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'Disembodied Bones':
Recovering the Poetry and Prose of Elinor Wylie

by
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Picking a book to read is like diving for a pearl, writes Elinor Wylie, a 20th-Century American poet, novelist, essayist and prominent magazine literary editor. In her essay “The Pearl Diver,” she writes that it is the diver that risks the unknown — unaided by diving equipment in the form of library indexes — who gains the greatest joy, Wylie states (*Fugitive Prose*, 869). Wylie explains:

I venture to perceive an analogy between the rebellious pearl diver and myself, in my slight experience with public libraries ... how much more delightful, how much more stimulating, to abandon the paraphernalia of card indexes and mahogany desks and slip unhampered into cool water; to snatch in the middle of a bursting breath the adventurous jewel or antique coin upon which one's fingers chance to fall! 869

Today, it would take an unaided dive into the depths of the literary shoals that sank precious artworks to find the four novels and four poetry volumes Wylie gave the world in eight shining years.

It was a Providential, “unaided dive” that brought me to Wylie’s jewels. I was perusing the free book tables in SUNY Cortland’s English Department when I stumbled across the 1996 edition of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* and clutched it as my very own. Later, I was looking through the anthology for a work by a different author when I stumbled upon Wylie’s “Let No Charitable Hope,” (1387). Here, in this poem, was the lived reality of womanhood. I marked the passage with a flashcard from my French class and came back to the author for my thesis.

By this time I had read much more of Wylie’s poetry and prose and conducted an informal survey of my professors: Wylie’s lyrical creations were unheard of and

unknown. Here was a writer — a contemporary of Robert Frost and Ernest Hemingway — who wrote of nature's grace like Frost, adhered to style and allegory as strictly as Hemingway, and used masterful technique to elucidate the same themes of rugged individualism and the futility of war. With Wylie I had taken an unaided dive and found a pearl.

Why read Elinor Wylie?

All human knowledge — including writing — faces a very human dilemma: it was created by an individual who lived in a certain time, place and culture, and those realities create a perspective that infuses the creations. The Metropolitan Museum of Art illustrates this reality with the plethora of artworks it curates that all depict the four seasons by different artists in different cultures at different times in human history. If the knowledge of the seasons was encapsulated in one artwork The Met would not need to own both Japanese hanging scrolls by the 16th-Century, Japanese artist Keison entitled *Landscapes of the Four Seasons* and hanging tapestries entitled *Seasons and Elements* attributed to Charles Le Brun, a 17th Century Parisian. These artists are exhibiting what literary critic and theorist Donna Harraw calls “situated knowledge.”

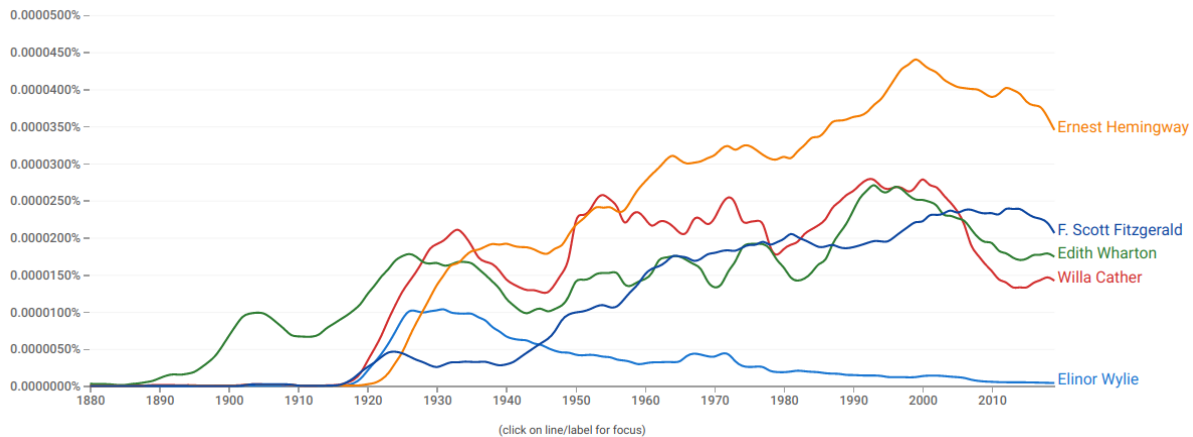
In her Autumn 1988 “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” in *Feminist Studies*, Harraway explains her vision, which she calls “feminist objectivity,” for scholars to acknowledge their specific perspective in their creations. “Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object,” Harraway writes. “It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see,” (583) But to have “situated knowledges” — that is a plethora of perspectives contributed by multiple

creators in different cultures and centuries — then creations by women and minority must be studied for the wisdoms they also contribute to English literature and many other fields.

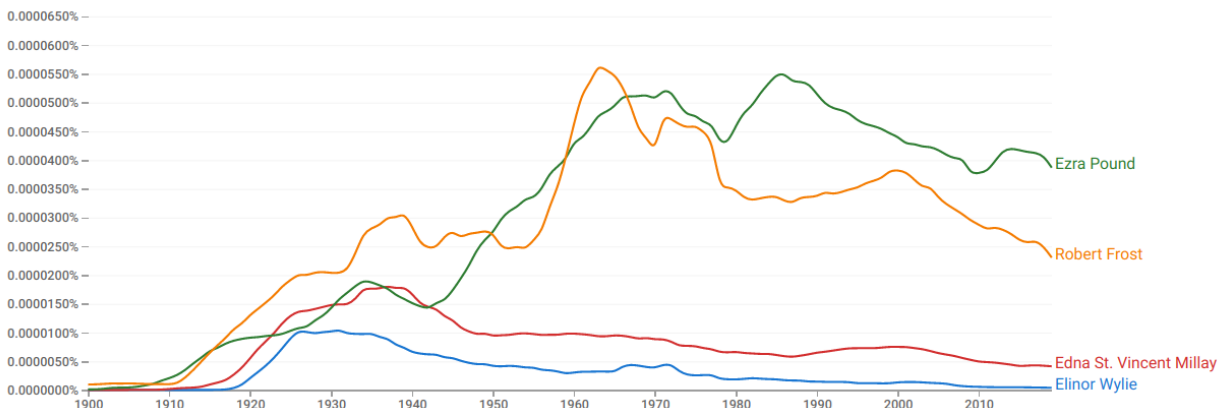
Despite many more college courses in postcolonialism, gender studies, race, sexuality, and indigenous peoples — and the artworks all these groups contribute — the most commonly assigned poets in college English literature courses are still dead white men. In its analysis of 427,545 of English Literature syllabi, the Open Syllabus Project listed only 22 poets in the top 100 assigned readings among college students across the world — and all of them were men, white and dead (17 April 2021). Some of them — such as Homer — have been dead for millenia. Recovering the voice of a woman poet, such as the award-winning poetic voice of Elinor Wylie, allows for greater understanding and cultural diffusion among scholars and readers generally. Women have always been at the heart of these ways and words: the first named author (currently) known to history was a poetess, princess and priestess called Enheduanna who served for 40 years around 2,300 B.C.E. in a temple in Ur, a city in Sumer that is known today as Tell al-Muqayyar, Iraq (De Shong Meador, 6).

