direct is the same connection made by Irene Stewart in "Dirge," a lament for a dead lover:

He is gone.  
 See this morning  
 The orange-blossoms  
 In clear caskets  
 Of ice.

He is gone -- my lover is gone,  
 Heaven's gates  
 Are ice-locked,  
 My prayers fall back  
 As frost.<sup>23</sup>

(August 1927)

In another poem, "Two in a Dark Tower" by Genevieve Taggard, the association is between winter and a psychological death. The poem is about two people who are both in a kind of deathlike isolation, because each has too much pride to attempt bridging the gap between them. By keeping them silent, pride allows the wintry death of loneliness to

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<sup>22</sup>Poetry, XXX (August 1927), 188-189.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

strike them down though they are together. The wintry image in the opening lines effectively establishes the idea of the poem:

Loose the door tonight, and stand  
Facing winter's bitter pause  
In the empty autumn land . . .<sup>24</sup>  
Ravished orchards and the wind.<sup>24</sup>  
(September 1927)

In the following lines by Legaré George the connection between snow and death is once again obvious:

But wind among the leaves must go  
Like hands upon a broken loom,  
Must find a way from fields of snow  
To fields that would be white with bloom,  
Must find a way from fields of snow  
To fields of tender bloom.<sup>25</sup>  
(September 1927)

The sense of the image is again quite clear in Herbert Gorman's poem about loss of faith and modern decadence when he writes of a female Prufrock:

She hears the winter creeping through the trees--  
A beggar from St. Jacques on broken knees.<sup>26</sup>  
(October 1927)

The conventional snow image as a symbol or correlative for death is, clearly, popular with poets of the Twenties. The cold grey land Hart Crane writes about in "North Labrador" is a dead unclaimed land dominated by the opening image of the poem:

A land of leaning ice  
Hugged by plaster-grey arches of sky,

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<sup>24</sup>Poetry, XXX (September 1927), 324.

<sup>25</sup>"Four Poems," XXX (September 1927), 316.

<sup>26</sup>"Worldlings," XXXI (October 1927), 6.

Flings itself silently  
 Into eternity.<sup>27</sup>  
 (1926)

And in "To Brooklyn Bridge" he notes that "Already snow submerges an iron year."<sup>28</sup>

The same image retains its popularity with poets of the Thirties and Forties. W. H. Auden uses it more than once:

Nights come bringing the snow, and the dead howl  
 Under the headlands in their windy dwelling.<sup>29</sup>  
 (1930)

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Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.  
 Upon what man it fall  
 In spring, day-wishing flowers appearing,  
 Avalanche sliding, white snow from rock-face.<sup>30</sup>  
 (1934)

\*\*\*\*\*

He disappeared in the dead of winter:  
 The brooks were frozen, the air-ports almost deserted,  
 And snow disfigured the public statues;  
 The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.  
 O all the instruments agree  
 The day of his death was a dark cold day.<sup>31</sup>  
 (1940)

Almost the identical image recurs throughout Conrad Aiken's "Blues for Ruby Matrix":

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<sup>27</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 905.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 908.

<sup>29</sup>"Taller Today We Remember," Chief Modern Poets, p. 381.

<sup>30</sup>"Doom Is Dark," Chief Modern Poets, p. 382.

<sup>31</sup>"In Memory of W. B. Yeats," Chief Modern Poets, p. 406.

And this a snowy night too and the soul starving.  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . I will unwrap the web around you,  
 oh I will blow the snow off your brain tonight.  
 . . . . .  
 for you too knew the way the hoarfrost grew  
 on God's terrific wings--  
 . . . . .  
 But God's terrific wing that day came down  
 snow on the world and Ruby you were snow,  
 deceitful whiteness and the blood concealed  
 so that the world might know how worlds will end.<sup>32</sup>  
 (1935)

In the Forties, Delmore Schwartz, G. S. Fraser, Gene Derwood, Randall Jarrell, and Wallace Stevens are among the poets using this winter image of ice and snow.<sup>33</sup> All these poets characteristically use the winter image to symbolize death, loneliness, sterility, or despair.

In contrast to the string of wintry images just examined are the images of spring used by the Moderns. As it normally occurs in Modern Poetry, spring symbolizes a rebirth or resurrection of life and spirit, and once more the Modern Poet can be seen using a traditional image of almost certainly archetypal origin; and once more a standardized and conventional use of this spring image and symbol can be detected among the Moderns. Frequently, too, the image of spring is coupled

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<sup>32</sup>New Poems, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>33</sup>Schwartz, "Shenandoah," New Poems, p. 182; Fraser, "Rostov," A Little Treasury, p. 643; Derwood, "In the Proscenium," A Little Treasury, p. 635; Jarrell, "90 North," New Poems, p. 117; Stevens, "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," "Chocorua to Its Neighbor," "Poesie Abrutie," The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York, 1955). W. C. Williams also uses this winter image at least two times, in "Winter" and "The Trees," Collected Poems 1921-1931 (New York, 1934), pp. 27, 66-67.

specifically with the month of April, a common association at least as far back as the time of Chaucer it is true, but still a fact which emphasizes the impression of standardization among the Moderns. The connections among spring, April, and the rebirth of life are made obvious in Ezra Pound's "A Virginal" when he writes:

. . . . I have still the flavor,  
Soft as spring wind that's come from birchen bowers.  
Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,  
As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches.<sup>34</sup>  
(1912)

The use of the color green in the passage is noteworthy in connection with the standardization among color symbols and images discussed in Chapter VII.

In the poem by Witter Bynner mentioned earlier about the secret life proceeding under the snow and ice, that life is symbolized by spring.<sup>35</sup>

Again April is emphasized by Arthur Davison Ficke, who writes of "The Youth, the light the rapture/Of eager April grace."<sup>36</sup> The coupling of April and spring occurs also in Arthur Stringer's poetry:

The wine that reddens ocean foam where far  
To straining eyes the darkling waters reach,  
The wine that Twilight drinks from paling rose  
And leaf, the wine that tender April pours  
Across the morning world . . . .<sup>37</sup>  
(August 1913)

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<sup>34</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 685.

<sup>35</sup>See above, p. 101.

<sup>36</sup>"To a Child Twenty Years Hence," Poetry, I (February 1913), 145.

<sup>37</sup>"A Woman at Dusk," Poetry, II (August 1913), 155.



When T. S. Eliot combines April and spring in The Waste Land, they are not the tender things of which these other poets have been writing. Nevertheless, although Eliot achieves an originality in his use of the images that raises them above the obvious use to which they have been put by other poets, they still stand for approximately the same things as with those other poets. It is Eliot's attitude toward life and rebirth that is different and provides a note of originality lacking in many of the passages quoted. This different attitude is apparent in the opening lines of The Waste Land:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.<sup>38</sup>  
(1922)

Eliot's use of an archetypal image in a manner that results in freshness and vigor emphasizes the complexity of the whole problem of originality. The effectiveness of these opening lines is proof enough that old images can be revitalized and made original. Obviously, however, speculations on the nature of artistic originality are beyond the scope of this work. In this instance, the originality of Eliot's treatment of a conventional image must be recognized, but at the same time his use of the image with a meaning conventional for the period as a whole must also be noted.

The painful awakening of spring Eliot presents is reflected in Elizabeth Coatsworth's use of the springtime image:

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<sup>38</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 271.

No snake in springtime ever felt the yearning  
 More poignantly than I to slough, to pull  
 The hated, hardened, drying, all-confining  
 Skin from the flesh . . . .<sup>39</sup>

(April 1927)

More recently, George Barker uses a similar spring image in his poem "Munich Elegy No. 1" where he mourns the temporary spiritual death of the free world:

I see a scene with a smother of snow over Love.  
 I know Spring will arise and later the swallow return;  
 I know, but my torso stands bogged in a load of time,  
 Like Love lying under the smother of our death and our  
 Dread. How soon shall the Spring bird arise and the  
 Summer bells hum with the murmur of our name?<sup>40</sup>

(c. 1940)

The reawakened life of spring is contrasted with the death of winter in a short poem by Wallace Stevens:

On an early Sunday in April, a feeble day,  
 He felt curious about the winter hills  
 And wondered about the water in the lake.  
 It had been cold since December. Snow fell, first,  
 At New Year and, from then until April, lay  
 On everything.<sup>41</sup>

(c. 1940)

Clearly, Modern Poetry has retained the archetypal images of spring and April and has to a great extent conventionalized and standardized anew their use.

Maud Bodkin's identification of hill and mountain imagery as archetypal has already been mentioned.<sup>42</sup> Numerous examples in Modern

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<sup>39</sup>"No Snake in Springtime," Poetry, XXX (April 1927), 13.

<sup>40</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 502.

<sup>41</sup>"An Extract," A Little Treasury, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup>Archetypal Patterns, pp. 100, 136ff.

Poetry that bear out Miss Bodkin's contention of a conventional treatment of hill and mountain imagery can be cited. For the Modern Poet as for his predecessor the mountain stands as a symbol of great power and the seat of blessedness. In addition, there is a symbolism of the ascent toward that blessedness and toward fulfillment and happiness in general that has been standardized throughout poetry. This latter theme of the ascent has had probably its most famous expression in Dante; and the theme is still encountered frequently in Modern Poetry.

Many examples of mountain and hill imagery appear in the 1913 issues of Poetry magazine. In Arthur Davison Ficke's tribute to Swinburne, the mountains and heights are obviously the seat of glory attained by the poet:

The autumn dusk, not yearly but eternal,  
Is haunted by thy voice.  
Who turns his way far from the valleys vernal  
And by dark choice  
Disturbs those heights which from the low-lying land  
Rise sheerly toward the heavens, with thee may stand  
And hear thy thunders down the mountain strown.<sup>43</sup>  
(February 1913)

Alfred Noyes uses mountains to symbolize a place where a new, meaningful life can be found away from the city:

Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,  
Ere I waken in the city -- Life, thy dawn makes all things new!  
And up a fir-clad glen, far from all the haunts of men,  
Up a glen among the mountains, oh my feet are wings again!  
Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,  
O mountains of my boyhood, I come again to you.<sup>44</sup>  
(March 1913)

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<sup>43</sup>"Swinburne, An Elegy," I (February 1913), 137.

<sup>44</sup>"The Hill Flowers," I (March 1913), 192.



Again in 1927, the mountain is a popular image among the poets contributing to Poetry magazine. In a passage already quoted from Elizabeth Coatsworth's Easter poem on Christ she refers to "the holy mountain."<sup>48</sup> Hortense Flexner writes a poem in which a mother creates an imaginary heritage for her adopted son and uses an image of ascending a hill to exemplify the idealistic love of the child's true parents.

There was a tale from which she had spun  
 A legend of bright grace:  
 A tale of two, who ran to climb a hill,  
 Lean clinging silhouettes on a velvet sky,  
 Exiles with proud sweet words from some far place --  
 Two shadows running upward of one will,  
 When the moon was high.<sup>49</sup>

Another poet describes his feelings about hills in two short lines:

My body thrills  
 To the slant of hills.<sup>50</sup>  
 (June 1927)

Hills are associated with God when still another poet exclaims:

Could she inhabit nerve and hand  
 Attentive to her will,  
 She would assemble sky and land  
 As God does on a hill.<sup>51</sup>  
 (September 1927)

Mountain imagery is used in this same conventional manner by

W. H. Auden when in 1936 he writes:

Cold, impossible, ahead  
 Lifts the mountain's lovely head

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<sup>48</sup>See above, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup>"Adopted Son," XXX (May 1927), 72.

<sup>50</sup>Frank Mitalisky, "Angles," XXX (June 1927), 134.

<sup>51</sup>Legaré George, "Four Poems," XXX (September 1927), 317.

Whose white waterfall could bless  
 Travellers in their last distress.<sup>52</sup>  
 (1936)

The ascent aspect of the image is dominant in a poem by Edwin Muir. In this poem, before man can arrive at the glories to be found on the crest of a hill he must first make a difficult climb through a terrifying grove of trees:

How could it be? There was the stifling grove,  
 Yet here was light; what wonder led us to it?  
 How could the blind road go  
 To climb the crag and top the towering hill  
 And all that splendour spread? We only know  
 There was no road except the smothering grove.<sup>53</sup>  
 (c. 1940)

Mountains, then, are another traditional symbol adopted by the Moderns and used in a conventional manner in much Modern Poetry.

Three other archetypal images traditional in poetry have been accepted by the Moderns. The sun, the moon, and the stars are used so freely and so consistently by the twentieth-century poets that symbolism surrounding them can also be said to have become conventionalized. These three images often appear together in Modern Poetry, and as ordinarily used there is a distinct relationship among their meanings. They form a kind of trinity of mystical and inspirational meanings often associated with God or the Divine. There are, however, distinct differences among the implications of the separate images. The sun usually

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<sup>52</sup>"Now the Leaves Are Falling Fast," Chief Modern Poets, p. 385.

<sup>53</sup>"The Grove," A Little Treasury, pp. 260-261. A further example of the use of mountain imagery is found in the works of Wallace Stevens, who writes:

stands for the source of life or a great revelation and is normally a correlative of life and vitality. The moon, on the other hand, is a calmer, softer image that ordinarily breathes comfort and/or solace. The star image retains the mystical implications of the other two, but is more often associated explicitly with inspiration or hope.

The connection between life and hope and the sun and the stars occurs in the following passage from a poem by Arthur Davison Ficke describing the functions of poetry:

From darkened sea-coasts without stars or sun,  
Like trumpet-voices in a holy war,  
Utter the heralds tidings of the deep.<sup>54</sup>  
(October 1912)

The emphasis is on darkness and the absence of light from the sun and stars. Lily A. Long identifies the sun with life in "The Singing Place":

But the life of the throbbing Sun  
Is in the song,  
And we weave the world anew,  
And the Singing Throng  
Fill every corner of space.<sup>55</sup>  
(November 1912)

In the early part of the century, sun imagery as a symbol for warmth and a source of life is common. Clark Ashton Smith remarks:

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At the end of night last night a crystal star,  
The crystal-pointed star of morning, rose  
And lit the snow to a light congenial  
To this prodigious shadow, who then came  
In an elemental freedom, sharp and cold.  
"Chocorua to Its Neighbor," Collected Poems, pp. 296-297.

<sup>54</sup>"Poetry," Poetry, I (October 1912), 2.

<sup>55</sup>Poetry, I (November 1912), 48.

Thus it was that some slant of sunset  
 In the chasms of piled cloud --  
 . . . . .  
 Smote warm in a buried realm of the spirit,  
 Till the snows of forgetfulness were gone.<sup>56</sup>  
 (December 1912)

A similar association between the sun and life is made by HD:

Apples on the small trees  
 Are hard,  
 Too small,  
 Too late ripened  
 By a desperate sun  
 That struggles through sea-mist.<sup>57</sup>  
 (January 1913)

The sun is still the source of life, though here not enough of its  
 warmth seeps through the mists to save the apples.

The warmth of the sun as a life source is made apparent by  
 Harriet Monroe in her poem to "Mother Earth":

Proudly she trails  
 Her flower-broidered dresses  
 In the sight of the sun.  
 Loudly she hails  
 Through her far-streaming tresses  
 His coursers that run.  
 For her heart, ever living, grows eager for life,  
 Its delight and desire;  
 She feels the high praise of its passion and strife,  
 Of its rapture and fire.<sup>58</sup>  
 (April 1913)

Amy Lowell uses a similar image in a poem describing the dull, shape-  
 less latter days of a woman who has once lived a joyous vital life:

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<sup>56</sup>"Remembered Light," Poetry, I (December 1912), 78.

<sup>57</sup>"Verses, Translations, and Reflections," Poetry, I (January  
 1913), 119.