Just as the world's first known poems were written by a woman, so too was the world's first novel: Murasaki Shikibu wrote her epic novel *The Tale of Genji* 1,000 years ago in Japan (BBC Culture). It would be more than 600 hundred years before Daniel Defoe would publish *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, considered the first English novel (Mullan). In this category, collegiate English Literature syllabi are more gender balanced as 12 of the 25 novels listed in the top 100 assigned readings were written by women, according to the Open Syllabus Project. But Wylie's four novels, and the writings of

Pulitzer Prize-winning novelists Willa Cather and Edith Wharton, remain neglected compared to their contemporaries Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald — despite the women’s initially greater popularity, according to Google Ngram.



The gender disparity in the reception of Elinor Wylie and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Edna St. Vincent Millay and their male contemporaries, Ezra Pound and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Robert Frost is downright discouraging in the Google Ngram:



At the heights of their respective poetic careers, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Elinor Wylie were received with equal enthusiasm as Ezra Pound, but never the reverence afforded to Robert Frost.

While the Ngrams reveal the readership and scholarship lost to female writers, it cannot show what could be gained by the reading and studying of women authors. And

there was something Elinor Wylie's avid contemporary readers gained through her poems, novels and essays — pleasure. "Her work ... had the seal of loveliness upon it," wrote *The Saturday Review of Literature* in a blurb for the 1932 *Collected Poems of Elinor Wylie*, "and a perfection like those Egyptian crowns whose fragile but enduring beauty preserves the fine essence of a life proudly lived more surely than the pyramids." Her work also has an enduring power that led to its inclusion in a 1999 anthology. "Taste is perhaps more kin to opinion than it is to thought," writes professor and poet Allen Mandelbaum in his introduction to *Three Centuries of American Poetry*, which includes two of Wylie's poems. "But we have tried to think through the vicissitudes of taste and to ingather poetic speech that conjures the speaker in a way that reaches us today. We have sought those words that ask to be read aloud." Despite modern poetry's and prose's rebellion against conventional form, there is an inner strength in Elinor Wylie's works that transcends literary theory and connects with the human reader on the other side of her iambic, metered, rhyming lines.

THE POEMS: Wylie's & Frost's Themes

Robert Frost's and Elinor Wylie's careers would follow similar paths during the World War I era and its immediate aftermath. Both executed tactical retreats to England where they found their first poetry volumes published; both would return to America fleeing the outbreak of The Great War. Frost, who was older than Wylie by 11 years, published his first American volume, *Mountain Interval*, in 1916 followed by his Pulitzer Prize-winning *New Hampshire* in 1923 (Britannica, "Robert Frost"). Wylie's first

American and commercial poetry volume *Nets to Catch the Wind* was published in 1921 to critical acclaim (Britannica, "Elinor Wylie").

Like other members of the lost generation, the poems of Frost and Wylie were deeply affected by the loss of human life, suffering, ecological destruction, societal hypocrisy, inhumanity and ultimate futility of The War to End All Wars. These themes are embedded in many poems, although their existence is not always obvious to modern readers enjoying the poets' stanzas a century later. But some themes, such as the value of turning from the pressure of society to follow one's own path, are still obvious in poems such as "The Eagle and The Mole" and "The Road Not Taken."

In Wylie's "The Eagle and The Mole," the poem's speaker urges the reader to abstain from society's hatred and corruption by rising above it all like an eagle or burying one's self away in contemplation, like a mole. Wylie writes in *Nets to Catch the Wind*:

Avoid the reeking herd,
Shun the polluted flock,
Live like that stoic bird,
The eagle of the rock.

The huddled warmth of crowds
Begets and fosters hate;
He keeps above the clouds,
His cliff inviolate.

When flocks are folded warm,
And herds to shelter run,
He sails above the storm,
He stares into the sun.

If in the eagle's track
Your sinews cannot leap,

Avoid the lathered pack,
Turn from the steaming sheep.

If you would keep your soul
From spotted sight or sound,
Live like the velvet mole:
Go burrow underground.

And there hold intercourse
With roots of trees and stones,
With rivers at their source,
And disembodied bones.

There is more than admiration of the natural world, and eagles and moles, in this poem: there is an indictment of the “huddled warmth of crowds” that “begets and fosters hate.” Stoic eagles — those who opted to live outside and above society’s endless, grinding mechanism — are lifted above the storms of life, such as war, and find their own life in the sun. But the poetic speaker acknowledges the immense strength it requires to live apart; the speaker offers another avenue “if you would keep your soul”: hide from society and bury oneself in quiet contemplation. Through an intellectual life that includes communion with nature, and seeking knowledge from “roots of trees and stones” and “rivers at their source,” one can gain wisdom. And there is another source of enlightenment: the “disembodied bones,” perhaps of society’s unknown soldiers put to rest in war graves, that testify to the preciousness of life and the consequences of death.

Likewise, Frost takes up the theme of self-reliance and avoiding society’s well-worn paths in “The Road Not Taken.” Frost writes in *Mountain Interval*:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

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

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

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

The speaker famously takes “the one less traveled by” when confronted with a choice of paths to take; the poem states the way not taken by society’s majority has “perhaps the better claim” and that taking this untaken path “has made all the difference.” The verse exudes the beauty of an independent spirit and the adventurous, divergent attitude.

Total war and the end of the world are the sober themes of Wylie’s “Fire and Sleet and Candlelight” in *Nets to Catch the Wind* and Frost’s “Fire and Ice” in *New Hampshire*. While Frost’s poem is appreciably shorter, both explore the various hatreds and ways the Earth could ultimately fall apart. The Wylie writes:

For this you've striven
Daring, to fail:

Your sky is riven
Like a tearing veil.

For this, you've wasted
Wings of your youth;
Divined, and tasted
Bitter springs of truth.

From sand unslaked
Twisted strong cords,
And wandered naked
Among trysted swords.

There's a word unspoken,
A knot untied.
Whatever is broken
The earth may hide.

The road was jagged
Over sharp stones:
Your body's too ragged
To cover your bones.

The wind scatters
Tears upon dust;
Your soul's in tatters
Where the spears thrust.

Your race is ended--
See, it is run:
Nothing is mended
Under the sun.

Straight as an arrow
You fall to a sleep
Not too narrow
And not too deep

In "Fire and Ice," Frost writes:

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

The apocalypse is the theme of both poems. Wylie references the Bible's prophetic Book of Revelation when the speaker states "your sky is riven"; the sixth chapter of the Bible's book of the end of time states in verse 14 that "the sky split apart" (NASB). Frost explicitly sets the theme, writing, "Some say the world will end in fire." From the beginning, both poems contemplate the end.

Defeated desire is the next destination for both poems. Wylie writes "you've wasted/Wings of your youth" and Frost states "From what I've tasted of desire/I hold with those who favor fire." Futile striving is the impetus that leads to the Earth's final destruction.

Wylie ruminates on war clearly as a harbinger of the end, referencing one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in Revelation. Chapter 6 verse 4 of Revelation states, "And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that people would kill one another; and a large sword was given to him" (NASB). This personification of divine judgement represents "War" (Britannica, "Four horsemen of the apocalypse"). The speaker in Wylie's poem cites a weapon of warfare as the tool of the listener's demise: "Your soul's in tatters/Where the spears thrust." War wounds both body and spirit as it spreads destruction in Wylie's poem.

In Frost's poem, the reader encounters the world ending either through fire or through ice. Both fire — in the form of the first widely used flamethrowers — and ice —

in the form of hypothermic wounded soldiers — caused traumatic deaths during The Great War. While Frost fled London a year after the outbreak of WWI, returning to then-neutral America with his family at the age of 41, the war was widely covered by American journalists for U.S. papers (Dobbs). The horrific deaths and injuries of a generation across the globe would have been well known to Frost before he published “Fire and Ice” in *Harper’s Magazine* in December 1920, a mere two years after the end of WWI.

Frost first envisions the world ending in flames: “Some say the world will end in fire/...I hold with those who favor fire.” The flamethrowers of The Great War helped create hell on Earth for millions of soldiers. Van Wyk writes for the *Military Medical Research* journal in 2020:

While the use of fire in warfare has existed since approximately 424 BC when the Greeks created the first flamethrower, it was not until World War I (WWI) that flame warfare was adapted for use by soldiers in a portable fashion. The Germans developed the first man-portable flamethrowers and flame warfare tactics, and other nations soon followed suit.

An unclassified U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command written on March 15, 1985 studied how novel weapons, including the flamethrower, affected the psychology of soldiers during WWI and found fire was particularly horrific for combatants. “Disfigurement of the wounded and killed by a weapon seems to be an especially horror-evoking characteristic of the weapon, and fire seems to be inherently frightening, apart from its lethality and apart from the novelty of the flamethrower when it was first introduced,” the report investigators found, (Hammer et al.). Considering

WWI cost about 20 million lives, the view that the world would end in fire is understandable (Census Bureau, Reperes Report).

Ice — or hypothermia and frostbite — and resulting illnesses likely cost more lives than bullets took in WWI. The Allies lost 9,386,453 soldiers and civilians; “most of the casualties during WWI are due to war related famine and disease,” (Census Bureau, Reperes Report). Returning American soldiers — including Priv. 1st Class Matthew R. Tibby and Sgt. Herbert Young who spoke about their experience to *Life* magazine in 1997 — recounted the horrors of the frigid winters and their death toll. Tibby stated:

The winter of 1917 was a son-of-a-gun, very hard on the American Army. A lot of our boys died from the flu; we lost two in our outfit. And the cold made it hard to do our work — pitching tents, building depots, barracks. In the morning, everything was frozen. By noon, it was mud. M-U-D. Terrible.

Cold and death walked hand in hand during the war, stated Young. He told *Life*:

Lost a lot of friends in those fights, or from sickness — the wet and cold did it — or from being gassed.

The frigid conditions, such as those the soldiers recount, have a vicious affect on combat wounds. Wang & Han explain, “...low temperatures often aggravate existing trauma, leading to high mortality rates if rapid and appropriate treatment is not provided. Hypothermia is an independent risk factor of fatality following combat trauma...” (Military Medical Research). Cold ice is as deadly, if not more deadly, than weapons.

Frost elucidates the deadliness of ice and hate in his poem: “I know enough of hate/To say that for destruction ice/Is also great...” Frost ends with the grim conclusion that to end the world, ice “would suffice.”

Both Wylie and Frost also reflected on the goodness of nature that ultimately cannot last in such a flawed world. In Wylie's "The Fairy Goldsmith" and Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay," each commented on the fleeting wonders of the Earth. Once again, Wylie writes more stanzas than Frost, but both list the "gold" of nature, its value and transient nature, and its destiny of destruction. In *Nets to Catch the Wind*, Elinor Wylie writes:

Here's a wonderful thing,
A humming-bird's wing
In hammered gold,
And store well chosen
Of snowflakes frozen
In crystal cold.

Black onyx cherries
And mistletoe berries
Of chrysoprase,
Jade buds, tight shut,
All carven and cut
In intricate ways.

Here, if you please
Are little gilt bees
In amber drops
Which look like honey,
Translucent and sunny,
From clover-tops.

Here's an elfin girl
Of mother-of-pearl
And moonshine made,
With tortoise-shell hair
Both dusky and fair
In its light and shade.

Here's lacquer laid thin,
Like a scarlet skin
On an ivory fruit;
And a filigree frost

Of frail notes lost
From a fairy lute.

Here's a turquoise chain
Of sun-shower rain
To wear if you wish;
And glimmering green
With aquamarine,
A silvery fish.

Here are pearls all strung
On a thread among
Pretty pink shells;
And bubbles blown
From the opal stone
Which ring like bells.

Touch them and take them,
But do not break them!
Beneath your hand
They will wither like foam
If you carry them home
Out of fairy-land.

O, they never can last
Though you hide them fast
From moth and from rust;
In your monstrous day
They will crumble away
Into quicksilver dust.

In *New Hampshire*, Frost writes:

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Beginning with "Here's a wonderful thing,/A humming-bird's wing/In hammered gold,"

Wylie's poem values nature's beauty, comparing animals, a girl and rain to a string of

precious stones and minerals. But the speaker has a stark warning: do not hold on to these cherished treasures because they will perish in a harrowing world. Wylie writes, “O, they never can last/though you hide them fast...” It is the dangerous world that spawned WWI that will destroy all that is beautiful: “In your monstrous day/they will crumble away.”

In similar words, Frost’s poet places the ultimate value on nature’s tender shoots: “Nature’s first green is gold.” But his speaker also warns that this precious treasure cannot last in a perishing world, calling the leaves nature’s “hardest hue to hold.” Just as Eden fell under the weight of sin into death, the worthy beauty of the world must ultimately die, like the setting sun: “So dawn goes down to day/Nothing gold can stay.” All that is good and gold falls to evil and lead when left out in the real world of both poems.

THE POEMS: Wylie’s & Frost’s Themes

In a July 4, 1913 letter to John T. Bartlett, Frost expounds how euphony — what he describes as “the sound of sense” — is essential to exceptional poetry. Frost writes, “It is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound — pure form. One who concerns himself with it more than the subject is an artist” (665). Frost does not shy from the classic concerns of rhyme, alliteration and meter or seek a modernist perspective that ignores the traditional pillars of poetry. Frost valorizes these poetic devices.