<sup>58</sup>Poetry, II (April 1913), 14.



And I have known a glory of great suns,  
 When days flashed by, pulsing with joy and fire!  
 Drunk bubbled wine in goblets of desire,  
 And felt the whipped blood laughing as it runs!<sup>59</sup>  
 (July 1913)

On into the Twenties the sun image continues to be used in much the same manner. In Robert Graves's "The Cool Web," a poem about the way language and thought act as a barrier between feeling and emotion for the adult in contrast to the immediate and direct reactions of the child, the image recurs:

Children are dumb to say how hot the sun is,  
 How hot the scent is of the summer rose,  
 . . . . .  
 But we have speech that cools the hottest sun.<sup>60</sup>  
 (April 1927)

The sun is identified with Christ in the following lines by Elizabeth J. Coatsworth:

The halo of Christ is rayed with the sun,  
 The cross of the Saviour stretches down into hell.<sup>61</sup>  
 (April 1927)

This association of the sun with life and warmth is repeated by Frank Mitalsky, who says "Girls when they run/Are lined with sun."<sup>62</sup> Conrad Aiken is another poet who uses this kind of sun imagery in the Twenties:

And further think, how the poor frozen snail  
 Creeps out with trembling horn to feel that heat,  
 And thaws the snowy mildew from his mail,  
 And stretches with all his length from his retreat;

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<sup>59</sup>"A Blockhead," Poetry, II (July 1913), 135.

<sup>60</sup>Poetry, XXX (April 1927), 16-17.

<sup>61</sup>"Easter Rains at Taos," Poetry, XXX (April 1927), 12.

<sup>62</sup>"Angles," XXX (June 1927), 134.

Will he not praise, with his whole heart, the sun?  
 Then think, at last, I too am such an one.<sup>63</sup>  
 (July 1927)

Archibald MacLeish conveys the idea of present life in the midst of awareness of passing time through using almost the identical sun image to begin and close his "You, Andrew Marvell":

And here face down beneath the sun  
 And here upon the earth's noonward height  
 To feel the always coming on  
 The always rising of the night  
 . . . . .  
 And here face downward in the sun  
 To feel how swift how secretly  
 The shadow of the night comes on . . .<sup>64</sup>  
 (1930)

In the Forties, another example of sun imagery occurs in the works of Jean Garrigue.

There are short-stemmed forests so close to the ground  
 You would pity a dog lost there in the spore-budding  
 Blackness where the sun has never struck down.<sup>65</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

Here, the light and warmth of the sun are necessary if there is to be healthy life within the forest.

The similarities displayed among the sun images in the passages just examined strongly indicate that the image of the sun as a source of warmth, light, and life is conventional for the twentieth-century poets as it had been for those of earlier periods.

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<sup>63</sup>"Six Sonnets," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 180-181.

<sup>64</sup>Chief Modern Poets, pp. 855-856.

<sup>65</sup>"Forest," A Little Treasury, p. 653.

Moon images are just as persistent in the century as those of the sun. T. R. Henn asserts that throughout William Butler Yeats's poetry the moon stands for the woman principle,<sup>66</sup> and it is true of the century's poetry as a whole that the moon appears as a symbol and correlative of something sympathetic and soothing. The restful moon of the following passage is, by and large, the typical moon for the century's poetry:

Moon of poets dead and gone,  
 Moon to gods of music dear,  
 Gardens they have looked upon  
 Let them re-discover here:  
 Rest — and dream a little space  
 Of some heart-remembered place!<sup>67</sup>  
 (October 1912)

The sympathetic aspect of the moon is emphasized in these lines by Charles Hanson Towne in which various mourners speak of a dead friend:

Another said: "Last night I saw the moon  
 Like a tremendous lantern shine in heaven,  
 And I could only think of him — and sob.  
 For I remembered evenings wonderful  
 When he was faint with Life's sad loneliness,  
 And watched the silver ribbons wandering far  
 Along the shore, and out upon the sea."<sup>68</sup>  
 (November 1912)

The attraction of the moon for man and its mystic powers are the themes of a poem by Fannie Stearns Davis about Conn the Fool:

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<sup>66</sup>The Lonely Tower, p. 166.

<sup>67</sup>Grace Hazard Conkling, "Symphony of a Mexican Garden," Poetry, I (October 1912), 35.

<sup>68</sup>"Beyond the Stars," Poetry, I (November 1912), 35.

I will go up the mountain after the Moon:  
 . . . . .  
 I will leap and will clasp her in quick cold hands  
 And carry her home in my sack.  
 . . . . .  
 And then I will sit by the fire all night,  
 And sit by the fire all day.  
 I will gnaw at the Moon to my heart's delight  
 Till I gnaw her slowly away.

And while I grow mad with the Moon's cold taste,  
 The World may beat on my door,  
 Crying, "Come out!" and crying "Make Haste!  
 And give us the Moon once more!"  
 But I will not answer them ever at all;  
 . . . . .  
 And some day, all of the world that beats  
 And cries at my door, shall see  
 A thousand moon-leaves sprout from my thatch  
 On a marvelous white Moon-tree!  
 Then each shall have moons to his heart's desire.<sup>69</sup>  
 (March 1913)

Hart Crane also imbues the moon with magical power and a tenderness that convert even a harsh, unpleasant alley scene of a modern city into something soft and wonderful:

. . . but we have seen  
 The moon in lonely alleys make  
 A grail of laughter of an empty ash can.<sup>70</sup>  
 (1926)

While just as she associates the sun with one aspect of Christ, Elizabeth Coatsworth associates the moon with another, the cooler, more compassionate side, in the same Easter poem referred to previously.<sup>71</sup>

The tenderness of the moon is also emphasized in Florence Frank's

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<sup>69</sup>"Conn the Fool," Poetry, I (March 1913), 183-184.

<sup>70</sup>"Chaplinesque," Chief Modern Poets, p. 904.

<sup>71</sup>See above, p. 98.



transfiguring qualities of the moon in a manner similar to that seen in the passage quoted from Hart Crane:

Wide as this night, old as this night is old and young  
 as it is young, still as this, strange as this;  
 Filled as this night is filled with the light of a  
 moon as gray;  
 Dark as these trees, heavy as this scented air from the  
 fields, warm as this hand;  
 As warm, as strong;

Is the night that wraps all the huts of the south  
 and folds the empty barns of the west;  
 Is the wind that fans the roadside fire;  
 Are the trees that line the country estates, tall as the  
 lynch trees, as straight, as black;  
 Is the moon that lights the mining towns, dim as the  
 light upon tenement roofs . . . .<sup>76</sup>  
 (1935)

Again in the moon the Moderns have adopted a traditional image and used it regularly and conventionally throughout their poetry.

The traditional star image has been afforded treatment by the Moderns similar to that of the others described. Appearing in the early part of the century as a symbol for inspiration and aspiration and as a sign of God and Divinity, much as it always had in poetry, the star image is still being employed in practically the same manner in the Forties. The early-century appearance of the image is typified by the following occurrence in the works of Charles Hanson Towne:

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<sup>76</sup>"Lullaby," Chief Modern Poets, p. 918. Wallace Stevens, too, uses the moon image to illustrate a similar bewitching power:  
 Look round, brown moon, brown bird, as you rise to fly  
 Look round at the head and zither  
 On the ground.  
 . . . . .  
 In your light, the head is speaking. It reads the book.  
 It becomes the scholar again, seeking celestial  
 Rendezvous.

(c. 1945)  
 "God is Good," Collected Poems, p. 285.

Oh, I remembered how he loved the world,  
 The sighing ocean and the flaming stars,  
 The everlasting glamour God has given --  
 His tapestries that wrap the earth's wide room.<sup>77</sup>  
 (November 1912)

The mystery surrounding the star in this passage, its identification with some desirable but not directly expressible quality, and its association with God are repeated in the use of the image throughout the century. Alice Corbin, for example, writes:

I saw a star fall in the night,  
 And a gray moth touched my cheek;  
 Such majesty immortals have,  
 Such pity for the weak.<sup>78</sup>  
 (December 1912)

For her the star is a sign of some kind of sympathetic Divine presence, a concept not far from that expressed by Fannie Stearns Davis:

Yes, stars were with me formerly.  
 (I also knew the wind and sea;  
 And hill-tops had my feet by heart.  
 Their shagged heights would sting and start  
 When I came leaping on their backs.  
 I knew the earth's queer crooked cracks,  
 Where hidden waters weave a low  
 And druid chant of joy and woe.)  
 But stars were with me most of all.  
 I heard them flame and break and fall.  
 Their excellent array, their free  
 Encounter with Eternity,  
 I learned, and it was good to know  
 That where God walked, I too might go.  
 . . . . .  
 This day I have great peace. With me  
 Shall stars abide eternally!<sup>79</sup>  
 (March 1913)

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<sup>77</sup>"Beyond the Stars," Poetry, I (November 1912), 35-36.

<sup>78</sup>"The Star," Poetry, I (December 1912), 82.

<sup>79</sup>"Profits," Poetry, I (March 1913), 182-183.

Edward Kemper Broadus also associates the star image with God when he writes:

And all the little ways which men have trod  
 Shall be as nothing by His star-dust whirled  
 Into the making of a single star.<sup>80</sup>  
 (March 1913)

The use of the star image to represent an ideal or inspiration is seen in a poem of the Twenties written by Frank Mitalsky:

Go, girl, go in green --  
 Go just as you are!  
 Life sees as I have seen --  
 Go to meet a star!<sup>81</sup>  
 (June 1927)

It is used by Pat Morrissette to stand for the intense ideals of her young scholar-intellectual in "Evening Song of a Young Scholar":

When he sang the bird would hush through fear,  
 And the stars would burn wet holes into the windless  
 night.<sup>82</sup>  
 (July 1927)

Conrad Aiken, on the other hand, emphasizes the inspirational aspect of the star image in the following passage:

Love, let me be the beginning world, and grow  
 To Time from Timelessness, and out of Time.  
 Create magnificent Chaos, and there sow  
 The immortal stars, and teach those stars to rhyme --  
 Even so, alas, I could in no sense move  
 From the begin-all-end-all phrase, "I love."<sup>83</sup>  
 (July 1927)

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<sup>80</sup>"The Oracle," Poetry, I (March 1913), 179.

<sup>81</sup>"Girl in Green," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 135.

<sup>82</sup>Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 147.

<sup>83</sup>"Six Sonnets," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 182.



In a short poem mourning the fall of Finland, Robinson Jeffers employs the star image to symbolize a far-off purity and peace that contrast with the chaotic, immoral "civilized" world:

Unhappy about some far off things  
That are not my affair, wandering  
Along the coast and up the lean ridges,  
I saw in the evening  
The stars go over the lonely ocean,  
And a black-maned wild boar  
Plowing with his snout on Mal Paso Mountain.

The old monster snuffled, "Here are sweet roots,  
Fat grubs, slick beetles and sprouted acorns.  
The best nation in Europe has fallen,  
And that is Finland,  
But the stars go over the lonely ocean,"  
The old black-bristled boar,  
Tearing the sod on Mal Paso Mountain.

"The world's in a bad way, my man,  
And bound to be worse before it mends;  
Better lie up in the mountain here  
Four or five centuries,  
While the stars go over the lonely ocean,"  
Said the old father of wild pigs,  
Plowing the fallow on Mal Paso Mountain.<sup>84</sup>

The symbolism of the star image changes little within the century, as is true of the sun and moon images previously examined. All are to a certain degree mystical; all are associated in various ways with divinity, inspiration, sympathy, and immortality; and all are used in a conventional manner reminiscent of traditional poetry.

Still another traditional image from nature that has caught the fancy of Modern Poets is that of fallen or falling leaves to stand for

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<sup>84</sup>"The Stars Go Over the Lonely Ocean," A Little Treasury, p. 262. Wallace Stevens uses the star image much as Jeffers had, see above, pp. 113-114n.

death and the passing of life; and though leaves had been used by earlier poets as a symbol for death, the similarity of the image's treatment among the Moderns is sometimes startling. The use made by E. A. Robinson of leaves as a symbol of death in "Luke Havergal"<sup>85</sup> is continued by a variety of poets until the midpoint of the century. In the early part of the century Arthur Davison Ficke writes:

The faiths and forms of yesteryear are waning,  
 Dropping, like leaves.  
 Through the wood sweeps a great wind of complaining  
 As Time bereaves  
 Pitiful hearts of all that they thought holy.<sup>86</sup>  
 (February 1913)

The same image of the leaf as a dead man or his soul appears in Samuel McCoy's poetry:

Nay, what hath she [the sea] of grief?  
 She knoweth not the leaf  
 That on her bosom falls,  
 Thou last of admirals!<sup>87</sup>  
 (March 1913)

Also in the early part of the century, F. S. Flint uses the leaf image:

They fall . . . they fall . . .  
 I am overwhelmed  
 and afraid.

Each little leaf of the aspen  
 is caressed by the wind,  
 and each is crying.<sup>88</sup>  
 (July 1913)

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<sup>85</sup>See above, p. 62.

<sup>86</sup>"Swinburne, An Elegy," Poetry, I (February 1913), 141-142.

<sup>87</sup>"Dirge for a Dead Admiral," Poetry, I (March 1913), 187.

<sup>88</sup>"Four Poems in Unrhymed Cadence," Poetry, II (July 1913), 139.



Although the emphasis here is upon the resurrection and reawakening of life with the return of the next spring, the basic image of the leaf to represent death is the same as that used by the other poets.

One more poet of the Twenties who couples the image of dead leaves with decay and death is Herbert Gorman:

Madame de Vaudraucourt strolls through dead leaves  
 While an uncertain wind discreetly grieves.  
 . . . . .  
The scattered leaves . . . the ochre leaves . . . the dark  
Betrayals of this ancient autumn park . . .

"Madame, Madame, these fluttered leaves that shift  
 Their wizened faces with the windy drift."<sup>92</sup>  
 (October 1927)

The same image of fallen leaves to symbolize approaching death and doom appears in Allen Tate's poetry in the Thirties:

Dazed by the wind, only the wind  
 The leaves flying, plunge  
 . . . . .  
 Seeing, seeing only the leaves  
 Flying, plunge and expire  
 . . . . .  
 Cursing only the leaves crying  
 Like an old man in a storm  
 . . . . .  
 We shall say only the leaves  
 Flying, plunge and expire.<sup>93</sup>  
 (c. 1930)

While Conrad Aiken, writing at approximately the same time as Tate, declares:

Watch long enough, and you will see the leaf  
 Fall from the bough. Without a sound it falls:

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<sup>92</sup>"Worldlings," Poetry, XXXI (October 1927), 6.

<sup>93</sup>"Ode to the Confederate Dead," A Little Treasury, pp. 382-384.

And soundless meets the grass . . . . And so you have  
 A bare bough, and a dead leaf in dead grass.  
 Something has come and gone. And that is all.  
 . . . . .  
 This is the world: there is no more than this.  
 The unseen and disastrous prelude, shaking  
 The trivial act from the terrific action.  
 Speak: and the ghosts of change, past and to come,  
 Through the brief word. The maelstrom has us all.<sup>94</sup>  
 (1931)

W. H. Auden also writes of leaves in a poem called "Now the Leaves  
 Are Falling Fast."<sup>95</sup>

Into the Forties, poets still use the image of the leaf:

Like crisp whispering leaves I feel them fall  
 All over Europe, the hope all over,  
 Falling the long still miles between despair  
 And despair, from the walled inducements of the lawns  
 And past the cautious crises in the furnished rooms  
 And down the atrophy of hunger  
 Into the unctuous dark  
 Into the salt dry pools.<sup>96</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

The fallen or falling leaf to symbolize various aspects of death or decay is now seen to be another of those archetypal images that the Modern Poets have inherited from poetic tradition and continued to use conventionally.