Wylie also defended the circumspection of confined, alliterative, metered and rhymed poetry in her Dec. 5, 1923 essay “Jeweled Bindings” for *The New Republic*. She

compares careful word choice and structure to a goldsmith setting precious gems into the structure of a piece of jewelry. She writes:

And I believe we are good workmen, dextrous and clean in our handling of gold and silver and precious — or even semi-precious — stones. I believe we are careful and conscientious, but not so much as our detractors declare. I think rather that we have found a manner which very justly encloses our matter, a letter which very nicely defines our spirit. As to the decoration, the setting of words transparent or opaque in a pattern upon our jewelled bindings, I am by no means ready to discard it. 874

For both Wylie and Frost, poetry was meant to be as aesthetically beautiful as it is meaningful. All six of the previous poems display Frost's and Wylie's commitment to traditional poetic mechanisms, including meter, rhyme and alliteration.

Turning to Wylie's "The Eagle and the Mole," the reader finds six quatrains of iambic trimeter: a veritable six-by-six. The poem uses a traditional rhyme scheme of alternating lines or an ABAB arrangement. Alliteration exists, including the phrases "live like" and "flocks are folded." Sibilance is especially showcased in the lines, "sails above the storm," "stares into the sun," "steaming sheep," and "...your soul from spotted sight or sound." Using these devices, Wylie placed her theory of "Jeweled Bindings" into practice.

Frost also adhered to traditional poetic forms in his "The Road Not Taken." The poem is composed of four iambic quatrains that hover between tetrameter and pentameter. A conventional, alternating rhyme scheme of ABAAB is utilized. The one true instance of alliteration is a sibilance that simulates the sigh it speaks of: "sigh

somewhere.” The poem also features another classic poetic device: repetition. Twice “two roads diverged” is used, representing each path, and the pronoun “I” is used a whopping nine times, expressing the individualism of the poem’s speaker.

With “Fire and Sleet and Candlelight,” Wylie employed common measure and the conventional alternating rhyme construction. The poem’s meter is not strict; it weaves its way through iambic dimeter and iambic trimeter. However, the verse is formal.

Alliteration is again at work in this poem with the phrase “wasted wings.” Sibilance takes a stand with “sharp stones.” Repetition also appears in the description of the grave that is “not too narrow/ And not too deep.” There are also two fine examples of assonance. In the second stanza, “wings” and “springs” are paired, while “twisted” and “trysted” are coupled in the third stanza.

In “Fire and Ice,” Frost again uses formal verse with a pattern featuring iambic tetrameter and iambic dimeter. The rhyme scheme also draws on poetic traditions, creating an ABAABCBCB stanza. Alliteration is present with the phrase “favor fire” and sibilance serves in the phrase “some say.” That phrase from the first line is repeated in the second.

Repetition is used in Wylie’s “The Fairy Goldsmith,” as well. Five of the eight sestets begin with “Here’s” or “Here.” The precious fairy objects are referred to as “them” three times and “they” twice. The sestets themselves explore variations of iambic trimeter and iambic dimeter. The rhyme scheme — AABBCCB — is traditional and formal. A soft alliteration appears with “A humming-bird’s wing/In hammered gold” while sibilance shows up more clearly in the phrases “scarlet skin” and “sun-shower.”

“Nothing Gold Can Stay” explores iambic trimeter in its single stanza. Frost employs traditional rhyming couplets and several moments of alliteration: “green is gold,” “her hardest hue to hold” and “dawn goes down to day.” Soft sibilance exists in the word “subsides” and the repetition of “so” three times, creating the effect of wind blowing through tree leaves.

Meter, rhyme, breaks and stanzas serve specific auditory and pleasurable purposes in both Frost’s and Wylie’s poems. Poems that employ these literary techniques exhibit embedded power to gain and sustain a reader’s attention, as well as to live in the reader’s memory and to reveal meanings obscured by everyday speech. The influential English poet J. H. Prynne noted in 2010:

It’s often asserted that the rhythmical deployment of sense carried into sound is what gives poetic discourse its special power of making a grateful living-space for readerly attention and remembrance; that pattern by varied repetition captures the speech habits of interior and sociable language use, and profiles these into the formats of record that can re-emerge into a reader’s vicarious experience, through the mental ears. ...[I]t is the sonic domain of completeness as composed by the dynamic boundary lineations, chiefly intonational and stress-marked in Western metrical disposition, that works towards significant endings which are the bounds and conclusions of significance: the unit measures of part and whole (8).

Meter, rhyme and other familiar poetic techniques are not simply the tools of a poet, they are meaning’s gateways into the mind and soul of the reader.

THE POEMS: Wylie's & Frost's Receptions

Despite their thematic and mechanical similarities, and their contemporaneous lives, the poetic legacies of Elinor Wylie and Robert Frost could not be more divergent. Despite lush praise, professional and commercial success and fame before her death in 1928, Wylie was posthumously dismissed by critics. Frost, who outlived Wylie by 34 years, continued an ascending arc of success from the first American printing of *North of Boston* in 1914 to his office as poet laureate consultant to the Library of Congress in the late 1950's and his recital at John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. Contemporary analysis of the two poet's works continue to be uneven, with Wylie facing criticism for her use of meter and symbolism to straddle the transition between traditional and modern poetry and Frost receiving praise for using the same techniques to sail from pre- and post-war attitudes into a new generation of poetry.

In a 1936 essay, critic Martha Elizabeth Johnson placed Wylie on a poetic pedestal few have ever achieved. Johnson particularly noted her mastery, her critical awards and her rapid growth. Speaking of *Nets to Catch the Wind*, Johnson wrote: "This book made her reputation as a poet of great prominence," (*Nets to Catch the Wind*, 7). The volume was awarded the Julia Ellsworth Ford prize for the best volume of American poetry in 1921 by the Poetry Society of America, Johnson noted. For context, other American works published in 1921 included Ezra Pound's *Poems 1918-1921* and Sherwood Anderson's *The Triumph of the Egg*, as the volumes' copyright pages attest.

Johnson is clear that Wylie's formalism is essential to the brilliance of Wylie's poetry, not a detriment to it. "Her clarity was the outcome of her carefully striving to attain that end," Johnson wrote. "Although her work is cleverly done, it never seems

labored," (*Nets to Catch the Wind*, 8). Even a negative review of Wylie in the Jan. 28, 1928 edition of *The New Statesman* could not help from admiring Wylie's technique. The unnamed reviewer remarks on Wylie's "formidable" performances in *Nets to Catch the Wind* and her second book of poetry, *Black Armour*, and notes "...the extreme dexterity with which she handles tenuous material" and her "...sedulously polished knack." Even the reviewer's negative remark could be read as a compliment; the writer states Wylie "sought to emulate Blake's shorter lyrical poems." The reviewer considers her an unfortunate imitator; apparently, the Poetry Society of America did not agree.

Neither did celebrity poet and author Charles Hanson Towne, another contemporary of Wylie and the editor of *Harper's Bazaar* from 1926-1929 ("Charles Hanson Towne," AllPoetry). In his introduction to the 1938 edition of *Collected Poems of Elinor Wylie*, Towne gushed:

Here was a poet indeed, one whose early promise and later fulfillment have withstood the stern measure of the years. Her poems seem even better and nobler ... They bear the imprint of a sensitive spirit, they are drenched with beauty, they have fire and fury, mixed with passionate restraint; and underneath there is a profound philosophy of life and death and love which is sane and steady, at once august and simple.

To Towne, the formalism of Wylie's poetry gave an anchor to the soaring emotions of her subjects. It acted as a counterbalance to create supreme art rather than flashing feelings that fade away.

Johnson certainly found Wylie an untamed, profound talent. "She seems to have emerged from a background of no preparation into a vast field of poetry, as a full-

fledged poet,” Johnson wrote. “She produced in an unbelievably short time four volumes of verse and four prose, and these books have placed her among the most accomplished American poets,” (*Nets to Catch the Wind*, 6). Johnson and other contemporaries loved Wylie’s work; modern critics loved to hate Wylie’s work.

In its biography of Wylie, *The Poetry Foundation* finds Wylie “a genius of a lesser rank,” using her modesty in discussing her own work in “Jeweled Bindings” against her. The unnamed biographer writes, “Her reputation was kept high for a while by her surviving champions, but after the 1950s, both attention and esteem flagged.” The biography — which leads with her tumultuous love life, failing to note that she was a literary editor of *Vanity Fair* and lauded by prominent peers until later in the article — quotes a 1969 criticism by Thomas Gray, stating “...in place of fresh perceptions, she [Wylie] very often gives an artificially posed personality and, in place of style, stylishness.” It does complicate the negative review by noting feminist scholars, including Melissa Girard “...have argued for Wylie’s central role in developing a distinct modernist aesthetic and poetics of voice that has long been ignored or downplayed by literary critics.” But the criticisms, and lopsided coverage of her personal life, leave the reader with a bad taste.

Encyclopedia Britannica’s article on Wylie is more even-handed, although the short article devotes a third of its space to her affairs and social life. It also emphasizes her use of conventions and finds she was not experimental. According to the encyclopedia, Wylie was an “American poet and novelist whose work, written from an aristocratic and traditionalist point of view, reflected changing American attitudes in the aftermath of World War I ... [The works] combine gentle fantasy and classical formality

with thoroughly researched historical settings.” Wylie’s *Nets to Catch the Wind* was a commercial and critical success when it was published, according to the article: “Her poetry, carefully structured and sensuous in mood, evinces the influence of 16th- and 17th-century English poetry. It struck a responsive chord in a general readership that more experimental poets missed.” The subtext of the article seems to suggest that her poetry was well admired because she was understandable; the actual technical brilliance of her modern themes married to traditional mechanisms is not highlighted in the same way that Robert Frost’s methods are.

Frost’s posthumous poetic life is as sterling as his living success was. In much longer articles, both *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *The Poetry Foundation* praise Frost for his use of meter, rhyme and traditional forms as he traverses modern themes. Gerber writes for *Britannica*: “Frost was widely admired for his mastery of metrical form, which he often set against the natural rhythms of everyday, unadorned speech. In this way the traditional stanza and metrical line achieved new vigour in his hands.” Frost’s unadorned word choices do stand apart from some of Wylie’s poems, such as “The Fairy Goldsmith.” But in both “The Eagle and the Mole” and “Fire and Ice and Candlelight” there is more dirt, dust, bones and stones than onyx and pearl. Frost, too, was unafraid to use gold for his poetic purposes — a mineral that is as naturally occurring as aquamarine and opal.

Whereas Wylie is criticized for using constraining forms, Frost is recognized as repurposing them for an endless fount of new poetry. “His strongest allegiance probably was to the quatrain with simple rhymes such as abab and abcb, and within its restrictions he was able to achieve an infinite variety,” Gerber writes. With Frost, the

reality that words can be combined in innumerable ways is acknowledged — even when the most common meter and rhyme is used.

Frost's shunning of experimental forms is seen as a part of his transcendent genius, not a traditionalist fault, in Gerber's article. "Frost was never an enthusiast of free verse and regarded its looseness as something less than ideal, similar to playing tennis without a net. His determination to be 'new' but to employ 'old ways to be new' set him aside from the radical experimentalism of the advocates of vers libre in the early 20th century," he writes. This is a reversal of the encyclopedia's perception of formalism in Wylie's poetry.

The Poetry Foundation is equally enthusiastic about Frost's continued use of traditional meters and rhymes throughout the 20th Century. The foundation's article states: "In a sense, Frost stands at the crossroads of 19th-century American poetry and modernism, for in his verse may be found the culmination of many 19th-century tendencies and traditions as well as parallels to the works of his 20th-century contemporaries." Frost bridges the gap between the old guard and the new guard, creating a singularly American poetic landscape in a global, schizophrenic century.

The use of adorning specificity and detail in Frost's poetry is only another attribute, not a detriment, the foundation argues. The foundation states:

The austere and tragic view of life that emerges in so many of Frost's poems is modulated by his metaphysical use of detail. As Frost portrays him, man might be alone in an ultimately indifferent universe, but he may nevertheless look to the natural world for metaphors of his own condition. Thus, in his search

for meaning in the modern world, Frost focuses on those moments when the seen and the unseen, the tangible and the spiritual intersect.

Here the metaphors sprung from nature that appear in Frost's poetry — like Wylie's "snowflakes frozen/In crystal cold" in "The Fairy Goldsmith" — are harbingers of meaning and transcendence.

The use of traditional, lyrical poetry was necessary to achieve Frost's desired effects — effects that experimental poets could not achieve, the foundation states. "To accomplish such objectivity and grace, Frost took up 19th-century tools and made them new. ... they liberate him from the experimentalist's burden—the perpetual search for new forms and alternative structures." Whether or not experimental poets could achieve the same level of grace and beauty is not an argument of this essay, but it is worth noting the critical embrace of Frost's methods, meters and rhymes and the rejection of Wylie's same methods.

THE NOVELS: Wylie's & Hemingway's Themes

Just as the poems of Wylie and Frost reflected post-war attitudes, so did Wylie's first novel *Jennifer Lorn: A Sedate Extravaganza* and Ernest Hemingway's first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. *Jennifer Lorne* was published in 1923 after Wylie's return to America (and the same year as her second book of poetry, *Black Armour*) while *The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1926. Both novels were critically acclaimed, commercially successful and brought fame to their authors immediately upon their publications ("Ernest Hemingway" *Britannica*, "Elinor Wylie" *The Poetry Foundation*). Each was also subtly interwoven with themes of hedonism in the face of life's meaninglessness, freedom of choice and the deadliness of society's conventions that is

easily overlooked. For Wylie — who fled lover’s England for America as World War I began to rage — and Hemingway — who served at the front in the Italian ambulance corps — the feelings of their Lost Generation were part of their blood and came out in their writings.