This chapter has been concerned with the images of Modern Poetry and their relations to the claim by the Moderns of almost complete originality in their poetry. The evidence examined thus far suggests that

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<sup>94</sup>"Watch Long Enough and You Will See," Chief Modern Poets, pp. 824-825.

<sup>95</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 384.

<sup>96</sup>Hugh Chisholm, Aceldama, in New Poems, p. 73. A further example of the leaf image, from the works of Wallace Stevens, shows

the claim has been exaggerated. Not only has it been shown that the Modern Poets use at least eight basic nature images in a conventionalized and standardized manner, but it has also been shown that those eight images have been retained in much the same form and have been used in much the same manner as always in the history of poetry, suggesting that imagery and symbols of Modern Poetry represent much less radical a departure from the traditional than has popularly been suspected. Chapter VII deals with a number of other images which occur in both Modern and traditional poetry but which do not show the obvious continuity with traditional meanings shown by those images just examined. This next group of images consists primarily of older ones that have taken on a distinct, characteristic, and conventional meaning in Modern Poetry.

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it united with winter and dryness, two other images conventionalized in Modern Poetry:

The field is frozen. The leaves are dry.  
 Bad is final in this light.

In this bleak air the broken stalks  
 Have arms without hands. They have trunks

Without legs or, for that, without heads.  
 They have heads in which a captive cry

Is merely the moving of a tongue.  
 Snow sparkles like eyesight falling to earth,

Like seeing fallen brightly away.  
 The leaves hop, scraping on the ground.

"No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," Collected Poems, pp. 293-294.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CONVENTIONAL USE OF TRADITIONAL NON-ARCHETYPAL IMAGES IN MODERN POETRY

Not all the images Modern Poets use conventionally are archetypal. Twentieth-century poets carry over a number of non-archetypal images from earlier poetry and use those images with some degree of standardization. Often, the Moderns' standardizations for images of this sort are a result of their concentration on one of perhaps many meanings common in traditional usage. In addition, the Moderns have introduced a third class of images which have become conventionalized and standardized. A discussion of the third class, or original images, has been reserved for Chapter VIII. This chapter investigates those carry-over images of trees, rocks, old people, young girls, some animals, and colors.

Trees and forests have been conventionalized by many Modern Poets into a symbol of terror; and this conventionalization becomes apparent once a representative group of tree and forest images are assembled:

So lonely, too, so more than sad,  
So droning-lone with bees --  
I wondered what more could Nature add  
To the sum of its miseries . . .  
And then -- I saw the trees.<sup>1</sup>  
(January 1913)

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<sup>1</sup>Madison Cawein, "Wasteland," Poetry, I (January 1913), 104.





Polly Chase takes the same attitude toward forests as other poets take toward trees and suggests a reason for her feelings in her inability to impose on forests any meaningful form:

The wide amorphous sea,  
 The unassembled arches of the trees,  
 Divergent clouds, irregular mountains -- we  
 Perceive no grace in these.  
 We tread the protean forest mute and blind,  
 And in our vehemence and pride we find  
 No meaning in its multiform mobility.<sup>5</sup>  
 (July 1927)

For her the forest is to be feared because it represents the unknown and the inexplicable.

On into the Thirties and Forties examples can be found of this conventional use of tree and forest images. Wilfrid Gibson writes (1932) of "the dark forest of another's mind,"<sup>6</sup> and Walter De La Mare also speaks (1933) of "the forests of the mind"<sup>7</sup> as a lurking place for fierce beasts.

The connotations of terror linger on when W. H. Auden mourns the state of the world and then exclaims:

Starving through the leafless wood  
 Trolls run scolding for their food.<sup>8</sup>  
 (1936)

Jean Garrigue, who also finds the forest frightening, states:

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<sup>5</sup>"Form," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 183.

<sup>6</sup>"The Dark Forest," Chief Modern Poets, p. 279.

<sup>7</sup>"Forests," Chief Modern Poets, p. 223.

<sup>8</sup>"Now the Leaves Are Falling Fast," Chief Modern Poets, p. 385.

. . . the woods lock us up  
 In the secret crimes of our intent.<sup>9</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

The trees Karl Shapiro writes about seem to possess an insane sort of hatred for man:

Now one by one the trees  
 Stripped to their naked knees  
 To dance upon the heaps of shrunken dead.<sup>10</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

For the Moderns, then, trees and forests are dark, gloomy, twisted, and lonely; they are comfortless and leafless, and they scream and curse at the race of man. Characteristically, they represent the dark and guilty corners of the mind and heart that man would prefer to keep hidden. They are ominous and malevolent, and man must be constantly on guard against them lest they surround him and annihilate him with their hate.

The threatening nature represented through the Moderns' use of tree and forest symbols can also be detected in rock images occurring throughout Modern Poetry. In 1913, for instance, an obscure poet, Mary Knevels, warns of rocks:

Through the pasture lie the rocks, gray as the sea  
     in a fog,  
 As the sea in a mist.  
 (O breath of my yearning, O sea, breaking gray in a fog!)  
 The rocks rise tumultuous, the rocks are waves.  
 Flee from them, they are in pursuit;

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<sup>9</sup>"Forest," A Little Treasury, p. 654.

<sup>10</sup>"Scyros," A Little Treasury, p. 696.

Lichen-cruled their summits, rolling most mightily.  
 Flee from the rocks, the pale-crested waves of the meadows.<sup>11</sup>  
 (July 1913)

A similar symbolic value is assigned to stones by T. S. Eliot in  
The Waste Land.<sup>12</sup>

John Rodker also uses the stone image, in 1927, mourning the  
 death of a loved one:

I should have fixed her in night.

But could not. Stone did. Here she lies  
 half leaning. I feel her hand. For her eyes,  
 now wide on the dark, I gave boys  
 girls' boats and a plunging porpoise.

For a while stone. She flying, then Death  
 caught her, he was grimmer, beneath  
 the dense unyielding stone,  
 shoved in her rests with mine, bone on bone.<sup>13</sup>  
 (August 1927)

By the 1940's the image has become fairly common. Jean Garrigue  
 writes:

There are alleys of light as well where the green  
 leads to a funeral  
 Down the false floor of needles.  
 There are rocks and boulders that jut, saw-toothed  
 and urine-yellow.  
 . . . . .  
 Among the divisions of stone and the fissures of  
 branch  
 Lurk the abashed resentments of the ego.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>"Rocks," Poetry, II (July 1913), 130.

<sup>12</sup>A Little Treasury, pp. 271-281.

<sup>13</sup>"Lines to An Etruscan Tomb," Poetry, XXX (August 1927),  
 262-263.

<sup>14</sup>"Forest," A Little Treasury, p. 653.

The obvious menace in the jutting, saw-toothed boulders is reflected in the treacherous stones Theodore Spencer describes:

I live my life on a path of stone over water  
 Stepping on stones across a stream whose stones  
 Look firm when I dare to look back but were not firm  
 When I put my foot on the first delusive stone.  
 Are you with me, ghosts, here on this present stone?  
 Halfway across -- is it? -- I've carried you over  
 The stones that seemed to be firm that lie behind  
 As we walked across the terror of water and stone.<sup>15</sup>  
 (c. 1940)

And in a poem resembling The Waste Land in theme, Sidney Keyes uses the rock image much as T. S. Eliot had done in the earlier poem.

Keyes's poem opens:

The red rock wilderness  
 Shall be my dwelling-place.

Where the wind saws at the bluffs  
 And the pebble falls like thunder  
 I shall watch the clawed sun  
 Tear the rocks asunder.<sup>16</sup>  
 (December 1942-January 1943)

All these poets use images of rocks or stones to symbolize something threatening to man and uncaring of him. Among some there is the implication of ominous uninterest, while with others there seems to be a more active threat; all, however, contain an element of terror. Once again an image has been used by Modern Poets until it becomes conventional and has a symbolic meaning on which they come to substantial agreement.

Nature images are not the only ones Modern Poets use

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<sup>15</sup>"Progress," New Poems, p. 201.

<sup>16</sup>"The Wilderness," A Little Treasury, p. 663.

conventionally; for example, a certain amount of standardization has developed around human and associated images. One of the most conspicuous of these images is that of the old man or old woman to signify loneliness, emptiness, and sterility. This image was made famous by T. S. Eliot as the hollow man or scarecrow, but it did not originate with Eliot by any means. In 1913 the image had been used by Arthur Davison Ficke and Harrison S. Morris. Ficke describes a dried-up old woman approaching death,<sup>17</sup> while Morris writes of a lonely old man:

A palace, and a garden, and a dome,  
All that remain of Empire far and free;  
An old man exiled in an alien Rome  
Wearing a crown of smoke in Italy.<sup>18</sup>  
(June 1913)

The concentration in this example is on the loneliness and futility of the old man.

When Eliot uses the image, however, the emphasis is upon sterility:

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,  
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.  
.....  
I an old man,  
A dull head among windy spaces.<sup>19</sup>  
(1920)

It is not a far cry from Eliot's old man to his hollow men:

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<sup>17</sup>"Portrait of an Old Woman," Poetry, I (February 1913), 145-146.

<sup>18</sup>"Pontifex Maximus," Poetry, II (June 1913), 96.

<sup>19</sup>"Gerontion," A Little Treasury, pp. 297-298.

We are the hollow men  
 We are the stuffed men  
 Leaning together  
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
 Our dried voices, when  
 We whisper together  
 Are quiet and meaningless  
 As wind in dry grass  
 Or rats' feet over broken glass  
 In our dry cellar.

. . . . .  
 Those who have crossed  
 With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom  
 Remember us — if at all — not as lost  
 Violent souls, but only  
 As the hollow men  
 The stuffed men.<sup>20</sup>

(1925)

The kinship between the hollow men and the image which appears in William Butler Yeats's "Among School Children" is obvious. The old man is now a scarecrow:

Better to smile on all that smile, and show  
 There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap  
 Honey of generation had betrayed,  
 And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape  
 As recollection or the drug decide,  
 Would think her son, did she but see that shape  
 With sixty or more winters on its head,  
 A compensation for the pang of his birth,  
 Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays  
 Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;  
 Solider Aristotle played the laws  
 Upon the bottom of a king of kings;  
 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras  
 Fingered upon a fiddle stick or strings

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<sup>20</sup>"The Hollow Men," Chief Modern Poets, p. 784.

What a star sang and careless Muses heard;  
 Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.<sup>21</sup>  
 (1928)

Yeats uses a similar image in "Sailing to Byzantium":

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
 For every tatter in its mortal dress.<sup>22</sup>  
 (1928)

Other Modern Poets have used images similar to those of Eliot  
 and Yeats. May Lewis writes:

What shall we give the old man,  
 Cast out by wind and rain?

A straw bed and a torn sheet  
And a patched counterpane

And what shall we give the old man  
 To heal his broken heart?

A plate of soup, and a silver bit,  
And a message to depart.<sup>23</sup>  
 (June 1927)

Miss Lewis's old man is as lonely and futile as the old men described  
 by Kenneth Fearing:

They [old men] are the raw, monotonous skies,  
 The faded placards and iron rails  
 Passed by in narrow streets of rain.  
 Theirs are the indistinct thin cries  
 Heard in a long sleep that fails  
 In strange confusion and numb pain.<sup>24</sup>  
 (July 1927)

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<sup>21</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>23</sup>"Charity," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 137.

<sup>24</sup>"Old Men," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 193.

With Ruth Manning-Sanders the image, this time changed to a woman, appears as follows:

To the lonely blind old woman  
 In her mouldy granite cottage,  
 There fell a monstrous happening one day;  
 For in, with scarce a knocking,  
 There stepped the three officials,  
 And said, "We have come to carry you away."

They said, "You are old and dirty":  
 They said, "You are blind and wretched,  
 You must leave this mildewed hole and come away."<sup>25</sup>  
 (August 1927)

The old woman of these lines is as pathetically alone and helpless as any of the old people in the other poems examined.

Robinson Jeffers employs the old-man image in "I Shall Laugh Purely," a poem about the condition of the world:

But this, I steadily assure you, is not the world's end,  
 Nor even the end of a civilization. It is not so late  
 as you think: give nature time.  
 These wars will end, and I shall lead a troupe of  
 shaky old men through Europe and America,  
 Old drunkards, worn-out lechers . . .  
 . . . . .  
 We shall rant on our makeshift stages in our cracked  
 voices . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . my old men will cough in the fog  
 and baa like sheep,  
 "Here comes the end of a civilization. Give nature time,"  
 And spit, and make lewd jokes.<sup>26</sup>

(c. 1940)

Jeffers's old men retain the futility and sterility of those earlier

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<sup>25</sup>"Away," Poetry, XXX (August 1927), 242.

<sup>26</sup>A Little Treasury, pp. 267-268.



old men, and Jeffers has identified them with the race of Man in an old, sick world intent on killing itself off.

By the Forties the image of the old man or woman to convey the idea of loneliness, hopelessness, and despair has occurred often enough in Modern Poetry that its use can be called conventional.

Modern Poetry also contains a group of images built around youth. In its most common form a young girl or group of young girls stand for escape into some dream world of perpetual beauty or youth. The young girls have a vitality about them that is akin to life itself. Quite often these young girls are associated with nymphs and the sea, and there is frequently a mention of mermaids and sirens. The young girls are either temptresses who coax man to escape his worldly lot, or objects of his envy and nostalgia through their personification of life and vitality. An example of the young-girl image early in the century is found in a poem by Margaret Widdemer:

I saw the little daughters of the poor,  
Tense from the long day's working, strident, gay,  
Hurrying to the picture-place . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . little beggars at Life's door for Joy!

But, ah, the little painted, wistful faces  
Questioning Life for Joy!<sup>27</sup>

(November 1912)

In these lines the poet pities the young girls, but she also wonders at and envies their ability to enjoy life.

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<sup>27</sup>"The Beggars," Poetry, I (November 1912), 52-53.

William Butler Yeats conveys an impression of the sheer exuberance of youth through a similar image in the following lines:

Dance there upon the shore;  
 What need have you to care  
 For wind or water's roar?  
 And tumble out your hair  
 That the salt drops have wet;  
 Being young you have not known  
 The fool's triumph, nor yet  
 Love lost as soon as won.<sup>28</sup>

(December 1912)

In another poem, Yeats expresses a related idea through the image of sea-nymphs:

Hope that you may understand.  
 What can books, of men that wive  
 In a dragon-guarded land;  
 Paintings of the dolphin drawn;  
 Sea nymphs, in their pearly waggons,  
 Do but wake the hope to live  
 That had gone  
 With the dragons.<sup>29</sup>

(December 1912)

In the 1913 issues of Poetry magazine, examples of youth imagery from at least five different poets appear. In one poem, the image of a child is associated with happiness:

Once I thought to have you [happiness]  
 Fast there in a child:  
 All her heart she gave you,  
 Yet you would not stay.<sup>30</sup>

(January 1912)

Another poet, Witter Bynner, writes a whimsical poem in which only the young are able to appreciate the music of Apollo:

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<sup>28</sup>"To a Child Dancing Upon the Shore," Poetry, I (December 1912), 68.

<sup>29</sup>"The Realists," Poetry, I (December 1912), 70.

<sup>30</sup>Ernest Rhys, "A Song of Happiness," I (January 1913), 114.