The hedonism of Hon. Gerald Poynyard — the heroine Jennifer Lorn’s rich, powerful and handsome husband — as he forges a path through a meaningless life is both the impetus of the novel’s action and the resolution of its ending. Gerald, whose father is an impoverished Baronet, makes an enormous fortune of fifty thousand pounds through the black market as an agent of the East India Company in 1772 (to put that in perspective, Jane Austen gave Mr. Darcy an income of \$10,000 a year when she published *Pride & Prejudice* in 1813). With scads of money in his pocket, Gerald returns to his native soil to find an ornamental wife. Wylie writes, “It was generally understood that he was going back to England to be married; when offered congratulations he accepted them simply and affably, without troubling to explain that as yet he had not selected his future wife” (16). Love, intelligence and suitability played no part in his search; when he spots the gorgeous Jennifer Lorne he immediately asks her father if he can marry her — without ever having met or spoken to Jennifer before in his life (33). “...She was the most beautiful girl in the world,” Wylie writes. “She was precisely what he had been searching for ever since his return to England; she had been in his mind’s eye all the time, correct in every detail...” (29-32). Gerald’s acquisition of a 17-year-old reincarnated Helen of Troy to satisfy his desire for beauty begins the novel, which follows their marriage as they travel to Paris, India and the ruins of Persepolis in modern Iran.

Gerald is specifically aligned with materialism and aestheticism when he reads polymath Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, which he also forces Jennifer to read (66, 97). In Paris, an intelligent woman asks the confused Jennifer "...whether or not I was happy in a marriage with M. Diderot's great work ... She also wished to know if you were going to Russia with the rest of his library," (66). Gerald reads and rereads Voltaire's *Candide* on sea voyages, a book that ruminates on the disillusionment of the idealist and offers the philosophy of cultivating one's own physical happiness ("Voltaire," Britannica). With these passages, Gerald's role as the consummate materialist and aesthete is established (15,17).

The ultimate expression of Gerald's extreme hedonism is when he contemplates murdering a young man for fun in Iran at the end of the novel. When Gerald comes across the boy (the young prince Abbas, unbeknownst to him), the youth is prostrated over a newly-dug grave and unconscious in his grief (210). Wylie writes of Gerald: "He lifted his high nose disdainfully to witness the very evident weakness and prostration of the unhappy boy. He fingered his pocket pistol, a small but deadly weapon of beautiful workmanship, and even... considered with sober amusement the possibility of strangling the unconscious youth," (210-11). For Gerald, the youth's life only has value in how it could give Gerald pleasure — even if that pleasure results in the boy's death.

Gerald's hedonism is a reaction to his conviction that life is both inexplicable and meaningless. "Life is obscure," Gerald tells Jennifer as they contemplate a poisonous snake in India, "the event is inexplicable always to the asking mind," (127). While visiting the ruins of Persepolis, Gerald reflects, "...the successive monarchs which this spot has exalted and consumed are a wise commentary on the futility of existence,"

(192). Perhaps no other sentence could so succinctly state the sad, faithless, hopeless feelings of the war-weary Lost Generation that prompted the hedonism of the Roaring Twenties.

Futility that leads to hedonism is also a theme of *The Sun Also Rises*, although Hemingway chooses a contemporary, rather than historical, setting. The Count Mippipopolous explains to hero Jake Barnes and heroine Lady Brett Ashley that the secret to life is accepting that it is meaningless and meant simply to be lived for enjoyment — a conclusion he comes to after fighting in wars and even suffering arrow wounds (61-2). Hemingway writes: “I have been in seven wars and four revolutions,” the count said. ... ‘You see, Mr. Barnes, it is because I have lived very much that now I can enjoy everything so well...That is the secret,’” (61). Both Brett, who served in WWI as a volunteer nurse, and Jake, who fought and was wounded, find common ground with the count’s philosophy, although it is Jake who takes it on most heartily. Hemingway writes: “I told you he was one of us. Didn’t I?’ Brett turned to me. ‘I love you, count. You’re a darling,’” (61). Brett finds camaraderie with the count, but it is Jake that says, “ ‘Yes. Absolutely’” when he reveals his philosophy of life (61). Brett, Jake and all the main characters in the novel respond to the futility of life by seeking pleasure in wild drinking, good food and an extravagant vacation to see the Running of the Bulls, bullfights and a week-long drunken street party in Pamplona, Spain.

Both novels also criticize societies that will sacrifice their young and their good for the conventions of their social order. In Wylie’s novel, the point is tragically exemplified when Jennifer Lorn luxuriates in new love and freedom when she believes she is a widow, only to sacrifice everything, including her life, when she discovers her

husband is still alive and determines it is her duty to return to him. Three times in the novel, Jennifer is offered protection by different chivalrous men who are willing to help her break from her marriage for her happiness, safety or well-being (85, 121, 195). Each time, she rejects the help, citing her honor as a wife. To the first Jennifer states, “Do not waste your time in such vain imaginings, my dear friend, my dear... I knew at the bottom of my heart that such happiness could not be for me,” (85). To the second she says, as she buries “her face in her hands,”: “I cannot go with you; I cannot possibly go with you...” (122). And finally, to the third, she states: “If you were not so young and inexperienced I should regard your proposals as insulting to my honour...” (195). What Jennifer cannot foresee is that when she returns to search for the husband she now knows survived a vicious assault, she will fall into the hands of a petty king — a petty king Gerald is negotiating with — and die (201). In the novel, Jennifer Lorn travels through French, Indian and Iranian societies, living in their respective capitals, and adheres strictly to the societal requirements that she stay with her lawful husband despite other offers. Ultimately, it is this adherence that results in her death — just as the adherence to societal obligations, such as country alliances and the draft, would lead to the deaths of millions of people in WWI.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the deadliness of adhering to society’s rituals and conventions is exemplified through the death of a 28-year-old participating in the Running of the Bulls. Hemingway writes:

The waiter came over to my table.

“You hear? Muerto. Dead. He’s dead. With a horn through him. All for morning fun. Es muy flamenco.”

...The next day in the paper we read that he was twenty-eight years old, and had a farm, a wife, and two children. He had continued to come to the fiesta each year after he was married. (178-9)

The Spanish sentence is a colloquial phrase and is used to refer to someone who is haughty or cocky (“flamenco,” SpanishDict). But even without the translation, the meaning is clear: by continuing to participate in his society’s dangerous ritual bullrun, a father lost his life and a family lost their protector and provider.