Apollo listened, took the quarter  
 With his hat off to the buyer,  
 Shrugged his shoulder small and sturdy,  
 Led away his hurdy-gurdy  
 Street by street, then turned at last  
 Toward a likelier piece of earth  
 Where a stream of chatter passed,  
 Yesterday at noon;  
 By a school he stopped and played  
 Suddenly a tune . . . .  
 What a melody he made!  
 Made in all those eager faces,  
 Feet and hands and fingers! <sup>31</sup>  
 (February 1913)

The association between the young-girl imagery and the special charm of youth is set forth clearly by Richard Burton:

Then, the lone figure of a girl  
 Clear-limbed against the buttressed hills;  
 Slim, beautiful, a tiny pearl  
 Set round with ruby light that fills  
 The all-illuminated spaces where  
 No dark may creep nor shadow dare.

Not for an earldom would I break  
 The silence of yon dreaming maid;  
 I could not play her soul awake  
 With Love's most magic serenade;  
 Her thought holds secrets hid from me,  
 Deeper than mortal minstrelsy.<sup>32</sup>  
 (July 1913)

For Burton there is something special and sacred about the image of the young girl outlined against the hill. She becomes for him the personification of all youth and youthful thoughts.

In the following two examples, the young girl becomes the charmer and the inspirer of the poet. Alfred P. Graves writes of the sea-maid:

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<sup>31</sup>"Apollo Troubadour," I (February 1913), 151-152.

<sup>32</sup>"An Impression," II (July 1913), 131.



And over her the little green waves flowed,  
 Coldly translucent and moon-colored showed  
 Her frail young beauty, as if rapt away  
 From all the light and laughter of the day  
 To some twilit, forlorn sea-god's abode.

Again into the sun with happy cry  
 She leapt alive and sparkling from the sea,  
 Sprinkling white spray against the hot blue sky,  
 A laughing girl . . . and yet, I see her lie  
 Under a deeper tide eternally  
 In cold moon-colored immortality.<sup>35</sup>

(1916)

The same nostalgic connection among youth, beauty, and the awareness of age haunts the following passage from T. S. Eliot's

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon  
 the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
 When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.<sup>36</sup>

(1917)

Also in the Twenties the image appears in the poems of Frank  
 Mitalisky:

Go, girl, go in green --  
 Go just as you are!  
 Life sees us as I have seen --  
 Go to meet a star.<sup>37</sup>  
 (June 1927)

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<sup>35</sup>"Sea-Change," Chief Modern Poets, p. 271.

<sup>36</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 776.

<sup>37</sup>"Girl in Green," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 135.

The image is modified only slightly by Marian Thanhouser, who says of

"Young Witches":

Young witches have green eyes,  
 And watchful in a slanting wise  
 . . . . .  
 Young witches have strange eyes  
 As spring twilight, and glances wise.<sup>38</sup>  
 (June 1927)

The image of young girls is also used by John Crowe Ransom  
 to express a sadness for youthful beauty that must grow old:

Twirling your blue skirts, travelling the sward  
 Under the towers of your seminary,  
 Go listen to your teachers old and contrary  
 Without believing a word.  
 . . . . .  
 Practise your beauty, blue girls, before it fail;  
 And I will cry with my loud lips and publish  
 Beauty which all our power shall never establish,  
 It is so frail.<sup>39</sup>  
 (1927)

By the time the young girl image is encountered in Delmore Schwartz's  
 poetry, it has become quite familiar:

Tired and unhappy, you think of houses  
 Soft-carpeted and warm in the December evening,  
 While snow's white pieces fall past the window,  
 And the orange firelight leaps.  
 A young girl sings  
 That song of Gluck where Orpheus pleads with Death;  
 Her elders watch, nodding their happiness  
 To see time fresh again in her self-conscious eyes.<sup>40</sup>  
 (c. 1940)

The image of the young girl as a nostalgic symbol of escape

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<sup>38</sup> Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 127.

<sup>39</sup> "Blue Girls," Chief Modern Poets, pp. 766-767.

<sup>40</sup> "Tired and Unhappy," A Little Treasury, p. 499.

into a dream world where perpetual charm and youth are contrasted with age and death is a commonplace in Modern Poetry, and many of the poets use this image with such a conventional meaning.

Another image occurring in Modern Poetry with striking frequency is that of eyes. As is often true with symbols, it is difficult to assign any one precise and definite meaning for eyes in Modern Poetry; instead, there is a general area of agreement for the meaning of this image in the poetry of the first half of the twentieth century. The eyes are concerned with man's knowledge of himself and seem to stand for a combination of the expression of some deep inner truth, often disturbing, and a kind of guilty awareness of the rest of humanity. Frequently, there are suggestions of prophetic vision, and sometimes there is the implication of the judgment of an ever watchful God. The degree to which one or another of these ideas dominates depends, naturally, upon the context in which the eye image appears. In "The Beggars," by Margaret Widdemer, is found an example of what the absence of eyes means:

The old man crouched there, eyeless, horrible,  
Complacent in the marketable mask  
That earned his comforts -- and they gave to him!<sup>41</sup>  
(November 1912)

There is guilt for the passersby in the eyelessness of the old man, while he is complacent, living on what they give.

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<sup>41</sup>Poetry, I (November 1912), 53. This passage also offers an additional example of the occurrence of the old man image in Modern Poetry.

Something of the mysterious, all-knowing nature of eyes can be seen in the following passage by W. C. Williams, writing a descriptive poem of the heavens at night :

The Bears are abroad!  
 The Eagle is screaming!  
 Gold against blue  
 Their eyes are gleaming!<sup>42</sup>  
 (June 1913)

The animals here are the heavenly constellations, and they look down over the earth, watchfully waiting in some superior power and knowledge they have.

A somewhat different aspect of the eye image is found in the poetry of Skipwith Cannell who suggests loneliness and despair:

Dark are your eyes and empty  
 Like the lost pools in that garden  
 Which is unremembered of God.<sup>43</sup>  
 (August 1913)

The eyes Arthur Stringer writes about are very similar to those in Cannell's poem:

Out of the ages gaze your brooding eyes,  
 And barrier gulfs of time between us drift,  
 And shadow-like you face the shadowy night  
 Above earth's sleeping hills, and converse hold  
 With hidden things.<sup>44</sup>  
 (August 1913)

Those eyes are dark and brooding because they have seen and known too much, as have these other eyes, also from early in the century:

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<sup>42</sup>"Peace on Earth," Poetry, II (June 1913), 93.

<sup>43</sup>"Poems in Prose and Verse," Poetry, II (August 1913), 172.

<sup>44</sup>"A Woman at Dusk," Poetry, II (August 1913), 154-155.



God grant he may not find her, since he might not win  
 her freedom,  
 Nor yet be great enough to love, in such marred,  
 captive wise,  
 The patient, painted face of her, the little Teresina,  
 With its cowed, all-knowing eyes!<sup>45</sup>  
 (August 1913)

The eyes belong to the young Teresina, who has found it necessary to sell herself in order to stay alive while waiting for her immigrant lover to return for her.

The introspective, self-conscious connotations of the eye image are exhibited when T. S. Eliot comments in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

And I have known the eyes already, known them all --  
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,<sup>46</sup>  
 (1917)

The eyes belong to the people about Prufrock, but he has read into them his own uncertainties, doubts, and misgivings. The guilt feelings suggested in "Prufrock" are emphasized in the accusing pitiless eyes of "The Hollow Men":

The eyes are not here  
 There are no eyes here  
 . . . . .  
 The eyes reappear  
 As the perpetual star  
 Multifoliate rose  
 Of death's twilight kingdom  
 The hope only  
 Of empty men.<sup>47</sup>  
 (1925)

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<sup>45</sup>Margaret Widdemer, "Teresina's Face," Poetry, II (August 1913), 167.

<sup>46</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 774.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 785.

Eyes are more than accusing for HD; they also terrify:

eyes that terrify people,  
 unfair estimates, prejudice,  
 hardly any charm.<sup>48</sup>  
 (June 1927)

These eyes recall those in "Prufrock."

Pat Morrisette uses the eye image to express the tortured  
 introspection of the intellectual:

Often in the afternoon he was calmly crucified  
 With a book within his hands, and a frozen thought  
 Withering within the molten fire of his eye.  
 . . . . .  
 When sleep had strapped his soul within a cell,  
 The muscles of his tense head would curve  
 And grow rigid, stretched across his thin temples;  
 And the muscles of his slender throat would strain  
 Upon a clenching jaw and tightened eyes, eyes  
 That looked into his own mind, a world unclosed by sleep,  
 Flooded only by heavy dreams that ebbed in oceans  
 And came creeping back like crushing motor-trucks  
 Over rutted and abandoned roads.<sup>49</sup>  
 (June 1927)

Man's consciousness of self is clearly seen in this example of the  
 eye image.

The eyes are used in these various ways throughout the 1927  
 issues of Poetry magazine. The accusing eyes already noted are employed  
 by Polly Chase:

Your eyes are like a forest where the wind  
 Has come upon a company of birches  
 All lit with gold. Your countenance is thinned

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<sup>48</sup>"Halcyon," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 120.

<sup>49</sup>"Evening Song of a Young Scholar," Poetry, XXX (June 1927),  
 145-146.

Of its last leaves that lifted luminous arches  
 Only a moment since. A storm of gold  
 Falls from your eyes like leaves torn from the bark  
 Of quivering branches. What my hands can hold  
 Of flame I gather now against the dark.  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . The awful calm  
 Of vanished winters settles on the ground.  
 The wind has died . . . and stark against the skies  
 I see the stricken outline of your eyes.<sup>50</sup>  
 (July 1927)

In a poem by John Holmes, Peter looks into a mirror and reads disturbing truths in his own eyes:

Peter, in what pools of fear  
 Have you looked, that standing here,  
 I am lost in you as deep  
 As the little death of sleep?  
 Though I breathe here by your side  
 And your eyes are dark and wide,  
 Nothing, nothing can I tell,  
 Though I lean as at a well.  
 And my eyes, accustomed, see  
 Ancient selves that you have slain  
 To quench a sickness and a pain.  
 Beyond, their shadows waver yet  
 Ghosts of names you must forget,  
 And a hunger for what died  
 Crouches there unsatisfied:  
 All your agonies to tell  
 The secret that you know so well,  
 All your brave clean lies . . .  
 Peter, Peter, shut your eyes.<sup>51</sup>  
 (August 1927)

The eyes that symbolize a frightening knowledge of self to Holmes are associated with a mystic knowledge outside self by Frances York:

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<sup>50</sup>"Fall of Leaves," XXX (July 1927), 188.

<sup>51</sup>"Peter at His Mirror," XXX (August 1927), 264-265.

Your eyes, deep wells of silent fear,  
Deny what lies above your sphere.<sup>52</sup>  
(September 1927)

These eyes express an awareness of certain things which they do not have the knowledge to understand. Nevertheless, there is a disturbing awareness of truths that cannot be explained.

Eyes are used by Herbert Gorman, first, to express the idea of objective introspection:

But if imagination counts the cost  
And knows itself with frank eyes unafraid,  
Nothing I had can ever be quite lost.<sup>53</sup>  
(October 1927)

Then, in the same poem, he manages to convey the emptiness of a character's life by equating that life with her eyes:

Her eyes are cities whence the folk have fled.<sup>54</sup>

It becomes apparent once more that many truths can be read in and through eyes.

Other poets who have used the eye image are Hart Crane, Robinson Jeffers, Conrad Aiken, and Allen Tate. Crane is another of those poets who write of despairing eyes:

Where icy and bright dungeons lift  
Of swimmers their lost morning eyes.<sup>55</sup>  
(1926)

While Robinson Jeffers is concerned with the "terrible eyes" of a

<sup>52</sup>"Ignorance," ~~XXK~~ (September 1927), 314.

<sup>53</sup>"Worldlings," XXXI (October 1927), 1-2.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>55</sup>"Voyages VI," Chief Modern Poets, p. 906.



soul," and the exact idea expressed by eyes has depended upon the state of the soul being examined. This much is clear; the eye image is a conventional symbol with a community of meaning contributed to and shared in by many Modern Poets.

Images from the animal world make up another group extensively used by Modern Poets, and the discovery of standardized and conventional symbols in this area, too, should not by now be surprising. Again, it is not suggested that the meanings the Moderns arrive at for various animal symbols are unique. The history of animal symbolism is long, and there have been, of course, numerous animal worship cults of the sort that existed in ancient Egypt. This study, however, is concerned primarily with discovering conventional uses of images in Modern Poetry and only incidentally with determining the sources for those images. The demands of the study are met if standardized images can be found, and there is strong evidence that many Modern Poets have used animal images in a conventional manner.

One popular animal image among Modern Poets is a generalized bird image. In this instance, there is no attempt at particularity; the poet merely reports the presence of a bird, or birds, and the sound or song of the birds. In most instances, this image signifies a spiritual peace of some kind, quite often associated with love. For instance, W. B. Yeats, according to T. R. Henn, habitually uses the image of a little bird to stand for love's ecstasy plus something spiritual and mocking,<sup>60</sup> and such a use can be seen in these lines from Yeats's

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<sup>60</sup>The Lonely Tower (New York, 1952), p. 58.

"Love and the Bird":

I sat as silent as a stone  
 And knew, though she'd not said a word,  
 That even the best of love must die,  
 And had been savagely undone  
 Were it not that love, upon the cry  
 Of a most ridiculous little bird,  
 Threw up in the air his marvellous moon.<sup>61</sup>  
 (December 1912)

The associations Yeats makes among love, the bird, and its cry  
 are also evident in a poem by Witter Bynner:

By seven vineyards on one hill  
 We walked. The native wine  
 In clusters grew beside us two,  
 For your lips and for mine,  
  
 When "Hark!" you said -- "Was that a bell  
 Or a bubbling spring we heard?"  
 But I was wise and closed my eyes  
 And listened to a bird;  
  
 For as summer leaves are bent and shake  
 With singers passing through,  
 So moves in me continually  
 The winged breath of you.<sup>62</sup>  
 (February 1913)

A relationship can be seen between these two images and the one used  
 by Rollo Britten in "Bird of Passion":

Bird of passion, unenshrined,  
 I can never phrase thee quite --  
 So I speed thee on thy flight,  
 Unembodied thus forever,  
 Floating in a mist that never  
 May be raised. Thou art one  
 Of the black-winged birds that run,

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<sup>61</sup>Poetry, I (December 1912), 69.

<sup>62</sup>"The Mystic," Poetry, I (February 1913), 157.

With uncomprehended flight,  
Unimpeded down the night.<sup>63</sup>  
(June 1913)

Sally B. Kinsolving also employs the bird image to stand for love and its ecstasy:

When I hear words  
I have uttered to you and forgotten,  
They are like birds  
That have flown in the autumn  
To the south,  
Returning in spring with youth in the heart  
And song in the mouth!<sup>64</sup>  
(May 1927)

All these bird images stand for some aspect of love.

The use of bird images, however, is not confined strictly to the love and lover situation. The bird has also become a kind of generalized sign for the spirit, a promise of hope or peace:

Who sings upon the pinnacle of night?  
Down, down, unearthly bird, you sing  
too soon!  
O bird, be still! O bird, the earth is stricken  
To hear you at the bosom of the moon.  
. . . . .  
Unhindered comes the day, and you may sing  
Victorious and vocal to the light.  
But now delay, and let the heart reverse  
Time's sinister profile on the wall of night.<sup>65</sup>  
(September 1927)

When the darkness of night is gone, this bird may sing its song unrestrained at the appearance of light.

The delicacy and grace suggested in the figure of the bird are

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<sup>63</sup>Poetry, II (June 1913), 98.

<sup>64</sup>"Surprise," Poetry, XXX (May 1927), 81.

<sup>65</sup>Hildegard Flanner, "A Bird Sings At Night," Poetry, XXX (September 1927), 299-300.



emphasized by W. H. Auden when he meditates on the condition of the world and contrasts the present and the past:

Small birds above me have the grace of those who founded  
The civilization of the delicate olive.<sup>66</sup>

(1936)

The bird image in the following lines from Oscar Williams has a similar meaning to others examined:

I lived a life without love, and saw the being  
I loved on every branch; then that bare tree  
Stood up with all its branches up, a great harp,  
Growing straight out of the ground, and there I saw  
A squadron of bright birds clothing the bare limbs;  
The music notes sat on the harp; it was all love.<sup>67</sup>  
(c. 1943)

Williams has directly associated the image of the bird and love.

All these poets employ the bird image in a conventional manner. For all, it is a graceful, hopeful symbol, and, more particularly, it is often used to express the culmination and realization of love.

A particular class of birds has received special attention from a number of Modern Poets. The birds of prey, particularly the hawk and the eagle, in their strength, grace, and beauty have reflected for many poets certain attributes of Divinity; and those birds have often been used to stand for that Divinity. A good example of such use can be seen in Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Windhover":

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in  
his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding

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<sup>66</sup>"Here on the Cropped Grass," Chief Modern Poets, p. 387.

<sup>67</sup>"The Mirage," A Little Treasury, p. 412.

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
 As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and  
 gliding  
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
 Stirred for a bird,-- the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!<sup>68</sup>  
 (1877, 1917)

It was not the falcon itself that Hopkins saw so much as its beauty, strength, and self-sufficiency; and those qualities he associated with Christ.

Many Modern Poets have used similar images. Some of the same qualities Hopkins saw in the falcon are seen by John Gould Fletcher in the eagle:

He sits upon his perch in the far evening:  
 Motionless, watching twilight fade away.  
 His wings he never rustles, he never makes a sound,  
 He waits until the night devours the day.  
 . . . . .  
 He sits upon his perch in the fresh morning:  
 Interrogating silently the sky.  
 No eyelid moves, no feather, as I watch him;--  
 I also know the bars more strong than I!<sup>69</sup>  
 (1913)

This bird has strength, dignity, and wisdom. The poet recognizes those qualities in him and admires them, as Hopkins had admired similar qualities in the hawk.

An equally noble picture of the eagle is drawn by Herbert Gorman when writing of the importance of that decisive moment that must be taken advantage of lest it be forever regretted:

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<sup>68</sup> Chief Modern Poets, p. 44.

<sup>69</sup> "The Caged Eagle," Chief Modern Poets, p. 695.

She sees the moment as a sigh that grows  
 Tomorrow with the yet unbudded rose.

She sees it as a prophecy that hymns  
 Unburied splendors of desirous limbs.

She sees it as an eagle on the height,  
 Whose yelping shakes the granite doors of night.<sup>70</sup>  
 (October 1927)

The eagle stands poised upon this moment in all his great strength  
 and splendor before the moment passes never to return.

Robinson Jeffers ascribes to an injured hawk this very same  
 sort of dignity and strength:

. . . cat nor coyote  
 Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is  
 game without talons.  
 . . . . .  
 . . . no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,  
 The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.<sup>71</sup>  
 (1928)

In another poem, about a forest fire, Jeffers makes the eagle almost  
 an object of worship:

. . . when I returned  
 Down the black slopes after the fire had gone by, an eagle  
 Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,  
 Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his  
 shoulders.  
 He had come from far off for the good hunting  
 With fire for his beater to drive the game; the sky was  
 merciless  
 Blue, and the hills merciless black,  
 The sombre-feathered great bird sleepily merciless between  
 them.  
 I thought, painfully, but the whole mind,

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<sup>70</sup>"Worldlings," Poetry, XXXI (October 1927), 7.

<sup>71</sup>"Hurt Hawks," Chief Modern Poets, pp. 741-742.

The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is better  
than mercy.<sup>72</sup>

(1932)

C. Day Lewis, W. H. Auden, and Dylan Thomas are three more poets who use the hawk to stand for those same qualities of beauty, intensity, and strength. Lewis uses the image to reflect the almost unbearably intense emotions of love's most passionate stage:

Consider then, my lover, this is the end  
Of the lark's ascending, the hawk's unearthly hover:  
Spring season is over soon and first heatwave;  
Grave-browed with cloud ponders the huge horizon.

Draw up the dew. Swell with pacific violence.  
Take shape in silence. Grow as the clouds grew.  
Beautiful brood the cornlands, and you are heavy;  
Leafy the boughs — they also hide big fruit.<sup>73</sup>  
(c. 1930)

The hawk is the symbol of violent, elemental passion and desire that develop into life. It is this same elemental desire that Auden writes about in "Here on the Cropped Grass":

The hawk is the symbol of the rule by thirst,  
The central state controlling the canals;  
And the blank sky  
Of the womb's utter peace before  
The cell, dividing, multiplied desire,  
And raised instead of death the image  
Of the reconciler.<sup>74</sup>  
(1936)

There are a hardness and strength to the hawk that stand for the vital, instinctive life. An awareness of similar hardness and vitality causes

<sup>72</sup>"Fire on the Hills," Chief Modern Poets, p. 747.

<sup>73</sup>"Do Not Expect Again a Phoenix Hour," A Little Treasury, pp. 429-430.

<sup>74</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 387.

Dylan Thomas to burst into praise:

All praise of the hawk on fire in hawk-eyed dusk be sung,  
 When his viperish fuse hangs looped with flames under the brand  
 Wing, and blest shall  
 Young  
 Green chickens of the bay and bushes cluck 'dilly dilly',  
 Come let us die'.<sup>75</sup>

(c. 1950)

The hawk is a god to whom the young chickens sacrifice themselves  
 gladly.

All the foregoing poets have been impressed with the strength,  
 beauty, vitality, grace, and nobility of the birds of prey. They  
 have made the hawk and eagle, the possessors of all those elemental  
 traits, a conventional symbol for them, and sometimes for the force  
 giving rise to them.

Modern Poets seem to have been impressed by the savage jungle  
 cats as much as they have been by the birds of prey. The tiger,  
 leopard, and jaguar are treated by many Modern Poets in a similar  
 manner to the eagle and the hawk. T. S. Eliot, for instance, in  
 "Gerontion" associates the tiger with Christ:

. . . . In the juvenescence of the year  
 Came Christ the tiger  
 . . . . .  
 The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.<sup>76</sup>  
 (1920)

Both here and, later, in "Ash Wednesday," when he writes of leopards,

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<sup>75</sup>"Over Sir John's Hill," A Little Treasury, pp. 536-537.

<sup>76</sup>Chief Modern Poets, pp. 778-779.

it is the vitality and strength of the animals that he identifies with the Divine. In "Ash Wednesday" he declares:

Lady, three white Leopards sat under a juniper-tree  
 In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety  
 On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained  
 In the hollow round of my skull. And God said  
 Shall these bones live?<sup>77</sup>

(1930)

Eliot's attitude toward the tiger is reflected in the following lines by Delmore Schwartz:

Tiger Christ unsheathed his sword,  
 Threw it down, became a lamb.<sup>78</sup>  
 (c. 1940)

Schwartz is concerned with the contrasting laws of life -- violence or vitality, and love; the tiger is the symbol for the vital Christ.

Stephen Spender also sees in the tiger hope-inspiring life.

Beseeching man not to despair because of his times, he exhorts:

Oh comrades, let not those who follow after  
 --The beautiful generation that shall spring from our sides--  
 Let not them wonder how after the failure of banks  
 The failure of cathedrals and the declared insanity of our  
 rulers,  
 We lacked the Spring-like resources of the tiger.<sup>79</sup>  
 (before 1940)

Dylan Thomas uses the tiger image in a poem about a hunchback who comes daily to a park where he is mocked by young boys and dreams of a world where straight young girls exist for him:

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<sup>77</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 790.

<sup>78</sup>"For the One Who Would Take Man's Life in His Hands," A Little Treasury, p. 497.

<sup>79</sup>"After They Have Tired," A Little Treasury, p. 481.

While the boys among willows  
 Made the tiger jump out of their eyes  
 To roar on the rockery stones.<sup>80</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

The tiger stands for the exuberance and the unfeeling animal life of the young boys contrasted with the pathos and enervation of the hunchback.

The leopard is substituted for the tiger in an image used by Hugh Chisholm:

Of the tampering fingers, exploring, appraising, and  
 brazenly adamant  
 When, through the telegraphic nerve, the tropical naked  
 body's  
 Message stutters at first, then bursts like a preying  
 leopard from hope to pitiless, pitiable desire.<sup>81</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

He is, however, still emphasizing the basic, elemental response to life that the other poets express through the tiger image.

Both Oscar Williams and Allen Tate use the jaguar to symbolize that same primeval, elemental level of life.<sup>82</sup>

All these poets have taken the basic image of a large jungle cat and used it in roughly the same manner. These cats are used to represent variously strength, vitality, endurance, and elemental life

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<sup>80</sup>"The Hunchback in the Park," A Little Treasury, p. 516.

<sup>81</sup>Aceldama, in New Poems, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup>Williams, "The Man Coming Toward You," A Little Treasury, p. 423; Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," A Little Treasury, p. 384; Wallace Stevens converts the jaguar into a god of the jungle:  
 This afternoon the wind and the sea were like that--  
 And after awhile, when Ha-ee-me has gone to sleep,  
 A great jaguar running will make a little sound. (c. 1945)  
 "Jouga," The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York, 1955), p. 337.

so consistently that they can be spoken of as conventional symbols in the imagery of Modern Poetry.

Yet another image Modern Poets have used conventionally is that of fish. Usually the fish image suggests fertility. Early in the century Emilia Stuart Lorimer makes fish central to a poem in which she praises God for life:

Fish of the flood, on the bankéd billow  
 Thou layest thy head in dreams;  
 Sliding as slides thy shifting pillow,  
 One with the streams  
 Of the sea is thy spirit.  
 . . . . .  
 So, God, thy love it not needeth me,  
 Only thy life, that I blessed be.<sup>83</sup>  
 (October 1912)

The concluding couplet identifies the image in the poem with God's blessing of life.

The same connection between fish and life is made in a poem by Witter Bynner:

When a wandering Italian  
 Yesterday at noon  
 Played upon his hurdy-gurdy  
 Suddenly a tune,  
 There was magic in my ear-drums:  
 . . . . .  
 Such a melody as star-fish,  
 And all fish that really are fish,  
 In a gay, remote battalion  
 Play at midnight to the moon!<sup>84</sup>  
 (February 1913)

A four-level hierarchy of happiness in which the fish image

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<sup>83</sup>"Fish of the Flood," Poetry, I (October 1912), 9.

<sup>84</sup>"Apollo Troubadour," Poetry, I (February 1913), 150-151.





His conscience upon its calm.<sup>87</sup>  
(c. 1941)

Another poet, Elizabeth Bishop, writes about catching a venerable old fish. During the course of the poem, through the poet's speculations, the fish takes on importance as a symbol of the triumph of life; and at the conclusion of the poem, the fish is turned loose.<sup>88</sup> All these poets use the fish as a conventional image to symbolize fertility and life.

Although not many examples of the crab image occur in Modern Poetry, the repetitions that appear are striking in their similarity. The resemblances among the following examples are unmistakable. The first, and probably the one most widely known, is from Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.<sup>89</sup>  
(1917)

The crab here is a correlative of Prufrock's desire for a primitive form of life in which he would not have to think or make decisions but could react instinctively to his environment. A similar crab image is used by Hart Crane in "O Carib Isle!":

The tarantula rattling at the lily's foot,  
Across the feet of the dead, laid in white sand  
Near the coral beach; the small and ruddy crabs

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<sup>87</sup>"At the Grave of Henry James," New Poems, p. 45.

<sup>88</sup>"The Fish," A Little Treasury, pp. 620-622.

<sup>89</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 775.

Stilting out of sight . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 But who is Captain of this doubloon isle  
 Without a turnstile? Nought but catchword crabs  
 Plaguing the hot groins of the underbrush.<sup>90</sup>  
 (October 1927)

Allen Tate's use of the crab image in "Ode to the Confederate  
 Dead" is strongly reminiscent of Eliot's:

The brute curiosity of an angel's stare  
 Turns you, like them, to stone,  
 Transforms the heaving air  
 Till plunged to a heavier world below  
 You shift your sea-space blindly  
 Heaving, turning like the blind crab.<sup>91</sup>  
 (c. 1930)

Tate's own explanation of the symbolism of the crab in his poem would  
 serve almost equally well to explain the image from "Prufrock":

This creature [blind crab] has mobility but no  
 direction, energy but from the human point of view,  
 no purposeful world to use it in: in the entire  
 poem there are only two explicit symbols for the  
 looked-in ego; the crab is the first and less explicit  
 symbol . . . .<sup>92</sup>

The same explanation helps to clarify the image in a third poem, by  
 Roy Fuller:

Donne, alive in his shroud,  
 Shakespeare in the coil of a cloud,  
 Saw death very well as he  
 Came crab-wise, dark and massy.<sup>93</sup>  
 (1940)

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<sup>90</sup>Poetry, XXXI (October 1927), 30-31.

<sup>91</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 382.

<sup>92</sup>"Narcissus as Narcissus," On the Limits of Poetry (New York, 1948), p. 253.

<sup>93</sup>"January 1940," A Little Treasury, p. 647.

True, Fuller identifies the crab with death instead of with men, but it is a blind, groping, unpurposeful death in the spirit of the image as used by Eliot and Tate. In these instances, at any rate, the crab is a conventional image.<sup>94</sup>

The standardizations that have occurred for the symbols and images used by the Moderns are by no means exhausted in these examples. There is, for instance, a great deal of agreement in the Moderns' use of colors. Once more, however, it must be pointed out that the Moderns' use of certain color symbols is not unique, merely characteristic; and although the subject of color symbolism is complicated and doubtless worthy of a separate study all its own, a certain degree of standardization and conventionalization in symbolism becomes apparent even from this sort of general and limited study.

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<sup>94</sup>Another example of a similar crab image appears in the poems of John Peale Bishop:

It needs no Proteus to announce the sea  
 Above the proclamation of loud surf --  
 Only the horseshoe crab, black carapace,  
 Project of life, though hideous, persisting  
 From the primordial grasp of claws on shore.  
 . . . . .  
 Reject him? Why? Though voiceless, yet he says  
 That any monster may remain forever  
 If he but keep eyes, mind and claws intent  
 On the main chance, be not afraid to skulk.  
 This proletarian of the sea is not,  
 But scuttles, noble as the crocodile,  
 As ancient in his lineage. His name  
 Is not unknown in heaven. But his shell  
 Affords no edifice where I can creep  
 Though I consent like him to go on claws.

(1938)

"Colloquy with a King-Crab," The Collected Poems of John Peale Bishop (New York, 1948), p. 109.

One of the colors most characteristically treated by the Moderns is green. Almost certainly as a result of its association with vegetation and spring, green is used frequently by the Moderns, as it had been by earlier poets, as a symbol for life or regeneration, and creation or fecundity. Mention is made in Chapter VI of Ezra Pound's description of the arrival of spring:

Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,  
As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches.<sup>95</sup>  
(1912)

Naturally, green is a realistically descriptive adjective for buds, but, especially in combination with buds, the color also suggests life. Much the same can be said of green as it is used by Richard Aldington in the following lines:

And the songs pass  
From the green land  
Which lies upon the waves as a leaf  
On the flowers of hyacinth.<sup>96</sup>  
(November 1912)

The songs in this passage are passing from the green, living land here to death's kingdom in later portions of the poem.

The green in the following poem does not describe vegetation, and yet it symbolizes life in contrast with the death suggested in sorrowing winds:

O winds that pass uncomforted  
Through all the peacefulness of spring,  
And tell the trees your sorrowing,  
That they must moan till ye are fled!