While following societal conventions leads to death in the novels, exercising one’s own will and choice leads to freedom. Jennifer Lorn experiences this when, believing Gerald is dead, she decides to escape Iran (and the licentious petty king) with the young Prince Abbas and return to England. This is the first decision Jennifer makes in the novel and it comes at page 180. Jennifer states: “I do not wish to marry anyone at present. Neither do I wish to go to Armenia, and as far as staying in the vicinity of the palace, I should very shortly perish of trepidation and suspense in so sinister an environment... I think, perhaps, we had better go back to Devonshire at once...” This is an astonishing step for a woman whose very marriage was decided for her and it comes just a few paragraphs after she says “no” for the first time, rejecting various plans concocted for her to escape the dastardly petty king. Wylie writes of Jennifer, humorously:

“I will not be strangled, I will not be stolen like a sheep, and I will not, no, even for you, be married by a pagan priest,” she sobbed breathlessly, displaying an unwonted vivacity in her protesting cries. “I will not be forced to eat fat mutton, and I will not wear these hateful and improper clothes another minute!” (179-80)

Although cloaked in humor, this is a pivotal moment for Jennifer. From here on out, until she discovers that her husband is actually alive, she takes charge of her life and makes her own decisions — decisions that delight and enliven her. Wylie writes:

...a vague and mysterious metamorphosis appeared to take place in the spirit of the child Jennifer from the very instant of her escape from Shiraz. From languor she passed to the lightest vivacity; her temper became merry and wild in the extreme; she all at once was a tease, a tomboy, and a witch. Each sign of fear or weakness was soon dissipated in the full illumination and speed of her humour; she dance, she sang, she pulled down fruit from every tree and tasted the water of every wayside spring. (186)

This blossoming into her own personality could not be more contrasted with the withering she experiences when she learns Gerald is alive and determines that she must go back to him. Wylie describes Jennifer's inner death: "... an icy pressure constricted her heart, but her mind was firm, cool and empty of all save a sense of decorum," (197). In her freedom, Jennifer became like a goddess of spring; in her societal constraints, Jennifer is little more than a tomb.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Lady Brett Ashley consciously realizes she must make her own choices, rather than be led by the society around her, in order to be happy. She explains to Jake: "I've got to do something. I've got to do something that I really want to do. I've lost my self-respect," (166). For Brett, that thing is running off with a lover when she is already married to another man (as well as engaged to a third) — the exact thing that Jennifer refuses to do. Brett's decision to act on her own changes her world and makes her happy: "Brett was radiant. She was happy. The sun was out and the day was

bright. 'I feel altogether changed,' Brett said. 'You have no idea, Jake,'" (187). While Jennifer's bloom dies in the society she submits to, Brett continues to blossom as she rejects her society's conventions.

Hemingway also displays a masculine version of exercising free will in the face of society's conventions in his description of the performance of bullfighter Pedro Romero in the ring. During the fight, Romero used his will to control the situation, to fight for himself and to make himself more than he already was, allowing him to share more of himself with Brett. Hemingway writes: "Everything of which he could control the locality he did in front of her all that afternoon. Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and did it for himself, too, as well as for her. Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too," (194). The great difference between Pedro Romero and Jennifer Lorn is not the time nor geographical gaps, nor their genders nor societies. It is that Romero does what he chooses to do for himself and then for society, while Jennifer chooses to place all of society ahead of herself — and discovers too late that society tramples life into oblivion just as easily as a bull tramples a matador.

THE NOVELS: Wylie's & Hemingway's Mechanisms

Just as the themes of both novels mirror each other, so do some of the literary devices used by the authors to create their art. Both Wylie and Hemingway employed an extended metaphor in their novels as a safe place to explore their controversial themes regarding society. Each used a specific aesthetic style, and elaborate descriptions of nature, to bring the pleasures of an artistic experience to the forefront.

Both used ironic undertones to distill key themes in their novels and make them plain to the reader. Using these mechanisms, Wylie and Hemingway showed their technical virtuosity as they created their first novels.

In both novels, the extended metaphor takes up the lion's share, if not the entirety, of the books. Jennifer's marriage to society's best man Gerald represents how complete obedience to society results in death in *Jennifer Lorn*. The Pamplona fiesta represents society's deadly hunger for the blood of its allegiant young men in *The Sun Also Rises*. These metaphors are not openly written, as Shakespeare's "It is the east and Juliet is the sun," but strung as a supporting cable on a suspension bridge of the novel's plot.

Rhetoricians Steve Oswald and Alan Rihs explain the nature and the function of an extended metaphor in a text:

Extended metaphors are realised in discourse through the recurring exploitation of the same metaphor at several conceptual levels over a relatively long span of text. Their interpretation, in those cases, can accordingly be seen as an incremental process which gradually enriches the representation as different properties of the source domain successively appear in one form or another throughout the same discourse. (139)

In this way, a recurring plot point — such as descriptions of Jennifer submitting to Gerald completely in their marriage and the bullfighters, bullfights and bullrunners in Pamplona — can symbolize the submission of the individual to a destructive, consuming society. Since an extended metaphor can run throughout the novel (as in *Jennifer Lorn*) or through most of the novel (as in *The Sun Also Rises*), the metaphor

strikes the reader with more force each time it is repeated. It also allows time for readers to process the metaphors and come to conclusions inductively, rather than through a brutal, obvious pronouncement.

Wylie explains in her essay "Symbols in Literature" that her novels are allegorical and that she views the allegory — so prominently used in Shakespeare and the Bible — as an enabling tool that allows the reader to understand truth clearly. She writes: "Another and less clearly defined form of allegory is that in which the story is possible, but frankly improbable and strange. In this class belong many books of adventure. ... Into this class I put my own books..." (878) As a writer, Wylie was aware of her artistic decisions and techniques and contemplative; she understood that she wrote allegories as novels in a quest for the truth.

Allegory's ability to reveal truth in the midst of a concealing metaphor is the literary device's magnificent power, Wylie explains in the essay. "Therefore I do not, in this paper, intend to apologize for allegories," she wrote. "I believe that no single person who reads my words has not accepted allegories as the very essence of truth, and grown so familiar with that truth that he has forgotten that they were allegories," (875-6). Wylie argues she was after the greater truths that lie in the allegories, just as Shakespeare "finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything." (*As You Like It*, Act II, Scene I).

Both Wylie and Hemingway made clear and unique style choices in their novels to create a specific aesthetic impression. Wylie employs long sentences filled with similes that paint beautiful, sensuous pictures in the reader's mind. For example, Wylie writes:

Jennifer was beginning to understand that her earlier incarnation as a beauty of Bath was to be no more than a farthing dip in comparison with the approaching dawn of her glory; she was to rise from the foam of the English Channel like a copy of Venus Anadyomene in gold and ivory, presently to be clothed in suitable raiment by the inspired matua-makers of Paris. (46)

In this 66-word sentence, Wylie impresses the reader with a feeling of sumptuousness through invoking gold, ivory, Venus and Paris. These images play to and support the theme of hedonism she explores throughout the novel.

Hemingway chooses short, brusque sentences, which bring out his themes of individuality and free will in the face of societal pressure. When Jake and Brett say their tender goodnights to each other in Paris, the romance is all in the context and not in the language, which is anything but conventional:

“Good night, darling.”

“Don’t be sentimental.”

“You make me ill.”

We kissed goodnight and Brett shivered. (37-8)

Brett and Jake do not need society’s morays to teach them how to say “I love you.”

They can say it with insults.