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<sup>95</sup>"A Virginal," Chief Modern Poets, p. 685.

<sup>96</sup>"ΧΟΡΙΚΟΣ," Poetry, I (November 1912), 39.

Think ye the Tyrian distance holds  
 The crystal of unquestioned sleep?  
 That those forgetful purples keep  
 No veiled, contentious greens and golds.<sup>97</sup>  
 (December 1912)

Two poets, Frank Mitalsky and Marian Thanouser, couple green with the young-girl image previously examined,<sup>98</sup> and once more the color takes on connotations of life and liveliness.

Green, again partially through its association with vegetation, is closely associated with the life process as a whole when Dylan Thomas writes:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
 Drives my green age . . . .<sup>99</sup>  
 (after 1940)

The force Thomas speaks of here is the life force itself as it causes the flower to develop from the stem. This life process in the flower is then transferred to the poet when he refers to his own "green age." The entire poem is an expression of wonder over this life force which cannot be explained. Thomas also uses green in a similar manner in "Fern Hill."<sup>100</sup>

Wallace Stevens frequently employs green to symbolize the life force, as in "Sunday Morning":

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<sup>97</sup>Clark Ashton Smith, "Sorrowing of Winds," Poetry, I (December 1912), 80.

<sup>98</sup>Mitalsky, "Girl in Green," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 135; Thanouser, "Young Witches," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 127. Writing at approximately the same time, W. C. Williams uses green with about the same meaning in "Man in a Room" and "The Codhead." Collected Poems 1921-1931 (New York, 1934), pp. 130, 20-21.

<sup>99</sup>"The Force That through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower," A Little Treasury, p. 518.

<sup>100</sup>A Little Treasury, pp. 520-521.

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  
 Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured  
 As April's green endures . . . .<sup>101</sup>

The same color conveys practically the identical idea in "Peter Quince at the Clavier," and "An Extract."<sup>102</sup>

Allen Tate, Richard Eberhart, and George Barker all use green to symbolize the life forces at work in nature.<sup>103</sup> Such a use for green has become conventional for many of the Modern Poets.

Evidence can also be assembled to show that Modern Poets have made conventional use of gray and gold. For the Modern Poet, gray is usually an unhealthy color; it is blank, lacks warmth and enthusiasm, and holds out no hope. Though it sometimes suggests calm, there is almost always a touch of sadness and despair in the images associated with gray, perhaps as a result of its relationship with the traditional wintry images of ice and snow.

The use of gray to suggest a kind of calm and sad resignation in the face of universal forces can be seen in the following lines:

I saw a star fall in the night,  
 And a gray moth touched my cheek;  
 Such majesty immortals have,

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<sup>101</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 168.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 173, 179.

<sup>103</sup>Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," A Little Treasury, p. 384; Eberhart, "On Shooting Particles Beyond the World," ibid., p. 436; Barker, "Epistle (to Dylan Thomas)," "O Golden Fleece She Is," ibid., pp. 505, 510.

Such pity for the weak.<sup>104</sup>  
(December 1912)

Despair and hopelessness are emphasized by the gray Madison  
Cawein uses in his "Wasteland":

I looked at the man; I saw him plain;  
Like a dead weed, gray and wan,  
Or a breath of dust. I looked again --  
And man and dog were gone,  
Like wisps of the graying dawn.<sup>105</sup>  
(January 1913)

This gray whispers of death and ghostly visions. The same association  
of gray and death occurs in a dirge written by Samuel McCoy:

No more the gray sea's breast  
Need answer thy behest;  
No more thy sullen gun  
Shall greet the risen sun.<sup>106</sup>  
(March 1913)

The sea is no longer green but becomes gray when death is introduced.

The sadness and apprehensions of a homesick emigrant arriving  
in America are reflected in his gray view of the land in a poem by  
W. C. Williams:

O-eh-li! La-la!  
Donna! Donna!  
Grey is the sky of this land.  
Grey and green is the water.  
I see no trees, dost thou?<sup>107</sup>  
(June 1913)

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<sup>104</sup>Alice Corbin, "The Star," Poetry, I (December 1912), 82.

<sup>105</sup>Poetry, I (January 1913), 105.

<sup>106</sup>"Dirge for a Dead Admiral," Poetry, I (March 1913), 187.

<sup>107</sup>"Sicilian Emigrant's Song," Poetry, II (June 1913), 94.



The emigrant is disturbed, for he can see no signs of life. Both sky and sea appear to him a "dead" grey.

Gray becomes a symbol for apprehension once more when Mary E.

Knevels writes of rocks seen in a pasture through the mist:

Through the pasture lie the rocks, gray as the sea in a fog,  
As the sea in a mist.

(O breath of my yearning, O sea, breaking gray in a fog!)<sup>108</sup>  
(July 1913)

There is the sadness of passing time in the combination of gray and the sound of the ocean in another poem:

The wide gray sweep of ocean and the long white curl of foam,  
The ever-pleading wash of waves, the never-ceasing moan.<sup>109</sup>

(September 1913)

A similar suggestion of sadness is achieved by Eunice Tietjens through contrasting youth and old age in their symbols of grey and gold:

Listen, my friend, since hours are slow tonight . . .

Perhaps a story, starting long ago  
When I was young, a story of grey things

That once were golden bright.<sup>110</sup>

(April 1927)

The following lines present only an incidental juxtaposition of gray and the desert:

Sky blue, mist gray,  
Desert mile on mile--

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<sup>108</sup>"Rocks," Poetry, II (July 1913), 130.

<sup>109</sup>Winifred Webb, "Contentment," Poetry, II (September 1913), 203.

<sup>110</sup>"The Man Who Loved Mary," Poetry, XXX (April 1927), 2.

What am I on earth's breast  
That she should smile?<sup>111</sup>  
(May 1927)

Viewed among the other examples of gray symbolism, however, it does offer further support for the impression of conventional usage.

The ghostly and lifeless are suggested by gray once again when Katherine Newton writes about a woman watching a factory discharge its child-employees as she goes to call for her husband.

Where factory smoke has laid a long black bruise  
Across the tender apricot sky  
Soft hands of night will blur it out.  
Grey children, leaving work you did not choose  
And walking without play or shout,  
You scar my heart until I die.<sup>112</sup>  
(August 1927)

There is no life, either, in the land described by Hart Crane:

A land of leaning ice  
Hugged by plaster-grey arches of sky,  
Flings itself silently  
Into eternity.<sup>113</sup>  
(1926)

The same impression of a land grown old and dead is transferred to the city when Delmore Schwartz describes it in the winter:

--Now in the great city, mid-winter holds,  
The dirty rags of snow freeze at the curb,  
Pneumonia sucks at breath, the turning globe  
Brings to the bitter air and the grey sky  
The long illness of time and history.<sup>114</sup>  
(c. 1941)

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<sup>111</sup>Noel H. Stearn, "Song," Poetry, XXX (May 1927), 80.

<sup>112</sup>"Six O' Clock," Poetry, XXX (August 1927), 266.

<sup>113</sup>"North Labrador," Chief Modern Poets, p. 905.

<sup>114</sup>"Shenandoah," New Poems, p. 182.

The use of gray to signify enervation or a kind of twilight zone of half-death, so clearly seen in these last three examples especially, has become standard and conventional in Modern Poetry.

While gray symbolizes this twilight zone, gold assumes a quite different function. It is a warm, triumphant color, full of life and hope. It almost invariably is connected with highly desired and desirable things. Possibly through association with the archetypal image of the sun, gold's connotations as a color are generally good; it often has about it some suggestions of the Divine. Alice Corbin definitely associates the sun with gold:

The little broken glitter of the waves  
Beside the golden sun's intense white blaze,  
Is like the idle chatter of the crowd  
Beside my heart's unwearied song of praise.<sup>115</sup>  
(December 1912)

There is an accumulation of goodness throughout this poem as a result of the connotations of golden, sun, and intense white culminating in a "song of praise."

In "Sorrowing of Winds," Clark Ashton Smith contrasts death, symbolized by purple and a mournful wind, with life symbolized by "contentious greens and golds,"<sup>116</sup> and when W. C. Williams describes the skies at night, part of the feeling of well-being that results is due to the colors he uses:

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<sup>115</sup>"Nodes," Poetry, I (December 1912), 83.

<sup>116</sup>Poetry, I (December 1912), 80.

The Archer is wake!  
 The Swan is flying!  
 Gold against blue  
 An Arrow is lying.  
 There is hunting in heaven --  
 Sleep safe till tomorrow.<sup>117</sup>  
 (June 1913)

Gold, this time the metal and the color, becomes a direct symbol for value and desirability in a love poem by Frederic Manning:

Oh thou in me  
 Art shrined, as none hath seen thee, as gods live  
 Whom time shall not consume; nor rusts thy gold  
 Ever . . . .<sup>118</sup>  
 (June 1913)

The gold of flower petals on the water represents a life awareness that penetrates to the fish in a poem by F. S. Flint:

Under the lily shadow  
 and the gold  
 and the blue and the mauve  
 that the whin and the lilac  
 pour down on the water,  
 the fishes quiver.<sup>119</sup>  
 (July 1913)

Gold in these lines from Amy Lowell can be interpreted with little difficulty:

Each plodding wayfarer looks up to gaze,  
 Blinded by rainbow-haze  
 The stuff of happiness,  
 No less,  
 Which wraps me in its glad-hued folds  
 Of peacock golds.<sup>120</sup>  
 (July 1913)

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<sup>117</sup>"Peace on Earth," Poetry, II (June 1913), 93.

<sup>118</sup>"Simaetha," Poetry, II (June 1913), 99.

<sup>119</sup>"Four Poems in Unrhymed Cadence," Poetry, II (July 1913), 138.

<sup>120</sup>"Apology," Poetry, II (July 1913), 134.

For Amy Lowell the color gold, along with the rainbow, is a symbol of happiness.

When Skipwith Cannell describes an old, noble eagle with "golden eyes" that gaze "Fiercely at the sun," he is, through the use of those "golden eyes," saluting the bird's indomitable spirit and will to live.<sup>121</sup> The life force is also symbolized through gold by Mary Knevels when she writes about "The golden of wheat fields."<sup>122</sup>

In Arthur Stringer's poem about a woman at dusk, gold becomes directly related to a sort of Divine glory:

Out of the gloom I see your white face yearn  
As silence yearns for music, or the sea  
For morning waits. A mirrored wonderment,  
A far-off glory, from you flashes and shines  
And then is gone, as in a casement burns  
The sunset gold.<sup>123</sup>

(August 1913)

Once more there is a close relationship between the color gold and the sun. The contrast between age and the golden brightness of youth in "The Man Who Loved Mary" has been mentioned in the discussion of gray symbolism.<sup>124</sup>

Laura Benét uses gold to symbolize the sheer immortal beauty of a wild fawn seen for only an instant in the woods:

"The wild white fawn--  
She saw it in the wood  
Tremble in solitude  
At the pale dawn

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<sup>121</sup>"The Eagle," Poetry, II (August 1913), 171.

<sup>122</sup>"Stone Walls," Poetry, II (July 1913), 130.

<sup>123</sup>"A Woman at Dusk," Poetry, II (August 1913), 154.

<sup>124</sup>See Above, p. 172.

Eyes fiery stars (she said),  
 Hoofs left a track of gold.  
 . . . . .  
 Never again in spring, fire and snow  
 And the immortal deer --  
 But, since the second year,  
 Violets, the footprints show.<sup>125</sup>  
 (April 1927)

Again, the symbolism of gold is obvious in the following lines:

The gull flies white  
 And measures with his flight  
 The carven golden hills that rise  
 Between the city and the sea.<sup>126</sup>  
 (May 1927)

Gold imparts to the hills a mysterious other-worldly glory. The gold used by Rorty is the conventional gold of many Modern Poets when they wish to convey an impression of warmth, life, hope, and desirability.

Doubtless, a complete study devoted to color symbolism in Modern Poetry would reveal many more examples of correspondences and standardizations, some of them probably also common in other periods of poetry. Even from the present general study, however, it is evident that Modern Poets use colors characteristically, conventionally, and with a great deal of agreement.

It should now be clear that Modern Poets have made conventional symbols of many images in addition to those archetypal ones examined in Chapter VI. It has been shown that familiar images from diverse areas of life and experience have been adapted by the Moderns and used

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<sup>125</sup>"Who Looks on Beauty," Poetry, XXX (April 1927), 11.

<sup>126</sup>James Rorty, "Boy and Gull," Poetry, XXX (May 1927), 87.

in characteristic manners with considerable agreement about their meaning. Two facts should now be clear: 1) not only is there an extensive body of conventional images which Modern Poets frequently use, but 2) Modern Poetry makes a far greater use of traditional images and symbols than has heretofore been generally realized. In connection with this latter point, however, it must not be assumed that Modern Poetry has introduced no images and symbols of its own. It is with some of those new images and symbols that Chapter VIII deals.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONVENTIONAL USE OF THE NEW

IMAGES OF MODERN POETRY

Recalling the Moderns' insistence on originality and their attacks upon the conventional images and diction of the Late Victorians, one would expect to find them intent on introducing new and fresh images and symbols into poetry; and certain images do appear in Modern Poetry that had previously seen extremely limited, if any, use. As a matter of fact, a number of images had their origins in modern life and thus could not have appeared in earlier poetry. Among the poems examined, however, there are surprisingly few new images for a movement founded principally as a revolt against the conventional and over-used. Even when those new images do appear, they do not long retain their originality and soon become conventionally used. Many instances occur in which different poets use the same image with practically identical symbolic values.

The Modern Poets' urban images reveal many examples of conventional and standardized usage throughout the first half of the century. City streets like those described by T. S. Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," for instance, have been a popular image with Modern Poets:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .  
. . . . .



Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .<sup>1</sup>  
 (1917)

These streets symbolize the loneliness and confusion of modern man in the maze of civilization. Modern man is surrounded, lonely and bewildered, by the dark, twisting, and overpowering streets. If one looks at the use other poets in the century make of this image, he can but notice a startling similarity.

Kenneth Fearing uses this image of city streets:

They [old men] are the raw, monotonous skies,  
 The faded placards and iron rails  
 Passed by in narrow streets of rain.  
 . . . . .  
 But old men have their deep dreams  
 They follow on quiet afternoons  
 At intervals, through distant streets.<sup>2</sup>  
 (July 1927)

Once more they are dim streets that reflect in their loneliness the loneliness of man in the city. The image as it appears in the following lines by Herbert Gorman is substantially the same as that used by Eliot and Fearing:

. . . . Twilight fills  
 The hollows with sly beasts. The street assumes  
 The brooding aspect of Pompeian tombs.<sup>3</sup>  
 (October 1927)

Conrad Aiken also uses the street image in "Blues for Ruby Matrix" with the same meaning when he writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Chief Modern Poets, pp. 773, 775.

<sup>2</sup>"Old Men," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 193.

<sup>3</sup>"Worldlings," Poetry, XXXI (October 1927), 8.

Boy, if you went with me along her streets,  
 under the windows of her lighted eyes,  
 . . . . .  
 Along dark streets that you have made your own,  
 the wretched streets that in-and-out are you,  
 there where the cry of pain is in the bone.<sup>4</sup>  
 (1935)

The image occurs in the works of W. H. Auden almost exactly as used by the others.

In unlighted streets you hide away the appalling.<sup>5</sup>  
 (1940)

Obviously, the image used by Auden is similar to the street images of the other poets both in form and in symbolic meaning.

Delmore Schwartz writes of those same streets in "Shenandoah":

--Now in the great city, mid-winter holds,  
 The dirty rags of snow freeze at the curb,  
 Pneumonia sucks at breath, the turning globe  
 Brings to the bitter air and the grey sky  
 The long illness of time and history.<sup>6</sup>  
 (c. 1941)

True, the streets are not mentioned by name in these lines, but the implication is clearly there in "The dirty rags of snow" that "freeze at the curb," and once more the image has the meaning it held for the other poets. All these men have taken an image from the city and attached similar symbolic values to that image. There is justification for saying that city streets have become a conventional image in Modern Poetry.

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<sup>4</sup>New Poems, pp. 26, 29.

<sup>5</sup>"The Capital," Chief Modern Poets, p. 404.

<sup>6</sup>New Poems, p. 182.

The streets are not the only image from the city that can be offered as an example of standardization. One of the favorite images of the twentieth-century poet is the dreary room or tawdry flat. Eliot uses it frequently. In "Morning at the Window" he writes:

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,  
And along the trampled edges of the street  
I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids  
Sprouting despondently at area gates.<sup>7</sup>  
(1917)

Here, the basement kitchens are identified with the people who work in them. The dull room is analogous to the "damp souls" of the housemaids. A similar identification between the rooms and the people who live in them is made in "Preludes":

One thinks of all the hands  
That are raising dingy shades  
In a thousand furnished rooms.<sup>8</sup>  
(1917)

The room image is used for the same purpose in The Waste Land when Eliot writes:

The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights  
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.  
Out of the window perilously spread  
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,  
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)  
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.<sup>9</sup>  
(1922)

Here the scene is elaborated more than in the other examples, but there is the same basic image of a cheap, drab, furnished room that

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<sup>7</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 777.

<sup>8</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 296.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

in its cheapness and drabness symbolizes the life of its occupant.<sup>10</sup>

John Van Druten, writing in Poetry in 1927, describes a soldier awakening in a flat on a Sunday during his leave. The soldier is there with his girl, and as he combs his hair he sees in the mirror a brass double bedstead, tumbled bedclothes, and the girl in a "pale blue tea-gown, seated by the stove/Beside remains of breakfast."<sup>11</sup> The sordidness of the situation is again reflected by the appearance of the room.

As has already been shown, in "The Capital" Auden speaks of "rooms where the lonely are battered/Slowly like pebbles into fortuitous shapes,"<sup>12</sup> and George Barker writes of "Tawdry tenements and crowds of dearth."<sup>13</sup> Hugh Chisholm uses the same image when he prophesies of the future of the world:

Like the crisp whispering leaves I feel them fall  
 All over Europe, the hope all over,  
 Falling the long still miles between despair  
 And despair, from the walled inducements of the lawns  
 And past the cautious crises in the furnished rooms

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<sup>10</sup>W. C. Williams uses the room image to mirror the kind of life led by its occupants much as Eliot does; and the room described by Williams resembles that of Eliot:

Bed, book-backs, walls, floor,  
 Flat pictures, desk, clothes-box, litter  
 Of paper scrawls. So sit I here,  
 So stand, so walk about. Beside  
 The flower-white tree not so lonely I:  
 Torn petals, dew-wet, yellowed my bare ankles.  
 (1915)

"Man in a Room," Collected Poems 1921-1931 (New York, 1934), p. 130.

<sup>11</sup>"Week-end Leave," Poetry, XXX (July 1927), 201.

<sup>12</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 404.

<sup>13</sup>"Elegy," New Poems, p. 54.

And down the atrophy of hunger.<sup>14</sup>  
(c. 1941)

Once again, the image of the furnished room has been used to symbolize the hopelessness of modern urban life. Here, too, in the image of the flat, the tenement, and the furnished room, Modern Poets have developed a conventional symbol.

The same sort of conventional use apparent in the image of the streets and the furnished rooms is found in the image of modern man as a number. This also has been a popular image with the Moderns.<sup>15</sup>

Conrad Aiken uses the number image:

. . . or poured  
The zeroes one on other and destroyed  
The indestructible to create the new.<sup>16</sup>  
(1935)

W. H. Auden employs a similar image at least twice, once in "Here on the Cropped Grass" when he declares:

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<sup>14</sup>Aceldama, in New Poems, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup>Man's submergence in the world of mathematics is pictured by Allen Tate in "The Last Days of Alice":

All space, that heaven is a dayless night,  
A nightless day driven by perfect lust  
For vacancy, in which her bored eyesight  
Stares at the drowsy cubes of human dust.

We too back to the world shall never pass  
Through the shattered door, a dumb shade-harried crowd,  
Being all infinite, function depth and mass  
Without figure, a mathematical shroud.  
(1931)

Poems: 1922-1947 (New York, 1948), p. 116.

<sup>16</sup>"Blues for Ruby Matrix," New Poems, p. 30.

A digit of the crowd, would like to know  
 Them better whom the shops and trams are full of,  
 The little men and their mothers, not plain but  
 Dreadfully ugly.<sup>17</sup>

(1936)

Then he uses it again in "At the Grave of Henry James":

That its [the earth's] plural numbers may unite  
 in meaning,  
 Its vulgar tongue unravel the knotted mass.<sup>18</sup>  
 (1942)

In both instances he uses the image of man as a number to suggest the loss of personality and individuality in the modern world.<sup>19</sup>

The image of the digit, the "zero-o," crops up once more in the poetry of Gene Derwood:

Created in your image, made up of words,  
 Till words reduce you to a zero-o,  
 We, then, reflecting you, are less than birds,  
 Bugs, or empty dugs, still less than minus no.<sup>20</sup>  
 (after 1940)

Although these poets do not use exactly the same words to evoke the image of man the number, they have come so close as to make the image a conventional one in Modern Poetry.

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<sup>17</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 387.

<sup>18</sup>New Poems, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup>This complete loss of the personal element in the make-up of man is repeated when Wallace Stevens writes of armies and war:

The armies are forms in number, as cities are,  
 The armies are cities in movement. But a war  
 Between cities is a gesticulation of forms,  
 A swarming of number over number, not  
 One foot approaching, one uplifted arm.  
 (1944)

"Chocorua to Its Neighbor," The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York, 1955), p. 296.

<sup>20</sup>"With God Conversing," A Little Treasury, p. 631.

Not exactly a city image but a reflection of another aspect of modern life is the ether image in Modern Poetry. The image is used early in the century by Ezra Pound:

Slight are her arms, yet they have bound me straitly  
And left me cloaked as with a gauze of aether.<sup>21</sup>  
(1912)

Not too long after that, Eliot makes a much more famous use of the image when he begins "Prufrock":

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table.<sup>22</sup>  
(1917)

The image is repeated in the work of a minor poet, James Rorty, who writes:

Between two breaths  
Of ether, while I strove to part the veil  
That hides the blanched face of oblivion,  
I lost the Swami's secret.<sup>23</sup>  
(May 1927)

The same image of ether is still being used when William Empson asserts:

It is an ether, such an agony.  
In the thin choking air of Caucasus  
He under operation lies forever  
Smelling the chlorine in the chloroform.<sup>24</sup>  
(c. 1941)

The similarity of treatment afforded this one image by the four different poets is striking enough to be noticed.

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<sup>21</sup>"A Virginal," Chief Modern Poets, p. 685.

<sup>22</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 773.

<sup>23</sup>"Almost Eureka!" Poetry, XXX (May 1927), 86.

<sup>24</sup>"Bacchus," New Poems, p. 88.

Conventional images are to be found in other general areas of modern life. A number of the Moderns are fond of images from the realm of economics, and among many of the poets there is an astonishing degree of similarity in the images used and the tone in which they are presented. All the following quotations about merchants, bankers, and business in general exhibit a common attitude on the part of the poets toward their subject, and the images are all either the same or derived from the same basic source, the field of finance and commerce.

Eliot describes the modern merchant in The Waste Land:

Under the brown fog of a winter noon  
 Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant  
 Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants  
 C.i.f. London: documents at sight,  
 Asked me in demotic French  
 To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel  
 Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.<sup>25</sup>  
 (1922)

Clearly, in Eliot's opinion the modern man of business is not a pleasant person. Unknown and obscure poets take a similar view of the world of finance. Pat Morrisette expresses this inimical attitude toward commerce when she writes of a poor and struggling young student:

Presently he leaves . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 Outside, the electric signs are miracles, flashing in  
 mystery.  
 Taxi-drivers are gods, plunging through night.  
 News-criers are turbulent scavengers of reality,

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<sup>25</sup>A Little Treasury, p. 277.



Hawking murders for pennies, pennies for dreams.  
 He leans quietly against the cornerstone, grey, tall,  
 Of the First National Bank. 1878. He smokes.<sup>26</sup>  
 (June 1927)

In this poem the author is obviously sympathetic with the young student. His hardships are described, and then those hardships are accentuated by having him lean quietly against the front of the bank to smoke his cigarette. There is the sharp implication that something is wrong with the economic system that results in such a situation.

To return to examples from more famous poets, a use of the images of commerce similar to Eliot's permeates Pound's Cantos. In "Canto XXI," for example, he states:

And Piero called in the credits,  
 (Diotisalvi was back of that)  
 And firms failed as far off as Avignon,  
 And Piero was like to be murdered.<sup>27</sup>  
 (1928)

Here, Pound is emphasizing the power resident in the merchant, and the sure results attendant upon manipulating the economic instruments.

W. H. Auden also writes of business and banking:

Europe grew anxious about her health,  
 Combines tottered, credits froze,  
 And business shivered in a banker's winter  
 While we were kissing.<sup>28</sup>  
 (1936)

Along with these other images from finance Robinson Jeffers presents

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<sup>26</sup>"Student at Lunch," Poetry, XXX (June 1927), 149.

<sup>27</sup>Chief Modern Poets, p. 688.

<sup>28</sup>"Here on the Cropped Grass," Chief Modern Poets, p. 386.

the picture of the millionaire:

Old drunkards, worn-out lechers; fallen dictators, cast  
kings, a disgraced president; some cashiered generals  
And collapsed millionaires: we shall enact a play, I  
shall announce to the audience:  
"All will be worse confounded soon."<sup>29</sup>

And Hugh Chisholm writes of the big businessman:

. . . the Chairmen of the Boards  
Are crucified on their dynamos. The gala  
Joe can enjoy, the dollar bards,  
And the ice-box.<sup>30</sup>

(After 1940)

The use of this particular image indicates the Modern Poet's anti-materialistic stand, a deploring of the loss of the spiritual, and a strong distrust of money and the way money influences and controls modern life. This conventional use of the complex of images about commerce, industry, and banking can in large part be called merely a standardization of an attitude toward commerce and finance; nevertheless, many Modern Poets do use the images from this general area of modern life with a high degree of agreement.

The examination of images and symbols from Modern Poetry concludes with this chapter. It becomes apparent now that the Moderns, in compliance with their insistence on originality, did introduce some images into poetry, though, based on the number of examples found in the poems selected for this study, relatively few when compared to the number retained or adapted from traditional sources. It becomes just as apparent, however, that even those new images have become

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<sup>29</sup>"I Shall Laugh Purely," A Little Treasury, p. 267.

<sup>30</sup>Aceldama, in New Poems, p. 69.

conventional symbols for ideas common to the group. These conventional symbols plus the ones examined in the two preceding chapters represent an extensive list of images that Modern Poets use with a high degree of agreement. The existence of such an extensive list of conventional images provides grounds for a reassessment of Modern Poetry and its aims. It seems now that both the opponents and proponents of Modern Poetry must modify their claims. The close agreement in symbolism noted in the last three chapters of this study suggests that the opponents of Modern Poetry may have exaggerated their charges of obscurity resulting from too-personal images. That same agreement, however, indicates that the proponents and practitioners of Modern Poetry have exaggerated equally, or have used up, the great originality they advanced as one of the chief virtues of the new movement.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

Any review of the conclusions reached in this study must be made in the light of the limited selection of the material and the proposed scope of the investigation as set forth in Chapter I. These conclusions about Modern Poetry are based on an examination of approximately 1500 poems contained in Volumes I, II, XXX, and XXXI of Poetry magazine and in the three anthologies referred to throughout the text: Chief Modern Poets of England and America; A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry; and New Poems, 1942. Such a selection is wide enough and extends over a sufficient period of time to be representative of Modern Poetry when it is defined as poetry written after 1912, a date selected because of its significance as the year in which Poetry magazine was first published. This selection of poems has been examined to determine whether Modern Poetry, as here represented, contains conventional elements, either retained from earlier traditions or originated by a Modern Poet and crystallized into conventions by others. No attempt has been made to seek out the originator of a given convention or to distinguish imitators of leading poets from followers of a convention already established; widespread use of a similar image by a variety of poets throughout the period has been considered sufficient evidence for the assumption that the practice goes beyond mere imitation. For the purpose of this study, then, examples from the poems of major and minor poets are considered to be of equal significance in determining the

existence of conventions. Although material is selected that assures representation from four decades within the first half of the twentieth century, the primary emphasis throughout the study has been on the period as a whole rather than its parts. For instance, no attempt is made to determine the relative frequency of certain images or practices in earlier and later volumes of Poetry magazine. In the course of the study, however, implications about frequency of usage, originality, and individuality suggest themselves.

According to the cycle theory of literature, especially as elucidated by John Livingston Lowes, poetry tends to progress through a series of revolts against too-rigid conventions that have themselves developed after earlier reactions against other conventions. This tendency is clearly illustrated by the revolt of the Romantic Poets against eighteenth-century conventions. Modern Poetry proves no exception to the cycle theory. It began as one of these periodic revolts against the conventions of a preceding age and has developed significant conventions of its own.

Beginning with the Romantic revolt against eighteenth-century conventions, the nineteenth-century poets gradually developed their own conventional approach to poetry and eventually arrived at the concept of the poetic subject and the poetic style. In this convention the poet was a seer and prophet whose role was to reveal philosophical and moral truth to Man. His purpose demanded a certain class of subject matter—abstract, lofty, sublime, ideal; and the subject matter in turn demanded an elevated, grand diction. The Moderns revolted against both

the notion of the proper poetic subject and the notion of poetic language. They expressed impatience with the derivativeness of the Victorians and asserted that they would be fresh and original in their subject matter and language. Originality became the watchword of the new poetry.

Examination reveals that the innovations of the Moderns in their attempts to achieve originality and freshness have become so widely used that they, too, have developed into conventions. Generally, the conventions that have developed in twentieth-century poetry can be ascribed to three influences: 1) the search for the fresh and new; 2) the Zeitgeist; and 3) the specialized audience of Modern Poetry.

In their search for the fresh and new the Moderns have introduced to poetry new subjects from modern life. They write about the modern city, factories, motors, and mechanics; they make modern cities, with their machines and complexities, subjects for poetry. This new subject matter demands a new vocabulary, for to describe the urban modern scene the poet must use modern terms. Since in the Moderns' view no subject should be excluded from poetry, no word that is appropriate to any particular subject can be excluded; thus, the use of a modern, colloquial vocabulary becomes widespread among the poets of the Twentieth Century.

The Moderns' search for the fresh and new takes them beyond the confines of subject and vocabulary. They also attack traditional metrics, and freedom from older traditional forms has become a characteristic of Modern Poetry. The twentieth-century poets indulge in metrical

experiments involving line length, word order, and verse form until the experimentation itself becomes a hallmark of Modern Poetry.

The syntax of Modern Poetry also shows the result of the Moderns' search for the fresh and the new. Modern Poets consistently sacrifice conventional word order and grammar when they believe greater power can be achieved through ignoring them. In their syntactic practices the Moderns can be divided into two groups. One group, going back to the symbolist tradition, uses the arrangement of images to present its feelings and ideas. This group depends primarily on associations among the meanings of its images and symbols for the expression of its ideas. The other group writes in a conversational manner that at first glance seems not far removed from the older, traditional manner of writing poetry. The writers in this conversational tradition, emphasizing what Donald Davie calls "pure" diction, compose in the smooth grammar of logical discourse and seem to have little in common with the writers in the symbolist tradition. Upon closer examination, however, the poetry written by this second group reveals embedded within the conversational framework images and image clusters that are used in a manner characteristic of the poetry produced by the group writing in the symbolist tradition. Not infrequently, too, poets move freely within either tradition, sometimes combining them whenever they see fit.