Just as their aesthetic adherence to a specific style is integral to their novels, so, too, is their use of irony. Both Wylie and Hemingway use irony to point to truths in their novels that are not explicitly stated, but that underpin their artworks. In *Jennifer Lorn* the irony is easier to lose under the weight of her descriptions, but its edge is just as sharp

as Hemingway's. An exquisite example occurs when Jennifer, in her confusion over the lady's Diderot comments, asks Gerald what they meant:

“She also wished to know whether or not you were going to Russia with the rest of his library.”

This time Gerald's face paled slightly with annoyance; he recovered his poise instantly; his third laugh was a little acid.

“They cannot forgive me for being cleverer than themselves... I shall be glad to provide you with a set of answers for all occasions.” (66-7)

Jennifer does not realize her husband was being insulted, but Wylie's description of Gerald's reaction and his response let's the reader in on the ironic joke.

Perhaps Hemingway's best moment of irony occurs when Jake tells a friend Georgette he is impotent due to a war wound. He writes:

“I got hurt in the war,” I said.

“Oh, that dirty war.”

We could probably have gone on and discussed the war and agreed that it was in reality a calamity for civilization, and perhaps would have better been avoided. I was bored enough. (22-3)

The war was the most important event to have ever occurred in Jake's life: it maimed him, it changed his outlook on life and introduced him to Brett. It also killed millions of people by horrendous methods. There is nothing boring about WWI. But Jake is not bored about the war — he is bored by the realization, a realization he has long since come to, that the war was not worth fighting. The ironic understatement at the end of the

phrase draws the reader to evaluate again the assertion that WWI was “a calamity for civilization” not a war to end all wars.

THE NOVELS: Wylie’s & Hemingway’s Receptions

During their lifetimes, both Wylie and Hemingway enjoyed immediate success and fame after their first novels were published. Each novel was critical and commercially acclaimed. But after her death in 1928, Wylie’s novels would fade into obscurity, while Hemingway’s influence and popularity would only grow after his death in 1961.

The 1933 preface to the reprinting of her novel in *Collected Prose of Elinor Wylie* is likely unabashed in its extravagant praise of an author’s mastery of technique and her artistic creation. Novelist, photographer and influential critic Carl Van Vechten writes: “There is, it may as well be proclaimed, a kind of perfection about Jennifer Lorn, the perfection of an artist who has completely realized her intention... *Moby Dick* and *Hamlet* have their greatnesses; they also have their faults,” (6). Van Vechten supports his assertion, telling the reader he read *Jennifer Lorn* cover to cover three times and could not find any faults (3). “My enthusiasm has mounted in ten years rather than ebbed,” he states. This is incredible as Van Vechten was so enthusiastic about the novel’s publication in 1923 that he organized a torchlight parade in Manhattan to celebrate its release (“Elinor Wylie”, *The Poetry Foundation*).

Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* was also successful, even without the parade. *The Southern Review* notes “The most brilliant juxtaposition love story of all [Hemingway’s novels] was the ironic love-story of *The Sun Also Rises*, in which a war-

ruined generation was symbolized ...” in a Jan. 1941 review of Ernest Hemingway’s works (Freckenbergs, 776). Britannica notes the novel was Hemingway’s “first solid success.” Literary critic Albert J. DeFazio III noted Hemingway and his first novel were hailed as beacons of American literature, “Reviewers of *Sun* received it as a much-anticipated event by a notable figure....despite the occasional criticism, the predominant response was praise” (59). The novel was also commercially successful, with a print run of 6,000 copies (Rodenberg).

Despite her status as a living legend in the literary world, Wylie’s work would slip into the ether after her death while Hemingway’s first novel would simply gain strength. Britannica does not describe Wylie’s first novel, noting it as “*Jennifer Lorn* (1923), a novel” and moving on. The Poetry Foundation describes it as a “romantic pastiche,” or an imitation of a classic romance. In the 1994 edition of *Reference Guide to American Literature*, critic Alice R. Bensen seems to insult both the reading Americans Wylie was popular with and her first novel:

Jennifer Lorn: A Sedate Extravaganza appealed to a public that was seeking relief from the ugly realities. Set in the late 18th century in the realms of aristocracy and wealth in England and India, it is a long catalogue of lovely, delicate objects; what plot it has concerns the fragile, fainting Jennifer and—the spine of the story—her husband Gerald, the exact, cool aesthete.

Bensen’s review ignores the novel’s multi-layered themes and styles, as well as the propulsive nature of the plot that runs from India to England to France to India to Iran to India again.

Perhaps the ultimate test of the novels' legacy is the number of copies in print and available for sale. There was only one stand-alone version of *Jennifer Lorn: A Sedate Extravaganza* for sale on March 15, 2021 on Amazon.com by a dubious third-party seller called "Literary Licensing, LLC." More than 50 sellers offered versions of *The Sun Also Rises*, while others offered summaries, critical analyses and other resources.

While Wylie is written out of modern English studies, Hemingway is just as in as ever. Britannica describes *The Sun Also Rises* as a "sparkling book," while a 2017 article for the Handbook of the American Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries describes the novel as depicting the clash of the titans modernism and traditionalism in a changing world: "It was the novel's style and provocative subject matter, its uncompromising description of new modes of conduct among the young generation, that made *The Sun Also Rises* one of the exemplars of modernism" (Rodenberg). On April 5, 2021, PBS' aired the new biography *Hemingway* by filmographers Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. The "...three-part, six-hour documentary ... examines the visionary work and the turbulent life of Ernest Hemingway, one of the greatest and most influential writers America has ever produced," according to the film's website. Certainly Hemingway is beloved by a new generation of adults struggling to find meaning in a seemingly meaningless world, to determine the ways obedience to society will result in death and to learn how to make independent choices that will lead to greater freedom. These themes are Hemingway's themes, but they are also Elinor Wylie's themes — a writer this generation has never read.

When F. Scott Fitzgerald analyzed his writerly ambitions in a 1920 essay “On His Own Literary Aims (A Self-Interview),” he wrote that he would rather write about his observations and perceptions of life of his contemporaries than write about a big “theme” in a “Magnum Opus”:

My idea is always to reach my generation. The wise writer, I think, writes for the youth of his own generation, the critic of the next and the schoolmasters of ever afterward. Granted the ability to improve what he imitates in the way of style, to choose from his own material, and we get a first-water genius. 262

Elinor Wylie was Fitzgerald’s “first-water genius”: she chose a style of aestheticism that encased the disembodied bones of truth in a jewel-studded treasure box that lured the reader to look inside. She chose to write about death, life, individualism, hedonism, war, beauty, apocalypse and nature and her technical abilities sparkle on the page. Wylie’s writings reached scores of readers in her generation and brought her fame. But the critic of the next generation was not nearly so kind, nor so knowledgeable, about Wylie as they were about Fitzgerald — but then, he lived longer to defend himself. So far, the teachers of “ever afterward” have largely not yet heard Wylie’s name or read her works. But that could always change.

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