All these contributions of the Modern Poets in subject matter, vocabulary, and metrical and syntactical experimentation have been introduced in the course of their search for the fresh and new; but

those innovations have become so widely used that they can justifiably be called conventions.

The same impulse to find the fresh and the new has encouraged the Moderns to use the symbol throughout Modern Poetry, and this extensive use of symbolism has become conventional. The Moderns have reached the conclusion that emotions can be adequately expressed only through concrete representations, or what T. S. Eliot calls "objective correlatives." Modern Poets, therefore, insist that images should have meaning and should be more than mere decorations and ornaments. The result of this insistence can be seen in the Moderns' treatment of nature images as opposed to that of earlier poets. The Moderns demand that nature images play an active and significant part in their poems rather than be, as they believe such images were for earlier poets, just a series of images presented to the reader for admiration and comparison. The Moderns use nature images to present ideas symbolically, and frequently take the attitude that nature is unfriendly and ominous, in contrast to the earlier nineteenth-century conception of nature as beneficent.

What the Moderns demand of nature images they demand of images from all areas of experience and endeavor. An image justifies its presence in a poem only by functioning actively to contribute meaning. The Modern Poet's acceptance of the idea of the objective correlative has led him to employ symbols so extensively that their use has become conventional in twentieth-century poetry.

Other conventions have developed in Modern Poetry primarily as a result of the Zeitgeist and the special audience of Modern Poetry.



Every writer must be influenced to some extent by the Zeitgeist within which he writes, and again the Modern Poets are no exceptions. The Modern Poets' world is dominated by science and conflicts involving science, and their Zeitgeist is characterized by uncertainty and conflict between science and religion. In addition to inheriting many of the social problems and complexities of the nineteenth century, the twentieth-century poets have experienced two catastrophic world conflicts, resulting in a deeper disillusionment and cynicism. The pervasive influence of science in modern life has caused many Modern Poets to adopt the objective and detached tone of the pure observer in their writing. The disillusionment and cynicism of Modern Poets are reflected in the widespread presence of the serio-comic tone in their poetry. The Modern tries to avoid becoming involved personally in what he is writing. He uses tonal understatement and refuses to give way to emotion.

A third great shaping influence on the conventions of Modern Poetry is the highly specialized audience to which that poetry has been addressed. The poets have been intellectual, serious about the art of poetry, and absorbed in aesthetic theory and doctrine; and they assume the same characteristics in their audience. Confident that their audience is one of marked intellectual achievements and interests, Modern Poets allude freely to material from literature, history, philosophy, art, and science. This allusiveness of their poetry is one of the chief causes of the charges of obscurity levelled at the Modern Poets by their critics. Among the major poets of the period, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound use this technique of allusiveness, and the use of

allusiveness among poets of slighter stature is so widespread that the practice may properly be termed a convention of Modern Poetry.

Despite the Moderns' own assertions of originality and the attacks made on them for too-personal, and therefore obscure, symbolism, this study shows that Modern Poetry includes a large body of images that have conventional symbolic values. The images examined in Chapter VI represent examples of the Moderns' conventional use of archetypal images. Numerous Modern Poets arrive at agreement in the use of water to represent spiritual solace and spring to stand for rebirth and regeneration. Similarly, they employ extensively the images of snow and ice, hills and mountains, the sun, the moon, the stars, and leaves in a conventional manner reminiscent of earlier poets.

An examination of Modern Poetry also reveals non-archetypal images which have been adapted by the Moderns from previous poetry and used with conventional symbolic values. Twelve different images, including trees, rocks, old people, youths, eyes, birds in general, birds of prey, jungle cats, fish, the crab, and the colors green, gray, and gold, are used conventionally and with standardized meanings by the poets represented in the poems studied.

Some images original to Modern Poetry also come to be used conventionally and with standardized symbolic meanings. The poems examined reveal relatively few images original to Modern Poetry, surprisingly few, perhaps, for a movement which took as its watchword originality. Among these, the following have crystallized into conventional images: city streets to symbolize loneliness, furnished rooms to reflect the

lives of their inhabitants, and the comparing of man to a number to emphasize his loss of personality. The Moderns have also used images of ether and of the modern business world conventionally.

As a result of the correspondences in the symbolic values among the images examined in this study, certain attitudes about Modern Poetry must be modified. For one thing, it appears that complaints of obscurity arising from too-personal systems of symbolism have been exaggerated. At the same time, the Moderns' own assertions of originality seem to have been at least equally exaggerated, for not only do they share the conventional use of a number of images, but they have also borrowed extensively from the poetry of earlier periods in building up their body of conventional images.

Modern Poetry can now be seen to have developed certain conventions relating both to the composition of poetry and to images used in that poetry. It should be apparent that the history of Modern Poetry has repeated the history of all its literary forerunners. The movement begins as a revolt against rigid conventions that were themselves the end result of the Romantic Poets' revolt against rigid eighteenth-century conventions. Now the Moderns' revolt against this end result has run its course and developed conventions of its own. If the past is accepted as a reliable guide to the future, a new poetic revolt against the conventions of Modern Poetry can be expected.

The implications of the findings of this study extend beyond the conclusions permitted by the limits and scope of the investigation. The method employed in the study emphasizes the appearance of

conventions in their persistency throughout the period as a whole. The study has shown that much of the matter of Modern Poetry and the techniques by which that matter is presented can justifiably be called conventional. No direct attempt is made to show the point at which various practices and images studied crystallized into convention, nor is there any direct comparison of the frequency of appearance of conventions in various portions of the period under discussion. Certain inferences as to the time of crystallization and as to the relative frequency of the conventions studied can be derived, however, from the materials cited in this study. These materials suggest an increased standardization in the manner of writing from the beginnings of the movement about 1912 to the middle of the Twenties. The poems cited from the 1927 issues of Poetry, for example, exhibit in a fully crystallized form almost all the conventions discussed as characteristic of the period as a whole. T. S. Eliot's importance as a pervading influence on the period also becomes clear through a study of these examples. Almost all the elements of convention discussed individually, with the exception of extreme eccentricity in versification, appear successfully synthesized in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, and it is significant that illustrative citations to his poetry far outnumber those from any other poet. It is also significant that the standardization observed in the Twenties is almost concurrent with the rise of Eliot into a position of leadership in the poetry of the first half of the twentieth century, and it seems likely that one of Eliot's most important creative functions in Modern Poetry was to effect the synthesis of existent elements into a poetry

recognizable as a distinct type. At any rate, from the period of Eliot's first rise to fame with the appearance of "Prufrock" in 1917 and The Waste Land in 1922 the form, manner, and content of Modern Poetry assume a striking degree of standardization; and few changes in subject matter, technique, or imagery can be observed in the samples used in this study from the Thirties and Forties when they are compared with those from the Twenties.

Certain other important distinctions of interest to the literary critic are blurred by the lumping together of such poets as William Butler Yeats and T. S. Eliot on the one hand and Madison Cawein and James Rorty on the other. The suggestion from numerous examples in the material examined is that sound distinctions may be made in the literary merit of individual poets on the basis of the degree of originality they reveal in their images and composition. A comparison of the images examined in this limited selection, for example, corroborates the general opinion that Yeats is immeasurably more original than, say, Madison Cawein, and that T. S. Eliot invents symbols that become the common property of his followers. On the other hand, a new evaluation of the work of other poets (Allen Tate, perhaps, whose poetry appears to be more derivative than previously suspected) along lines suggested by this study might well result in a realignment of poets in the Modern hierarchy. No definite judgments of this nature are warranted, however, on the basis of a general study of this sort. Only complete and thorough investigations of individual poets in relation to the poetry of the period as a whole can determine with any degree of certainty

whether some poets are especially prone to imitation and whether the ranking of minor poets as minor can be explained by such imitation. Obviously, such studies would be of inestimable value to literary criticism. As it is, this dissertation will have accomplished its purpose if it has prepared the way for such specialized studies by establishing the fact that Modern Poetry has run its course of revolt and has developed conventions of its own.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

A LIST OF POEMS CITED IN THE  
TEXT OF THIS STUDY

This list includes only those poems actually cited in the text from among approximately fifteen hundred examined. The poems have been arranged alphabetically by authors. It should not be assumed that the examples of standardization found in the study group are exhausted in the poems cited in the study. These poems merely afford the most obvious examples to illustrate the points being made. In some instances, examples of standardizations could have been multiplied, but such multiplication would have served little purpose other than to increase the length of the work.

Aiken, Conrad	Taller Today, We Remember
Blues for Ruby Matrix	Barker, George
Six Sonnets	Elegy
Watch Long Enough and	Epistle (to D. T.)
You Will See	Munich Elegy No. 1
Aldington, Richard	O Golden Fleece She Is
XOPIKOS (Choricos)	Benét, Laura
Auden, W. H.	Who Looks on Beauty
At the Grave of Henry	Bishop, Elizabeth
James	The Fish
The Capital	Bowers, Mildred
Doom Is Dark	Idyl
Epilogue	Britten, Rollo
Here on the Cropped	Bird of Passion
Grass	
In Memory of W. B.	
Yeats	
Now the Leaves Are	
Falling Fast	

## Appendix

- |                             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Broadus, Edmund Kemper      | No Snake in Springtime       |
| The Oracle                  | Conkling, Grace Hazard       |
| Burton, Richard             | Symphony of a Mexican Garden |
| An Impression               | Corbin, Alice                |
| Buzzell, Francis            | Nodes                        |
| Dancing to a Chewink's Song | The Star                     |
| Bynner, Witter              | Crane, Hart                  |
| Apollo Troubadour           | Atlantis                     |
| Twilight I-III              | Chaplinesque                 |
| The Mystic                  | For the Marriage of          |
| Passing Near                | Faustus and Helen (III)      |
| Cannell, Skipwith           | North Labrador               |
| Poems in Prose and Verse    | O Carib Isle                 |
| II. The Eagle               | To Brooklyn Bridge           |
| V. The Mountains            | from "Voyages" I, V, VI      |
| Cavin, Miriam               | Cummings, E. E.              |
| Wondering                   | As Freedom Is a Break-       |
| Cawein, Madison             | fastfood                     |
| Wasteland                   | Pity this Busy Monster       |
| Chase, Polly                | Manunkind                    |
| Fall of Leaves              | D., H. (Doolittle, Hilda)    |
| Fall of Snow                | Halcyon                      |
| Form                        | Verses, Translations, and    |
| Chisholm, Hugh              | Reflections from "The        |
| <u>Aceldama</u>             | Anthology"                   |
| Coatsworth, Elizabeth J.    | Davis, Fannie Stearns        |
| Easter Rains at Taos        | Conn the Fool                |
|                             | Profits                      |
|                             | De La Mare, Walter           |
|                             | Forests                      |
|                             | Derwood, Gene                |
|                             | In the Proscenium            |

## Appendix

Derwood, Gene (cont.)

With God Conversing

Eberhart, Richard

Hand View

On Shooting Particles  
Beyond the World

Eliot, T. S.

Ash Wednesday  
Burnt Norton  
Gerontion  
The Hollow Men  
The Love Song of  
J. Alfred Prufrock  
Morning at the  
Window  
Preludes  
Sweeney Among the  
Nightingales  
The Waste Land

Empson, William

Bacchus

Fearing, Kenneth

Caricature of Felix  
Ricarro  
The City Takes a Woman  
Lullaby  
Old Men

Ficke, Arthur Davison

Poetry  
Portrait of an Old  
Woman  
Swinburne, An Elegy  
To a Child -- Twenty  
Years Hence

Flanner, Hildegard

A Bird Sings at Night  
The Rain

Fletcher, John Gould

The Caged Eagle

Flexner, Hortense

Adopted Son

Flint, F. S.

Four Poems in Unrhymed  
Cadence

Frank, Florence K.

Prairie Night

Fraser, G. S.

Rostov

Frost, Robert

Desert Places  
Two Tramps in Mud Time

Fuller, Roy

January 1940

Garrigue, Jean

Forest

George, Legaré

Four Poems

Ghiselin, Brewster

To the South

## Appendix

- |                                  |                                       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Gibson, Wilfrid                  | Keyes, Sidney                         |
| The Dark Forest                  | The Wilderness                        |
| Sea-Change                       | Kinsolving, Sally Bruce               |
| Gorman, Herbert                  | Surprise                              |
| Worldlings                       | Knevels, Mary Eastwood                |
| Graves, Alfred Perceval          | Rocks                                 |
| The Sea-Singer                   | Stone Walls                           |
| Graves, Robert                   | Lawrence, D. H.                       |
| The Cool Web                     | Humming Bird                          |
| Hieronymus, R. E.                | Snake                                 |
| To a Steam Turbine-<br>Generator | LeCron, Helen Cowles                  |
| Holmes, John A.                  | The Wife                              |
| Peter at His Mirror              | Lewis, C. Day                         |
| Hopkins, Gerard Manley           | Do Not Expect Again a<br>Phoenix Hour |
| The Caged Skylark                | Lewis, May                            |
| The Windhover                    | Charity                               |
| Hoyt, Helen                      | Lindsay, Nicholas Vachel              |
| Ellis Park                       | Factory Windows Are Always<br>Broken  |
| Jarrell, Randall                 | Long, Lily A.                         |
| 90 North                         | The Singing Place                     |
| Jeffers, Robinson                | Lorimer, Emilia Stuart                |
| Fire on the Hills                | Fish of the Flood                     |
| Hurt Hawks                       | Lowell, Amy                           |
| I Shall Laugh                    | A Blockhead                           |
| Purely                           | Apology                               |
| Meditation on                    |                                       |
| Saviours                         |                                       |
| The Stars Go Over the            |                                       |
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| You, Andrew Marvell   | The Hill Flowers           |
| Manning, Frederic     | Owen, Wilfred              |
| Simaetha              | Strange Meeting            |
| Manning-Sanders, Ruth | Pound, Ezra                |
| Away                  | A Virginal                 |
| McCoy, Samuel         | Canto XXI                  |
| Dirge for a Dead      | Canto XLV                  |
| Admiral               | Commission                 |
| Mitalsky, Frank       | Salutation                 |
| Angles                | Hugh Selwyn Mauberley      |
| Girl in Green         | Mauberley 1920             |
| Monroe, Harriet       | Ransom, John Crowe         |
| Mother Earth          | Blue Girls                 |
| Moore, Marianne       | Rhys, Ernest               |
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| Morris, Harrison S.   | Richardson, Dorothy M.     |
| Pontifex Maximus      | Message                    |
| Morrisette, Pat       | Robinson, E. A.            |
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| Young Scholar         | Rodker, John               |
| Student at Lunch      | Lines to an Etruscan Tomb  |
| Muir, Edwin           | Rorty, James               |
| The Grove             | Almost Eureka              |
| Newton, Katherine     | Boy and Gull               |
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|                       | For the One Who Would Take |
|                       | Man's Life in His Hands    |

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     Tired and Unhappy
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- Smith, Clark Ashton  
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     Sorrowing of Winds
- Spencer, Theodore  
     Progress
- Spender, Stephen  
     After They Have Tired
- Stearn, Noel H.  
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- Stevens, Wallace  
     An Extract  
     Peter Quince at the  
     Clavier  
     So-and-so Reclining  
     on Her Couch  
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Love and the Bird  
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Ignorance